



*AmericasBarometer Insights: 2009 (No.17)**

World Views: ‘Political Monism’ or the Battle between Good and Evil¹

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The debate as to how to define populism is long and in some ways tortured (Laclau 2005; Laclau 2006; Panizza 2005; Taggart 2000; Zizek 2006). Some scholars apply economic definitions, others political definitions (Weyland 2001), while still others link populism to authoritarianism (Munro-Kua 1996). In this paper we focus in one attitude that has been associated with populist belief systems, namely what has been called the belief in *political monism*: “the belief that the oneness of God and his heaven can be achieved on earth, if only the forces of satanic darkness can be rooted out” (Knopff 1998: 698). Stated more simply, this perspective on populism holds that adherents

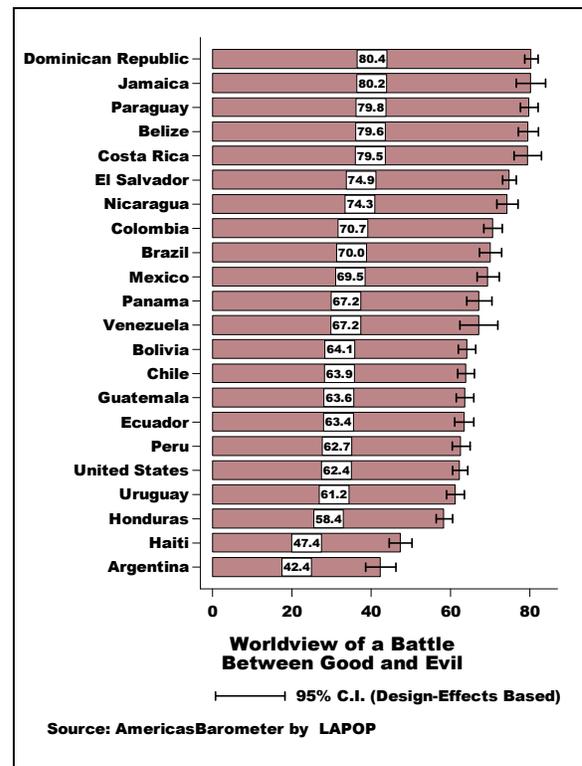
* The Insights Series is co-edited by Professors Mitchell A. Seligson and Elizabeth Zechmeister with administrative, technical, and intellectual support from the LAPOP group at Vanderbilt.

¹ Prior issues in the Insight series can be found at: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/studiesandpublications>. The data on which they are based can be found at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/datasets>

believe the world is defined by a battle between good and evil.

This paper in the *AmericasBarometer Insight Series* is the second to analyze the predictors of populist attitudes and/or predispositions in the 2008 round of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) survey (others will be examined in future *Insights* studies).² However, in contrast to previous studies, in here, we will proceed in a more exploratory manner without making any policy recommendations, but rather open a discussion for further studies on the sources of populist attitudes.

Figure 1.
Average Belief in the Americas that the World is a Battle Between Good and Evil, 2008³



² Funding for the 2008 round mainly came from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Important sources of support were also the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Center for the Americas (CFA), and Vanderbilt University.

³ Non-response was 11.3% for the sample as a whole.

This survey involved face-to-face interviews conducted in 23 nations in Latin America and the Caribbean, and a web survey in the United States. Data from 22 of those national surveys are analyzed here (this question was not asked in Canada). A total of 33,738 respondents were asked the following question:

POP109. In today’s world there is a battle between good and evil, and people must choose between one of the two. How much do you agree or disagree that such a battle between good and evil exists?

Responses were based on a 1-7 scale, where 1 meant “strongly disagree” and 7 meant “strongly agree.”⁴

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Strongly disagree			Strongly agree				Doesn't know

Figure 1 displays national averages for the 22 countries in the sample. We first note that in the majority of the countries in the Americas, *political monism*⁵ or citizens’ worldview of a battle between good and evil exceeds 50 on a 0-100 scale. In particular, the Dominican Republic (80.4) is the country with the highest belief in political monism, followed by Jamaica (80.2), Paraguay (79.8), Belize (79.6) and Costa Rica (79.5). At the other extreme of the scale, Haiti and Argentina reveal the lowest levels of political monism, lower than 50 points on a 0-100 scale, but come very close with 47.4 and 42.2 points, respectively.

