A Political Trust Project

Institutions and Government in Latin America, 1995–2024

Pedro Graterol
Working draft · November 2026

457,499 interviews · 18 countries · 24 observed waves

Research foundation · Literature Review · Theoretical Framework · Methods · Results · Discussion · References

Executive Summary

The empirical landscape

This working draft assembles a 1995–2024 comparative archive of 457,499 Latinobarómetro interviews across 18 countries and 24 observed waves to study confidence in five institutions separately: Congress, political parties, the judiciary, police, and the armed forces. The five-institution design is the project's empirical center. It makes visible a pattern that a single national trust index would blur: political confidence is distributed across institutional objects, and that distribution changes across countries and historical periods. The project uses the term institutional architecture of confidence for this observed configuration of levels, relative positions, shared versus selective movement, and relationships with incumbent government approval.

What the evidence shows

The strongest regional regularities are relational. From 2010 to 2024, Congress loses relative ground to the judiciary in 16 of 17 matched countries and to police in all 17; police gains relative ground to the judiciary in all 17 and to political parties in 15 of 17. Yet the broader five-institution system resists a simple representative-versus-security story: police versus armed forces is almost evenly divided, at eight positive and seven negative relative changes. The ten pairwise comparisons are therefore best read as views into a larger institutional configuration, not as ten separate stories or evidence of two fixed blocs.

Country-first analysis shows why the regional regularities are only part of the story. Brazil's 2010–2024 configuration combines declines in Congress (-18.2 pp), judiciary (-16.4), armed forces (-18.1), and parties (-8.9) with a police increase (+4.0). Mexico combines increases in Congress (+2.8), parties (+11.0), judiciary (+7.2), and police (+7.6) with a decline in armed-forces confidence (-4.4). Bolivia, Colombia, Honduras, and Venezuela show negative point changes across all five institutions, while the Dominican Republic and El Salvador show positive changes across all five. Similar pairwise outcomes can therefore emerge from different national pathways.

Those pathways are historical rather than permanent country types. Changing the window from 2010–2024 to 2018–2024 materially changes the apparent architecture of several countries. Brazil moves from broad decline with a police exception to recent recovery in Congress (+14.6) and parties (+9.5) alongside declines in police (-2.9) and the armed forces (-11.8). Uruguay and Chile likewise combine institutions differently in the recent window. The country-period configuration is therefore a useful descriptive unit: the same country can contain different political-trust architectures at different historical moments.

Individual-level results add a productive tension. Across 367 complete five-institution matrices in 16 countries, the first descriptive principal component accounts for a median 53.2% of standardized rank variance. Respondents who express confidence in one institution are often more likely to express confidence in others. But this commonality is not enough to make the institutions historically interchangeable: aggregate trajectories can still diverge sharply across time, country, and institutional object.

Government approval provides a second form of differentiation. Institutional confidence differs not only in its historical movement but also in its association with evaluation of the incumbent government. The clearest contrast is Congress versus political parties: across the 18-country summary, the approval–Congress association is more positive than the approval–parties association in every country, with a median contrast of about 5.1 percentage points. Police and armed forces likewise do not behave as one coherent security object. Institutional families remain useful comparative labels, but the observed objects retain distinct political relationships.

Democratic evaluations provide another branch of the project. Across 88 eligible country-time series for each measure, median associations between observed confidence changes and democratic evaluations are 0.58 for satisfaction with democracy, 0.39 for the view that democracy is the best system, and 0.12 for democratic support, with negative cases present in each distribution. These results keep open a separate line of inquiry about how institution-specific confidence relates to different dimensions of democratic evaluation.

The archive is built for reuse. Harmonization, measurement eligibility, national referents, weighting, denominators, effective-sample thresholds, matched endpoints, joint-response samples, alternative windows, uncertainty, political-context auditing, robustness specifications, and reproducibility records are preserved in Methods and the underlying outputs. The design is repeated cross-sectional and observational: it supports strong descriptive claims about magnitude, direction, timing, differentiation, and heterogeneity, while causal mechanisms, individual attitude change, and universal latent structures remain outside what this analysis identifies.

Why this draft matters

The project's broad finding is that political confidence across Latin America is not simply rising or falling. It is being distributed and redistributed across institutions in configurations that vary across countries and historical periods. That finding opens several editorial directions rather than closing the project around one final story: representative institutions versus police; police versus armed forces; broad-rise and broad-decline cases; institutional recovery after 2018; Brazil's changing configuration; Venezuela's trajectory; Congress versus parties in approval coupling; democratic satisfaction versus democratic support; and the coexistence of shared individual attitudes with divergent historical trajectories.

The draft therefore treats regional regularities and national heterogeneity as complementary evidence. Striking pairwise patterns matter because they recur across countries; country-period configurations matter because they reveal the different institutional movements that produce those patterns. The analytical task is not to choose one level and discard the other, but to preserve both.

This is a research foundation rather than a finished article. Its purpose is to retain enough empirical and methodological detail that future essays, country analyses, visualizations, and research extensions can return to the evidence without rebuilding the project from scratch.

Contents

01 Literature Review
Differentiated support, institutional specificity, and national context

02 Theoretical Framework
Institutional architecture, country-period configurations, and political differentiation

03 Methods
Harmonization, estimation, robustness, and contextual audit

04 Results
Five institutions, ten relationships, and changing country-period configurations

05 Discussion
Political confidence as a changing institutional distribution

06 References
Working bibliography for the project

Literature Review

Differentiated political support

Research on institutional trust begins with the distinction between evaluations of political authorities, institutions, and the broader political order. Easton's (1965, 1975) account of specific and diffuse support provides a foundational framework for understanding why dissatisfaction with incumbent authorities need not entail rejection of the regime. These distinctions concern both the objects of support and the bases on which support rests; they should not be reduced to a simple correspondence between government approval and specific support, on the one hand, and institutional confidence and diffuse support, on the other. Institutional evaluations may incorporate judgments of current performance as well as more durable attachments.

