

# Citizen Participation, Social Trust, and Ethnic Groups in Ecuador\*

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## ABSTRACT

Employing survey data collected by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) 2010 Americas Barometer, this paper investigates the relationship between citizen participation and social trust in Ecuador along ethnic lines. Are there differences in the levels of social trust found across ethnic groups? What impact does ethnicity have on social trust? What is the effect, if any, of ethnic affiliation on engagement in political affairs? The evidence showed that, while the respondent category of "indigenous" is notoriously more prone to participate in civic organizations than any other ethnic group, ethnicity had no impact on political participation when controlling for other relevant variables. The social capital hypothesis, which sustains that more trusting individuals are more likely to participate in politics, found no support in the data.

**Key Words:** Ecuador, political trust, social trust, citizen participation, ethnic groups

## INTRODUCTION

The widely accepted view that social capital has been declining for the past few decades in industrialized democracies has prompted scholarly attention to this issue. The central preoccupation is that declining social trust may have negative ramifications in terms of political participation, since the conventional wisdom states that more trusting individuals are

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more likely to be involved in politics (Almond and Verba 1965; Parry 1976). However, even in the best-documented case –the U.S.– “little empirical support exists for the relationship between trust and participation” (Abrajano and Alvarez 2010, 114).<sup>1</sup>

While there are a number of empirical studies on these issues for the U.S. over long periods of time (see, for example, Putnam 2000 and 1993), I am not aware that comparable time series data exist for Latin American countries. We do have data for the past decade, showing that when compared with the rest of the countries in Latin America, Ecuador fares poorly in terms of interpersonal trust, ranked as the fourth lowest trusting country in the region (Donoso et al. 2010).

In ethnically diverse societies, one may wonder if ethnic groups participate differently in public affairs, and if so, why.<sup>2</sup> The American politics scholarship has devoted much effort to answering these questions, especially focusing on the Black-White dichotomy. The literature has pointed to a number of theories to account for participatory disparity, including group consciousness, social connectedness, and socioeconomic status, among others.<sup>3</sup> The empirical puzzle consists in identifying whether ethnic group membership has an impact on the level of participation in politics.

The Ecuadorian case is appropriate to address these important issues. Ecuador, as a culturally diverse country, hosts over a dozen Indigenous groups, and Afro Ecuadorian and Montubio communities. Both the 1998 and the 2008 Ecuadorian constitutions included a number of provisions promoting diversity and the rights of minorities. Ecuador is also noteworthy with regard to its attempts to institutionalize civic engagement in political affairs. The promotion of citizen involvement in public affairs was cornerstone in the Constituent Assembly that drafted the 2008 Ecuadorian constitution. The phrase “citizen participation” appears 36 times in the

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- 1 Some scholars have contended that, because social capital and increased interpersonal trust are believed to have positive effects on society and on democratic attitudes, trusting more is desirable. However, as Hardin notes (2006, 32-35), trusting per se does not lead to successful relationships and happiness; trusting the right people does. Encouraging individuals to trust people who may exploit them could have devastating effects. Additionally, interpersonal trust is a tool that could be put to use for different, obscure purposes (Levi 1996, 52), for example, among mafia members who are loyal to each other (Gambetta 1988); hence, social capital may not *intrinsically* promote the achievement of desirable social goals.
  - 2 From a theoretical perspective, the very existence of vibrant and politically mobilized ethnic groups is rather surprising in light of the expectations of revolutionary and bourgeoisie thinkers of the nineteenth century, who mistakenly believed that ethnic and national differences would disappear over time (Diaz-Polanco 1981, 53).
  - 3 See Leighley and Vedlitz (1999) for a study that tests five theories of minority political participation in the U.S.

constitution, a document of over 450 articles. The country's 2008 constitution introduced a novel branch of government to promote citizen participation and social oversight of government activity. This government institution has no precedent in Latin America. Given this background, I set to explore the patterns of political trust, social trust, and political participation of different Ecuadorian ethnic groups.

There is no consensus on the size of each ethnic group in Ecuador, a debate that largely responds to whether estimations are based on surveys where respondents are asked to self-identify or on surveys where the interviewer makes an assessment according to observed characteristics. For example, the largest indigenous organization, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), has stated that the indigenous population represented between 40 and 45% of the total population in 1997. The 2001 census reported, based on self-identification, that the share of the Indigenous was 6.83%, and the situation with other ethnic groups is similar (CEPAL/BID 2005). The 2010 census showed a comparable figure, as 7% of respondents self-identified as Indigenous (INEC). The Latin American Public Opinion Survey (LAPOP) dataset includes 82.18% respondents who self-identified as of Mixed race, 3.13% Indigenous, 2.29% Afro Ecuadorians, 10.28% White, 1.99% Mulatto, and 0.13% other. Of all the women who were interviewed by LAPOP, 2.62% wore traditional indigenous clothes. However, only 1.12% of women self-identified as Indigenous. The numbers are similar in the case of Indigenous men. Hence, the self-identification mechanism gives us a smaller sized Indigenous population that we would have with an observer's assessment. This is probably true of other ethnic minorities as well.

