



Expert Group Meeting

New research on trust and social cohesion – World Social Report 2025.

Session III. Trust and inequality

“Social unrest, trust and inequality: Findings from the Panorama of Social Cohesion in Latin America”



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- 1. Social unrest and social cohesion**
- 2. (Mis)trust in institutions and expectations in LA (2015-2023): findings from the Panorama of social cohesion in LA**
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Challenges and starting point

- **A different and uncertain regional and global context:** pandemic and unprecedented economic crisis with modest recovery; new questionings about globalization and liberal democracy with rising populist leaderships.
- **A polarized and changing regional political context** with no hegemonic/ univocal models; social unrest (2019: Chile, Haiti, Colombia; 2021: Colombia; 2022: Ecuador)
- **Global reference points:** 2030 Agenda for sustainable development as a global commitment with setbacks in its fulfilment
- **New reference points from ECLAC:** a rich reflection on inequality as a structural obstacle for sustainable development and pacific coexistence (**social inequality matrix**; dual social and labour inclusion; **RAISD**)
- A need to **revisit social unrest and social cohesion from a new measurement and policy framework** based in these new reference points.

1. Social unrest and social cohesion

2019 protests in Chile: The trigger was the rise in public transport costs



2019 protests in Haiti: The trigger was a rise in fuel costs



2019-2022 protests in Ecuador: The trigger was the elimination of fuel subsidies



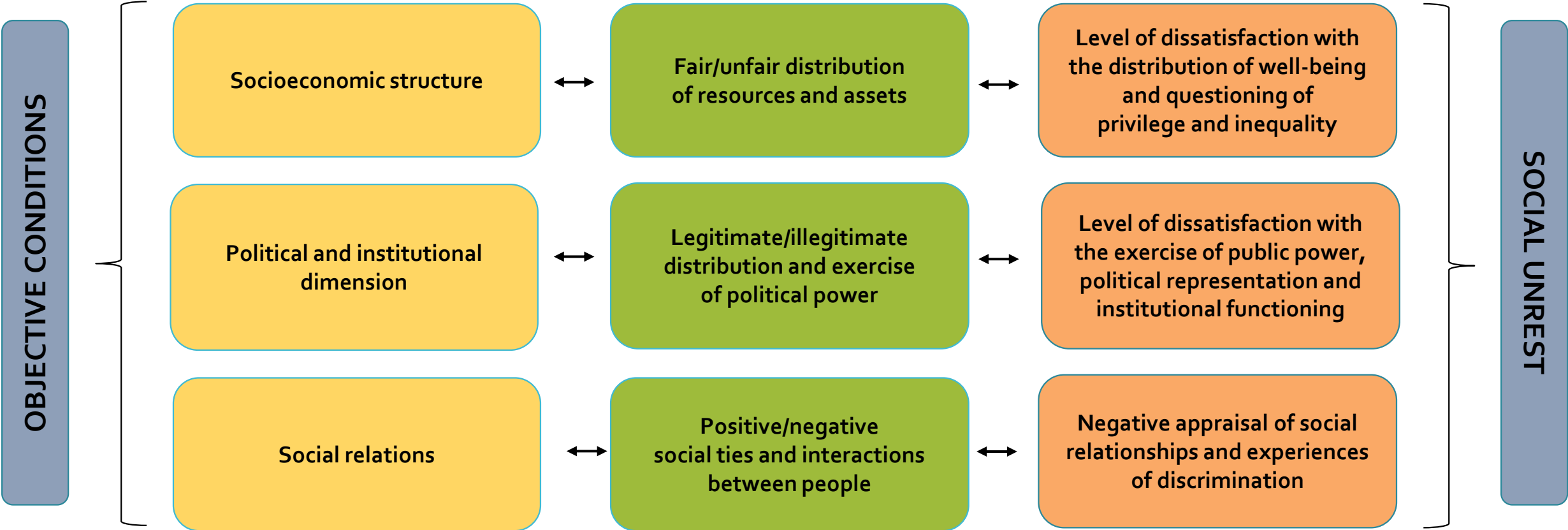
2021 protests in Colombia: The trigger was the proposal of a regressive fiscal reform



What is social unrest?: Definition of the 2020 Social Panorama of Latin America

- Social unrest is linked to a **negative perception of different dimensions of social life**. It can arise from disapproval of various elements of the socioeconomic structure, the political and institutional framework or social relations.
- **It takes the form of dissatisfaction with the distribution of well-being**, the exercise of **public power** and/or **political representation**, **as well as the distrust** towards institutions and individuals, and feelings of insecurity.

Analytical dimensions of social unrest



Social Cohesion: an elusive concept, with multiple approaches

- Since the end of the 19th century, it responds to a concern about **what unites and identifies individuals as part of modern societies** (E. Durkheim)
- CS is usually approached as a **process or as a result** (end or goal).
- It may or may not also be seen as a **continuum** according to one definition, or a **diversity of possible/coexisting models** of social cohesion.
- Given such a diversity of approaches and definitions, it is useful to classify each approach based on **3 recurring criteria**:



Social cohesion as shared values and sense of belonging



Social cohesion as trust associated with commitment and ability to live/work together



Social cohesion as the promotion of well-being and the reduction of gaps

Towards a reformulation of the concept of social cohesion in ECLAC

ECLAC – Social Cohesion 2007

Social cohesion incorporates both structural and subjective dimensions, and can be understood as *the dialectic between instituted mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion, and the responses, perceptions and attitudes of citizens towards the way these mechanisms operate.*

