

# Class and the Development of Trust in Police in Latin America\*

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## Abstract

In the United States, trust in police is positively correlated with socioeconomic status (SES). We show that this is not the case in Latin America. In 146 surveys spanning 20 Latin American countries, we find that trust in police is weakly and negatively correlated with SES—a fact that neither regional nor subject-matter experts anticipated. By way of explanation, we propose that rich citizens are more likely to interpret everyday experiences as signals about the police. Because bad experiences like crime victimization and bribe solicitation are more common in Latin America than in the US, rich citizens’s tendency to interpret poor security outcomes as signals of police untrustworthiness leads to a lower trust–SES gradient. In our account, cross-country differences in the trust–SES gradient are driven by differences in policing outcomes coupled with universal class-based differences in people’s readiness to see the world around them as a signal about police.

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A durable empirical regularity in the United States holds that citizens' race and class correlate with their beliefs about and attitudes toward the police. For example, in a 2021 Gallup survey, 56% of white respondents and 27% of Black respondents expressed "quite a lot" or "a great deal" of confidence in the police (Gallup, 2021). Such disparities in trust or confidence in the police, assessments of police service quality, and attitudes toward police have been observed for decades (Decker, 1981; Skogan, 2005; Macdonald and Stokes, 2006). Conventional wisdom holds that groups with worse experiences of the police—whether more abuse, worse quality of service, or poorer security outcomes—tend to trust the police less. In this paper, we document that this conventional wisdom about police service quality and trust from the United States does not travel to Latin America. In so doing, we propose a new mechanism that contributes to the formation of trust in police.

Latin America and the Caribbean suffer the highest rates of crime and violence of any region (Muggah and Tobon, 2018; Vilalta, 2020). These high crime rates impose substantial welfare costs (Soares and Naritomi, 2010; Jaitman et al., 2015) and, in public opinion surveys, regularly register as important concerns of citizens (LAPOP, 2022). The primary institutional responses of the state to problems of crime and violence involve the police and the justice system. But these state agents do not operate in a vacuum in isolation from the citizens they police and serve. In this paper, we seek to more accurately characterize one dimension of the relationships by citizens and police in order to generate new implications for states' abilities to address crime and violence.

We focus on citizen trust in the police. Refining general definitions by Hardin (2003) and Bhattacharya, Devinney, and Pillutla (1998), we conceptualize trust in the police as a citizen's belief that a representative police agent will take an action that produces a beneficial outcome for the citizen. Citizen trust in police is important because many security outcomes are co-produced between citizens and police officers. Indeed, Blair et al. (2021: p. 1) assert that by generating more trust, interventions like community policing can "build more effective police agencies in environments of low trust." In these environments, trust is posited to promote information sharing (e.g., crime tips), which should increase the ability of police to locate, stop, remedy, investigate, or

preempt crimes or misdemeanors. To the extent that community-policing interventions that seek to build trust in police have occupied a central role in policing in Latin America (as elsewhere), it is important to understand this key outcome—trust in police—across the region.

Drawing on a growing body of literature on policing in Latin America, we evaluate a widely-held assumption that trust in police is increasing in social class or socioeconomic status. Latin America is the world’s most unequal region (Hoffman and Centeno, 2003; Gasparini and Lustig, 2011) where social class has long been considered a highly salient social cleavage.<sup>1</sup> Work on police abuse and repression suggests that police abuses disproportionately target poor and marginalized communities (Magaloni, Franco-Vivanco, and Melo, 2020; González, 2020; González and Mayka, 2022). Moreover, anti-poor bias is believed to be pervasive in many Latin American justice systems (O’Donnell, 1999; Brinks, 2007, 2019). Following the conventional logic from the United States, if poor treatment and bad security outcomes reduce trust in police, we would expect trust in police to be increasing in socioeconomic status.

Leveraging 146 cross-sectional surveys from 20 countries in the region and three panel surveys, we do not find support for this conjecture. Indeed, pooling the 236,892 individual responses from all countries, we estimate that the correlation between income and trust in police is -0.053, and the correlation between education, a proxy for social class with less missingness, is -0.084. The negative correlation suggests that low socioeconomic-status individuals trust the police slightly more than their high socioeconomic counterparts. Both correlations are statistically distinguishable from zero. Disaggregating across countries, we do not find a positive correlation that is statistically distinguishable from zero between either measure of socioeconomic status and trust in police in *any* of the 20 Latin American/Caribbean countries for which we have data. This represents a significant departure from decades of findings from the US, where income and the same trust question (in English) exhibit a *positive* correlation of 0.12.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Other identity-based cleavages (e.g., ethnicity or race) in Latin America vary more substantially between countries.

<sup>2</sup>In the US, the racial disparity in trust in police between Black and White respondents is approximately twice the magnitude of the difference between respondents in the top and bottom income decile.

These results are surprising in light of conventional wisdom about the relationship between policing outcomes and trust in police. We measure the degree to which two groups of experts anticipated these findings through a forecasting exercise (DellaVigna, Pope, and Vivaldi, 2019). The experts consisted of: (1) a sample of scholars of politics and public administration in Latin America and (2) a sample of activists working on issues related to justice in Mexico. We show that the modal expert and the average forecast anticipated a positive correlation between socioeconomic status and trust in the police. Interestingly, inaccuracies in forecasts stem from underestimates of trust by poor respondents (those at the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile). Respondents were much more accurate in their assessment of trust by median and rich respondents (those at the 50<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> percentiles, respectively). This exercise affirms that our findings challenge conventional wisdom, not only from the US but also from subject-matter and regional experts.

Why do our results depart so substantially from existing understandings of the correlates of trust in police derived from decades of research in the US? Comparing our findings to those from the well-studied US case where trust increases in socioeconomic status, we measure manifestations of multiple mechanisms that could produce correlations between class and trust in police. We thereby probe the external validity of the mechanisms thought to generate canonical findings from the US (Slough and Tyson, 2023).

Within our cognitive conceptualization of trust in police, citizen trust in police evolves through observation of police or security outputs. When citizens are victims of police abuse or crime, for example, they update negatively on the trustworthiness of the police. Good service, on the other hand, leads to positive updating. Data from cross-sectional and panel survey reports of crime victimization, exposure to police corruption, and general feelings of security affirm this assumption. The conventional wisdom from the US holds that rich citizens receive better service from the police—in other words, they are more likely to see “trustworthy” signals—and thus are more likely to update positively than poor citizens. As this process perpetuates, the rich come to trust the police at higher rates thereby inducing the observed positive correlation between class and trust in police.

This mechanism—the rich receive more positive signals—was cited (in some way) by many experts in our elicitation exercise. We show that on the basis of self-reported survey data this is not the case: in contrast to the US, in Latin America, rich respondents self report *higher* rates of crime victimization and police corruption than poor respondents. Further, perceptions of insecurity do not vary substantially in socioeconomic status. While these observations help to explain the negative correlation between trust and socioeconomic status observed in Latin America, they stand in contrast to administrative data on *violent* crime (e.g., homicide) and expert beliefs that the poor are disproportionate victims of crime, insecurity, and abuse by police.

We suggest that this apparent contradiction between conventional wisdom and survey data can be resolved through two observations. First, survey and administrative data suggest that police corruption, perceived insecurity, and (in general) crime rates are higher in Latin America than in the US, corresponding to a greater overall probability of observing a poor signal of police performance (i.e., an intercept shift). Second, we provide suggestive evidence that the translation of observed outcomes of police service into *perceived* signals varies by socioeconomic status. Here, we argue that the probability of perceiving a negative signal of police performance is *lower* for rich than for poor citizens, holding fixed (latent) policing quality. This increases the exposure of the rich to signals of poor police performance, holding constant actual performance.<sup>3</sup> This mechanism is likely present in the US, but it should be less influential (and thereby harder to detect) given the lower rates of crime and insecurity.

We explore but find no evidence for several alternative explanations premised on the measurement of trust in police and different conceptualization of trust. Using various bounding approaches and ancillary analyses related to questions of institutional trust, we do not recover evidence that systematic measurement error drives our findings. We then consider the possibility that our concept of trust is mischaracterized. We examine whether trust in institutions is a fixed trait rather

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<sup>3</sup>We show that conditional on perceiving such a signal, poor and rich citizens update in the same direction by a similar magnitude. Thus, one need not be highly educated in order to rationally update on police trustworthiness from these signals, unlike arguments in other domains (Weitz-Shapiro and Winters, 2017).

than a belief by examining the intra-cluster correlation in trust across multiple institutional trust measures (e.g., Ojeda, 2016; Mondak et al., 2011). We find low intra-cluster correlations in all countries examined, providing evidence against this correlation. Further, we ask whether trust might be picking up preferences for the role of police by considering respondent preferences over *mano dura*, which may be correlated with income. Here, we find that, if anything, preferences for *mano dura* are stronger among the rich and predict *lower* trust in police across the income distribution.

This paper contributes to the extensive literature on institutional trust (Levi and Stoker, 2000; Citrin and Stoker, 2018). We build on the insight that trust is cognitive (Bhattacharya, Devinney, and Pillutla, 1998; Hardin, 2003) by using data to isolate different attributes of citizens' updating on police agent trustworthiness. We show strong evidence that citizens of all socioeconomic statuses update in a roughly Bayesian manner (on average) in response to *perceived* signals of low trustworthiness. Yet, we note that these signals of police performance are ultimately perceptions, which vary in their fidelity to actual service provision. To the extent that this mapping between service provision and citizen perceptions varies in demographic features—like class—similar state outputs may beget very different levels of trust.

