

LAPOP's  
AmericasBarometer  
takes the

# Pulse of Democracy in Suriname

REPORT EDITORS

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20  
23



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



VANDERBILT  
UNIVERSITY



AmericasBarometer  
*Barómetro de las Américas*



## Our Mission

LAPOP Lab is a center for excellence in international survey research. Located at Vanderbilt University, our mission is to:

- Produce high-quality public opinion data
- Develop and implement cutting-edge methods
- Build capacity in survey research and analysis
- Generate and disseminate policy-relevant research

The lab is run by experts in survey methodology who innovate approaches to public opinion research. The team is dedicated to collaboration and pedagogy. The lab's work facilitates evidence-based dialogue and policy decisions about a broad range of issues related to democratic governance.

## A Letter from USAID

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is a proud supporter of the AmericasBarometer, an award-winning project that captures the voice of the people of the Americas. Drawing upon survey data from over 34 nations from North, Central, and South America, and the Caribbean, the AmericasBarometer informs discussions over the quality and strength of democracy in the region.

Since 2004, the AmericasBarometer measures attitudes, evaluations, experiences, and behavior in the Americas using national probability samples of voting-age adults. Survey topics include the economy, rule of law, state capacity, trust in institutions, individual values, corruption, security, and more.

USAID relies on the AmericasBarometer to inform strategy development, guide program design, and evaluate the contexts in which we work. The AmericasBarometer alerts policymakers and international assistance agencies to key challenges. Importantly, the project provides citizens with information about democratic values and experiences in their country, over time, and in comparison to other countries.

**Chantal Agarwal**  
Agreement Officer's Representative  
Democracy Human Rights and Governance Team  
Office of Regional Sustainable Development  
Bureau for Latin America & the Caribbean  
United States Agency for International Development

While the AmericasBarometer is coordinated by LAPOP Lab at Vanderbilt University, it is a collaborative international project. LAPOP consults with researchers across the Americas, local survey teams, USAID, and other project supporters at each stage. These rich discussions increase the relevance and validity of questionnaires; improve sample designs; build and maintain state-of-the-art quality control protocols; and support the development and dissemination of data and reports. As a collaborative project, the AmericasBarometer also builds capacity in public opinion research via knowledge transfers to local teams, student participation in the project, and frequent workshops.

USAID has been the largest supporter of the surveys that form the core of the AmericasBarometer. In addition, each round of the project is supported by individuals and institutions. USAID is grateful to that network of supporters, the LAPOP team, their outstanding former and current students, the many experts and institutions across the region that contribute to and engage with the project, the local fieldwork teams, and all those who took the time to respond to the survey.



# LAPOP

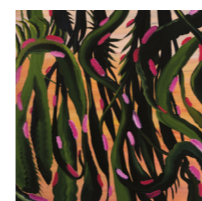
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## UNDERSTANDING THE FIGURES IN THIS REPORT

AmericasBarometer data are based on national samples of respondents drawn from each country; naturally, all samples produce results that contain a margin of error. It is important for the reader to understand that each data point (for example, a country's proportion of citizens who support democracy) has a confidence interval, expressed in terms of a range surrounding that point. Many graphs in this study show a 95% confidence interval that takes into account this sampling variability. When two estimated points have confidence intervals that overlap to a large degree, the difference between the two values is typically not statistically significant; conversely, where two confidence intervals do not overlap, the reader can be confident that those differences are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Estimates for the 2023 AmericasBarometer are based on weighted data where applicable. Due to sampling discrepancies, calibration weights are generated for national surveys in Ecuador, Trinidad & Tobago, The Bahamas, and Brazil by strata based on population distributions for urban/rural population, gender, and age. Weights for Haiti and Nicaragua (telephone surveys) are calculated by estimating baseline probabilities adjusted for eligibility and non-response, then calibrated to the distributions of gender, education, age, and region in the most recent previous face-to-face AmericasBarometer country surveys. Cross-time and cross-country weights are standardized so that each country/year has the same effective sample size. Data for this report are based on the pre-release dataset; analysts may find small differences in point estimates when using publicly released datasets due to ongoing data cleaning and quality control.



**COVER ART**  
**'Plagas de jardín' [Garden plagues]**  
50 x 52 cm, oil on paper, 2020, by Sylvia Fernández

Sylvia Fernández (Lima, 1978) graduated with a gold medal in Fine Arts from Corriente Alterna, in Lima, Peru, in 2002. Her painting explores the abstract boundaries of the mind and body and its relationship with nature, time and memory. <https://www.sylvia-fernandez.com>

Sylvia is represented by **Galería del Paseo** Founded in 1998 in Montevideo, Uruguay—and present as well in Lima, Peru, since 2003—Galería del Paseo promotes young Latin-American artists in the field of contemporary arts. <https://www.galeriadelpaseo.com>

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# Introduction

Jack Menke<sup>1</sup>

Suriname, an ethnically diverse society with slightly over half a million people in the northeast of South America, has one of the smallest populations on this continent.<sup>2</sup> Since the first general elections of 1949, a power-sharing political tradition evolved and dominated Suriname's politics, particularly from 1958 to 1967.<sup>3</sup>

Power sharing evolved within a multi-party coalition system based on the cooperation between political elites and political parties linked to the major ethnic groups. After the military regime (1980-1987), the economic power base of the traditional coalition of ethnic parties gradually eroded due to the decline of the economic mainstays—bauxite-alumina production and Dutch aid. At the same time, a new power elite emerged with the gold rush of the 1980s. Since 1987, Suriname experienced fluctuating electoral outcomes, resulting in alternating left populist regimes linked to the previous military leadership and traditional democratic power sharing regimes.

The 2023 AmericasBarometer survey reveals the characteristically weak political institutions in Suriname, cutting

across regimes in an uncertain policy environment in periods of stress, and resulting in a diminished capacity to maintain economic and social stability.<sup>4</sup> Survey results indicate that trust in Suriname's political system has dropped significantly from 2010 to 2023. There are interesting differences between Suriname and other countries of the Americas in the way unequal opportunities affect political perceptions and legitimacy. In 2023, Suriname ranks the lowest among all countries studied on respect for the country's political institutions and second to last, one percentage point above Haiti, on pride in the system. Satisfaction with Suriname's democracy is nearly the lowest in the region.

Although most Surinamese citizens are not happy with the present state of the country,

they do not seem keen to abandon the democratic system as a whole. Despite a historically low 3% presidential approval, 41% trust the government to do what is right and 61% believe that people should support the political system. Although support for democracy is relatively low, nearly half agree it is still the best form of government. Even amidst an unfavorable economic situation, Surinamese citizens are not likely to embrace an authoritarian regime.

Suriname's political parties, which legally acquired more power after the military regime, lack financial and economic transparency, one of the pillars of the electoral political system. Related to this, many political leaders of influential political parties are involved in or have strong connections with other legal and illegal economic activities. Widespread corruption is also prevalent among the political elite. Strengthening of anti-corruption laws and enforcement as well as laws on the financial transparency of political parties is a must to improve the level of democracy.

Suriname's citizens are experiencing a declining standard of living, with 78% reporting that economic issues are the most serious problem. Suriname holds the highest perception of a deteriorating national economy in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region, while almost as many citizens indicate that their personal situation worsened over the past year. The majority of Surinamese citizens report to be personally impacted. Among the vulnerable groups are women, those with

<sup>1</sup> Jack Menke is a professor of qualitative and quantitative research methodology in Suriname who participates in innovative academic projects across the Americas, the Caribbean, and Europe. He has published research on democracy, political economy, sustainability, and development.

<sup>2</sup> The 2012 Suriname census reported a population of 541,638 (see <https://statistics-suriname.org/the-census/>).

<sup>3</sup> Menke 2023.

<sup>4</sup> The 2023 survey fieldwork, carried out in the first half of 2023, is based on a national probability sample design of 1,539 voting-age adults involving face-to-face interviews conducted in the lingua franca (Sranan Tongo), Dutch, and English.

<sup>5</sup> Mehlum, Moene, and Torvik 2005.

lower levels of wealth, and those living in indigenous and tribal communities in the hinterlands of Brokopondo and Sipaliwini. They report the highest levels of food insecurity, while these groups have also poor or no access to political power and decision-making.

On the issue of crime, victimization and feelings of insecurity rose sharply in 2023. Crimes resulting from economic desperation (such as theft, robberies, scams, and fraud) are becoming common, while violent crimes are not. There is evidence of a close link between crime and economic security.<sup>5</sup> The data indicate that feelings of insecurity may erode trust in democracy and lay the seeds for political turmoil.

With respect to the future of Suriname's economics and politics, most Surinamese favor the American model of development, though trust in China is increasing. The recent strong profiling of China through diplomatic channels and the Confucius Institute in Suriname, as well the feasibility of the new Chinese immigrants in trade and other economic sectors may contribute to increased trust in China.

This report details the findings of the 2023 AmericasBarometer in Suriname and places them in a cross-country and cross-time context. Chapter 1 deals with the pressing issue of economic strife in Suriname. Chapter 2 turns the focus to crime, insecurity, and gang activity. Finally, Chapter 3 considers political issues, including attitudes toward democracy in contemporary Suriname.

## BY THE NUMBERS

**1,100**  
interviewers

**2023**  
AMERICASBAROMETER

**41,524**  
interviews

**180**  
core questions included in  
most countries

**415**  
country-specific questions

**26**  
COUNTRIES

Argentina  
Belize  
Bolivia  
Brazil  
Canada  
Chile  
Colombia  
Costa Rica  
Dominican Republic  
Ecuador  
El Salvador  
Grenada  
Guatemala  
Haiti  
Honduras  
Jamaica  
Mexico  
Nicaragua  
Panama  
Paraguay  
Peru  
Suriname  
The Bahamas  
Trinidad & Tobago  
United States  
Uruguay

### INTERVIEWER TRAINING

**24**  
local firm  
trainings

**420**  
training  
hours

### CAPACITY BUILDING IN SURVEY RESEARCH IN 2023

**33** events

**600+** hours

**1,390** attendees

### THE AMERICASBAROMETER SERIES

**10** waves of  
surveys across  
20 years

**34** countries

**385,000+**  
interviews



# Economic Decline and Public Discontent

Luke Plutowski<sup>1</sup>

Suriname's economy faces significant challenges, with a mounting debt crisis and soaring inflation driving the country to the brink of crisis by mid-2023. Dependency on imports exacerbated consumer woes as prices surged in late 2022, with inflation reaching 54.6% for the year. Economic distress sparked protests in early 2023 against austerity measures imposed by the government and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), leading to clashes and arrests. Economic turmoil can have profound political implications, eroding trust in government and risking instability.

Public opinion offers crucial insights into individual experiences and beliefs, informing policymaking for effective economic solutions. This chapter delves into Surinamese attitudes toward the economy, food and water insecurity, and key stakeholders shaping the country's economic landscape, notably the United States and China.

## MAIN FINDINGS

- Economic concerns are the overwhelming top issue for Suriname's citizens, unlike all previous waves of the study.
- The vast majority of Suriname's people say the national economy and their personal economic situation have declined over the past year.
- The share who say that the national economy in 2023 has worsened (98%) is higher than any other country in the LAC region.
- Over one third (36%) face food insecurity, and that rate is higher among residents of Sipaliwini and Brokopondo, women, those with low household wealth, and those 26-45 years of age.
- Half say that Suriname should follow the U.S. model of development, a higher rate than those of other Caribbean countries.

Suriname’s economy is experiencing a turbulent period. A growing debt crisis and rampant inflation have pushed the country’s economy to the brink of crisis in the first half of 2023.<sup>2</sup> Due to several factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Suriname has struggled to pay back a rather significant debt load owed to a mix of private investors, the Inter-American Development Bank, and Chinese lenders.<sup>3</sup> Suriname’s economy is largely dependent upon imports, which spelled trouble for consumers when commodity, food, and energy prices spiked in the second half of 2022. Inflation totaled 54.6% in 2022.<sup>4</sup>

Economic anxiety reached a fever pitch in early 2023 when protesters flooded the streets of Paramaribo in response to austerity measures imposed by the government of Chan Santokhi and the

IMF.<sup>5</sup> This agreement required, among other provisions, cutting out subsidies for electricity, water, and fuel, which caused a backlash among the Surinamese people, who were already struggling with high inflation and economic contraction.<sup>6</sup> On February 17, 2023, peaceful protests turned violent when dozens forcefully entered the country’s parliament and others clashed with police in the streets. Over a hundred people were arrested. Protests continued in March when hundreds gathered at the National Assembly to demand President Santokhi’s resignation.<sup>7</sup>

As evidenced by these protests, economic strife can have serious political ramifications. When citizens cannot provide for their basic needs, they may lose faith in the government, which risks instability or even collapse. The strength and quality of democracy depends on the ability of government to “deliver the goods.”<sup>8</sup>

Public opinion data can improve understanding of these issues by offering insights into the consequences of macro-level economic problems. Official economic data cannot provide a window into individual experiences and beliefs, which is critical for informed decision-making in public policy. By helping lawmakers better understand the prevailing concerns and priorities of the people they represent, surveys serve an essential role in the design and implementation of effective economic policies.

This chapter describes the attitudes of Suriname’s citizens toward the current state of the economy. It then discusses the incidence of food and water insecurity among the Surinamese population. Finally, the chapter shows results from the survey related to public opinion about

the governments of the United States and China, who are the main holders of Suriname’s debt load and, as such, are playing a critical role in the design of the country’s economic framework.

### SURINAMESE PEOPLE ARE PREOCCUPIED ABOUT ECONOMIC ISSUES

The AmericasBarometer survey series includes several questions related to public perceptions about the economy. Data from 2023 indicate that Surinamese citizens are extremely concerned about economic matters. The lead-in question for the survey asks respondents what they believe

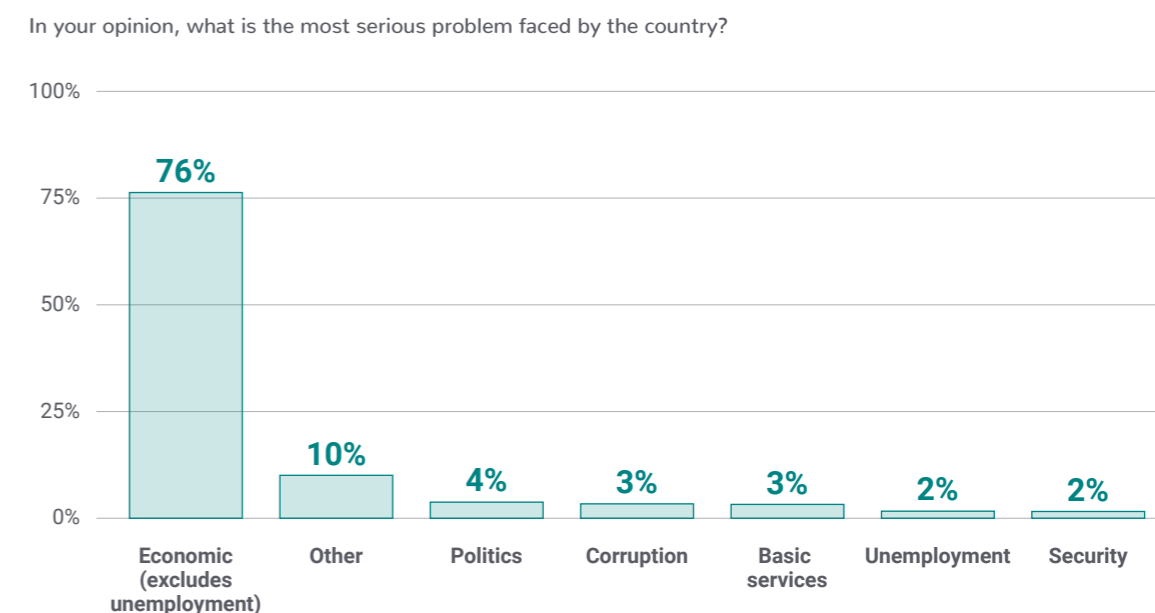
to be the most serious issue facing the country. Responses are open-ended and categorized by the interviewer.

Figure 1.1 shows the distribution of responses to this question. The vast majority of Surinamese citizens are concerned with economic issues, with 76% indicating that their top issues are inflation, debt, the economy, poverty, problems with farmland, and the like. An additional 2% pointed to unemployment, and 10% chose “other,” a category that encapsulates some economic-adjacent issues like food insecurity, inequality, and strikes.

*In your opinion, what is the most serious problem faced by the country?*

Economic strife can have serious political ramifications, as evidenced by the 2023 protests in Suriname that culminated in the storming of its parliament.

Figure 1.1 Economic matters are the overriding concern for Surinamese citizens



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2023



**78%**  
of Surinamese adults identify economic problems as the top issue facing the country.

Figure 1.2 shows this item tracked across the four rounds of the AmericasBarometer in Suriname, with the items further collapsed into four categories. The data further underscore how dominant concerns over the economy have become in recent years. Economic matters were not at the top of the minds of Surinamese people in 2010, 2012, or 2014, with issues like crime, corruption, housing, and education higher on the list of concerns. In 2023, nearly four in five people identified issues related to the economy as the main problem facing the country, six times the next leading issue.

**PUBLIC OPINION DATA POINT TO ECONOMIC HARDSHIP AMONG SURINAME'S POPULATION**

One set of core items on the AmericasBarometer survey asks respondents to provide retrospective personal and sociotropic economic evaluations—that is, whether they believe their personal economic situation, their income level, as well as the national economy have improved, worsened, or stayed the same over the previous 12 months (two years in the case of income). Figure 1.3 displays the results of these three questions, with higher numbers indicating a worse economic situation.

