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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

DRG Learning Digest

DATE: AUGUST 2021



Survey Edition

Do people support democracy? Do they trust their public institutions? How do they feel about the media? These are questions we in the DRG sector must ask as we design and implement our programs. Many surveys around the world cover these and other issues of interest to us, but their data often cannot be compared across countries or regions due to differences in question wording, data collection methodology, and/or sampling or weighting techniques. Still, together they help paint a useful picture of where democracy stands among the world's people and can point to ways in which we can protect and strengthen democracy.

This edition of the DRG Learning Digest focuses on:

- **Global Barometer Surveys** — these surveys cover 70 percent of the world population and use similar methodologies across five regions, allowing for comparisons across countries and time.
- **Other International Surveys** — these surveys are focused on particular regions or DRG topics.
- **DRG Assessment Surveys** — these surveys have been conducted by Missions around the world to better understand the DRG context in their countries.
- **Things to Know: Survey Best Practices** — the final section provides some tips for assessing survey quality and best practices.

And please make use of DRG Evidence and Learning Team resources!

Global Barometer Surveys

Launched in 2004, the [Global Barometer Surveys](#) (GBS) brings together five barometer surveys. Together, these cover 70 percent of the world's population, to more effectively measure public opinion on DRG-related topics and allow for comparison across country and regional contexts. These surveys measure perceptions on such common topics as democracy, authoritarianism, public institutions, human rights, rule of law and governance, political participation, and media usage. A 2018 report, "[Exploring Support for Democracy Across the Globe: Report on Key Findings](#)," distills the findings from the various GBS barometers, concluding that citizens overall tend to evaluate democracy based on its performance and not as an end in itself, and that especially in the developing world, citizens support democracies when they deliver tangible results. Another [analysis of the barometer data](#) from 51 countries across three continents further drives home the connection between public support for democracy and good governance.

In 2021, the GBS is planning to collect data on a new module of questions to gauge the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on individual rights and freedoms. This data will provide a deeper understanding of people's reactions to the pandemic and how citizens assess the performance of their political systems in these turbulent times.

The five GBS barometer surveys are:

- 1) [Afrobarometer](#) — this barometer surveys 37 African countries in 115 languages, covering about 76 percent of the African population. The latest round of data collected in 2020 show that citizens of five West African nations largely perceive [COVID-19 relief distribution to be somewhat or very unfair](#). Additional findings from the 22 countries surveyed in 2020 indicate that [trust in traditional authority figures](#), such as chiefs, remains strong and may be strengthening.
- 2) [Asian Barometer](#) — this barometer covers the countries in East, Southeast, and South Asia, and has surveyed or plans to survey [16 countries between 2018 and 2021](#).
- 3) [Latinobarómetro](#) — this survey covered countries in Central and South America, and last published data in 2018. Some of the countries covered by this barometer are also covered by the Americas Barometer, discussed in the next section.
- 4) [Arab Barometer](#) — this barometer covers Middle Eastern and North African countries, most recently publishing data from 2018-2019. The recent data show that people in the region believe that their freedoms, such as expressing opinions, protesting peacefully, and joining associations, [are less guaranteed today](#) than before the Arab Spring. Still, almost half to two-thirds of citizens across five Arab countries [supported restrictions to free speech](#) during a public health emergency.
- 5) [Eurasia Barometer](#) — this survey included the countries of the former Soviet Union, and the most recent wave of data was collected in 2013.

The map below shows the countries covered by the various barometers.



Other International Surveys

Many other independent international surveys cover all regions of the globe. We cannot discuss all of them here, but rather will feature the main active surveys that gauge public perceptions on issues relevant to democracy, human rights, and governance. The granddaddy of them all is the [World Values Survey](#), which since 1981 has been surveying respondents globally about social, political, economic, religious, and cultural issues. The most recent wave of surveys (Wave #7) concluded in 2020; [online data analysis](#) is available for all waves. One of the most important findings from their four decades of surveying is the dramatic increase in acceptance of equal rights for women, gays and lesbians, foreigners, and other minority or disadvantaged groups ([World Value Survey Key Findings](#)).