Subsequent scholarship develops the possibility that dissatisfaction with political institutions can coexist with commitment to democratic principles. Norris (1999, 2011) and Dalton (2004) distinguish democratic commitments from evaluations of the institutions and authorities through which democracy operates. Catterberg and Moreno (2006), meanwhile, situate political trust within a wider set of relationships involving well-being, efficacy, social capital, corruption attitudes, and government performance. Together, these perspectives caution against interpreting institutional distrust as an unambiguous indicator of democratic rejection.

This literature establishes the importance of distinguishing government approval, confidence in particular institutions, satisfaction with democracy, and support for democratic principles. The measures may covary, but neither their conceptual differences nor their empirical relationships should be assumed away.

Commonality and differentiation within institutional trust

A related debate concerns whether confidence in different institutions reflects a generalized political orientation or evaluations of particular institutional objects. Shared judgments about corruption, competence, fairness, or political performance could generate considerable commonality across institutional evaluations. Research on political trust has consequently examined both their common foundations and their differentiation (Mishler and Rose 1997; Newton and Zmerli 2011).

Commonality, however, does not make institutional measures interchangeable. Institutions occupy different positions within political systems and expose citizens to different forms of representation, authority, and public service. Combining their evaluations may conceal differences in levels, trajectories, and correlates.

Valgarðsson et al. (2025) provide an important longitudinal benchmark. Their global analysis distinguishes trends in representative and implementing institutions, finding that confidence in the former has generally declined in recent decades while confidence in the latter has remained stable or increased. Their results also identify substantial differences across countries and regions. This establishes the value of disaggregating institutional objects without implying that the same institutional grouping must reproduce itself in every national setting.

The distinction between institutional families therefore offers a comparative benchmark rather than a classification to impose. Police and armed forces, for example, have overlapping security functions but differ in their historical roles, organizational structures, and relationships with civilian authorities. Research on Latin America examines these institutions separately and identifies differences in their relationships with insecurity and

militarization (Sung, Capellan, and Barthuly 2022). Similar functions need not entail identical public evaluations.

A further distinction concerns the level of analysis. Co-movement in national confidence percentages does not establish that individual respondents organize their institutional attitudes into the same latent dimensions. Aggregate trajectories and individual attitude structures are related research questions, but evidence about one does not resolve the other.

Institutional objects and evaluative relationships

Institution-specific evaluations may arise because citizens apply different criteria to different institutions. Research emphasizes effectiveness, procedural fairness, impartiality, and other dimensions of institutional performance as potential foundations of trust and legitimating beliefs (Levi and Sacks 2009; Rothstein and Stolle 2008). These considerations need not have the same relevance for legislatures, courts, police, and armed forces.

Recent research reinforces the importance of specifying both the institutional object and the evaluation being measured. Murtin et al. (2026), for example, connect trust in government to perceptions of reliability, integrity, and public services. The broader implication for this project is not that every institution has the same determinants, but that confidence judgments are evaluations of particular objects and can respond to different criteria.

Political identification offers another possible source of differentiation. Huang, Lee, and Lin (2013) examine how partisan identification relates differently to confidence across institutional objects. Kuhn and Torgler (2026), studying Swiss cantons, find that stronger direct-democratic rights are associated primarily with confidence in institutions directly subject to those rights, with weaker relationships for more distant institutions. Together, these studies make institutional specificity an empirical question rather than a nuisance surrounding a general trust measure.

These approaches identify several plausible bases of institutional confidence: experiences with public services, perceptions of performance and fairness, political identification, and judgments about the relationship between an institution and incumbent authorities. The present analysis does not adjudicate among these mechanisms. Its prior task is to establish where confidence moves together, where it separates, and how those patterns vary across institutional objects and historical settings.

National context and heterogeneous pathways

Institutional specificity also depends on national context. The same formal institution may occupy different political positions across societies. Aydın Çakır and Şekercioğlu (2016), for example, examine contextual differences in the relationship between political awareness and judicial confidence. Solar (2022) identifies variation in the correlates of military confidence across Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. These studies make national heterogeneity part of the substantive question rather than a residual surrounding a regional average.

This is particularly relevant in Latin America, where institutions have different relationships with authoritarian rule, democratic transition, civilian authority, political competition, and domestic security. Scholarship on civil-military relations illustrates why a common institutional label does not establish a common political role (Diamint 2015).

The contribution of a regional longitudinal comparison is consequently not limited to establishing whether confidence rises or falls on average. It can examine how similar relative changes are composed within countries. A widening gap between confidence in two institutions may reflect an increase in one, a decline in the other, movement in opposite directions, or unequal movement in the same direction. These configurations are arithmetically compatible with the same gap change but describe different national

histories.

The present study extends this comparison to government approval. Institutional differentiation can appear historically, through different trajectories of confidence, and politically, through different associations between confidence in an institution and evaluation of the incumbent government. The project maps both forms before attempting to explain the mechanisms behind them.

Theoretical Framework

Objects of support and bases of evaluation

This study distinguishes the object toward which an evaluation is directed from the basis on which that evaluation rests. Government approval concerns the incumbent administration. Institutional confidence concerns a particular institution. Support for democracy concerns a broader political principle or regime preference. These objects can be related without being interchangeable.

An institution's durability does not establish that confidence in it measures exclusively diffuse support. Respondents may evaluate Congress, courts, police, or armed forces partly through current performance, current leadership, or contemporary political circumstances. Conversely, evaluations of an incumbent may incorporate attachments that extend beyond immediate performance. Easton's distinction therefore organizes the conceptual problem without assigning each survey question to a pure form of support.

The empirical analysis therefore retains government approval and institutional confidence as separate measures. Their association is substantively informative because it shows how incumbent evaluation maps differently onto institutional objects, without requiring either measure to be treated as a pure form of specific or diffuse support.

The institutional architecture of confidence

The project uses institutional architecture of confidence as an operational description of the observed distribution of confidence across institutions. Let T(j,c,t) denote the share expressing positive confidence in institution j, country c, and observed wave t. The architecture at a given country-period includes these institution-specific levels, their relative positions, and how those positions change. It is a descriptive configuration, not a latent psychological construct.

