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Young People's Views of Government,  
Peaceful Coexistence, and Diversity  
in Five Latin American Countries

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# Young People's Views of Government, Peaceful Coexistence, and Diversity in Five Latin American Countries

IEA International Civic and Citizenship  
Education Study 2016  
Latin American Report



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The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), with headquarters in Amsterdam, is an independent, international cooperative of national research institutions and governmental research agencies. It conducts large-scale comparative studies of educational achievement and other aspects of education, with the aim of gaining in-depth understanding of the effects of policies and practices within and across systems of education.

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# Foreword

High-quality, large-scale comparative studies of education systems across the world enable better understanding of the policies and practices that foster educational progress. These studies also play a critical role in helping nations build their own knowledge and research capacity. For over 60 years, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) has conducted research studies such as these with the aim of improving learning for all. In this context, the long-standing and successful work with our members and other countries in Latin America is at the heart of this report.

Educational research should focus on more than students' ability in relation to foundational skills such as mathematics, science, and reading literacy. Civic and citizenship education has an equally important part to play in preparing our children for life after school and societies in the second decade of the 21st century. The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) and its predecessors demonstrate the IEA's ongoing commitment to research focused on holistic goals of education.

ICCS 2016 is the fourth IEA study to investigate the ways in which education systems not only prepare young people to undertake their current and future roles as citizens but also help them prosper in a world that requires an open and culture-oriented approach, a moral orientation emphasizing human rights, and a focus on social justice and active political participation. ICCS 2016 provides data, evidence, and research on students' knowledge and understanding of civics and citizenship in 24 countries. It also includes measures of persisting aspects of civic and citizenship, examines differences in relation to these aspects among and within countries, and provides statistical links that ensure a sound basis for comparing the findings of ICCS 2009 and ICCS 2016.

As in the 2009 cycle of ICCS, the countries that participated in ICCS 2016 supplemented the already comprehensive core study with two regional student questionnaire components, one for countries in Europe and the other for countries in Latin America, the focus of this self-standing report. The Latin American questionnaire, designed to measure civic and citizenship education-related aspects of specific relevance in this region, was completed by about 25,000 students in Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Peru. The first four of these countries also participated in ICCS 2009, which means this report includes comparisons of the data collected in them during ICCS 2009 and 2016. The 2016 cycle of ICCS was the first time Peru participated in ICCS.

Referencing also test, background, and contextual data from the international core instruments, this report focuses on contexts for civic and citizenship education, students' perceptions of public institutions and government, students' views of peaceful coexistence, and students' perceptions of social cohesion and diversity. The topics covered in the regional component are generally like those covered in 2009 and therefore allow for comparisons over time for the four countries that participated in both cycles. I additionally recommend that readers consult the main ICCS 2016 international report for a comprehensive and critical analysis of the study's findings across the full set of countries. The soon-to-be-published ICCS 2016 technical report along with a Latin American supplement to the international public-use database and an already published user guide will enable the research community to use the regional data and conduct in-depth analyses.

Viewed from a global perspective, the main results from ICCS 2016, which were released in late 2017, as well as this additional report of findings make an important and timely contribution to discussions about civic and citizenship education. The need to prepare young people in an appropriate way for citizenship has received increased attention across many Latin American countries in recent decades. This young and vibrant subcontinent is undergoing significant societal challenges. The past two decades have seen a resurgence of more authoritarian forms of government along with low levels of trust in government and a relatively low level of commitment

to democracy. Societal inequalities, persistent poverty, and very high levels of violence, crime, and corruption remain significant issues.

The issues explored in ICCS 2016 offer unique insights into young people's civic attitudes and generate policy-relevant results for national governments. As Professor Cristián Cox, a researcher in the field from Diego Portales University and a valued project advisor to ICCS, emphasizes:

The ICCS framework offers arguably the richest and most consistent definitions of a democratic society in today's world as well as their educational and cultural prerequisites. Latin America is a region with high aspirational democratic values, but in reality has weak civic institutions and poor political practice. In this context, ICCS has huge relevance and value, that of setting the basis for the best and better-shared definitions of what contemporary civic and citizenship education is and should be.