Many regional surveys have also arisen to measure public perceptions of important issues relevant to DRG. The [Latin American Public Opinion Project](#) (LAPOP) runs the [AmericasBarometer](#), covering Latin America and the Caribbean; Central Asia is covered by the [Central Asian Barometer](#); Europe is covered by the [European Social Survey](#) and the [Eurobarometer](#); and [Caucasus Barometer](#) covers Armenia and Georgia. These organizations conduct frequent surveys in their respective regions, often using identical questions and sampling methodologies to allow cross-time comparisons. LAPOP includes a [Data Playground](#) where users can see how respondents in different countries responded to every survey question across time. They also publish accessible reports about their substantive and methodological findings. One of their recent [reports](#) details the progress (or lack thereof) that the region has made toward Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) like reducing corruption. The graph below shows the change from LAPOP's 2012 survey to their 2018/2019 survey in the percentage of people reporting that they were asked to pay bribes.

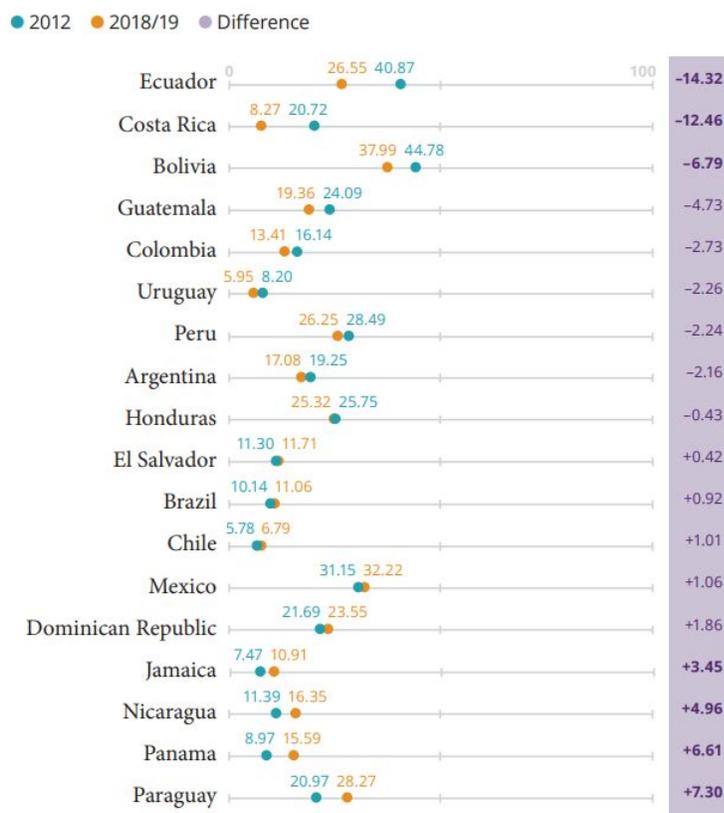


Figure 3: Bribery Victimization by Country, 2012 and 2018/19

Bolded differences are those that reach statistical significance at the 95% level.

Other key surveys are topical. The [International Social Survey Programme](#) conducts annual surveys about topics of interest to social scientists, such as social inequality, the environment, and the role of government. The [Comparative Study of Electoral Systems](#) conducts standardized post-election surveys globally, focusing on citizens' perceptions of policies, political actors, and political systems. Transparency International's [Global Corruption Barometer](#) surveys respondents on every continent about their experiences with corruption. And the [Comparative National Elections Project](#) adds standardized questionnaires about democracy and elections to other surveys being conducted in specific countries. And, of course, private organizations like the [Pew Research Center](#), [Gallup](#), and [Gallup International](#) conduct surveys on a variety of topics, making some of their data publicly available.