Our paper is primarily descriptive, responding to important calls for larger-scale quantitative description (Gerring, 2012; Munger, Guess, and Hargittai, 2021). While recent randomized interventions have sought to increase citizen trust in police (Blair et al., 2021; Karim, 2020; Peyton, Sierra-Arévalo, and Rand, 2019), our goal here is to try to understand baseline levels of trust in police in Latin America. Because causal effects of policing interventions are ultimately differences from these baseline levels, a richer descriptive understanding of this important outcome has two benefits. First, we can better interpret the causal and welfare effects of interventions. Second, for policymakers, police forces, and scholars intent on increasing trust in police, we show that these interventions are less easily targetable (on the basis of income) than in the US context, affirming an observation by Hanson, Kronick, and Slough (2024).

We make one further methodological innovation that serves to advance efforts to cumulate

descriptive knowledge. We integrate expert forecasting to assess the state of knowledge of these outcomes. While recent literature advances the use of forecasting in experiments (DellaVigna, Pope, and Vivaldi, 2019; DellaVigna, Otis, and Vivaldi, 2020), we show how these tools can be used in service of description. Using forecasting data for description disciplines a reliance on heuristics and allows us to identify blindspots among scholars. Scholars were less accurate in their characterization of the trust of poor (relative to middle-class or rich) respondents. If scholars or policymakers acted upon these beliefs about the distribution of trust in police when targeting policing interventions (i.e., community policing), the resultant allocation would limit the efficacy of a trust-building intervention.

## **1 Trust in Police: Concept and Context**

### **1.1 Concept of institutional trust**

Social scientists have devoted substantial attention to the measurement of citizens' trust in government or governmental institutions (Citrin and Stoker, 2018; Levi and Stoker, 2000). Nevertheless, the definition of "trust"—and, indeed, the possibility of institutional trust—remains contested (PytlikZillig and Kimbrough, 2016). Building upon the conceptualizations of Hardin (2003) and Gerbasi and Cook (2009), we conceive of institutional trust as being *cognitive* and *relational*.

By cognitive, we mean that trust is fundamentally a belief. Bhattacharya, Devinney, and Pillutla (1998: p. 465) characterize trust as "an expectancy of positive (or nonnegative) outcomes one can receive based on the expected action of another party in an interaction characterized by uncertainty." In other words, individuals hold a belief about how the other party is likely to act or behave. In contexts of policing, this could be an individual's expectation about how police will treat them or an expectation of whether and how police will respond to a tip about a crime or misdemeanor.

By relational, we emphasize interactions between two parties, citizens and police agents. This is implicit in the formulation of trust by Bhattacharya, Devinney, and Pillutla (1998). Within this conception of trust, beliefs can be changed (updated) by observation of the other party's behavior.

In the context of citizen trust in police, thus, when citizens observe police behavior, they gain information about police trustworthiness. This signal can be used to update a citizen's belief about how the police might behave toward them in subsequent encounters. An unsavory encounter with a police agent, for example, can lead citizens to negatively update about the trustworthiness of police, in general, thereby reducing trust in police.

Hardin (2003) was skeptical of whether institutional trust is possible, largely because of limits to citizens' ability to form relationships with an institution. Whereas citizens may be able to interact with individual police agents, Hardin (2003) argues, it is nonstandard to think of an institution as an actor with whom these interactions might take place. We argue that interactions/relationships between individual citizens and individual police agents shape trust in police. In this context, citizens can hold beliefs about whether an individual officer is trustworthy. Moreover, they can make assessments about the share of trustworthy officers on a police force (or in a given police unit). Institutional trust is, therefore, both cognitive and relational.

It is useful to clarify two alternatives distinct from our concept of institutional trust. First, some authors view or evaluate political trust as a trait (e.g., Ojeda, 2016; Mondak et al., 2011). Individuals from different groups may have different baseline propensities to trust other individuals or agents of institutions. If this were the case, environmental or genetic traits could confound the relationship between social class and trust. Alternatively, social/political trust may facilitate economic advancement, thereby increasing an individual's social class and generating a positive association between the two measures (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, 1993). Second, individuals undoubtedly hold varying preferences over what police should do or how the institution should function. The accounts of motivated reasoning or inference proposed by Kunda (1987) and Taber and Lodge (2006) suggest that these preferences may affect how citizens form beliefs about police trustworthiness. While it is, of course, possible that preferences condition updating processes (Little, Schnakenberg, and Turner, 2022), we contend that experiences with the police—good or bad—shape future expectations about police agents in the direction of the signal.



## **1.2 Policing and class in Latin America**

Despite Latin America's regional turn towards democracy, police forces routinely engage in corrupt and abusive behavior (Macaulay, 2012; Magaloni, Franco-Vivanco, and Melo, 2020; Johnson, Mendelson Forman, and Bliss, 2012). Citizens' opinions of police in the region tend to be by and large negative (Malone and Dammert, 2021; Cao and Zhao, 2005). Yet, experiences with police are far from uniform: research indicates that police forces can behave repressively toward lower-income individuals and individuals from marginalized groups while being responsive to the demands of privileged community members (González and Mayka, 2022; González, 2020). Additionally, regional scholars have pointed out bias against poor, indigenous, and other marginalized communities in the region's justice systems that lingers even after recent reforms (O'Donnell, 1999; Brinks, 2007, 2019).

To our knowledge, no study has systematically analyzed how support for police covaries with class across Latin American countries. Nevertheless, existing accounts support a common premise: socioeconomic status predicts an individual's exposure to policing or the outcomes of policing. These distinct experiences with police agents or crime outcomes should provide different opportunities for learning about the trustworthiness of the police.

## **2 Research design**

Our primary research question is descriptive: how does trust in police vary in social class? Accordingly, we estimate the correlation between measures of socioeconomic status and reported trust in police. We view these correlations as important in characterizing citizen-police relationships in Latin America and elsewhere.

This quantity—correlation between socioeconomic status and trust—is likely to capture information relevant to interactions between citizens and police. Levels of trust are not outwardly-observed characteristic, but individuals' level of trust in the police predicts at least some citizen behaviors toward the police. For example, Hanson, Kronick, and Slough (2024) show that citizen behavior toward police—in the context of community-police meetings—does vary in levels of trust

in Medellín, Colombia. In the context of interactions with citizens, it is plausible that police officers may want to ascertain a citizen’s level of trust when deciding how to engage. Because beliefs are unobserved, police may use observable characteristics to infer a citizen’s trust and their likely behavior, a form of statistical discrimination (Phelps, 1972). In contrast to levels of trust, in Latin America, socioeconomic status is typically easily observable through an individual’s dress, way of speaking, comportment, and surroundings (Britto Ruiz and Ordóñez Valverde, 2005; Sabatini, 2006; Villarreal, 2010).

## 2.1 Data

Our principal data source is LAPOP’s AmericasBarometer (LAPOP, 2022). The sample incorporates the responses of 236,892 individuals collected from 146 unique surveys in 20 Latin American countries between 2004 and 2019. Each survey round was designed to be representative of the country’s voting-age population that year. Table A1 in the Appendix lists the years and countries where the surveys were collected.

We use respondents’ self-reported income bracket to measure socioeconomic status or class. We supplement this measure with individuals’ educational attainment in years of schooling to assuage concerns that systematic misreporting of income might drive any results. In each round, respondents are asked about their trust in several institutions. We measure trust in the police with the question “To what extent do you trust the Police?” Responses range from 1 (not at all) to 7 (a lot).<sup>4</sup>

We complement the (repeated) cross-sectional data from LAPOP with three panel surveys that measure trust in police: a five-wave nationally representative survey from Chile (COES, 2022), a two-wave representative survey from Medellín, Colombia conducted in 2018 and 2019 (Hanson, Kronick, and Slough, 2024), and a quarterly representative rolling panel from Mexican cities spanning 2017-2023 (INEGI, 2024). While these surveys cover just three settings (Chile, Medellín, and Mexico, respectively), they allow us to examine within-individual variation over time.<sup>5</sup> We focus

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<sup>4</sup>We report all survey questions and response scales in Table A5.

<sup>5</sup>While other existing longitudinal surveys cover other Latin American countries, we are un-

on individual variation in exposure to poor police service provision—crime victimization, police corruption, and perceived insecurity.

## 2.2 Estimation

We use ordinary least squares (OLS) to estimate the correlation between trust in police and socioeconomic status, as detailed in Equation 1. We regress individual  $i$ 's self-reported trust in the police,  $\text{Trust}_i$ , on a self-reported measure of class (income or education),  $\text{Class}_i$ . Both trust and class measures are standardized within country-year to account for secular trends. We cluster standard errors at the level of each survey's primary sampling unit. Because the dependent and the independent variables are standardized,  $\beta$  is the estimator of the correlation coefficient.

$$\text{Trust}_i = \alpha + \beta \text{Class}_i + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

Correlation summarizes a linear relationship. We allow for non-linearities in the relationship between trust and socioeconomic status by binning measures of socioeconomic status by decile and estimating the following equation by OLS:

$$\text{Trust}_i = \sum_{d=1}^{10} \beta_d \mathbb{I}[\text{Class}_i = d] + \epsilon_i \quad (2)$$

In this expression, the  $\beta_d$ 's are estimators of the average level of reported trust in police by respondents in each decile  $d$ .

