

WEEKLY ASADO

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
Latin American Program
Friday, September 29, 2017



'Corruption trap': Oh, Odebrecht

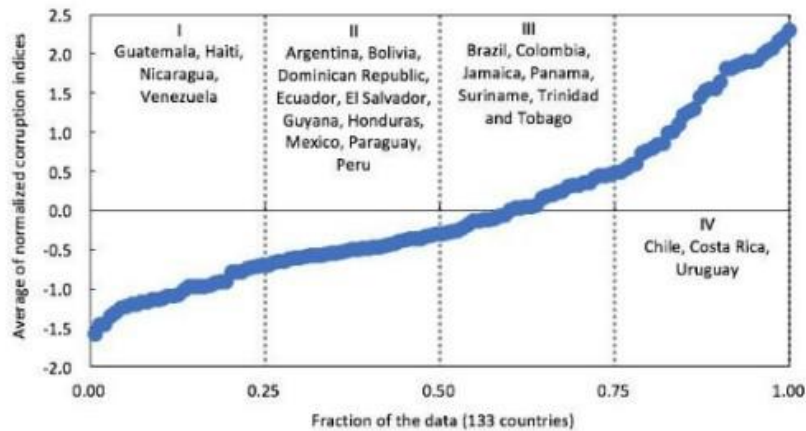
The IMF [published](#) a helpful, short analysis on corruption in Latin America, which blames the problem in part on a cultural acceptance of the practice. “Corruption is so endemic to the fabric of society,” the authors conclude. That appears to be a factor in Argentina, where corruption – the abuse of public office for private gain – ranks far below crime and inflation among public concerns, and “*roba pero hace*” is a political catchphrase. That is despite a string of high-profile cases, including the cinematic arrest last year of a former Fernández de Kirchner official, who was caught

throwing millions of dollars in cash over the walls of a monastery. The authors of the IMF report observe that Latin America has seen little progress in fighting corruption, but they note one reason for optimism: “the public is losing patience.”

Large differences

In Latin America, corruption varies greatly among countries.

(global distribution of corruption, average of normalized corruption indices)



Sources: Transparency International; Verisk Maplecroft; and World Bank, World Governance Indicators database.

Note: The IMF does not construct these measures. Higher index means less corrupt. Normalized indices = (observation - average) / standard deviation.



GDP: Up and up

For the second quarter of the year, Argentina's National Statistics Institute (INDEC) reported 2.7 percent growth. Construction activity expanded by ten percent, agricultural by five percent and manufacturing by 2.5 percent. (I hear from Buenos Aires that asphalt sales in the first two quarters were almost double the total from the same period last year.) Citi and Itaú project 2.5 percent growth for the year. For next year, the Argentine government expects 3.5 percent growth. That is well above

analyst expectations, but so far, third quarter indicators are promising.

Lab coat sit-in: Making the ministry sweat

Last week, we reported that 500 researchers and post-doctoral fellows were occupying Argentina's Science and Technology Ministry to protest cuts to the budget of CONICET, the Argentine National Science Foundation. After eight days, the two reached an agreement. In exchange for ending the sit-in, the researchers won a meeting with senior ministry officials to discuss two issues previously excluded from the negotiations: compensation for scientists who unexpectedly lost grants, and help finding university jobs for scientists losing CONICET support, according to a listserv used by the protestors. However, the group organizing the protests – the Red Federal de Afectados – remains

skeptical. "There was little good will" demonstrated by the government, it said.

Secure ties: Burzaco draws senior officials

Argentine Secretary of National Security Eugenio Burzaco was in Washington for high-level meetings with U.S. government officials. On Tuesday, Burzaco and National Security Council Senior Director Juan Cruz – along with representatives from the State Department’s Bureau of International Law Enforcement Affairs and the Department of Defense – gathered at the Argentine Embassy. Burzaco also met with Representatives Albio Sires (D-N.J.) and Jeff Duncan (R-S.C.). The warm welcome shows, despite setbacks in bilateral relations on issues such as Argentine biodiesel imports, there is strong interest in the security relationship.



La Puente: Team of rivals

The Argentine Embassy on Wednesday hosted the launch of the Wilson Center’s Argentina Project, proving yet again that Malbec and empanadas help bring together Washington’s friendly competitors. The shrimp, skewered beef and crostini drew senior representatives from both the White House and the Obama administration; professors from George Washington University, the John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and the University of Maryland; and scholars from

the Atlantic Council, Inter-American Dialogue and Wilson Center.

