

Insights Series #158

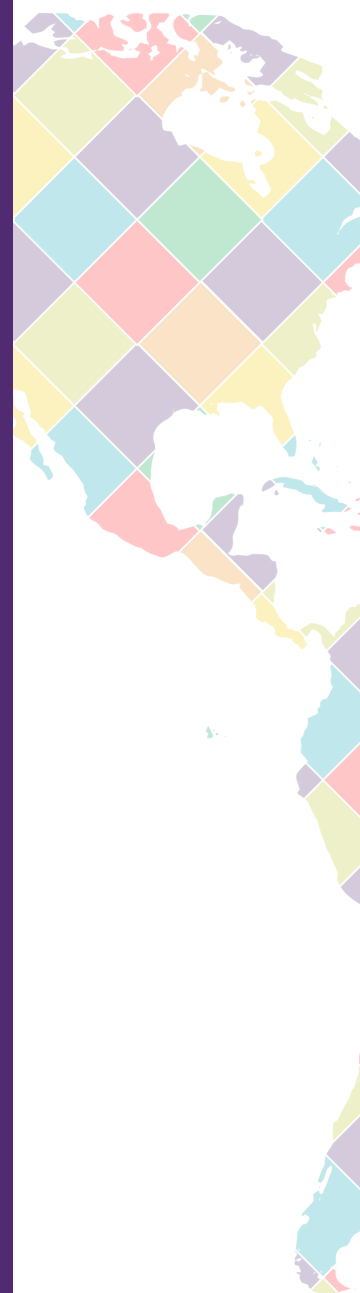
## Who Believes the Rich Buy Election Results in the Americas?

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### Key Findings:

- In 12 out of 15 countries, more than 75% of adults believe the rich sometimes or always buy election results
- Those with more wealth and those who are more educated are less likely to perceive the rich buy election results
- Higher levels of political trust are correlated with lower perceptions of the rich buying election results
- Higher levels of social trust are also correlated with lower perceptions of the rich buying election results
- Citizen satisfaction with democracy is tightly connected with perceptions of election corruption: a maximum increase in satisfaction with democracy is associated with a lower perception of the rich buying election results by 19.22 units (on a 0-100 scale)



Considering low and, in some cases, decreasing trust in the political institutions across the Americas,<sup>1</sup> it is imperative for policymakers to determine mechanisms of political cynicism. Beliefs that the rich buy election results are one useful indicator of assessing citizens' trust in the political system - in this case, specifically their confidence in elections. Some scholars have suggested that election integrity underlies satisfaction with democracy.<sup>2</sup> In this broader sense, views of the rich buying election results can provide important insight into larger political dynamics. Thus, it is valuable to investigate perceptions that the rich buy election results in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region.

This *Insights* report analyzes predictors of individuals' evaluations that the rich buy election results. The 2021 round of the LAPOP AmericasBarometer survey measured views of the rich buying election results by asking the following question:

**COUNTFAIR2:** [I will mention some things that can happen during elections and ask you to indicate if they happen in [country]...] The rich buy the election results. Would you say it happens always, sometimes or never?

## In Most Countries, More than Three-Quarters Believe the Rich Buy Election Results

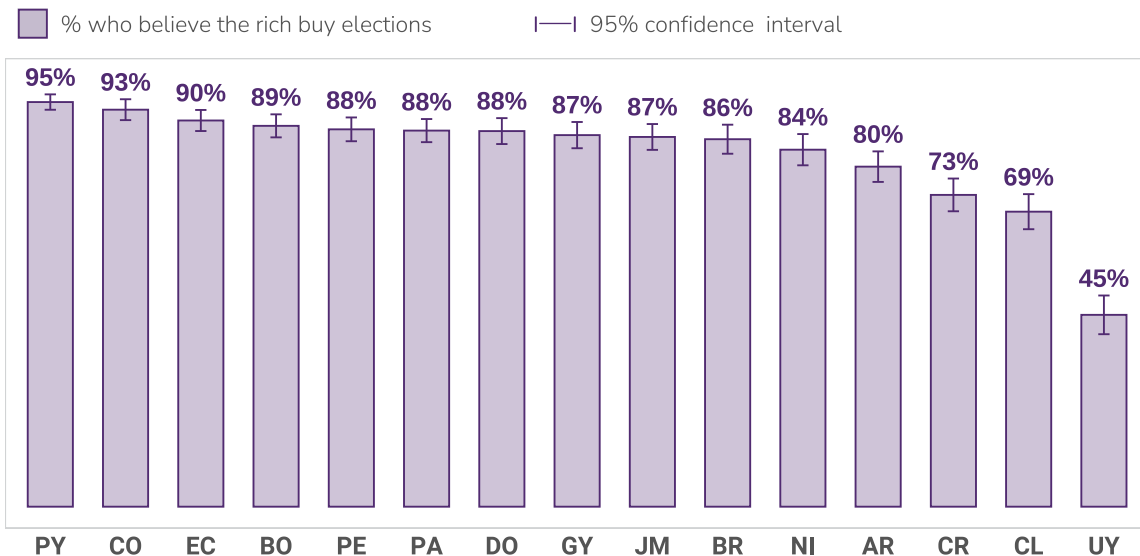
Figure 1 displays perceptions that the rich buy election results in 15 countries surveyed. The figure shows the percentage of individuals who say the rich sometimes or always (vs. never) buy elections.

