



# Problems of Political Tolerance in the Americas

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Political and social tolerance, as measured in the AmericasBarometer Survey, provides an index of the degree to which citizens are more (or less) willing to accept and respect the political rights and civil liberties of minorities or those whom they may disagree with. We measure political tolerance as the belief that critics of the political system should have core political liberties, such as the right to vote and run for office. Most analysts agree that democracy as a form of government is more likely to persist in an environment where the proportion of intolerant citizens is low.

**Figure 1.**  
Political Tolerance  
by Country, 2006/07

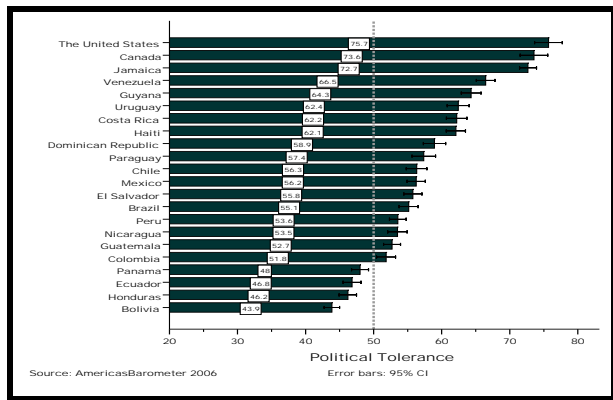
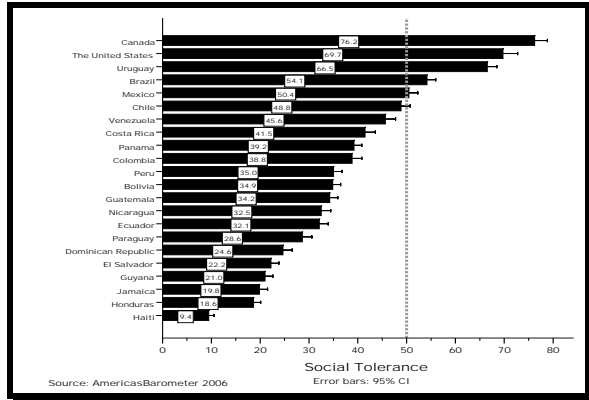


Figure 1 shows that on a scale from 0 to 100 the average level of political tolerance is far higher in the United States, Canada, and Jamaica than it is in any of the Spanish or French-speaking countries included in the 2006/07 AmericasBarometer Survey conducted by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) at Vanderbilt University. At the same time, other countries in the sample enjoy relatively high levels of political tolerance such as Costa Rica and Venezuela that like the United States and Canada have long standing democratic traditions compared to other Latin American and Caribbean cases in the sample. In contrast, Panama, Ecuador, Honduras, and Bolivia demonstrate the lowest levels of political tolerance in the sample—all below the mid-point of 50 on a scale of 0 to 100. These results suggest that countries that are stable democracies may owe part of that democratic stability to their higher levels of political tolerance. However, these results also suggest that even though established democracies enjoy higher levels of political tolerance, they are far from achieving universal agreement on tolerance.

## Relationship between Political and Social Tolerance

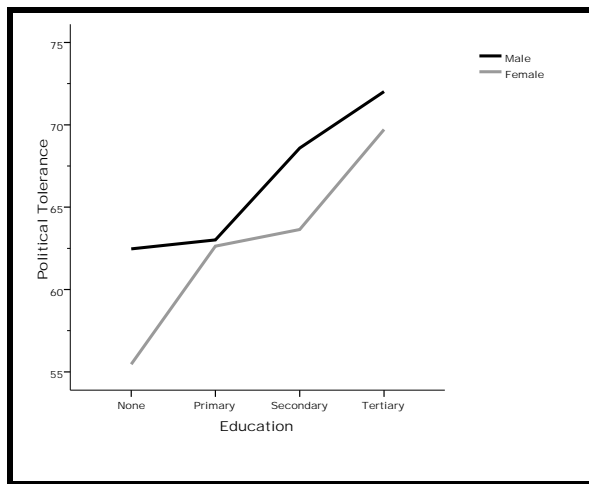
Social tolerance is measured by the AmericasBarometer Survey as support for the political rights of homosexuals. As shown in figure 2, the contrast between higher levels of political tolerance and lower levels of social tolerance is evident. Figure 2 shows that while certain countries demonstrate relatively high levels of social tolerance (e.g., Panama, Colombia, and Bolivia), they are far from achieving the same levels as political tolerance, and even then, both types of tolerance remain distant from being at the positive end of the continuum. Similarly, the figure shows a striking contrast between North America, Latin America and the Caribbean. Canada and the United States have, on average, the highest social tolerance levels, with 76 and 70 points respectively on the 0 to 100 scale, while Haiti is the country with the lowest levels of social tolerance.

**Figure 2.**  
Social Tolerance  
by country, 2006/07



At the same time, Uruguay and Brazil (i.e., 67, 54 respectively) show relatively high levels of social tolerance compared to other countries in the region. The majority of countries have levels of social tolerance lower than the mid-point of 50 points on a scale from 0 to 100, while only four countries studied in the survey had political tolerance scores below the same mark. What explains the differences in political and social tolerance across countries?

**Figure 3.**  
Political Tolerance  
by Sex and Education, 2006/07



## Tolerance and Education

The most important finding that explains the higher levels of political and social tolerance across countries is education: higher levels of education lead to higher levels of tolerance. Figures 3 and 4 show differences in levels of political and social tolerance by sex, demonstrating that higher levels of education strongly translate into high levels of tolerance; therefore, since tolerance is an important goal of democratization, increases in the quantity and quality of their educational systems ought to translate into higher tolerance, which in turn will help to ensure that the rights of minorities remain secure.

**Figure 4.**  
Social Tolerance  
by Sex and Education, 2006/07