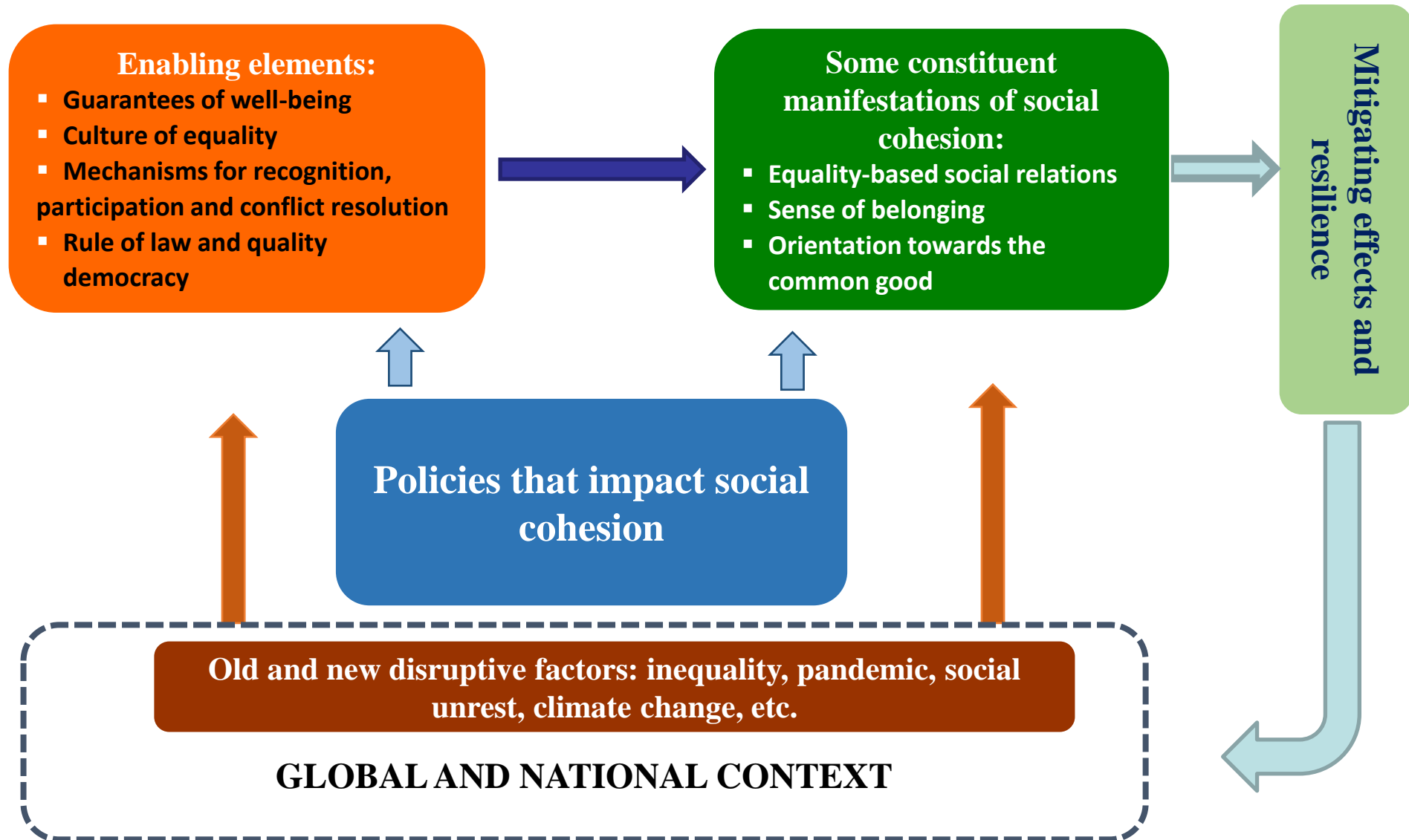
New reference points:

- 2030 Agenda
- Equality as the strategic horizon of development (ECLAC)
- Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development (RAISD)

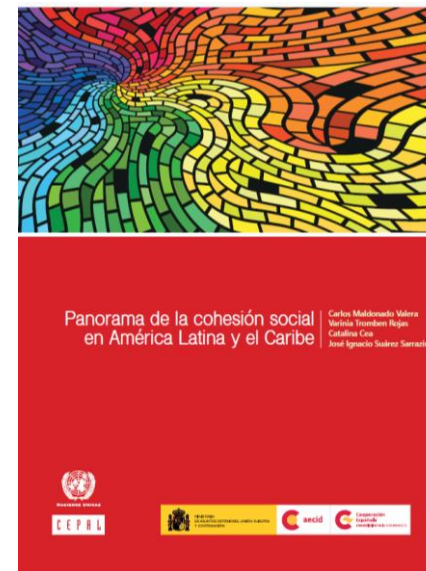
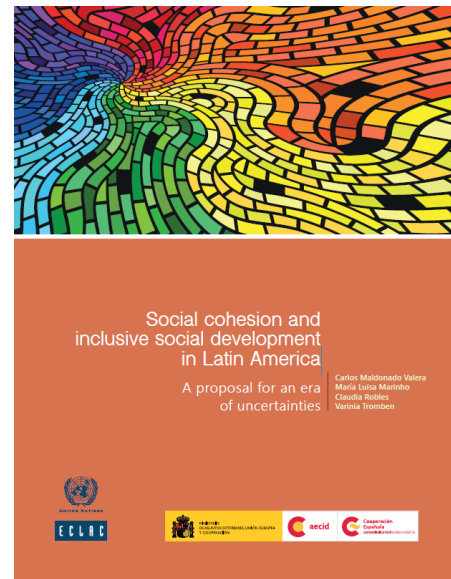
ECLAC – Social Cohesion 2022

Prescriptive approach, focused in equality and democracy:
Social cohesion as *the capacity of a society and its democratic institutions to promote equality-based social relations and to generate on the basis a sense of belonging and an orientation towards the common good in a way that is perceived as legitimate by its members*

Analytical outline of democratic and equality-oriented social cohesion

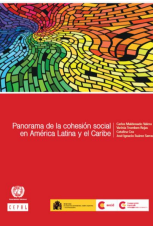


2. Social cohesion panorama: some findings and regional trends



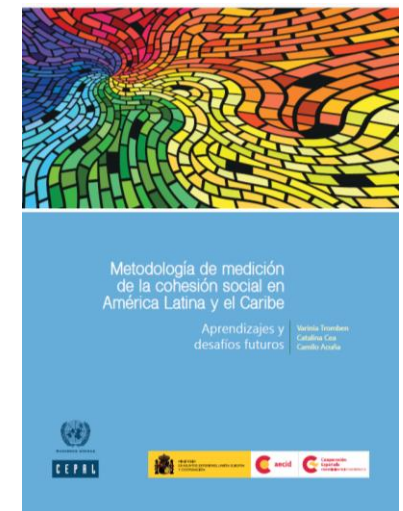
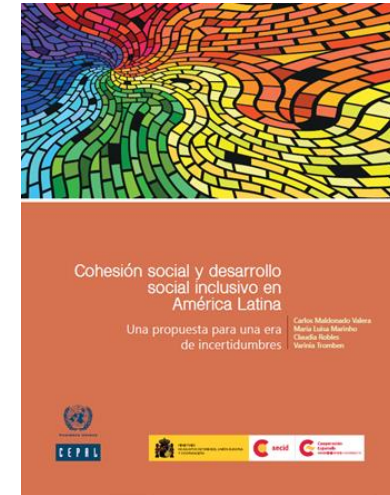
Some regional features and challenges for social cohesion