The questions that I seek to address in this manuscript are the following: Are any specific Ecuadorian ethnic group more trusting than the others? What impact does ethnicity have on interpersonal trust? Do ethnic groups have different patterns of confidence in government institutions? What is the effect, if any, of ethnic affiliation on engagement in political affairs? Do these groups participate in public life differently? In light of the data on Ecuador, does trust have, as expected by the prevailing wisdom, a positive impact on political and/or civic participation? Note that "trust" can refer to very different things. On the one hand, it can refer to an individual's confidence in government institutions, or more generally, to political trust. On the other hand, it may refer to interpersonal relations, that is, how much people trust each other. We will analyze them separately employing the 2010 AmericasBarometer survey data produced by LAPOP.<sup>4</sup>

The manuscript is organized as follows. We begin by presenting and

discussing the data on political trust and the models that account for political trust. Next we focus on social trust, followed by a section on political participation and the relationship between trust and participation. All analyses are performed taking into consideration the ethnic group affiliation of survey respondents. The last section concludes.

## **POLITICAL TRUST**

The relationship between the government and the citizens is not one of trust or distrust, although citizens want the government to be trustworthy (Hardin 2006, 167). It may be rational, for epistemological reasons, to distrust the government. For most people, it is easier to learn bits of information that are enough to distrust particular officials or agencies, but getting sufficient information to establish the trustworthiness of government institutions is much less possible (Montinola 2004). In any case, identifying the observed patterns of political trust among citizens remains an important task given that political trust may have an impact on the attitudes towards democracy and on the levels of electoral participation (Morales Quiroga 2008), or on the level of political participation in general.

There are reasons to believe that ethnic minorities may have less confidence in government institutions than the non-minority group. In the Ecuadorian case, the fundamental reason for this is that the minority groups, especially some Indigenous and Afro Ecuadorian groups, have maintained over time that government institutions are dominated by the mixed majority, which imposes those institutions on the minorities. While confidence in government institutions does not measure the degree of imposition that ethnic minorities may experience, one can plausibly expect it to reflect how these minority group members perceive them.

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4 I employ the LAPOP dataset, which is to my knowledge, the only available opinion survey conducted in Ecuador that includes questions on interpersonal trust, and civic and political participation while at the same time providing information on ethnic affiliation of respondents. The survey was administered to 3,000 respondents.

**Table 1. Average Confidence (From 1-7) in Ethnic Movements, By Ethnic Group**

Ethnic self identification	Confidence in Indigenous movements	Confidence in Afro Ecuadorian movements
White	4.2 (284)	3.9 (269)
Mixed	3.7 (2279)	3.6 (2142)
Indigenous	<b>4.7 (93)</b>	3.7 (81)
Afro Ecuadorian	3.9 (65)	<b>4.6 (62)</b>
Mulatto	3.9 (56)	4.3 (53)
Other	5.3 (4)	4.3 (4)

Notes: Values in cells show means; number of observations between parentheses. Values range from lowest confidence (1) to highest confidence (7).

Source: 2010 AmericasBarometer by LAPOP.

**Table 2. Average Confidence in Institutions by Ethnic Group**

	National Government	National Assembly	Justice System	Local Government	Political Parties	Catholic Church	Armed Forces
White	<b>4.54</b> (298)	3.62 (297)	3.51 (300)	<b>4.36</b> (296)	2.78 (296)	<b>5.43</b> (299)	<b>5.08</b> (299)
Mixed	4.37 (2406)	3.54 (2356)	3.34 (2376)	4.15 (2401)	2.60 (2376)	5.10 (2405)	4.88 (2382)
Indigenous	4.38 (93)	3.73 (89)	<b>3.69</b> (89)	3.97 (93)	<b>2.99</b> (91)	4.82 (89)	<b>5.02</b> (88)
Afro Ecuadorian	4.47 (67)	3.67 (67)	3.25 (67)	4.22 (68)	2.36 (66)	5.02 (68)	<b>5.08</b> (66)
Mulatto	4.53 (59)	<b>3.88</b> (59)	3.52 (58)	4.00 (59)	2.78 (59)	4.97 (57)	5.09 (59)
Other	4.50 (4)	3.50 (4)	4.25 (4)	4.25 (4)	2.25 (4)	5.75 (4)	5.50 (4)
Total	4.40 (2927)	3.56 (2872)	3.37 (2894)	4.16 (2921)	<b>2.63</b> (2892)	<b>5.12</b> (2922)	4.92 (2898)

Notes: Values in cells show means; number of observations between parentheses.

Values range from lowest confidence (1) to highest confidence (7).

Source: 2010 AmericasBarometer by LAPOP.

