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Riches Don't Explain Campaign Participation in the Americas, but Community Involvement Does

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Executive Summary: Campaign work involves a subset of the population that is highly dedicated to exercising its democratic right to participate in politics. It can therefore be used as an indicator of electoral participation beyond voting. We find that rates of campaign participation vary across individuals and countries in the Americas, with rates in certain Caribbean countries especially high. Focusing on the individual level, we find that education is a positive predictor of this type of involvement in electoral politics, but wealth is not. Interestingly, we also find that interpersonal trust negatively predicts campaign work. We discuss two potential explanations for this finding: one is that those with more interpersonal trust might feel less compelled to participate because they trust others to do so, and the other is that participation in the inner-workings of electoral politics might sour people and decrease interpersonal trust.

LAPOP is pleased to note that this report was developed and written by undergraduate students participating in a Vanderbilt University honors seminar in the Spring of 2012. That class, HONS186, was taught by Professor E. J. Zechmeister and Margarita Corral acted as teaching assistant. Author names are listed here in alphabetical order; biographies of the authors are provided in the report appendix.

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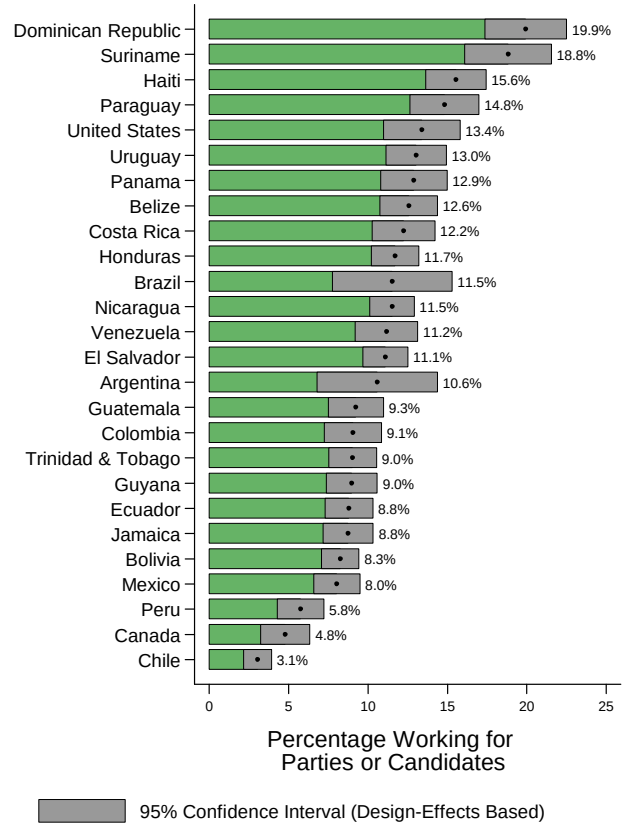
The electoral process arguably is *the* most significant feature of a modern democracy. It is principally through elections that systems meet "the claim of democracies to be governments in which the people participate in policy making" (Powell 2000, p. 3). While most individuals participate in elections through voting, *if* they participate at all, a smaller subset of citizens devote time and energy to political campaigns. Citizen participation in campaigns to elect representatives demonstrates commitment to the system, reflects a strong interest in exercising the basic democratic right of participation, and may impart important political knowledge and skills. Thus, it is important to understand who participates in campaign work in the Americas, and why.

In this *Insights* report, we examine individual level variables that predict a person's likelihood of having worked on a recent national campaign. We focus in particular on resources and social capital. With respect to the first category, interestingly, we find that wealth is not a predictor of participation in campaign work, while education is. Together this provides only modest support for a classic resource model of participation.[1] Moving on, we assess two dimensions of social capital: community engagement and interpersonal trust. We find that indicators of community engagement positively predict working for an electoral campaign. In contrast, trust has a slight *negative* relationship with campaign work. As we discuss later, this latter finding could be due to exposure the conflict inherent in political campaigns, though testing such a causal relationship is outside the scope of this report.

Figure 1. Working for Parties or Candidates during Campaigns in the Americas, 2010



Source: AmericasBarometer 2010, by LAPOP

The question at the center of this *Insights* report was included in the 2010 AmericasBarometer[2] survey by LAPOP[3], and was presented to 42,488 individuals across 26 countries.[4] The question was worded as follows:

PP2, "There are people who work for parties or candidates during electoral campaigns. Did you work for any candidate or party in the last Presidential [Prime Minister] elections of 20[XX]?"