The bars show the 95% confidence interval for each country. All data are from the 2021 AmericasBarometer; the question was asked only in the countries shown in the figure. In all, 11,264 people in the LAC region were asked the question.<sup>3</sup>

There is a 50-percentage point difference between the country with the highest percentage of individuals who believe the rich sometimes or always buy election results (Paraguay at 95%), and the country with the lowest percentage (Uruguay at 45%). In 12 out of 15 countries, more than 75% of adults believe the rich sometimes or always buy election results.

Figure 1.

### Belief that the Rich Buy Elections



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

## Wealth and Education Predict Perceptions that the Rich Buy Election Results

To evaluate who believes the rich buy election results in the LAC region, I start by using an OLS regression analysis to assess the variable's relationship with age, education, wealth, and gender.<sup>4</sup> Country-fixed effects are included, but not shown in the figure. I scale the three-category dependent variable from 0 to 100, where higher values indicate greater belief that the rich frequently buy elections.<sup>5</sup> All independent variables are coded from 0 to 1, so that each coefficient can be read as the maximum predicted effect on the dependent variable.

Figure 2 illustrates that, on average, in the LAC region, as individuals accumulate wealth, moving from the least wealthy to the most wealthy group, they are 12.7 units less likely to perceive the rich buying election results. This conforms with research that demonstrates that low-income individuals have lower trust in the electoral process.<sup>6</sup>

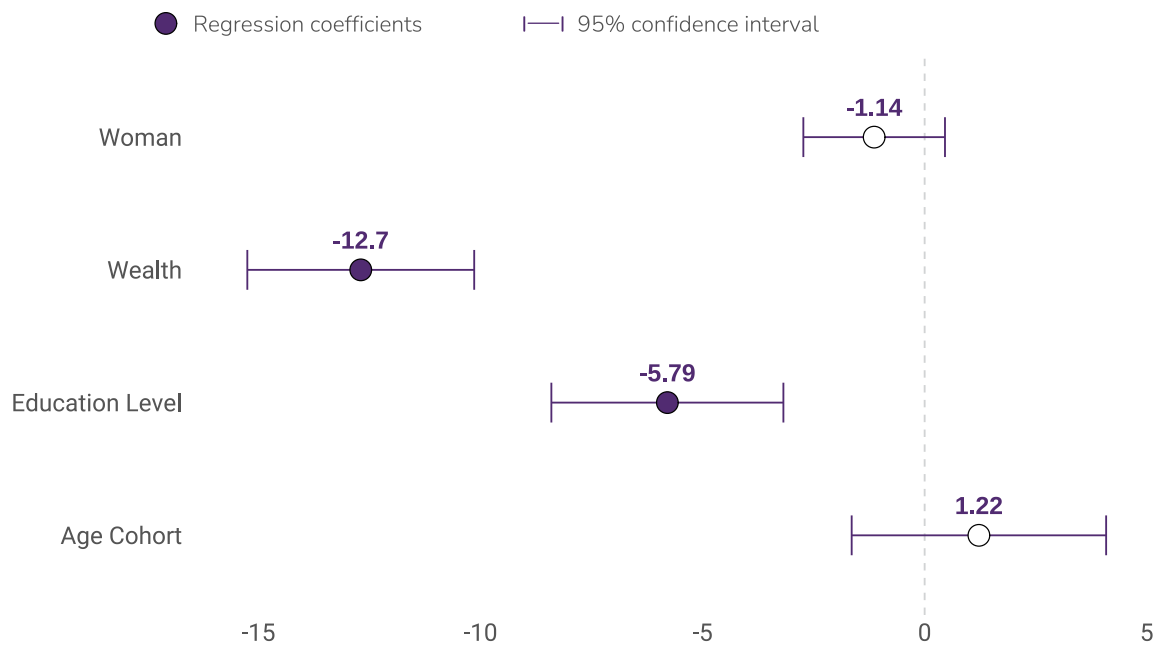
A negative correlation also exists for education; in general, the more educated an individual is, the less they perceive the rich buy election results in their country. This is consistent with work suggesting that more educated citizens have more trust in elections across the region.<sup>7</sup>

It should be noted that other scholars find that higher levels of education and wealth are related to a greater likelihood of citing corruption as the most pressing issue.<sup>8</sup> In brief, there appear to be two different strains of cynicism in the LAC region: the less educated and less wealthy are more likely to believe the rich corrupt electoral processes, while the more educated and more wealthy are more likely to think politics itself is corrupt.