The figure reveals the extent of Suriname's economic pain. Nearly all believe that the national economy has worsened, and more than four out of every five Surinamese report that they are personally worse off than they were a year prior. Two in five indicate that their household income level had decreased, which seems like somewhat reassuring news compared to the other results. This is more than double the amount reported in any previous wave, and, in a context marked by rampant inflation, wages must rise considerably to offset the cost-of-living increases. However, poor macroeconomic policy management in the 2020s led the Surinamese Central Bank to become

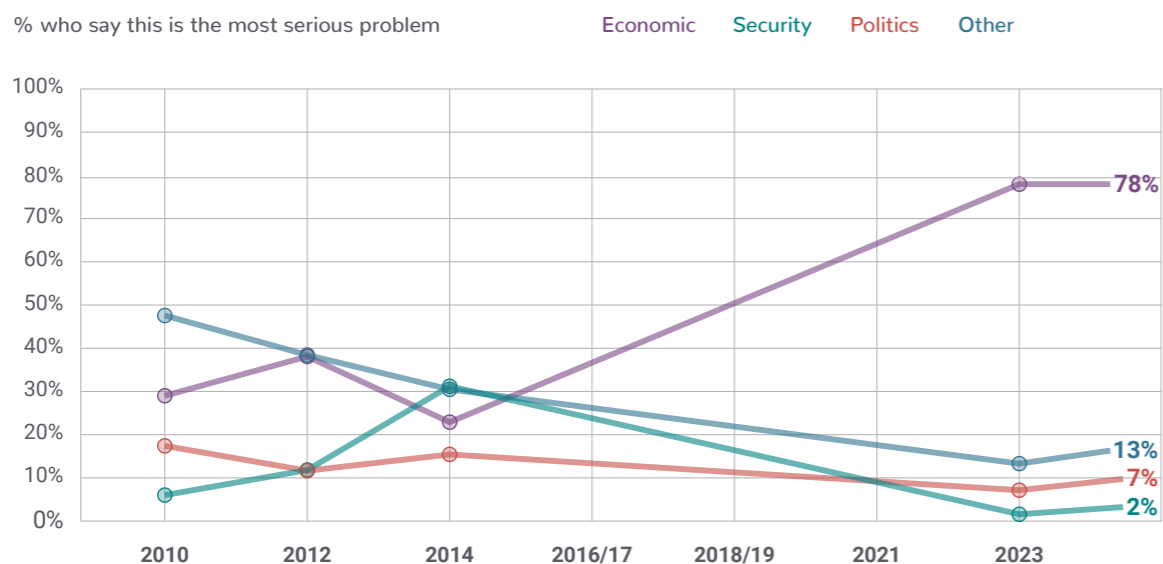
essentially bankrupt, rendering it unable to meet debt obligations and hence causing negative downstream effects on inflation as well as employment.<sup>9</sup>

*Do you think that the country's current economic situation is better than, the same as or worse than it was 12 months ago?*

*Do you think that your economic situation is better than, the same as, or worse than it was 12 months ago?*

*Over the past two years, has the income of your household increased, remained the same, or decreased?*

**Figure 1.2** Economic issues are predominant concern among the Surinamese for the first time in the series



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2010-2023

**Figure 1.3** Virtually all Surinamese believe economic matters have worsened



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2010-2023

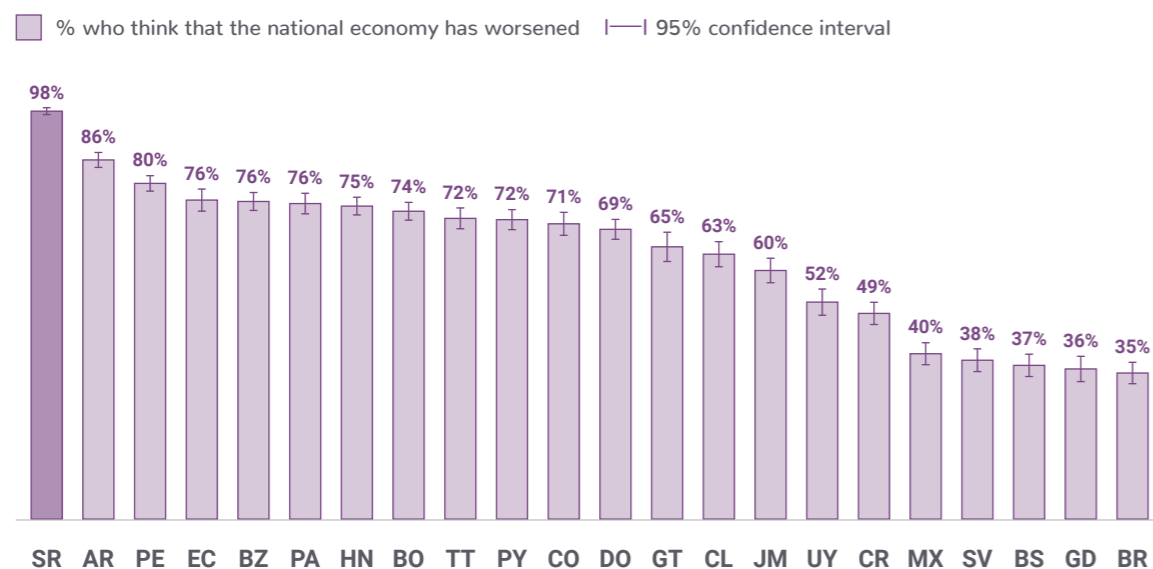
Nearly all people in Suriname believe that the national economy has worsened over the previous year, and more than four out of every five say they are personally worse off.

Suriname’s economic troubles are uniquely woeful. **Figure 1.4** shows the percentage of respondents in each country who believe their nation’s economy had worsened over the previous 12 months. Although majorities in most countries report a worsening economy, Suriname stands alone at the top of the ranking. Suriname, at 98% in 2023, is 12 percentage points higher than the next highest country (Argentina), and 34 percentage points above the regional average of 64%.

**A SIGNIFICANT MINORITY ARE STRUGGLING WITH FOOD AND WATER INSECURITY**

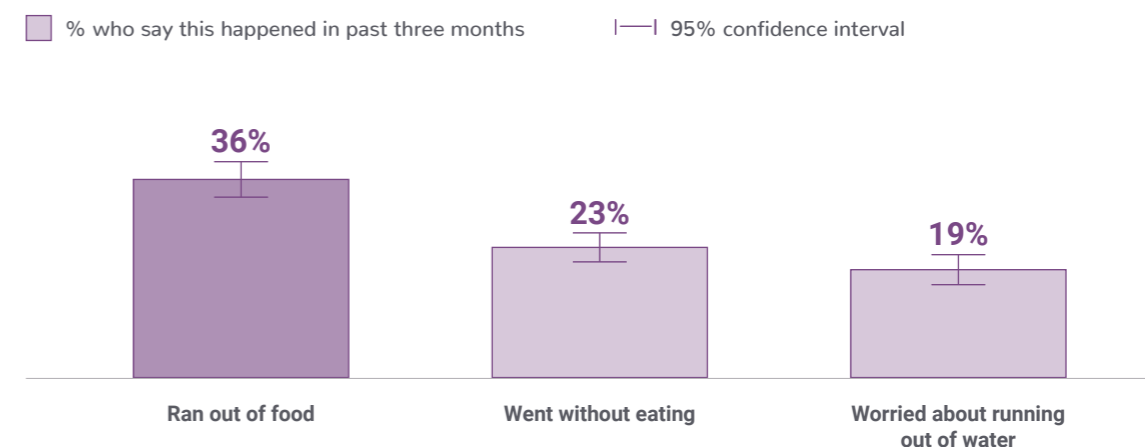
Other items on the survey offer insights into the consequences of this economic strife. This year, LAPOP asked several questions on food and water insecurity. Three of these items are shown in **Figure 1.5**. More than a third of Surinamese adults ran out of food due to a lack of money or resources in the previous three months (an additional 4% reported that they ran out of food in the last *twelve* months). This represents an astounding

**Figure 1.4** Suriname reports the highest level of national economic strife in the LAC region



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

**Figure 1.5** Over one third of Surinamese have experienced food insecurity



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2023



**36%**  
of Surinamese citizens say they ran out of food in the past three months.

fourfold increase from 2012 when just 9% of the population experienced food insecurity. Further, in 2023, almost a quarter reported going hungry in the previous three months (eating only once or not at all for at least one day due to lack of money), and 19% said that they worried about having not enough water to meet their needs.

Further analysis reveals that food insecurity is not spread evenly throughout the population. **Figure 1.6** shows that certain demographic groups are struggling to feed themselves significantly more than others. For instance, those who reside in the districts of Sipaliwini and Brokopondo, the most remote parts of Suriname, have

significantly higher levels of food insecurity than the rest of the country. Almost half (47%) of residents there have run out of food in the past three months, while the rate is around one third (34%) for the rest of the districts (in fact, it is below 36% in all other districts except Coronie, at 45%). Women are 9 percentage points more likely to experience food insecurity as well. Further, people with the lowest levels of wealth (groups based on possession of various household items) are most likely to report food insecurity at 55%, more than three times higher than those in the highest wealth category. Finally, food insecurity is curvilinear with age, meaning that young people (18-25) and older people (66+) are least likely to have run out of food.

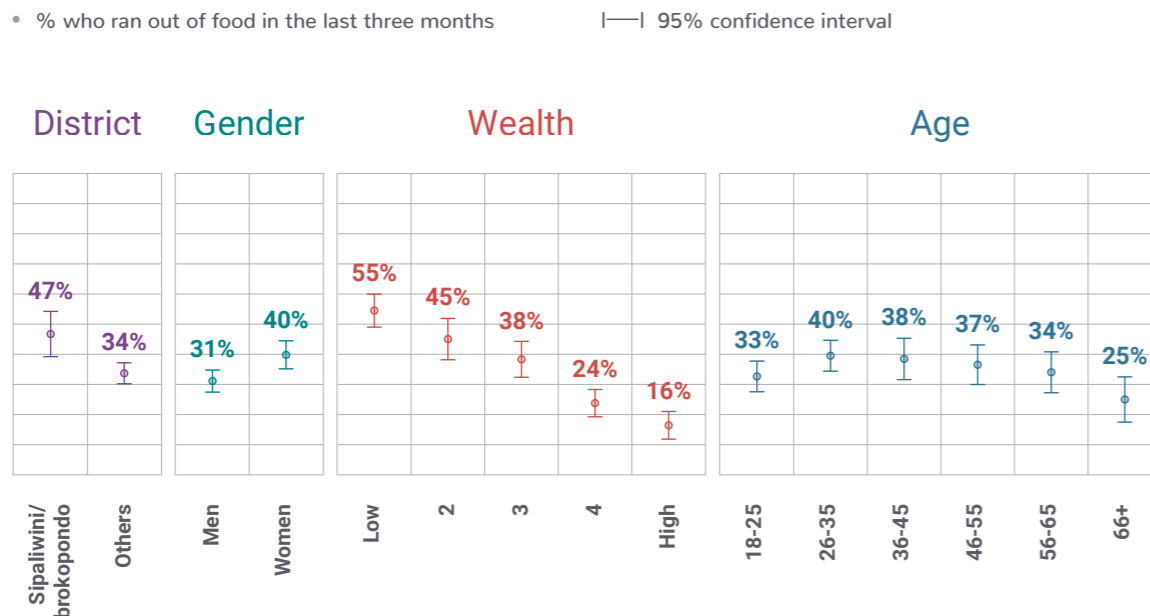
**IN THE MIDST OF THE DEBT CRISIS, PUBLIC OPINION IS MORE FAVORABLE TOWARD THE UNITED STATES THAN CHINA**

This economic hardship may also have consequences for how Suriname’s people view the external world. The debt crisis has put the country at somewhat of a financial crossroads. For many years, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has been the go-to source for low-to-middle-income countries to seek capital to jumpstart their economies. Recently, China has emerged as a major player in the world of international lending, providing loan packages to countries across Latin America, Africa, and Asia,

often with fewer strings attached than the IMF. The broader geopolitical conflict between China and the United States (the IMF’s biggest stakeholder) is now playing out via Suriname’s debt problem, with both sides playing chicken in providing relief to the struggling South American country.<sup>10</sup> How this conflict ultimately plays out may shape Suriname’s development trajectory, whether leaning toward the capitalist West or communist China.

How do the citizens of Suriname view these two models of development and the countries that embody them? The AmericasBarometer surveys in the Caribbean include a few questions related to this topic. The first of this

**Figure 1.6** Those in remote areas, along with women, poor, and middle-aged Surinamese are most likely to experience food insecurity



The issue of food security is especially critical for residents of more remote parts of Suriname, women, the less wealthy, and people 26-55 years old.

Suriname’s economic problems are being exacerbated by the geopolitical conflict between China and the United States, with both sides refusing to provide debt relief until the other does so first.

**50%**  
of Surinamese say the United States should be a model for the development of their country.

set asks respondents to choose from a list of countries for the ideal model for Suriname’s development.

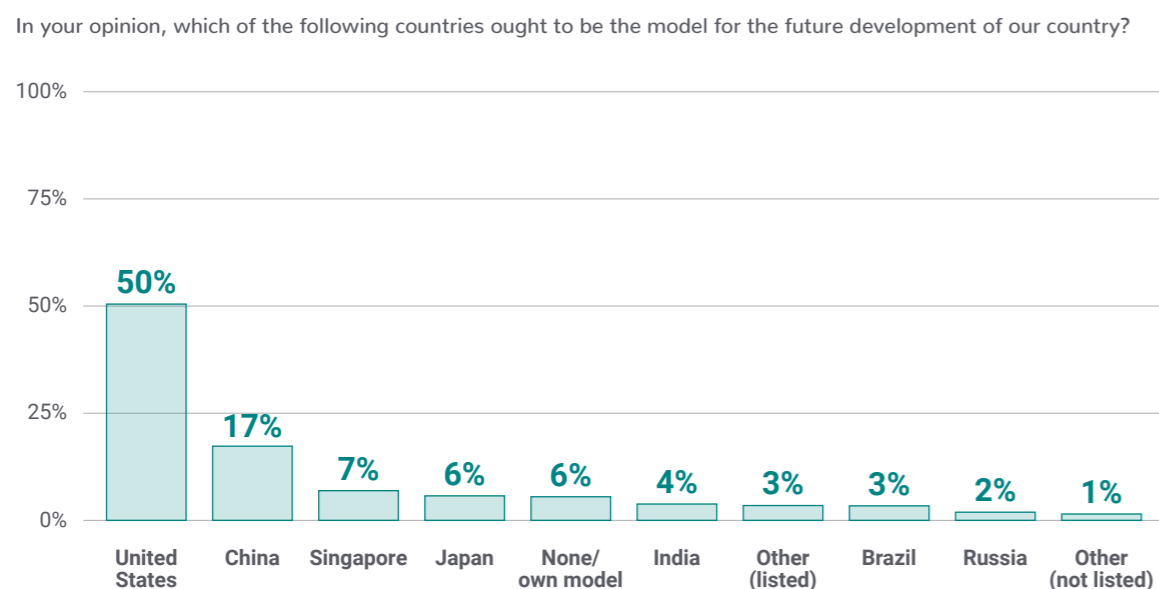
*In your opinion, which of the following countries ought to be the model for the future development of our country?*

As shown in **Figure 1.7**, Suriname’s population leans toward the West. Half the population believes that Suriname ought to follow the United States’ model, with the next most popular being China’s model at 17%. Compared to some other Caribbean countries, Suriname is particularly fond of the United States. As shown in **Figure 1.8**, a significantly higher proportion of Suriname’s population

believes the United States should be its model compared to The Bahamas, Grenada, and Trinidad & Tobago. Conversely, Suriname and The Bahamas are less likely to see China as an ideal model compared to Grenada and Trinidad & Tobago.

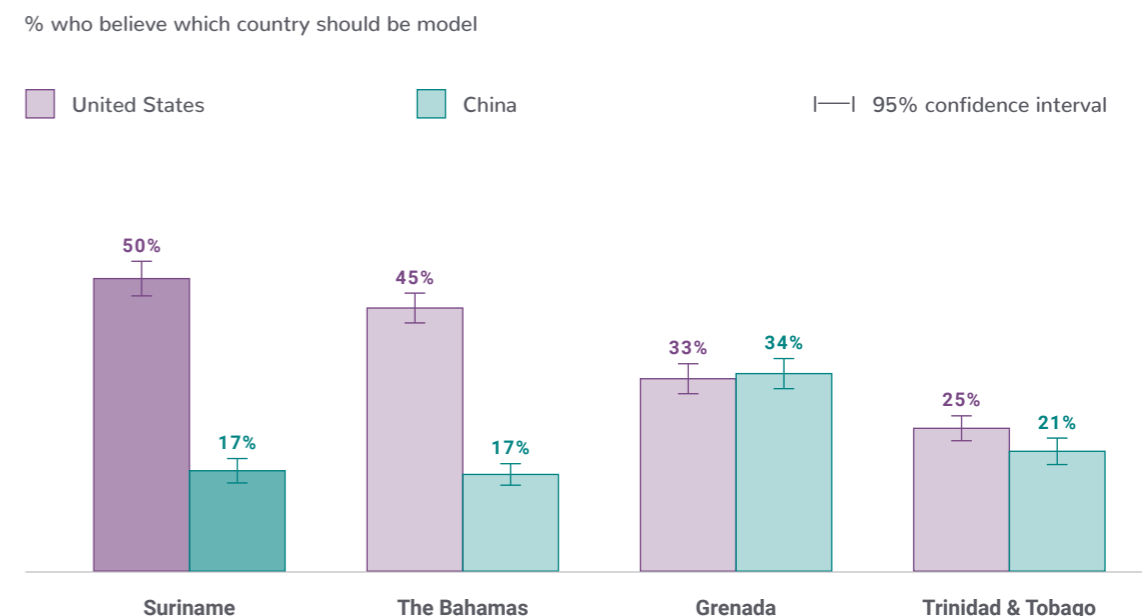
Two additional questions probe more deeply into this question by directly asking how much respondents trust the governments of China and the United States. The results reveal that trust in the U.S. government is higher than that of China, but trust in China has grown since 2012. A full analysis of these questions is shown in the Spotlight “Trust in the United States versus China.”

**Figure 1.7** Half believe the United States should be the model for Suriname’s development



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2023

**Figure 1.8** Compared to other Caribbean citizens, Surinamese are more likely to believe in the American development model



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023



## Conclusions

The AmericasBarometer data indicate that Suriname's citizens are experiencing a high degree of economic anxiety. For the first time in the history of the series, more than three out of every four people report that economic issues are the most serious problem facing the country. Nearly all say that the country's economy is deteriorating (the most of any country in the LAC region), and almost as many say that their personal situation worsened over the past year as well. This has led many to go without food and water.

