

# Introducing the Lynching in Latin America (LYLA) Dataset

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## **Abstract**

This article introduces the Lynching in Latin America (LYLA) dataset. Lynching is a surprisingly prevalent form of collective violence, but the systematic study of this phenomenon has previously been hampered by a lack of cross-national event data. The LYLA data covers reported lynching incidents across Latin America between 2010 and 2019. In total, it includes 2818 lynching events in 18 countries. The data feature information on the alleged wrongdoing that motivated the event, the type of violence deployed, the size of the mob, the exact date of the event, and geo-coded coordinates capturing where the event took place at the street level. The LYLA data provides an empirical basis to assess questions concerning the conditions that give rise to lynching, the impact of lynching on communities and social processes, and policies to prevent this form of violence. This article introduces the rationale for the data collection, the coding rules and procedures, and offers an illustrative example of how this data can be used, focusing on state illegitimacy as key condition for lynching.

**Key words:** Lynching, violence, Latin America, dataset, legitimacy

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## 1. Introduction

When, where and why do communities choose to take justice into their own hands and “lynch” alleged wrongdoers? Analysis of lynching is mainly focused on historical US cases (Pfeifer, 2004), but lynching is today common in many countries across the Global South, including India, Indonesia, Nigeria, South Africa, and Mexico (Jung & Cohen, 2020). Contemporary cases of lynching appear closely connected to the state’s political institutions. Lynching participants often claim that they act in the service of justice and complain about the state’s ineffectiveness or unwillingness to deal with wrongdoers (Godoy, 2006). Yet the prior lack of suitable cross-national data means that even basic relationships between lynching and core factors such as state capacity and legitimacy remain poorly understood.

Lynch mobs have rarely been identified as political agents, perhaps because they neither systematically attack state representatives nor follow clear ideological precepts. However, lynchings represent a political expression of the marginalized (Goldstein, 2003). Lynchings belong to the same category as Edward Thompson’s food riots in the 18<sup>th</sup> century UK and James Scott’s Cold War peasant rebellions in Southeast Asia (Thompson, 1971; Scott, 1976). They also resemble vigilantism, although they do not usually count on sustained organizational structures (Moncada, 2017; Bateson, 2021). Lynching can thus be classified as a form of political violence (Kalyvas, 2019). It represents a glaring symptom of deficient state rule and should attract attention from policymakers.

In this article, we introduce the Lynching in Latin America (LYLA) dataset. It is the first dataset spanning more than one country which for the first time enables researchers to conduct cross-country research on lynching. The LYLA data captures 2818 reported fatal and non-fatal events across 18 Latin American countries from 2010 to 2019. It also includes details such as the alleged wrongdoing that motivated the lynching, the type of violence involved, and the number of lynched persons. The data can be used to identify temporal trends across Latin America, offering unique insights to media reporting and policy debates. All events in the LYLA data are geo-coded, and compatible with other spatial data, making it possible to examine previously untested assumptions and generate a fuller understanding of lynching, in comparison to other more commonly studied forms of violence. Using this dataset, researchers can examine the drivers of lynching, such as state deficiencies, community characteristics, and delinquency, and the consequences of lynching, for example its alleged deterrent effect on petty crime, or its capacity to increase community cohesion.

In this article, we first set out the need for a new lynching dataset. Progressing we discuss the process of conceptualizing lynching, our coding approach, followed by a series of descriptive analysis of the data, and an illustrative empirical application focusing on state legitimacy and lynching. The final section concludes by discussing how this data creates new avenues for research.

## 2. Why a new dataset on lynching in Latin America?

Existing lynching data is mainly focused on historical lynchings in the US. For example, data collected by the Tuskegee Institute contains 4742 lynching victims for the period between 1882 and 1968 (Ramey, 2017), and more recent datasets include additional cases (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017; Seguin & Rigby, 2019) and more information on the victims (Tolnay & Beck, 1995; Bailey & Tolnay, 2015).

Evidence on lynching from other contexts is more limited. It often refers to lynching-related violence with local researchers adopting a different terminology. It is nonetheless informative for the wider phenomenon of lynching-related violence. In Indonesia, the World Bank collected data on vigilante violence, a phenomenon that often overlaps with lynching, encountering 33.627 cases with 1659 fatal victims between 2005 and 2014 (World Bank, 2014; Jaffrey, 2019). The South African Police Service identified 846 murders in 2017 and 2018 in relation to mob justice, the term used locally to describe lynching-related incidents (ISSAfrica.org, 2019). In the capital of Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, public health scholars counted 1249 people killed in cases of mob justice in the five years from 2000 to 2004, drawing on autopsy reports from the Department of Pathology combined with interviews (Ng'walali & Kitinya, 2006). In Latin America, several organizations and scholars have collected data on lynching in single countries, including Guatemala (MINUGUA, 2000; see Mendoza, 2008), Mexico (Rodríguez Guillén & Veloz Ávila, 2019), and Argentina (Gamallo, 2020).<sup>1</sup>

Lynching is thus a widespread phenomenon, notably in mid- and low-income countries of the Global South with imperfect democracies. Yet to reliably capture the frequency of lynching and understand its causal drivers, we need comparable cross-country event data. Each of the prior discussed datasets use different definitions, rely on different sources, and cover different time periods. This may explain many of the differences between the figures both across and within countries and limits any systematic comparison.