Supporters of *political monism*, according to Rainer Knopff are “those who believe faction to be unnecessary” and who “see their political foes not as legitimate opponents but as the embodiment of evil, to be rooted out or

⁴ In order to make comparisons across questions and survey waves simpler; these responses were recoded on a 0-100 scale, where 0 indicates “strongly disagree” and 100 “strongly agree.”

⁵ Measured by the question we discuss here, which is labeled pop109 in the AmericasBarometer questionnaire.

overcome through some form of ultimate political salvation” (698). Such political salvation is often viewed in the embodiment of a leader who will solve all problems and meet all needs. In this case, a populist and charismatic leader will have a strong appeal among this segment of the population. Consequently, political monism at the very least might be considered an attitude that leaves some susceptible to embracing populism. For that reason, it is important to understand what are the determinants of high levels of political monism.

Predicting Support for Political Monism

What explains these different levels of support for political monism in the Americas? We examined contextual factors that might explain some of the national-level variation we found. Nonetheless, multilevel analyses predicting people’s levels of political monism with the conventional national characteristics, such as GDP, economic growth, and level of democracy, did not achieve statistical significance, even though a larger sample of countries, including nations from other parts of the world, might have. Alas, our data are confined to the Americas, and therefore, we decided to focus on individual-level characteristics that may impact citizens’ worldviews concerning a battle between good and evil. We begin by examining a traditional set of socio-economic and demographic variables: levels of education, gender, wealth, and size of the city/town. ⁶ In addition, a variable that taps into citizens’ religious devotion, and thus perhaps religious conservatism, was included.⁷ We expect that

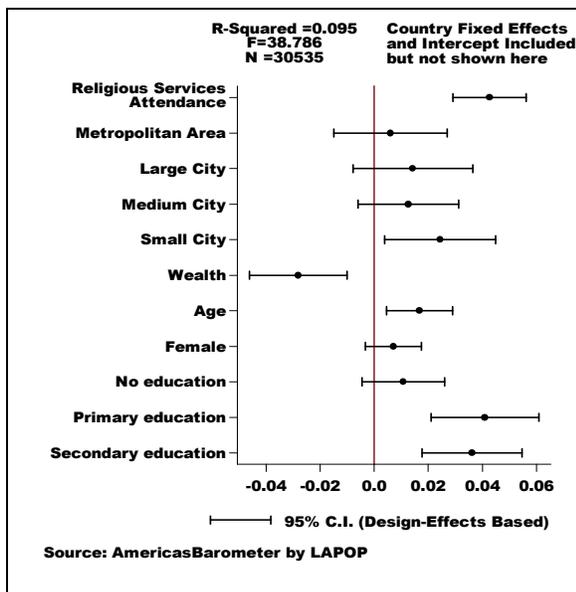
⁶ Because the average citizen in the United States and Canada scores very high on socio-economic characteristics compared to those in the rest of the countries in the sample, and because of our interest in Latin America and the Caribbean, we exclude those two cases from the analysis.

⁷ How often do you attend religious services? (1) More than once per week (2) Once per week (3) Once a month (4) Once or twice a year (5) Never. This question was recoded into a scale from 0 to a 100 where 0 meant “never” and 100 meant “more than once per week”.

those who are more religious are more likely to view the world as a battle between good and evil.

Figure 2 shows the role of these variables in explaining citizens' *political monism*. Each variable included in the analysis is listed on the vertical (y) axis. The impact of each of those variables is shown graphically by a dot, which if located to the right of the vertical "0" line indicates a positive effect, and if to the left of the "0" line a negative effect. If the effects are statistically significant, they are shown by confidence interval lines stretching to the left and right of each dot that do not overlap the vertical "0" line (at .05 or better). If they overlap the vertical line, the effects are statistically insignificant. The relative strength of each variable is indicated by standardized coefficients.

