

2005 Latinobarómetro Poll Results: Venezuela a Democratic Bright Spot in Latin America

Much has been made of the 2005 survey results from Chilean polling firm Latinobarómetro. The annual poll, based on 20,000 face-to-face interviews in 18 Latin American countries, found this year that enthusiasm for Democratic governments has declined throughout the hemisphere, a result of regional dissatisfaction with liberalized economies that have failed to decrease poverty, and rising crime rates that have created fear in many urban areas.

The country that has resisted this regional trend the most is Venezuela. This year, Latinobarómetro found that Venezuelans tend to be far more optimistic about their economy than other nations, less turned off by the political process, and more likely than most other Latin Americans to be happy with the direction their country is headed. Whats more, *more people in Venezuela consider their country "totally democratic" than any other nation in Latin America.*

Latinobarómetro, has conducted similar country-by-country surveys for the past decade, and is widely recognized as the leading multi-country public opinion polling firm in Latin America. The full report is available at www.Latinobarometro.org.

Below are the highlights for Venezuela. Charts with country-by-country breakdowns for each of the below statement are provided in the appendices to this document.

Democracy

- Venezuelans are more likely than citizens of other Latin American countries to describe their government as "totally democratic." On a scale of 1 to 10, the average Venezuelan gave her democracy a 7.6. The regional average was a ranking of 5.5 [Figure 1].
- More than three in four Venezuelans prefer democracy over all other forms of government--the second highest ranking in the region [Figure 2]
- Perhaps more crucially, Venezuelans have the second highest satisfaction level with the way their own democracy functions [Figure 3].

Economy

- Venezuelans are far less worried about becoming unemployed than others in the region. While three in four Latin Americans in general worry about job losses in the upcoming year, less than half of all Venezuelans share this fear **[Figure 4]**.
- Venezuela is the second most optimistic country in Latin America about the direction of their economy. Only powerhouse Chile ranks higher in this regard. More than half of Venezuelans say their economy is progressing, in a hemisphere where less than one in three have similar confidence **[Figure 5]**.

Politics and Corruption

- While most Latin Americans think that politics is too complicated to understand, only 2 in 5 Venezuelans share their frustration. Of the 18 countries surveyed, Venezuelans are the least likely to say they are confused by politics **[Figure 6]**.
- Venezuelans are optimistic that their government is effectively dealing with corruption. It ranks third among countries that believe that things have improved in the last two years **[Figure 7]**.

What Does This Survey Mean?

Clearly, Venezuelans are generally more content with their government and economy than the vast majority of Latin Americans. Perhaps there is some cultural tendency that makes Venezuelans more optimistic by nature? A year-by-year analysis of Venezuelan opinions indicates that this is not the case.

Latinobarómetro polls from 1996-1998 indicate that in the three years before President Hugo Chavez was elected, Venezuelans had a much lower level of satisfaction with the way their democracy functioned.

Data is not available for 1999, President Chavez's first full year in office, but by the year 2000, satisfaction levels jumped a full 20 percentage points. Levels dipped a bit between 2001 and 2003, a time period which included the coup d'état against President Chavez and a nationwide oil strike, yet even during these bleak times, satisfaction levels were *still higher* than the pre-Chavez years. Satisfaction really began to climb again in 2004, and by 2005 they've reached their highest levels since Latinobarómetro began issuing their annual report ten years ago **[Figure 8]**.

Another obvious conclusion is that more Venezuelans believe their country is "totally democratic" than do citizens of other Latin American nations. Perhaps Venezuelans define democracy differently than a North Americans would? You may remember that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has referred to "democratically elected leaders who govern in an illiberal way." But when asked to describe the most important characteristics of a democracy, Venezuelans were far more likely than citizens of any other country in the region to prioritize civil liberties over elections **[Figure 9]**.

In other words, Venezuelans largely have the same definition of a democracy as the United States.

Figure 1: Perceptions of Democracy In Latin America

Response to the question: "On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is 'not democratic' and 10 is 'totally democratic,' where would you place your country?"
Source: Latinobarómetro 2005