[1] Brady, Verba and Schlozman (1995, p. 273) identify time, money, and civic skills as "resources for political participation."

[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

[3] Prior issues in the *Insights* Series can be found at: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights.phpThe data on which they are based can be found at http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/survey-data.php

[4] The 2010 round of the AmericasBarometer included 43,990 respondents, but the question examined here was asked of only a split sample in the U.S. and Canada; the average non-response rate for this question for the pooled sample is 1.9%.

Figure 1 depicts the percentage of individuals in each country who report having worked for a political party or candidate in the last national, executive-level electoral campaign. The rates of participation range from 3.1% in Chile to 19.9% in the Dominican Republic. The gray bars indicate the 95% confidence interval; countries with overlapping confidence intervals are statistically indistinguishable with respect to their estimated rates of participation in electoral campaigns. The countries with the highest levels of participation are found in the Caribbean region, namely the Dominican Republic and Suriname, whereas there is only modest variation across the remaining 24 countries, with percentages tapering off slowly. Overall, working for a political party or candidate in the more recent national campaigns is a task that is only taken on by a small subset of the population. But who are these select few? In the next sections we evaluate a number of possible individual level predictors of campaign work.

Political campaign activism is high in the Caribbean. The Dominican Republic and Suriname lead all nations in the Americas, while Canada and Chile lag far behind.

Socioeconomic and Demographic Characteristics and Working for a Party or Candidate

One dominant explanation of political participation is the resource model (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995). Drawing on this perspective, one might expect that those with more wealth and education are more likely to participate because wealth might provide people with the time and financial resources to support participation in campaigns and education should impart civic skills. While we test these expectations here, we found two reasons to caution against making strong *a priori* predictions along these lines. First, much of the literature dealing with political participation does not address campaign work as the sole focus of its research, and therefore our research expectations are based on extrapolation from more general works on political participation. Second, resources may encompass more than just the benefits of wealth and education; thus, other factors might reasonably matter more than status in predicting campaign work in the Americas.[5]

We conduct a logistic regression analysis in which we predict our dichotomous dependent variable, working for a political party or candidate, with the following measures: place of residence (urban versus rural), quintiles of wealth[6], age, gender, and education level.[7] Figure 2 presents the results of this analysis, with the independent variables aligned on the vertical axis. Each dot on the graph corresponds to the relative predicted impact of each independent variable based on standardized coefficients. Dots to the left of the vertical line at 0.0 represent a negative correlation with working for a political party or candidate. Likewise, the dots to the right of the line represent a positive correlation with work for a political party or campaign. The lines flanking the dot on either side represent the 95% confidence interval. When the confidence interval does not overlap the vertical "0.0" line we conclude that the coefficient for that independent variable is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

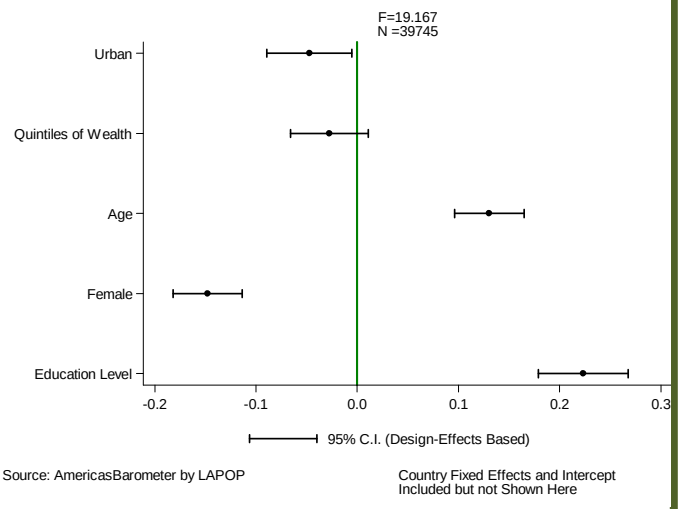
[5] Huckfeldt and Sprague (1992) claim that political structure exists independently of social structure and therefore, social status may not always predict political participation.

[6] See Abby Córdova, 2009, "Methodological Note: Measuring Relative Wealth using Household Asset Indicators" for a description of the construction of the wealth index: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/I0806en.pdf

[7] In this and subsequent analyses in this report, we omit the U.S. and Canada in order to focus on public opinion and behavior in the Latin American and Caribbean regions.

