

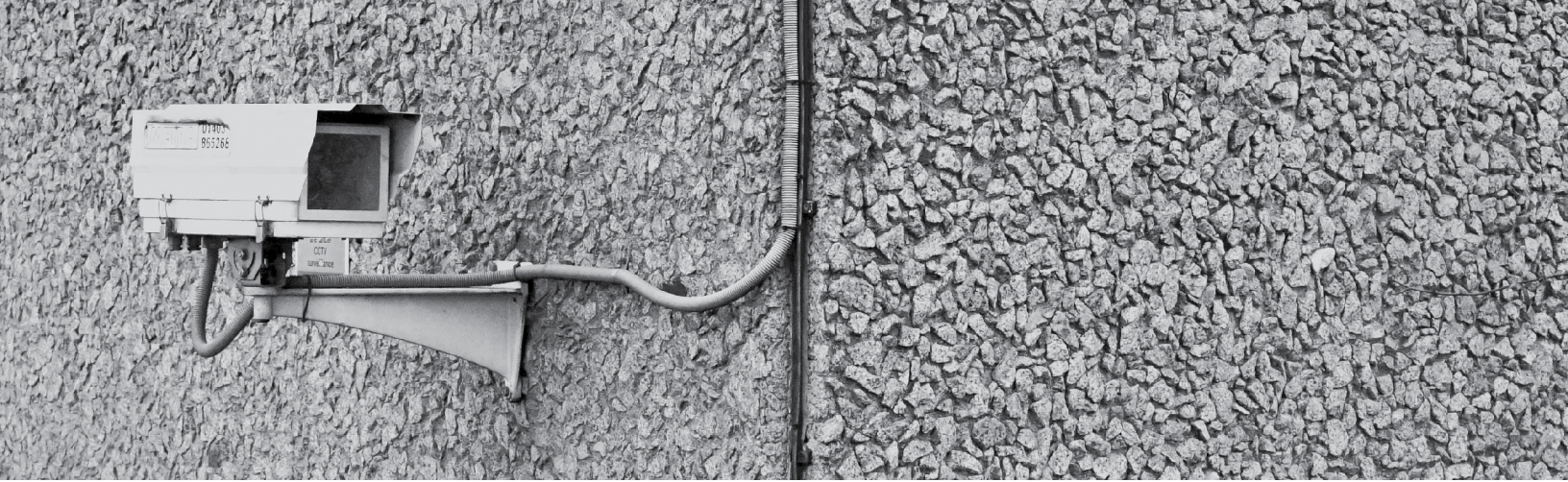


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# The Latin America and Caribbean Learning and Rapid Response (LACLEARN) Learning Agenda

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The Latin America and Caribbean Learning and Rapid Response (LACLEARN) task order contributes to improving USAID's work in democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG) in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). LACLEARN produced this LAC DRG learning agenda in consultation with USAID's Bureau for LAC and relevant Functional Bureaus to identify and address the knowledge gaps which are critical to guide these improvements. The agenda's priority themes and questions were finalized in August 2021, with corresponding learning activities and products to come through September 2024.



## Citizen Security and Crime and Violence Prevention

Suffering from globally high rates of gender-based violence, gang violence, homicide, extortion, theft, kidnapping, and other crimes, citizens in LAC reported crime and insecurity as the most significant problem in the region.<sup>1</sup> USAID has long prioritized contributing to reduce the incidence and effects of crime and violence through regional programs like the Central America Regional Security Initiative and Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, as well as other activities at the country and sub-regional level. The U.S. Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in Central America and Country and Regional Development and Cooperation Strategies continue to emphasize the strategic importance of improving citizen security for achieving broader development outcomes. The questions in this theme aim to take stock of work done to date in the region and identify approaches for increased effectiveness in improving citizen security moving forward. This theme acknowledges the intrinsically linked concepts of “crime and violence prevention” and “citizen security,” and the need to address crime and violence within the scope of the economic, environmental, political, and social systems in which it occurs.

### Questions

- What institutions and social norms promote impunity for gender-based violence (GBV)? What does a survivor-centered approach to accountability for GBV entail? What are validated approaches for preventing GBV?
- What programming would be best placed to address known clusters (i.e. people, places, behaviors) of crime and violence in LAC? How does this vary based on the characteristics (e.g. ethnicity, gender, age) of perpetrators and victims?
- How have USAID missions and implementing partners adapted citizen security, criminal governance, and community youth violence interventions—and associated diagnostic and assessment tools—developed in other contexts for use in LAC? How has this adaptation varied within the region? What is the current state of interventions after several years of adaptation and implementation? What evidence is there that these interventions have achieved meaningful and sustainable outcomes?
- What does the evidence say regarding the impacts of improved security on economic, environmental, and social outcomes (including education, health, migration, and others) in LAC?
- Which institutional reforms in the justice and security sector are most effective in fostering an enabling environment for community violence prevention? How does the institutional, social, and economic context inform which reforms might be most suitable?

