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Gender and Community Participation in Latin America and the Caribbean

By Frederico Batista Pereira
frederico.b.pereira@vanderbilt.edu
Vanderbilt University

Executive Summary. This *Insights* report explores why women tend to participate less than men in community activities in Latin America and the Caribbean. Using data from the 2010 round of the AmericasBarometer surveys, the report finds some innovative, and yet self-evident, responses to this question. The analysis shows that this gender gap in participation is not entirely explained by the fact that women tend to have lower levels of education, political interest, and political knowledge, which are conventional variables in the explanation of political participation. I show instead that a great part of the gap in participation between men and women is explained by gender roles inside the family. Being a homemaker and having children at home strongly decreases women's participation relative to men in community affairs throughout the Americas.

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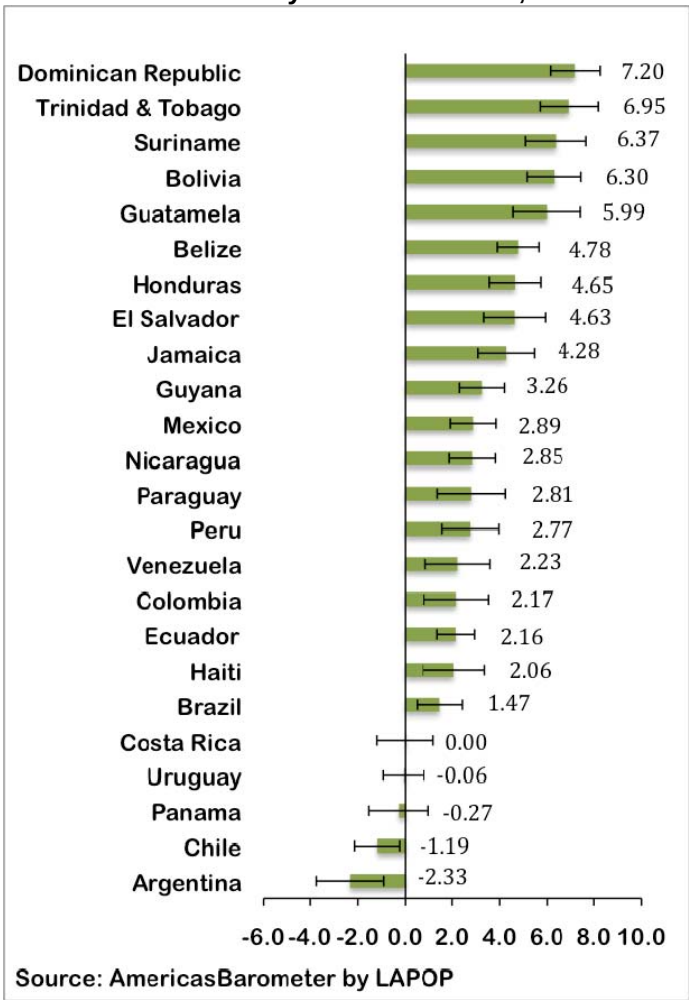
Political participation at the local level is usually seen as a defining aspect of democracy (Hirschman, 1970). Among the ways in which citizens can participate in local politics, in this *Insights* paper we look at communal participation, a form of activism that is increasingly seen as foundational for stable democratic politics (Reid, 2000). By organizing at the community level, citizens can manage to improve their life conditions by generating local resources and attracting resources from central governments and thus overcome some of the most immediate needs they face. However, for communal participation to have these positive democratizing effects, it is vital that different groups within the community have the same opportunities to participate. In this sense, one troubling aspect of community level politics is the tendency in many countries for gender bias to manifest itself. In both the United States and Latin America, scholars have shown that, on average, women tend to participate less than men in different types of political activities (Burns, Schlozman & Verba, 2001; Kam, Zechmeister & Wilking, 2008; Deposato & Norrander, 2009).

