



## CHAPTER 6:

# Discussion of results and implications for research, policy, and practice

Unlike more established Western democracies, most countries in Latin America returned to democratic rule only three or four decades ago or even more recently, and their political, social, and economic stability is often still called into question. Recent surveys have consistently found that commitment to democracy among adults in this region is not well established (see Cohen, Lupu, & Zechmeister, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2017; Valenzuela, Schwartzman, Biehl, & Valenzuela, 2008). These findings stress the urgency of ensuring education for citizenship as an important component among the efforts needed to achieve democratic sustainability in this region.

ICCS 2016 was the second cycle of the IEA Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS). ICCS is designed to study the ways in which young people are prepared to undertake their roles as citizens in society. This area of learning in Latin America takes places within the ambit of challenges and contexts particular to this region. These include acquiescence to authoritarianism, corruption, violence, and breaking the law. Also of relevance are young people's trust in government, their development of empathy toward peers, their acceptance of diversity, and their perceptions of discrimination against different social groups in society.

ICCS collected and analyzed data on four topics that reflect these aspects of civic and citizenship education in Latin America:

- National contexts for civic and citizenship education in the region;
- Students' perceptions of public institutions and government;
- Students' views on peaceful coexistence; and
- Students' perceptions of social cohesion and diversity.

In this final chapter, we summarize the main findings for each of these aspects of civic and citizenship education in the five Latin American countries that participated in ICCS 2016. We also discuss potential implications for policy and practice and provide an outlook on future research in this area in the Latin American region.

## Summary of findings

### *Contexts for civic and citizenship education*

The five Latin American ICCS countries that participated in ICCS 2016 differ in terms of population size, economic strength, and human development. They also differ in their political contexts, especially with regard to voter turnout, female representation in parliament, and support for democracy. While adult literacy rates are relatively high in all five countries, differences relating to educational provision remain.

ICCS recorded considerable differences across the countries in regard to (Grade 8) students' civic knowledge as well as (Grade 6) students' reading abilities. While all five countries place strong emphasis on civic and citizenship education, they differ in the extent to which and how they have implemented this learning area in their national curricula. Civic and citizenship education in the ICCS 2016 Latin American countries is also strongly influenced by the recent historical and political background of each country.

### ***Students' perceptions of public institutions and government***

While most of the ICCS 2016 Latin American lower-secondary students tended not to agree with most examples of authoritarian government practices, they still expressed considerable support for some of these authoritarian practices. Furthermore, when these students were asked about their level of agreement with justifications for dictatorial rule, about two thirds of them across the participating countries agreed that upholding law and order or providing economic benefits justify dictatorships. Of the four Latin American countries that participated in both ICCS 2009 and ICCS 2016, Chile was the only one where student support for authoritarian rule and dictatorial rule decreased over time.

When the Latin American students were asked about their support for or acceptance of corrupt practices in public (civil) services and government, most tended not to endorse corruption. However, a considerable proportion of the students still accepted corrupt practices. Since 2009, student support for corrupt practices declined in Chile but increased slightly in Colombia and Mexico. Students enrolled at urban schools, students who expected to undertake university education, and students with higher levels of civic knowledge were less likely to endorse corrupt practices.

The lower-secondary students surveyed in the ICCS 2016 regional survey for Latin America expressed high levels of trust in the institution of schools but low levels of trust in political institutions. Since 2009 both Chile and Colombia recorded declines in students' levels of trust in institutions such as the government and political parties. When we looked at the association between trust in institutions and civic knowledge, we observed that students with higher levels of civic knowledge were less inclined than their peers to trust political parties or the national government but were somewhat more inclined to trust schools or the armed forces.

### ***Students' views on peaceful coexistence***

The need for dialogue and negotiation was widely accepted by students. However, majorities of students in four out of the five countries supported the notion of using violent means outside the law to punish criminals. Most students did not, however, agree with statements justifying the use of violence, and in three out of four countries their acceptance of using violence decreased significantly between 2009 and 2016. We also recorded considerable variation across the five countries in the extent to which students accepted violence. The lowest levels of endorsement were found among females, students who expected to attain a university degree, and students with higher levels of civic knowledge.