Finally, when considering explanations for observed patterns of trust in police, we examine how individual experiences of police abuse or poor security outputs affects trust in police (both unconditionally and by a respondent's socioeconomic class). To do so, we rely on the panel surveys at the individual level to estimate the average treatment effect on the treated (ATT). To estimate the ATT, we report estimates from a standard two-way fixed effects estimators. We denote a binary aware of others that include repeated questions about policing.

observation of poor performance  $S_{it} \in \{0, 1\}$  and estimate:

$$\text{Trust}_{it} = \delta S_{it} + \gamma_t + \psi_i + \epsilon_{it}, \quad (3)$$

where  $\gamma_t$  and  $\psi_i$  are time and unit fixed effects, respectively. In this specification,  $\delta$  is our estimator of the ATT. We also employ a more general fixed effects counterfactual estimator proposed by Liu, Wang, and Xu (2022) to ensure robustness of our ATT estimates to a variety of weighting problems that arise with two-way fixed effects estimators.

### 3 Baseline results

We present estimates of the correlation between socioeconomic status and trust in the police for the entire pooled sample of Latin American respondents in Figure 1. In addition, we also plot country-specific correlations and include the US-specific correlation as benchmark. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the overall pooled correlation and all but one country-specific result are close to zero and slightly negative. The estimated correlation for the pooled Latin American sample is -0.053 [95% CI: -0.059, -0.046] when class is operationalized as income and -0.084 [95% CI: -0.089, -0.078] when we use education as a proxy. El Salvador has the most negative country-specific correlation, with an estimated correlation of -0.18 [95% CI: -0.20, -0.16] when class is operationalized as education. For the rest of the countries, the correlation oscillates between -0.15 and .01. In the cases of Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Jamaica, and Peru, at least one correlation estimate is not statistically distinguishable from zero. Conversely, the estimated correlation for the US is 0.12 [95% CI: 0.09, 0.15] when class is operationalized as income and 0.025 [95% CI: 0.002, 0.05] when we use education as a proxy.

Correlation measures a linear relationship. Do the weak, negative correlations reported in Figure 1 mask a stronger, non-monotonic relationship between socioeconomic status and self-reported trust in the police? To explore the possibility, we divide respondents into class deciles and plot the mean level of trust in the police for the members of each decile. As before, we compute the means for the entire pooled sample and each country. Figure 2 reveals no evidence of a non-

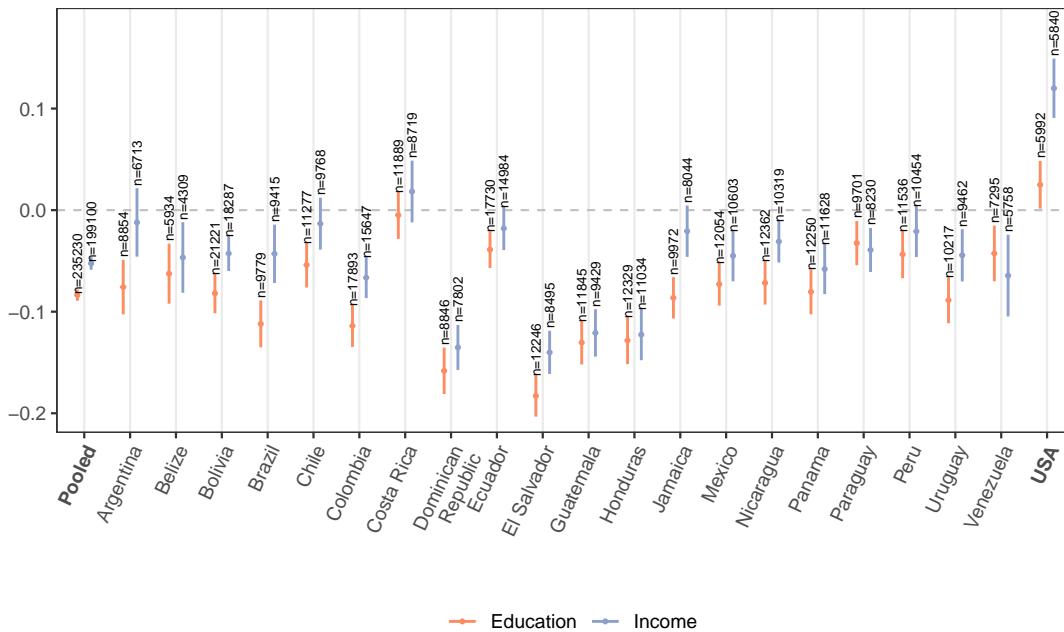


Figure 1: Correlation between LAPOP respondents’ self-reported trust in police and two class measures: income (in blue) and education (in orange).

monotonic relationship between the two variables: the mean levels of trust are stable or decreasing only slightly in income or education in all countries and the pooled sample.

One limitation of our analysis is that we measure class using self-reported education and income measures, which are indirect measures of socioeconomic status. Three alternative measures may be preferable for different purposes. First, some countries have administrative classifications of class. For example, in Colombia, dwellings are categorized by *estrato* (socioeconomic stratum) to prorate public utility charges. Similarly, based on census data, the Mexican National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) classifies primary sampling units of dwellings into sociodemographic *estratos*. Drawing upon the original panel survey in Medellín, we estimate a correlation between dwelling *estrato* and trust in the police of 0.068 [95% CI: 0.029, 0.107]. We note, however, that the sample is not representative of Colombia and is not weighted to the population of Medellín. Nevertheless, this figure is substantially lower than the correlation between income and trust in police that we estimate from US data. The correlation estimated using the Mexican panel data is similar to the LAPOP estimates based on self-reported education and income: -0.073 [95%

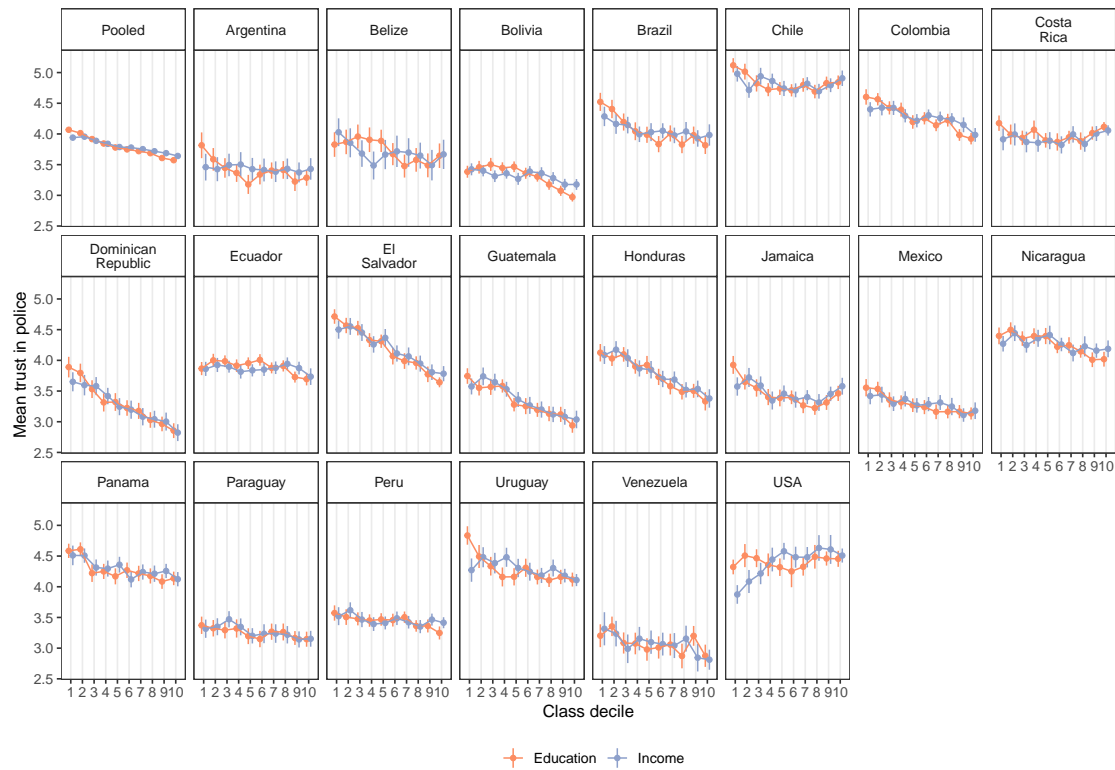


Figure 2: Mean trust in the police on a seven point scale (1-7) by decile of income (in blue) and education (in orange).

CI: -0.093, -.052] and -0.045, [95% CI: -0.070, -.020], respectively.

Second, citizens may identify with a higher or lower class than their income or education would suggest. From panel data in Chile, in which class identification is measured subjectively, we estimate a correlation of 0.038 (95% CI: [0.003, 0.073]) between self-identified class and trust in police. Again, this correlation remains substantially weaker than correlations between class and trust in police observed in the US.