For institutions j and k, the confidence gap is G(j,k,c,t) = T(j,c,t) - T(k,c,t). Its change between two observed waves is ΔG = ΔT(j) - ΔT(k). The gap change identifies relative movement, but its interpretation requires both components. A positive change can occur when both institutions gain confidence, when both lose confidence, or when they move in opposite directions. It also leaves the intervening trajectory unspecified. Two countries can have similar endpoint changes but different reversals, timing, and intermediate levels.

The second feature is the association between government approval and confidence in each institution. The study calls this approval-confidence coupling: the adjusted cross-sectional difference in positive institutional confidence between government approvers and disapprovers within a country-wave.

Coupling is an operational description of an association, not a latent psychological construct. A more positive coefficient indicates a larger adjusted confidence advantage among approvers. A negative coefficient indicates the reverse. A movement from a strongly negative coefficient toward zero is therefore a more positive association, but not necessarily a stronger association in absolute magnitude.

Confidence levels and approval coupling capture different dimensions of that architecture. Average confidence can fall while the approval coefficient becomes more positive; an institution can retain relatively high confidence while the difference between approvers and disapprovers narrows. Keeping the dimensions separate allows the analysis to distinguish historical differentiation from political differentiation.

Institutional differentiation without predetermined blocs

Institutions may share evaluative foundations. Broad assessments of political performance or integrity could generate parallel movements across several objects. At the same time, institutional functions, experiences, and political relationships could generate selective movement.

The study consequently treats Congress, political parties, the judiciary, police, and armed forces as separate objects. Representative, implementing, and security categories provide possible comparisons, but their internal coherence is not assumed. Parallel aggregate trajectories would be compatible with common evaluative influences; divergent trajectories would establish limits to a uniform account. Neither result, by itself, identifies the underlying individual attitude structure.

In this draft, architecture therefore refers to five observable features: confidence levels across institutions; relative institutional positions; changes in those positions; shared versus selective movement; and institution-specific relationships with incumbent government approval. The concept is useful precisely because it organizes the empirical configuration without presuming a universal factor structure.

Historical context and changing associations

There are several plausible reasons why approval-confidence associations might vary. Government and institutional evaluations may draw on common assessments of competence or integrity. Political identification may relate to both. An institution's relationship with incumbent authorities may become more salient, or the composition of approvers and disapprovers may change.

These possibilities do not generate a necessary positive association for every institution. An institution publicly opposed to incumbent authorities could, for example, receive greater confidence among disapprovers. Negative and reversing associations are therefore substantively meaningful observations even when the survey coefficient cannot identify the political process that produced them.

Historical context helps assess which interpretations are temporally and institutionally plausible. Formal institutional control, perceived alignment, partisan identification, and institutional confidence remain distinct concepts, so contextual evidence is used to orient interpretation rather than convert observational associations into causal mechanisms.

Analytical questions

The framework organizes an exploratory and descriptive investigation rather than a set of preregistered confirmatory hypotheses. Four questions guide the comparison:

1. Institutional differentiation: To what extent do confidence levels move together or diverge across institutions within countries?

2. National pathways: Which component movements and intervening trajectories underlie similar institutional gap changes?

3. Approval coupling: How do the direction and magnitude of approval-confidence associations differ across institutions and change across observed waves?

4. Contextual configurations: Which changes are broad, selective, persistent, or reversible, and what documented political settings coincide with them?

Evidence of broadly parallel trajectories and stable approval associations would imply a comparatively uniform architecture. Concentrated changes, contradictory countries, reversals, and institution-specific approval relationships instead point toward reorganization. The analysis therefore treats common patterns and exceptions as equally informative parts of the comparative landscape.

These questions separate description from explanation. The project can establish that similar outcomes emerge through different observed trajectories and preserve those differences as targets for later explanatory work.

Methods

Data and comparative design

The study uses harmonized Latinobarómetro repeated cross-sections spanning 1995-2024. The frozen research dataset contains 457,499 interviews across 24 observed waves and 413 country-wave samples in 18 Latin American countries. Spain is excluded. Coverage varies across countries, waves, and variables; Nicaragua's last available observation is in 2020.

Countries are the primary comparative units. National source weights are applied within country-wave samples and are not interpreted as regional population weights. Cross-national summaries are calculated from national estimates, with eligible countries receiving equal weight.

Respondents are not followed over time. Changes describe repeated cross-sectional distributions or associations, not within-person attitude change. Historical equivalence in territorial coverage, sampling frames, and target populations cannot be fully established across the archive. Longitudinal comparisons therefore retain the documented coverage qualifications.

Harmonization and measurement eligibility

Harmonization linked source items through their wording, response categories, coding, institutional referents, and available documentation. Shared variable names were treated as candidate mappings rather than sufficient evidence of equivalence. Source information and transformation provenance were preserved alongside harmonized measures.

Incompatible formats were separated into measurement segments or excluded. Missing waves were not imputed, and absent items were not assigned substantive values. Distinctions among don't know, refusal, combined nonresponse, not applicable, unavailable items, and system missing were retained whenever the source permitted them.

The v0.3 dataset was frozen before the analyses reported here. Subsequent work reused its clearance, comparability, and coverage records. Later contextual verification did not silently alter source responses or previously estimated coefficients.

Institutional confidence and government approval

The principal outcomes are confidence in Congress, political parties, the judiciary, police, and armed forces. The measures remain separate throughout. Positive confidence combines the two positive categories of the four-category substantive scale; the remaining two substantive categories form the negative category. Primary confidence percentages use substantive respondents as their denominator. Nonresponse is not coded as distrust.

Institutional referents require country-specific qualifications. In particular, modern armed-forces comparisons exclude Costa Rica and Panama. The institutional trajectory inventory contains 2,028 eligible institution-country-wave estimates.