Though it may be self-evident from the conditions on the ground in Suriname that the economy is in a slump, these data reinforce that the cost of this downturn is far-reaching and unequal.

The vast majority of Surinamese report being personally impacted, and the data reveal that certain groups are particularly vulnerable. Women, those with lower levels of wealth, and those living in the hinterlands of Brokopondo and Sipaliwini report the highest levels of food insecurity, and these groups are also the least likely to have access to the levers of power.

How Suriname manages the current turbulent period will be critical for shaping the future of its economics and politics. The survey data show that most Surinamese favor the American model of development, though trust in China is increasing. As the debt crisis unfolds and popular dissatisfaction grows, we may yet see shifts in the country's approach to governance.

As the debt crisis unfolds and popular dissatisfaction grows, we may see shifts in Suriname's approach to governance.

## Notes

- 1 Luke Plutowski is a Senior Statistician with LAPOP Lab.
- 2 The most recent statistics suggest that the situation is improving, as there was a significant decline of inflation reported at the end of 2023 (after data collection). The General Bureau of Statistics (ABS) recorded inflation of 32.6% in 2023, compared to 60.8% in 2020, 60.7% in 2021, and 54.6% in 2022 (see <https://www.starnieuws.com/index.php/welcome/index/nieuwsitem/79500>).
- 3 Osborn 2023.
- 4 Kuipers 2023.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Rozenblad 2023.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Cordero and Simón 2016; Gasiorowski 1995; Morlino and Quaranta 2016.
- 9 Menke 2023.
- 10 Goodman 2023.

## Trust in the United States versus China

Emily Noh<sup>1</sup>

Over half trust the United States versus less than one in four who trust China.

Suriname is rich in natural resources that both American and Chinese businesses covet.<sup>2</sup> When commodity prices tanked during the pandemic, Suriname plunged into a debt crisis with China as its largest creditor, and the Surinamese government was forced to turn to the United States-led IMF for relief.<sup>3</sup> IMF's austerity measures have recently caused anti-government protests in the country.<sup>4</sup> Against the backdrop of its economic ties to both countries, how trustworthy does the public in Suriname view the United States and China?

In 2023, the AmericasBarometer measured the trustworthiness of the United States and China in Suriname by asking:

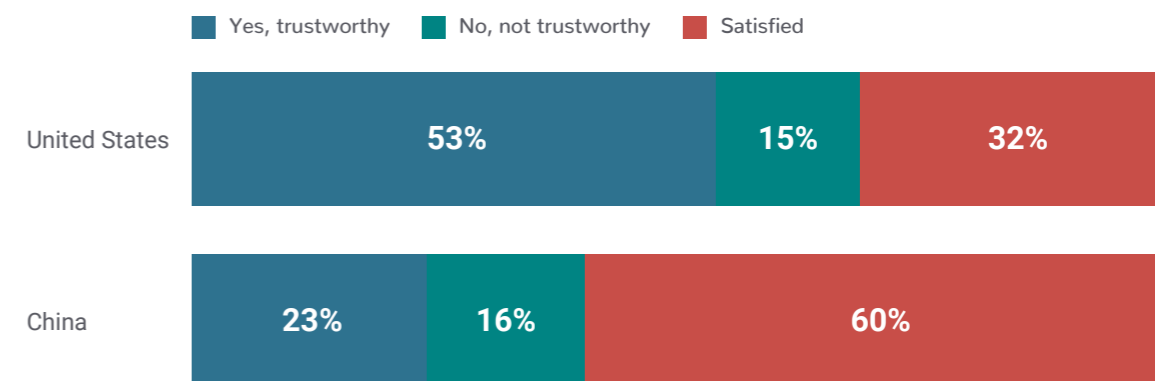
*The government of the [United States/China]. In your opinion, is it very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, not very trustworthy, or not at all trustworthy, or do you not have an opinion?*<sup>5</sup>

Those who trust the United States significantly outnumber those who trust

China. Over one in two adults (53%) trust the government of the United States, which is more than twice the proportion of the Surinamese public who trust the Chinese government (23%). There is an equally large gap between the proportion of "don't know/no opinion" responses. Compared to one in three (32%) for the United States, three in five individuals (60%) do not provide an opinion on how much they trust the Chinese government. These questions were included once before on the AmericasBarometer, in 2012. Since then, distrust in China has nearly halved, from 29% to 16%. Both trust and distrust in the United States have increased significantly, indicating greater polarization of opinions about the United States government.

Overall, more than double the proportion of those who trust China trust the United States. However, with the majority undecided on how trustworthy the Chinese government is, public opinion in Suriname favors the United States while being more ambiguous toward China.

Over half of people in Suriname trust the United States versus less than one in four who trust China



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2023

### Notes

- 1 Emily Noh is a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science at Vanderbilt University and a LAPOP Affiliated Researcher.
- 2 AFP 2020; The World Bank 2023.
- 3 International Monetary Fund 2023; Goodman 2023; Runde 2021; The World Bank 2023.
- 4 Associated Press 2023; Rozenblad 2023.
- 5 I recode the first responses two responses, "very trustworthy" and "somewhat trustworthy" into one category ("yes, trustworthy") and "not very trustworthy" and "not at all trustworthy" into "no, not trustworthy".

# Crime, Gangs, and Democratic Governance

Luke Plutowski

Crime has long been a pressing concern for Suriname, with nearly a third of the population citing it as the top issue in 2014. The country experienced a significant increase in violent crime in 2022. Organized crime poses additional challenges. Suriname serves as a transit point for cocaine trafficking, and its gold-mining industry is linked to criminal activities. Former President Dési Bouterse and current Vice President Ronnie Brunswijk have faced allegations of involvement in crime. President Chan Santokhi has prioritized crime-fighting efforts, though solutions remain elusive.

Public opinion data offer insights crucial for effective crime-fighting strategies and helps allocate resources, highlight disparities, and gauge public receptiveness to prevention measures. This chapter explores crime experiences, security perceptions, gang awareness, and attitudes about rehabilitation programs, alongside the relationship between insecurity and democracy.

## MAIN FINDINGS

- Crime victimization rose significantly in 2023 to one in five. Victimization is especially high among men and residents of Paramaribo.
- Feelings of insecurity rose to a new high, but most people report feeling safer in their neighborhood compared to other neighborhoods and compared to last year.
- Reported gang presence has increased, though Surinamese are relatively more likely to say gangs are non-violent and beneficial compared to other countries in the Caribbean.
- Feelings of insecurity, though not crime victimization, predict less support for democracy.



Crime has been a central issue of concern for Suriname’s population since the country’s independence in 1975. Nearly a third of Surinamese cited crime as the top issue facing the country in the last round of the AmericasBarometer in 2014. Though its murder rate is middling at 6.1 per 100,000 residents,<sup>1</sup> much lower than many countries in the LAC region, the rate increased by 46% from 2021 to 2022.<sup>2</sup> Suriname also faces challenges from organized crime. The country’s location within the Amazon rainforest and along the Caribbean Sea has led it to become a transit point for the cocaine trade.<sup>3</sup> Further, gold mining, which accounts for the majority of Suriname’s public revenue, has been linked with several types of criminal activity.<sup>4</sup>

Crime has been closely linked with the Surinamese political sphere for years. Bouterse, the president of Suriname from 2010 to 2020, was suspected of ordering the murder of 15 political opponents in 1982. He and the country’s current vice president, Brunswijk, were convicted in absentia in the Netherlands of drug trafficking and sentenced to eight years of prison. Current President Santokhi, who previously served as Minister of Justice and Police, made crime-fighting a central aspect of his campaign in 2020. He has made efforts to bolster the rule of law and clamp down on organized criminal enterprises, though resolutions to the myriad crime problems remain elusive.<sup>5</sup>

Public opinion data can provide valuable insights on the issue of public safety that help researchers, policymakers, and society at large understand the issue and

**20%**  
of Surinamese citizens have been a victim of a crime in the past year.

craft effective crimefighting strategies. For one, surveys reveal the concerns and opinions of everyday people, information which helps guide resources to the most pressing issues. Second, more so than official crime statistics, surveys can highlight disparities in experiences with crime across different communities and demographics. Finally, researchers can gauge the public’s receptiveness toward different crime prevention strategies through surveys.

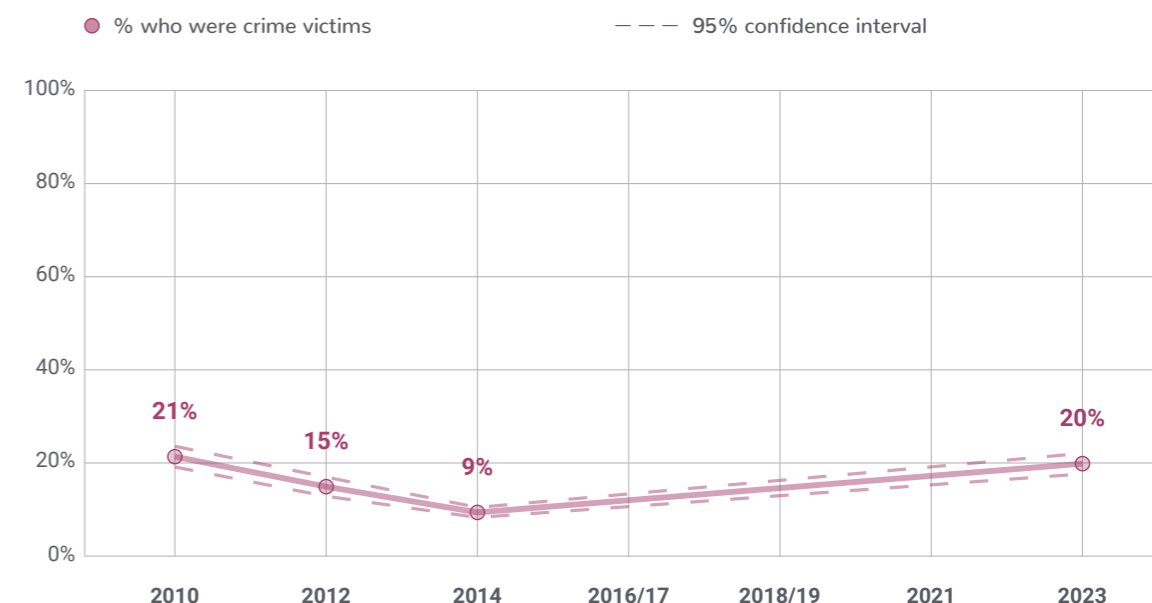
Crime and security are central themes of the AmericasBarometer survey. This chapter investigates experiences with crime, perceptions of security, and awareness of gangs through time series and cross-national data. It also presents data on the relationship between insecurity and democracy as well as attitudes about rehabilitation programs.

**CRIME VICTIMIZATION AND PERCEPTIONS OF INSECURITY HAVE WORSENE SINCE 2014**

One central survey item in the AmericasBarometer project is on crime victimization, that is, whether the respondent had been a victim of a crime in the previous 12 months. **Figure 2.1** shows the percentage of people in Suriname who reported being a victim of any type of crime over the previous year in 2023 and in the three previous rounds. In 2023, one in five have been a victim of a crime, which is almost double the number reported in the previous wave (2014; 9%). Although crime victimization was higher in 2010 (21%), it had been steadily decreasing over the next two rounds. Fortunately, Suriname is on the lower end of crime in the countries studied this year, ranking 14<sup>th</sup> out of 24 countries included in the 2023

Survey data can provide valuable insights on the issue of public safety that help researchers, policymakers, and society at large understand the issue and craft effective crime-fighting strategies.

**Figure 2.1** Crime victimization increased to one in five in 2023



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2010-2023

**27%**  
of Paramaribo residents have been a victim of a crime in the past year.

AmericasBarometer. However, the rather significant increase since 2014 is cause for concern.

*Now, changing the subject, have you been a victim of any type of crime in the past 12 months? That is, have you been a victim of robbery, burglary, assault, fraud, blackmail, extortion, violent threats, or any other type of crime in the past 12 months?*

Incidence of crime is spread unevenly across the population. As displayed in **Figure 2.2**, there is significant variation in crime victimization by region and gender. Those who live in Paramaribo, the urban center of Suriname, are much more likely

to report having fallen victim to a crime; the victimization rate is 27% in the capital, 8 percentage points higher than the next highest region (Wanica and Para). Men have a significantly higher likelihood of being a victim of a crime as well (22%, compared to 18% for women). Notably, there is no significant relationship between crime victimization and education, wealth, or age.

Actual experience with crime may not fully capture the issue of security, as merely *perceptions* of insecurity can also cause economic harm and social ills. To address this, another core item on the AmericasBarometer surveys asks respondents how safe they feel in their

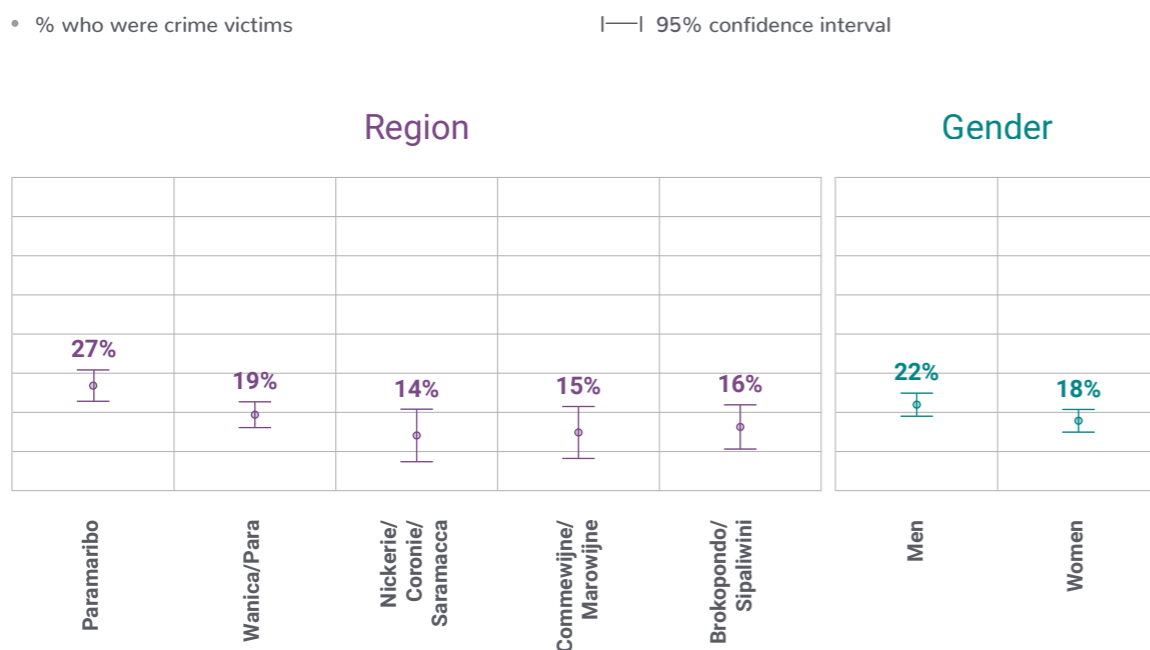
neighborhood on a four-point scale (the question makes specific reference to assault and robbery). **Figure 2.3** shows the percentage of Suriname’s population saying they feel “very unsafe” or “somewhat unsafe” in their neighborhood over time. The results reveal that in 2023, feelings of insecurity reached their peak across the four rounds of the AmericasBarometer. Almost half (45%) of people feel unsafe, a 9-percentage point increase from 2014. Even in 2010, when crime victimization was 21%, only 28% of people reported feeling insecure. In 2014, Suriname ranked 16<sup>th</sup> out of 28 countries on feelings of insecurity; in 2023, Suriname jumped to 11<sup>th</sup> (of 24). Feelings of insecurity were especially high

among women and less wealthy people (no significant differences across regions, ages, or education levels).

*Speaking of the neighborhood where you live and thinking of the possibility of being assaulted or robbed, do you feel very safe, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe?*

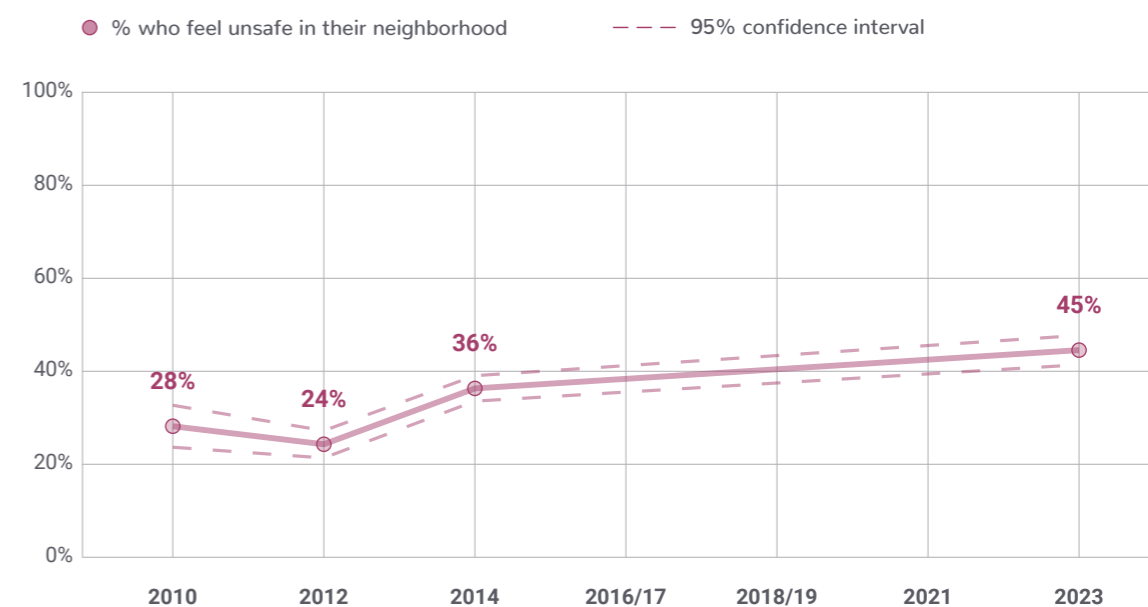
To delve deeper into the question of perceptions of security, LAPOP also included two questions on this year’s AmericasBarometer survey to gauge how respondents feel about the *relative* level of violence in their neighborhood. That is, the questionnaire asked whether the level of violence in the respondent’s

**Figure 2.2** Residents of Paramaribo and men are more likely to experience crime



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2023

**Figure 2.3** Feelings of insecurity in Suriname rose to their highest level in the series



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2010-2023

neighborhood is higher, lower, or about the same compared to 12 months ago, and compared to other neighborhoods in the country.