Third, some researchers advocate expenditure-based economic status indicators might be more accurate than measures based on self-reported income. We follow Córdova (2009) and construct a wealth index using a battery of LAPOP questions measuring possession of household assets. Section A1.4 in the Appendix details the construction of this index and reports consistent pooled and country-specific results in Figures 1 and 2. However, the index is difficult to substantively interpret in a repeated cross-section, where factor loadings vary substantially (and non-monotonically) across time and between countries. For this reason, we prefer analyses based on self-reported income and education. Overall, these ancillary surveys suggest that our findings from the widely available LAPOP proxies of class do not substantially mislead relative to plausible alternative measures.

## **4 Expert Forecasts**

The finding that trust in the police covaries weakly and, in general, negatively with socioeconomic status in Latin America was surprising to us. We conducted an expert forecast elicitation with two samples to assess whether our findings were similarly surprising to other experts. Expert forecasts are increasingly used to measure experts' prior beliefs about quantities of interest in social science research (DellaVigna, Pope, and Vivaldi, 2019).

Our two expert samples are (i) scholars of Latin American politics and (ii) activists working on issues of human rights and policing. We used a recent program of a Latin American politics conference known for the participation of scholars from all regions as our sample frame for the academic sample. One of the authors identified a network of activists through past non-academic

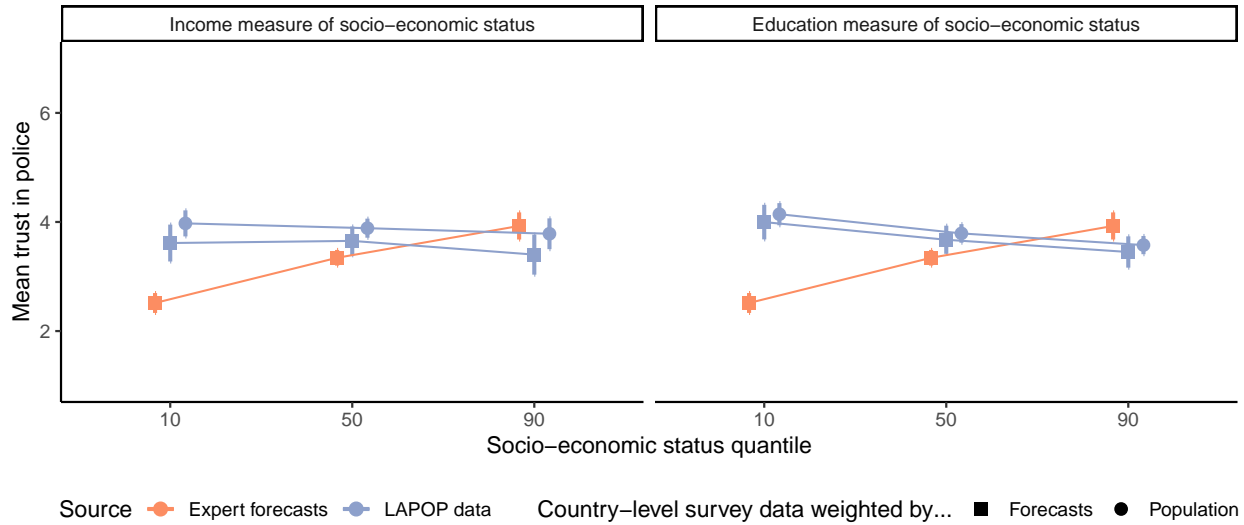


Figure 3: Divergence between average forecasts (in orange) and corresponding survey-based measures (in blue).

employment related to policing in Mexico. All participants were invited to share the survey with other interested colleagues and students. In sum, we collected 121 country-level forecasts from 101 unique experts. Table A7 in the Appendix shows the count of forecasts by country and respondent type.

We asked experts to provide at least one *forecast* for one country in Latin America (or the region as a whole). A forecast consists of three quantities: mean levels of trust—per the LAPOP survey question—at the 10th, 50th, and 90th percentiles of household income. As depicted in Appendix A3, our forecasting instrument contextualized the income range by reporting average income at each level. Respondents had access to the text of relevant LAPOP questions in English and Spanish.

Figure 3 shows that, on average, expert respondents expected a positive correlation between socioeconomic status and trust in police. The average expert forecast is monotonically increasing from 2.51 [95% CI: 2.32, 2.69] for citizens in the first decile of income to 3.34 [95% CI: 3.20, 3.49] for citizens of median income to 3.93 [95% CI: 3.68, 4.18] for citizens in the tenth decile of income. Because the forecast is an average over country-level forecasts, we report two measures from the survey data, drawn in blue. First, we weight country-level surveys by the prevalence of



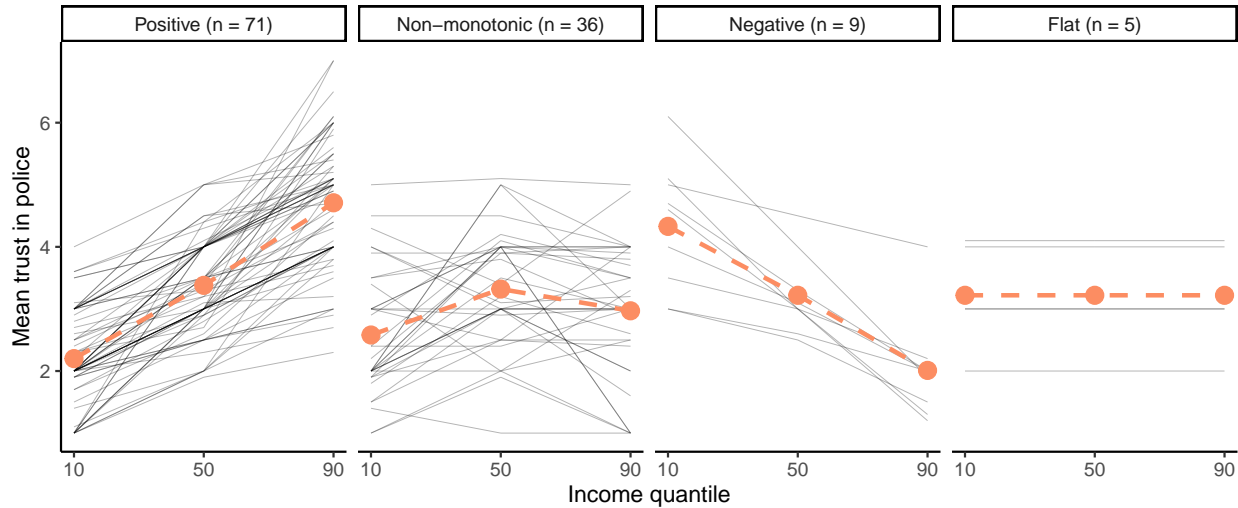


Figure 4: Classification of individual forecasts. Thin lines each represent individual forecasts. The points and dashed lines represent averages for each type of forecast.

each country in the forecasts to ensure that the frequency with which countries are forecasted does not drive the divergence. We also weigh the survey data by each country’s population, offering a more interpretable regional average. Both weighting schemes yield similar flat or slightly negative relationships between socioeconomic status and trust in police, starkly contrasting with the forecasts. The right panel of the graph shows that using education rather than self-reported income to measure class in the LAPOP survey data does not change our qualitative finding that the positive relationship between income and crime anticipated by experts—including us—is not borne out in the data.

Two further disaggregations of the forecast data help to clarify experts’ expectations. First, Figure 4 disaggregates four types of forecasts. As in Figure 3, the modal prediction suggested a *positive* relationship between socioeconomic status and trust in police. Additionally, 30% of forecasts posited a non-monotonic relationship. On balance, these forecasts suggested that a citizen with a median household income should trust the police more than the rich or the poor. Just 7.5% and 4% of forecasts posited a negative or flat relationship, respectively. Second, Figure A5 in the Appendix shows that the prediction of a positive relationship between income and trust in police is not specific to any country: we observe a similar pattern in all countries for which we have  $\geq 8$

predictions: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico.

These forecasts help us to identify several blindspots in our collective understanding of trust in police in Latin America. First, Figure 3 reveals that, in the aggregate, experts were more accurate in their assessment of average trust in police among the middle class (50th percentile) and rich. Errors in expert beliefs are largely driven by the underestimation of trust in police among poor Latin Americans. This pattern suggests a need for a better understanding of interactions between poor citizens and police in the region. Second, to the extent that interventions like community policing aim to build trust in police as a primary objective (e.g., Blair et al., 2021), expert beliefs would suggest that interventions should be targeted to poor communities to maximize the possibility to increase trust in police. Instead, survey data shows that these interventions are difficult to target on the basis of socio-economic status and that if such interventions are effective, there is (slightly) more room to increase trust in police among the rich, not the poor.

## **5 Trust and experiences with police**

To this point, we have established that trust in police is generally weakly and negatively correlated with socioeconomic status in Latin America. Within our cognitive conceptualization of trust, citizen trust in police should evolve through observation of police behavior or security outputs. As such, our results suggest that the rich observe worse policing outcomes in Latin America than the poor. Such a pattern runs contrary to regional experts' expectations and conventional wisdom based on evidence from the US. We now seek to explain this discrepancy between expectations and empirical findings. To that end, we examine additional data on respondent experiences with police and perceptions of security outcomes.