I am convinced that the reliable and comparable evidence and data provided by the ICCS series of studies will enable countries to evaluate the strengths of their educational policies and to measure progress toward achieving national, regional, and international goals. Building on the success of the 2009 and 2016 studies, the IEA will conduct the next cycle of ICCS in 2022, recognizing once again that civic and citizenship education is a "moving target" that needs to respond to changes in national, regional, and international contexts. Global citizenship education (GCE) and education for sustainable development (ESD) are expected to play a significant role in the new study and thereby further support the international education agenda, especially aspects related to Target 4.7 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The IEA expects that a regional addition for Latin America will once more be developed for ICCS 2022.

For ICCS 2016, the IEA drew on its established international network of research organizations, scholars, and technical experts. Two partner organizations, in cooperation with the IEA and the study's national research coordinators (NRCs), organized and implemented the study. They were the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), which was the lead organization responsible for this report, and the Laboratorio di Pedagogia Sperimentale (LPS) at the Roma Tre University in Italy. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the research teams for their intellect and dedication that made this report a reality, namely, Wolfram Schulz, John Ainley, and Tim Friedman from ACER, as well as Cristián Cox from the University Diego Portales in Santiago. Extended thanks go to the larger ICCS research team for their analytical work, critical review, and overall support during the drafting stage: Bruno Losito from LPS, Gabriella Agrusti from the LUMSA University in Rome, and Julian Fraillon and Eveline Gebhardt from ACER.

My special thanks go to the members of the study's project advisory committee (PAC) for their thoughtful and scholarly guidance during the main study's development and reporting: specifically, Erik Amnå (Örebro University, Sweden), Cristián Cox (University Diego Portales, Chile), Barbara Malak-Minkiewicz (IEA honorary member, the Netherlands), Judith Torney-Purta (University of Maryland, the United States), and Wiel Veugelers (University of Humanistic Studies, the Netherlands). I am also grateful for the expert advice provided by the ICCS 2016 sampling referee, Marc Joncas, and Christian Monseur (University of Liège, Belgium), who undertook a technical review of scaling and reporting procedures.

My sincere thanks are also due to the key research, operations, and management staff at the IEA—Falk Brese, Roel Burgers, Christine Busch, Ralph Carstens, Juliane Kobelt, Hannah Köhler, Paulína Koršňáková, Marta Kostek, Andrea Netten, Gabriela Noveanu, and Sabine Weber—for their tireless leadership, commitment, and attention to detail. The IEA publications and editorial committee (PEC) provided critical feedback and suggested improvements to draft versions of this report. I thank Seamus Hegarty on behalf of the group, as well as Paula Wagemaker and Gillian Wilson for editing this report and managing its timely production.

As is the case with all IEA studies, ICCS 2016 has depended on the critical engagement, perseverance, and enthusiasm of the national research coordinators and their teams. Five countries participated in the Latin American option and contributed to this development and review of this report. They are the foundation of and our guides in all IEA endeavors.

Core funding for the international and regional studies was provided by the 24 countries and education systems that participated in ICCS 2016.

Finally, all of us owe our deepest gratitude to the many thousands of students, teachers, and school principals for their willingness, time, and efforts in providing the information that underpins this Latin American report. Without them, this study would not have been possible. We look forward to the many publications, research papers, and conference contributions inspired by the data from this important study.

*Dirk Hastedt*

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, IEA

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# Executive summary

ICCS 2016 included, in addition to the core international survey instruments, regional instruments for countries from the European and Latin American regions. This report focuses on the five countries that participated in the study's Latin American regional survey and administered its corresponding regional student questionnaire. The report is based on regional student questionnaire data as well as on data from the international student and school instruments.