*Do you think that the current level of violence in your neighborhood is higher, about the same, or lower than in other neighborhoods?*

*Do you think that the current level of violence in your neighborhood is higher, about the same, or lower than 12 months ago?*

**Figure 2.4** shows the results of these two questions for 2023. It reveals that most Surinamese see their neighborhood as relatively safe, with 70% saying the amount of violence in their neighborhood is below average. Further, half report that violence in their neighborhood is decreasing. Although 21% say that the level of violence in their neighborhood is higher than 12 months ago, these results provide at least some reassurance that despite increasing feelings of insecurity (**Figure 2.3**), most people in Suriname do not see the violence problem as intensifying.

**GANGS PRESENCE HAS INCREASED, THOUGH THEY ARE RELATIVELY NONVIOLENT**

Suriname, like other South American countries surrounding the Amazon rainforest, faces threats from organized crime. The country’s abundant natural resources, sparse population, and position along the sea make it an attractive location for drugs, arms, human trafficking, and more recently, illegal deforestation as well as gold mining.<sup>6</sup> Although experts do not consider Suriname as a global hotspot for criminal activity, weak rule of law has prevented the government from stamping out gangs.<sup>7</sup>

The AmericasBarometer data shed light on the experiences of everyday people with organized crime. The questionnaire includes three questions about perceptions of gang presence: whether there is a gang or gangs in their neighborhood; to what extent the neighborhood is affected by gangs; and whether the respondent thinks young people in gangs is a serious problem in their neighborhood.

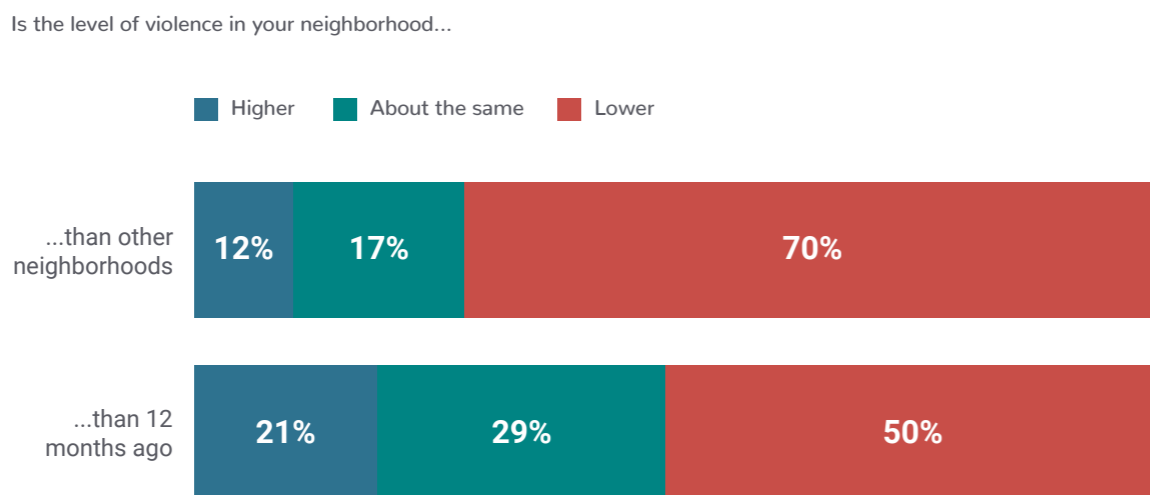
*Please, tell me if the following situation is a problem that is very serious, somewhat serious, a little serious, not serious at all, or is not a problem in your neighborhood... Young people or children living here in your neighborhood who are in gangs.*

*To what extent do you think your neighborhood is affected by gangs? Would you say a lot, somewhat, a little or none?*

*Is there a criminal gang or gangs in your neighborhood?*

**Figure 2.5** displays the results of these items in 2023 and the last time they were asked, in 2014. On whether young people in gangs is a serious problem, the figure shows the percentage that said it was at least “a little serious,” and for the extent of the gang problem question, the dots indicate the percentage that said “a lot” or “somewhat.” The results point to an increase in gang presence; there were significant increases on all three measures. In particular, the number of people who say young people living in their neighborhood who are in gangs is a serious issue more than doubled to 45%. Out of the four Caribbean countries where these questions were asked (Bahamas, Grenada, and Trinidad & Tobago),

**Figure 2.4** Despite increased crime victimization, most Surinamese do not feel violence in their neighborhood is particularly bad



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2023

More than two in five say they feel unsafe in their neighborhood, but half say the level of violence in their neighborhood is less than it was a year ago.



Suriname ranked the highest on two of the three items, and was closely behind Trinidad & Tobago (as well as Haiti) on the “gangs exist in neighborhood” question.

The mere presence of gangs may not present a complete picture of the problem, as criminal enterprises vary in their level of sophistication and intensity. For example, highly visible street-corner gangs made up of rudderless youth operate quite differently than drug cartels which are less likely to interact with civilians on an everyday basis. Therefore, respondents who reported at least some gang presence in their neighborhood are also asked how much violence (murder or injuries) has stemmed from gangs over the previous year.

*Was anyone murdered in your neighborhood as a result of gang violence within the last 12 months? No/One person/Two persons/Three persons/Four or more persons*

*Was anyone injured in your neighborhood as a result of gang violence within the last 12 months? No/One person/Two persons/Three persons/Four or more persons*

The results of these questions reveal that gangs in Suriname do not seem to be particularly violent. **Figure 2.6** shows the results for Suriname in comparison to other countries, to provide some context. In Suriname, 14% of people who reported

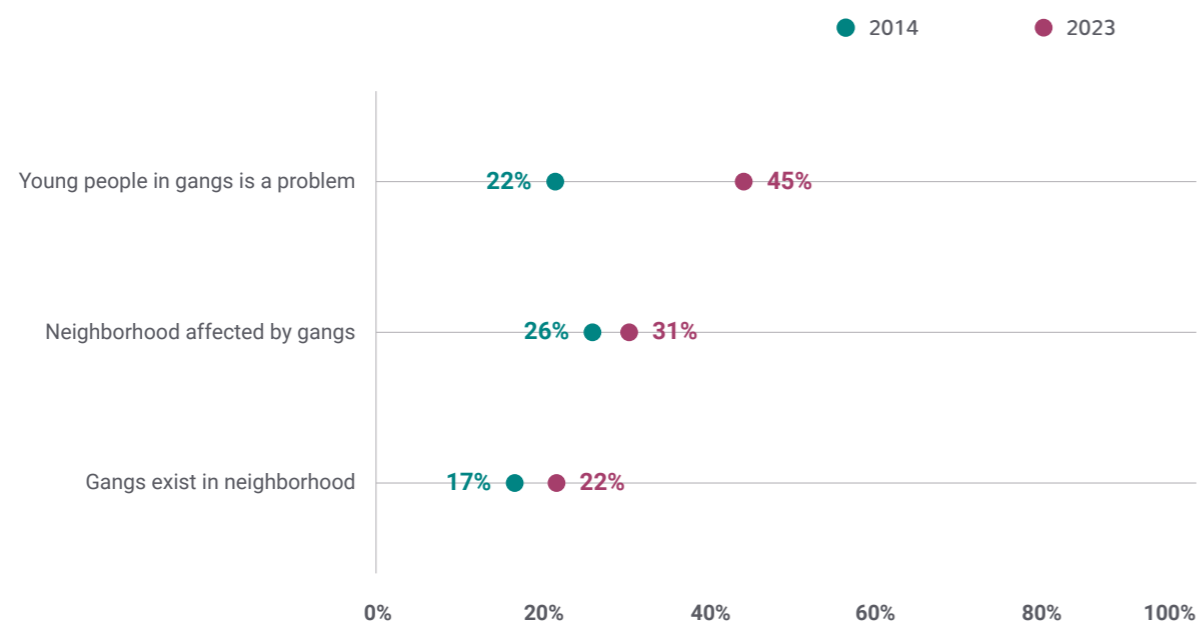
**31%** say their neighborhood is affected by gangs, a significant increase from 2014.

at least some gang presence say there was a murder as a result of gang violence in the previous year. Further, only 22% say that someone was injured due to gangs in the same time span. This is the lowest of the four countries studied by a significant margin. Further breaking down the data reveals that Surinamese do not see gangs in their neighborhood as particularly violent. Only 1% say that four or more people were murdered, compared to 15% in Trinidad & Tobago, 8% in The Bahamas, and 1% in Grenada. Likewise, just 4% reported that four or more people were injured by gangs, the lowest of the countries studied. These patterns seem to track with official statistics on crime and violence. In 2021, Trinidad & Tobago

and The Bahamas had two of the highest intentional homicide rates in the world (39.5 per 100,000 and 29.2, respectively).<sup>8</sup> Suriname (9.1) and Grenada (4.0) had much lower rates.

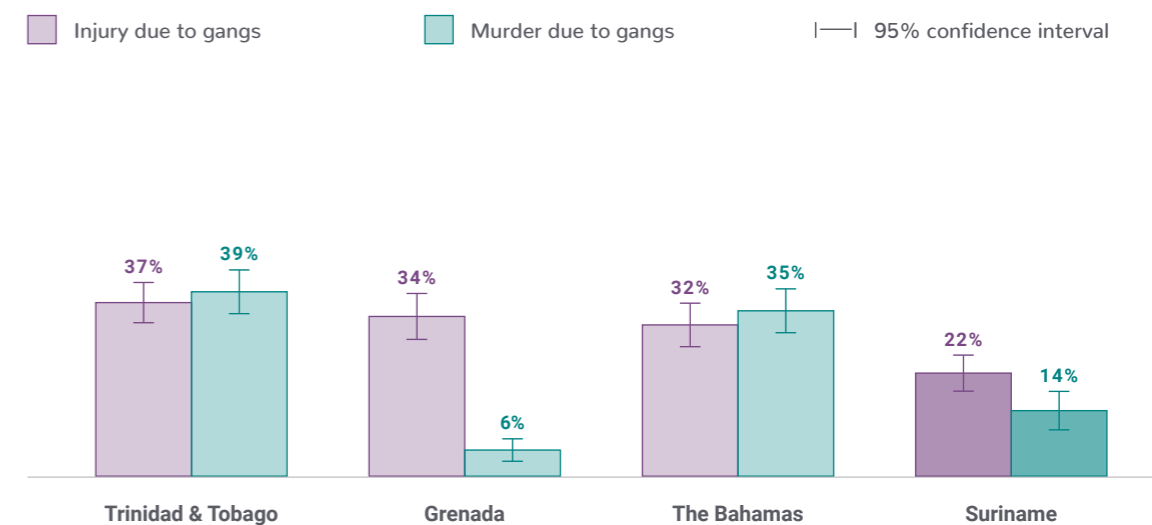
One final aspect to consider about the gang issue is the possibility that ordinary people view gangs as a boon to their community. In some cases, organized criminal groups take advantage of weak state capacity to provide services and deliver justice as a means of increasing their legitimacy and control in a certain area.<sup>9</sup> Two questions on the AmericasBarometer ask if gangs provide any positive benefits including law enforcement and services to the community:

**Figure 2.5** Reported gang presence has increased since 2014



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2014-2023

**Figure 2.6** Gangs in Suriname are relatively less violent than in Caribbean neighbors



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

**30%**

of those with gangs in their neighborhood say gangs help enforce the law.

*Do gangs help to enforce the law in your neighborhood?*

*Do gangs help persons in your neighborhood, for example, by providing school supplies for children, providing jobs, etc.?*

not see benefits to gangs. However, when placed in a comparative context, it seems Surinamese are relatively more apt to see positive aspects of gang presence.

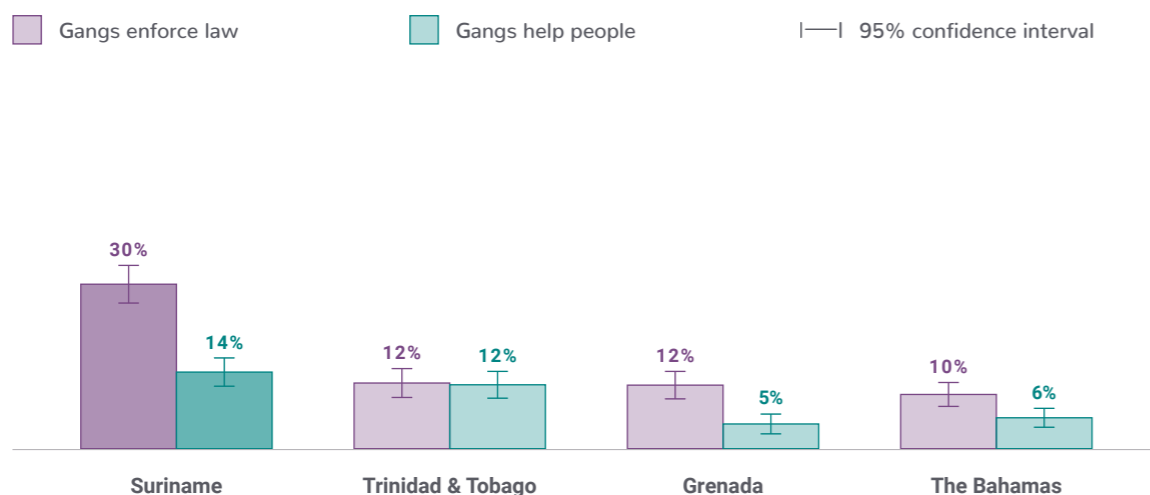
**INSECURITY PERCEPTIONS INFLUENCE OPINIONS OF DEMOCRACY**

Crime can have political ramifications. Security and political stability often go hand-in-hand; when the population fears for their safety, they desire change, often in the direction of more authoritative governance.<sup>10</sup> Experiences with crime can lead some to question the effectiveness of institutions and desire stronger leadership. Are crime and security associated with attitudes toward democracy in Suriname?

Figure 2.7 shows that a significant minority of Surinamese see benefits to the gang presence. Among those who report at least a little gang presence in their neighborhood, 30% say that gangs help to enforce the law, and 14% say that they are helpful to people in their neighborhood (e.g., providing school supplies or jobs). Suriname ranks well above Trinidad & Tobago, Grenada, and The Bahamas on these measures. It is important to keep in mind that the large majority of people do

A significant minority of Surinamese see benefits to gang presence, with 30% believing gangs help enforce the law and 14% saying they provide community support like school supplies or jobs. This perception is higher than in Trinidad & Tobago, Grenada, and The Bahamas.

**Figure 2.7** Three in ten say that gangs help to enforce the law in Suriname, a rate higher than in other Caribbean countries



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

To investigate this matter, this section assesses the relationship between support for democracy and crime victimization, as well as perceptions of insecurity. The support for democracy measure, analyzed further in the following chapter, asks respondents whether they believe democracy is the best form of government, despite its shortcomings.

The survey data show that crime victimization is not significantly associated with support for democracy, as demonstrated in the left-hand side of **Figure 2.8**. Crime victims are roughly as supportive as non-victims. On the other hand, perceptions of insecurity matter in predicting support for democracy. Those who feel somewhat or very secure

in their neighborhood are 5-percentage points more likely to think democracy is the best form of government. This result is statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ), both on the variables' original scales and the recoded versions shown in **Figure 2.8**. When using the original scale, the association holds when controlling for respondent age, gender, wealth, and education (the dichotomized variable holds at a higher significance level). Thus, the findings suggest that *feelings* of security shape democratic attitudes more than actual experience with crime.

*Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?*

### MOST BELIEVE YOUNG CRIMINALS SHOULD NOT BE SENT TO PRISON

What should be done about young people who face legal issues? Some believe that criminals should face stiff penalties including incarceration, either as a means of punishment, an opportunity for reflection, or to deter future crime. Others think that especially when dealing with young people, resources are better spent on rehabilitative programs which seek to reduce recidivism by addressing underlying issues that contribute to criminal behavior.

The 2023 AmericasBarometer survey in Suriname gauges support for these rehabilitative programs in the abstract

by asking respondents if young people in trouble with the law should enter programs outside of the prison system. **Figure 2.9** shows that over three-quarters of Suriname's citizens believe in alternatives to prison, suggesting a preference for rehabilitation over punitive measures. When placed in a cross-national context, though, Suriname is significantly less supportive of these programs than other Caribbean countries.