### **5.1 Security-socioeconomic-status gradient**

Our concept of trust in police centers on citizens updating their beliefs about police trustworthiness based on their experience with or observation of policing outcomes. Within this framework, a negative correlation between socioeconomic status and trust in police implies wealthier respondents perceive worse policing outcomes than their poorer co-citizens. To test, we identify one experience

—police solicitation of bribes (corruption)—and two policing outcomes —crime victimization and perceptions of safety—in the survey data. We examine the rate at which respondents of different socioeconomic classes report observing these signals of poor police performance. While the experiences of crime victimization and feeling “unsafe” do not necessarily require active interaction with police, they at least imply that police failed to prevent crime or inspire a feeling of security.

In Figure 5, we plot the country-specific probability that a respondent from each socioeconomic decile reports each of the three binary signals of police trustworthiness, following (2). We use analogous LAPOP survey data from the US as a benchmark. The top three panels bin respondents into deciles using education, while the bottom three panels bin respondents using income.

The first column panels in Figure 5 show that, for most Latin American countries,<sup>6</sup> the probability of self-reported crime victimization increases in socioeconomic status. Conversely, in the case of the US, the probability of reporting crime victimization does not change with class when it is measured with education, and it slightly *decreases* when it is measured with income.<sup>7</sup> Overall, the figure shows that the probability of observing a negative signal of policing quality, be it police corruption, perceived insecurity, or crime victimization, is higher in Latin America than in the US, on average.

Whether the presence of a positive relationship between class and victimization in Latin America is a surprising finding is unclear. Our evidence aligns with findings on urban property crime by Gaviria and Pagés (2002), albeit in a larger sample of urban/rural municipalities and with a broader range of crimes. On the other hand, poorer neighborhoods and municipalities are often distinguished by high rates of violent crime and insecurity. The panel survey from Medellín and administrative crime data for Medellín and Mexico City offer a potential reconciliation of these patterns by disaggregating crime victimization experience by type of crime. Figure A9 shows that self-reported exposure to violent crimes (especially homicide) is more common among the

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<sup>6</sup>The correlation between victimization and class is always positive and statistically distinguishable from zero at the  $\alpha = 0.05$  level, except for correlation with income in Panama and Venezuela.

<sup>7</sup>The correlation between crime victimization and class in the US is negative and statistically distinguishable from zero at the  $\alpha = 0.05$  level when class is measured with income, and positive but statistically indistinguishable from zero when measured with education.

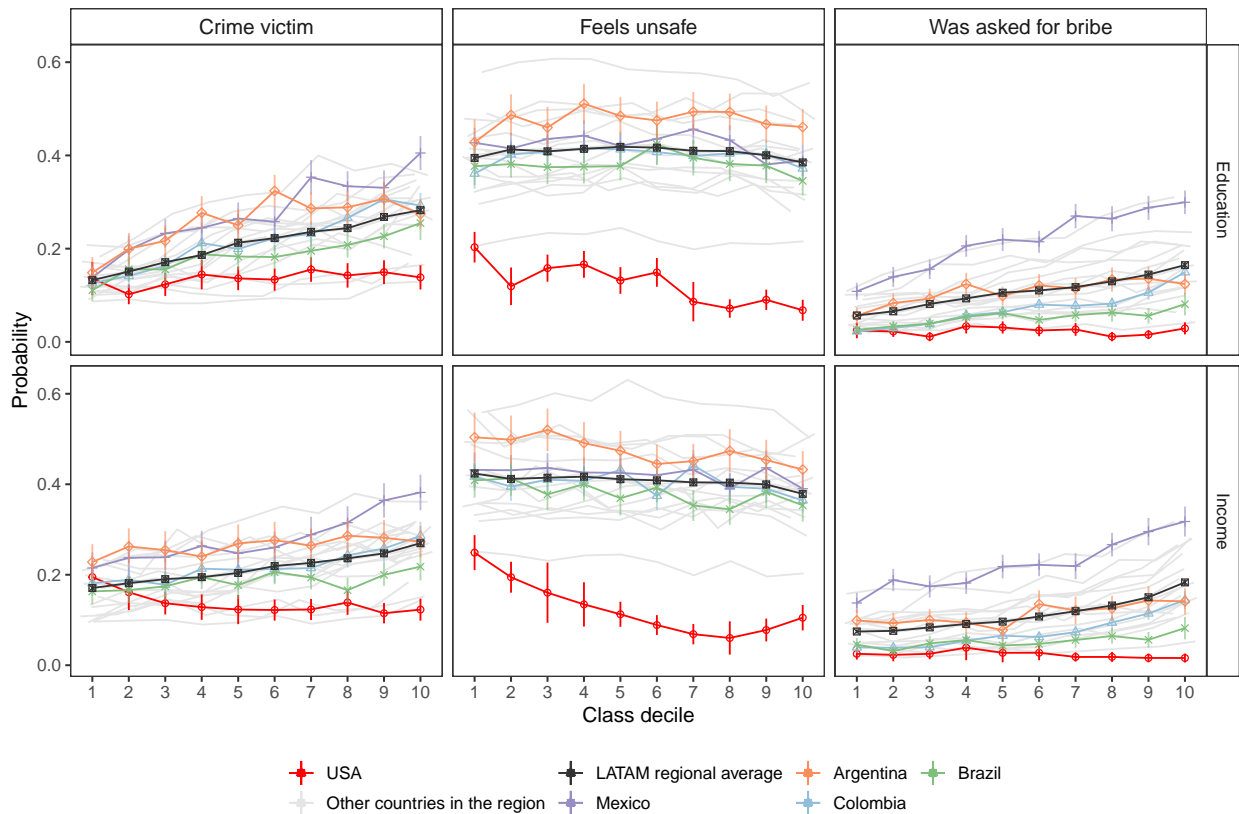


Figure 5: Lines show the estimated country-specific probability that a respondent from each education decile (top row) and income decile (bottom row) reports (from left to right): having been a victim of a crime during the past 12 months, perceiving the neighborhood as unsafe, and a police officer soliciting a bribe.

poor, whereas property crimes—which happen with higher frequency—disproportionately target the rich. Figures A11 and A10 show the same pattern when analyzing within-city variation in crime—as reported in administrative data—and income.

Despite the positive relationship between socioeconomic class and self-reported victimization identified in the data, the middle panels of Figure 5 suggest that the probability of feeling unsafe in a respondent’s neighborhood generally does not vary in socioeconomic status for Latin American respondents. Conversely, for US respondents, the probability of feeling unsafe is uniformly lower than in any of the Latin American countries and decreases as socioeconomic class increases.

The right panels of Figure 5 report the probability that respondents recall a police officer asking for a bribe in the last year. The positive relationship suggests that the rich in Latin America

are asked for bribes more frequently across countries and class measures. From the perspective of rent maximization, these are the citizens from whom police may be able to extract larger sums. Conversely, the probability of reporting bribe solicitation is near zero at each decile for US respondents. This measure, of course, does not rule out police corruption in the US, but it does suggest that individual experiences of bribe solicitation are highly circumscribed in the US.

## 5.2 Updating on policing outcomes

Latin American respondents report worse policing outcomes, on average, than US respondents. Additionally, survey evidence indicates wealthy Latin American respondents report being asked for bribes and being victims of crime at higher rates than the poor. We now show that exposure to signals of the police’s untrustworthiness —police solicitation of bribes, crime victimization, and perceptions of safety— is, in fact, associated with the level of trust reported.

Figure 6 plots the predicted level of trust in the police as a function of our three signals (denoted  $S_i$ ) of police trustworthiness: (i) crime victimization in the past 12 months (left), (ii) feeling “unsafe” in their neighborhood (center), and (iii) whether a police officer asked for a bribe during the past 12 months (right). In each panel, the black line plots the mean level of trust by decile of socioeconomic status across the full sample. This line is very similar across all three vertical panels: the only (slight) differences come from variation in the presence of questions measuring the aforementioned signals across country-year survey waves. For each measure of socioeconomic status (the horizontal panels), trust decreases slightly and monotonically as income increases. We note that these means can be additively decomposed as follows:

$$E[\text{Trust}_i] = E[S_i = 1]E[\text{Trust}_i|S_i = 1] + E[S_i = 0]E[\text{Trust}_i|S_i = 0] \quad (4)$$

The orange and blue points and lines report our estimates of the conditional expectations in (4). The blue line ( $E[\text{Trust}|S_i = 1]$ ) consistently falls below the orange line ( $E[\text{Trust}|S_i = 0]$ ). This is consistent with our expectations—and the conventional wisdom—that poor security outcomes or treatment by police reduce trust in police. Importantly we see evidence consistent with updating—