1. A generalized **aversion** and **dissatisfaction** with high levels of **inequality**
2. A sense of **material and physical vulnerability (violence, crime, gender-based violence)**, as well as **labour precariousness**.
3. Some **institutional progress** in terms of recognition and equality (treaties, legal norms, etc.)
4. A **high and growing distrust, both towards other people and to institutions** (state powers, electoral authorities, armed forces, churches, political parties, etc) and a generalized perception of **corruption** among public officials.
5. Despite a **severe dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy in each country**, democracy is still an **ideal** and the preferred system of government.
6. A **shared expectation** that the **State must take action to reduce inequalities**.

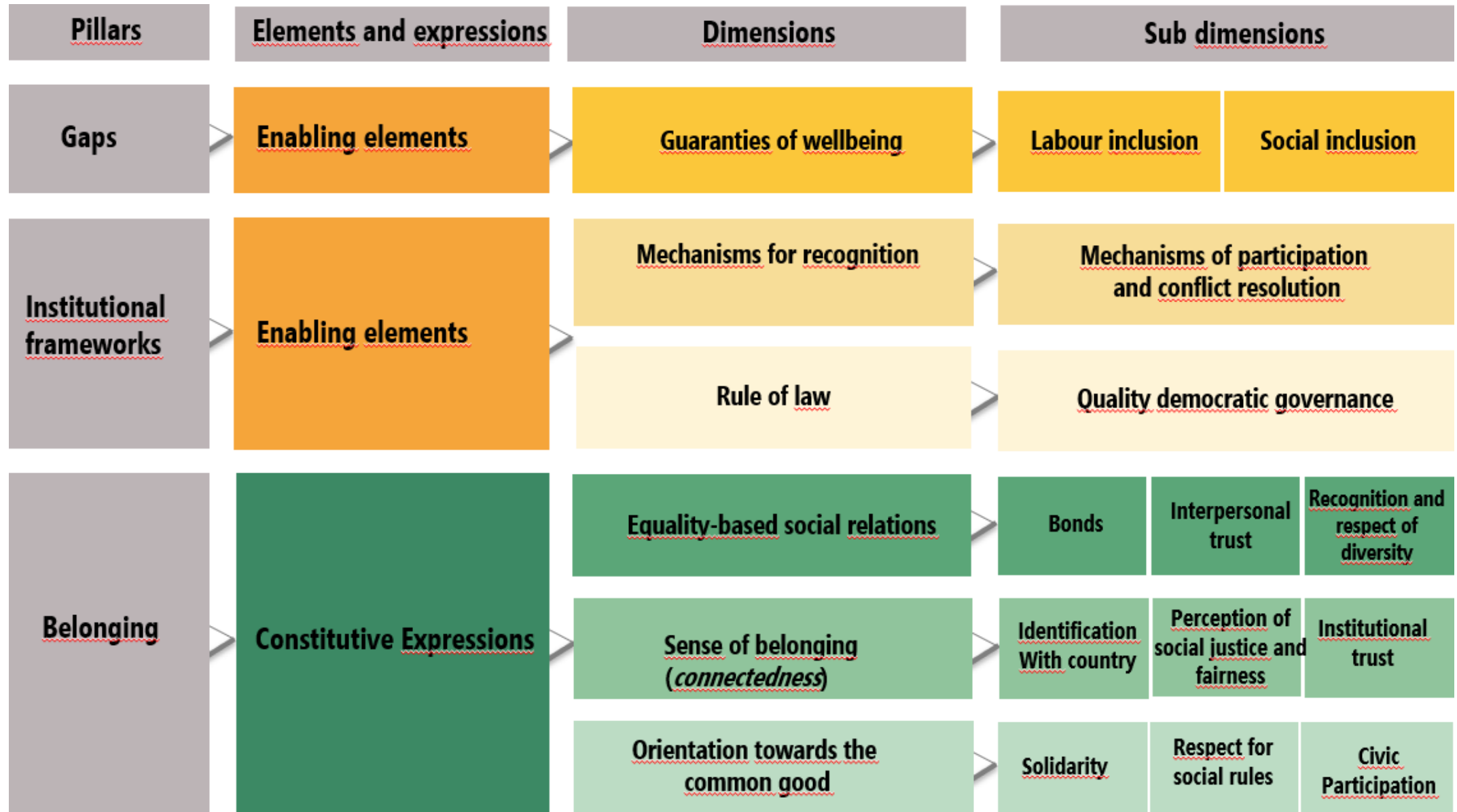


Measurement framework

1. **Three pillars** in congruence with previous ECLAC measurements
2. **Measurement of the constitutive expressions of social cohesion and its enabling elements**
3. Subjective and objective indicators
4. **Dashboard (type “dashboard”)**: allows comparison without ranking and shows directions of change in the different indicators
5. **Traffic light format** to facilitate understanding and analysis of data



