Citizens' Evaluations of Bureaucratic Corruption in Paraguay

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Theoretical Framework

In an oft-cited statement, Huntington (1968: 386) claimed that "in terms of economic growth, the only thing worse than a society with a rigid, over-centralized, dishonest bureaucracy is one with a rigid, overcentralized, honest bureaucracy." This claim has been widely discredited at the macro level as several studies have shown that there is a clear link between corruption, slow growth, and underdevelopment (Fisman and Miguel 2008, Gupta, Davoodi, and Alonso-Terme 2002, Gyimah-Brempong 2002). However, we know much less about how individuals perceive and evaluate 'petty corruption' in the bureaucracy. Regardless of its impact on economic growth and development, individuals might still tolerate bureaucratic corruption if it allows them to overcome barriers to access quality public services. In contexts where the bureaucracy is slow and inefficient, do citizens sometimes prefer (or at least tolerate) corruption in the delivery of public services? Are some forms of bureaucratic corruption more likely to be tolerated by citizens?

Our study builds on a large and growing literature on citizens' evaluations of corruption in Latin America and beyond. Most of this literature has focused on analyzing whether corrupt political leaders are held accountable at the polls. Several studies demonstrate that Latin American voters disapprove of 'grand corruption' in the political arena and strongly punish individual politicians involved in malfeasance (Chong et al. 2015, Vera 2020, Weitz-Shapiro and Winters 2017, Winters and Weitz-Shapiro 2013). There appears to be a strong societal norm against corruption in Latin America even in contexts where political leaders are not sanctioned at the polls (Boas, Hidalgo, and Melo 2019). Our research project seeks to expand on this literature by investigating citizens' evaluations of petty corruption in bureaucratic services. This is a form of corruption that citizens experience directly in their everyday life as they interact with state agencies and public servants. Yet, it is unclear how citizens evaluate 'petty corruption.'

In order to explore this question, we build on the typology of corruption developed by Ang (2020). This typology distinguishes between two types of corruption in the bureaucracy: 'petty theft' and 'speed money.' Petty theft refers to "acts of stealing, misuse of public funds, or extortion among street-level bureaucrats" (Ang 2020: 2). Speed money refers to "petty bribes that businesses or citizens pay to bureaucrats to get around hurdles or speed things up" (Ang 2020: 2).

Our key argument is that citizens react differently to these two types of bureaucratic corruption. We expect that citizens always evaluate 'petty theft' (e.g., stealing from the coffers of a state agency to take a vacation) very negatively. This form of corruption is a clear violation of public trust and presents no benefit whatsoever to citizens who rely on the public bureaucracy. Citizens should therefore strongly disapprove of 'petty theft' in the bureaucracy.

On the other hand, 'speed money' corruption (e.g., asking for a small bribe to speed up the obtention of a document) might be tolerated in contexts where bureaucracies are perceived as slow and inefficient. When citizens are burdened by long delays and excessive regulations in the

delivery of services, they might come to accept the payment of bribes to public servants as necessary to speed up access to essential services.

Not only that, citizens might also react negatively to conscientious and honest public servants who reject bribes because they take away the only available option to expedite bureaucratic processes. In contexts of generalized corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency, there might be a high-corruption equilibrium in the bureaucracy (Collier 2000). Citizens know that they can speed up the delivery of services by paying bribes. It is unclear whether citizens would prefer more honest public servants that would remove that possibility.

Our theoretical expectations build on previous experimental research on evaluations of corrupt politicians that has demonstrated that citizens are much more tolerant of corruption when they expect to obtain something in exchange, such as clientelistic goods or welfare benefits (Botero et al. 2019, Fernández-Vázquez, Barberá, and Rivero 2016, Weschle 2016). In a similar vein, corruption tends to have a stronger negative effect on presidential approval during bad economic times (Carlin, Love, and Martínez-Gallardo 2015, Zechmeister and Zizumbo-Colunga 2013).

While the lower sanctions for corrupt politicians when economic conditions are good may constitute an "implicit exchange" (Rundquist, Strom, and Peters 1977), the higher tolerance for speed money corruption in the bureaucracy is more explicit in nature as citizens can immediately grasp what they receive in exchange for the bribe they pay.