ICCS 2016 was the second cycle of the IEA Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS). ICCS studies the ways in which education systems from around the world prepare young people to undertake their roles as citizens in society. In Latin America, this area of learning is set within particular challenges and contexts. Compared to established Western democracies, most countries in this region returned to democratic rule only three or four decades ago or even more recently, and their political, social, and economic stability continues to be called into question. Surveys have consistently found that commitment to democracy among adults in this region is not well established, a situation that makes education for citizenship an important element in efforts to establish democratic sustainability.

The results reported in this publication are based on data gathered from random samples of about 25,000 students in their eighth year of schooling in almost 900 schools from five Latin American countries. Four of these countries (Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico) participated in ICCS 2009, thereby providing data for comparison across the two cycles. ICCS 2016 was the first time Peru participated in ICCS.

This regional report is based on data relating to the following four region-specific topics:

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

## **Contexts for civic and citizenship education in the five Latin American countries**

The five ICCS 2016 Latin American countries differ in important ways, among them population size, economic strength, and human development. The countries also differ in terms of their political contexts, as reflected in voter turnout, female representation in parliament, and support for democracy. While adult literacy rates are relatively high in all five countries, there are notable differences in the provision and outcomes of education. Considerable variation is also evident in civic knowledge among students in the ICCS target grade (8), and likewise in students' reading abilities at the end of primary school.

Efforts to strengthen civic culture have increased in the five countries over recent decades. While all five countries place strong emphasis on civic and citizenship education, their provision of this learning area in national curricula differs. Human rights, equal opportunities for men and women, citizens' rights and responsibilities, critical and independent thinking, and conflict resolution are included in all national curricula. All five countries also specify learning objectives such as "knowing basic civic and citizenship facts" and "understanding key civic and citizenship concepts." However, some important topics relating to educating young people about formal political participation, such as voting and elections, are not included in the curricula of all five countries. In addition, the countries differ in the ways in which they include civic and citizenship education in the curriculum, in their specification of the amount of time given to this area of education, and how they assess its learning outcomes.

Civic and citizenship education is taught as a specific subject in three of the countries and is implemented as a learning area integrated into several subjects in the other two. Some countries specify the amount of instructional time to be spent on civic and citizenship education whereas others do not. While the five countries all expect students in Grade 8 to be formally assessed with regard to learning outcomes of civic and citizenship education, these assessments can take different forms, such as classroom assessments (Peru), written tests (Chile), standardized examinations (Colombia), and projects, oral presentations, and research reports (Dominican Republic).

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

Most of the lower-secondary students in the participating ICCS 2016 Latin American countries supported justifications for dictatorships. About two thirds of the surveyed students on average agreed that dictatorial rule may be justified when it brings order and safety or economic benefits. Students with higher levels of civic knowledge were less likely to agree with justifications for dictatorship. Students' support for authoritarian government practices also varied across the five countries, but we observed a decrease in support for authoritarian government practices since 2009 in only one country. Students enrolled at urban schools, students who expected to study for a university degree, and students who had higher levels of civic knowledge were less likely than their peers to support authoritarian government practices.

While students from the ICCS 2016 Latin American countries tended not to agree with corrupt practices, there was some variation across countries in the extent of that acceptance. Of the four countries that participated in both ICCS cycles, one recorded a slight decrease in acceptance of corrupt practices since 2009 while two others recorded increases in acceptance. Students who studied at urban schools, students who expected to study for a university degree, and students who had higher levels of civic knowledge were those less likely to support corrupt practices in government.

Between 2009 and 2016, schools remained trusted institutions among students in the Latin American region. Chile and Colombia recorded a general decline in trust in civic institutions, while students from the Dominican Republic expressed somewhat higher levels of trust. Students with lower levels of civic knowledge expressed greater trust in government and political parties than did their peers with higher levels of civic knowledge. However, this pattern did not hold for trust in schools or the armed forces. These findings suggest that students who know more about how institutions work may reflect on the shortcomings of these institutions and so have lower levels of confidence in them.