Framework for social cohesion framework

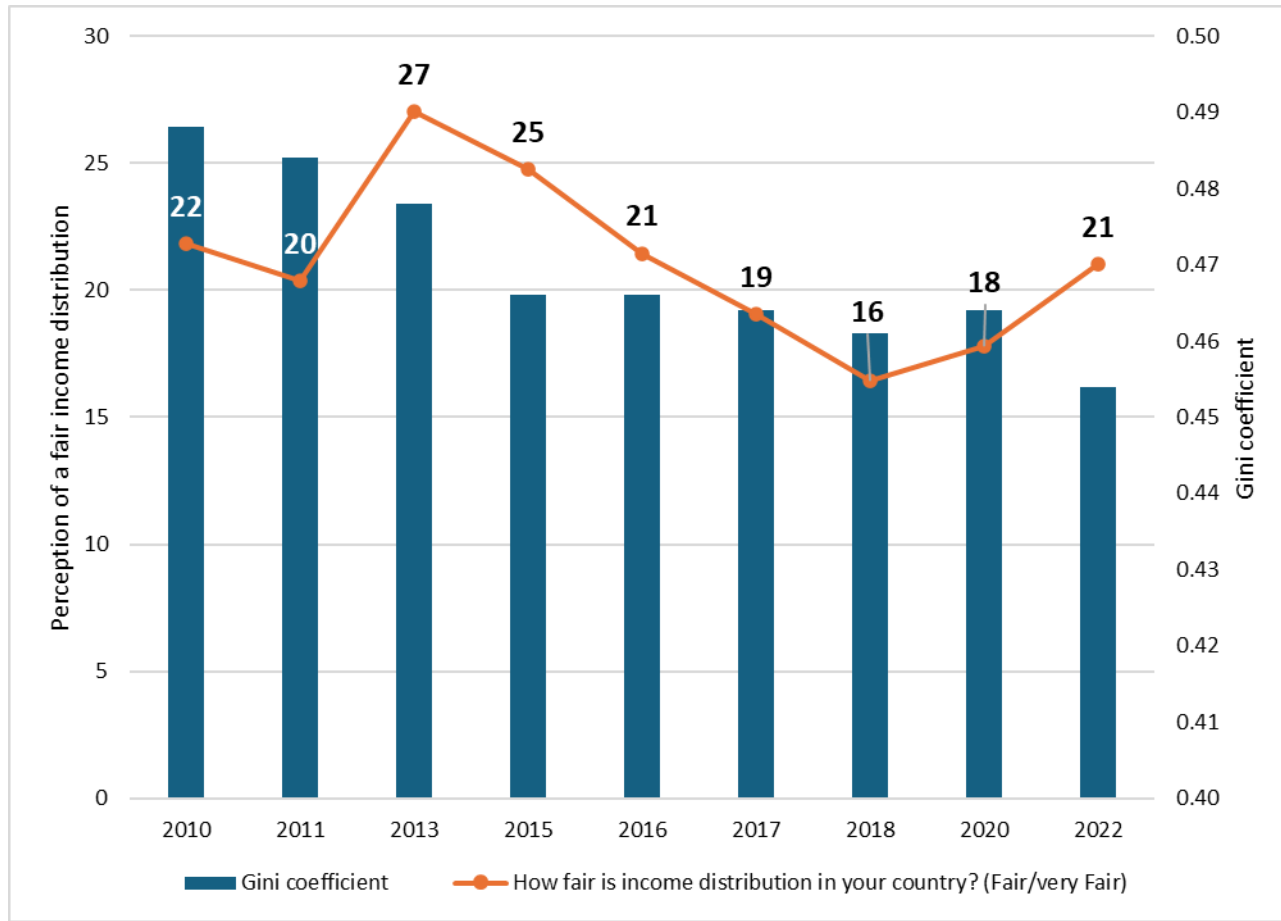


Dashboard: Belonging Pillar, circa 2018

Pillar	Dimension	Subdimension	Indicator	Argentina	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Brazil	Chile	Colombia	Costa Rica	Ecuador	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras	Jamaica	Mexico	Nicaragua	Panama	Paraguay	Peru	Dominican Republic	Uruguay			
Institutional framework	Mechanisms for recognition, participation and conflict resolution		Country has signed and ratified the CEDAW Optional Protocol	100%	100%	100%	50%	100%	100%	100%	50%	100%	0%		100%	0%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%		
			Ratification of ILO Convention 169	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	0%	100%	100%	0%			
			Ratification of Escazú Agreement	100%	100%	100%	0%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
			Constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples and their basic collective rights in line with international standards	66%	94%	74%	0%	58%	0%	86%	10%	34%	22%		56%	78%	30%	30%	40%					0%
			Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (2019)	41%	53%	15%	23%	18%	46%	39%	33%	19%	21%	29%	48%	47%	23%	16%	26%	28%	28%	28%	28%	21%
					↑	→	↓	→	↓	→	↑	↑	→	→	↑	→	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑		
				Special mechanisms for the participation of indigenous peoples in the representative bodies of the legislative branch	0%	92%	0%	0%	92%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	72%	0%	0%	0%	0%	88%	0%	0%	
	Rule of law and quality democracy		Basic rights are protected	20%	32%	22%	24%	27%	38%	37%	27%	26%	24%	28%	36%	38%	25%	26%	20%	27%	34%			
			Democracy is better than any other form of government	71%	49%	60%	64%	60%	72%	54%	59%	49%	45%	51%	63%	52%	54%	51%	49%	59%	59%	78%		
			Positive perception of democracy in the country	31%	42%	19%	50%	32%	57%	36%	16%	32%	23%		27%	24%	35%	32%	25%	29%	62%			
Perception of corruption among public officials			6%	8%	14%	6%	13%	7%	11%	12%	16%	18%	8%	8%	16%	14%	11%	9%	10%	8%				
Homicide rate			5.1	7.0	20.9	3.9	25.0	11.2	6.8	37.1	26.0	41.8	45.4	28.7	7.9	11.3	7.9	7.7	9.6	11.3				
				↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓			
Equality-based social relations	Bonds	Interpersonal trust	Importance of friends in life	89%	49%	85%	85%	69%		63%		84%			77%	74%			50%					
			Trust in members of the community	70%	45%	40%	66%	65%	68%	50%	58%	46%	55%	69%	54%	51%	51%	65%	42%	58%	73%			
				Trust in people	19%	16%	4%	14%	21%	10%	14%	13%	22%	14%		19%	12%	13%	18%	12%	14%	21%		
	Recognition of and respect for diversity	Approval of the right of same-sex couples to marry	65%	24%	49%	56%	30%	31%	29%	15%	19%	16%	15%	52%			14%	16%	23%	23%	69%			
		Women killed by their current or former intimate partners (per 100,000 women)	0.78			0.5	0.51	0.36	1.15	0.5			1.01	0.34		0.65	0.29	0.99	0.59	1.54	1.22			
		Men do not have priority over women for obtaining a job when there is a shortage of work	69%	56%	70%	43%	74%		53%		60%			52%	63%				60%					
	Sense of belonging	Identification	Pride in the political system	28%	45%	24%	36%	43%	61%	46%	36%	37%	32%	39%	49%	47%	35%	36%	26%	35%	49%			
			Pride in nationality	90%	91%	63%	79%	93%		95%		92%			91%	94%			94%					
			The State must implement policies to reduce income inequality	73%	58%	74%	80%	73%	85%	69%	76%	65%	64%	74%	69%		72%	64%	61%	75%	70%			
		Perception of social justice and equity	Incomes should be made more equal; inequality to encourage personal effort should not be maintained	35%	25%	44%	56%	28%		28%		16%			34%	21%			29%					
Work brings benefits in the long run, not connections or luck			47%	54%	49%	47%	43%		57%		49%			55%	44%			67%						
Trust in institutions			Trust in the judiciary	24%	24%	34%	27%	24%	50%	25%	14%	24%	25%		24%	16%	22%	26%	17%	21%	40%			
			Trust in the national legislature	27%	30%	13%	18%	21%	28%	26%	10%	18%	21%		24%	16%	28%	26%	8%	20%	35%			
	Trust in the national police	39%	23%	48%	49%	48%	51%	48%	23%	26%	33%		20%	21%	41%	35%	32%	24%	60%					
	Trust in political parties	15%	12%	6%	15%	16%	18%	19%	6%	11%	13%		11%	11%	11%	22%	7%	15%	22%					
Orientation towards the common good	Solidarity	Attendance at community improvement group meetings	23%	33%	7%	40%	22%	34%	26%	10%	16%	26%		16%	21%	16%	27%	13%	22%	39%				
		Trust in elections	24%	26%	27%	31%	49%	58%	27%	12%	26%	18%		33%	15%	26%	28%	34%	30%	50%				
			Respect for social rules	57%	52%	51%	50%	60%	74%	58%	65%	59%	49%	51%	60%	61%	52%	51%	37%	54%	64%			
Civic participation		Engagement in political activity (signing petitions, boycotts, peaceful demonstrations, strikes)	20%	29%	35%	22%	40%		23%		32%			19%	17%			22%						
		Participation in an organization	26%	70%	55%	33%	58%		54%		65%			41%	59%			34%						
		Voted in the most recent presidential election	82%	81%	76%	58%	67%	73%	88%	67%	62%	72%	54%	80%	52%	67%	73%	82%	71%	84%				