Our analysis distinguishes between two sets of outcomes: "normative" and "strategic." In a recent study of corruption in Brazil, Boas et al. (2019) demonstrate that there is a divergence between strong anti-corruption norms and continuing electoral support for corrupt mayors who deliver in terms of health services and job creation. In the same vein, we expect Paraguayan citizens reject all forms of bureaucratic corruption at a normative level, but strategically tolerate "speed money" corruption that facilitates access to essential services.

The theoretical expectation regarding our "normative" outcomes is that citizens will reject both types of corruption *regardless of their perceptions of bureaucratic inefficiency*. This across-the-board rejection (or intolerance) is predicated upon the well-known fact that citizens hold a strong social norm against corruption in principle, which includes all types of corruption. In fact, LAPOP data indicates that 83% of respondents in Paraguay perceive that corruption is never justified. Both "speed money" and "petty theft" corruption should decrease the likelihood that citizens will find civil servants suitable for a promotion or for attending an international conference representing Paraguay (i.e., our normative outcomes).

We have different expectations regarding the "strategic" outcomes. In fact, we expect that Paraguayan citizens are strategic and prefer to be assisted by a "speed money" corruption official (over an honest one) when they have higher perceptions of bureaucratic inefficiency. In particular, participants might become more tolerant of "speed money" but not "petty theft" when asked about which official they would prefer to see at the Civil Registry or which official would be more likely to help them obtain a certificate in a timely manner (i.e., our strategic outcomes). This discussion yields the following hypotheses:

H1: Citizens reject "petty theft" corruption more strongly than "speed money" corruption, but the gap in rejection between these two forms of corruption should be larger (smaller) when citizens are asked to evaluate strategic (normative) outcomes.

H2: Higher perceptions of bureaucratic inefficiency will not affect tolerance for "speed money" or "petty theft" corruption when citizens are asked to evaluate normative outcomes.

H3: Higher perceptions of bureaucratic inefficiency will lead to higher tolerance for "speed money" but not for "petty theft" corruption when citizens are asked to evaluate strategic outcomes.

The Case of Paraguay

In order to address our research questions and hypotheses, we plan to conduct a conjoint experiment in Paraguay. This South American country provides an ideal context to study attitudes towards petty corruption in a dysfunctional bureaucracy. As can be observed in Figure 1 below, Paraguay has one of the highest levels of corruption victimization in Latin America according to data from the latest wave of the AmericasBarometer. Corruption victimization refers here to being asked to pay a bribe by a government employee in the last 12 months. The percentage of people who report they have been asked to pay a bribe in the last 12 months is 28.3% in Paraguay. The level of corruption in the public administration is twice the level observed in Colombia, and more than four times the corruption victimization reported by citizens in Chile or Uruguay.

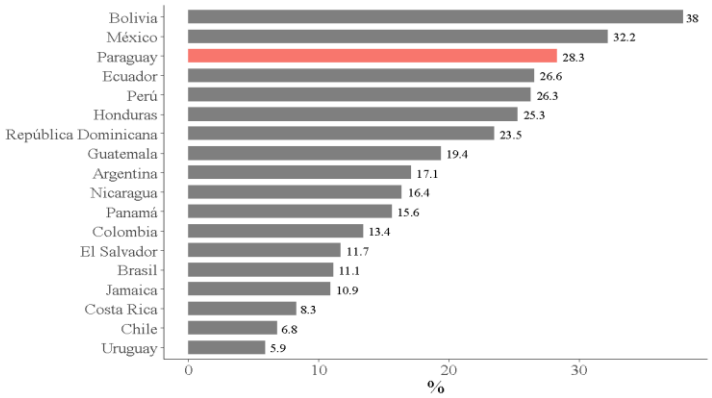


Figure 1. Corruption victimization in Latin America

Source: AmericasBarometer, 2018-2019.