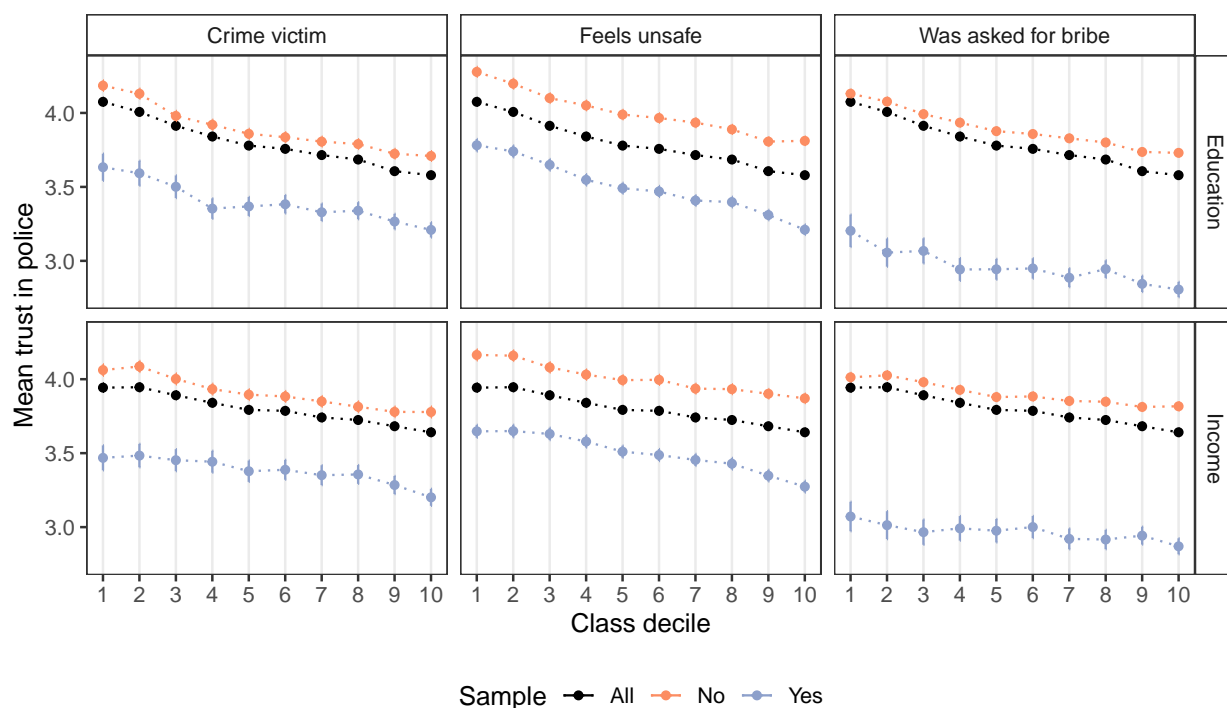


Figure 6: Predicted level of trust in police, by class decile, as a function of the following binary signals: crime victimization in the past 12 months (first panel), feeling unsafe in their neighborhood (second panel), and a police officer asked for a bribe during the past 12 months (third panel). The model was fit on pooled data from all country-waves.

the difference in the orange and blue lines—for all deciles of socioeconomic status. The idea that poor treatment or outcomes reduce trust is consistent with many existing theoretical and empirical accounts of trust in government or government institutions (Hardin, 2003; Levi and Stoker, 2000). We do not find evidence that poor, middle-class, and rich Latin Americans update according to fundamentally different cognitive processes. This analysis does not, for example, support claims that citizen rationality (in this domain) varies in education or socioeconomic status.

The distance between the black lines and the orange/blue lines reflects the share of respondents that experience a given signal (e.g.,  $E[S_i = 1]$  from (4)). We see that crime victimization and especially bribe solicitation are *rare* at all levels of socioeconomic status (consistent with Figure 5). This is evident because the black line is much closer to the orange line, the conditional means for citizens who did not observe the signal in the last year. Indeed, in the full sample, only 21.0%

and 10.6% of respondents reported crime victimization or bribe solicitation in the last year, respectively. The correlations in Figure 5 suggest that these outcomes of policing are increasing in socioeconomic status, which is evident from the growing distance between the black and orange lines as socioeconomic status increases. For example, moving from the lowest to the highest decile of education corresponds to (reported) increases from 13.5% to 28.1% in crime victimization and from 5.7% to 16.3% in bribe solicitation. While these differences in exposure to poor police behavior do increase the (negative) gradient of socioeconomic status and trust in police by pulling the black line toward the blue line, we note that these differences in isolation do not account for the negative gradient of the orange and blue lines.

### **5.3 Updating on policing outcomes: panel evidence**

Our language in this section has veered closer to causal language. Ideally, we would describe the updating in Figure 6 as the *effect* of different signals of police trustworthiness on trust in police at different income levels. While we lack a research design capable of supporting such an inference with the LAPOP data, the panel surveys from Mexico, Medellín, and Chile permit estimation of average treatment effects on the treated (ATTs) for several closely related signals. We employ a two-way fixed-effect estimator and the fixed-effect counterfactual estimator proposed by Liu, Wang, and Xu (2022). From the latter, we report the ATT that weights respondents (units) equally. As in Figure 6, these signals are self-reported, though the questions vary slightly (as we report in Table A5). In Figure 7, we compare the estimated ATTs to associations (analogous to Figure 6) for the full sample of respondents. We show that all of the estimated ATTs are significant at the  $\alpha = 0.05$  level and signed in the same direction as in the cross-sectional analyses from the Mexico, Medellín, Chile, and LAPOP samples: feeling unsafe, crime victimization, and viewing the police as corrupt reduces trust in police. However, the magnitudes of the ATTs relative to the pooled cross-sectional associations are reduced by 49-81%. This suggests that the magnitude of findings in Figure 6 is likely overstated, but that updating on the basis of poor security outcomes or abusive interactions with police leads to lower levels of trust in police. In Figure A12, we show

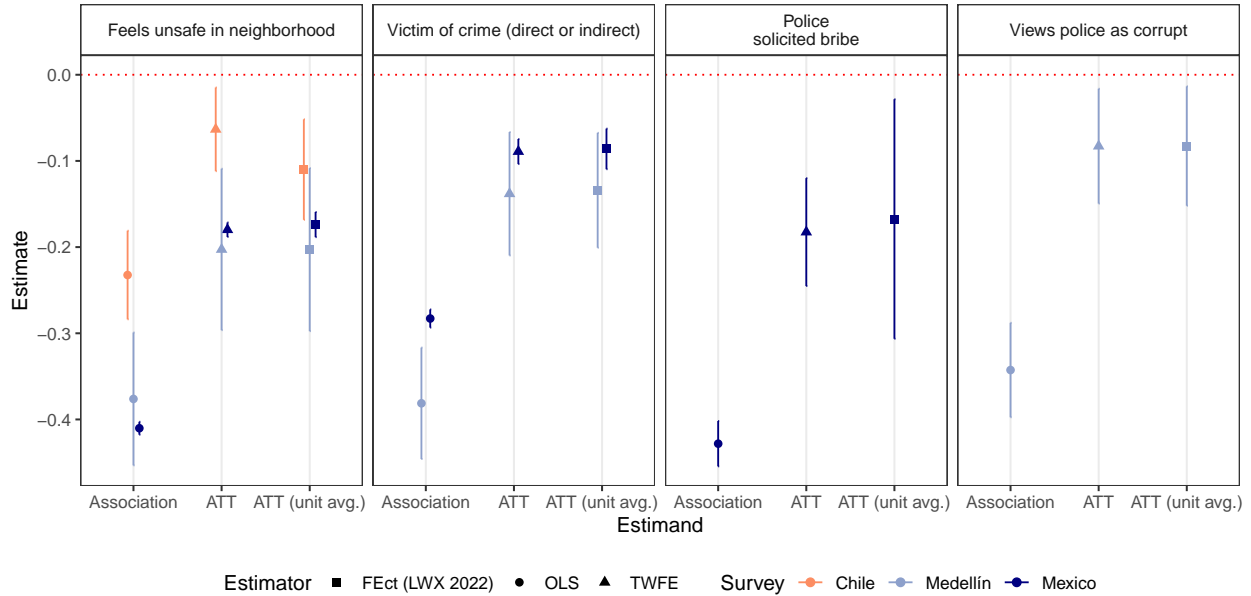


Figure 7: Estimates of pooled associations (across waves) to estimates of the average treatment effect (ATT) on the treated of signals analogous to those in Figure 6. LWX (2022) indicates the fixed effects counterfactual estimator proposed by Liu, Wang, and Xu (2022). 95% confidence intervals are calculated on standard errors clustered at the primary sampling unit.

that estimated ATTs are very similar for respondents of different socio-economic statuses.<sup>8</sup>

These results help clarify the negative correlation between trust and socioeconomic status observed in Latin America, in contrast to the US. Overall, wealthier respondents report experiencing worse policing quality than the region’s poor. While the most egregious police abuses and security failures disproportionately affect poor Latin Americans (González, 2020; Magaloni and Rodriguez, 2020), these events are less frequent than more quotidian signals of policing failures.

#### 5.4 Translating security outcomes into signals

Our findings suggest that the surprising weak-to-negative correlation between socioeconomic status and trust in police stems, in part, from wealthier respondents’ higher rate of reporting signals of bad policing: crime, insecurity, and police corruption. Conventional wisdom—as expressed by forecasters—did not anticipate that the rich would express higher levels of insecurity/victimization

<sup>8</sup>We use the Mexican panel data for this test because it has a much larger sample size than the other panels, increasing our ability to detect differential updating by social class (by comparing conditional ATTs).