Government approval is measured separately as approval or disapproval of the government headed by the president named in the questionnaire. It is not treated as confidence in the presidency as an institution. The eligible approval series begins in 2002, with country-specific gaps and later entry.

Item availability and model eligibility are distinct. The approval inventory contains 319 eligible country-wave observations, while the common-sample historical models contribute 317 country-waves and 1,549 institution-specific coefficients. The model sample

additionally requires eligible outcomes, covariates, weights, and response-group support.

Estimation of confidence levels

Primary national estimates are source-weighted positive-confidence shares among substantive respondents. Descriptive cells require at least 100 valid responses and a Kish weight-dispersion effective sample size of at least 50. Kish effective N is used as a weight diagnostic, not as a substitute for complete complex-survey variance estimation. These descriptive thresholds are distinct from model-specific sample and response-group eligibility rules.

Sensitivity definitions include unweighted substantive-valid shares, all-interview positive-response shares, adult-only estimates, fixed age/sex-standardized estimates, and weighted and unweighted joint-response contrasts. The all-interview quantity measures how many interviewed respondents supplied a positive answer; it does not classify nonresponse as a negative opinion.

Standardization uses adult age-by-recorded-sex strata and fixed country-specific reference shares. Unsupported standardized cells remain unavailable. The procedure addresses observed age/sex composition rather than cohort effects or unobserved selection.

Cross-national and country-first comparisons

Available-country equal summaries include eligible countries in each wave. Balanced-country summaries retain the same countries over a defined comparison. Matched-endpoint comparisons require observations at both endpoints; full-window balanced comparisons additionally require eligibility at every included wave. These estimands are reported separately.

The central 2010-2024 institutional comparison includes 17 countries for Congress, parties, judiciary, and police, and 15 for armed forces. Alternative windows and multiwave summaries assess dependence on endpoints and coverage.

Country-first analysis retains each institution's longest defensible observed history. It examines levels, adjacent observed-wave changes, reversals, and pairwise institutional gaps. Gap changes are decomposed into changes in both institutions. Period-specific sign combinations describe observed movements rather than permanent country types. No annual values are interpolated. Connections between observed points, where used, are graphical aids rather than estimates for intervening years.

Approval-confidence models

The primary historical models estimate approval associations separately for each country-wave and institution:

$$Y(i,c,t,j) = \alpha(c,t,j) + \beta(c,t,j)A(i,c,t) + X(i,c,t)'\gamma(c,t,j) + \varepsilon(i,c,t,j).$$

Y indicates positive institutional confidence, A indicates government approval, and X contains age-group and recorded-sex indicators. Models are source-weighted linear probability models. The reported quantity, 100β, is the adjusted percentage-point difference between government approvers and disapprovers. All coefficients are estimated separately by institution and wave; no linear temporal trend is imposed.

Within each country-wave, the institutional models use a common eligible respondent sample across five institutions, or four in Costa Rica and Panama. This prevents differences in respondent eligibility across outcomes from mechanically generating institutional contrasts. It does not make the institution-specific estimates independent.

Government approval was selected for focused investigation after the broader exploratory comparison of approval, victimization, current economic evaluations, and future expectations. The subsequent analysis is therefore an exploratory extension, not an independent confirmatory test of a prospectively selected predictor.

Extended covariate specifications

The primary historical specification includes approval, age, and recorded sex. It should be distinguished from the demographic-only B0 block. The extended architecture adds nominal employment categories and interviewer socioeconomic assessment in B1; ideology, political interest, and interpersonal trust in B2; one evaluative predictor in B3; and all four evaluative predictors jointly in B4. Education, religion, and urbanicity are excluded.

Interviewer socioeconomic assessment is not interpreted as income, and employment categories are not treated as an ILO unemployment measure. Comparisons intended to isolate adjustment from sample composition re-estimate specifications on identical respondents.

Richer specifications substantially reduce coverage. B3 approval is available in 96 country-wave cells; B4 in 53 cells across seven waves. Extended models therefore provide bounded sensitivity checks rather than the historical backbone. Coefficient changes after adjustment are not interpreted as mediation.

Temporal heterogeneity and observed changes

Temporal constancy is evaluated within country, institution, and measurement segment using wave-specific coefficients and variances. The Q statistic sums inverse-variance-weighted squared deviations of wave coefficients from their inverse-variance-weighted mean. Waves are treated as independent repeated cross-sections.

Eligibility requires at least eight observed waves within a comparable segment. Benjamini-Hochberg adjustment is retained within the previously defined test families. Rejection identifies temporal heterogeneity under the inherited variance assumptions; breakpoints, substantive importance, and mechanisms are evaluated separately rather than inferred from the Q statistic itself.

Trajectories are additionally described through endpoint changes, observed ranges, sign crossings, and adjacent-wave movements. A crossing of zero in point estimates is distinguished from a precisely estimated reversal. For changes between independent waves, the standard error is the square root of the sum of the two coefficient variances. These are conditional pointwise intervals. They do not test differences between institutional changes without the relevant within-wave covariance.

Co-movement and political context

Within-country co-movement is described using matched-wave correlations between institutional coefficient series, separately for levels and observed changes. These are correlations among estimated coefficients, not among individual attitudes. Shared estimation error, unequal intervals, common trends, and coverage differences limit their interpretation.

Political context was assembled after the quantitative trajectories and focal comparisons had been identified. The contextual audit records administrations, transitions, elections, relevant institutional events, and actual fieldwork windows where recoverable. Nominal survey years are not automatically treated as fieldwork dates.

Government-transition windows compare adjacent observed surveys assigned to different executives. Ambiguous or mixed-executive observations remain flagged. The inherited strict screen contains 58 transition windows; it is retained as a defined descriptive universe rather than silently revised after later documentation was recovered. Same-executive intervals are not causal controls.

Focal cases were selected to examine broad change, selective movement, reversals, and counterexamples. Historical evidence is used to assess temporal plausibility and competing interpretations; causal attribution to turnover, institutional control, crises, or reform would require a different design.