In particular, citizens report high corruption victimization in their dealings with local government employees, the judicial system, and the bureaucratic agency in charge of producing identity cards and passports (*departamento de identificaciones*).[1] Corruption is also widespread in the public health and public education systems. In sum, it is common for Paraguayan citizens

[1] 19% of Paraguayans who processed a document in this agency report they had to pay a bribe to obtain the document or to speed up the service (Transparencia Internacional, 2017).

to pay bribes to process documents faster or to have access to public services, as can be observed in Table 1.

Table 1. Petty corruption in Paraguay, by type of service/agency

Service/Agency	% who report the payment of a bribe in their dealings with the public sector	Regional Ranking
Local government	17.2%	8th
Courts	16.5%	3rd
Police	15.4%	5th
Schools	11.8%	3rd
Health centers	8.3%	4th
Government employee	8.1%	4th

Source: AmericasBarometer, 2018-2019

Paraguay is also an ideal case to conduct this analysis because its bureacracy is politicized, slow, and ineffective. Civil servants at the national or local levels are often cronies recruited based on political criteria (i.e. suppoting the governing party), rather on their merits. Low wages and the lack of meritocracy in recruitment and career advancement generate the wrong incentive structures. Echebarría (2006) describes the bureaucracy in Paraguay as having both low capacity and low autonomy (from political actors). This characterization is corroborated with data from the World Governance Indicators. One of the six composite measures of the WGI is government effectiveness, which captures "perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures." This measure ranges from -2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong) governance performance. As can be observed in Figure 2, Paraguay received a score of -0.55 in 2019 and has one of the most ineffective public sectors in South America (the average for the region is -0.18).

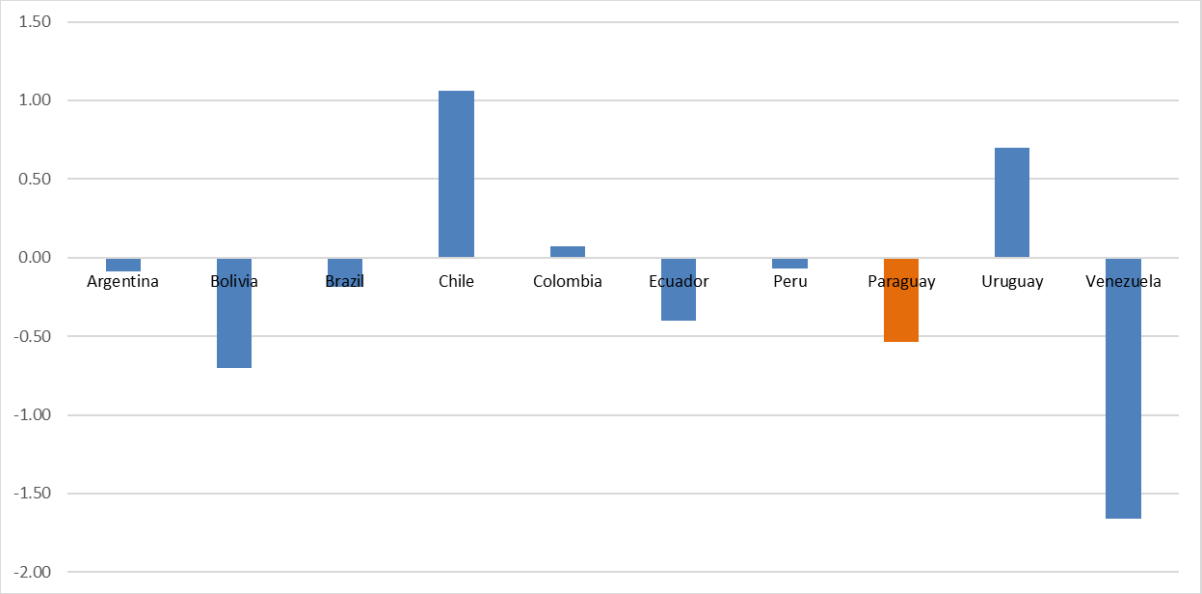


Figure 2. Government effectiveness in South American countries
Source: World Governance Indicators, 2019.