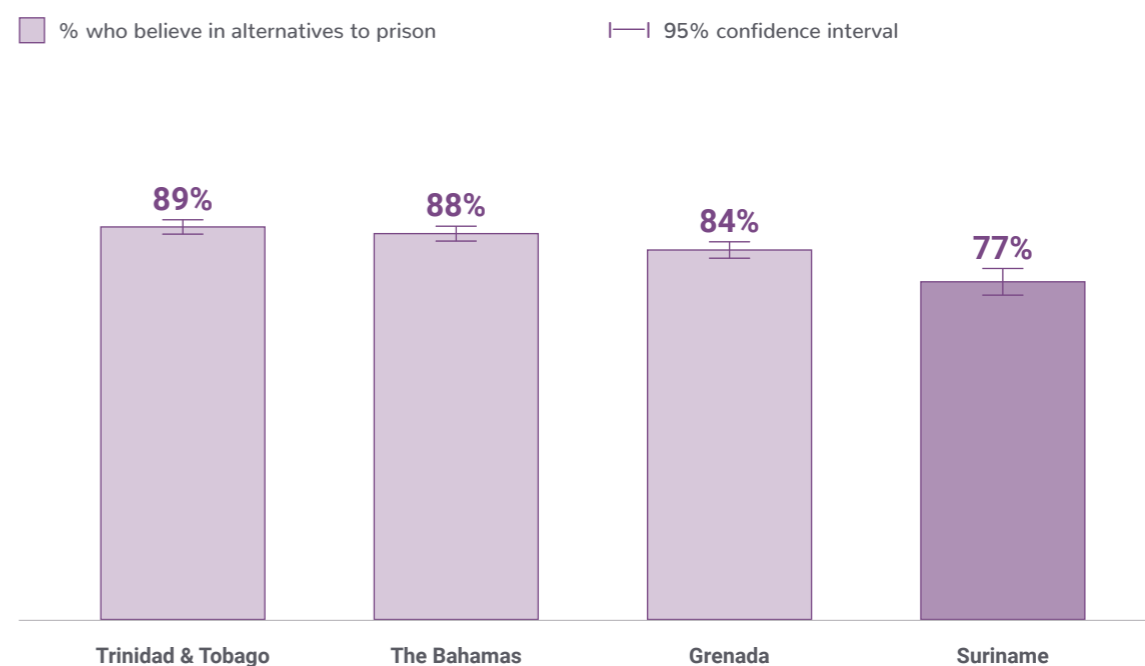
*Do you think young people who are in trouble with the law should enter programs that offer alternatives to going to prison?*

**Figure 2.8** Surinamese who feel insecure are less supportive of democracy



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2023

**Figure 2.9** Most Surinamese think young criminals should be offered alternatives to prison, but they are relatively tough on crime



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023



## Conclusions

The findings from this chapter provide a mix of disconcerting and reassuring news on the issue of crime in Suriname. On the one hand, security appears to be significantly worse than it was the last time the AmericasBarometer was fielded in 2014. Crime victimization doubled to one in five, feelings of insecurity rose to their highest level recorded in the four rounds of data collection, and by three measures, gang presence has expanded since 2014. On the other hand, most people reported that their neighborhoods were not particularly violent relative to other neighborhoods or compared to one year ago. Further, few linked gangs in their neighborhoods to violence, and a significant minority actually reported some positive aspects of gang presence. Just two percent cited security issues as the top problem facing the country.

Crime and economic security are closely linked. The findings from the previous chapter on the economic problems faced by Suriname today may help explain the results shown in this chapter. For example, the fact that a record low number of people list security as the top issue in the country in 2023 may have more to do with the depth of Suriname's economic distress rather than any change in opinion about crime. The juxtaposition of a rise in crime and insecurity since 2014 and the feeling that respondents' own neighborhoods are relatively nonviolent is somewhat puzzling at first but makes sense if respondents distinguish between violent crime and economic crime. Perhaps it is the case that crimes borne out of economic desperation (e.g., theft, robberies, scams, fraud) are becoming common, but more serious violent offenses are not.

Regardless of the causes, the crime problem should continue to be closely monitored and managed before it becomes a much larger issue. As academic research has found, and this chapter demonstrates, feelings of insecurity can erode faith in democracy, potentially leading to political unrest. Crime has precipitated a political crisis in Ecuador, where the National Assembly was dissolved by presidential decree and organized crime has infiltrated the country's political institutions.<sup>11</sup> Should Suriname's citizens begin to perceive an increase in violence in their neighborhood, particularly by gangs, alarm bells should ring for the country's leadership.

The juxtaposition of a rise in crime and insecurity since 2014 and the feeling that respondents' own neighborhoods are relatively nonviolent makes sense when respondents distinguish between violent and economic crimes.

## Notes

- 1 See <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/VC.IHR.PSRC.P5?locations=SR>
- 2 See <https://www.dbsuriname.com/2023/02/10/insight-crime-47-geregistreerde-moorden-in-2022-in-suriname-tegenover-32-in-2021/>
- 3 See <https://2017-2021.state.gov/bureau-of-international-narcotics-and-law-enforcement-affairs-work-by-country/suriname-summary/#:~:text=Suriname%20is%20a%20transit%20zone,detection%20and%20interdiction%20efforts%20difficult>
- 4 MacDonald 2023.
- 5 Ford and den Held 2022.
- 6 See <https://ocindex.net/country/suriname>
- 7 See <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/GITOC-Global-Organized-Crime-Index-2021.pdf>
- 8 See <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/murder-rate-by-country>
- 9 In some favelas of Brazil, for example, "gangs are the government." See [https://www.wilsonquarterly.com/quarterly/\\_/what-government-in-rios-slums-drug-gangs-are-the-government](https://www.wilsonquarterly.com/quarterly/_/what-government-in-rios-slums-drug-gangs-are-the-government)
- 10 Fernandez and Kuenzi 2010; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009; Merolla, Mezini, and Zechmeister 2013; Pérez 2003; Roccato, Vieno, and Russo 2014.
- 11 Freeman 2023.

Luke Plutowski

Most Surinamese think their politicians are corrupt, but that is a common attitude in the LAC region.

Corruption is a pervasive issue in Suriname.<sup>1</sup> Transparency International gave the country a 40 out of 100 on the Corruptions Perception Index, giving it a middling rank of 85<sup>th</sup> of 180 countries studied. The Surinamese government passed major anti-corruption legislation in 2017, which requires financial disclosures for public officials, although some experts say the law does not go far enough.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the judicial system has investigated, tried, and/or convicted many high-profile officials for corruption recently, including former Minister of Finance Gillmore Hoefdraad, former Central Bank Governor Robert van Trikt, and former Vice President Ashwin Adhin.<sup>3</sup>

Does the Surinamese public believe that corruption is pervasive among

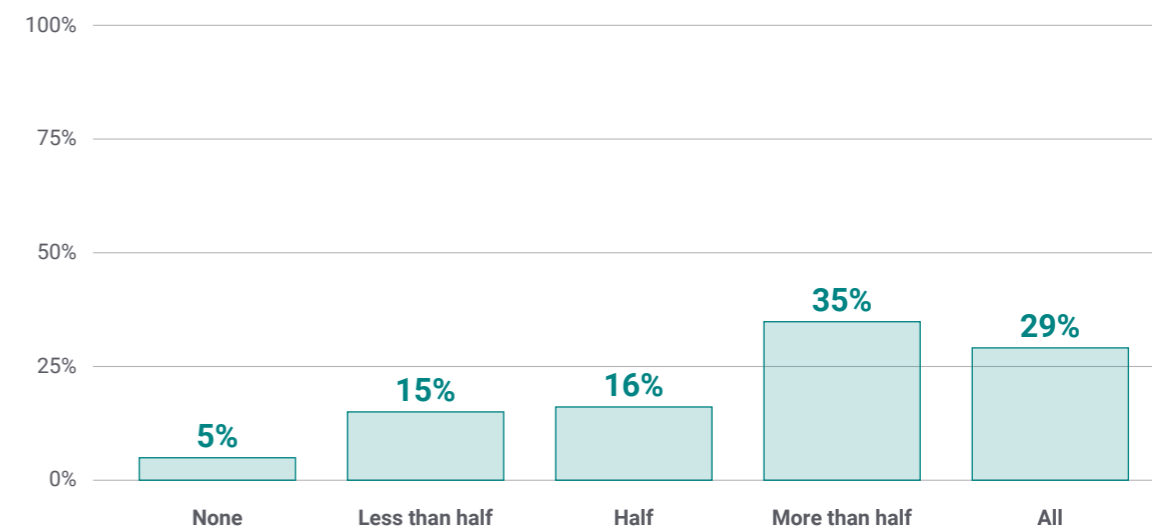
their country's leadership? The 2023 AmericasBarometer survey investigated this with the following question:

*Thinking of the politicians of Suriname... how many of them do you believe are involved in corruption?*

The results reveal that Surinamese people are quite distrustful of their representatives. Over one in three (35%) say that they think more than half of politicians are corrupt, and more than a quarter (29%) believe that every politician in Suriname is involved in corruption. This question was not asked previously in Suriname, though on a similar item in 2012, only 38% said that corruption was "common" or "very common" among public officials.

### Most people think that more than half of politicians in Suriname are corrupt

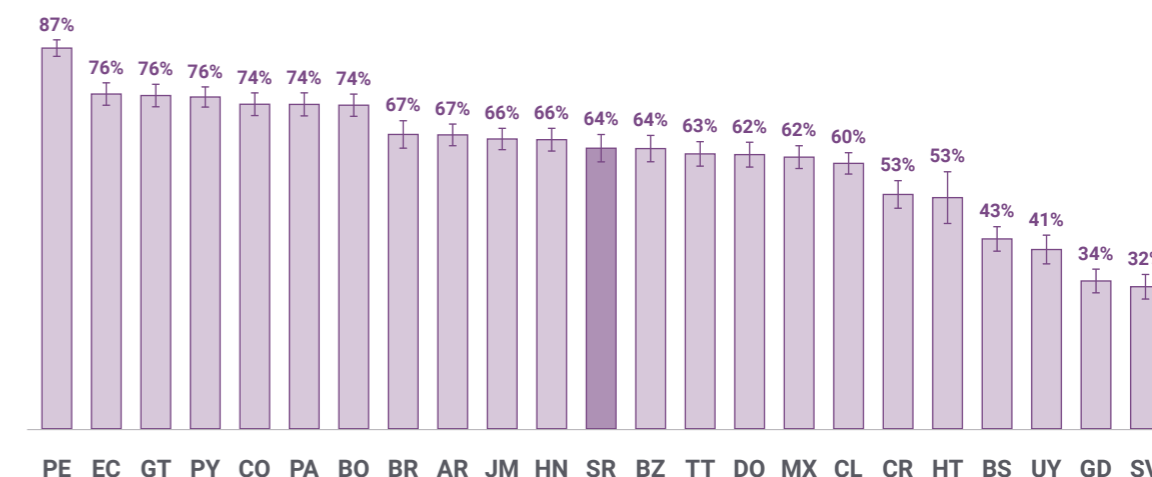
Thinking of the politicians of Suriname, how many of them do you believe are involved in corruption?



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2023

### Suriname ranks near the middle of the region in perceptions of corruption among elites

■ % who think more than half or all politicians are corrupt |—| 95% confidence interval



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

The corruption perceptions question was asked in all AmericasBarometer countries in 2023. Hence, it is possible to contextualize these results in terms of Suriname’s placement relative to other nations in the region. The results show that most people across the LAC region think their politicians are corrupt. In fact, Suriname ranks exactly in the middle of countries based on the percentage who say “more than half” or “all” politicians in the country are involved in corruption. In Peru, nearly nine in ten (87%) say the same. Suriname ranks slightly below its neighbor Brazil (67%).

Perceptions of corruption among public officials vary along demographic lines. There is a curvilinear relationship between age and beliefs about corruption: Surinamese people age 26-45 are more likely to say that more than half of all politicians are corrupt (69-70%), while the oldest (66+) and youngest (18-25) cohorts are less likely to say the same (55% and 58%, respectively). Socioeconomic status is tied to corruption perceptions as well. Those with the highest educational attainment and wealth level are more likely to say that corruption is generalized among the political elite (72% and 71%,

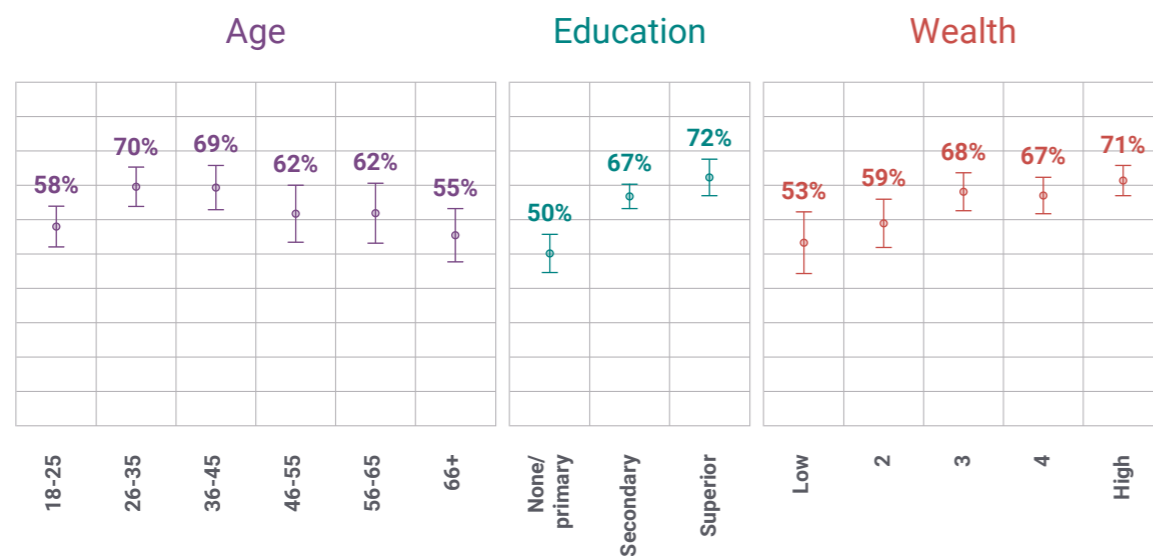
respectively). Meanwhile, only around half of those with primary education or less (50%) and those in the lowest wealth group (53%) say that most politicians are corrupt.

A core problem of Suriname’s democracy is the lack of financial and economic transparency of political parties who are the pillars of the political system and legally acquired more power after the military regime. However, the political leadership of influential political parties is directly involved or has strong links with illegal economic activities.

Corruption remains a problem in Suriname, and citizens are rather cynical about the extent of corruption among the political elite. Experts within the country have called for strengthening anti-corruption laws as well as laws on the financial transparency of political parties and politicians and continuing to hold leadership accountable through legal measures. More effective corruption-fighting strategies could help the Surinamese government inspire confidence among the public, especially those in the age and socioeconomic groups most likely to see politicians as corrupt.

**Those with higher socioeconomic status and people aged 26-45 are more likely to think Surinamese politicians are corrupt**

• % who think more than half or all politicians are corrupt | — | 95% confidence interval



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2023

**Notes**

- 1 Freedom House 2023.
- 2 Zagaris 2020.
- 3 Ibid.



# Attitudes toward Government, Politics, and Democratic Institutions

Luke Plutowski

In the wake of political and economic upheaval, Suriname has faced challenges in both governance and economic recovery. President Chan Santokhi's austerity measures, enacted as part of an IMF debt restructuring plan, have strained citizens already grappling with high prices, fostering discontent. Persistent security issues and corruption allegations have further eroded public trust. Anti-government protests erupted in February 2023, escalating to violence and demands for Santokhi's resignation, relief from inflation, and electoral reform.

Amidst this backdrop, LAPOP Lab conducted the AmericasBarometer survey to gauge public sentiment on governance. Such surveys are vital for democracy, offering insights into citizens' satisfaction with institutions, trust in leaders, and support for democratic principles. By informing policymakers and holding leaders accountable, these surveys play a crucial role in shaping policy responses and ensuring governance aligns with public interests.

## MAIN FINDINGS

- Approval for President Santokhi is extremely low (3%), though trust in the national government (41%) is near the average for the LAC region.
- Support for democracy in Suriname dropped significantly to just under half, the second-lowest rate in the region.
- Satisfaction with democracy plummeted since 2014, and most Surinamese do not believe elections are fair.
- Most disapprove of the February 17 storming of the National Assembly, though 14% "strongly approve."
- Trust in the political system has decreased across several metrics, and trust in all institutions measured is below 50%.

**3%**  
of Surinamese citizens say they think President Santokhi is doing a good job.

Suriname has experienced significant political turbulence in recent years. Since emerging from the pandemic, the country's economy has struggled to regain its footing, which has led to widespread discontent with present political leadership. President Chan Santokhi agreed to a debt restructuring plan with the IMF which included austerity measures that pinched the pocketbooks of middle- and lower-class people already struggling with high prices. Moreover, despite Santokhi's "tough on crime" promises, security and corruption have remained persistent.<sup>1</sup>

Unrest came to a head on February 17, 2023. Anti-government demonstrations escalated when demonstrators in Paramaribo looted stores, threw bricks and bottles at police forces, and ultimately stormed the country's National Assembly. Though that demonstration was quelled, protests have continued in subsequent months, demanding President Santokhi's resignation, relief to runaway inflation, and the creation of a fairer voting system.<sup>2</sup>

It is in this context that LAPOP Lab studied the political attitudes of Suriname's people with the AmericasBarometer survey. As a study of democratic governance, this survey sheds light on public satisfaction with political institutions and leaders, trust in government, and support for democracy in the abstract. Public opinion surveys like these are critical for the health of democracy, as they provide information to leadership about the interests, preferences, and concerns of the people. This helps to hold leaders accountable, guide policymaking to meet the needs of constituents, and provide data to combat misleading narratives.

**SURINAME'S PEOPLE OVERWHELMINGLY DISAPPROVE OF THE PRESIDENT, ALTHOUGH THEY STILL TRUST GOVERNMENT**

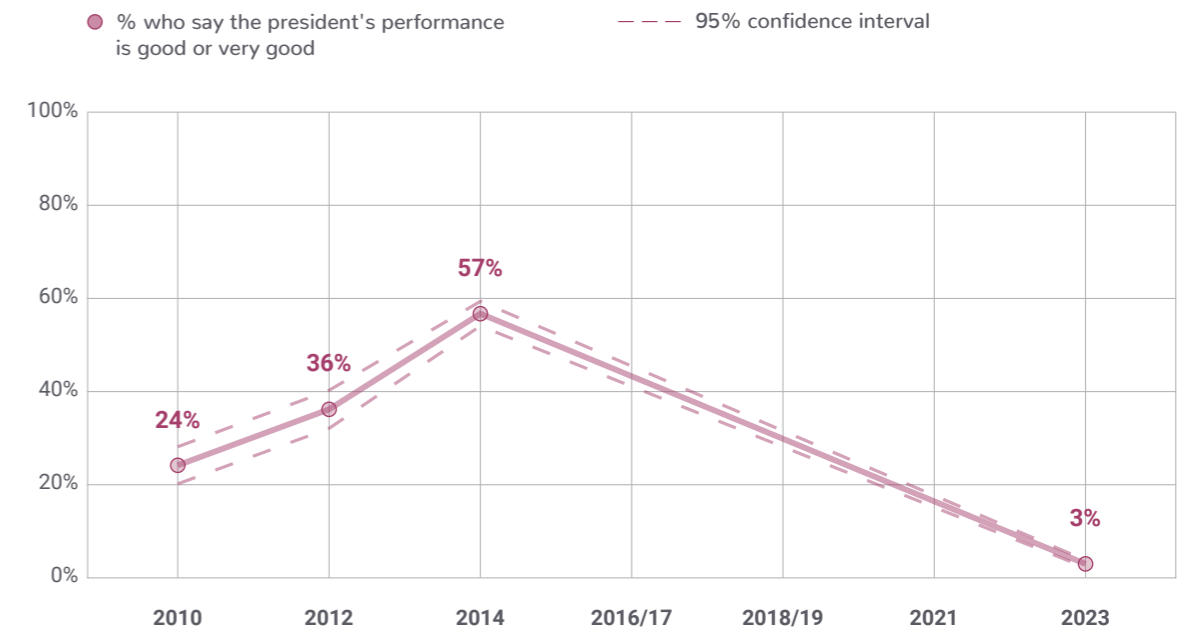
This section starts by assessing the attitudes of Suriname's people toward the current government. One of the core questions gauges the executive's job approval—in this case, President Chan Santokhi—on a five-point scale. This question has been asked in the three previous studies in Suriname about former presidents Desiré Bouterse (2012 and 2014) and Runaldo R. Venetiaan (2010).