All of the independent variables *except* quintiles of wealth are statistically significant predictors of the likelihood that a person worked for a political party or candidate. The variables "urban" and "female" are negatively correlated, whereas "age"[8] and "education level" are positively correlated. Thus, those who live in rural areas, men, those who are older, and those who are more educated are more likely to have worked for a campaign in the last national election. The relative strength of each correlation is determined by the absolute value of the standardized coefficient. Thus, in relation to each other and the dependent variable, urban versus rural place of residence has the weakest significant relationship, while education level has the strongest correlation with the dependent variable. Thus, while we find no support for the expectation, drawn from the standard resource model framework, that wealth matters, we do find that education has a strong effect on one's likelihood of working for a campaign or party in national elections in the Americas.

Figure 2. Socioeconomic and Demographic Predictors of Campaign Participation



Community Involvement, Interpersonal Trust, and Political Identification as Predictors of Working for a Party or Candidate

One additional factor that may influence the likelihood that a person has worked for a political party and/or candidate in an election is social capital. Klesner (2007) defines "social capital" as the quantity of communal bonds formed in society, which allow citizens to pursue similar goals and objectives. Social capital thus implies both social trust and participation. Drawing on this perspective, we consider that high levels of social trust and participation in one's community, which capture the two principal dimensions of social capital, might be related to a higher likelihood that citizens will actively participate in politics, with such participation in this case evidenced by work for a political campaign.

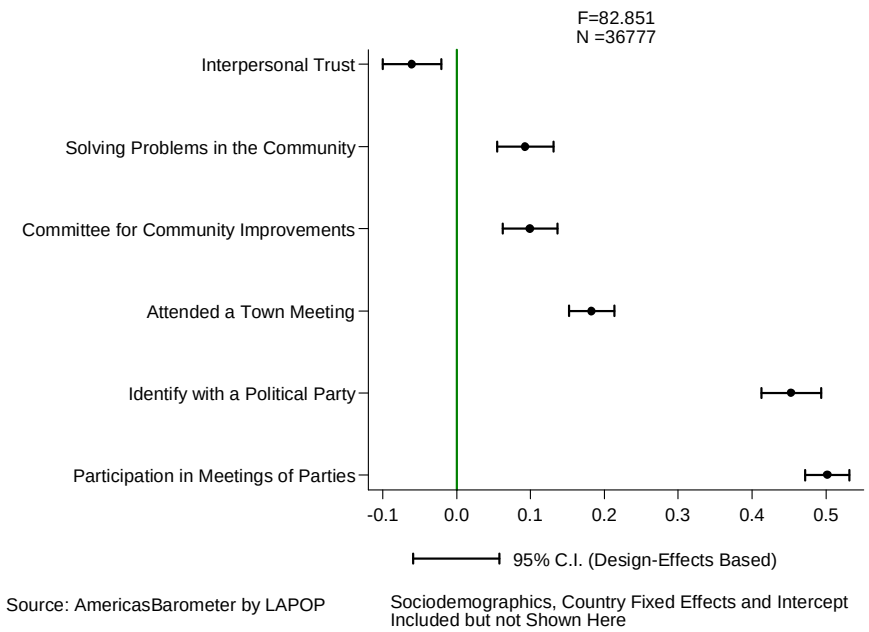
Our extended model thus includes three types of indicators: interpersonal trust, community involvement, and general political attachment and involvement. Before introducing the specific measures, we provide further discussion of our expectations for these factors.

The general social capital framework suggests that, as a component of social capital, interpersonal trust should be positively correlated with campaign work. One might reasonably assume that the more trust a person has in others, the more likely he or she will be to engage with other citizens and political leaders. Amber Seligson (1999) introduces the idea of interpersonal trust as a factor in determining engagement with a political system, though she concedes that her research did not fully support this hypothesis. Thus, there is reason to think that interpersonal trust, though often associated

[8] Interestingly, age does not show a perfectly linear relationship with the dependent variable. After the age of 55, the likelihood of campaign participation decreases, suggesting a curvilinear relationship. For the sake of brevity and focus, this was eliminated from the discussion.

with social capital, should be considered independently from community involvement. Focusing on the complexity of social capital, Uslaner and Brown (2005, p. 874) assert, "[T]rust should not work the same way (if at all) across different forms of participation. There is little reason to believe that trust should affect all forms of civic engagement equally, or even at all..." The mixed theory and ambiguous findings in prior research leave this as an open question: does interpersonal trust positively predict campaign work?