In sum, Paraguay is a country where the bureaucracy is slow and inefficient and where corruption in the public sector is rampant. It is an ideal setting to conduct our conjoint experiment to assess whether citizens are willing to accept forms of petty corruption that accelerate access to public services or the processing of essential documents.

Survey design

We will rely on a high-quality service provider with an expansive panel in Paraguay (Offerwise) from which a non-probability sample will be drawn. Offerwise will draw participants from their panel to match a set of known targets, in order to generate a sample that resembles a nationally representative sample. The selection of panelists will be based on socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, education, and income.

The provider will conduct the recruitment process by contacting subjects in their active pool of panelists. Offerwise's main recruitment channel consists of invitational ads on social networks. Respondents are rewarded with points, an Offerwise-owned currency that can be traded for local currency. The resulting sample will be later post-stratified on a number of characteristics to better approximate the census population.

We will implement a questionnaire divided in two parts. First, we will ask basic demographic and socioeconomic questions. A key question in this section is the one attempting to capture perceptions of bureaucratic efficiency. As a reminder, we hold that citizens that perceive that public services are slow and inefficient will be more likely to tolerate the use of speed corruption. That question has the following structure: How do you evaluate the work of the Civil Registry processing documents? 1) Very inefficient, 2) somewhat inefficient, 3) neither efficient nor inefficient, 4) somewhat efficient, and 5) very efficient.

In a second part, we will use a choice-based conjoint design to capture the outcomes and examine how citizens evaluate corruption in the public sector. Conjoint analyses have been used for assessing citizens' preferences about candidates, migrants, and public officials (Hainmueller et al. 2014, Lupu and Carnes 2015, Oliveros and Shuster 2018). Choice-based designs contribute to reducing social desirability bias since respondents evaluate profiles with multiple attributes. As a result, it is not possible to identify which profiles' characteristics explain participants' final assessments (Wallander 2009, Hainmueller et al. 2013). Additionally, conjoint experiments have shown to have high external validity when comparing their results with behavioral benchmarks (Hainmueller et al. 2015), and these designs have been used in both developed and developing countries (Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth 2018, Mares and Visconti 2020, Hanretty et al. 2020).

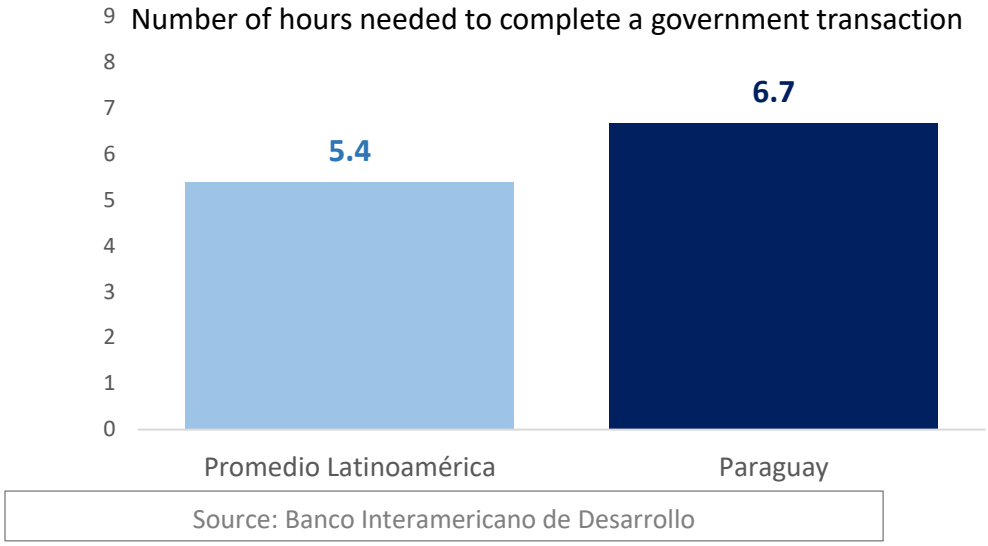
Participants in our survey will be asked to evaluate different pairs of public officials who varied across a variety of attributes—such as partisanship, gender, age, education—in addition to corruption in public services. Table 2 provides the full list of attributes to be used to generate hypothetical public employees.