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion on other sources of lynching data in Latin America see Appendix 1.

To date the only cross-national data was collected by Jung and Cohen (2020). They use mentions in US State Department human rights country reports as source of information. Lynching is mentioned in reports from all world regions and increasingly so from the 1970s to the 2000s. Beyond this creative approach, which does not allow for insights about the frequency and specific characteristics of lynching events, there are no cross-national data on lynching.<sup>2</sup>

To develop the first cross-national lynching event dataset, we focus on Latin America. Several reasons motivate this choice. Firstly, existing data suggest lynching is a common form of collective violence in many Latin American countries, and surveys show there is broad support for community justice (Zizumbo-Colunga, 2015; Nussio & Parás, 2022; Nussio, forthcoming). Yet, as we detailed above, there is a deficit in systematic cross-national data.

Secondly, as a region Latin America is comparatively homogenous, which allows researchers to keep relatively constant several background factors that may bias data collection. Importantly, there is a similar vocabulary and use of the term lynching in Spanish and Portuguese. This facilitates data collection based on news reports which would not be the case if countries from different world regions were compared.

Thirdly, despite the relative homogeneity of the region, there is large variation within Latin America. For example, there are both relatively strong states in the *Cono Sur* region and relatively weak states in Central America. Perhaps more importantly, most countries are characterized by notable variation in state presence across their territories with pockets of state weakness or “brown areas” (O’Donnell, 1993). This variation provides a fertile terrain to examine theoretical claims about lynching.

To summarize, existing lynching data are usually limited to single countries, and mixed in terms of the temporal scope and conceptual approach. While they provide indicative if anecdotal evidence, they do not allow for thorough comparative analysis. To address this, we compile the first cross-national lynching event data, focusing on Latin America for pragmatic and methodological reasons.

### 3. The concept of lynching

The term lynching has its roots in a certain Judge Lynch, who defended extralegal justice in 18<sup>th</sup> century Virginia (Waldrep, 2002). Several languages, including German, French, Spanish,

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<sup>2</sup> The Armed Conflict Location Event Dataset (ACLED) includes a variable called “mob violence”, which is more closely related to riots than to lynching.

and Portuguese have adopted a version of the term. Locally, other terms are used to describe a similar phenomenon, such as *dikeroyok massa* (beaten up by a crowd) in Indonesia (Colombijn, 2002), or *justicia por mano propia* (justice by our own hands) in Latin America (Goldstein, 2003). Scholars often use terms like extralegal justice (Kloppe-Santamaría, 2020), popular justice (Berg, 2011), mob violence (Bailey & Tolnay, 2015), and punitive violence (Baron et al., 2022) to denote essentially the same phenomenon.

We understand lynching as *publicly displayed physical violence executed by a group of civilians against alleged wrongdoers*. For a lynching to occur we therefore require that the following four criteria are met.

First, an act of *physical violence*. This act of violence can be, but does not need to be, fatal. In line with most authors from outside the US context, and especially Latin America (Godoy, 2006; Kloppe-Santamaría, 2020), we do not believe that a fatal outcome should be a necessary criterion, as this risks excluding relevant events where the target escaped, was rescued or simply survived the attack. Readers should note that this is an important distinction to common usage of the term in the US context, which requires a fatal outcome. US researchers have called lynchings that did not end in fatality due to interventions of state agents “threatened” or “averted” lynchings (Hagen, Makovi & Bearman, 2013; Beck, 2015; Beck, Tolnay & Bailey, 2016).

Second, the act is perpetrated by a *group of civilians*, rather than members of a standing armed organization (Senechal de la Roche, 1997). This differentiates lynching from violence used by gangs, rebels, and regular security forces. The term “mob” is often used in this context, denoting a temporary and fickle civilian group with an ambiguous agenda, and fluid and fuzzy membership (Senechal de la Roche, 1996). Members of organizations may join in a lynching, but the perpetrators must act in their capacity as civilians and not as members of an existent standing organization (e.g., the Ku Klux Klan, or a drug cartel). Different from other researchers, we abstain from using the related term vigilantism, which includes, in addition to acts of violence, the prevention and investigation of violence (Bateson, 2021). Lynching is the more precise term for our dataset as it denotes the act of violence, rather than a more sustained social practice, as implied by vigilantism.