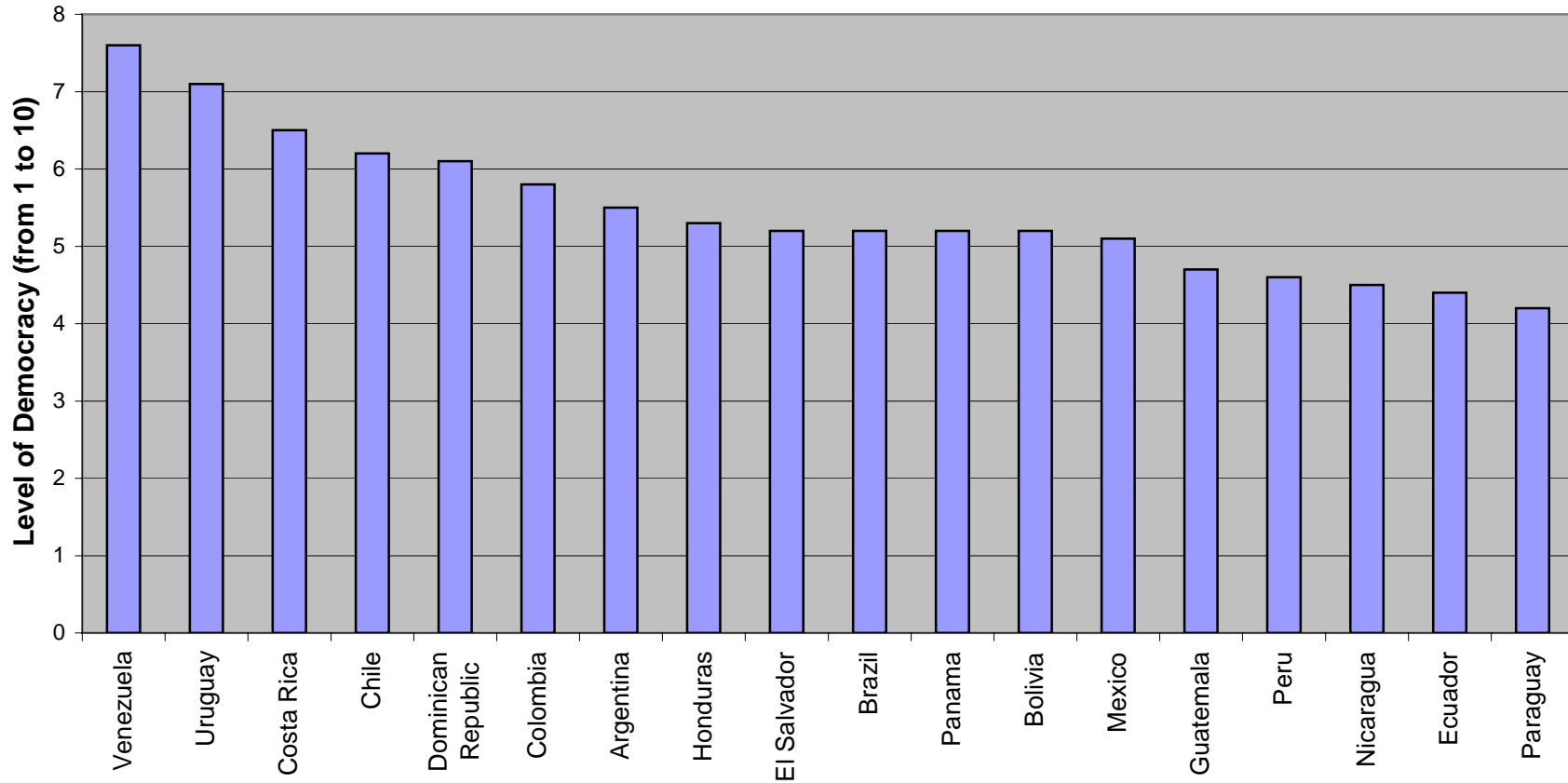
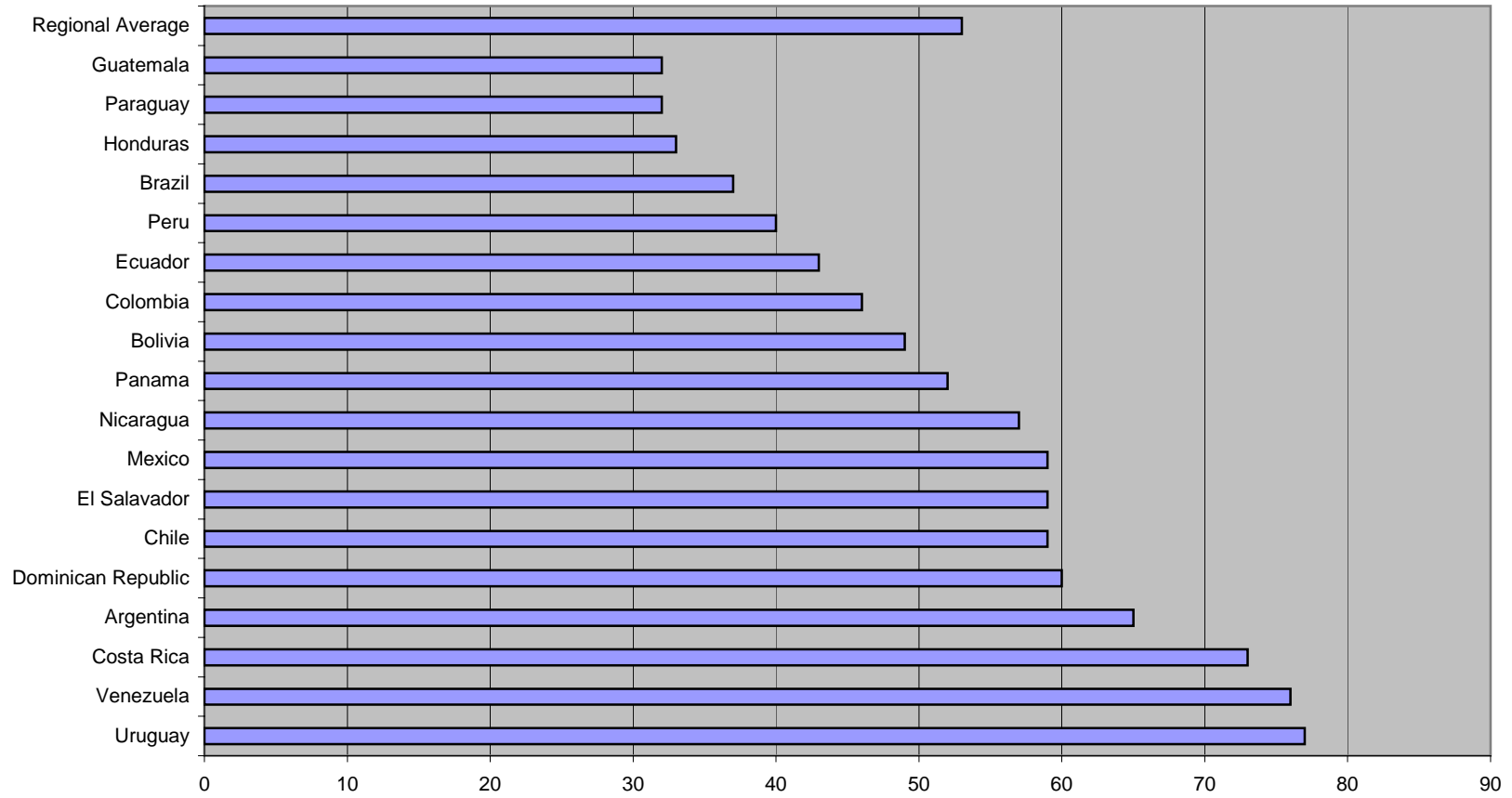