<sup>1</sup> Crime and Violence Prevention Field Guide. Democracy International. April 2021. <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/PA00XGHG.pdf>



## Democratic Backsliding and Authoritarian Resurgence

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated a global trend of democratic backsliding. While LAC remains the most democratic emerging region globally, the increase of authoritarian rule and leaders with populist tendencies have dimmed the prospect of consolidated democratic governance over the last fifteen years.<sup>2</sup> Governments committed to democracy require assistance to build citizen trust in democratic institutions and democratic legitimacy. Civil society, media, and other actors require support to work with governments in democracy-enhancing reforms in some countries, while in others, these actors require support to protect democracy and resist repression in a closing civic space. Throughout the region, addressing new issues like disinformation and long-standing ones like citizen malaise and political exclusion requires creative approaches grounded in politically-savvy analysis. The questions in this theme address the need to develop a more thorough understanding of the factors that contribute to democratic backsliding and identify effective programming to safeguard and strengthen democracy.

### Questions

- What approaches are best suited to strengthen citizen commitment to democracy in the region? Can the citizenry in LAC be divided into distinct publics according to their commitment to and satisfaction with democracy, and other political attitudes and behaviors? What individual and contextual factors explain the evolution of these publics?
- What tactics are available to USAID in working with local partners to prevent or reverse democratic backsliding in LAC? How can USAID ground these tactics in relevant institutional, social, economic, historical, and other contextual factors that have driven authoritarian resurgence in LAC?
- What actors are the main purveyors of disinformation and misinformation in LAC and what are their objectives? What tactics are best suited to prevent, counter, or mitigate the effects of disinformation and misinformation?

<sup>2</sup>"Democratic Challenges and Opportunities in America." Submitted by Deborah Ullmer to the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. March 24, 2021



## Accountable, Transparent, and Effective Governance

From small bribes to high-profile corruption and elite capture of the state, corruption in all its forms is an endemic problem in LAC. Corruption, ineffective governance, and criminal activity can occur symbiotically, each creating conditions that can fuel the other. USAID has committed vast resources to supporting accountability and transparency interventions in partnership with governments, civil society, the media, and the private sector. In a region historically characterized by high-centralized government, USAID has also supported decentralization reforms and local governance programming aiming to bring decision-making and service providers closer to the citizenry. The questions in this theme aim to take stock of USAID's work to reduce corruption, promote accountability and transparency, and strengthen local governance and service provision.

### Questions

- What are the most effective approaches to reduce corruption in its various forms and promote transparency in LAC? What contextual factors (e.g. country commitment, presence/types of criminal groups, actions of other U.S. government actors) support or constrain the enabling environment for reducing corruption in LAC? What lessons can be gleaned from previous approaches to tackle high-profile corruption (e.g. Misión de Apoyo contra la Corrupción y la Impunidad en Honduras and Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala)?
- Are bottom-up accountability and transparency interventions seeking to reduce corruption through the actions of the citizenry, civil society, media, and the private sector effective, scalable, and sustainable in LAC? What non-judicial routes to accountability could be leveraged to strengthen these interventions?
- Which technical approaches have been more widely employed in USAID local governance programs in LAC over the past five years? What have been the main achievements and pitfalls of these programs? What evidence is there that these interventions have achieved meaningful and sustainable outcomes, especially when it comes to improving access to and the quality of government services?
- What is the relationship between corruption and citizen security in LAC? Do successful approaches exist to reduce corruption while also improving citizen security, or vice versa?



## Innovations in Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

USAID's 2013 Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance reaffirmed the Agency's commitment to rigorous evidence generation and use in the DRG sphere, while also acknowledging the challenges inherent in evidence-based approaches to DRG programming. DRG activities and concepts are harder to measure and host governments do not usually produce relevant data as they do in other sectors. Causal pathways for change in the DRG space are often complex, non-linear, or incremental in nature, further complicating program monitoring and evaluation. USAID, especially through its DRG Center, has made significant progress in building DRG knowledge through evaluation and research since 2013. The questions in this theme respond to the most pressing ongoing challenges in this regard cited by USAID personnel who work on MEL for DRG programming in LAC. As outlined in ADS 205, these innovations will include methods for better integrating gender analysis into USAID's MEL procedures to improve its ability to address relevant gender gaps and opportunities for female empowerment.

### Questions

- What innovative measurement approaches (e.g. rubrics) and technologies (e.g. big data, remote and digital tools, etc.) can USAID programs in LAC leverage to (1) track program performance and (2) gauge illicit, hard-to-observe, or underreported activities (e.g., corruption, gang membership, GBV, and migration) and abstract DRG concepts (e.g., criminal governance, accountability, conflict sensitivity, and political will/country commitment)?
- What can USAID do to help DRG programs in LAC better define the long-term conditions they intend to change and causal pathways for reaching desired end states, including better incorporating awareness of complexity and potential unintended effects? What “leading indicators” are most predictive of achieving these desired changes?
- What learning and adaptation approaches have been the most effective for ensuring that USAID missions and implementing partners use evidence on what works in LAC at the strategy and activity level? How can USAID incentivize evidence-based adaptive management by missions and implementing partners?
- What key strengths and shortcomings exist in local institutions' ability and capacity to collect and analyze data relevant to citizen security, democratic norms, and accountable governance, and to evaluate relevant policies and programs in LAC?

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