Third, the perpetrators must act against *some alleged wrongdoing*. In lynching violence, targeted individuals are held responsible for what they allegedly did. This distinguishes lynching for example from rioting or hate crimes, which do not require a particular wrongdoing. Senechal de la Roche (1997: 61) calls this aspect of lynching “individual liability”. We use the inclusive term “wrongdoing” rather than the more specific crime or

offense as transgressions that give rise to lynchings can either be against the law (like theft) or against some social norm (concerning for example appropriate sexual behavior or witchcraft).

Fourth, the act must include a form of *public display*, sometimes enacted as a spectacle (Fujii, 2017). This differentiates lynching from clandestine forms of collective violence like social cleansing. Ritualized actions may be part of lynching, but this is not a definitional aspect as lynchings vary so much that they cannot be generally classified as a ritual. Some authors have distinguished different types of lynchings depending on different levels of publicness (Smångs, 2016). We only require that the violence be undertaken in public without any intention to conceal it.

#### 4. Coding Lynching

To identify and categorize lynching events, we primarily relied on Factiva, the most comprehensive global news database, containing almost two billion news articles from more than 33,000 news sources from 200 countries in around 28 languages.<sup>3</sup> This includes news networks, such as Reuters and the Associated Press, as well as local radio, television and newspaper reporting in local languages.<sup>4</sup> Factiva allows researchers to search for keywords and specify the countries of interest.<sup>5</sup> We tested several search strings, ultimately settling on a specification that included common terms for lynching in English and Spanish (e.g. Lynching and Linchamiento), a number of related colloquial terms in Spanish (e.g. *justicia por mano propia*), terms relating to mob violence in both Spanish and English (e.g. lynch mob or vigilantes), and excluding a number of common terms unrelated to our concept (e.g. the bank Merrill Lynch).

Next, we limited the geographic scope of our search to Latin America. Given that our data collection is mainly based on newspapers, we limit our focus to Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries in Latin America for reasons of language comparability. This includes: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. We exclude Jamaica, Belize, Haiti, Guyana, Suriname, and a series of smaller Caribbean states due to different language use hampering comparability of news-based text search across countries and limited news coverage. We also exclude Cuba due to limited

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed discussion on different sources, see Appendix 3.

<sup>4</sup> We also pilot tested LexisNexis. Results were similar.

<sup>5</sup> We coded articles in English, Spanish and Portuguese.

newspaper reporting. The temporal focus is 2010 to 2019. This approach produced a corpus of around 80,000 news articles.

Human coders then reviewed each article to determine whether it identified a lynching event. Identified cases were coded to capture details such as the date of the event, the location, number of targets and perpetrators<sup>6</sup>, and a series of variables, such as the form of violence, the alleged form of wrongdoing, and the physical consequences suffered.

Following best practices (Davenport & Moore, 2015), all coding sheets were then checked by one of the more experienced coders. Any disagreements or contentious issues were either discussed in meetings with the project leaders or solved between the coders in the event of a clear error. Therefore, all lynching events included in the LYLA data have been checked by at least two persons, and unclear cases reviewed by at least one project leader. To avoid double counting, we cross-checked all events that happened on similar dates and in similar locations at the end of the coding process.

We set a low bar for events to enter the dataset, including cases that some may not consider lynchings, but “attempted” or “averted” lynchings. The boundary condition for inclusion was a clear threat of lynching violence. A clear threat of lynching is expressed by the presence of a mob showing intimidating behavior or engaging in vandalism of goods that belong to the target. This low bar allows researchers who use the dataset to set their own threshold, for example including all LYLA cases, only cases resulting in injury, or, even more restrictively, only cases resulting in death. Also, this low bar allows researchers to examine what causes lynchings to be lethal vs. non-lethal (see Hagen, Makovi & Bearman, 2013).

Whilst the news-based approach was the best suited to gather systematic cross-national lynching data, there are well-known limits to collecting violent event data using news reports. News have an important reporting bias for lynchings (Godoy, 2006: 26; Mendoza, 2008: 51), which affects the collection of data on all types of violent events (see Weidmann, 2015). More newsworthy events are prioritized, which means that more violent, more urban, and more spectacular lynchings involving unusual protagonists are reported more often (Miller et al., 2022). Our approach therefore risks introducing systematic bias (e.g., urban bias, bias towards bigger events etc.). Similar problems also afflict well-known and high-quality lynching datasets from the US (Spilerman & Gerratana, 2009). By relying on local media sources included within the Factiva database, we hope to mitigate some of these problems, and prior

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<sup>6</sup> A lynching usually involves three parties: a victim of an alleged wrongdoing (for example of a theft), the alleged wrongdoer (for example a thief) and the perpetrators (the lynch mob). We refer to the alleged wrongdoer as target rather than victim to avoid confusion.

research has shown that despite these challenges this type of data can be instructive (Sundberg & Melander, 2013). This must however remain an important consideration for researchers who use the LYLA data.