Figure 2: Preference for Democracy in Latin America



Percentage of respondents who agree with the statement "Democracy is preferable over all other forms of government."

Source: Latinobarómetro 2005

Figure 3: Satisfaction With the Way Democracy Functions

Percentage of respondents who answered "satisfied" or "very satisfied" to the question, "In general, are you very satisfied, satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way your democracy functions?"

Source: Latinobarómetro 2005

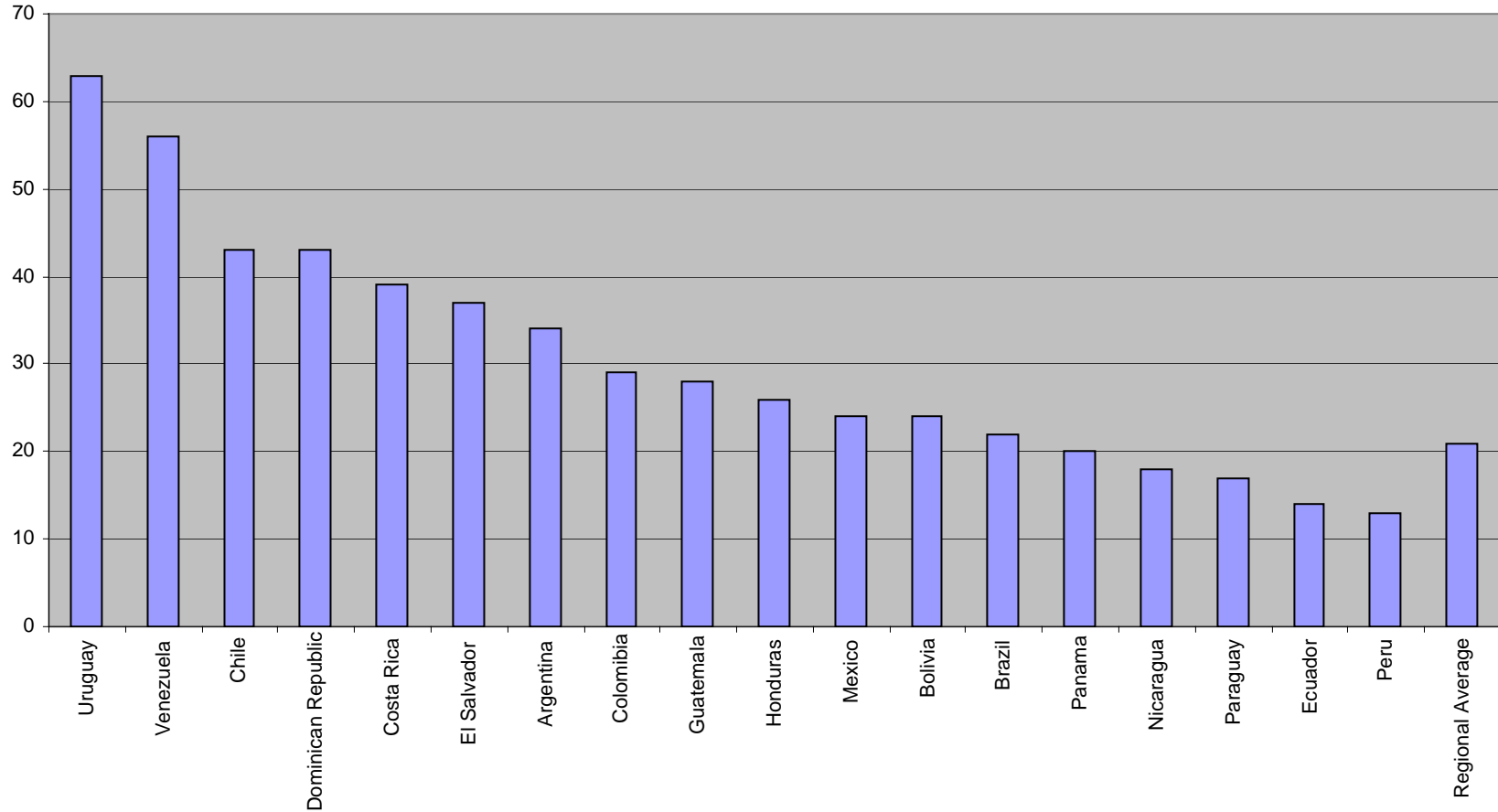
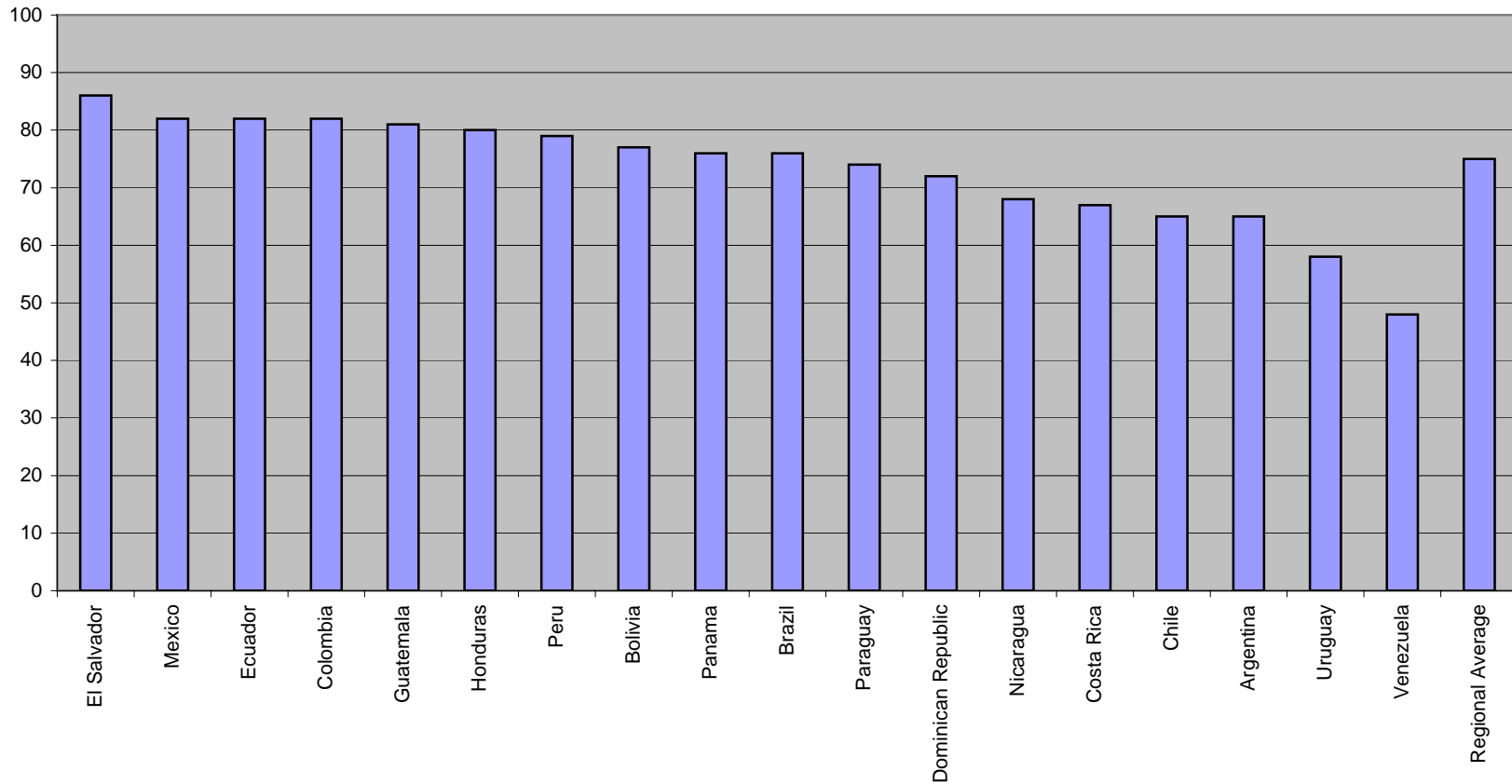