Finally, age and gender identity are not statistically significant predictors of perceptions that the rich buy the election results for individuals in the Americas. Some past scholarship suggests that men and older individuals have less trust in elections in the region. The results in this study - which focus on a similar but distinct outcome variable - are not statistically significant.<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 2.**

**Socioeconomic and Demographic Predictors of Perceptions that the Rich Buy Elections**



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021



## Additional Explanations of Perceptions that the Rich Buy Election Results

In this section, I consider several additional factors that could be related to perceptions that the rich buy election results: political trust, social trust, and satisfaction with democracy. The goal is to measure the correlation between evaluations of trust and democracy, on the one hand, and perceptions that the rich buy election results, on the other hand.

My first expectation is that lower political trust and lower social trust positively predict perceptions of the rich buying election results. Previous research indicates that political distrust, defined as distrust in political institutions, casts doubt on election outcomes.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, social trust, defined as trust in social circles, has also been associated with perceptions of electoral outcomes. Although a previous study suggested that only political trust has a statistically significant effect on perceptions of election results (see Norris 2013), most of the literature indicates that social trust still plays a role (see Levi and Stoker 2000).

Figure 3 presents the results of an OLS regression analysis that includes these additional variables. The analysis also controls for the sociodemographic variables included in the analysis for Figure 2.<sup>11</sup>

To measure political trust, I operationalize a question that asks respondents to evaluate how much trust they have in the national government to do what is right. In line with expectations, a maximum increase in trust in the government predicts a decrease of 7.48 units in an individual's perception of viewing the rich buying election results.

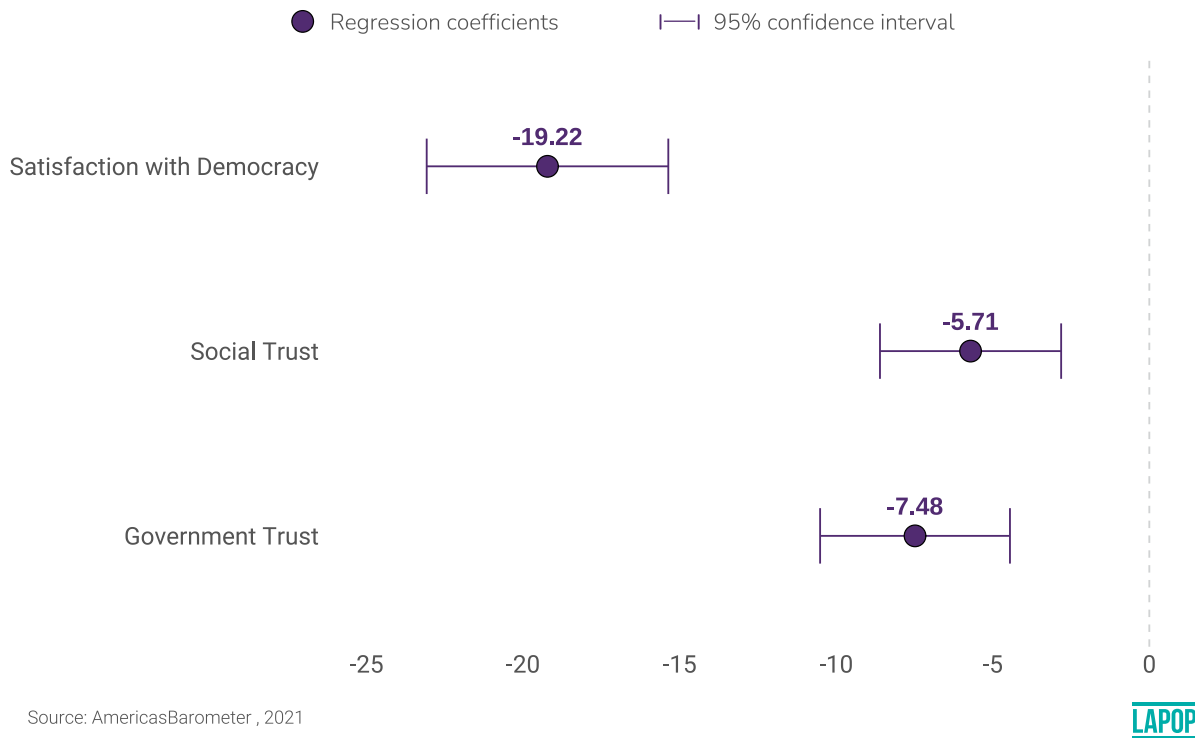
I operationalize social trust via a question that asks respondents to identify whether their neighborhood, area, and community members are trustworthy. Affirming other scholars' notions, a maximum increase in social trust predicts a 5.71 unit decrease in an individual's perception of viewing the rich buying election results.