It is important to stress that the LYLA data captures *reported* lynchings. There is a significant number of lynchings that go unreported in news media. Hence, we are not blind to potential biases in data collection and try to be as transparent as possible in our presentation. We also conduct additional validation checks using locally coded national datasets, which largely support the validity of our data. In addition, we provide researchers with information on the country-year level on overall Factiva news coverage, which allows to identify potential biases stemming from changes in the source material (Clark & Sikkink, 2013). We discuss validation in Appendix 4 and provide a separate 50-page document including individual country reports comparing our data with datasets available for individual countries.

We opted to rely on news media reports after carefully considering alternatives, including crime statistics, social media, and surveys. First, lynching is not defined as a crime in the penal code of any Latin American state (see Appendix 2). A lynching incident may enter crime statistics, for example, as a homicide or injury, but given the large number of homicides and injuries unrelated to lynchings, these forms of violence do not provide a meaningful proxy. Hence, there is no readily available official information.

Second, we decided against using social media. News reports provide a consistent corpus of data that can be analyzed systematically and retrospectively, and of which the biases are relatively well understood (Miller et al., 2022). Social media is harder to study systematically, and the biases are less clear. Furthermore, social media entries on brutal violence tend to be quickly deleted from platforms. Using social media would also have risked exposing our coders to considerable psychological harm. We made sure that our coders were only exposed to text, rather than to potentially more harmful visual material about lynching, shown on Facebook and other platforms.<sup>7</sup>

Third, we opted against using surveys. To achieve sufficient coverage across time and space would have been prohibitively expensive and likely to only reveal scattered and geographically limited information. Instead, we ran a survey to validate the LYLA data on the level of Mexico City neighbourhoods (see below and Appendix 4.3). We also explored whether existing surveys might provide a workable source of data. However, possible indicators, such

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<sup>7</sup> We prepared the coders to the kind of content they were going to encounter before they started, assured that they could stop working or take extended breaks without repercussions, and inquired about any disturbing experiences in group meetings.



as expressed support for self-justice, were found to be relatively poor proxies for lynching events.<sup>8</sup>

## 5. The Lynchings in Latin America dataset

The LYLA dataset includes 2818 reported lynching events from 2010 to 2019.<sup>9</sup> It is the first cross-national lynching event dataset, and the first Latin America-wide lynching dataset spanning multiple years of observation based on a unified coding scheme and common data sources. The most important variables concern date and location (in most cases identified down to the street level), the types of wrongdoing giving rise to lynching, the number of perpetrators, the types of violence inflicted, and the types of harm suffered by the targeted persons. Individual variables are described in detail in a separate Codebook.

### *5.1. Geographic distribution of lynching*

Figure 1 shows a map of Latin America. Each country is shaded relative to the total reported lynchings per million inhabitants. Darker shading signifies a higher rate of lynching. Guatemala is the country that has the highest rate over the whole ten-year period with 19 events per million inhabitants (261 cases for a population of roughly 14 million inhabitants). Bolivia has a rate of 11 per million inhabitants. Mexico has by far most cases (1134) and the third highest rate with 9 per million inhabitants. Peru (6) and Argentina (5) also have relatively high rates. In contrast, we register no lynchings in El Salvador. This is possibly a result of limited news coverage, as an open internet search points to evidence of isolated lynching events. Another explanation is that other forms of collective violence, especially gang violence, replace lynching, or instead “crowd out” the reporting of lynching in El Salvador (Castillo Claudett, 2000: 219).

Figure 1 also marks the locations of all lynching events, with higher densities of black dots indicating greater frequencies of lynching in that region. The areas in and around Mexico City and the Southwestern highlands of Guatemala stand out as hot spots. Also, highland regions in Bolivia and Peru as well as urban areas across Latin America (e.g., Lima, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro) show a concentration of lynchings. In Colombia, we see lynchings