Figure 1. The Gender Gap in Community Participation in Each Country of Latin America, 2010



An important challenge for both scholars and policymakers is to explain and help reduce the gender gap in political participation. Allowing it to persist only serves to weaken democracy by denying equal opportunity to all groups, in this case, women. One frequently mentioned explanation for the gap is that women tend to have lower levels of education and political interest, which are factors frequently found to be important determinants of all forms of political participation.[1] However, many analyses show that, even after taking into account these and other variables theorized by the mainstream model of political participation (e.g. education, income, political interest and knowledge), part of the gap between men and women still remains to be explained (Verba, Burns & Schlozman, 1997; Burns, Schlozman & Verba, 2001, Deposato & Norrander, 2009).

Another possible explanation for the gap relates to gender roles in the family, and, more specifically, to two aspects of family life and the gendered division of labor. First, the burden of housework tends to be disproportional between men and women, being heavier on the latter (Baxter, 1997). Second, the division of labor regarding childcare also tends to fall much more heavily on women than on men (Howell & Day, 2000).

This AmericasBarometer *Insights* report will, first, examine the gender gap in community participation across countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Second, it will examine whether such differences are explained by the mainstream model of political participation, which will be represented by indicators such as

[1] In the 2010 round of the AmericasBarometer surveys, men have on average higher levels of education, wealth and political interest than women.

education, political interest, and political knowledge. Finally, this report will analyze to what extent gender roles in the family help explain the gap. Two variables are important in that last step: homemaker status and number of children at home.

The Gender Gap in Community Participation

The report looks at two survey questions asked about participation in community activities from the 2010 round of the AmericasBarometer surveys by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP),[2] in which 40,990 respondents from 24 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean were asked the following questions:

CP5. "Now, changing the subject. In the last 12 months have you tried to help to solve a problem in your community or in your neighborhood?"

"I am going to read a list of groups and organizations. Please tell me if you attend their meetings at least once a week, once or twice a month, once or twice a year, or never.
CP8. Meetings of a community improvement committee or association?"

The response options offered were "Never," "Once or Twice a Year," "Once or Twice a Month," and "Once a Week."[3] The response levels were coded from 0 ("Never") to 3 ("Once a Week"), and the two variables were added to form a single variable.[4] The final variable was then transformed to range between 0 and 100. Figure 1 shows the average gap in community participation between men and women for each of the 24 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.[5]

Figure 1 shows that there are moderate and statistically significant gender gaps in community participation in 19 out of the 24 countries across Latin America and the Caribbean. The gap is not statistically significant in Uruguay, Costa Rica, or Panama, while it is statistically significant but in the opposite direction (i.e., men participate *less* than women) in Argentina and Chile. The largest gap in favor of men is in the Dominican Republic (7.2), while the average gap is about 2.9.

Explaining the Gap

Why do women participate less than men in community activities across Latin America and the Caribbean? In order to make a first attempt to explain the gap, I consider the mainstream model of political participation, which considers participation rates to be a product of one's general opportunities (e.g., education), resources (e.g,. wealth), and motivation (e.g., interest in politics). In the AmericasBarometer survey, there are eight variables that can be considered good indicators for this model. Wealth is an index comprising five quintiles and is based on an analysis of household assets.[6] Education is a continuous variable measuring years of schooling. Urban is a binary variable indicating if the respondent lives in an urban area. Interpersonal trust is a continuous indicator ranging from 0 to 100, measuring to what extent the respondent trusts other people.[7] External efficacy is measured on a 1 to 7 scale.[8] Political

[2] Funding for the 2010 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), and Vanderbilt University. Prior issues in the *Insight*s series can be found at: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights.php. The data on which they are based can be found at http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/survey-data.php.

[3] Item non-response for CP6 was 0.6%. Item non-response for CP8 was 0.8%

[4] The Pearson correlation between the two variables was .38, which is sufficiently large to allow the inclusion of those variables in a single construct.