Pick me: Argentina seeks HRC seat

Argentine Vice President Gabriela Michetti announced Argentina’s candidacy for the UN Human Rights Council in her Sept. 20 [remarks](#) at the UN General Assembly. The council has 47 members – elected by the General Assembly – including eight from Latin America. The three-year terms for Bolivia, El Salvador and Paraguay expire at the end of the year. To establish Argentina’s bona fides, Ms. Michetti sharply criticized Venezuela for its “lack of free elections,” and called for the “resumption of democracy.” Regrettably, the HRC’s own credibility is hardly unalloyed. Though the UN Human Rights Office has [assailed](#) Venezuela for abusing protestors to “repress political dissent and instill fear,” Venezuela remains a council member, alongside a handful of dictatorships, including Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Though she alluded to areas of disagreement with the United States – such as trade and climate change – she did not discuss the bilateral relationship. But I did, in a Sept. 19 [interview](#) with *El Economista*.



Homebody: Out and about

President Mauricio Macri skipped the UN General Assembly, but not for rest and relaxation. The Oct. 22 midterms are in 23 days, and Mr. Macri is attending campaign events every other day, with a focus on the *conurbano* – the densely populated communities surrounding the City of Buenos Aires.

Carnival Cruise Line: Persona non grata

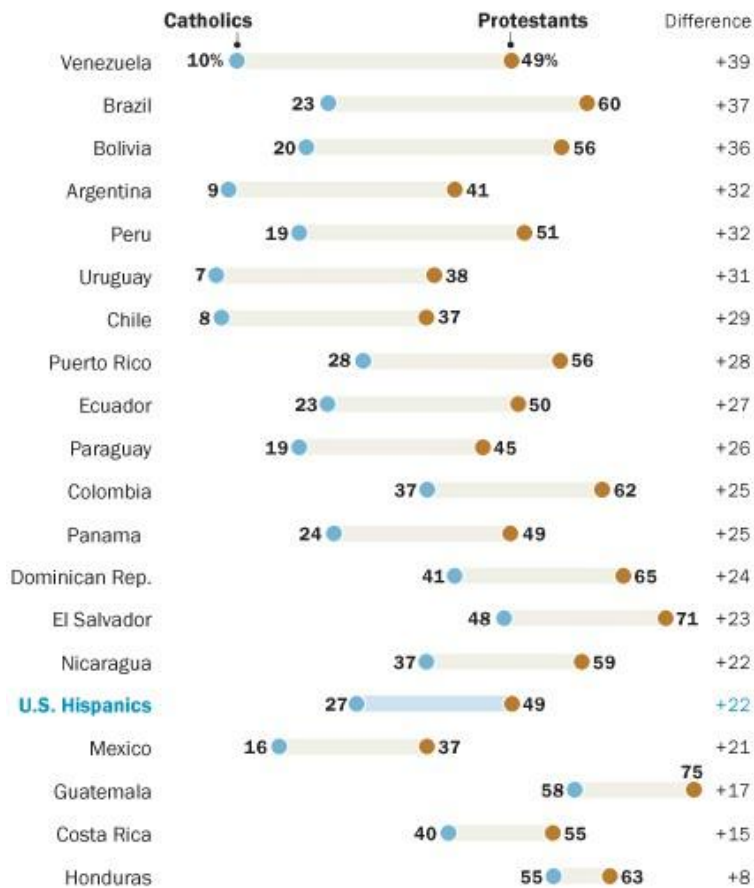
In a Wall Street Journal [op-ed](#), I questioned Caribbean support for Venezuela in the Organization of American States. The reactions have been diverse. “You have *cajones* the size of the Taj Mahal,” one academic told me. A Latin America energy sector expert had a different view. “I would say the Caribbean countries are acting rationally. They vote for whom they get support/help from,” she e-mailed me. “You have to walk the walk to get the vote!”

Weekly Asado Explainer: Religious landscape

In honor of the Ten Days of Repentance, between the Jewish holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, here’s a primer on Argentina’s religious landscape: Roman Catholics make up 71 percent of Argentina’s population (even though one prominent Argentine Catholic, Pope Francis, moved to Rome in 2013), followed by Protestants, who constitute 15 percent. Taken together, atheists, agnostics and those with no religious affiliation make up 11 percent. The Jewish population is 0.5 percent of the population, according to [Pew](#), whereas Muslims make up one percent of the population. Latin America is home to 40 percent of the world’s Catholics but in much of the region, Catholicism is [declining](#). This is true in Argentina, despite a constitutional requirement to support the Roman Catholic Church and subsidies for private Catholic schools. In Argentina, *55 percent of Protestants were raised Catholic* and though 86 percent of Argentines were raised Catholic, only 71 percent identify with that religion today. Argentina gets [high marks](#) in the State Department’s International Religious Freedom Report.

The Commitment Gap

% who say religion is very important in their lives, pray daily and attend services weekly



Q29, Q45, Q58

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

[Subscribe to the Weekly Asado](#)

[Donate to the Argentina Project](#)

Your email preferences are set to receive our updates.

unsubscribe.