In Ecuador, the Catholic Church is the most trusted institution out of the 26 institutions that LAPOP asked respondents about, while political parties are the least trusted institution. When asked about their degree of confidence in Indigenous movements and on Afro Ecuadorian movements, minorities were again more trusting. On average, those who self-identified as Indigenous had the most trust in Indigenous movements

(4.7 out of 7), followed by Whites (4.2) and Afro Ecuadorians (3.9) (see Table 1). In turn, the Afro Ecuadorians surveyed believed that Afro Ecuadorian movements were trustworthier than did other ethnic groups, closely followed by Mulattos.

Turning to confidence in other institutions, the Indigenous group proved to be trusting. As Table 2 shows, the Indigenous placed more confidence than the other ethnic groups on the justice system (leaving aside “others”, a group composed of only four respondents) and political parties. Whites had more confidence than any other group in the national government, the local government, the Catholic Church, and the armed forces. Curiously, ethnic minorities have more confidence in institutions than the non-minority –mixed– population.

Table 3. Ordered Logit Estimates: High Confidence in Government

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	
	Confidence in the national government	Confidence in local government
Female	0.05 (0.09)	0.15 (0.09)
Age	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)*
Education	-0.05 (0.01)***	0.01 (0.01)
Right Wing Ideology	-0.02 (0.02)	0.09 (0.02)***
Victim of race discrimination	-0.06 (0.12)	-0.39 (0.11)***
Economic indicators		
Poor economic evaluation	-0.56 (0.06)***	-0.09 (0.06)**
Country going in wrong direction	-0.74 (0.07)***	-0.18 (0.06)*
Personal finances worse	-0.15 (0.07)*	-0.15 (0.07)
Ethnicity (a)		
Afro Ecuadorian	0.34 (0.35)	0.11 (0.35)
White	0.06 (0.15)	0.08 (0.15)
Indigenous	0.02 (0.27)	-0.12 (0.26)
Mulatto	0.32 (0.32)	-0.40 (0.32)
Other	-0.84 (1.45)	-1.23 (1.46)
N	1601	1605
Log-likelihood	-2862.0321	-2964.7261

Notes: (a) the baseline is mixed. \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Values are coefficients; standard errors in parentheses.

Source: 2010 AmericasBarometer by LAPOP.

To assess whether these observed empirical patterns are truly important in determining confidence in institutions, we estimate an ordered logit model –given the ordinal nature of the dependent variable– to assess

the impact of several independent variables on the variables “Confidence in the national government” and “Confidence in local government”. As in Abrajano and Alvarez (2010), the independent variables are gender, age, education, political orientation (conservatives tend to trust government less than liberals), and economic indicators. The key independent variables are dummies accounting for ethnicity, with Mixed as the omitted category. We have also included a variable measuring race discrimination, which is a dummy coded as 1 if the respondent ever felt discriminated against based on the color of her skin within the past five years and it is zero otherwise.

Despite the intuition that emerged from the descriptive statistics in Table 2, the ordered logit estimates reveal that ethnicity is irrelevant for determining confidence in either the local government or the national government. As Ecuadorians get older they are less likely to trust local government, and as their assessment of the state of the economy gets worse, people trust government less. The deterioration of personal finances negatively affects the level of confidence in the national government, but it has no impact on the level of confidence in the local government. Education was found to harm confidence in the national government, but it is irrelevant on the level of confidence in the local government. The further to the right wing in the ideological spectrum that respondents are, the more likely they are to trust the local government, but political orientation has no impact on the respondent’s confidence in national government. Having felt victimized on the basis of race harms confidence at the local level of government. These results offer support to the theories that state that trust in government is based upon the expectation that the government can do a good job (Hardin 2002) and are robust to alternative model specifications.

But why does feeling discriminated against on the basis of race have a significant impact on confidence in government, but being a member of an ethnic minority does not? The ethnic group with the largest percentage of members having felt discriminated against on the basis of race is the Afro Ecuadorians (39.7%), followed by the Indigenous (33.3%), and the Mulattos (25.4%). Even 14.5% of members of the Mixed race group stated that they had at least a few times felt discriminated against. The least proportion of Whites (5.9%) answered affirmatively to this question. So it seems that members of all other groups have felt discriminated against on the basis of race at one time or another.

## SOCIAL TRUST

Apart from assessing whether government institutions are trustworthy, citizens may also trust or distrust each other, a notion that has been at the center of the scholarship on social capital. In Hardin's approach, interpersonal trust is essentially a rational, a cognitive notion that typically involves risk:<sup>5</sup>

“[...] I trust you because your interest encapsulates mine, which is to say that you have an interest in fulfilling my trust. It is this fact that makes my trust more than merely expectations about your behavior. Any expectations I have are grounded in an understanding (perhaps mistaken) of your interests specifically with respect to me” (Hardin 2002, 3).

When citizens trust each other, the social capital argument reads, opportunities open up. Information flows more efficiently, collective action gets easier, mobilization is facilitated, and people are overall happier.