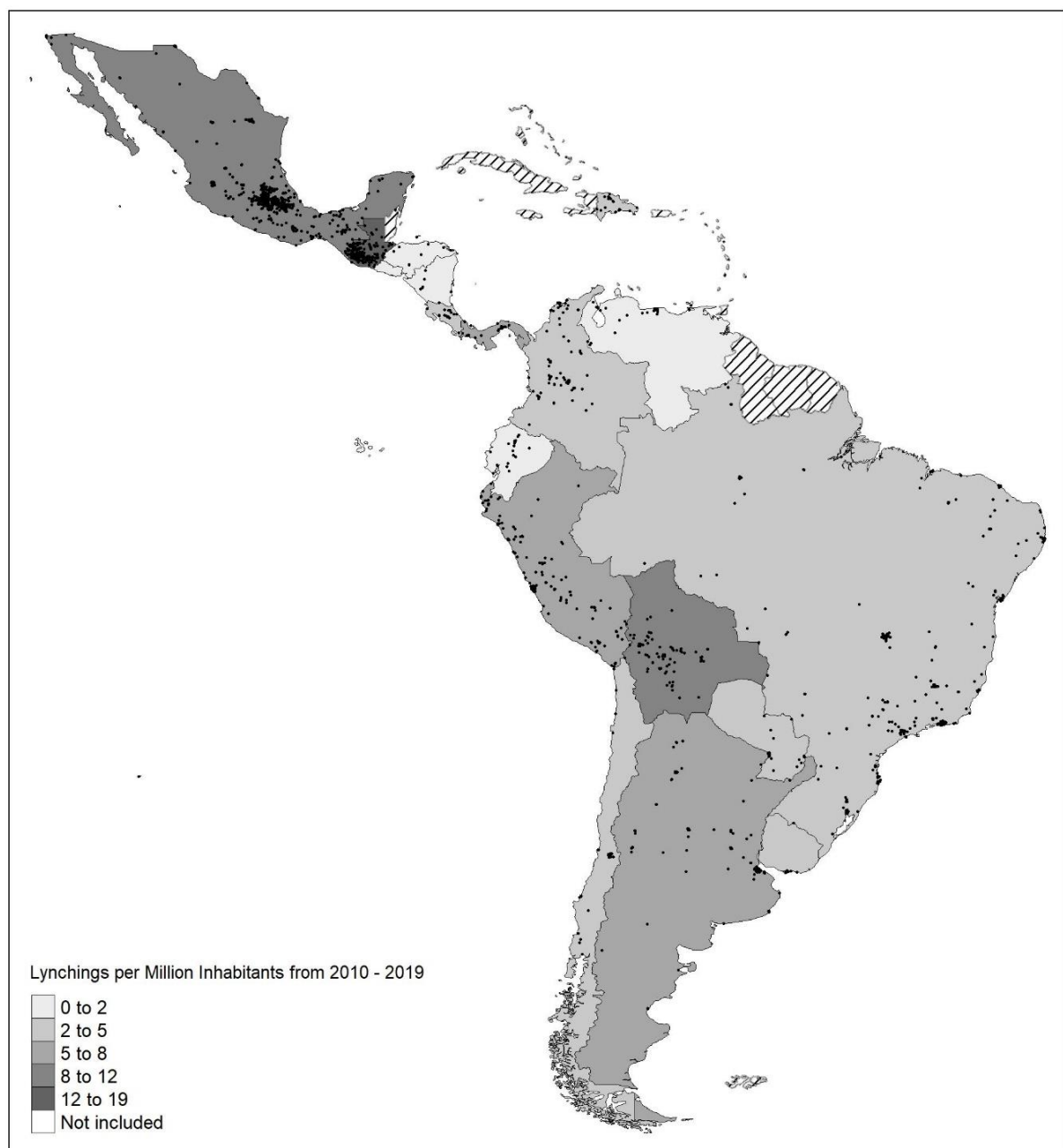
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<sup>8</sup> Pearson’s correlation between average support for self-justice (taken from the Latin American Public Opinion Project) measured at the province level and lynching per million inhabitants is 0.09 (for other specifications of the lynching variable, correlation is close to 0).

<sup>9</sup> For Mexico, we extended the observation period to also include the years 2000 to 2009 (371 cases) as well as 2020 to February 2022 (354 cases). These cases are not included in the below figures but are included in the dataset.

clustered around major population centres, with low levels of lynching in the most conflict-affected areas. It is not clear if this corresponds to a process of violence substitution or reflects the “crowding out” of lynching reporting. These patterns of geographic variation may provide interesting gateways for the study of violence substitution, the importance of urbanity, and the role of the state. Just from eyeballing the LYLA data we can already cast serious doubt on the prevalent notion that lynching is specific to rural societies.

*Figure 1. Reported lynchings across Latin America, 2010-2019*



As most lynchings are geo-coded on the street level, the LYL data can be utilized for fine-grained analysis at the sub-national and even sub-city level. As an example, Figure 2 presents lynchings across Mexican states. Here, we see that lynchings are largely concentrated in the most populated area of Mexico (even when accounting for population size) in and around Mexico City, including Puebla with a rate of 30 lynchings per million inhabitants, Tlaxcala (28), Mexico State (*Estado de México*) (21), Mexico City (20), Hidalgo (16), and Morelos (12). Oaxaca (14) and Chiapas (8) also have relatively high amounts of lynchings. This supports prior research by Fuentes Díaz (2005: 13) who reported the exact same eight states as having the highest concentration of lynchings for the period 1984 to 2001. Similarly, Kloppe-Santamaría (2020: 127) reports that most lynchings are concentrated in the three states of Mexico City, Puebla, and Mexico State for the period between 1930 and 1959, suggesting a considerable historical continuity in the geographic prevalence of lynching.