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

Across the five Latin American countries, most students agreed with the statement that "Peace is only achieved through dialogue and negotiation." However, a substantial proportion also endorsed the statement that "Hitting is a justified punishment when someone commits a crime against my family." Majorities of students in four of the five countries supported the notion that using violent means outside the law to punish criminals is acceptable in certain circumstances. Most students tended not to endorse positive statements about the use of violence, and in three out of four countries (Colombia especially) the level of acceptance significantly decreased between 2009 and 2016. The lowest levels of endorsement of the use of violence were found among females, students who expected to study for a university degree, and students with the higher levels of civic knowledge.

When students were asked about their agreement with justifications for breaking the law, majorities of them supported some of these justifications (such as finding it the only way to help one's family or not doing it with bad intentions). We also observed considerable differences on this measure

across countries, with students in Chile and Colombia less inclined to agree with justifications. Again, civic knowledge was negatively associated with endorsement of justifying disobedience to the law, as was female gender and students' expectations of attaining a university degree.

ICCS 2016 also investigated the extent to which students empathized with classmates. Most students indicated that they would feel bothered when classmates found themselves in difficult situations, such as being unfairly punished or victimized by others. Female students and students with higher levels of civic knowledge tended to express higher levels of empathy.

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

More than four out of five students across the participating countries expressed acceptance of neighbors from different social minorities. However, we recorded differences in the proportions of students who said they would not be bothered by neighborhood diversity. Students in Chile and Colombia showed relatively higher levels of acceptance of neighborhood diversity, while students from the Dominican Republic and Peru expressed lower levels. Female students, students at schools in urban areas, and students with higher levels of civic knowledge were more likely than the other students 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. However, we also found notable differences across countries, with students in the Dominican Republic and Peru expressing less positive attitudes and students from Chile and Mexico more positive attitudes. In Chile, Colombia, and Mexico, we recorded higher levels of acceptance of same-sex marriage in 2016 than in ICCS 2009. Support for equal opportunities and rights for homosexual people were more prevalent among female students, students studying at schools in urban areas, and young people with higher levels of civic knowledge.

When asked about discrimination against different social groups in their respective countries, students perceived relatively low levels of discrimination against young people, unemployed persons, and older people. High percentages of students perceived discrimination against homosexual persons, however.

### **Implications**

Students' attitudes toward authoritarian government practices, corruption, and disobedience to the law, as reported in ICCS 2016, appear to be similar to the attitudes recorded in surveys among adult citizens in this region. Commitment to democratic principles was limited among the young people surveyed during ICCS 2016, and their respect for the rule of law was often conditional, especially in terms of safeguarding family interests. Although majorities of students rejected authoritarian government practices, high proportions of them saw safeguarding economic interests or ensuring law and order through dictatorial rule as acceptable. The results from ICCS 2016 emphasize a concurring low level of democratic and pro-social orientations among young people in these Latin American countries, and thus suggest the need for a further strengthening of civic and citizenship education in general.

We found a strong association between these attitudes and students' civic knowledge. Students with high levels of civic knowledge tended to be much less inclined than their less knowledgeable peers to agree with justifications for dictatorship or law-breaking, or to endorse the use of authoritarian government practices, corruption in public services, and use of violence. This finding provides a strong case for improving students' civic learning and acquisition of civic knowledge and understanding, with the prospect of developing more democratic orientations and higher levels of acceptance of the rule of law.

Students with higher levels of civic knowledge were less inclined to express trust in the government or political parties. This negative association may be because knowing more about civic institutions leads to insights into problems with how these political institutions work. In addition, the fact that trust in schools was higher among more knowledgeable students indicates that having more civic knowledge does not necessarily translate into lower levels of trust. These findings support the notion that having more information and knowledge about how political systems and institutions in Latin America work may result in 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.