Figure 2. Socio-economic and Demographic Determinants of the Average Belief in the Americas that the World is a Battle Between Good and Evil, 2008⁸



What we find in Figure 2 is that those who attend religious services more regularly are those who show higher levels of a worldview of

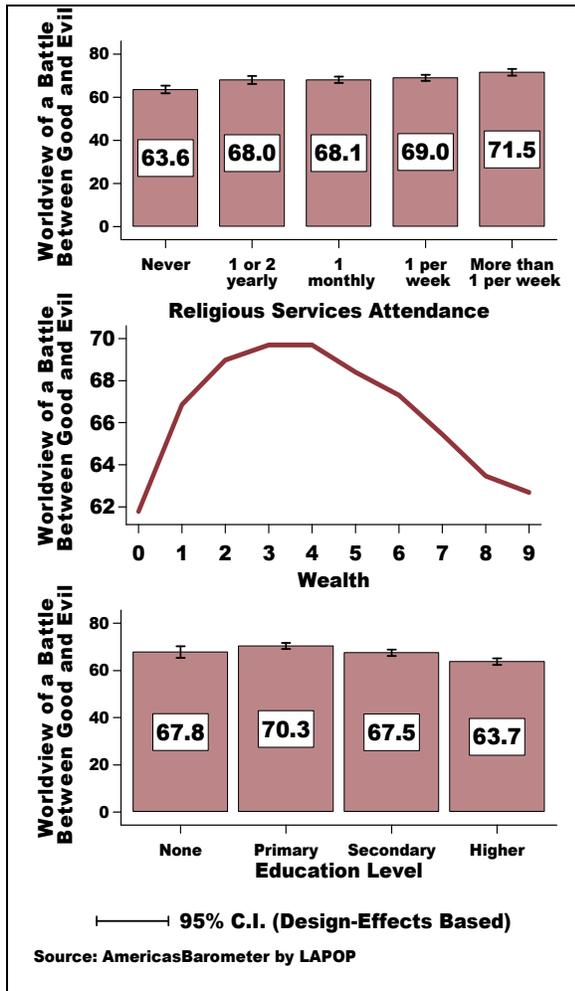
⁸ Reference groups are rural areas and higher education

a battle between good and evil. This result is not unexpected as people who are more religiously conservative may be exactly those who are most likely to perceive the world as a sort of biblical struggle between good and evil. In addition, those living in smaller cities show higher levels of *political monism* compared to those who live in rural areas, while there are no statistically significant differences among those who live in metropolitan areas, larger, and medium cities compared to those who live in rural areas. Similarly, the wealthy show significantly lower levels of support for *political monism*. To the extent that this variable measures populist tendencies, it is worth noting that these findings relate to those of previous reports in this *Insight Series* focused on support for presidential limits on the voice and vote of opposition parties (I0809) and support for a government without Congress; in short, previous reports show that citizens with the same characteristics, such as wealth, show lower levels of support for executive concentration of power.

An interesting finding and in contrast to what we have seen in prior studies in the populism series (where older people show significantly lower levels of support for executive concentration of power) is that the older the respondent, the higher his/her tendency to view the world as a battle between good and evil. Furthermore, there is no clear effect of education on *political monism*. While those with primary and secondary education have higher levels of political monism than those with higher education, there are no statistically significant differences between those who have no education and those who have higher education. Therefore, as happens with the effects of wealth, it also seems that there is a curvilinear effect of education on citizens' view of the world as a battle between good and evil. Specifically, as education or wealth increases, citizens' political monism increases, but once education or wealth reaches a certain point, the levels of political monism decrease. A better display of these effects can be seen in Figure 3, illustrated by sample means.

Figure 3.

Size of City/Town, Wealth, Education, and Support for Political Monism or a View of the World as a Battle Between Good and Evil in Latin America, 2008



In order to have a comprehensive understanding of what factors influence citizens' views of the world as a battle between good and evil, we also examine the impact of some political attitudes and behaviors that may play a central role in explaining this view. It is noteworthy that one of the purposes of this *Insights Series* is to analyze individual variables as an alternative to indices, a usual practice in academic writings. Thus, we take this opportunity to explore the determinants of this

single belief, thought to be related to populism, independently from other variables that collectively might be considered to tap into populist predispositions. When considered as a standalone attitude, a worldview of a battle between good and evil may be tapping political predispositions, such as populist attitudes, religious practices, or both. As we have already seen, there is evidence that political monism is related to religious devotion; we now assess whether it is also related to political attitudes.