A low perception of a fair income distribution

Latin America (18 countries): Gini coefficient and perception on income distribution, 2010-2023

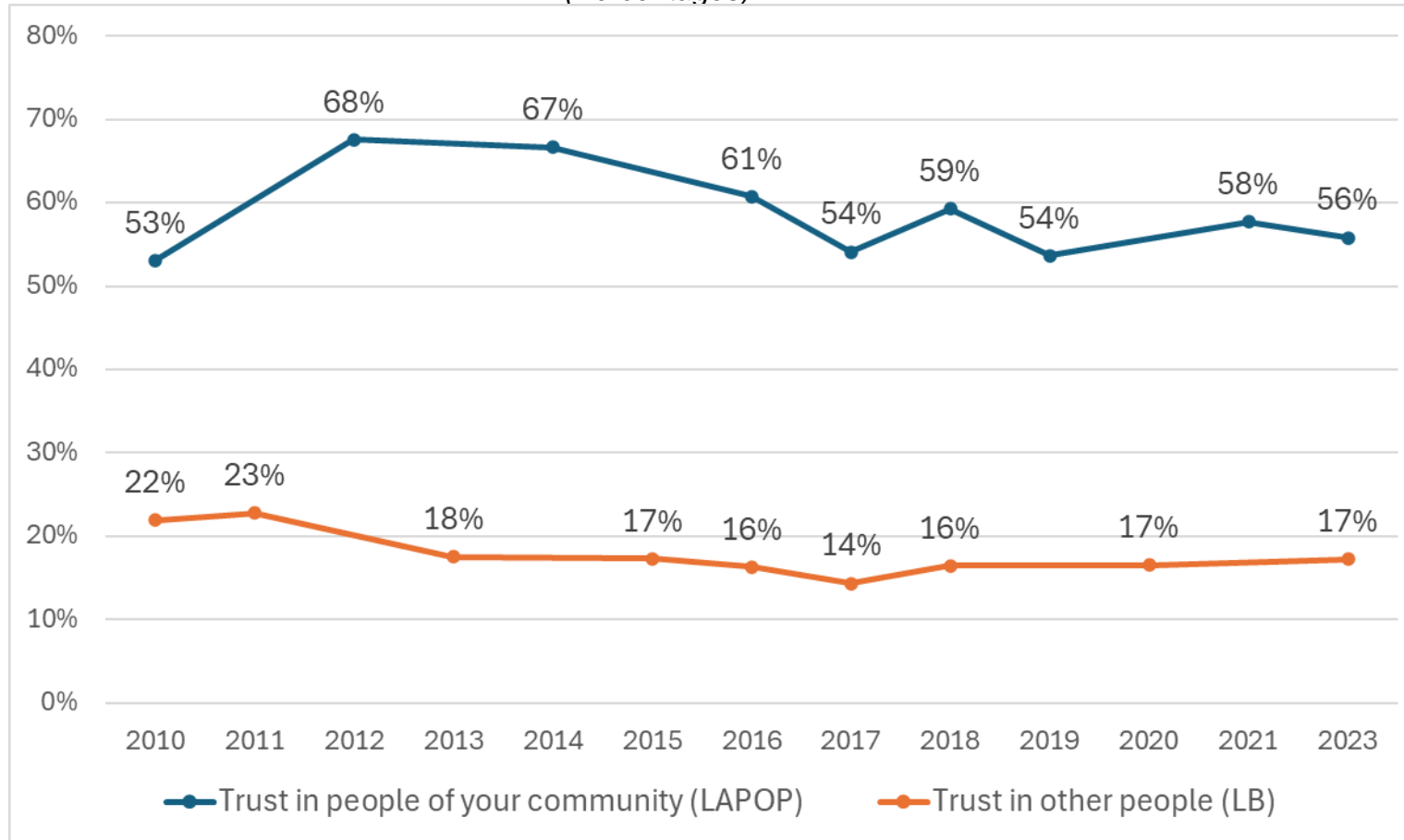


- In 2023, only **21%** considered that income distribution was **fair/very fair**, despite gradual reductions in income inequality indexes.
- Perceptions matter

Fuente: Own elaboration, based on CEPALSTAT and special tabulations of the surveys carried out by the Latinobarómetro Corporation.