Validity, uncertainty, and reproducibility

The final audit distinguishes harmonized coding, master-questionnaire wording, and national implementation. Recovering a master item does not independently verify every nationally inserted presidential name. Failure to recover a national instrument is recorded as NOT VERIFIED rather than treated as evidence of incorrect coding.

Contextual comparisons receive explicit validity classifications. YELLOW comparisons remain usable with qualifications; RED comparisons cannot carry strong contextual attribution. The quantitative observations are preserved rather than deleted to resolve interpretive difficulties.

Model uncertainty uses inherited respondent-level HC1 estimates with national weights treated as fixed. It does not fully incorporate unavailable historical PSU and strata information, quota-selection uncertainty, or all sample-frame changes. Statistical inference is conditional on this architecture.

Robustness checks examine weighting, denominators, sample composition, flagged observations, and same-sample extended adjustment where coverage permits. Directional agreement strengthens a specified descriptive comparison; unavailable checks remain explicitly unavailable.

Versioned data, coefficient files, eligibility records, source audits, and scripts preserve analytical provenance. Detailed coverage calendars, model thresholds, software information, hashes, and execution dependencies are retained in the project's reproducibility materials.

The design distinguishes confidence levels, relative institutional changes, approval-confidence associations, and democratic-evaluation relationships. It supports claims about observed magnitude, direction, timing, differentiation, and heterogeneity. Causal mechanisms, within-person attitude change, partisan sorting, polarization, institutional capture, and a single region-wide political process are outside the identifying reach of the design.

Results

Five institutions reveal a changing architecture of confidence

The five-institution extension establishes the empirical center of the project. Congress, political parties, the judiciary, police, and the armed forces are analyzed as distinct institutional objects across the harmonized archive. The central result is institutional differentiation: political confidence does not move as a single national or regional quantity. It is distributed across institutional objects, and that distribution changes across countries and historical periods.

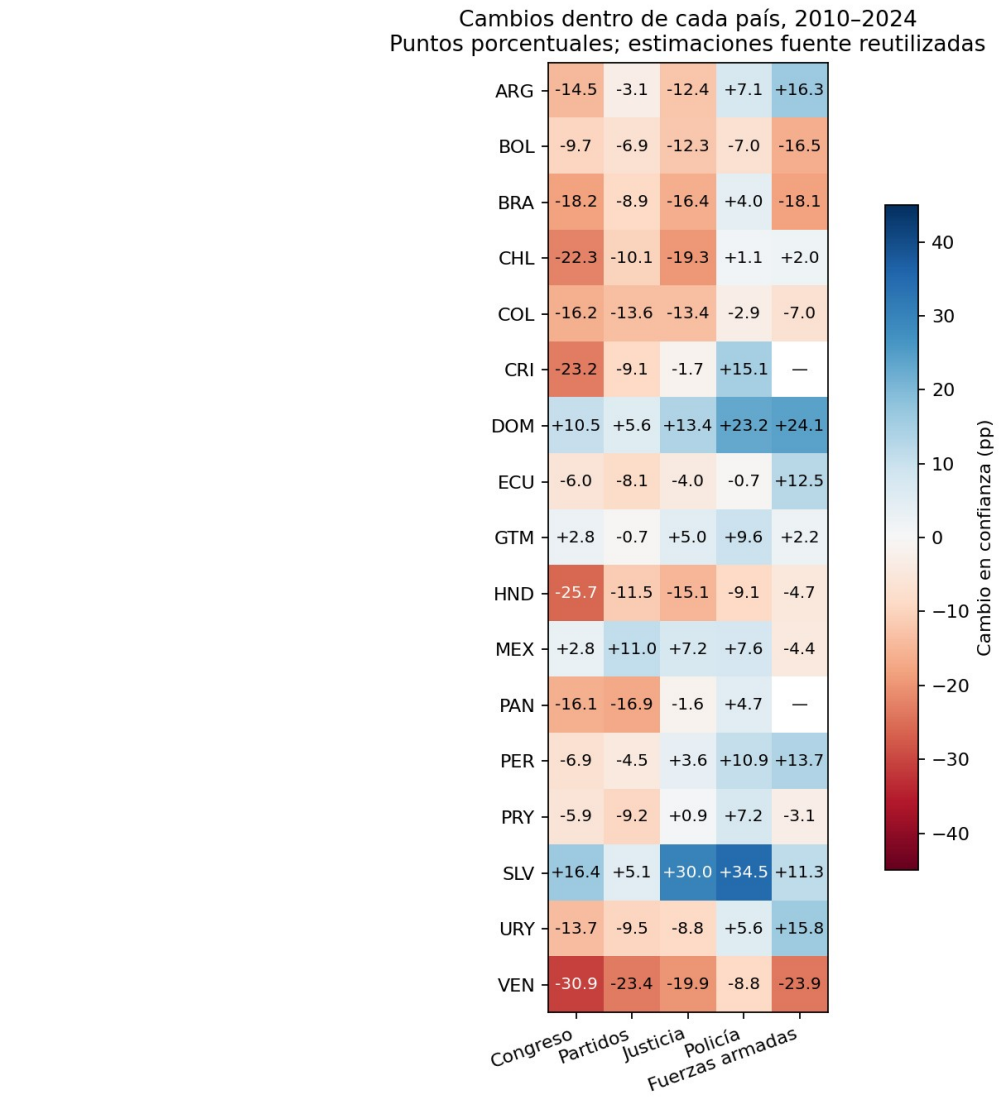
The extension reuses 2,028 institution-country-wave estimates and evaluates all ten possible institutional pairs. For the 2010-2024 matched-endpoint comparison, Congress, parties, judiciary, and police are observed in 17 countries; armed-forces comparisons include 15 because Costa Rica and Panama are excluded where the military referent is not comparable. Pairwise samples are joint samples for the institutions being contrasted.

Ten pairwise relationships map the broader architecture

The clearest regional regularities appear in relative change. Congress loses relative ground to the judiciary in 16 of 17 countries and to police in all 17. Police gains relative ground to the judiciary in all 17 and to political parties in 15 of 17. Yet police versus armed forces is almost evenly divided, with eight positive and seven negative relative changes. These relationships are striking precisely because they sit inside a five-institution system that does not resolve into a simple representative-versus-security divide.