Figure 3. Predicting Work in Campaigns



The second set of variables relates to community involvement. According to Amber Seligson (1999 p. 357-358), "participation in community development groups appears to be one of the keys to sparking further democratic participation." Furthermore, she argues that "institutions working on strengthening democracy would best use their resources in forming community development groups and supplying them with the funds with which to sustain their projects" (p. 359), which again emphasizes the importance of social capital. Therefore, we have reason to expect a strong link between community participation and political participation. We examine community involvement with measures of active participation in working to solve problems and resolve issues in the community, in addition to attending community meetings.

Our third basket of variables relates to general political attachment and participation. In identifying with a party, a person is attaching himself or herself to a set of beliefs and policies. As Klesner (2007 p. 26) asserts, "for the five forms of conventional and unconventional political activity, …either political interest or a sense that politics is important was a significant indicator in all forms." Rather than examine political interest in the abstract, we test whether specific expressions of interest – party identification and attending meetings of parties – affect participation in campaign work. We expect to find positive correlations for these variables.

The results of our new analysis are presented in Figure 3. The model includes a measure of *Interpersonal Trust*.[9] It also includes the following measures of community involvement: *Solving Problems in the Community, Participation in Committee for Community Improvement,* and

[9] **IT1**. And speaking of the people from around here, would you say that people in this community are very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, not very trustworthy or untrustworthy...?

Attending a Municipal Meeting.[10] Finally, we include two measures of more general political attachment and involvement: *Identifying with a Political Party* and *Participating in Meetings of Parties*.[11] The model also includes the socioeconomic and demographic measures and country fixed effects contained in the analysis shown in Figure 2; the full set of results is available in the appendix.

One of the most interesting results from our analysis is that, contrary to expectations drawn from the social capital literature, interpersonal trust is *negatively* correlated with work for political parties. This suggests that social capital indeed is a nuanced factor when it comes to its role in political engagement. The negative correlation that exists between interpersonal trust and our dependent variable runs counter to conventional wisdom that involvement strengthens trust and makes an individual more apt to approve of political participation. It does, however, fit with classic conceptions of the ways in which political parties can sow divisions within a society. George Washington, in his 1796 Farewell Address, warned against divisive partisanship that could create less-trusting political participants. As Washington stated, "the alternate domination of one's action over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to party dissention … is itself a frightful despotism" (Washington 1796). Thus, one possibility is that engagement in campaign work decreases interpersonal trust by exposing an individual to the political discord inherent in democratic politics. Another possibility is that those with high interpersonal trust are content to let others do the work involved in campaigns, as they trust that others can get the job done well. We note that our analyses cannot adjudicate between these possibilities; it is possible that either one, or both, explains the negative correlation and we urge researchers to take up this topic in more detail in future work.

Our measures of community and general political attachment and involvement work as expected. First, working to solve problems, participating in community improvement meetings, and attending municipal meetings are all positive predictors of working for a political campaign. Second, as anticipated, identification with a political party and attending political party meetings are very strongly correlated with campaign work.

Conclusion

Our analysis of the AmericasBarometer 2010 data suggests that working for a political party or campaign is uncommon. Therefore, we wondered what factors help account for the small percentage of active, involved citizens. Our discussion highlighted two principal types of factors that could matter: resources and social capital. We find only moderate support for a resource model: education matters, but not wealth. This suggests that the intangible lessons and resources obtained through education are more important to involvement in campaign work than the material resources that wealth provides. Beyond just resources, education may instill a sense of duty, which may be a cause or effect of community participation and activism. In other words, not only do people need a specific skill set, but they also need to feel obligated to participate, and education may be one avenue through which individuals acquire this sense of duty.

[10] We used the following items to measure these variables: **CP5**: "In the last 12 months have you tried to help to solve a problem in your community or in your neighborhood?," CP8: "Have you attended meetings of a community improvement committee or association?," and **NP1**. "Have you attended a town meeting, city council meeting or other meeting in the past 12 months?"

[11] These items are: **VB10**: "Do you currently identify with a political party?" and **CP13**: "Have you attended meetings of a political party or political organization?" We also considered *Approving of People Working for Campaigns*. Although it shows a strong positive correlation with our dependent variable, there is insufficient support from the literature at this time to provide us with the basis for a strong theoretical claim of its causal relationship to our dependent variable.