Disparities in interpersonal trust (community vs general)

Latin America (18 countries): community-level and interpersonal trust, 2010-2023
(Percentages)

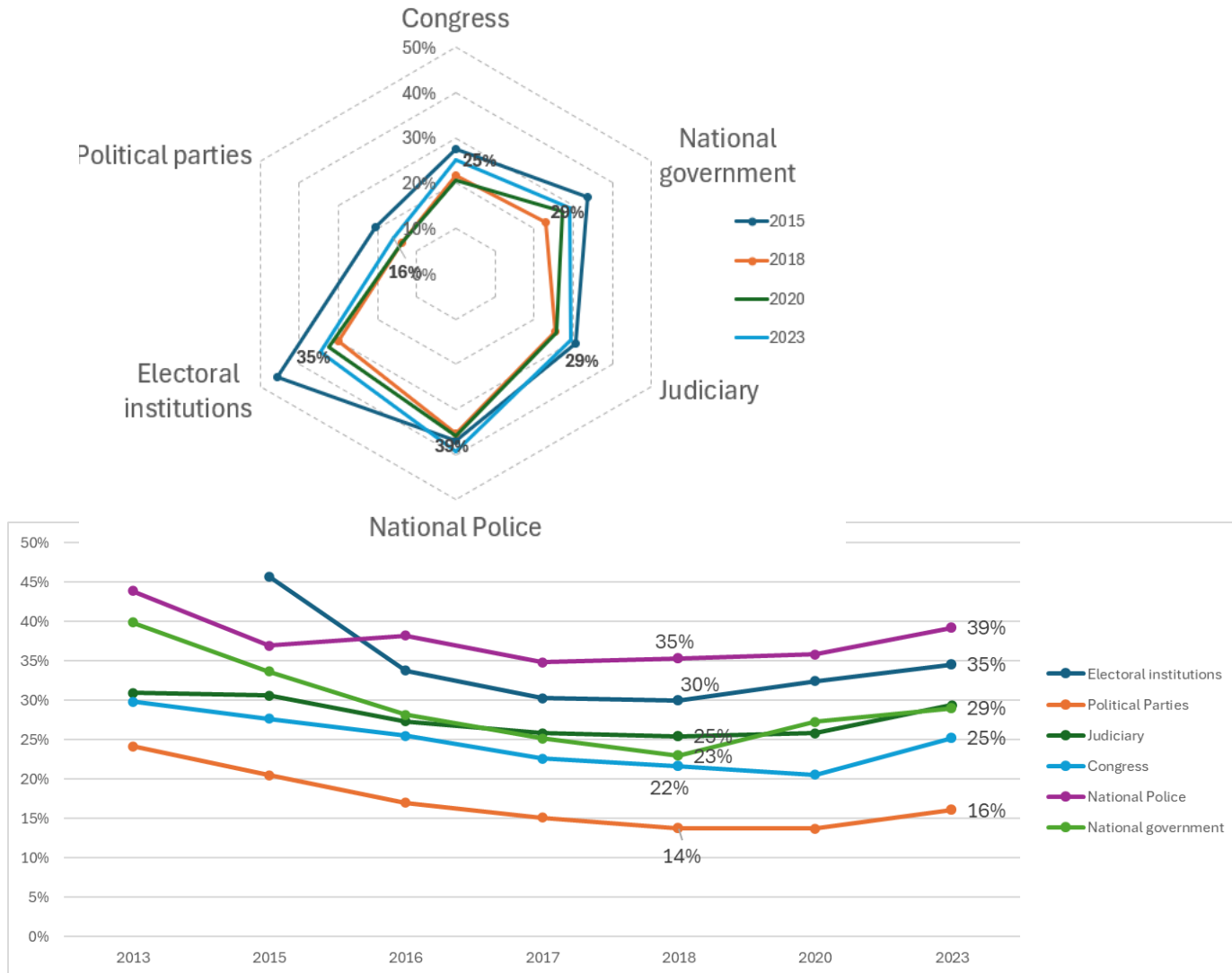


- In 2023 there were signs of close social links, represented by a 56% people who trusted the people in their communities, which has kept relatively high.
- However, this does not reflected more trust in people in general, which fell in 2010-2017, and has since stabilized around 17%.

A cross-cutting and growing institutional distrust

Latin America (17 countries): Institutional trust by institution, 2015-2023

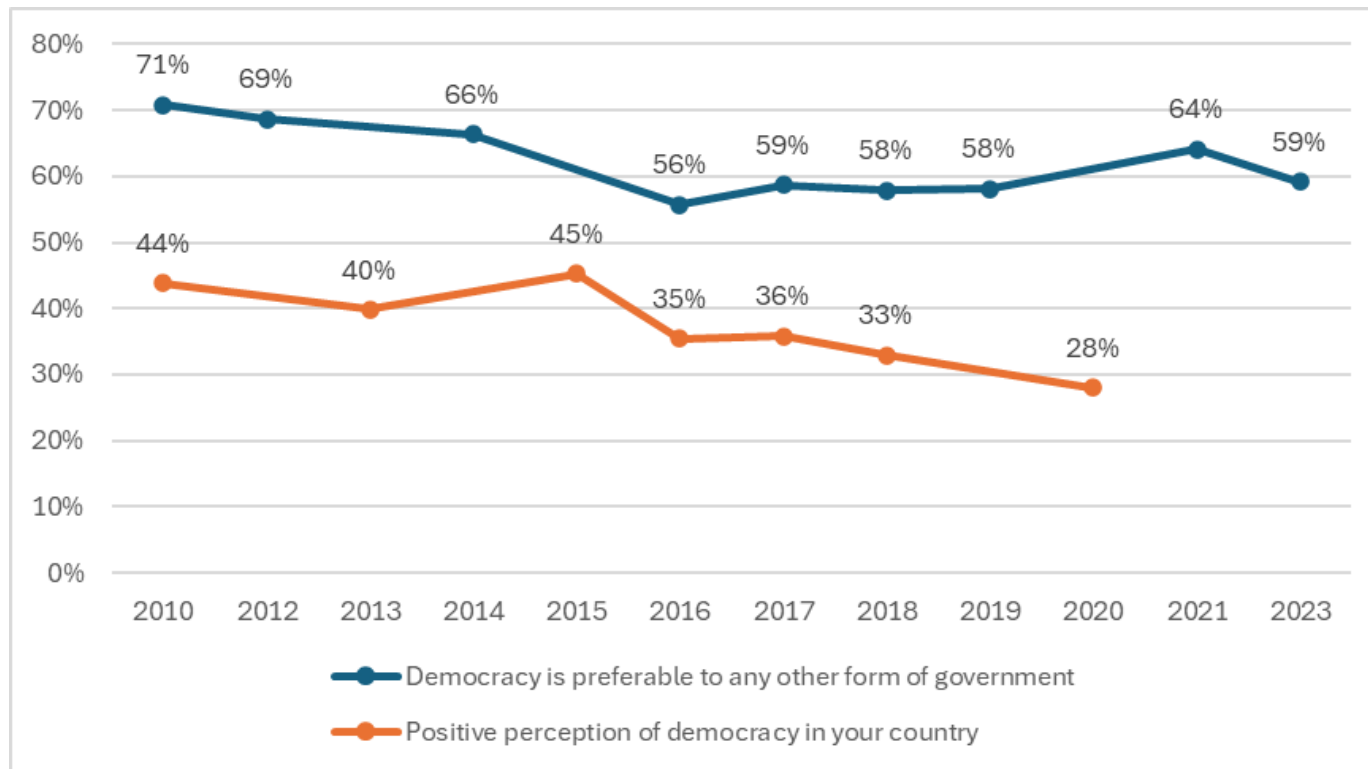
(Percentages)