Pair (A-B)	Countries	Δ>0	Δ<0	Adj. CI >0	Adj. CI <0
Congress - Judiciary	17	1	16	0	7
Congress - Armed forces	15	4	11	2	9
Congress - Parties	17	6	11	1	7
Congress - Police	17	0	17	0	14
Judiciary - Armed forces	15	7	8	2	7
Judiciary - Police	17	0	17	0	10
Parties - Judiciary	17	6	11	3	7
Parties - Armed forces	15	4	11	3	7
Parties - Police	17	2	15	0	14
Police - Armed forces	15	8	7	7	3

Precision varies across those directional regularities. Police improves relative to Congress in all 17 matched countries; adjusted intervals exclude zero in 14. Police improves relative to the judiciary in all 17; adjusted intervals exclude zero in ten. The sign counts describe the breadth of the observed regional pattern, while the adjusted intervals distinguish the subset with stronger separation from zero under the project's uncertainty specification.



Guion = ausencia de comparación. No son intervalos de confianza.
Cobertura histórica y diseño no equivalentes; consultar cautelas.

Figure 1. Five-institution country changes, 2010-2024. Point changes are reused from the country-first Phase 6 estimates; institutional denominators remain institution-specific.

Regional regularities emerge from different national configurations

The country-level component movements make the limits of bloc language especially clear. Brazil, from 2010 to 2024, records declines in Congress (-18.2 pp), judiciary (-16.4), armed forces (-18.1), and parties (-8.9), while police rises (+4.0). Police is therefore exceptional within Brazil's security institutions rather than representative of a common security trajectory.

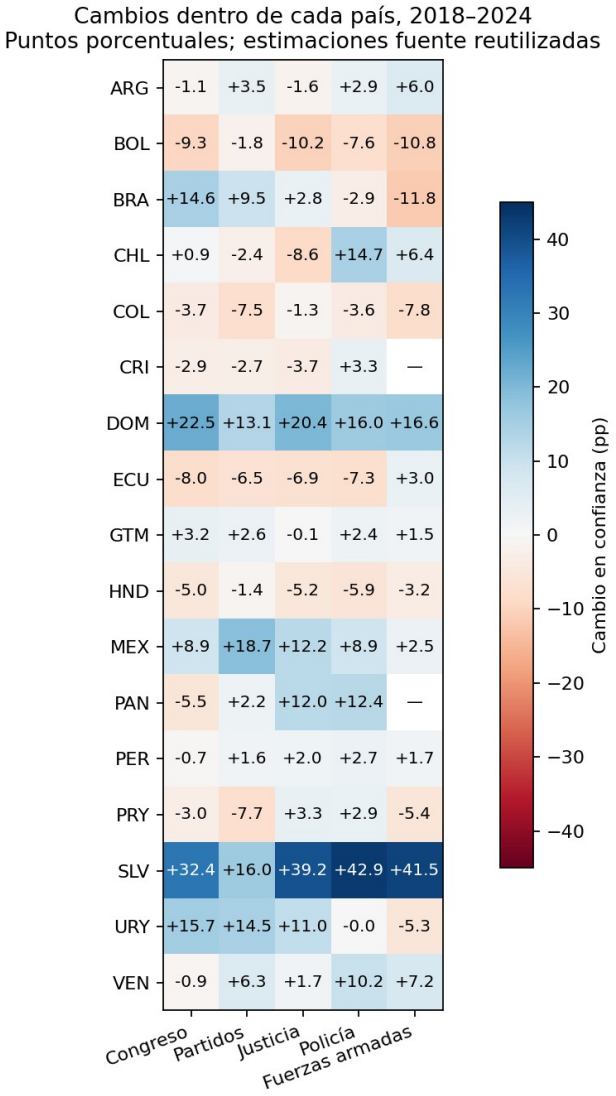
Mexico presents almost the inverse configuration: Congress (+2.8), parties (+11.0), judiciary (+7.2), and police (+7.6) all rise, while armed-forces confidence falls (-4.4). Here, strengthening is not confined to coercive or implementing institutions. Bolivia, Colombia, Honduras, and Venezuela show negative point changes across all five institutions in the same window, while the Dominican Republic and El Salvador show positive changes across all five. These are different country-period configurations, not permanent national types.

Taken together, these cases show how regional regularity and national heterogeneity coexist. A country can produce a larger police-Congress gap because police rises, Congress falls, both move, or because the broader institutional field changes around them. The pairwise relationship is one view into the architecture; the national trajectory is the configuration of all five objects underneath it.

Country-period configurations change with historical time

The 2018-2024 window further weakens any interpretation of country profiles as stable types. Brazil shifts from the long-window pattern to a recent configuration in which Congress (+14.6) and parties (+9.5) recover while armed forces (-11.8) and police (-2.9) decline. Uruguay combines increases in Congress (+15.7), parties (+14.5), and judiciary (+11.0) with little point change in police and a decline in armed forces (-5.3). Chile combines a large police increase (+14.7) and a smaller armed-forces increase (+6.4) with declines in judiciary (-8.6) and parties (-2.4), while Congress changes little (+0.9).

These shifts are substantively revealing, not merely a robustness complication. The same country can move from broad decline to selective recovery, or from co-movement to divergence, depending on the historical period examined. The country-period configuration is therefore a useful descriptive unit: it preserves national context while recognizing that institutional architectures themselves change over time.



Guion = ausencia de comparación. No son intervalos de confianza.
Cobertura histórica y diseño no equivalentes; consultar cautelas.

Figure 2. Five-institution country changes, 2018-2024. The recent window reveals configurations that differ from the 2010-2024 endpoint comparison.