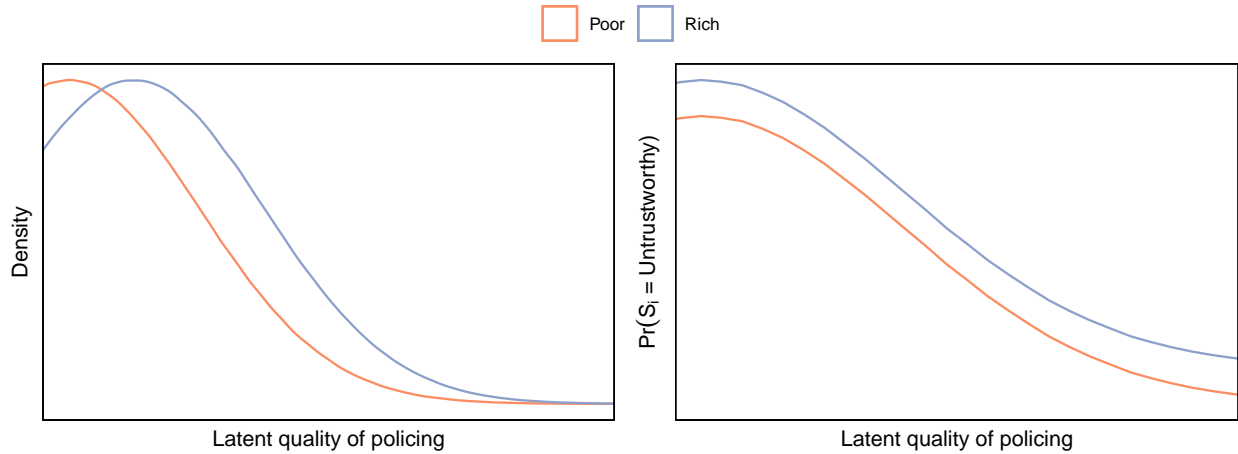


Figure 8: Illustration of how different latent levels of policing might translate into observed signals.

than the poor. We argue that these expectations can be reconciled with our findings by considering how policing outputs are translated into informational signals about police trustworthiness.

We contend that the underlying quality of policing is distinct from the signals that citizens observe, use, and ultimately report on public opinion surveys. Figure 8 considers how a latent (unobserved) quality of policing may translate into signals. In the left panel, we consider that the quality of policing may vary for citizens of different socioeconomic classes. The densities are hypothetical but reflect conventional wisdom that the quality of policing is better for rich citizens than poor citizens. In this case, we would expect that differences in police quality that favor the rich *increase* the correlation between socioeconomic status and trust in police.

Yet, this conventional wisdom is only one part of the story. We argue that citizens of different socioeconomic statuses may translate the quality of policing into signals of police trustworthiness differently. Specifically, we argue that the rich are likely to apply a more stringent standard to policing. This means that for a given level of latent police quality, the rich are more likely to interpret a negative (or untrustworthy) signal. We provide a visualization of this argument in the right panel of Figure 8. The functional forms are purely illustrative. The core piece of our argument is that for a latent police quality  $q$ ,  $\Pr(S_i = \text{Untrustworthy} \mid q)$  is weakly higher for rich than poor citizens. This conceptualization could accommodate a stochastic mapping of police quality onto the binary signal (as in Figure 8) or a deterministic threshold (in  $q$ ) in which the threshold for

observing an untrustworthy signal is greater for the poor than for the rich. In either case, the translation of police quality into signals of police trustworthiness should *decrease* the correlation between socioeconomic status and trust in police, potentially even making this correlation negative.

Given that both the difference in the distribution of policing quality and the difference in the probability of observing a poor signal of police performance, exemplified in Figure 8, are likely present in our survey data, decomposing the relative contributions of each on the overall class-trust gradient is impossible if we cannot directly observe policing quality. A body of existing research establishes the prevalence of crime underreporting in administrative data, implying that policing quality is not directly observable (e.g., Carr and Doleac, 2016; Jaitman and Anauati, 2020). Therefore, we proceed by offering indirect evidence in support of the right panel of Figure 8.

First, recall the disaggregation of offenses from Medellín in Figure A9 that suggests that rich respondents report higher levels of property crimes (e.g., theft), whereas poor respondents report higher levels of violent crimes (e.g., homicide). Additionally, administrative data on homicide rates—the crime that is least likely to go unreported—from Medellín and Mexico City suggest that violent crime is decreasing in neighborhood income (see Figures A10 and A11). Yet, our binary measure of *any* crime victimization in the last year suggests similar levels of updating despite differences in the profile and severity of crimes that target these populations. Further, respondents across socioeconomic strata express similar perceptions of the security situation, as shown in Figure 5. Thus, despite higher rates of (lethal) violence in poorer neighborhoods or communities, citizens express similar perceptions of safety in all neighborhoods. Both observations are consistent with rich citizens being more likely to observe poor signals of police trustworthiness holding fixed the underlying quality of policing.

Second, we consider measures of variation in trust in police by social class in Figure 9. This Figure shows that, across both proxies of socioeconomic status, the standard deviation of trust in police is *decreasing* in socioeconomic status. This pattern implies more variation in assessments of trust in police among poor than rich individuals. A similar pattern is evident in the US, though

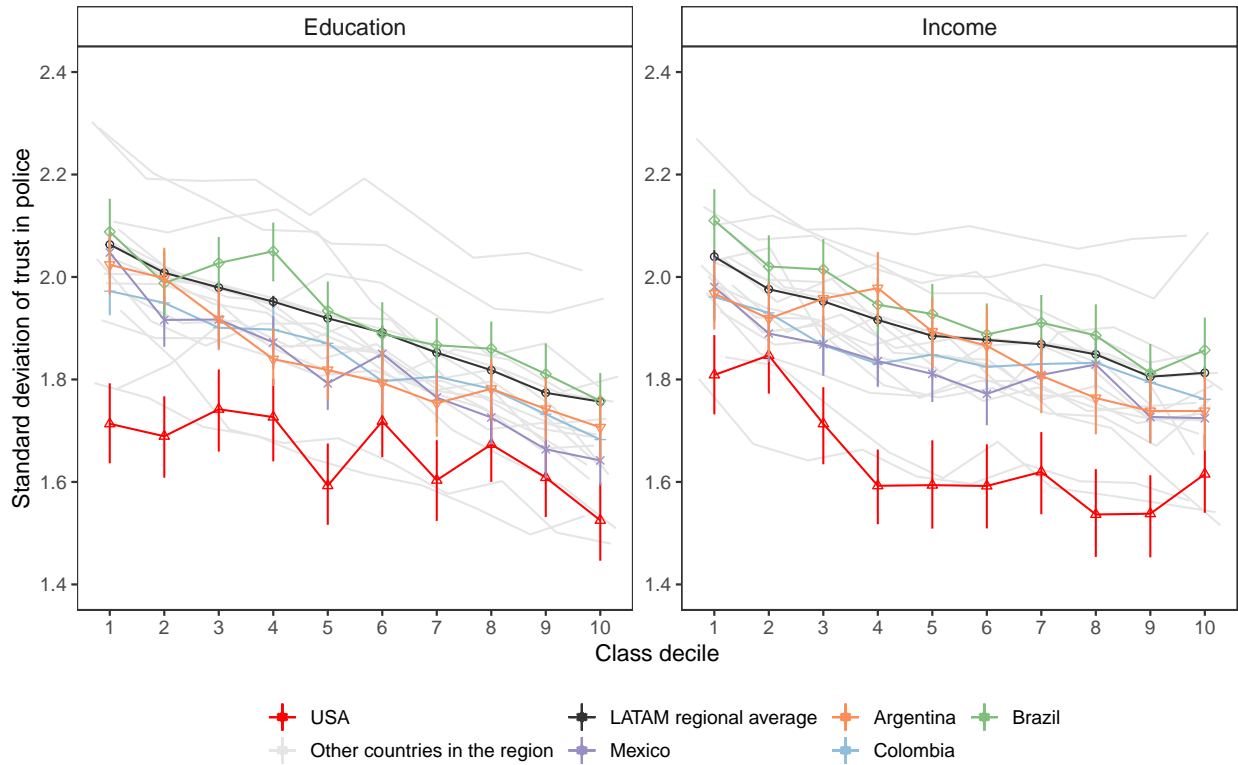


Figure 9: Figure shows the estimated standard deviation of trust in police by class decile for the country-specific and Latin America pooled samples and its the 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals.

the standard deviation of trust in police is lower across the board than in most Latin American countries. This decreasing variance is consistent with a pattern of updating in which the rich translate bad experiences with the police into poor signals of police trustworthiness with greater frequency than the poor.

One alternative interpretation of Figure 9, distinct from our argument about variation in the probability of translating experience or observation into a signal of police quality, is that the rich have more frequent contact with the police than the poor and thus can observe signals about their trustworthiness more frequently. However, in Figure A14 and A15 in the Appendix, we show suggestive evidence that the frequency of interaction with police does not appreciably vary with social class. In data from Medellín—in which all respondents are urban—reported contact rates with patrol officers do not vary in class (*estrato*). LAPOP offers a less direct test of the frequency

of contact through estimated response time. We see limited differences between poor and rich respondents, which vary substantially by country. As a result, our results in Figure 9 are unlikely to be generated by variation in frequency of exposure to the police alone.