Figure 4.

Determinants of Average Belief in the Americas that the World is a Battle Between Good and Evil, 2008

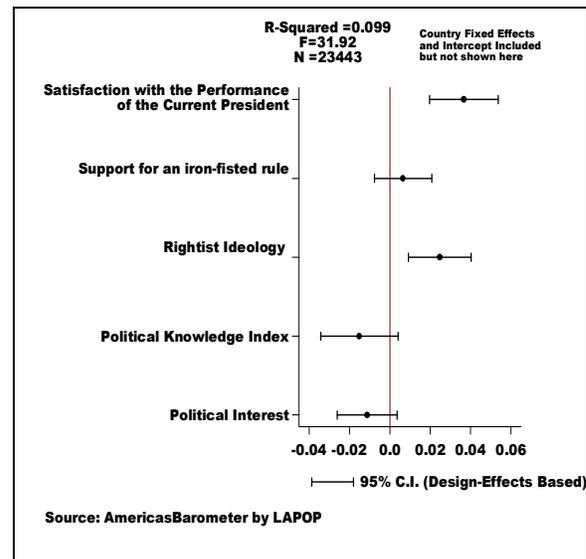


Figure 4 shows the impact of selected political attitudes on *political monism*. For instance, those who are more satisfied with the performance of the incumbent president have a higher tendency to view the world as a battle between good and evil. By the same token, those who place themselves in the right⁹ of the ideology scale are

⁹ Rightist Ideology was measured by: (Left-Right Scale) Now, to change the subject... On this card there is a 1-10 scale that goes from left to right. Nowadays, when we speak of political leanings, we talk of those on the left and those on the right. In other words, some people sympathize more with the left and others with the right. According to the meaning that the terms "left" and "right" have for you, and thinking of your own political leanings, where would you

those who have higher levels of political monism. As with the same demographic and socio-economic characteristics, these results also echo those of the previous reports in this series where citizens with similar characteristics tend to have higher support for the president limiting the voice and vote of opposition parties (I0809) and tend to have higher support for a government without Congress. Yet, in contrast to these prior reports, here we do not find support for the effects of support for an iron-fisted government nor for political knowledge¹⁰ or political interest¹¹ on support for a worldview of a battle between good and evil. Consequently, it is somewhat difficult to arrive at overall conclusions on support for populism based on the evidence found here. It may be the case that the question analyzed in this short paper is rather tapping into both political predispositions and religious attitudes and not necessarily populists attitudes alone per say. It is worth noting that all these variables have been controlled for country effects and the traditional socio-economic and demographic variables.¹²

Conclusion

As we examined in our previous reports in this *Insight Series*, there is an increasing number of executives whose tendency is toward a further concentration of their power in Latin America (Hawkins 2003; Seligson 2007). Thus, it becomes essential to understand what the nature and sources of citizens' populist attitudes are as

place yourself on this scale? Indicate the box that comes closest to your own position.

¹⁰ The Political Knowledge Index is measured through the following questions: GI1. What is the name of the current president of the (country)? GI2. What is the name of the President of (Congress) in (country)? GI3. How many (provinces) does the (country) have? GI4. How long is the (presidential/prime ministerial) term of office in country? GI5. What is the name of the current president of Brazil?

It is worthy of note that the question related to Congress was not asked in Bolivia.

¹¹ This variable was measured by: how much interest do you have in politics: a lot, some, little or none?

¹² Refer to the Appendix for a detailed display of those effects.

continued high levels of support for executive concentration of power remain present in the region. At the same time, it is important that future work focuses on a more abstract analysis of people's worldview and how they may affect their policy choices. In this paper, we analyzed a belief that has been connected by some scholars to populist attitudes, *political monism*, which particularly relates to citizens' view of the world as a battle between good and evil.