Shared individual variation and differentiated historical trajectories coexist

Institution-specific historical movement does not imply that respondents evaluate institutions independently. Using weighted mean-rank correlations with ties respected, the extension constructs 367 complete five-institution matrices across 16 countries. Costa Rica and Panama are excluded from this five-object exercise because of the military referent, while remaining eligible in analyses of the other institutions.

Across these matrices, the first descriptive principal component accounts for a median 53.2% of the variance in standardized ranks, with a range from 42.3% to 76.6%. A second eigenvalue exceeds one in 66 matrices. The substantive result is the coexistence of commonality and differentiation: confidence judgments share substantial individual-level variation, yet that commonality does not make the institutions historically interchangeable. PCA remains descriptive here; the project does not use the eigenvalue threshold as a factor-selection test or claim a universal latent structure.

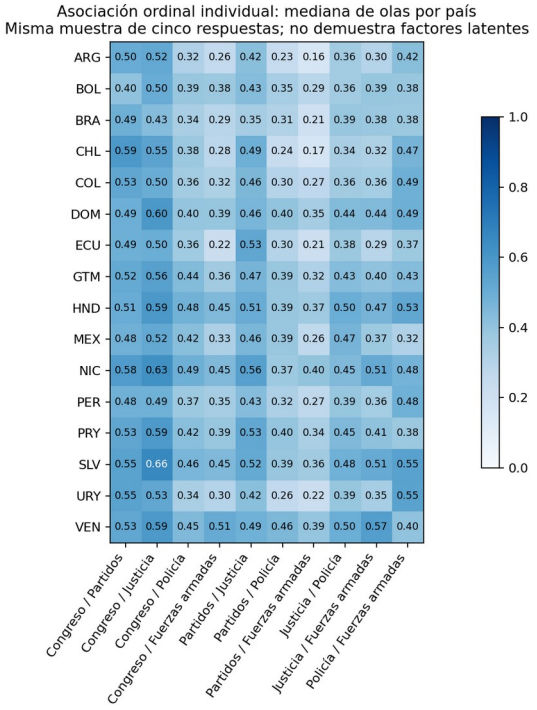


Figure 3. Within-person ordinal associations across institutional pairs and countries. Shared association coexists with substantial pairwise and national heterogeneity.

Government approval reveals political differentiation across institutions

Government approval adds a second axis of institutional differentiation. Historical differentiation asks how confidence in the five institutions moves over time; political differentiation asks how confidence in each object is associated with evaluation of the incumbent government. For each country-wave, the analysis compares the approval-confidence association for two institutions using the same respondents. A positive contrast means that the confidence difference between government approvers and disapprovers is more positive for institution A than for institution B.

The most consistent contrast is Congress versus political parties. After summarizing waves within countries and then countries by the median, the approval-Congress association is more positive than the approval-parties association in all 18 countries, with a median national contrast of approximately 5.1 percentage points. Congress versus police is positive in 12 of 18 countries, with a median contrast of about 2.27 points. Parties are less positively associated with approval than judiciary, armed forces, and police in most country summaries. Even institutions conventionally grouped as representative institutions therefore occupy distinct relationships to incumbent evaluation.

Approval contrast (A-B)	Countries	Median pp	Positive countries
Congress - Judiciary	18	0.70	10
Congress - Armed forces	16	2.08	11
Congress - Parties	18	5.10	18
Congress - Police	18	2.27	12
Judiciary - Armed forces	16	1.20	9
Judiciary - Police	18	1.51	13
Parties - Judiciary	18	-4.22	0
Parties - Armed forces	16	-2.68	3

Parties - Police	18	-2.50	4
Police - Armed forces	16	-0.49	7

Approval coupling and confidence levels remain separate empirical dimensions. An institution can gain or lose confidence while its relationship with government approval moves differently. The key finding is that incumbent evaluation is associated with institutional confidence in institution-specific ways; causal effects, institutional capture, polarization, and partisan control are not measured by these contrasts.

Democratic evaluations correspond selectively to institutional confidence

Country-time associations between observed confidence changes and democratic evaluations open another empirical branch. Across 88 eligible series for each democratic measure, the median association is 0.58 for satisfaction with democracy, 0.39 for the view that democracy is the best system, and 0.12 for democratic support, with negative cases in each distribution. The pattern is consistent with the broader project logic: democratic support, democratic satisfaction, and institution-specific confidence are related but analytically distinct objects whose historical relationships vary across countries and institutions.

Robustness, uncertainty, and scope

The five-institution extension preserves the seven previously defined Phase 6 sensitivity definitions and adds paired-change uncertainty, predefined windows, longer paired histories, unweighted contrasts, and adult-adjusted contrasts. New standard errors preserve within-person covariance between institutions and combine variances across independent survey waves. Bonferroni-adjusted intervals address the ten pairwise comparisons within country and window, but they do not recover unknown PSU or stratum information, correct quota-sample limitations, or eliminate historical measurement uncertainty.

Reproducibility checks reconcile 3,982 new paired gaps with earlier joint-sample tables to a maximum discrepancy of 2.13e-14 percentage points. The frozen base hash is unchanged and new outputs are stored separately. The extension is therefore computationally consistent with the earlier phases while retaining the observational and repeated-cross-sectional inferential boundaries defined in Methods.

Discussion

Political confidence is distributed, not singular

The five-institution analysis supports a broader way of describing political trust in Latin America. For questions of historical change, political confidence is often more informative as a distribution across institutional objects than as a single national stock of trust. Congress, parties, judiciary, police, and armed forces occupy different levels, follow different trajectories, and relate differently to incumbent evaluation. The architecture of confidence is the configuration produced by those relationships at a particular country-period.

Some regional regularities are unusually consistent. Congress loses relative ground to police in every matched country from 2010 to 2024, and police gains relative ground to the judiciary in every matched country. But those relationships coexist with a nearly even police-armed-forces split, countries in which all five institutions move together, and countries in which institutions conventionally grouped together move in opposite directions. The regularities are real; so are the different institutional systems that produce them.