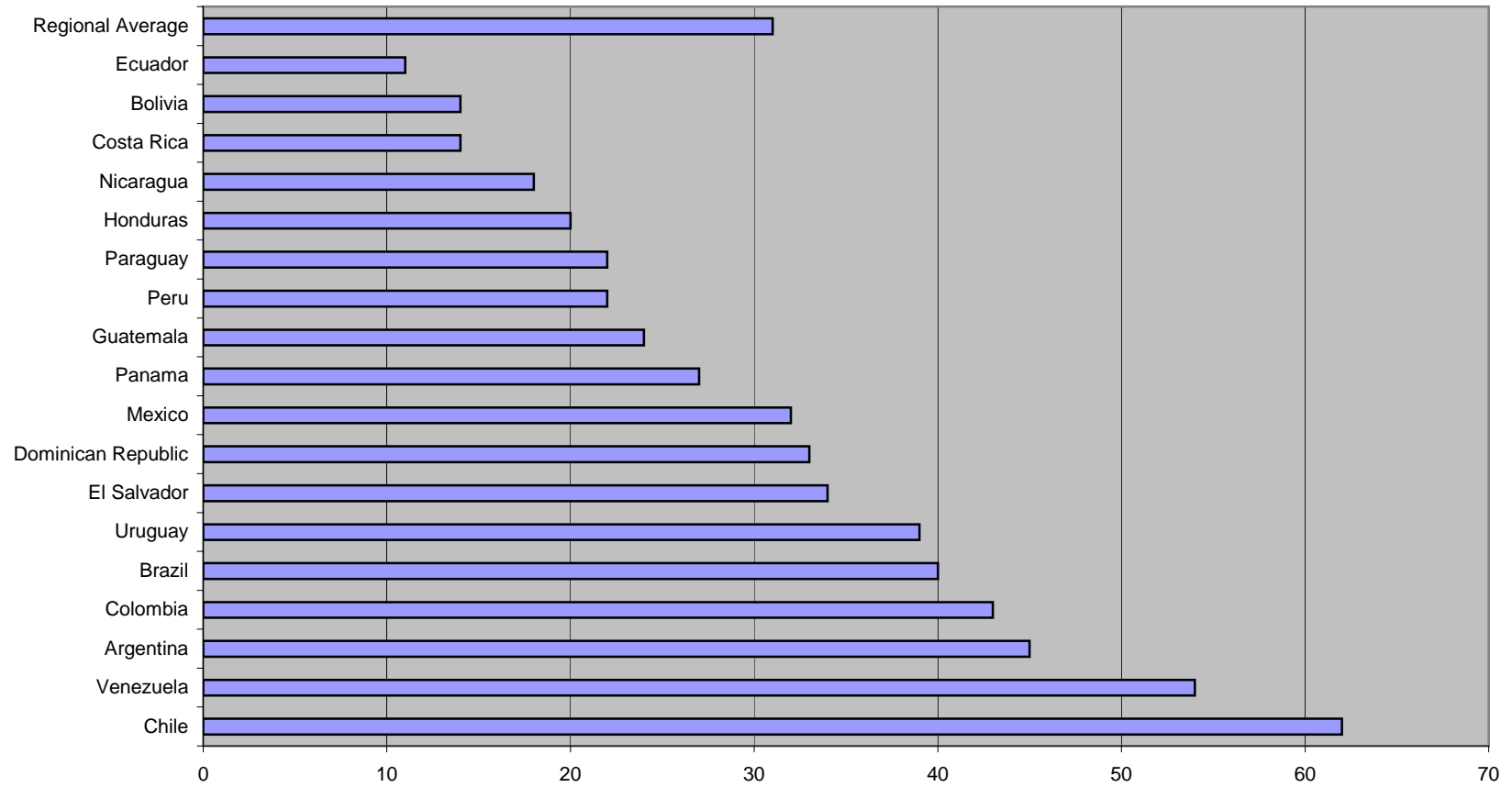
Figure 4: Concerns About Unemployment



Percentage of respondents answering "worried" or "very worried" to the question, "How worried are you that you will be without work or unemployed over the next twelve months?"