- The region exhibits rates of **institutional trust below 40%** for a wide variety of institutions included in the analysis, which continued to fall from 2015 to 2018, and a slight recovery since.
- In 2023, trust levels were low for all institutions, specially regarding **political parties (16%)**, followed by Congress (25%), the national government (29%), the judiciary (29%), electoral institutions (35%), and the national police (40%).

Most people prefer the democratic system, despite criticisms about its functioning and a high perception of corruption

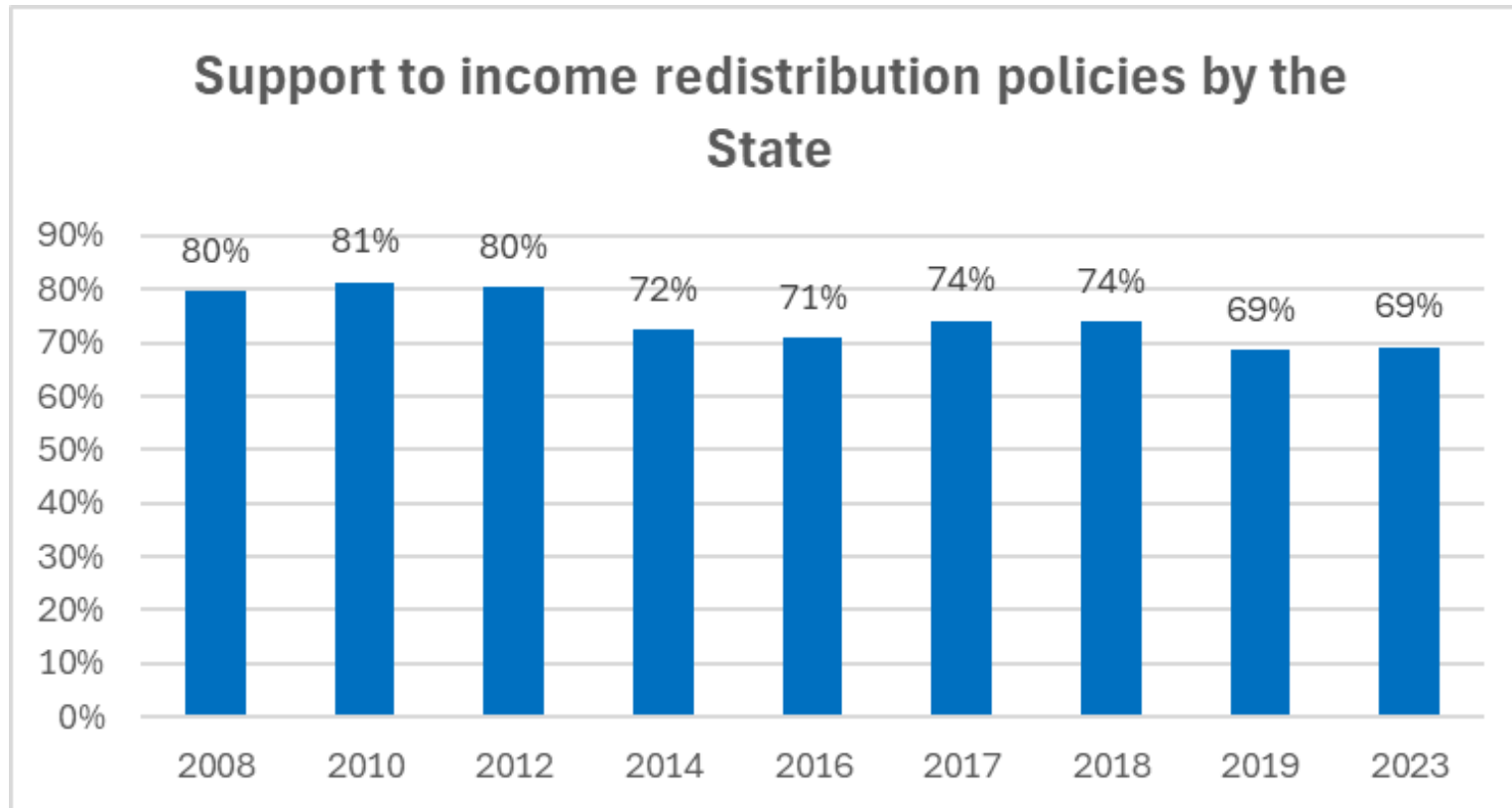
Latin America (18 countries): evolution of the assessment of democracy as best form of government and its actual functioning, 2010 - 2023 (in percentages)