*Speaking in general of the current administration, how would you rate the job performance of President [Chandrikapersad Santokhi]? Very good/Good/Neither good nor bad (fair)/Bad/Very bad*

Figure 3.1 shows the percentage of Surinamese people who rate the president's performance as "good" or "very good." Approval is very low in 2023, with only 3% saying President Santokhi is doing a good job. This is a significant drop from 2014 when a majority (57%) approved of the president. Further, Santokhi's approval rating is the lowest of any elected leader in any country and year in the history of the AmericasBarometer (second only to Haiti's Ariel Henry, an acting president who assumed office after the assassination of Jovenel Moïse, at 2.8%). The results comport with a question on trust in the president asked later in the survey. Trust dropped from 65% in 2012 to 10% in 2023. Because of the relatively large gap in the time series data, it is difficult to identify a single reason for the change, though the period of economic decline beginning in 2015 combined with increased ethnic rivalry and polarization are likely contributing factors.<sup>3</sup>

Suriname has experienced significant political turbulence in recent years, culminating in violent anti-government demonstrations and the storming of the National Assembly in February 2023.

Figure 3.1 Virtually no Surinamese approve of the president's performance



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2010-2023

**41%**  
of the  
Surinamese  
public say  
they trust the  
government  
to do what is  
right.

This year's AmericasBarometer also asked respondents about generalized trust in the national government, on a four-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "a lot." **Figure 3.2** shows the percentage of those who say "a lot" or "somewhat" in all countries surveyed. On this measure, Suriname sits in the middle (12<sup>th</sup> of 22) at 41%, just between Chile and Trinidad & Tobago. Thus, while satisfaction with the current president is quite low, Suriname's citizens have not been alienated from the government as a whole. With 38 percentage points between trust in government and satisfaction with the executive, Suriname holds by far the largest such gap across all countries (the next most is Brazil, with 65% trust in government and 45% presidential approval).

*How much do you trust the national government to do what is right? A lot/Somewhat/A little/Not at all*

**SUPPORT FOR AND SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY ARE VERY LOW**

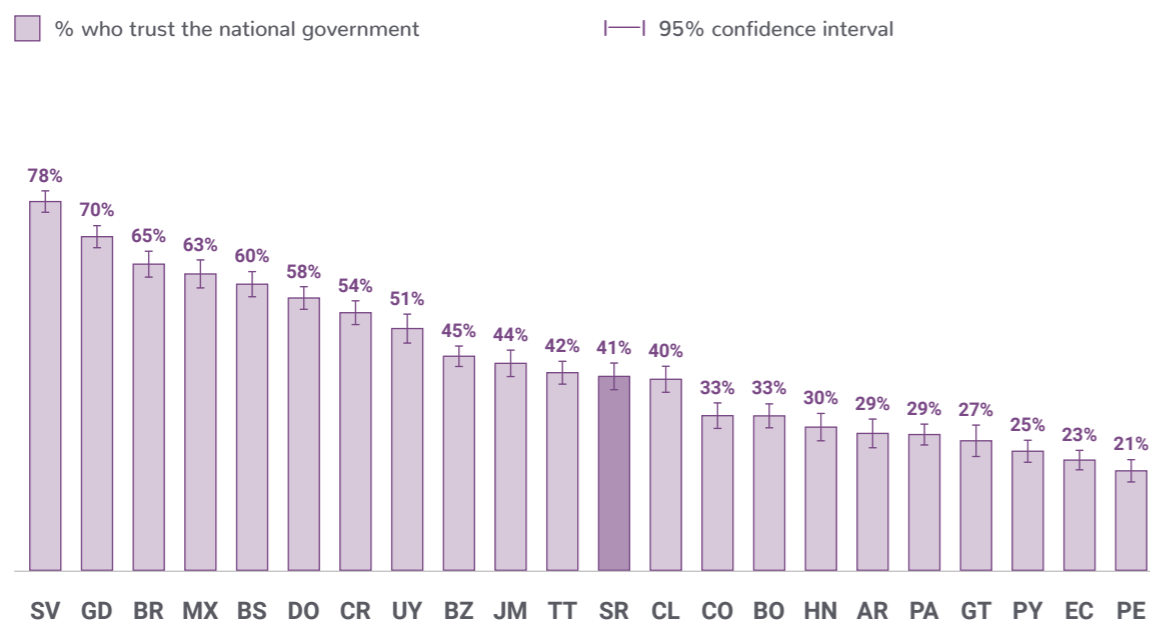
Two cornerstone questions of the AmericasBarometer ask about support for democracy and satisfaction with democracy. The former is meant to gauge abstract support for the system of democracy, while the latter probes satisfaction with the current state of democracy in the respondent's country. These questions are asked in all AmericasBarometer surveys, allowing for strong cross-national and cross-time comparisons.

*Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?*

*In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the way democracy works in Suriname?*

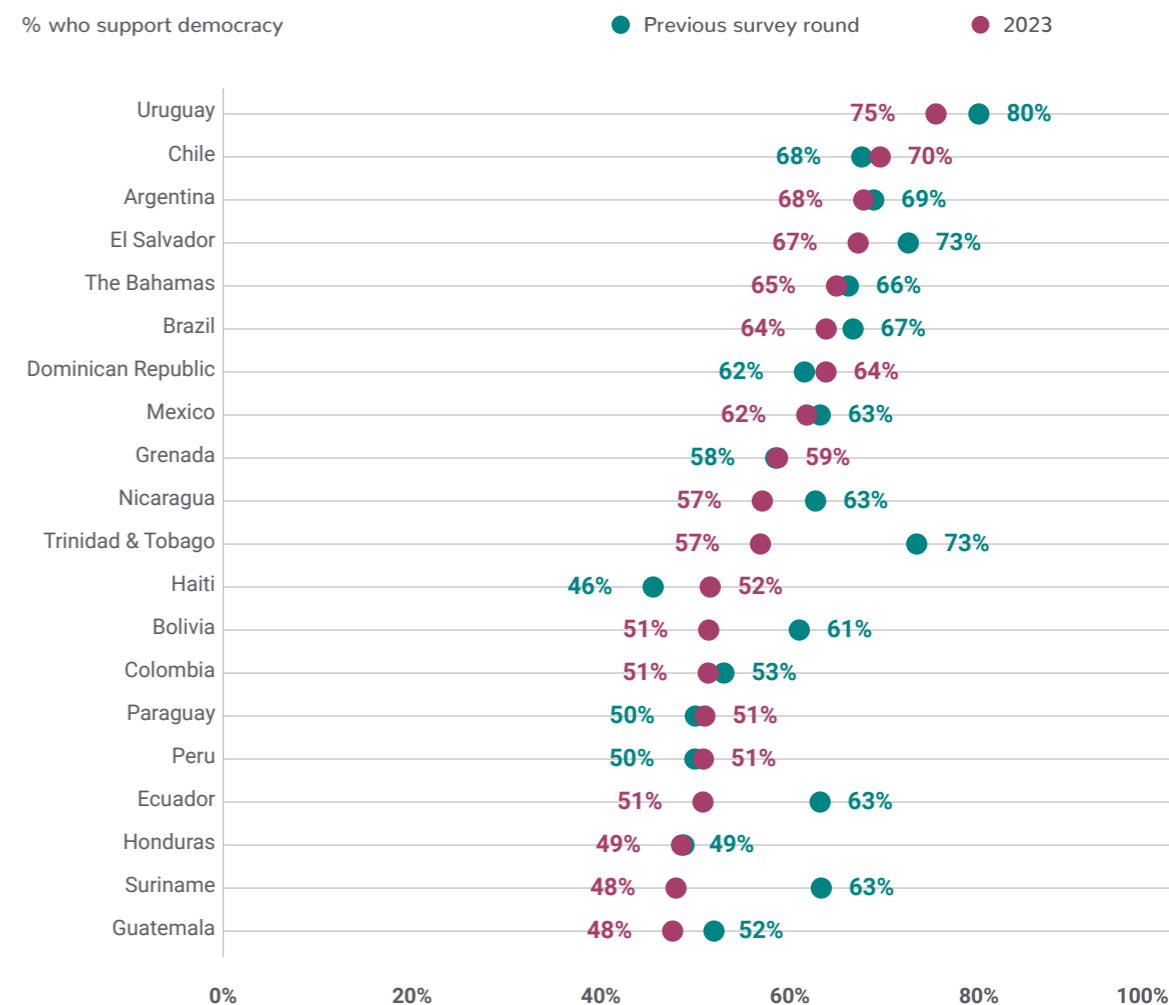
**Figure 3.3** shows the percentage of the population in each country who agree that democracy is the best form of government (5-7 on a 1 "strongly disagree" to 7 "strongly agree" scale). The red dots show the percentage in 2023, while those in green indicate support for democracy in the most recent year in which the question was asked for each country

**Figure 3.2** Suriname ranks near the middle of the region on general trust in government



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

**Figure 3.3** Suriname has the second-lowest level of support for democracy in the LAC region in 2023



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2014-2023

**48%**  
of Surinamese citizens support democracy, the second-lowest rate in the region.

(2021 in most cases, except for Suriname (2014), Trinidad & Tobago (2014), The Bahamas (2014), and Grenada (2016)). Suriname ranks near the bottom on this metric for 2023, with just under half (48%) agreeing with the statement. Support for democracy in Suriname is much lower in 2023 than it has been in previous rounds; 63% found it the best form of government in 2014, while 78% said the same in 2012, compared to a high of 84% in 2010. In only three countries (Suriname, Honduras, and Guatemala) do less than a majority support democracy in 2023.

Next, **Figure 3.4** displays satisfaction with democracy across time within Suriname. The level of satisfaction has dropped precipitously from 71% in 2014 to just over one in eight (13%) in 2023. The current level is less than one-fourth of the next lowest percentage in the

series (58%, in 2010). Cross-nationally, this measure roughly tracks with approval of the president (**Figure 3.1**). Only in Haiti are fewer people satisfied with the current state of democracy, and Suriname ranks well below the regional average of 40%. Further analysis of this question is provided in the Spotlight “Satisfaction with Democracy.”

**SURINAMESE DOUBT THE FAIRNESS OF ELECTIONS, BUT STILL BELIEVE IT TO BE THE BEST WAY TO INFLUENCE THINGS**

This year’s AmericasBarometer included several questions related to voting and elections. One area of interest is perceptions of electoral integrity. Specifically, the survey asks respondents if they think votes are always, sometimes, or never counted correctly and fairly,

Support for democracy in Suriname is much lower in 2023 than it has been in previous rounds, and only in Haiti do fewer people feel satisfied with the way democracy works in their country.

and whether politicians can always, sometimes, or never find out who each person voted for. Results are shown in **Figure 3.5**.

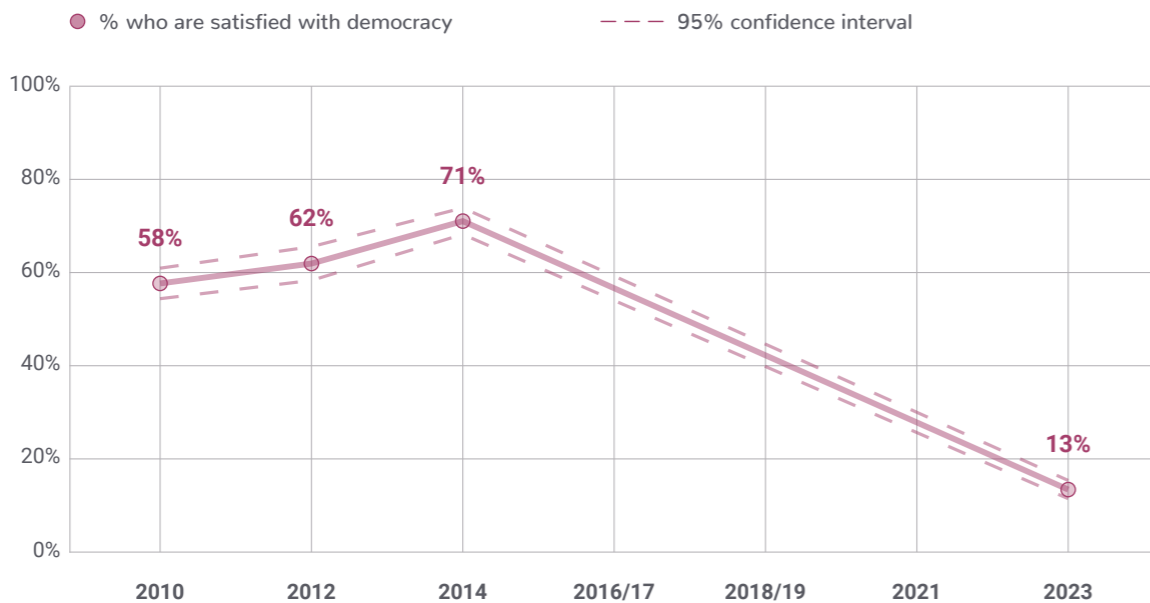
*I will mention some things that can happen during elections and ask you to indicate if they happen in Suriname...*

*Votes are counted correctly and fairly. Would you say it happens always, sometimes, or never?*

*Politicians can find out who each person voted for. Would you say it happens always, sometimes, or never?*

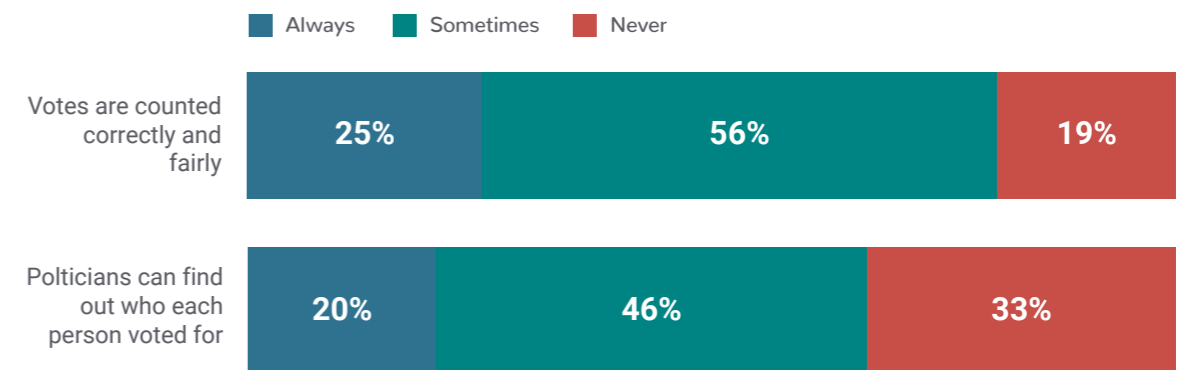
There are widespread doubts about electoral integrity. Only 25% say votes are always counted correctly and fairly; put another way, three out of every four people think there are at least some times when

**Figure 3.4** Satisfaction with democracy in Suriname has plummeted



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2010-2023

**Figure 3.5** Most Surinamese discredit fair elections and the secret ballot



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2023



votes are not counted correctly. Likewise, one third of Surinamese people think the ballot is always secret; conversely, two-thirds believe politicians can at times find out how someone voted (20% think politicians can always do so).

Even if some have doubts about electoral fairness, they may still engage with the electoral process. In fact, the data show 74% reported voting in the most recent general elections (2020), consistent with previous rounds (72% in 2014). When asked what the respondent would do if elections were held today, 28% said they would not vote. This is a significant increase from 2014 (15%), but the fact that a large majority *would* vote indicates that Surinamese are still not entirely alienated from democratic institutions.

The 2023 AmericasBarometer also added a new question to ask respondents what they believe to be the most effective way of bringing about change in the country. **Figure 3.6** shows the breakdown of responses to this question. The most common response was voting, at 37%. One in four, however, said that it was not possible to influence the country, indicating some degree of cynicism about the political process. Just 12% said that community boards/associations are the best way to influence things, compared to 24% in The Bahamas, 30% in Trinidad & Tobago, 32% in Haiti, and 38% in Grenada.