Figure 2. Reported lynchings across Mexico, 2010-2019

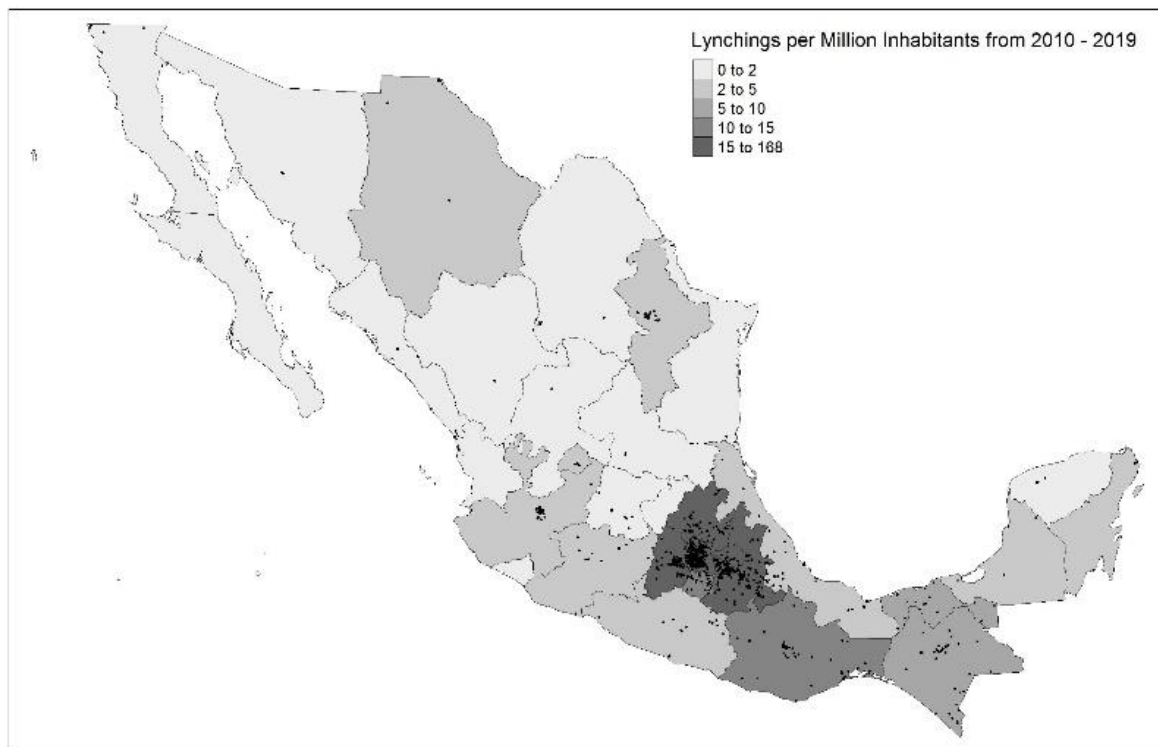
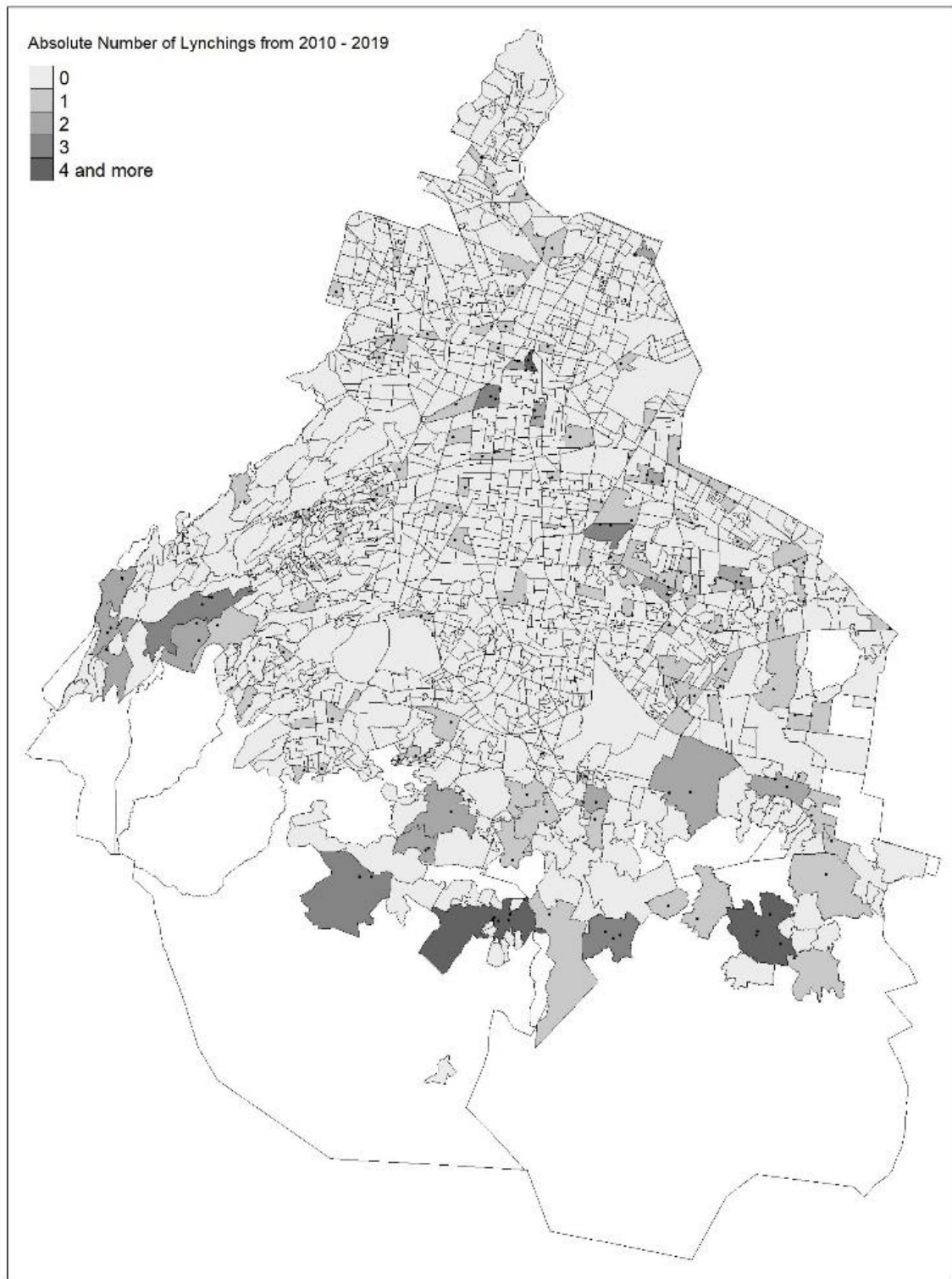