My next expectation is that higher satisfaction with democracy negatively predicts perceptions of the rich buying election results. Scholars have demonstrated that when individuals believe there is pervasive election fraud or have doubts about election outcomes, they also tend to have less satisfaction with democracy.<sup>12</sup> I assess this with a question that asks about the level of satisfaction with democracy. As expected, increases in democracy satisfaction are associated with lower perceptions that the rich buy election results; a move from the minimum to the maximum level of satisfaction with democracy predicts a decrease in this attitude of 19.22 units.

This strong connection between satisfaction with democracy and views of elections is worth putting a spotlight on. In the raw data, of those who believe the rich buy elections always, 29.8% are satisfied with how democracy is working; of those who believe the rich sometimes buy elections, 44.8% are satisfied. In contrast, among those who believe the rich never buy elections, the percent satisfied with democracy is significantly higher: 61.9%.

**Figure 3.**

**Predictors of of Perceptions that the Rich Buy Elections**



**Conclusion**

This *Insights* report shows that satisfaction with democracy is the strongest predictor of a person’s likelihood to perceive the rich buy election results. Additionally, I find that those with lower trust in the government and lower trust in a person’s social circle are more likely to perceive that the rich buy election results. Furthermore, less wealthy, and less educated people are more likely to perceive that the rich buy election results.

One of the most notable relationships revealed in this report is that perceptions of the rich buying election results is highly correlated with satisfaction with democracy; the regression analysis makes no claim as to the direction of this relationship: it may be that low confidence in elections decreases satisfaction with democracy, and it may also be the case those who are discontent with how democracy is working are more likely to believe elections are corrupted. It is imperative that policymakers recognize that citizen satisfaction with democracy is so tightly connected with perceptions of election corruption. This has implications for the best methods to improve citizen satisfaction with democracy. For example, it is worth investigating and implementing effective policy that mitigates the influence of elite interests in electoral outcomes, which may in turn improve trust in political processes and ultimately strengthen democracy.

## Notes

1. Saiani et. al (2021).
2. Norris (2019).
3. Of those who were asked the question, 687 responded "don't know" and another 347 gave no response; the non-response rate for the question is thus 9.2%. All figures in this report use the following AmericasBarometer dataset version: 2021 v.1.2\_w. The U.S. and Canada are not included in this analysis. (2016).
4. All independent variables were re-coded from 0 to 1. Age (**EDAD**) is a measure of the respondent's age in cohorts (youngest cohort = 25 or under; oldest cohort=66+). Movement from 0 to 1 in age is from the youngest category to the oldest category. Wealth (**WEALTH**) is measured based on a factor analysis of household possessions, such as a TV, refrigerator, etc. A series of new wealth variables were created to represent each quantile, with the wealthiest category acting as the baseline for comparison. Education (**EDR**) is categorical by the highest level of education obtained by the individual. In this report, the lowest category is no or primary education while the highest is post-secondary education. Data for no education and primary education were coded together because the percentage of people surveyed with no education is very small. Therefore, movement from 0 to 1 in education is from primary or no education to post-secondary education. For gender (**GENDER**), women and non-binary individuals are represented by a 1, while men are represented by 0.
5. [The three-category variable is coded so that 0="never", 50="sometimes", and 100="always".
6. Mochtak, Lesschaeve, and Glaurdić (2021).
7. Rosas (2010).
8. Inglehart (1981); Franzen and Meyer (2010).
9. Rosas (2010).
10. Citrin and Stoker (2018).
11. I recoded the following variables: **ANESTG**. How much do you trust the national government to do what is right? This variable (**ANESTG**) is on a 4-point scale that is coded in terms of a minimum (not at all, scored as 0) to maximum (a lot, scored as 1). **IT1**. And speaking of the people from your neighborhood/area/community, would you say that people in your neighborhood/area/community are very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, not very trustworthy or untrustworthy? This variable (**IT1**) is on a 4-point scale that is coded in terms of a minimum (not very untrustworthy, scored as 0) to maximum (very trustworthy, scored as 1). **PN4**. In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the way democracy works in (country)? This variable (**PN4**) is on a 4-point scale that is coded in terms of a minimum (very dissatisfied, scored as 0) to maximum (very satisfied), scored as 1.
12. Norris (2019); Fortin-Rittberger, Harfst, and Dinglera (2017).



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As a charter member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) Transparency Initiative, LAPOP Lab is committed to routine disclosure of our data collection and reporting processes. More information about the AmericasBarometer sample designs can be found at [vanderbilt.edu/lapop/core-surveys](http://vanderbilt.edu/lapop/core-surveys).

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