We found that most students accepted some justifications for breaking the law, such as finding it the only way to help one's family or not doing it with bad intentions. One explanation for this finding could relate to students' perceptions of societal or personal need, in the sense that the direr they perceive a situation to be, the more accepting they are of breaking the law. We also found marked differences in acceptance of breaking the law across countries, with students in Chile and Colombia being those least inclined to agree with justifications for disobedience to the law. Again, civic knowledge was negatively associated with endorsement of justifying disobedience of the law, as were female gender and having parents who completed a university degree.

Most students when presented with hypothetical situations in which peers at school found themselves in difficult situations, such as being subjected to unfair treatment by others, showed concern for those schoolmates. Female students and students with higher levels of civic knowledge were more likely than other students to express empathy for their classmates.

### ***Students' perceptions of social cohesion and diversity***

Large majorities of students across the participating countries expressed acceptance of neighbors from different social minority groups. However, notable differences were apparent in the proportions of students who said they would not be bothered by neighborhood diversity. Female students, students at schools in urban areas, and students with higher levels of civic knowledge were the students most likely to accept members of minority groups living next door.

Students across the five ICCS 2016 Latin American countries showed positive attitudes toward people with a homosexual orientation, while Chile, Colombia, and Mexico all recorded higher levels of agreement with same-sex marriage than they did in ICCS 2009. However, we also found marked differences across countries, with students in the Dominican Republic and Peru expressing somewhat less positive attitudes. Support for equal opportunities and rights for homosexual people were more prevalent among the female students, those students studying at schools in urban areas, and students with higher levels of civic knowledge.

When asked about the levels of discrimination in their countries toward members of different social groups, students generally thought that the groups least discriminated against were young people, unemployed persons, and older people. High percentages of students perceived relatively high levels of discrimination against homosexual people, however.

### **Implications for research, policy, and practice**

Studies such as ICCS 2016 have a cross-sectional design, which means that the data collected come from samples of students, schools, and teachers at one point in time. This feature limits the feasibility of drawing firm conclusions about causal relationships from findings. Also, because each country can decide whether or not to participate in a study such as ICCS, the number of countries participating in each cycle of that study varies. Although only a few Latin American countries elected to participate in ICCS 2016, the collected data have provided a number of results that suggest implications for further research, for policy and practice in general, and for the individual countries that participated in particular.

With regard to students' attitudes toward government forms and practices, corruption, and disobedience to the law, we found results that are similar to those from surveys conducted among adult citizens in this region. Our findings indicate that commitment to democratic principles is somewhat limited among young people, and that their respect for the rule of law (as indicated by their acceptance of corruption or justifications for breaking the law) is often conditional, especially in terms of safeguarding family interests. And while majorities of the ICCS 2016 Latin American students rejected more authoritarian government practices, large proportions of these young people considered safeguarding economic interests or ensuring law and order through dictatorial rule acceptable. Thus, the results from ICCS 2016 emphasize a concerning level of undemocratic and anti-social orientations among substantial proportions of young people in these five Latin American countries.

When comparing the contexts for civic and citizenship education across the Latin American countries, we found commonalities such as a shared emphasis on the importance of this learning area for promoting democratic stability. However, we also observed differences in how this learning area is conceived and organized across national curricula. We also noted that this learning area in each country is strongly influenced by its national historical and political contexts, such as specific experiences with non-democratic regimes in the past (for example, the Fujimori government in Peru, or the military regime in Chile between 1973 and 1990).