*In what way do you believe you can have the most influence to change things in the country? /Vote to elect those who support your position/Run as a candidate for public office/Participate in protests/*

*Participate in community boards/Influence in other ways/It is not possible to have an influence to change things*

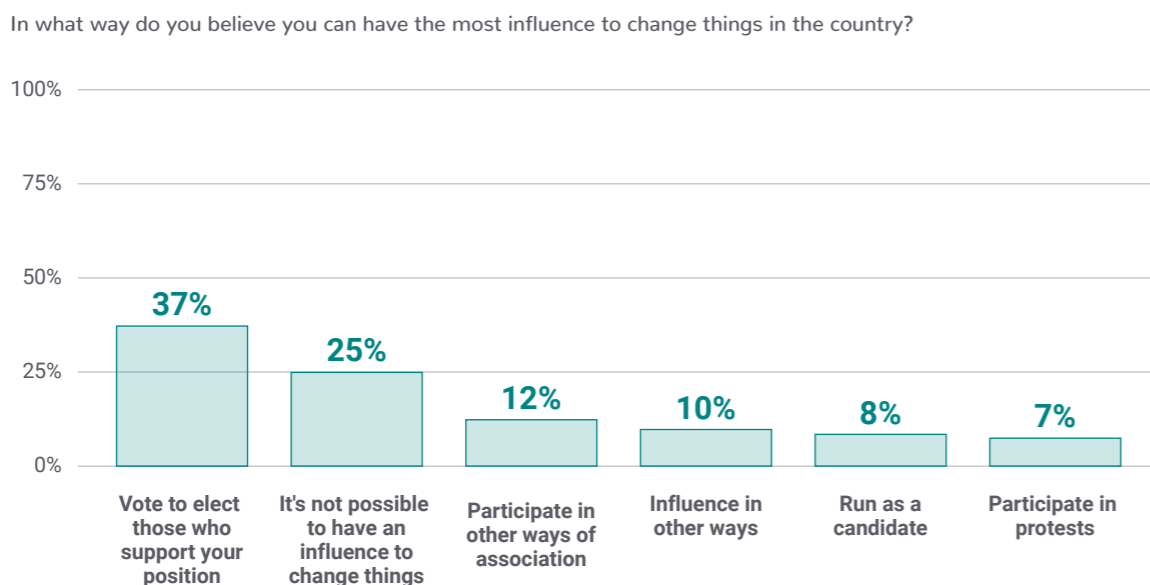
Dissatisfaction with the democratic process can often lead to extremism and extralegal methods of protest. This was evident in February of 2023, when anti-austerity protesters stormed the National Assembly in Paramaribo. Did this turn to violent protest enjoy popular support, or does it represent the actions of a vocal minority?

The 2023 AmericasBarometer asks about approval of the February 17 storming on a scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disapprove”) to 10 (“strongly approve”). The distribution of responses is shown in **Figure 3.7**. Most disapprove of the actions of the protesters, with

45% strongly condemning the attack. One in ten (10%) gave a response of 5, indicating neutrality. A significant minority (14%) expressed strong support. Those who approve of the attack (answer of 6 or higher) have significantly lower evaluations of President Santokhi’s job performance ( $p < .01$ ; result holds after controlling for demographic variables). Notably, however, approval of the attack is not significantly associated with satisfaction with democracy, support for democracy, or belief about the best way to change things in the country.

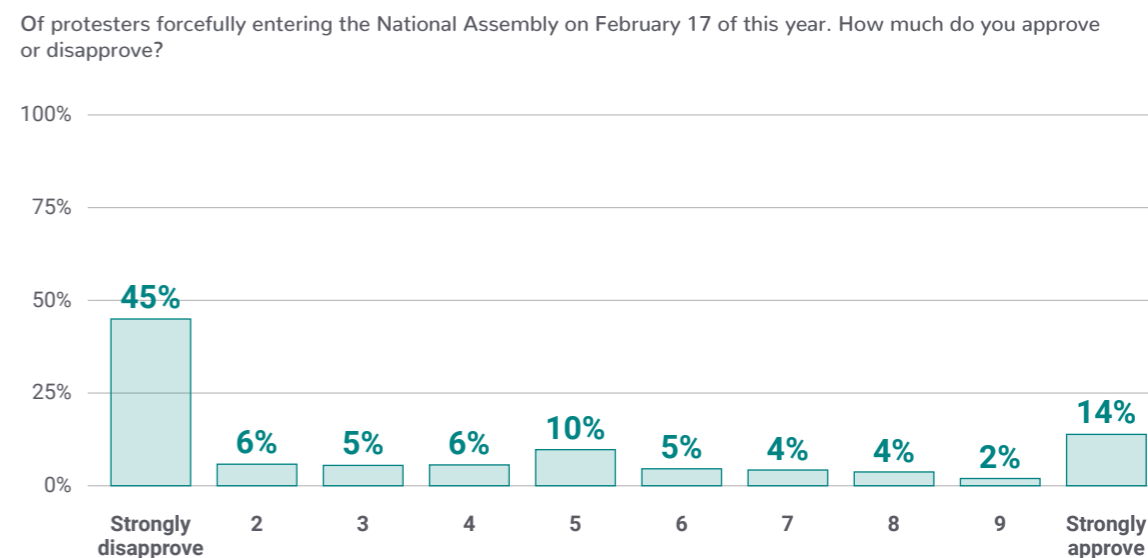
*Please tell me how strongly you would approve or disapprove... Of protesters forcefully entering the National Assembly on February 17 of this year. How much do you approve or disapprove?*

**Figure 3.6** Surinamese are most likely to say voting is the best way to influence change



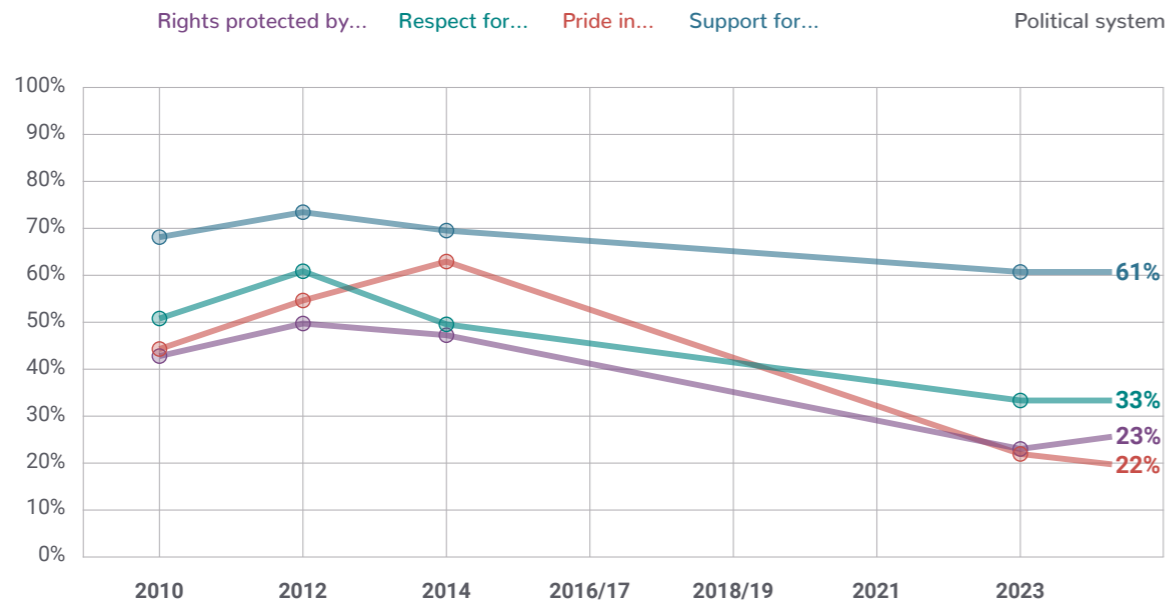
Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2023

**Figure 3.7** Most Surinamese disapprove of the February 17 storming of the National Assembly, but views are mixed



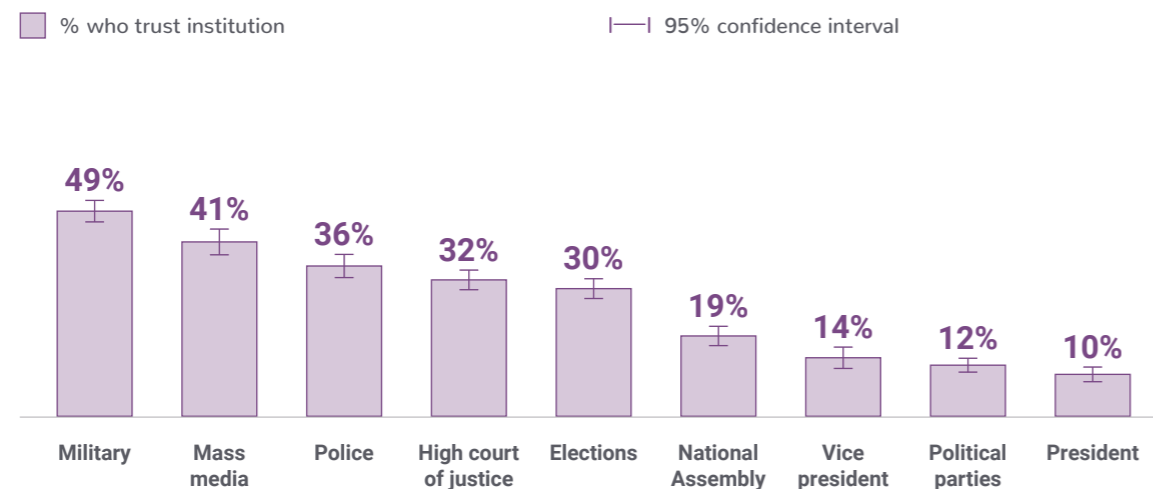
Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2023

**Figure 3.8** Attitudes toward Suriname’s political system have soured since 2014



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2010-2023

**Figure 3.9** Trust in Surinamese institutions is low, especially when it comes to current political leadership



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2023

**ALL MEASURES OF INSTITUTIONAL TRUST REACHED THEIR SERIES LOW IN 2023**

Good governance requires that citizens have faith in the institutions that govern them. Governments that do not earn trust from its populace risk losing legitimacy, which can threaten social cohesion and policy effectiveness. The AmericasBarometer survey includes several measures of trust and support of Suriname’s political system. The first set of such questions asks to what extent respondents have trust in the system of government along a variety of dimensions, including respect for the system, belief that basic rights are protected, pride in the political system, and belief that people

should support the system. The responses are measured on a 1 to 7 scale, where 1 means “not at all” and 7 means “a lot.”

*To what extent do you respect the political institutions of Suriname?*

*To what extent do you think that citizens’ basic rights are well protected by the political system of Suriname?*

*To what extent do you feel proud of living under the political system of Suriname?*

*To what extent do you think that one should support the political system of Suriname?*

**Figure 3.8** shows the percentage of people who indicated trust in the system (an answer of 5-7) along these different dimensions across time. Trust in the system has dropped considerably in 2023 across the board. Although a majority (61%) think that people ought to support the political system of Suriname, a third or fewer have respect for the system (33%), think their rights are protected by the system (23%), and have pride in the system (22%). Suriname ranks the lowest among all countries studied this round on respect for the country’s political institutions, and second to last, one percentage point above Haiti, on pride in the system.

The AmericasBarometer also asks about trust in specific institutions. The results from 2023 in Suriname are shown in **Figure 3.9**, which displays the percentage who gave an answer of 5-7 on the 1-7 trust scale (the questions follow the format “to what extent do you trust the [institution]?”). Trust is highest in the military (49%), mass media (41%), and police (36%), and lowest in the vice president (14%), political parties (12%), and the president (10%). The results indicate a large degree of cynicism among the public across various arms of the government and the media.

Trust in the Surinamese political system has dropped considerably in 2023. Suriname ranks the lowest among all countries studied this round on respect for the country’s political institutions, and second to last, 1 percentage point above Haiti, on pride in the system.

## Conclusions

The results from this year's AmericasBarometer portray of bleak image of Suriname's democratic system. Support for democracy has dropped considerably, and satisfaction with democracy is nearly the lowest in the region. Surinamese adults have very little respect for the country's system of government and low levels of trust in its various institutions. Further, many doubt the fairness and integrity of elections, and one third of the population says they support the actions of protesters who stormed the nation's legislature.

At the same time, for astute observers, there are pieces of reassuring news. Although Suriname's population is extremely unhappy with the state of the country now, they do not yet seem keen to abandon the democratic system as a whole.

Despite only 3% presidential approval, 41% trust the government to do what is right, and 61% say that people should support the political system. Support for democracy is low relative to other countries, but nearly half still agree it is the best form of government. A majority condemned the attack on the National Assembly, and, although many see problems in the electoral process, many still see voting as the best way to bring about change.

An excellent test of democratic strength is how much citizens are willing to stick with the system when times are tough. Despite a historically poor economy, there is no evidence that the Surinamese people are ready to embrace an authoritarian regime. If the government can create policies that address the concerns and needs of its constituents, they may yet be able to weather the turbulent period and regain legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry in the coming years.

An excellent test of democratic strength is how much citizens are willing to stick with the system when times are tough. Despite a historically poor economy, there is no evidence that the Surinamese people are ready to embrace an authoritarian regime.

## Notes

- 1 Macdonald 2022. Also see <https://freedomhouse.org/country/suriname/freedom-world/2023> as well as <https://www.dbsuriname.com/2023/02/10/insight-crime-47-geregistreerde-moorden-in-2022-in-suriname-tegenover-32-in-2021/>
- 2 Rozenblad 2023.
- 3 Menke 2023.

## Satisfaction with Democracy

Alexandra Rounds<sup>1</sup> and Luke Plutowski

Surinamese adults report one of the lowest levels of satisfaction with democracy in the region.

Suriname operates under a constitutional democracy and is generally considered to hold fair elections. However, corruption has increased in recent years despite a new anti-corruption law being passed in 2017. Surinamese citizens also have limited access to government information, with transparency and communication remaining a major issue. Major anti-government protests were held throughout 2022, reflecting citizen's discontent with the government.<sup>2</sup>

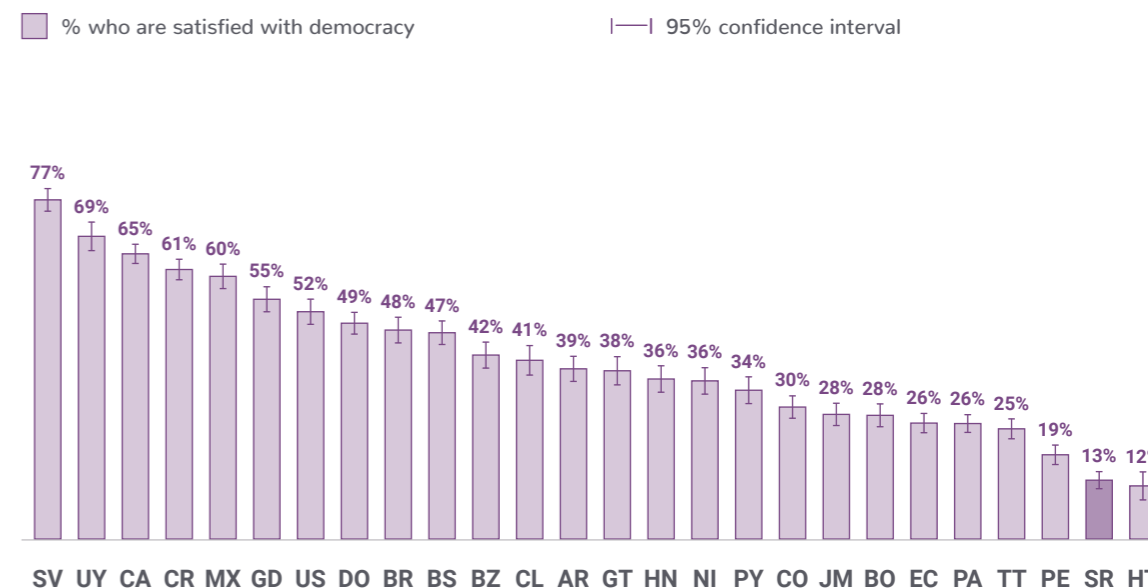
Since 2004, the AmericasBarometer has measured satisfaction with democracy in the LAC region by asking the following question:

*In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the way democracy works in Suriname?*<sup>3</sup>

Suriname's level of satisfaction is low compared to the rest of the region. Suriname's level of satisfaction, 13%, is only higher than that of Haiti (12%). Most people are dissatisfied across the LAC region, but the median rate of satisfaction (38.5%) is still three times higher than Suriname's. El Salvador and Uruguay report the highest satisfaction with democracy (77% and 69%, respectively).

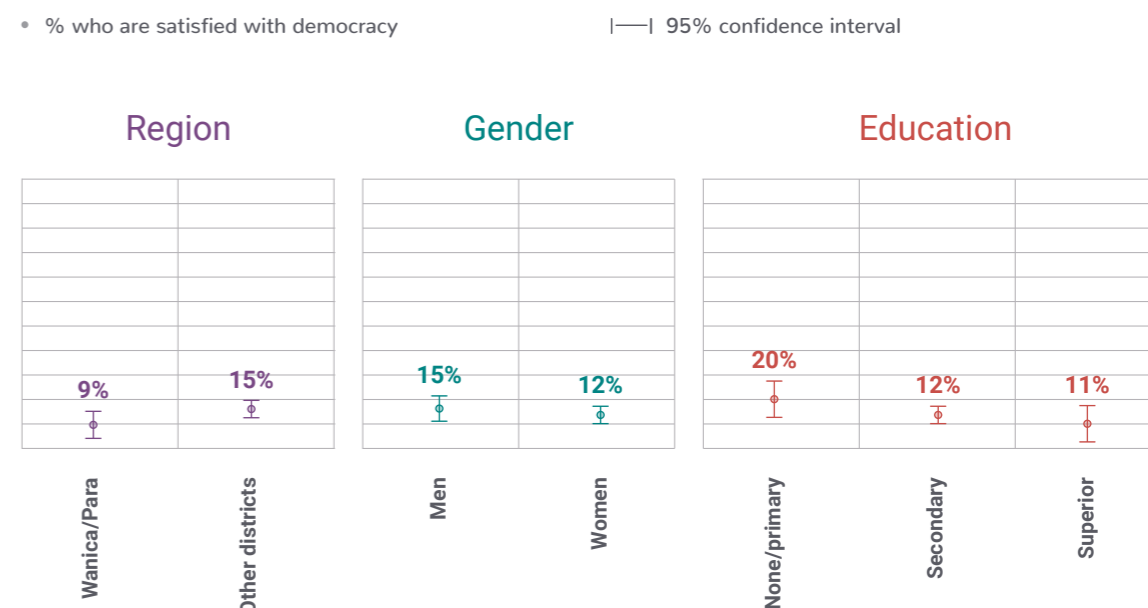
As chapter 3 of this report shows, satisfaction with democracy reached a record low in 2023, with only 13% indicating satisfaction, compared to a high point of 71% in 2014. Since 2020, the nation has defaulted on its debt three times and continues to face economic uncertainty.<sup>4</sup> There has also been an increase in government corruption as multiple high-ranking officials have been accused of fraud and embezzlement in the past seven years.<sup>5</sup>

### Suriname has the second-lowest level of satisfaction with democracy in the LAC region



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

### Satisfaction with democracy in Suriname is particularly low among those in Wanica and Para, women, and the highly educated



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Suriname 2023



What characteristics of individuals predict satisfaction with democracy in Suriname?<sup>6</sup> Residents of the districts of Wanica and Para are particularly dissatisfied; less than one in ten are satisfied, compared to 15% across the other districts. On average, men (15%) are more likely than women (12%) to report being satisfied with democracy.<sup>7</sup> There is also significant variation by educational attainment. Satisfaction is highest among those with no education or primary-level education (20%) and lowest for those with at least some superior education (11%). These are all statistically significant differences, and that significance holds when controlling for region, gender, age, education, and wealth.