Table 2. List of public officials' attributes

Attributes	**Values**
Speed Corruption	Has NOT received bribes to speed up the processing of documents. Has received bribes to speed up the processing of documents.
Theft Corruption	Has NOT diverted public funds to his/her bank account. Has diverted public funds to his/her bank account.
Gender	Man Woman
Party ID	Partido Colorado Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico No party affiliation
Age	30 years old 40 years old 50 years old
Education	Primary education Secondary education College education

Using the question about perceptions of inefficiency comes with some shortcoming since the answer to that question can correlate with multiple factors such as income, education or partisanship. As a result, just before introducing the conjoint experiment, we will randomly prime

participants about the international evaluation of the bureaucracy in Paraguay. The control group will not be exposed to any prime, and the treatment group will be exposed to the following sentence and figure: "*According to multiple international reports, the Paraguayan bureaucracy has been characterized as slow and inefficient, occupying one of the last places in the region*."



After seeing the stimulus, participants will read the following introduction:

[Treatment/Control] We will present information that includes profiles of two hypothetical public officials who work in the Civil Registry processing documents such as birth, marriage, divorce, and death certificates. We will ask you questions about these two public employees. We will repeat this exercise five times.

In Table 3, we present an example of two randomly generated public employees profiles included in our survey.

Table 3. Example pair of public employees

Public employee 1	**Public employee 2**
Has NOT received bribes to speed up the processing of documents	Has received bribes to speed up the processing of documents
Has NOT diverted public funds to his/her bank account	Has NOT diverted public funds to his/her bank account
Woman	Woman
30 years old	50 years old
Primary education	College education
Colorado Party	No party affiliation

After evaluating the two profiles, each respondent will be asked to evaluate the public officials along two key dimensions. The first is a normative evaluation about who should be promoted. Meanwhile, the second is a strategic evaluation about who is more going to help citizens. The order of these questions will be randomized across participants. The questions are the following:

Normative outcomes: Which of these public officials should be promoted to a higher position in the Civil Registry? Which of these public officials should represent Paraguay in an international conference of public officials?

Strategic outcomes: Which of these public officials do you prefer to see you when you visit the Civil Registry? Which of these public officials is most likely to help you obtain a certificate in less time?

Analysis

We will use three equations to test the main hypotheses. The first equation corresponds to regressing the binary outcome on public officials' attributes only for the control group. We will directly compare b1 and b2 to test hypothesis 1.

$$Y = a + b1Speed\ Corruption + b2Theft\ Corruption + b3Gender + b4Partisanship + b5Age + b6Education + e \quad \text{(Equation 1)}$$

The second equation uses an interaction between the candidates' attributes (conjoint experiment) and perceptions of bureaucratic inefficiency only in the control group. Regarding the variable perceptions of inefficiency, we will use a binary version in the main manuscript for power concerns and to avoid removing missing values,[2] we will report results using the continuous in the appendix. The latter will allow us to not remove missing values where 1: perceptions of inefficiency and 0: otherwise. We will use d1 and d2 to test hypotheses 2a and 4a.

$$Y = a + b1Speed\ Corruption + b2Theft\ Corruption + b3Gender + b4Partisanship + b5Age + b6Education + gPerceptions + d1SpeedCorruption*Perceptions + d2Theft\ Corruption*Perceptions + d3Gender*Perceptions + d4Partisanship*Perceptions + d5Age*Perceptions + d6Education*Perceptions + e \quad \text{(Equation 2)}$$