It is pertinent to make a distinction between bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam 2000). The first kind relates to the strengthening of ties within a given group that is defined along a specific criterion that not every citizen may fit, for example, ethnic groups. Bridging social capital is outward looking and seeks to recruit members from the larger society, for example, consumer's groups. In Putnam's words, “both bridging and bonding social capital can have powerful positive social effects” (2000, 25).

Table 4 shows descriptive statistics on the level of interpersonal trust by ethnicity in Ecuador (bonding social capital). Are we more likely to trust those who we find to be similar to us? The data reveal that Whites trust the community they live in more than any other group (highest “high” percentage of responses), closely followed by the Mixed group. Since minority ethnic groups tend to live in the same neighborhoods, one may infer from these data that the Indigenous is the ethnic group with the least interpersonal trust of all other ethnically defined groups. However, note that the Indigenous group is also the group with the least percentage of respondents stating that they had no confidence in their neighbors. In turn, 19.4% of the Afro Ecuadorians surveyed responded that they completely distrusted their fellow community members. With

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5 Some trust games fit the specification of a weak sequential equilibrium in game theory, in which both sequential rationality and the system of beliefs in the path of play is consistent with the rest of the game, which means that people are correct in their beliefs in equilibrium.

these observations, we have reason to believe that bonding social capital in ethnic minorities has room to grow.

**Table 4. Interpersonal Trust by Ethnic Group**

Trust in your community	Ethnicity					
	White	Mixed	Indigenous	Afro Ecuadorian	Mulatto	Other
High	27.6	21.6	17.6	13.4	18.6	25.0
Somewhat	33.9	38.6	34.1	28.4	32.2	75.0
A little	27.9	27.4	39.6	38.8	33.9	
None	10.6	12.4	8.8	19.4	15.3	

Note: Values in cells are percentages.  
 Source: 2010 AmericasBarometer by LAPOP.

The factors that may have an impact on the level of interpersonal trust are both individual and social characteristics (Alesina and La Ferrara 2000). At the individual level, traits such as age, gender, education, the state of personal finances (if one is not doing well one might become weary of others), and the perception of insecurity could affect a person’s level of trust in others. At the aggregate level, the homogeneity of the neighborhood may make it easier to trust others; we will proxy homogeneity with the variable “Small size of locality”, which measures the size of the respondent’s place of residence.

Table 5 presents the results of an ordered logit model estimating the level of distrust in the respondent’s community. The variable “Distrust in your community” was coded as follows (1) very trustworthy, (2) somewhat trustworthy, (3) a little trustworthy, and (4) not trustworthy. The variables education (measured as the number of years of schooling) and age have negative and significant impacts on distrust in one’s community. Being a woman or making a poor evaluation of the state of personal finances have positive and significant impacts on the level of distrust in one’s community. The variables signaling ethnic groups are irrelevant in the determination of the level of distrust in the community.

Table 5. Ordered Logit Estimates, Social Trust

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Distrust in your community	
	(1)	(2)
Female	0.31 (0.07)***	0.32 (0.07) ***
Age	-0.01 (0.00)***	-0.01 (0.00) ***
Education	-0.04 (0.01)***	-0.03 (0.01) ***
Trustworthy person		-0.08 (0.03) **
Personal finances worse	0.10 (0.05)*	0.09 (0.05)
Perception of insecurity	0.64 (0.04)***	0.63 (0.04) ***
Small size of locality	-0.09 (0.02)***	-0.09 (0.02) ***
Ethnicity (a)		
Afro Ecuadorian	0.34 (0.22)	0.37 (0.22)
White	-0.11 (0.12)	-0.09 (0.12)
Indigenous	0.22 (0.20)	0.19 (0.20)
Mulatto	0.10 (0.24)	0.09 (0.24)
Other	-1.07 (0.99)	-1.14 (0.99)
N	2842	2834
Log-likelihood	-3557.1643	-3544.7887

Notes: (a) the baseline category is Mixed. \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Values are coefficients; standard errors in parentheses.

Source: 2010 AmericasBarometer by LAPOP.

It may be argued that personal characteristics, such as one's innate propensity to be a trustworthy person, might contribute to one's expectations that others will also be trustworthy. Hence, model (2) incorporates an ordered variable indicating whether a person considers herself to be "reliable and disciplined", a variable ranging from 1 to 7 as the respondent strongly agrees that she is reliable and disciplined. The results do not change in models (1) and (2) for the other variables, except that the effect of a poor assessment of personal finances disappears. As suspected, considering oneself to be a trustworthy person actually has a negative impact on distrust in one's community.

Now we turn to participation in civil society organizations. When asked if they had contributed to help with a community problem within the past 12 months, 65% of respondents stated that they never did. When we break down the numbers by ethnic group, we find that 77% of Afro Ecuadorians and 69.5% of Mulattos never participated in solving community

problems while the analogous figures for the other groups are much lower: 35% of Whites participated at least once a year, 34.6% in the case of Mixed, and 38% in the case of the Indigenous community.