- The positive evaluation of the functioning of democracy has kept falling (28% in 2020) but the assessment of democracy as the best form of government is still above the majority (58%).
- In addition, people are usually critical of the state's probity. **In 2018, only 11% considered that corruption was not generalized among public officials.**

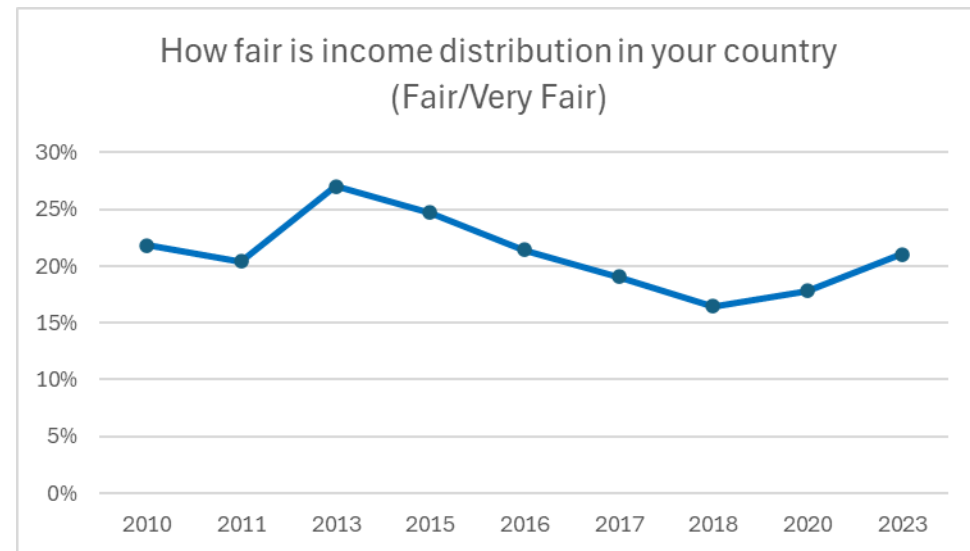
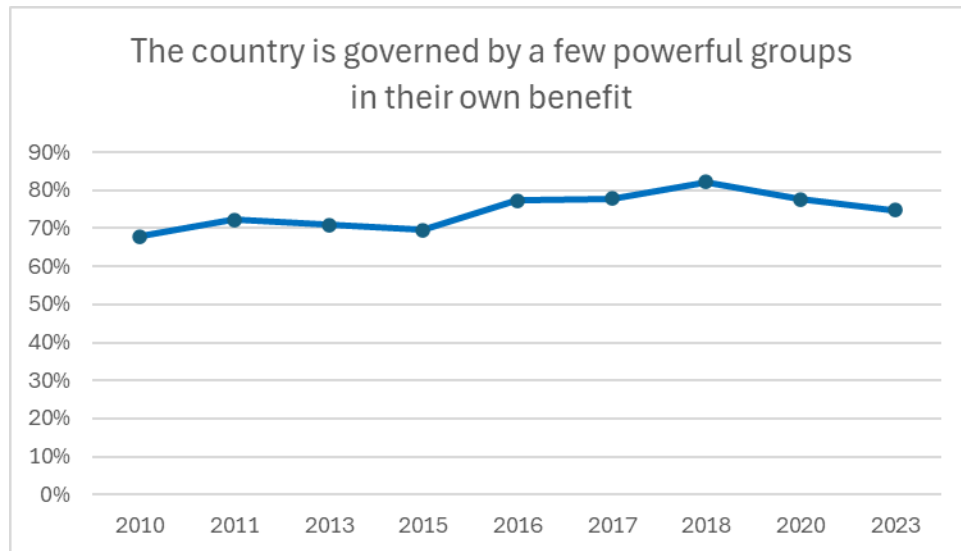
A wide consensus among citizens about the state's redistributive role

Latin America (18 countries): citizens' expectations regarding income redistribution by the State, 2008-2023
(Percentages)



- In 2023, still a shared conviction in the region that the State should implement policies to reduce income inequality (69%).

A wide consensus among citizens about the unfairness of inequality and the exercise of power



Inequality, trust and democracy in LA: perceptions on inequality and fairness matter a great deal

- Income inequality and trust are negatively related (Latinobarometro, LAPOP, WVS)
- While inequality is still considerable in most realms, **perceptions** on its **high levels and 'unfairness'** are linked to rising mistrust.
- Perceived inequality plays a significant role in changes in trust (Valle and Scarsatini, 2020).
- Trust is shaped by many factors, one of which is the distribution of income and wealth in a society, particularly when it is not perceived as **legitimate** (CEPAL, 2020; Valle and Scarsatini, 2020).
- The **quality of public policies** also matters for there is an expectation that governments act to reduce inequalities.
- Improvement in some trust indicators since 2017?

3. Policy recommendations based on the interdependence between democratic governance and wellbeing

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Enabling elements of social cohesion	Policy areas
Guarantees of well-being	Universal social protection systems and human capacity-building
Culture of equality	Social and labour inclusion
	Affirmative action policies and anti-discrimination measures
Mechanisms for recognition, participation and conflict resolution	Governance, openness in decision-making processes and dialogue mechanisms
Rule of law and quality democracy	Open and participatory government, mechanisms for accountability and efficiency
	Information and public debate

- **Policy areas are originated in the enabling elements of social cohesion;** with a special focus on the promotion of well-being, equality, recognition and participation, and a quality democracy.
- **Different policy sectors emerge from each area.** For example, from social and labour inclusion emerge access and quality policies in educational services, health, water and sanitation provision, among others.
- **This is not an exhaustive list,** but a first approach to **priority and interdependent areas.**

Conclusion: Governance and well-being

- In the face of an uncertain and volatile context, **social cohesion must be a horizon to guide policies**
- The transition towards an **equality-focused social cohesion** is also an instrument to **face change, uncertainties and to generate resilience with legitimacy**.
- A regional overview offers a **complex scenario** with some **positive highlights** (*institutional progress, democracy as the best system of government, the expectation that the State should reduce inequality, etc.*)
- To strengthen social cohesion it is important to **implement integral policies**: in each national context, **to reinforce governance from the basis of better institutions and the gradual construction of real welfare states**
- **It is hard to think on how to provide legitimacy and funding** for this policy agenda in a sustainable way across time, **without a social pact that has both pillars in its center**



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THANK YOU!