It will therefore be of major interest to review the study results more closely at the national level, not only with respect to the most recent results but also with respect to changes since 2009. For example, it is noteworthy that in Chile the lower-secondary students in 2016 were less inclined than

their peers in the previous survey to agree with authoritarian government practices, justifications for dictatorship, and corrupt practices. We also recorded the rather unexpected finding that in countries with relatively high crime rates, the 2016 students were more supportive than the 2009 students of peace and less prone to endorse extra-judicial punishments. Findings like these may relate to country-specific developments, such as initiatives to support the development of democratic orientations, or programs to promote conflict resolution and counter violent behavior at schools. Findings of this nature warrant further investigation within the respective national contexts for civic and citizenship education.

Using as our basis the ICCS 2016 data, we reviewed associations between questionnaire scales with selected variables related to students' backgrounds and students' attained civic learning. Our results broadly confirmed findings from earlier research about differences in student scale scores and perceptions between gender groups, as well as relationships with parental education, students' expectations of further education, and community context. For this first report on the ICCS 2016 Latin American results, we looked at bivariate associations but did not conduct multivariate analyses. We acknowledge that our findings about differences in attitudes between students studying at rural or urban schools, for example, may be (partly or entirely) due to differences in socioeconomic background or other related variables. Future secondary analyses using multivariate analysis models should shed further light on these relationships.

There are also research questions of interest that warrant more in-depth investigation but that were outside the scope of this first report. These include associations between the different types of student perceptions measured by the Latin American student questionnaire. For example, it would be interesting to look at the extent to which students' perceptions of discrimination of minorities in a country are associated with their attitudes toward neighborhood diversity or homosexuality. The rich ICCS 2016 database, containing both regional and international data, provides ample opportunity for further analyses of this kind, and for setting student survey results within the respective educational and national contexts.

One of the most interesting findings in this report, which was also evident in the ICCS 2009 results, was the strong association between attitudes and the levels of civic knowledge students had developed. Students with high levels of civic knowledge tended to be much less inclined to agree with justifications for dictatorship or law-breaking, or to endorse the use of authoritarian government practices, corruption in public services, and the use of violence. Given the relatively low levels of civic knowledge among students in Latin America, findings such as these make a strong case for improving civic learning, with the prospect of developing more democratic orientations and higher levels of acceptance of the rule of law.

Our examination of the ICCS 2016 findings from the Latin American countries also found that students with higher levels of civic knowledge were less inclined to express trust in the government or political parties. This negative association suggests that knowing more about civic institutions leads to more insights into the problems with how these political institutions work. The fact that trust in schools was higher among more knowledgeable students indicates that having more civic knowledge does not always translate into lower levels of trust. These findings also suggest that having more information and knowledge about how the political systems and civic institutions in Latin America work leads to more critical views of those systems and institutions. In the long term, providing young people with a better understanding of civic issues has the potential to provide a better foundation for discussions about political reform among future generations.

## Outlook

This report has provided a first picture of lower-secondary students' perceptions across a wide range of important region-specific issues set within their broader national contexts in five Latin American countries. It has documented the extent of students' beliefs, changes since the first cycle of ICCS in 2009, and associations with selected variables such as students' gender, school location, parental education, expected tertiary attainment, and civic knowledge. Over coming years, we expect that the ICCS 2016 data will contribute to a wide range of secondary research activities, as occurred with the CIVED 1999 (Reimers, 2007) and the ICCS 2009 datasets. The more detailed and refined analyses this secondary research offers should provide greater insight into the factors influencing students' beliefs and perceptions of civics and citizenship in Latin America. Researchers conducting these analyses will find this current publication and the previous ICCS 2009 Latin American report (Schulz, Ainley, Friedman, & Lietz, 2011) important points of reference.

IEA implemented ICCS as a fully developed cycle of comparative studies of civic and citizenship education. ICCS 2009 was the first in the cycle and ICCS 2016 has been the second. The second survey provided an invaluable opportunity for monitoring students' beliefs about democracy, institutions, and society over the course of seven years in those Latin American countries that participated in both ICCS surveys. The IEA will soon commence preparations for the next cycle of ICCS, with its data collection scheduled for 2022. We hope that this report with its first description of our findings about young people's perceptions of civic-related issues in five Latin American countries will encourage continued and increased ICCS country participation in this region.

## References

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