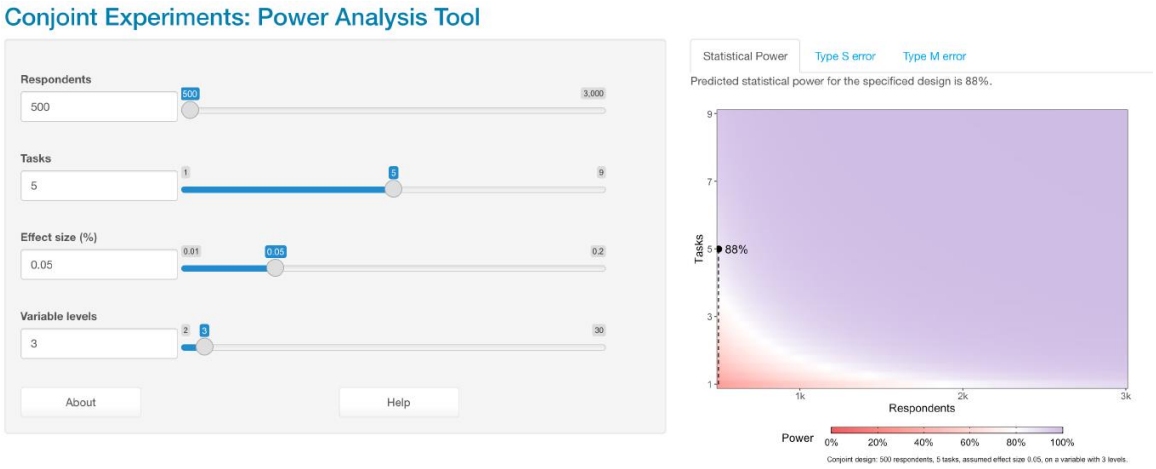
The third approach is also based on an interaction but with the treatment indicator and for all the units. We will also use d1 and d2 to test hypotheses 2 and 3.

$$Y = a + b1Speed\ Corruption + b2Theft\ Corruption + b3Gender + b4Partisanship + b5Age + b6Education + gTreatment + d1SpeedCorruption*\ Treatment + d2Theft\ Corruption*\ Treatment + d3Gender*\ Treatment + d4Partisanship\ *\ Treatment + d5Age*\ Treatment + d6Education*\ Treatment + e \quad \text{(Equation 3)}$$

[2] 1: Somewhat efficient or very efficient, 0: otherwise.

Regarding the power analysis, we use Schuessler and Freitag (2020) to implement a power analysis for conjoint experiments. In the case of equation 1, we would need less than 500 participants when using five tasks per persons, expecting an effect size of five percentage points, and three levels of the attribute with the highest number of levels (i.e., power of 0.88). Regarding the interactions, following Schuessler and Freitag (2020), we need to multiple the sample size by the number of levels of the other variable. Both the perceptions and the treatment are binary indicators. In the case of equation 2, where we only use the control group, we are aiming to less than 1,000 participants. In the case of equation 3, we are aiming to double the size of the control group. As a result, our goal is to try to have a sample close to 2,000 respondents.

Figure 3. Power analysis



Questionnaire

o. Information provided by Offerwise

o1. What is your age?

_____

o2. ¿What is your gender?

1. Male
2. Female

o3. What is your total monthly household income before taxes? Note that this includes your income from employment and all other sources, as well as any other income that comes from your spouse, partner, or any other family member living with you.

1. Less than ₲ 1.500.000
2. Between ₲ 1.500.001 and ₲ 2.000.000
3. Between ₲ 2.000.001 and ₲ 3.000.000
4. Between ₲ 3.000.001 and ₲ 4.000.000
5. Between ₲ 4.000.001 and ₲ 5.000.000
6. Between ₲ 5.000.001 and ₲ 6.000.000
7. Between ₲ 6.000.001 and ₲ 8.000.000
8. Between ₲ 8.000.001 and ₲ 10.000.000
9. Between ₲ 10.000.001 and ₲ 15.000.000
10. More than ₲ 15.000.000

[NOTE TO PROGRAMMER: Add region, state, and city].

a. Socioeconomic, demographic, and political questions

a1. In which department of Paraguay do you live?

1. Alto Paraguay
2. Alto Paraná
3. Amambay
4. Asunción (city)
5. Boquerón
6. Caaguazú
7. Caazapá
8. Canindeyú
9. Central
10. Concepción
11. Cordillera
12. Guairá
13. Itapúa
14. Misiones
15. Neembucú
16. Paraguarí
17. Presidente Hayes
18. San Pedro

a2. What is your total monthly household income before taxes? Note that this includes your income from employment and all other sources, as well as any other income that comes from your spouse, partner, or any other family member living with you.