[5] All analyses presented here were conducted using STATA v11.1.

[6] More details about the construction of this variable can be found in a previous number of the *Insights* series (Córdova, 2009).

[7] Interpersonal trust is usually seen along with civic engagement (participation) as a component of social capital (Brehm & Rahn, 1997). Even though the causal direction between the two variables goes beyond the scope of this report, it is important to take into account the possibility that citizens that are most trustful of others are also more likely to participate.

[8] The question about external political efficacy (EFF1) asked how much respondents agreed or disagreed with the

interest and political knowledge indicate respondents' involvement with politics.[9,10] The model also controls for age and indigenous identity. Age is a continuous variable measured in complete years. Indigenous is a binary variable indicating whether the respondents considers herself indigenous.[11] The main independent variable in the model is a binary variable indicating if the respondent is a woman. If the mainstream model entirely explains the gap, the effect of "Woman" should be close to zero and not statistically significant in the model. The model also includes a binary variable for each country (except Uruguay, which is the country of reference); these country fixed effects are not shown in the figure.

Figure 2. Weighted Standardized Effects of Gender and Control Variables on Community Participation, 2010

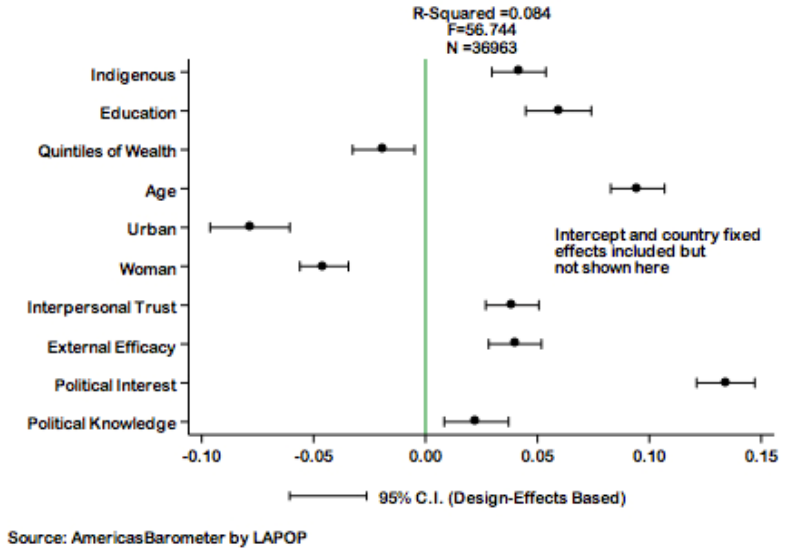


Figure 2 displays the results from the mainstream model of political participation. First, it is notable that the effect of "Woman" is negative and statistically significant even after the inclusion of the variables from the mainstream model. This reveals that factors such as education, political interest, and interpersonal trust do not entirely explain the gap between men and women in community participation. Second, even though the gap still has to be explained, most of the variables from the mainstream model have the expected effects. Only "Quintiles of Wealth" and "Urban" have negative and statistically significant effects, while the other variables have the expected positive effects. So, general factors related to opportunities, resources, and motivation for political participation do not fully explain the existence the gender gap.

The next step is to take into account gender roles in the family to try to explain the gap. To do so, I add three variables to the mainstream model in order to provide a more complete account of the gender gap in community participation. These variables attempt to capture the process by which the division of labor in the home constrains women's participation in community politics. First, a binary variable indicates whether the respondent declares herself to be a homemaker.[12] Second, the model also includes a continuous variable for the number of children still living with the respondent.[13] However, in order to capture the separate effect the number of children can have for women and men, it is also necessary to include a multiplicative term between "Woman" and "Number of Children at Home." So, when the respondent is a man,

following statement: "Those who govern this country are interested in what people like you think." It ranges from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree"). Item non-response for this question was 4.3%

[9] The question about political interest (POL1) asked: "How much interest do you have in politics: a lot, some, little or none?" Item non-response on the question was about 1%.