Source: Latinobarómetro 2005

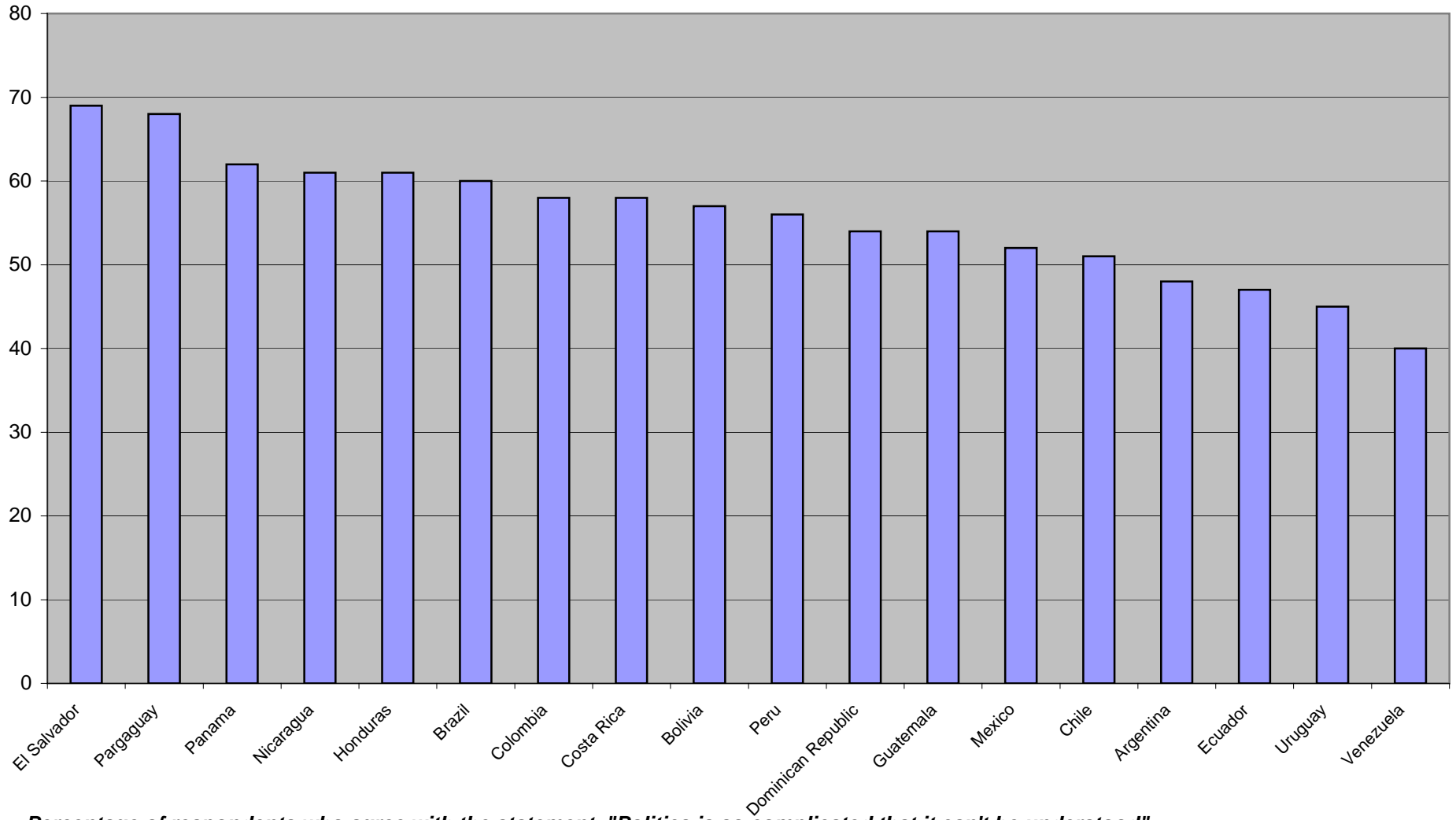
Figure 5: Progress of Economy



In the context of the nation's economy, the percentage of respondents who believe their country is "progressing."