With respect to social capital, our discussion and results highlighted the importance of distinguishing between the engagement and trust dimensions. We found that interpersonal trust and engagement in local and partisan politics both matter, but in opposite ways. We have several thoughts as to why this is so. With respect to engagement, it may be that involvement in community and political affairs, like education, sharpens civic skills in ways that promote electoral campaign involvement. With respect to trust, our analyses point to the possibility, though we caution it is only a possibility, that working for a campaign decreases social trust (we can infer this as a *possibility* because the relationship between these two variables is negative in our model). To the extent there is indeed this type of causal relationship at work, our analyses have implications for policymakers who might wish to increase citizen involvement in electoral campaigns; specifically, our findings with respect to the negative relationship between trust and electoral work cautions against civic engagement and education programs that emphasize partisan differences and competition, for these may be the aspects of working for a campaign that undermine social trust. If future work were able to demonstrate that this negative correlation we find is indeed rooted at least in part in such a causal process, then there is a potential dark side to citizen involvement in campaign work.

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Appendix

Table 1. Predictors of Campaign Participation in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2010

	Coefficient	**Standard Error**	**Coefficient**	**Standard Error**
Education	0.223*	0.023	0.167*	0.025
Female	-0.148*	0.017	-0.071*	0.018
Age	0.131*	0.018	0.041*	0.020
Urban	-0.047	0.021	-0.008	0.023
Quintiles of Wealth	-0.028*	0.020	-0.025*	0.021
Solving Problems in the Community			0.092*	0.019
Participated in Committee			0.099*	0.019
Attended Municipal Meeting			0.182*	0.016
Identify with a Party			0.452*	0.020
Participated in Meeting of Party			0.501*	0.015
Interpersonal Trust			-0.060*	0.020
Mexico	-0.090*	0.025	-0.020	0.025
Guatemala	-0.053	0.025	0.032	0.027
El Salvador	-0.024	0.021	0.021	0.022
Honduras	0.005	0.022	0.047*	0.022
Nicaragua	-0.009	0.021	0.016	0.022
Costa Rica	-0.003	0.023	0.068*	0.023
Panama	-0.005	0.024	0.088*	0.026
Colombia	-0.089*	0.026	-0.033	0.028
Ecuador	-0.112*	0.032	0.083*	0.032
Bolivia	-0.129*	0.030	-0.069*	0.030
Peru	-0.179*	0.030	-0.098*	0.029
Paraguay	0.032	0.022	0.066*	0.022
Chile	-0.334*	0.037	-0.146*	0.037
Brazil	-0.017	0.049	0.124*	0.050
Venezuela	-0.035	0.024	0.007	0.027
Argentina	-0.035	0.039	-0.018	0.030
Dominican Rep.	0.107*	0.022	0.023	0.021
Haiti	0.052*	0.023	0.065*	0.024
Jamaica	-0.097*	0.024	-0.031	0.026
Guyana	-0.076*	0.025	0.021	0.025
Trinidad & Tobago	-0.083*	0.023	-0.013	0.025
Belize	0.012	0.022	0.087*	0.023
Suriname	0.061*	0.024	0.033	0.027
Constant	-2.152*	0.024	-2.440*	0.026
F	*19.17*		*86.75*	
Number of Observations	*39745*		*37,605*	
* p<0.05				

Note: Coefficients are statistically significant at *p<0.05, two-tailed.
Country of Reference: Uruguay

Author Biographies*

Erica Graff has just finished her sophomore year at Vanderbilt University, where she is a member of the College Scholars Program. Erica is majoring in Communication Studies, but plans on attending medical school after graduation. Erica blogs for the Office of Undergraduate Admissions and volunteers at a medical clinic.

Maranda Orrell has just finished her junior year at Vanderbilt University. She is a History major and a member of the College Scholars Program. She is a member of Zeta Tau Alpha, serves as Community Service Chair for Sigma Phi Lambda, and is the Event Coordinator for Reach Out and Read. After graduation, she is considering business school.

Alexandra Rigl has just finished her sophomore year at Vanderbilt University. She is a member of the College Scholars (Honors) Program. She is majoring in English Literature and minoring in Medicine, Health, and Society. She currently serves as the Vice President of Member Education of Kappa Delta Sorority and was recently nominated to participate in the Lead Now Initiative. After graduation, she plans to attend law school and pursue a career in the nonprofit realm.

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