

Chileans, Bolivians Top Latin America in Optimism, Barómetro Iberoamericano Finds

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Chileans were the Latin Americans who felt most confident that their country was heading in the right direction in the spring of 2006, followed by Bolivians. Those most pessimistic about their countries' future were Ecuadorans and Costa Ricans.

These are some of the findings of [Barómetro Iberoamericano 2006](#), a multi-country poll conducted by the Iberoamerican Consortium of Market Research and Consulting (known as CIMA, for its Spanish acronym). The survey includes samples from 13 Latin American countries plus Puerto Rico, Spain, Portugal and the Latino population of the continental United States.

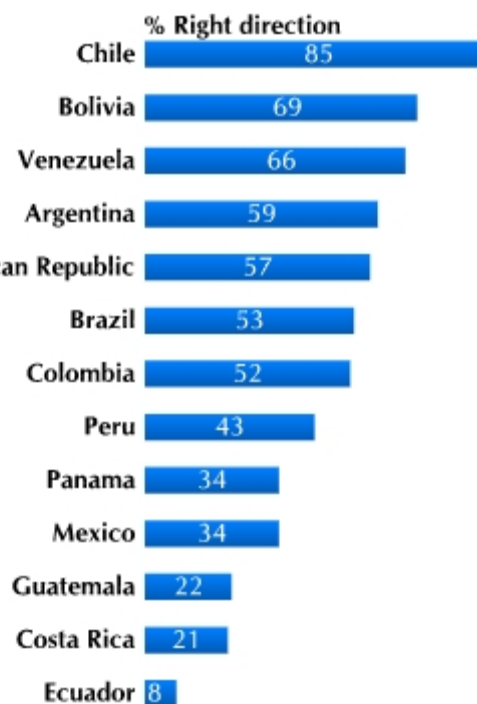
The wide-ranging poll examined attitudes in the Americas and on the Iberian peninsula regarding governance, presidential leadership, political legitimacy and democratic values. Seventeen polling firms took part, interviewing 8,410 people in March 2006. Country sample sizes ranged from 300 in Guatemala to more than 1,000 in Argentina and Bolivia. The survey, which has been conducted since 1992, also included, for the first time, a sample of 213 Latinos in the United States.

Overall the Latin Americans, U.S. Latinos and Iberians surveyed were evenly divided over whether their country was headed in the right direction (48%). But there was wide variation by country. While more than eight out of ten Chileans (85%) and seven out of ten Bolivians (69%) said their country was on the right path, fewer than one in five Ecuadorans (8%) and one in three Costa Ricans (21%) did.

The optimism in Chile and Bolivia in 2006 may have been fueled in part by the election of new presidents in 2006. Both countries were surveyed in March, when Chile's first female president, Michelle Bachelet, took office, and when Bolivia's first indigenous president, Evo Morales, was completing his third month in power.

Chilean optimism, however, is not new. Residents of the country, which boasts one of South America's most dynamic economies, were also mostly upbeat in April 2005 (72% said they were on the right path) and in May 2004 (74%). Bolivians, on the other hand, changed in one year from being among the most pessimistic of Latin Americans (in April 2005, only 18 percent believed their country was on the right path) to one of the most hopeful. Bolivia is South America's poorest country and has historically been among the least stable. Morales's electoral victory came after his two predecessors were forced from power amid mass demonstrations, spurred in large part by the Aymara Indian leader himself.

Do you feel that your country is headed...



Barometro Iberoamericano, Spring 2006.

Venezuela, whose economy has been buoyed by high oil prices, was Latin America's third most optimistic country in the spring of 2006 with 66 percent saying it was headed in the right direction, according to the poll.

The two least hopeful countries—Ecuador and Costa Rica—have both been rocked by political unrest and scandal in recent years. Over the past decade, four Ecuadoran presidents have been forced out of office before completing their terms amid allegations of incompetence and corruption. Moreover, despite being South America's second-largest exporter of crude oil to the United States, the country is burdened with a large foreign debt and an overwhelmingly poor population. Not surprisingly, the percentage of Ecuadorans believing the country was headed in the right direction declined from 17 percent in May 2004 to 11 percent in August 2005 to 8 percent in March 2006.

Costa Rica boasts a relatively robust economy and one of Latin America's oldest and most stable democracies. But in 2005 the country endured bitter battles over the ratification of the Central American Free Trade Agreement, which was vehemently opposed by Costa Rica's powerful labor movement. And in 2004, an investigation into political corruption implicated three ex-presidents. Over the past two years, the proportion of Costa Ricans saying their country was headed in the right direction has dropped from a third (32%) in May 2004 to a fourth (24%) in April 2005 to a fifth (21%) in March 2006.

On the issue of globalization, Chileans were again the Latin Americans most likely to register optimism. Eight out of ten Chileans said globalization had had "a positive impact" on their country, followed by Dominicans (78% positive impact), Brazilians (72%), Guatemalans (64%), Peruvians (61%), Colombians (56%) and Venezuelans (54%). Costa Ricans (52% positive impact) and Panamanians (47%) were divided on the question while Mexicans (43%), Ecuadorans (40%), and Bolivians (38%) tended not to view globalization as positive. Argentines were the least likely to see globalization as good for their country: less than a third (30%) said it had had a positive impact.

Other findings of the 2006 IberoBarómetro include:

- Less than half of those surveyed (43%) on average said that the proposal to create a Free Trade Area of the Americas would benefit their country. Chileans (75%), Guatemalans (57%) were the most likely to see this as beneficial while Costa Ricans (53%), Dominicans (51%), Peruvians (49%), Panamanians (49%), Mexicans (49%) and Colombians (45%) were divided. Generally unenthusiastic were Bolivians (40% in favor), Brazilians (37%) Venezuelans (35%), Ecuadorans (35%) and Argentines (13%).

- Argentines were by far the Latin Americans least likely to have a positive image of the United States (8% positive), followed by Venezuelans (26%), Brazilians (28%) and Bolivians (29%). Most likely to view the U.S. positively are Panamanians (56%), Chileans (51%), Costa Ricans (50%) and Colombians (49%).
- Asked to measure their empathy for Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez on a scale of 0 to 100, the countries surveyed on average gave him a 41. Ecuadorans gave him an 80, higher than Venezuelans themselves who gave their president a 69. Mexicans and Costa Ricans were the least enthusiastic about Chávez, with both giving him a 23.
- Cuban President Fidel Castro and U.S. President George Bush got the lowest average scores among the nine leaders rated. The Cuban communist received on average a rating of 35, with Ecuador the most favorable (67) followed by Argentina (46). Costa Rica (18) and Panama (22) gave Castro the lowest ratings. The two countries that liked Castro least liked Bush most. The U.S. president got a score of 51 in Panama and 45 in Costa Rica. He got his most negative scores in Argentina (8) and Venezuela (17). On average the countries surveyed gave Bush a score of 32.
- Chilean President Michelle Bachelet got the highest average rating of the leaders surveyed with a score of 53. She was most popular among fellow Chileans (86) Ecuadorans (69) and Argentines (59), least among Venezuelans (33) Dominicans (31) and Guatemalans (23). The other leaders rated were Brazilian President Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva (average score of 50), Mexican President Vicente Fox (47), Argentine President Nestor Kirchner (46), Colombian President Álvaro Uribe (45) and Bolivian President Evo Morales (41).