When it comes to attending civil society organization meetings, the Indigenous excel. Members of the Indigenous communities are more religious than any other group, with 65% of respondents attending church meetings at least once a year. They are also more likely to attend school meetings and communal meetings for community improvements, professional association meetings, political meetings, and Indigenous women are more prone to join women’s groups meetings. So why is it that the Indigenous, who are more likely to attend all sort of civil society meetings than any other ethnic group, are not the group with the highest interpersonal trust? This question assumes that there is a relationship between interpersonal trust and civic participation, which is something that needs to be tested.

Table 6. Ordered Logit Estimates, Civic Participation by Ethnic Group

Independent Variables	Frequency of Attendance Community Meetings		
	School	Professional	Religious orgs.
Female	0.61 (0.07)***	-0.62 (0.11)***	0.32 (0.07) ***
Age	0.02 (0.00)***	0.02 (0.00)***	0.02 (0.00) ***
Education	0.03 (0.01)***	0.11 (0.01)***	0.02 (0.01)
Sociable person	0.08 (0.04)*	0.15 (0.06)*	0.01 (0.04)
Small size of locality	0.02 (0.03)	0.19 (0.04) ***	-0.04 (0.02)
Number of children	0.23 (0.02)***		
Distrust in Community	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.06)	-0.08 (0.04)*
Ethnicity (a)			
Afro Ecuadorian	-0.03 (0.25)	0.21 (0.37)	-0.66 (0.26)*
White	-0.17 (0.13)	-0.09 (0.18)	0.22 (0.11)
Indigenous	0.44 (0.20)*	0.63 (0.27) *	0.55 (0.19) **
Mulatto	-0.59 (0.29)*	0.32 (0.37)	0.01 (0.25)
Other	0.43 (1.01)	0.88 (1.17)	-0.05 (0.95)
N	2897	2908	2896
Log-likelihood	-2859.0601	-1526.183	-3563.5419

Notes: (a) the baseline category is Mixed. \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001.

Values are coefficients; standard errors in parentheses.

Source: 2010 AmericasBarometer by LAPOP.

Table 6 shows the results of an ordered logit model where the dependent variables are the frequency of attendance to school, professional association (including peasant associations), and religious organizations meetings. The independent variables are gender, age, education, whether the person considers herself to be sociable, the size of the locality (small town people may be more prone to attend local meetings, perhaps due to peer pressure or boredom), the number of children (people without children will unlikely attend school meetings), and the state of personal finances. The key independent variable is trust in the community; if it were shown that it does not have a positive impact on participation in community events, this would be evidence against the social capital argument.

We have found that the level of trust in one's community has no impact on the likelihood of attending community meetings. Sociability is relevant in the case of school and professional meetings, but not for religious attendance; the level of education reveals similar results as sociability. The coefficient of the variable "Female" is always significant and positive, except when the dependent variable is "Attendance to professional meetings", which may be explained by chauvinism – the men attend business meetings. Older people are less likely to attend school meetings but more likely to attend other types of meetings. Note that in all three models, the only coefficient denoting ethnic affiliation that is consistently significant is that of the variable "Indigenous". Therefore, there must be an unobserved characteristic that the members of Indigenous groups share that makes them more prone to engage in civic activities – for example, cultural practices.

## **POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

Political participation has been the subject of an unresolved debate among scholars. The theorists of political development postulated that the processes of socioeconomic change would culminate in a modern society, which politically implies broadened participation, stability, and democracy (Lerner 1958). A classic view sustains that inclusive political reform is a strategy to achieve political survival and legitimacy (e.g., Bendix and Rokkan 1962; Przeworski and Cortes 1971; Freeman and Snidal 1982). In turn, others have contended that, in countries trying to develop, excessive politization is detrimental to political stability (Huntington 1965; 1968). According to Almond and Verba (1965), the political attitudes of a civic culture can only appear "where the stakes of politics are high enough

to involve more and more people in the political process, but not so high as to force them to enter into politics as if into a battle to protect their interests from dangerous adversaries” (368). The idea is that moderate levels of participation aid the citizens to balance the roles of subject and participant in the political system and also help keep the social balance between consensus and cleavage (Milbrath 1965, 142-154). Numerous scholars noted that gradual mobilization had been more successful in preserving institutional stability (Dahl 1971; Lipset 1963, among others).

If broadened participation—in gradual increases or not—is desirable for democratic stability, what factors make an individual more likely to participate in public affairs? According to Almond and Verba, social trust is key: “Belief in the benignity of one’s fellow citizen is directly related to one’s propensity to join with others in political activity. General social trust is translated into politically relevant trust” (1965, 228 as quoted in Hardin 2006, 158). In this section we will test this hypothesis in the Ecuadorian case while incorporating into the analysis the fact that respondents belong to different ethnic groups. Before we do so, we will refer briefly to the Ecuadorian experience regarding political participation and minorities.