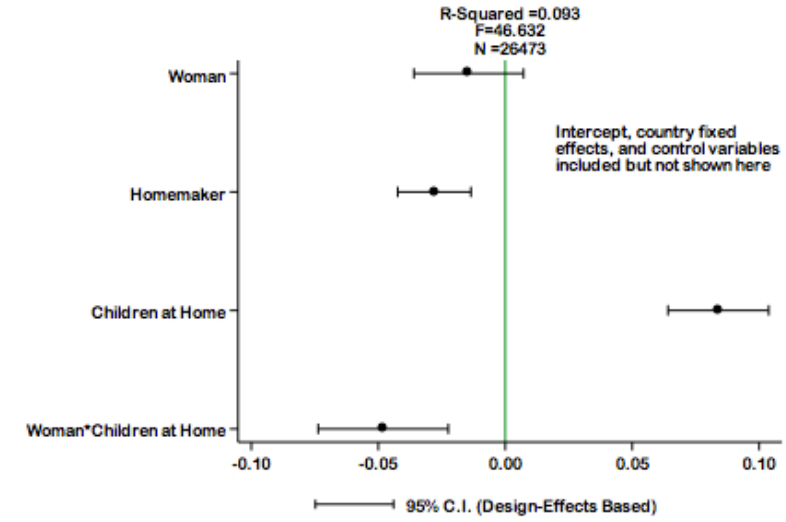
[10] A battery of factual political information questions measured political knowledge. The questions were about the number of provinces/departments/states in the country (GI1), the name of the US President (GI3), and the length of the presidential/prime ministerial term in the respondent's country (GI4). The questions were coded 1 if correct and 0 if incorrect. Missing values were coded as 0. The final variable was the sum of the three items.

[11] Item non-response for this question (ETID) was 2%.

[12] Respondents who said that they "mainly spend their time" by "taking care of the home" were coded as "homemakers." Only 1.5% of male respondents chose this option, while 37.2% of female respondents did so. Males who stay at home were excluded from the analysis since they are a residual category with difficult interpretation.

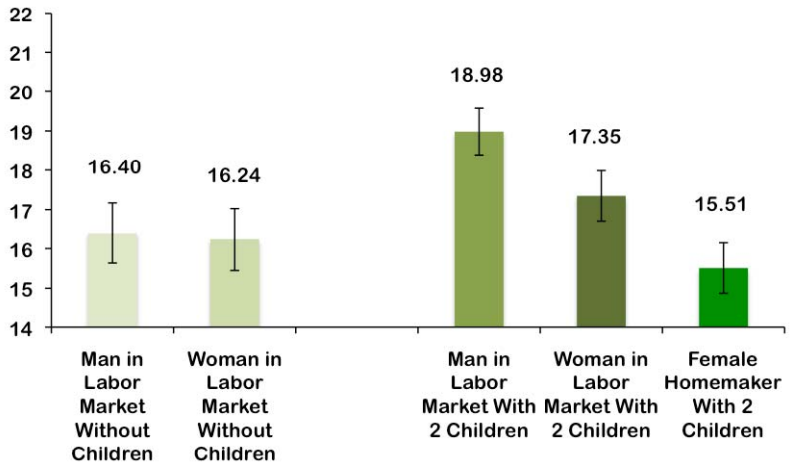
[13] The variable ranges from 0 to 20, with about 98% of the cases falling between 0 and 5.