Source: Latinobarómetro 2005

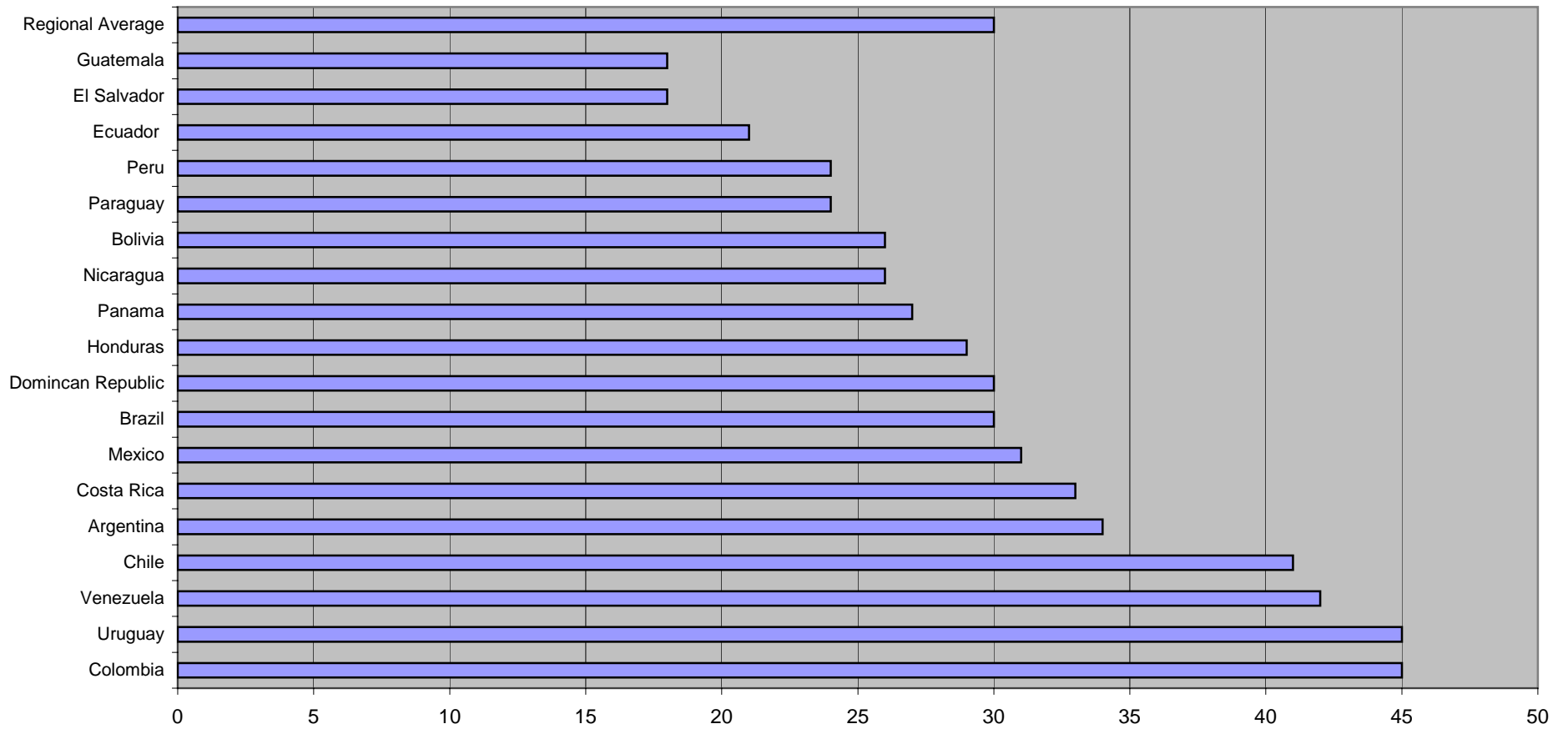
Figure 6: Understanding of Politics



Percentage of respondents who agree with the statement, "Politics is so complicated that it can't be understood"

Source: Latinobarómetro 2005

Figure 7: Reduction in Corruption in Latin America



Percentage of respondents who answered "some" or "very much" to the statement "There has been progress in reducing corruption in state institutions for the last two years."