DRG Surveys

In addition to these third-party publicly available surveys, USAID Missions sometimes conduct their own surveys to assess the DRG environment in specific countries. Examples of these include the [2018 Liberia Electoral Access and Participation Survey \(LEAP\)](#), which provided information on citizen knowledge and awareness of the election process and procedures, political institutions, political parties and of various election issues. Several Missions, such as [Honduras in 2018](#) and the [Philippines in 2019](#) have also conducted surveys to assess human trafficking in those countries. Some DRG surveys have also included embedded experiments to answer specific questions, such as an experimental survey in Mali that sought to understand the [impact of membership in an association on trust, tolerance, public good provision and political knowledge](#).

Other Missions might consider conducting similar surveys prior to designing DRG programs. The DRG Center's Evidence and Learning Team is exploring the potential of creating standardized survey modules for assessing various sectors within the DRG Center. Missions interested in more information should reach out to the DRG Center's Survey Advisor, Mousumi Sarkar, at msarkar@usaid.gov.

Two women conduct a street poll on disability issues in December 2009 in Armenia, as part of USAID and World Vision's Building Disabled Persons Organizations' Outreach for Greater Disability Inclusiveness Project. (Photo: World Vision.)



Things to Know: Survey Best Practices

As DRG officers, we are rarely called on to design and implement surveys. But our work often requires us to commission surveys and to assess the quality of these surveys. Here are some tips on what to look for:

- 1) **Questionnaire design:** Questions should be simple, easy to understand, and should measure one concept at a time. Questions should also be asked in a way that does not bias or prompt the respondent to answer in a specific way.
- 2) **Questionnaire translation and cultural adaptation:** Questionnaires should be translated and culturally adapted using a committee or modified committee approach (and not translation/back translation). More information on best practices is available [here](#).
- 3) **Questionnaire testing:** Questionnaires should be cognitively tested in the language in which they will be implemented to ensure that potential respondents are interpreting the questions as intended.
- 4) **Pilot:** The survey instrument and data collection protocols should be piloted prior to full implementation and the results of the pilot should be used to inform the final implementation.
- 5) **Sampling:** The survey should be administered to a random sample of the target population, if possible. The survey design should address issues of creating a sampling frame, provide information on the comprehensiveness of this frame, and include a strategy for sampling from the frame.
- 6) **Mode of data collection:** Data are usually collected using face-to-face methods, but phone and web-based modes of data collection are increasingly common. It is important to ensure that questionnaires are adequately adapted for the different modes of data collection, and verify that those modes do not exclude important sub-groups of the population. LAPOP recently published a [report](#) about its method of ensuring data quality with phone surveys.
- 7) **Data monitoring:** To ensure data quality, quality checks should be conducted daily during data collection. Some key things to look for are survey duration, GPS location, nonresponse rates, and response distributions. Sometimes portions of the survey can also be recorded to verify that enumerators are conducting the survey properly.

Use Our Resources

Welcome to the DRG Learning Digest, a newsletter to keep you informed of the latest learning, evaluation, and research in the Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG) sector. Views expressed in the external (non-USAID) publications linked in this Digest do not necessarily represent the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

Don't forget to check out our DRG Learning [Menu of Services!](#) (Link only accessible to USAID personnel.) The Menu provides information on the learning products and services the Evidence and Learning Team offers to help you fulfill your DRG learning needs. We want to help you adopt learning approaches that emphasize best fit and quality. The Evidence and Learning Team is also excited to share our [Inventory of DRG Learning](#) with you! (Link only accessible to USAID personnel.) The inventory is a searchable database of DRG learning products, including summaries of key findings and recommendations, drop-down menus to easily find documents related to a particular country or program area, and links to the full reports on the DEC.

Our friends at the [Varieties of Democracy \(V-Dem\) Institute](#) are also seeking to expand their research partnership with USAID on the complex nature of democracy by inviting research questions from you for V-Dem to work on. If there's a DRG technical question you've been wondering about, please submit it to the [Research Wishlist](#) now! (Link only accessible to USAID personnel.)