Importantly, Figure 9 suggests that, as in Latin America, the rich in the US similarly translate experience into signals of police (non)-trustworthiness with higher probability. Why would we observe differences in the gradient of trust in police in social class between the US and Latin America? If this behavioral mechanism predisposes the rich to negatively update more frequently than the poor, why is trust in police increasing in socioeconomic status in the US?

Per Figure 8, there exist two countervailing forces that translate experiences of police quality into signals of police trustworthiness. First, oft-documented disparities suggest that racial minorities and poor citizens receive poorer quality policing. In line with conventional wisdom, these disparities should produce a positive correlation between socioeconomic status and trust in police. It is possible that class-based differences in the quality of policing are greater in the US than in Latin America, though we cannot test this directly. Second, we believe that is conceivable that differences in quality of police translate into signals about police trustworthiness differently for poor and rich US residents, in line with the right panel of Figure 8. As in Latin America, this mechanism should decrease the correlation between socioeconomic status and trust in police.

In comparing the rates of observed signals, 5 suggests that policing outcomes are generally *better* in the US: crime victimization rates are lower for almost all citizens, more citizens feel secure in their neighborhoods, and bribe solicitation is nearly non-existent. If the quality of policing is generally higher in the US than in Latin America, fewer negative signals are perceived for citizens of all socioeconomic classes, attenuating the influence of the mechanism in the right panel of Figure 8, and supporting a stronger (positive) correlation between class and trust. To the extent that better signals (lower crime, less petty corruption) are more common, we should also see lower variance in trust in the US context, as in Figure 9.

## 6 Alternative explanations

In this section, we consider whether alternative explanations premised on the measurement of trust in police and its alternative conceptualizations could also account for the empirical patterns observed in the data. We consider three classes of alternative explanations: measurement concerns, institutional trust as a trait, and departures from Bayesian updating on police trustworthiness

### 6.1 Artifacts of measurement

One possible cause of the divergence between experts' beliefs and what LAPOP survey data shows could be how class and trust are measured. Missingness may be correlated with socioeconomic status and trust in police.

We conduct a bounding exercise in Appendix A7 to assess the maximum extent to which missingness could bias our conclusions. To generate worst-case bounds, note that correlation is bounded between -1 and 1. Since both trust in police and our measures of socioeconomic status are coded as  $Z$ -scores in (1), we can calculate these worst-case bounds for any respondent that reports at least one of the two measures. For this subset of missing observations (99.8% of all missing responses), we impute the observed  $Z$ -score for the missing  $Z$ -score (such that the imputed observation lies on the  $45^\circ$  line) to generate the worst-case upper bound. We then impute the negative of the observed  $Z$ -score (such that the imputed observation lies on the  $-45^\circ$  line) to generate the worst-case lower bound. We estimate the correlation with all observed and imputed observations to generate worst-case bounds for the correlations reported in Figure 1. We estimate a worst-case bound using the education measure of  $[-0.11, -0.05]$ , suggesting that missingness can have only a minimal effect on our conclusions. The worst-case bounds for the income measure of social class are  $[-0.22, 0.13]$ . The width of these bounds is unsurprising given the different degrees of missingness. Nevertheless, it is useful to note that this worst-case upper bound on trust in the Latin American case is approximately equal to the estimated correlation between social class and trust in the United States (reported above), showing how different these empirical patterns are in practice.

Alternatively, one may be worried about the semantic content of respondents' opinions. While LAPOP does not offer any form of validation outside of each cross-sectional survey, we again draw upon findings from the panel surveys, which all use very similar question wordings (see Table A5). In a field experiment associated with the Medellín panel, Hanson, Kronick, and Slough (2024) find that survey-measured baseline trust in police predicts subsequent engagement with police. Specifically, they show that respondents that report the top category of trust in the police (out of four categories) in a baseline survey are more than twice as likely to attend community-police meetings in beats assigned to treatment (18.4% vs. 8.4% of respondents). If survey measures of trust in the police were entirely random noise, we would not expect this alignment between reported trust and observed behavior. Further, trust in police in subsequent survey waves is highly (and positively) autocorrelated: 0.44 [95% CI: 0.42, 0.46] in Chilean panel data, 0.48 [95% CI: 0.44, 0.51] in Medellín, and 0.42 [95% CI: 0.41, 0.43] in Mexico. This offers further evidence that reported trust is not entirely noise.

## **6.2 Institutional trust as a trait**

We have shown that in Latin America, trust in the police does not vary in class in the way most experts predicted. However, the alternative concepts of trust we described above may imply different predictions for the correlation between socioeconomic status and trust in police. If trust or propensity for trust were a trait rather than a relational expectation of police behavior, our findings could be explained by a weakly negative correlation between this predisposition and class. We note that a negative correlation between trust predispositions and socioeconomic status would cut against notions that higher trust or social capital promotes economic advancement (e.g., Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, 1993).

To examine the possibility that our results are driven by stable individual differences in LAPOP respondents' *trust propensities*, we estimate the intra-class correlation between each respondent's trust in multiple institutions: the army, political parties, the sitting president, the supreme court, the national legislature, and the police. The intra-class correlation gives the ratio of between-respondent variance to the total variance in trust in these institutions. If the ICC were close to 1,

it would suggest limited variance in an individual's assessment of multiple institutions, suggesting that institutional trust functions as a stable trait or predisposition. However, we do not observe a high ICC. Across all subjects in the LAPOP surveys, we estimate an ICC of .05 (95% CI: [.02,.23]). Disaggregating by country in Figure A8, we show similarly small estimates in all countries. It is therefore unlikely that a stable individual-level predisposition to trust that correlates with socioeconomic status can explain away our results.

### 6.3 Beliefs vs. Preferences

We have argued that trust should be characterized as a belief, but skeptical readers may argue that it is, instead, a manifestation of a preference about policing. Moreover, psychology and political psychology literature argues for the plausibility of an interaction between (prior) beliefs and preferences in the updating process (Kunda, 1987; Taber and Lodge, 2006; Little, Schnakenberg, and Turner, 2022). Specifically, the evolution of trust could be subject to motivated reasoning or directional motives, whereby trust becomes a function of an individual's prior preferences regarding policing (Ibid.). If this were the case, a respondent who prefers a policy that necessitates active police involvement may be motivated to hold more positive views of the police, thereby generating higher levels of trust in police, all else equal.

To gauge if respondents' beliefs about police trustworthiness may be shaped by their preferences over policing practices or policy, we characterize the relationship between socioeconomic status, self-described support for tough-on-crime or *mano dura* policing, and trust in police. Two expectations are worth clarifying. First, a motivated-reasoning or inference account of updating on police trustworthiness holds that pro-*mano dura* individuals have higher trust in police. Second, given the generally negative (if weak) correlations between socioeconomic status and trust in police reported in Figure 1, we would expect that the poor hold more favorable views of *mano dura* policies. The figure counters both expectations.

First, the left panel in Figure A16 in the Appendix shows a close-to-zero and *positive* correlation between income and support for tough-on-crime policing across all countries except Argentina and Uruguay. This finding is in line with recent research showing there is a positive relationship

between (i) crime victimization and support for *mano dura* (Visconti, 2020) and (ii) income and urban property crime victimization (Gaviria and Pagés, 2002). The right panel in Figure A16 in the Appendix shows the predicted level of trust in police by class decile as a function of respondents' self-reported support for *mano dura*. The black line plots the expected level of trust in police for respondents in each decile, and the blue line plots the conditional expectation for respondents in that decile who support *mano dura*. In contrast, the orange line plots the conditional expectation for respondents in that decile who are *unsupportive* of *mano dura*. As we can see, the expected level of trust for individuals supportive of *mano dura* is lower than for individuals unsupportive of the measure across all income levels. Additionally, trust for both groups decreases at a similar rate. The results reveal the opposite empirical pattern we would expect to find if trust was largely driven by individuals' preferences, discounting the possibility of a motivated-reasoning explanation of our results.

## 7 Conclusion

Conventional wisdom from the US suggests that racially and socioeconomically marginalized populations have lower trust in police than their advantaged counterparts. This apparent conventional wisdom has been extended to other contexts by police agencies that design interventions to increase trust (Blair et al., 2021) and, as our forecasting exercise shows, expert beliefs about trust in police. We show that descriptively, a distinct pattern obtains in Latin America, as a whole, and effectively all countries therein. Specifically, we find that trust in police is slightly decreasing in socioeconomic status: on average, the rich trust the police less than the poor.

Our finding of a negative trust-class gradient is important for considerations of the political economy of security provision in Latin America, world's most violent region. Poor assessments of police trustworthiness may motivate the rich to invest in private security (Jayadav and Bowles, 2006; Wilke, 2022). With this substitute, the rich (Bergolo, Londoño-Vélez, and Tortarolo, 2023)—who form a disproportionate share of the tax base—may be less likely to support funding police, further inhibiting police performance. Moreover, strategies to increase trust in po-



lice by increasing service quality may be least effective among these citizens precisely because they are more likely to observe negative signals at any level of police quality. These implications of our findings merit further study in the Latin American context.

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