This is why the five-institution design matters. Easton's distinction among objects and bases of political support cautions against treating dissatisfaction with one authority or institution as equivalent to rejection of the political order. The comparative evidence extends that logic historically: differentiation appears among institutions within the same country, between countries, and across periods within the same national history.

Regional regularities can emerge from different national pathways

Pairwise divergence is an outcome that can be produced by several underlying configurations. A widening police-Congress gap can reflect rising police confidence, falling congressional confidence, movement in both institutions, or broader reorganization that changes the relative position of both. Brazil, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and the broad-decline cases demonstrate that the same pairwise sign can sit inside very different five-institution systems.

This tension between regional regularity and national heterogeneity is one of the project's most useful comparative findings. Regional summaries identify relationships that recur; country-first analysis shows the component histories beneath them. Future explanations have to account for both levels rather than treating one as noise around the other.

Institutional architectures are historical

The contrast between 2010–2024 and 2018–2024 shows that national configurations are not stable classifications. Brazil's long-window architecture and recent-window recovery are substantively different; Uruguay and Chile likewise recombine institutional movements when the period changes. The same country can therefore contain different political-trust architectures at different historical moments.

The country-period configuration is a useful descriptive unit because it captures that historical plasticity without abandoning comparison. Recurrent relationships remain visible, but labels such as high-trust, low-trust, representative decline, or security rise should not be treated as permanent country attributes when the underlying configuration changes across windows.

Commonality and differentiation coexist

The individual-level diagnostics resolve an apparent contradiction by showing that commonality and differentiation operate at different levels. Respondents who express confidence in one institution often express confidence in others, and the first descriptive component captures substantial common variance. At the same time, institutional confidence can move differently across historical periods. Shared individual-level orientation and differentiated aggregate trajectories can coexist.

This tension is theoretically productive. Political confidence may contain a generalized evaluative component while remaining responsive to institution-specific histories, roles, experiences, and political relationships. The present design does not identify the psychological mechanism, but it establishes an important empirical limit: common individual variation is not sufficient reason to collapse the five institutions into a single historical index.

Incumbent evaluation interacts differently with institutional objects

Government approval reinforces institutional specificity from another direction. Government approvers and disapprovers do not differ equally in their confidence toward every institution. The Congress-versus-parties result is especially revealing because two institutions normally placed in the same representative family nevertheless have systematically different relationships with incumbent approval. Police and armed forces likewise resist treatment as one coherent security object.

Institutional families remain useful comparative categories, but they are not empirically homogeneous blocs. Approval coupling describes an association with incumbent evaluation, not a mechanism. Its value here is to show that institutional differentiation is political as well as historical: the five objects differ both in how confidence moves and in how confidence relates to the government of the day.

Implications for comparative political trust research

The project supports a strong descriptive conclusion: institutional confidence in Latin America has changed through multiple configurations rather than one regional trajectory. The five institutions sometimes move together and sometimes separate; pairwise relationships differ in consistency; country configurations change across periods; shared individual variation coexists with divergent histories; and government approval maps differently onto different institutional objects.

These findings shift the comparative question. Asking whether a society has more or less political trust can be useful, but it is often too coarse for historical analysis. A richer question asks how political confidence is distributed across institutions, how that distribution changes, and which country-period histories generate the configurations we observe. This approach keeps the object of trust, the historical period, the national context, and the distinction between individual commonality and aggregate movement in view at the same time.

The draft deliberately leaves several explanatory possibilities open. It does not need a universal representative-versus-security cleavage, a latent trust structure, institutional capture, partisan sorting, authoritarian preferences, or permanent national trust regimes to make the descriptive finding consequential. Its value is the empirical landscape itself: a large comparative record in which recurring regional relationships and changing national architectures can be studied together and developed into more focused future products.

The coexistence of substantial within-person commonality and divergent aggregate trajectories is itself a conceptual story. It creates space for future work on how generalized political evaluations and institution-specific historical dynamics coexist without requiring this draft to settle the latent psychological structure.

Democratic evaluation and the meaning of trust

The different country-time associations with democratic satisfaction, democracy-as-best-system, and democratic support create another line of inquiry. The current results are descriptive, but they are sufficient to motivate future work on whether institutional confidence is more closely connected to evaluations of democratic performance than to broader democratic commitments.

Government approval and institutional politics

The Congress-versus-parties approval contrast creates a separate route into the politics of institutional confidence. The existing evidence can support an editorial question about why incumbent evaluation maps differently onto institutional objects while keeping causal explanations open.

Recovery, decline, and contradiction

The contrast between 2010–2024 and 2018–2024 makes institutional recovery after 2018 a distinct editorial branch. So do countries that contradict apparent regional patterns, broad-rise and broad-decline configurations, and periods in which institutions usually grouped together move in opposite directions.

Country-period stories

Brazil offers a particularly clear demonstration that a country's architecture changes with the window. Venezuela, Mexico, Chile, Uruguay, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, and the broad-decline cases provide additional country-centered directions grounded in the existing trajectories. These stories can be developed without turning the observed configurations into permanent national types.

Police and armed forces

The near-even 2010–2024 police-versus-armed-forces split is an immediate counterweight to treating security institutions as one object. Brazil, Mexico, Chile, and other cases provide different configurations for asking when police and military confidence travel together and when they separate.

Police and representative institutions

The unusually consistent relative gains of police over Congress and the judiciary create a strong regional story, while the country-first results show multiple pathways into that pattern. A future product could focus on the divergence itself, its component movements, and the countries that complicate a simple security-versus-representation interpretation.

Why these directions remain open

This draft is intentionally broader than any single eventual article. The empirical branches above are already visible in the existing analysis and can be developed separately without requiring the project to choose one master narrative.

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The references below consolidate the working bibliography supplied for this project. Entries with incomplete publication metadata are flagged for verification rather than completed by inference. This bibliography is intended to remain a stable research reference as the draft develops.

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EDITORIAL NOTE This working draft reorganizes the existing evidence around the five-institution architecture of confidence, strengthens the interpretation of established descriptive findings, and preserves the audited analytical backbone. No new statistical analysis was conducted for this revision.