The promotion of citizen involvement in public affairs was a key component of President Rafael Correa’s campaign to approve a new constitution in 2008, which had overwhelming popular support at the polls. The constitution introduced a novel branch of government to promote citizen participation and social oversight of government activity, called “Transparency and Social Control”. The ways in which citizens may get involved in politics under the new rules include mandate recall, citizen legislative initiative, citizen-based requests for referenda, and government oversight groups.<sup>6</sup> The constitution withdrew from the legislature the responsibility to appoint oversight authorities and gave it to the Transparency and Social Control branch, whose governing council is composed by members selected among candidates proposed by social organizations and the citizenry.<sup>7</sup> The new legal framework does not only promote the political participation of all citizens, but also emphasizes the inclusion of minorities. The constitution declares the state to be plurinational, bans discrimination

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6 Creative mechanisms of political participation were also introduced in the 2008 constitution. In Article 101 a provision for an “empty seat” was included, which is a seat reserved for a citizen representative in local government sessions.

7 The new branch of government has no precedent in Latin America and triggers a number of questions regarding the nature of civic involvement in public affairs, particularly whether institutionalizing participation amounts to cooptation. However, this is an issue that exceeds the scope of this paper.

based on race, gender, social status, and disability, and adopts affirmative action policies to guarantee the representation of minorities. These institutional changes addressed, at least on paper, the perennial discrimination of ethnic minorities in Ecuador.<sup>8</sup> While there have been notable improvements, ethnic minorities continue to face important challenges. Former president and social scientist Osvaldo Hurtado has noted that persons with darker skin tend to be poorer and less educated, and therefore have less access to economic and social opportunities which prevents them from climbing up the socio-economic ladder (2007, 213-217).

The better-organized ethnic minority in Ecuador is the Indigenous. The Indigenous movement is, albeit fragmented, very strong and has successfully mobilized its members in the recent past. The CONAIE, founded in 1986 from already existing Indigenous organizations, is the country's umbrella organization representing indigenous groups from the highland, lowland, and coastal regions of the country. CONAIE was a protagonist in the protests that led to political crises and the subsequent ouster of two presidents in Ecuador – Abdala Bucaram in 2007 and Jamil Mahuad in 2000 (de la Torre 2008). Indigenous groups have become known for their mobilization capability since the 1990's, when the indigenous movement became politically visible (Sanchez-Parga 2007). Since its foundation in 1995, Pachakutik –CONAIE's political arm– has achieved some electoral success by winning some seats in the national legislature and the executive in local governments and by having been part of successful national electoral alliances over time (but unable to maintain the alliance once in office).<sup>9</sup>

Having briefly provided the political context for minority participation in Ecuador, a note on the definition of political participation is in order before we delve into the empirical analysis of LAPOP's data. Political participation, according to a classic definition, includes all the actions taken by groups or individuals aimed at influencing governmental decisions (Milbrath 1965). These include employing institutional channels to voice citizen's concerns and also illegal ways of attempting to influence the government. Hence, below we will study voter turnout and attendance to local government meetings, which fall in the first category. As for

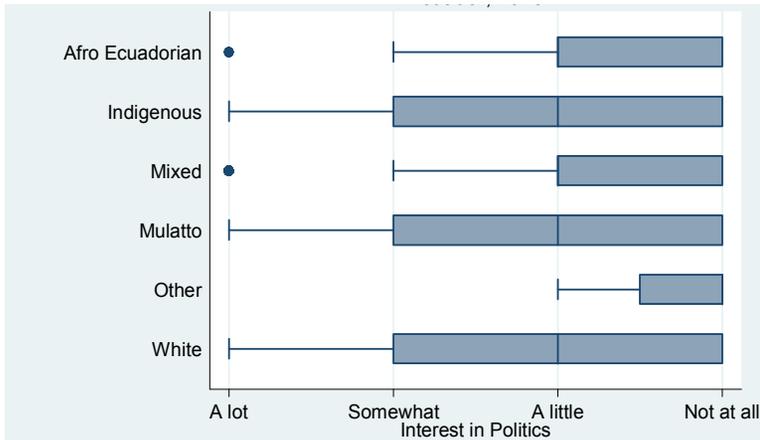
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8 Ethnic minority groups were originally very supportive of the new institutional features promoted by President Correa, but some of them –particularly several indigenous leaders– grew disappointed with the Correa administration, particularly over its natural resources policy.