Figure 3 zooms in to Mexico City. This granular level reveals the location of lynchings down to the roughly 1800 Mexico City neighbourhoods (*colonias*)<sup>10</sup>. We see that lynchings are concentrated in the Southern, semi-urban outskirts of the city, in the highly populated area of Iztapalapa, and in some areas of the center, especially the neighbourhood of Tepito with an

<sup>10</sup> In this figure, the shading does not reflect a population-adjusted measure as units are too small.

important market area. Using this highly granular approach, we validated our news-based data collection by deploying a survey in 340 colonias of Mexico City where respondents were asked whether they knew if lynching-style incidents occurred in their colonia. As we set out in Appendix 4.3, the survey measure was significantly correlated with the news-based indicator of lynching (correlation coefficients between 0.11 and 0.21), suggesting that within Mexico City at least, the spatial variation represented in the LYLA data is broadly in line with local knowledge of lynching. The encountered correlations, though significant, are though weak, which is mainly due to two reasons: first, the survey-based measure of lynching prevalence is noisier than expected, as respondents from the same neighborhood showed little agreement about the existence of lynchings, suggesting that survey-based measures may be problematic. Second, the media-based measures underreport lynchings, which may also weaken the correlation.

*Figure 3. Absolute number of reported lynchings in Mexico-City, 2010-2019*



### *5.2.Temporal distribution of lynching*

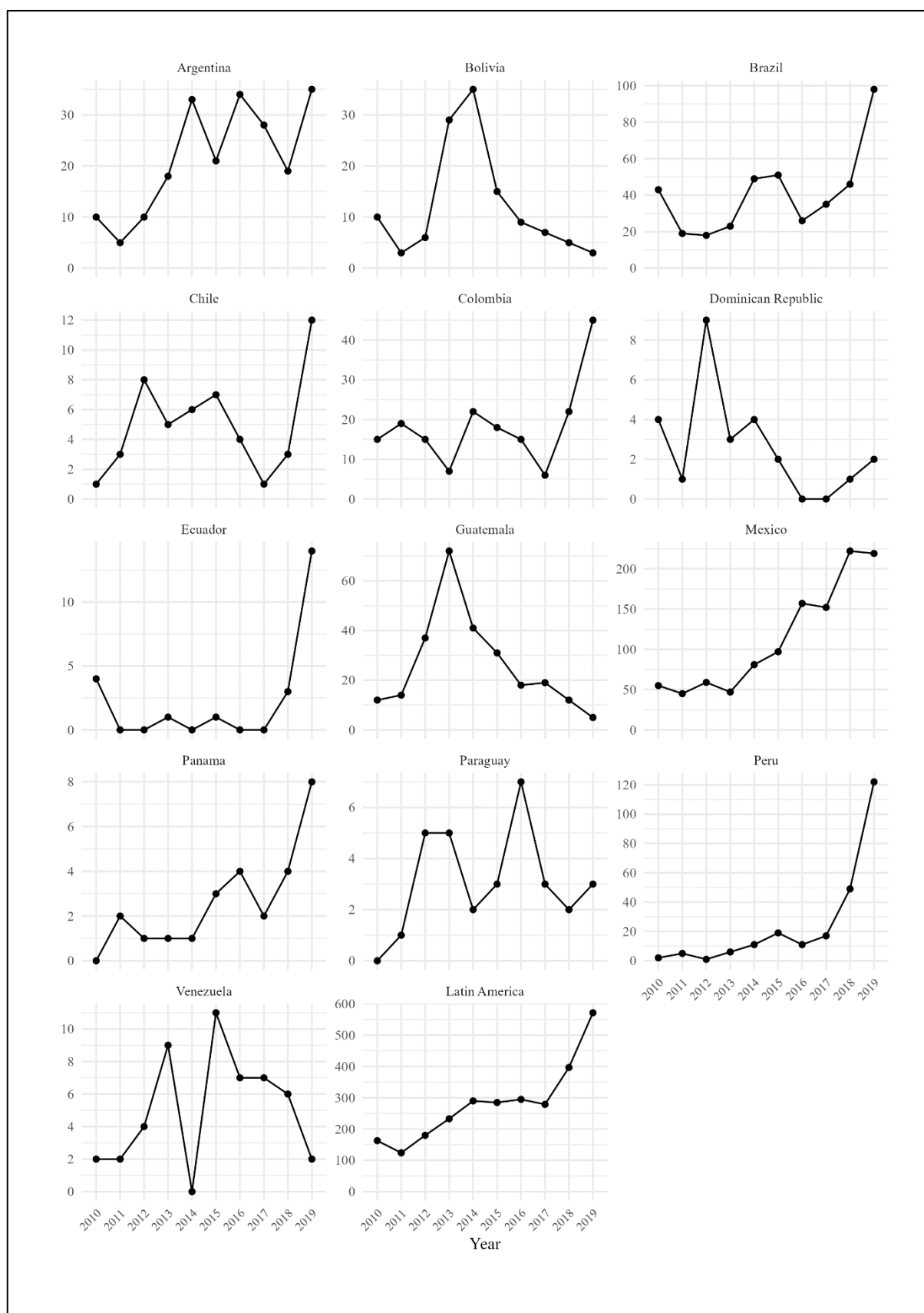
A repeated claim in the Latin American news media is that lynching has increased in recent years. Yet a lack of data has limited empirical assessments of this claim. The LYLA data captures the precise date of each event, allowing researchers to explore trends.