We found here that those who attend religious services more regularly are those who show higher levels of a worldview of a battle between good and evil. Similarly, those who are more satisfied with the performance of the incumbent president and those who place themselves in the right of the ideology scale are those who have a higher tendency to view the world as a battle between good and evil. In relation to the socio-economic and demographic determinants of political monism, we found that poor individuals and those living in smaller cities show higher levels of *political monism* than those who live in rural areas. Because this question appears to be related to both social (religious) and political factors, we are hesitant to provide strong program recommendations on the basis of this question alone. Rather we suggest that this short paper provides insight into the possible determinants of an attitude that theoretically may place individuals at greater risk of embracing a populist leader, but we also conclude that there is more work to be done to fully understand the attitudinal bases of populism.

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Appendix

Table 1. Socio-economic and Demographic Determinants of Average Support for Political Monism in the Americas, 2008

	Coefficient.	t
Secondary education	0.036*	(3.84)
Primary education	0.041*	(4.03)
No education	0.011	(1.39)
Female	0.007	(1.35)
Age	0.017*	(2.70)
Wealth	-0.028*	(-3.06)
Small City	0.024*	(2.33)
Medium City	0.013	(1.33)
Large City	0.014	(1.26)
Metropolitan Area	0.006	(0.57)
Religious Services Attendance	0.043*	(6.20)
Mexico	0.043*	(3.85)
Guatemala	0.002	(0.25)
El Salvador	0.073*	(8.25)
Honduras	-0.027*	(-2.87)
Nicaragua	0.069*	(6.22)
Costa Rica	0.109*	(8.56)
Panama	0.031*	(2.46)
Colombia	0.045*	(4.47)
Ecuador	0.010	(0.68)
Bolivia	0.012	(0.89)
Peru	0.004	(0.43)
Paraguay	0.094*	(10.86)
Chile	0.016	(1.75)
Brazil	0.043*	(3.77)
Venezuela	0.034*	(2.20)
Argentina	-0.098*	(-7.23)
Dominican Republic	0.107*	(12.59)
Haiti	-0.102*	(-8.44)
Jamaica	0.112*	(8.47)
Belize	0.102*	(9.80)
Constant	-0.006	(-0.60)
R-Squared	0.095	
Number of Obs.	30535	
* p<0.05 Education level of Reference: Higher education Size of City/Town Reference: Rural area Country of Reference: Uruguay		

Table 2. Determinants of Average Support for Political Monism in the Americas, 2008

	Coefficient.	t
Political Interest	-0.009	(-1.14)
Political Knowledge Index	-0.015	(-1.59)
Ideology Scale	0.021*	(2.70)
Support for an iron-fisted rule	0.006	(0.83)
Satisfaction with the Performance of the Current President	0.031*	(3.57)
Secondary education	0.025*	(2.43)
Primary education	0.021	(1.77)
No education	0.001	(0.08)
Female	-0.005	(-0.75)
Age	0.015*	(2.10)
Wealth	-0.025*	(-2.37)
Small City	0.019	(1.68)
Medium City	0.011	(1.09)
Large City	0.011	(0.89)
Metropolitan Area	0.005	(0.42)
Religious Services Attendance	0.042*	(5.42)
Mexico	0.038*	(3.17)
Guatemala	-0.014	(-1.17)
El Salvador	0.073*	(7.75)
Honduras	-0.039*	(-4.13)
Nicaragua	0.074*	(6.15)
Costa Rica	0.104*	(7.59)
Panama	0.025	(1.83)
Colombia	0.036*	(3.42)
Ecuador	-0.017	(-1.08)
Bolivia	0.022	(1.51)
Peru	0.005	(0.44)
Paraguay	0.090*	(9.51)
Chile	0.008	(0.83)
Brazil	0.029*	(2.35)
Venezuela	0.039*	(2.34)
Argentina	-0.109*	(-6.98)
Dominican Republic	0.102*	(11.18)
Haiti	-0.102*	(-7.48)
Jamaica	0.112*	(8.42)
Belize	0.090*	(7.79)
Constant	-0.027*	(-2.41)
R-Squared	0.099	
Number of Obs.	23443	
* p<0.05		
Country of Reference: Uruguay		