1. No income

2. Less than 210.000
3. From 210.000 to 410.000
4. From 410.001 to 590.000
5. From 590.001 to 850.000
6. From 850.001 to 1.125.000
7. From 1.125.001 to 1.400.000
8. From 1.400.001 to 1.725.000
9. From 1.725.001 to 1.975.000
10. From 1.975.001 to 2.210.000
11. From 2.210.001 to 2.415.000
12. From 2.415.001 to 2.665.000
13. From 2.665.001 to 2.680.000
14. From 2.680.001 to 2.695.000
15. From 2.695.001 to 4.660.000
16. From 4.660.001 to 8.000.000
17. More than 8.000.000
88. DK
89. NA

a3. What is the highest education level you completed?

1. 0 years: None
2. 1 año: 1st grade
3. 2 years: 2nd grade
4. 3 years: 3rd grade
5. 4 years: 4th grade
6. 5 years: 5th grade
7. 6 years: 6th grade
8. 7 years: 1st curso
9. 8 years: 2nd curso
10. 9 years: 3rd curso
11. 10 years: 4th curso
12. 11 years: 5th curso
13. 12 years: 6th curso
14. 13 years: 1st year of superior or university education
15. 14 years: 2nd year of superior or university education
16. 15 years: 3rd year of superior or university education
17. 16 years: 4th year of superior or university education
18. 17 years: 5th year of superior or university education
19. 18 years or more: 6to year of superior or university education
88. DK
89. NA

a4. What language do you speak at home most of the time?

1. Guarani

2. Guarani and Castellano
3. Castellano
4. Another language _____
88. DK
89. NA

a5. Do you think that the country's current economic situation is better than, the same as or worse than it was 12 months ago?

1. Better
2. Same
3. Worse
88. DK
89. NA

a6. Now, to change the subject.... The following scale goes from liberal to conservative. One means liberal and 10 means conservative. Nowadays, when we speak of political leanings, we talk of liberals and conservatives. In other words, some people sympathize more with the liberals and others with the conservatives. According to the meaning that the terms "liberals" and "conservatives" have for you, and thinking of your own political leanings, where would you place yourself on this scale?

1									10
Liberal									Conservative

a7. Do you believe that in our society someone who accepts a bribe or kickback in the performance of their duties may be: always justified, never justified, or something in between?

1									10
Always justified									Never justified

a8. Speaking in general of the current administration, how would you rate the job performance of Mario Abdo Benítez?

1. Very good
2. Good
3. Fair
4. Poor
5. Very poor
88. DK
89. NA

a9. Taking into account your own experience or what you have heard, corruption among public officials is…

1. Very common
2. Common
3. Uncommon
4. Very uncommon
88. DK
89. NA

a10. Thinking about this city/area where you live, are you very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the condition of the streets, roads, and highways?

1. Very satisfied
2. Satisfied
3. Dissatisfied
4. Very dissatisfied
88. DK
89. NA

a11. And the quality of public medical and health services? Are you…

1. Very satisfied
2. Satisfied
3. Dissatisfied
4. Very dissatisfied
88. DK
89. NA

a12. How do you evaluate the work of the Civil Registry processing documents?

1. Very inefficient
2. Somewhat inefficient
3. Neither efficient nor inefficient
4. Somewhat efficient
5. Very efficient
88. DK
89. NA

a13. Suppose you need to do a procedure in the Civil Registry and you go to one of the service centers. How long do you think the Civil Registry would take to process your request?

1. Less than 30 minutes
2. More than 30 minutes and up to 1 hour
3. More than 1 hour and up to 3 hours
4. More than 3 hours and up to 1 day
5. More than 1 day
88. DK

89. NA

a14. ¿Do you currently identify with a political party?