Figure 3. Weighted Standardized Effects of Gender and Gender Role Variables on Community Participation, 2010



Source: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP

Figure 4. Predicted Values of Community Participation for Different Types of Respondents, 2010



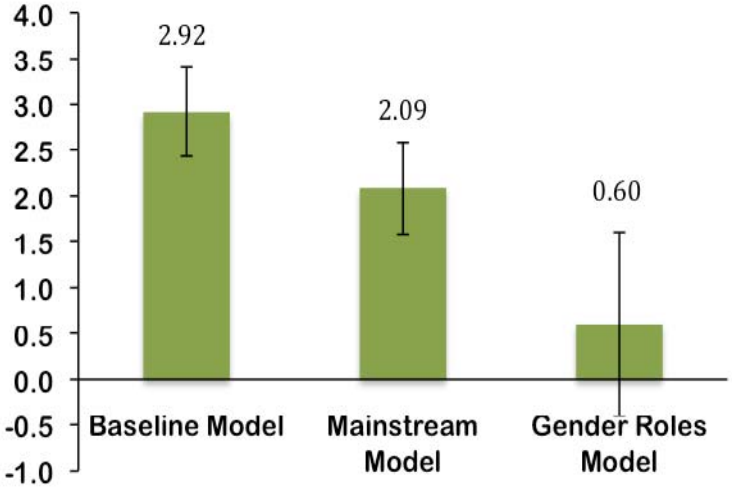
Source: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP

"Woman" equals 0, and the coefficient of "Number of Children at Home" refers to the effect among men. When the respondent is a woman, the coefficient of "Number of Children" added to the coefficient of the multiplicative term represents the effect of having children at home among women. Figure 3 shows the results from this model. The model also includes all the variables from the mainstream model and the country indicators, but they are not shown in the figure due to lack of space (see Appendix for full models).

The results from Figure 3 show that gender roles are indeed an important key to explaining the participatory gap. The coefficient of "Woman" falls very close to zero and is not statistically significant, meaning that the gap between men and women is closed when the analysis takes into account gender roles. Homemaker status has a negative and statistically significant effect on community participation. Regarding the number of children, the effects have to be carefully interpreted. Having more children has a positive effect for men (since the effect of "Children at Home" alone is positive), and an almost null effect among women (because the positive coefficient of "Children at Home" is balanced and neutralized by the negative multiplicative term). In this sense, having kids fosters community participation among men, while it does not among women, who may be more directly involved in the day-to-day care of the children, and who are probably also taking care of the home.

Therefore, on the one hand, women are disadvantaged because of the constraints in having time to participate, mainly caused by the fact that on average they tend to care for children at home to a greater degree than men. On the other hand, even though housewives could conceivably have less time constraints than women who work, the latter presumably have more opportunities to learn skills and avenues for engagement in politics. Figure 4 helps in the interpretation of the coefficients just discussed. It displays the predicted participation for specific types of respondents, by showing the differences between male and female respondents, between respondents with and without children, and between housewives and non-housewives.

Figure 5. Gender Gap in Local Level Participation Across Different Models, 2010



Source: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP

Finally, another way to interpret the magnitude of the contributions of the mainstream and the gender role models is to see how the gap decreases as variables are added into the analysis. Figure 5 compares the initial gap ("Baseline Model") when no other variables are included in the analysis with the gaps in the two models discussed above.[14] The gap drops from 2.9 in the baseline model to 2.1 in the mainstream model, and it is still statistically significant. When the gender role variables are included in the last model, the gap drops from 2.1 to 0.7 and is no longer statistically significant.

While the analyses here have been conducted in a manner that considers the Latin American and Caribbean region as a whole, I also assessed the models for each country. Regarding the effects in each country, the mainstream model fully explains the gap of 7 of the 19 countries where the gap originally existed, leaving another 12 countries with a gap to be explained. The gender roles model brings substantial improvements in this respect, leaving only Bolivia and Suriname with gender gaps in need of additional explanation, a task that might be taken up by future research on the subject.

Discussion

This *Insights* report asked why women participate less than men in community activities in Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition to variables that are typically seen as explaining the existence of this type of gap, such as education, political interest, and interpersonal trust, the analysis here also took into account factors related to gender roles in the family. For that purpose, variables measuring homemaker status and the number of children at home were included in the analysis in order to verify if the gender gap in community participation could be better explained when these variables are taken into account.