9 The Indigenous had been excluded from the right to vote until 1978, when the literacy restriction was lifted.

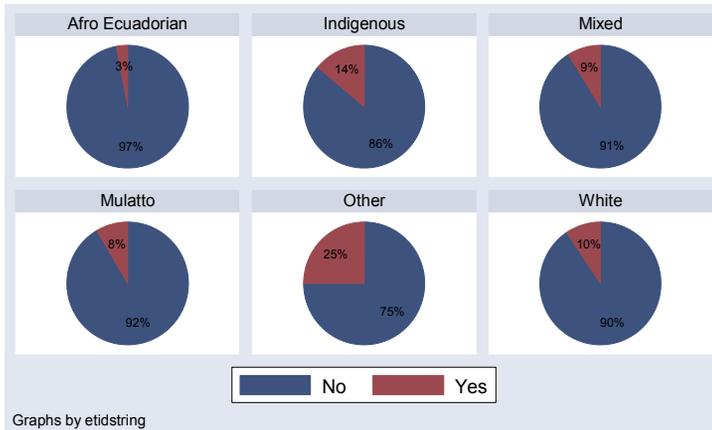
the non-institutionalized channels, such as protests that may or may not become violent, we use the variable measuring participation in public protests. While there is no way for us to know if the protests that the respondents attended were outside of institutional boundaries or not, we know that they could have been. Now, how do ethnic groups participate in Ecuadorian politics?

To begin, we analyze the data on how much interest each ethnic group places in politics. Motivation may be a driving force for a person when it comes to deciding whether to participate in politics. Nevertheless, the lack of interest in politics is a common characteristic of modern day societies, and Ecuador is not an exception. Figure 1 shows descriptive statistics on the interest in politics by ethnic group. The vertical lines inside each box show the median. Each box comprises the observations located between the 25th and the 75th percentiles of the distribution of each ethnic group (50% of observations symmetrically around the median). The whiskers represent the upper and lower adjacent values, and the outliers are represented by observations outside this range. The median is “a little” for the Indigenous, Mulattos and Whites, and “not at all” for Afro Ecuadorians, Mixed, and others. Consider, in addition, that only 16% of respondents stated that they had sympathy for a political organization. However, it is interesting to see that the Indigenous are more interested in politics than Afro Ecuadorians. This is consistent with the data analyzed in the previous sections.



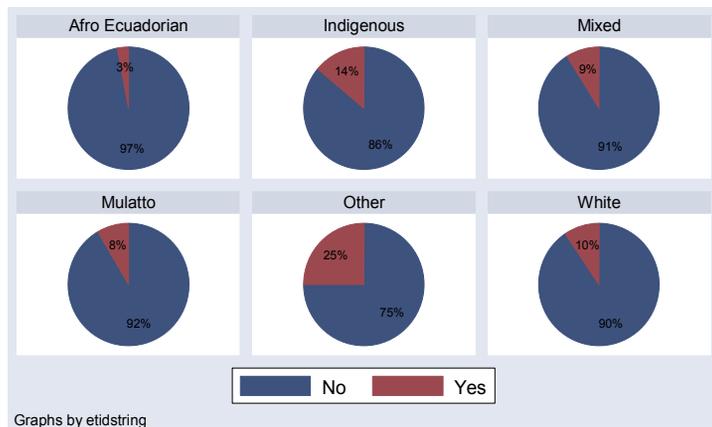
Source: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP.

Figure 1. Interest in Politics by Ethnic Group (Ecuador, 2010)



Source: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP.

Figure 2. Participation in Local Politics by Ethnic Group (Ecuador, 2010)



Source: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP.

Figure 3. Participation in Protests by Ethnic Group (Ecuador, 2010)

Engaging in local –rather than national– public affairs is probably facilitated by several factors, such as proximity to the venues where political action takes place, closeness with local authorities, familiarity with the issues, and peer pressure. Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents by ethnic group who said that they had participated in a local government meeting over the past 12 months. The group “other” has the highest attendance rate, but it is also a very small group of only four respondents.

The Indigenous are at the lead with 14%, which is consistent with the high performance of this group regarding the variable interest in politics. Afro Ecuadorians are once more at the bottom. Figure 3 shows whether respondents, by ethnic group, participated in public protests in the past 12 months. Again, the Indigenous population is the most participant and Afro Ecuadorians are the least participant.

Turning to another indicator of political participation, we look at voting in general elections. When asked if they voted in the 2009 elections, all ethnic groups registered percentages of over 85% of attendance to the polls. While voting is mandatory in Ecuador—which probably explains the high rates of voter turnout—, not everyone does vote, and it is important to analyze if any ethnic patterns determine the decision of an individual to vote in any given election. Only 5.4% of Indigenous respondents reported that they did not vote and 13.6% of Mulattos reported not having voted (the largest percentage of absenteeism by ethnic group). Therefore, it appears that when it comes to whether or not to vote, ethnic groups behave similarly, with a slightly higher turnout among Indigenous groups.

Table 7 shows the results of probit models where the dependent variables are dichotomous variables measuring whether a person: voted in the 2009 elections, attended a municipality meeting, or joined a protest. The standard controls for personal traits were included (gender, age, education), plus controls for economic conditions (state of personal finances), satisfaction with government, and interest in politics. The key variables are trust in the community and the dummies measuring ethnic group affiliation.