1. Yes
2. No [skip to conjoint]

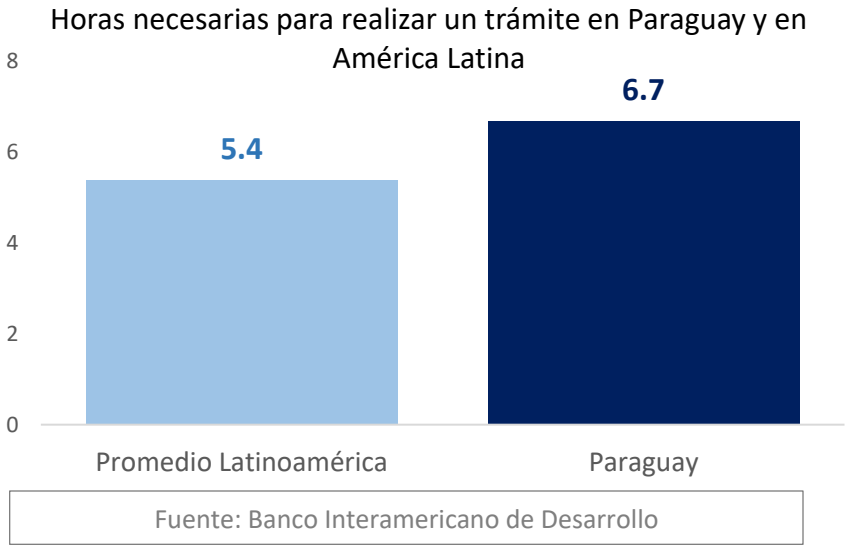
a15. Which political party do you identify with?

1. ANR - Partido Colorado
2. PLRA - Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico
3. Partido Patria Querida
4. Frente Guasú
5. Partido Encuentro Nacional
6. Partido Hagamos
7. Movimiento Cruzada Nacional
8. Partido Democrático Progresista
9. UNACE - Unión Nacional de Ciudadanos Éticos
10. Otro _____
88. DK
99. NA

b. conjoint

Randomization just before presenting the conjoint.

Treatment: *According to multiple international reports, the Paraguayan bureaucracy has been characterized as slow and inefficient, occupying one of the last places in the region.*



Control: None

[Treatment/Control]. We will present information that includes profiles of two hypothetical public officials who work in the Civil Registry processing documents such as birth, marriage, divorce, and death certificates. We will ask you questions about these two public employees. We will repeat this exercise five times.

PAIR 1

[Order of the questions will be randomized]

b.1) Which of these public officials should be promoted to a higher position in the Civil Registry?

(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

b.2) Which of these public officials should represent Paraguay in an international conference of public officials?

(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

b.3) Which of these public officials do you prefer to see you when you visit the Civil Registry?
(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

b.4) Which of these public officials do you think could help you obtain a certificate in less time?

(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

PAIR 2

[Order of the questions will be randomized]

b.5) Which of these public officials should be promoted to a higher position in the Civil

Registry?

(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

b.6) Which of these public officials should represent Paraguay in an international conference of public officials?

(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

b.7) Which of these public officials do you prefer to see you when you visit the Civil Registry?
(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

b.8) Which of these public officials do you think could help you obtain a certificate in less time?

(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

PAIR 3

[Order of the questions will be randomized]

b.9) Which of these public officials should be promoted to a higher position in the Civil

Registry?

(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

b.10) Which of these public officials should represent Paraguay in an international conference of public officials?

(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

b.11) Which of these public officials do you prefer to see you when you visit the Civil Registry?
(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

b.12) Which of these public officials do you think could help you obtain a certificate in less time?

(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

PAIR 4

[Order of the questions will be randomized]

b.13) Which of these public officials should be promoted to a higher position in the Civil

Registry?

(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

b.14) Which of these public officials should represent Paraguay in an international conference of public officials?

(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

b.15) Which of these public officials do you prefer to see you when you visit the Civil Registry?
(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

b.16) Which of these public officials do you think could help you obtain a certificate in less time?

(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

PAIR 5

[Order of the questions will be randomized]

b.17) Which of these public officials should be promoted to a higher position in the Civil Registry?

(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

b.18) Which of these public officials should represent Paraguay in an international conference of public officials?

(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

b.19) Which of these public officials do you prefer to see you when you visit the Civil Registry?
(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

b.20) Which of these public officials do you think could help you obtain a certificate in less time?

(1) Public employee 1 (2) Public employee 2

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