Overall, satisfaction with democracy in Suriname has decreased significantly since the last time the question was asked in 2014, and now the country is among the least satisfied in the region. Widespread perceptions of worsening personal economic situations (more than four out of every five persons indicated that they are personally worse off than they were a year prior; see **Figure 1.3** in chapter 1) is part of the citizenry's discontent with the government. These trends are happening as the nation faces economic hardships in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and cases of political corruption have increased.<sup>8</sup> These events may provide a context where Surinamese people are not satisfied with their democracy.

Suriname's level of satisfaction is low. Most people are dissatisfied with democracy across the LAC region, but the median rate of satisfaction (38.5%) is still three times higher than Suriname's 13%—just above Haiti's 12%.

## Notes

- 1 Alexandra Rounds is a senior at Vanderbilt University majoring in Political Science and Spanish.
- 2 Freedom House 2023.
- 3 The analyses groups those who say "very satisfied" with those who say "satisfied" to indicate satisfaction.
- 4 Osborn 2023.
- 5 Freedom House 2023.
- 6 Results are derived from a logistic regression where the dependent variable is coded as 1 if a respondent is satisfied with democracy and 0 if not. Various sociodemographic predictors are included in the model—gender, age cohorts, wealth, place of residence (urban vs. rural), and education (none/primary vs. secondary vs. superior).
- 7 In Suriname in 2023, there were not enough cases to report out on those who responded, "neither man nor woman," "don't know," or "no response." Since these categories are exclusive, we do not collapse categories. In Suriname in 2023, 0.06% of respondents identified as a gender other than man or woman, 0.84% of respondents said they did not know, and 2.34% of respondents gave no response.
- 8 Freedom House 2023.

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## TECHNICAL INFORMATION FOR THE 2023 AMERICASBAROMETER IN SURINAME

This survey was carried out between March 25 and May 18, 2023, as part of LAPOP's 2023 AmericasBarometer. It is a follow up to LAPOP's AmericasBarometer Suriname surveys of 2010, 2012, and 2014. The 2023 survey fieldwork was carried out by Datafruit on behalf of LAPOP. Key funding came from Vanderbilt University, USAID, and the Inter-American Development Bank.

Questionnaire pretesting took place between March 9 and March 12, 2023, and interviewer training took place from March 16 to March 18, 2023. Pilot surveys were conducted on March 18 and March 19, 2023. A full copy of the 2023 AmericasBarometer Suriname questionnaire can be found at LAPOP's website at [www.LapopSurveys.org](http://www.LapopSurveys.org).

The project used a national probability sample design of voting-age adults, with a total N of 1,539 people involving face-to-face interviews conducted in Sranan Tongo, Dutch, and English. In the 2023 round, LAPOP used the SurveyToGo® (STG) software, running on Android tablets and phones, to conduct 100% of the interviews.

The survey used a complex sample design, including stratification and clustering. The sample was developed by LAPOP, using a multi-stage probability design and was stratified by five major regions: Paramaribo, Wanica/Para, Nickerie/Coronie/Saramanca, Commewijne/Marowijne, and Brokopondo/Sipaliwini. The sample is representative at the national level and of the five regions. Each stratum was further sub-stratified by size of municipality<sup>1</sup> and by urban and rural areas within municipalities. Respondents were selected in clusters of six in urban and rural areas. Reported statistics or statistical analyses should be adjusted for the design effect due to the complex design of the sample.<sup>2</sup>

The sample frame used for the sample is the 2012 Population Census. The sample is representative of voting age population at the primary stratum level, by urban/rural areas, and by size of the municipalities. No areas or regions of the country were excluded from the design. During fieldwork a total of four clusters were substituted in Suriname.

The sample consists of 63 primary sampling units and 252 secondary sampling units (sampling points) across the set of all districts in Suriname. A total of 499 respondents were surveyed in urban areas and 1,040 in rural areas. The estimated margin of error for the survey is  $\pm 2.5$ . Margin of sampling errors are not adjusted for weights. The final sample achieved in the survey is self-weighted.

For more details on the methodology used in Suriname, see the complete technical report at <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/suriname.php>.

<sup>1</sup> The sample design includes three different strata of municipalities classified according to their size: (1) small municipalities with less than 3,000 inhabitants, (2) medium-sized municipalities with between 3,000 and 10,000 inhabitants, and (3) large municipalities with more than 10,000 inhabitants.

<sup>2</sup> For more information visit <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/survey-designs.php>

## AMERICASBAROMETER DATA AND REPORTS AT A GLANCE

### DATA

The AmericasBarometer datasets feature a common core set of questions that have been asked from 2004 to present day. In addition, LAPOP has datasets that date back to the 1970s. Data files are free and publicly available for download.



Users can also access AmericasBarometer data through our Data Playground. This data analysis tool is free and interactive. It is particularly useful for those individuals unfamiliar with advanced statistical software programs. Data Playground users can analyze AmericasBarometer data through tabulations of a single variable, cross-country comparisons on a map, and cross-tabulations of two variables.



### REPORTS

LAPOP produces numerous reports on the AmericasBarometer and other projects. Our goal is to provide analysis and evidence for scholars and practitioners on public opinion and democratic governance.

*Insights* reports are short briefs produced by students, network affiliates, our researchers, and our faculty. The series is used by journalists, policymakers, and scholars.



*Standard Insights* engage social science research and AmericasBarometer data to develop and assess theories regarding links between public opinion and democracy.

*Topical Insights* use project data to provide evidence and context on a current event.

*Methodological Insights* offer windows into our cutting-edge approaches, report on our innovations, and engage scholars who work at the survey research frontier.

*Global Insights* introduce findings from LAPOP-affiliated research outside the Americas.

*Spotlights* present quick snapshots of AmericasBarometer questions across countries, time, and subgroups.



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Country reports are book length, contain more extensive analyses, and are organized thematically to address findings relevant to democratic governance, strengthening, and stability. They include a focus on topics that stakeholders, especially USAID Missions, identify as important in the local context.



The following AmericasBarometer datasets (■) and reports\* (●) are available for free download on our website ([www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop)):

	2004	2006	2008	2010
Regional	●	●	●	●
Mexico	●	●	●	●
Guatemala	●	●	●	●
El Salvador	●	●	●	●
Honduras	●	●	●	●
Nicaragua	●	●	●	●
Costa Rica	●	●	●	●
Panama	●	●	●	●
Colombia	●	●	●	●
Ecuador	●	●	●	●
Bolivia	●	●	●	●
Peru		●	●	●
Paraguay		●	●	●
Chile		●		●
Uruguay			●	●
Brazil				●
Venezuela		●	●	
Argentina				●
Dominican Republic	●	●	●	●
Haiti		●	●	●
Jamaica		●	●	●
Guyana		●	●	
Trinidad & Tobago				●
Belize				
Suriname				
The Bahamas				
Barbados				
Grenada				
St. Lucia				
Dominica				
Antigua and Barbuda				
St. Vincent and the Grenadines				
St. Kitts and Nevis				
United States		■	■	■
Canada		■	■	■

\*2023 AmericasBarometer country reports will be available in early 2024.

	2012	2014	2016/17	2018/19	2021	2023
Regional	●	●	●	●	●	●
Mexico	●	●	●	●	●	●
Guatemala	●	●	●	●	●	●
El Salvador	●	●	●	●	●	●
Honduras	●	●	●	●	●	●
Nicaragua	●	●	●	●	●	●
Costa Rica	●	●	●	●	●	●
Panama	●	●	●	●	●	●
Colombia	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ecuador	●	●	●	●	●	●
Bolivia	●	●	●	●	●	●
Peru	●	●	●	●	●	●
Paraguay	●	●	●	●	●	●
Chile	●	●				
Uruguay	●					
Brazil						
Venezuela						
Argentina	●					
Dominican Republic	●	●		●	●	●
Haiti	●	●				●
Jamaica	●	●	●	●	●	●
Guyana						
Trinidad & Tobago						●
Belize						●
Suriname	●					●
The Bahamas						●
Barbados						
Grenada						●
St. Lucia						
Dominica						
Antigua and Barbuda						
St. Vincent and the Grenadines						
St. Kitts and Nevis						
United States			■	■	■	■
Canada			■	■	■	■

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY FOR THE 2023 AMERICASBAROMETER

The AmericasBarometer is a multinational, multiregional, and multicultural (3MC) public opinion survey of democratic values and behaviors of voting-age citizens and permanent residents in the Western Hemisphere.

Respondents are selected through national probability samples in Latin America and the Caribbean, and through nonprobability panels in the United States and Canada. The project uses a standardized core questionnaire and country-specific modules to collect data via face-to-face household surveys, except in Haiti and Nicaragua, where the project uses computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), and in the United States and Canada, where the project uses self-administered Web surveys. The per-country average sample size of 1,512 respondents enables national and subnational estimations of key population variables.

## QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The AmericasBarometer survey instruments consist of a core questionnaire and country-specific modules that measure attitudes regarding, experiences with, and behaviors within political, economic, and social systems. The core questionnaire is a set of structured items that permit valid comparisons across time and space. Country-specific modules measure opinion on context-specific sociopolitical phenomena. As in every round, new questions are designed through workshops with input from country experts and leading scholars in the field. While the average face-to-face questionnaire includes 152 questions and lasts 45 minutes, the average CATI questionnaire includes 77 questions and lasts 20 minutes. The main questionnaire topics in 2023 are democratic values, system support, the rule of law, gender, and migration intentions.

## COGNITIVE PRETESTS

The core questionnaire and country-specific modules are thoroughly pretested with a three-stage iterative cognitive interviewing process. First, LAPOP cognitive interviewers carry out a handful of in-depth tests of new modules to develop early drafts of questionnaire items. Second, LAPOP extensively trains research assistants and consultants to conduct cognitive interviews of the full core questionnaire in selected countries from different regions of the Americas to ensure context variation. Third, a similar process is carried out in all countries for each country-customized questionnaire. For the 2023 AmericasBarometer, local survey institutions recruited pre-test participants, and, in some cases, a small incentive was offered for their participation. Most cognitive interviews were conducted remotely using video or phone calls.

## SAMPLING

LAPOP uses a stratified, multistage, and clustered sampling strategy to draw national probability samples in countries where the survey is administered face-to-face. LAPOP-trained enumerators interview any eligible respondent available at the time of the survey. A single respondent is selected in each household and no revisits are required. In face-to-face studies, LAPOP uses “frequency matching,” a technique that ensures that the samples achieved mirror the national distributions of age and gender in the sampling frame. Frequency matching is implemented at the cluster level. In countries where the survey is conducted via CATI, LAPOP uses random-digit dialing (RDD) of mobile phones. In cases of unanswered calls, each number selected into the sample is called at least five times before it is discarded.

## WEIGHTS

The 2023 AmericasBarometer sample design strategy in face-to-face studies produce self-weighted observations, with a few exceptions. Datasets in Ecuador, Trinidad & Tobago, The Bahamas, and Brazil use calibration weights to compensate for sample size deviations. LAPOP computes these weights using population distributions by strata for urban and rural population, gender, and age. Weights for Haiti and Nicaragua (CATI) are calculated by estimating baseline probabilities adjusted for eligibility and non-response, then calibrated to the 2018/19 AmericasBarometer country samples on gender, education, age, and region. Cross-time and cross-country weights are standardized so that each country/year has the same effective sample size.

## INTERVIEWER, SUPERVISOR, AND AUDITOR TRAINING

In the 2023 AmericasBarometer is designed as an opportunity for fieldwork personnel to grow their knowledge base and to standardize data collection and monitoring practices. Training workshops include an in-person component, where LAPOP-trained fieldwork personnel instruct interviewers and quality control auditors on logistics, security protocols, and fieldwork monitoring; a virtual component, where LAPOP representatives review the full questionnaire and country samples with each team; a set of pre-recorded training videos that review best practices in survey research, ethical principles, and operations with the data collection platform; and a full pilot of the survey, where fieldwork personnel practice what they have learned before launching the actual survey. Training sessions typically last two full days and all trainings conclude with a learning assessment that interviewers have to pass (>80% correct answers) in order to be certified to work on the project.

## QUALITY CONTROL

The 2023 AmericasBarometer uses LAPOP’s Fieldwork Algorithm for LAPOP Control over survey Operations and Norms (FALCON). FALCON collects multiple types of paradata, including voice recordings and interviewer images, question and questionnaire timing, and interviewer performance indicators. These paradata indicators are monitored daily during data collection so that any corrections or cancellations resulting from a failure to meet quality control standards are made while fieldwork is in progress. Final datasets include high-quality interviews only. Each technical report for an AmericasBarometer survey summarizes the results of this process.

## Acknowledgements

The AmericasBarometer emerges from collaborations among hundreds of individuals involved in its design and implementation. We thank all the members of the public who generously shared their beliefs and experiences with our survey teams. We are also grateful to our dedicated partner survey organizations and fieldwork teams across the region.

The AmericasBarometer is made possible with support from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and Vanderbilt University. Over the course of the 2023 round, we benefited from the thoughtful advice and leadership of USAID's Chantal Agarwal, Luis Azurduy, and Cara Thanassi. For their unflagging support for the project, we are grateful to leadership at Vanderbilt University, including John Geer, Timothy McNamara, Padma Raghavan, Alan Wiseman, and David Wright. We also thank Vanderbilt's Sponsored Programs Administration and the A&S Finance & Administration Unit for their support. We are proud to be a partner of Vanderbilt's Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latinx Studies.

Implementing our project across the Western Hemisphere is possible thanks to support from additional partners, including researchers at Duke University, Environics Institute, the Inter-American Development Bank, and University of California, Berkeley. We are grateful for their collaboration.

The LAPOP Lab team devoted tens of thousands of hours to the design, implementation, and dissemination of the 2023 AmericasBarometer. For this round, these exceptional individuals are, in alphabetical order, Rubí Arana, Fernanda Boidi, Oscar Castorena, Sebastián Larrea, Boyoon Lee, Arturo Maldonado, Daniel Montalvo, Luke Plutowski, Georgina Pizzolitto, Camilo Plata, Eli Rau, Mariana Rodríguez, Valerie Schweizer-Robinson, Laura Sellers, and Carole Wilson. We are also very grateful to Laura Kramer and Mary McNamee for project administration and coordination.

One way LAPOP achieves its mission of knowledge transfer and capacity building is by involving students in all aspects of the AmericasBarometer. While they gain experience with cutting-edge survey methodologies, they also contribute to the project's success. At the graduate level, the project benefited from engaging the Vanderbilt political science comparative politics graduate student community in various discussions and activities; these students are Sofia Berrospi, Lucas Borba, Shashwat Dhar, Guilherme Fasolin, Margaret Frost, Martin Gou, Facundo Salles Kobilanski, Preeti Nambiar, Emily Noh, Mariana Ramírez, Sofía Rivera, and Alexander Tripp. This round also benefited from the involvement of undergraduate students, including Daniel Ardity, Danni Chacon, Ade Forrest, Audrey Heffernan, Jazmín Los, Adin McGurk, Marco Navarro Stanic, Tomás Majeovsky, Chase Mandell, Krishna Podishetti, Allie Rounds, William Royster, Hedid Rojas Salinas, Samuel Schulman, Carson Viggiano, Evan Wilkerson, and Stanley Zhao.

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It would not have been possible to produce the 2023 AmericasBarometer without the efforts of all these institutions and individuals, and we are deeply grateful to all of them. We also thank all those who engage with the project's data and reports for contributing to LAPOP's core objective: provide a critical and reliable tool for assessing the public's experiences with democratic governance across the hemisphere.

Noam Lupu  
Liz Zechmeister  
Nashville, Tennessee  
November 2023



The AmericasBarometer is carried out by LAPOP Lab, a center for excellence in international survey research based at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN. LAPOP has deep connections to the Latin America and Caribbean region, established during more than five decades of public opinion research. The AmericasBarometer is possible due to the activities and support of a network that spans the Americas. To complete each round, LAPOP partners with individuals, survey firms, universities, development organizations, and others in up to 34 countries within the Western Hemisphere.

Project efforts are informed by LAPOP's mission: to produce objective, non-partisan, and scientifically sound studies of public opinion; to innovate improvements in survey research; to disseminate project findings; and, to build capacity.

The AmericasBarometer project receives generous support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Vanderbilt University. Other institutions that have contributed recently to multiple rounds of the project include Environics Institute, Florida International University, and the Inter-American Development Bank. Over the years, the project has benefited from grants from the United States National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development in Brazil (CNPq), the Ford Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, and numerous academic institutions across the Americas.

The 2023 AmericasBarometer was carried out via face-to-face interviews in 22 Latin American and Caribbean countries, phone surveys in Haiti and Nicaragua, and online surveys in Canada and the United States.

All samples are designed to be nationally representative of voting-age adults. In all, more than 41,524 individuals were interviewed in this latest round of the survey. The complete 2004-2023 AmericasBarometer dataset contains responses from over 385,000 people across the region. Common core modules, standardized techniques, and rigorous quality control procedures permit valid comparisons across individuals, certain subnational areas, countries, regions, and time. AmericasBarometer data and reports are available for free download from the project website: [www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop). Individuals can also use that website to query the data via an interactive Data Playground. Datasets from the project also can be accessed via "data repositories" and subscribing institutions across the Americas.

Through such open access practices and an extensive network of collaborators, LAPOP works to contribute to the pursuit of excellence in public opinion research and ongoing discussions over how programs and policies related to democratic governance can improve the quality of life for individuals in the Americas and beyond.

LAPOP's AmericasBarometer takes the  
Pulse of Democracy in Suriname

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