Despite the consistent advantage of Indigenous groups at participation in politics that was revealed by the descriptive statistics, the coefficients of all the dummies indicating ethnicity are insignificant. Therefore, the data suggests that ethnicity is not a determinant of political participation. As numerous previous studies have shown, educated voters are more likely to participate in public affairs. A puzzling result is the fact that being a woman increases the likelihood of participation in municipality meetings and protests, but gender does not matter to account for turnout in the 2009 presidential elections. The results for participation in municipal meetings show that being older, living in small towns, and being interested in politics increases the likelihood to participate in those types of meetings. Finally, the evidence does not provide support for the social capital hypothesis, given that the lack of trust in one's community has no impact on the likelihood to participate in politics.

Table 7. Probit Models: Political Participation by Ethnic Group

Independent Variables	Voted in 2009 presidential elections	Attended a municipality meeting	Joined a protest
Female	-0.01 (0.07)	-0.17 (0.07)*	-0.16 (0.08)*
Age	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.00)*	-0.00 (0.00)
Education	0.03 (0.01)***	0.02 (0.01)**	0.04 (0.01)***
Small size of locality	0.04 (0.03)	0.13 (0.03)***	-0.03 (0.03)
Interest in politics	-0.01 (0.04)	0.21 (0.04)***	0.31 (0.04)
Distrust in community	-0.03 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	-0.07 (0.04)
Satisfaction with current president	0.08 (0.04)*	--	--
Satisfaction with municipal services	--	-0.01 (0.04)	--
Personal finances worse	0.10 (0.05)	-0.06 (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)
Ethnicity (a)			
Afro Ecuadorian	-0.26 (0.21)	-0.40 (0.32)	-0.05 (0.2)
White	-0.21 (0.11)	0.03 (0.11)	0.09 (0.12)
Indigenous	0.24 (0.24)	0.32 (0.17)	0.32 (0.19)
Mulatto	-0.34 (0.21)	0.01 (0.25)	-0.02 (0.26)
Other	Dropped	1.26 (0.77)	1.70 (0.89)
Constant	0.60 (0.28)	-2.28 (0.27)***	-1.84 (0.26)
N	2812	2806	2794
Log-likelihood	-710.36585	-799.27324	-698.22211

Notes: (a) the baseline category is Mixed. \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Values are coefficients; standard errors in parentheses.

Source: 2010 AmericasBarometer by LAPOP.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The investigation of the patterns of social and political trust by ethnic group in Ecuador revealed some interesting results. It was important to analyze social and political trust separately; this is something that is frequently overlooked in the literature on social capital. Consider that social and political trust does not go together. For example, Stalin's URSS

presented very high levels of confidence in government accompanied by low levels of interpersonal trust (Hardin 2006).

There are no big differences in the level of confidence in institutions among ethnic groups, but the largest ethnic group –Mixed– is not the one with the most confidence in any of the seven institutions analyzed (see Table 2) when compared with minorities. Having been the victim of race discrimination was a strong predictor of lack of confidence in government. There were victims of race discrimination in all groups –even the non-minority Mixed group– and ethnicity had no impact on confidence in the local or the national government.

The Indigenous have more confidence in Indigenous movements than any other group, and Afro Ecuadorians have the most confidence in Afro Ecuadorian movements. While it appears that being represented by someone who looks like oneself contributes to trusting one's representative more, ethnic affiliation had no impact on how much people trust others within the community they live in (presumably, community members tend to share a given ethnicity). In turn, considering oneself to be trustworthy makes a person more trusting of her community.

With regard to civic and political participation, the Indigenous are notably the most active group and the Afro Ecuadorians are notably the least active group. Interpersonal trust and ethnic affiliation had no effect on civic participation. Being a member of the Indigenous group had a significant impact on civic engagement but not on political engagement, thus suggesting that participating in civil society events may be associated with an unobserved characteristic of the Indigenous people – perhaps cultural practices.

Since social trust had no impact on political or civic participation, we found no evidence to support the social capital hypothesis in the Ecuadorian case, that is, that people who trust others are more likely to engage in public affairs. Being a member of an ethnic minority did not increase the probability that an individual participates in political activities either. Nevertheless, we did find evidence that Indigenous groups participate in politics more actively than other groups. What drives Indigenous people to be politically engaged –even when they do not particularly trust each other more than any other group– remains unclear.

The statistical analysis pointed to education as a consistent predictor of political participation, both at the national and the local levels. More educated individuals are more informed about their rights and current events and are therefore better equipped to seize opportunities to participate and influence policymaking. Improvements in the education level are expected to result in increases of political participation. However, minorities

other than the Indigenous—notably the Afro Ecuadorians—, also face disadvantages in education and are less politically participant than the Indigenous. Further research is required to address this puzzle, although we have here contributed to the debate by outlining patterns of trust and political participation by ethnic group in Ecuador and finding that trust in one’s community is not a determinant of political participation, at least in this country, regardless of ethnic affiliation.

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