The findings from the empirical analysis using the 2010 round of the Americas Barometer survey clearly indicate that gender roles are fundamental in understanding the gap. While variables from the mainstream model of political participation help to explain a small part of the gap, homemaker status and number of children at home are shown to be major factors in the differences between men and women.

The results presented in this *Insights* report have some important practical implications. The 2010 round of the AmericasBarometer surveys confirms that there is a gap between men and women in regards to community participation, and shows that this gap is explained by gender roles in the family. In this sense, increasing women's participation in communities across the area depends heavily on developing strategies and forms of participation that take into account the trade-off many women face between taking care of the family and engaging in politics.

[14] This gap corresponds to the effect of gender on community participation in a model that only takes into account age, urban/rural residence, indigenous ethnicity, and the country fixed effects.

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Appendix. Predictors of Community Participation in Latin America and the Caribbean

	Mainstream Model Standardized Coefficient (Standard Error)	Gender Roles Model Standardized Coefficient (Standard Error)
Political Knowledge	0.023*	0.028*
	(0.007)	(0.008)
Political Interest	0.134*	0.128*
	(0.007)	(0.008)
External Efficacy	0.040*	0.037*
	(0.006)	(0.007)
Interpersonal Trust	0.039*	0.046*
	(0.006)	(0.007)
Woman	-0.045*	-0.013
	(0.006)	(0.011)
Urban	-0.078*	-0.086*
	(0.009)	(0.010)
Age	0.095*	0.061*
	(0.006)	(0.008)
Quintiles of Wealth	-0.019*	-0.015
	(0.007)	(0.008)
Education	0.059*	0.066*
	(0.007)	(0.009)
Indigenous	0.042*	0.035*
	(0.006)	(0.007)
Homemaker		-0.031*
		(0.007)
Children at Home		0.081*
		(0.010)
Woman*Children at Home		-0.045*
		(0.013)
Mexico	0.040*	0.036*
	(0.008)	(0.010)
Guatemala	0.096*	0.084*
	(0.009)	(0.010)
El Salvador	0.057*	0.052*
	(0.009)	(0.011)
Honduras	0.018	0.008
	(0.010)	(0.012)
Nicaragua	0.054*	0.047*
	(0.009)	(0.009)
Costa Rica	0.018*	0.014

	(0.009)	(0.012)
Panama	0.021	0.002
	(0.013)	(0.013)
Colombia	0.028*	0.019*
	(0.008)	(0.009)
Ecuador	0.055*	0.042*
	(0.011)	(0.013)
Bolivia	0.102*	0.095*
	(0.013)	(0.015)
Peru	0.075*	0.073*
	(0.009)	(0.010)
Paraguay	0.115*	0.097*
	(0.010)	(0.011)
Chile	0.017	0.015
	(0.009)	(0.010)
Brazil	0.015	0.004
	(0.014)	(0.016)
Venezuela	0.090*	0.085*
	(0.010)	(0.011)
Argentina	0.015	0.006
	(0.008)	(0.010)
Dominican Republic	0.116*	0.110*
	(0.010)	(0.011)
Haiti	0.158*	0.168*
	(0.010)	(0.011)
Jamaica	0.055*	0.042*
	(0.010)	(0.012)
Guyana	0.029*	0.010
	(0.010)	(0.012)
Trinidad & Tobago	0.031*	0.012
	(0.008)	(0.009)
Belize	0.023*	0.005
	(0.008)	(0.009)
Suriname	-0.011	-0.025*
	(0.010)	(0.012)
Constant	-0.002	0.038*
	(0.008)	(0.009)
R-Squared	0.084	0.093
F-test	56.74*	46.63*
Number of Obs.	36963	26262
**p<0.05*		

Note: Coefficients are statistically significant at *p<0.05, two-tailed