Source: Latinobarómetro 2005

Figure 8: Venezuelan Satisfaction With Government 1996-2005

Percentage of Venezuelans who said they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the way their democracy functioned, year by year.

[Note: data for 1999 is not available]

Source: Latinobarómetro

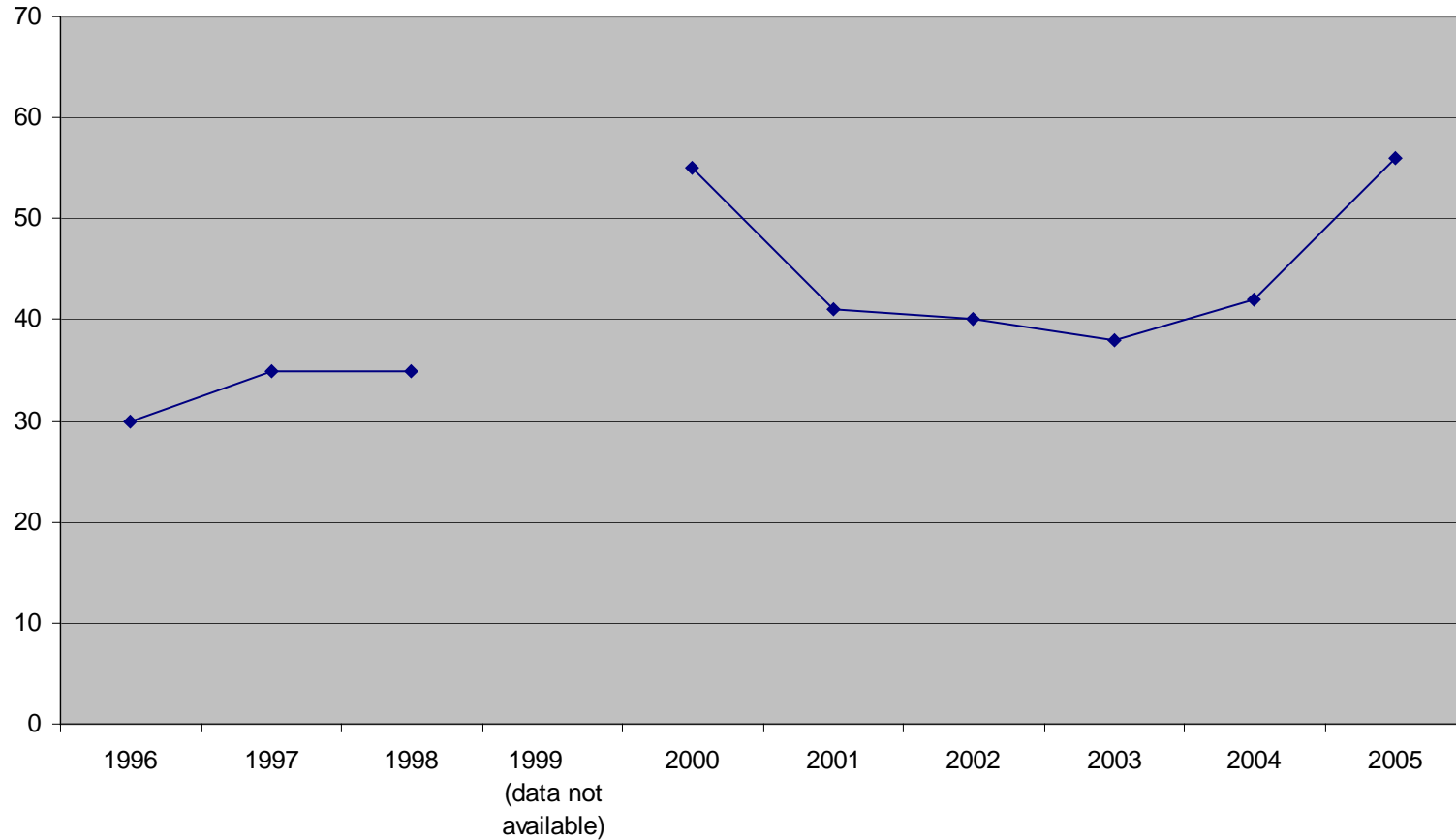


Figure 9: What Constitutes A Democracy?

Responses to the question, *What are the most important characteristics of a democracy?*
 Source: Latinobarómetro 2005