Figure 4 presents the total number of reported lynchings in the covered countries over time. The last panel shows the trend across all Latin America. Overall, we see a tendency towards an increase in lynchings. Interestingly, reported lynching does not show a common temporal pattern when comparing countries. For example, for both Bolivia and Guatemala, 2013 was a pivotal year from which point lynching became less common. In contrast, in several countries reported lynchings increase dramatically towards the end. In Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Mexico, for example, the last two years witnessed the highest absolute number of lynchings on record.

We are mindful that these increases might emerge from an increase in the sources included in the Factiva database, which has improved its news coverage over time. We investigate this further and determine that this does not seem to have been a decisive factor in shaping our trends. In Mexico, for example, we find increased news coverage, but the increase in reported lynchings is much larger than the increase in news coverage, suggesting that there is also an increase in the actual number of lynchings. We are thus confident that our data provides support for the widely held impression, particularly in Mexico, that lynchings are increasing in recent years.

Also, to validate the temporal trends, we compare our data with other existing datasets at the country level. We find that the LYLA data provides comparable figures to other country-focused datasets based on local newspapers. We detail these validation checks in Appendix 4 and in a separate appendix including individual country reports.

Figure 4. Reported lynchings by country and Latin America, 2010-2019<sup>11</sup>



<sup>11</sup> Countries with less than 5 cases in each year are not shown.

### *5.3. The wrongdoers and their wrongdoings*

In addition to date and location, the LYLA data captures several other attributes. For example, we register the alleged wrongdoings that precipitated the lynching (see Figure 5). Alleged theft is by far the most common catalyst of lynchings in all countries (1745 cases in total). This is in line with other country specific datasets that also point to a large majority of cases triggered by suspected theft, for example Ecuador (Castillo Claudett, 2000: 214) and Bolivia (Luna Acevedo, 2016).

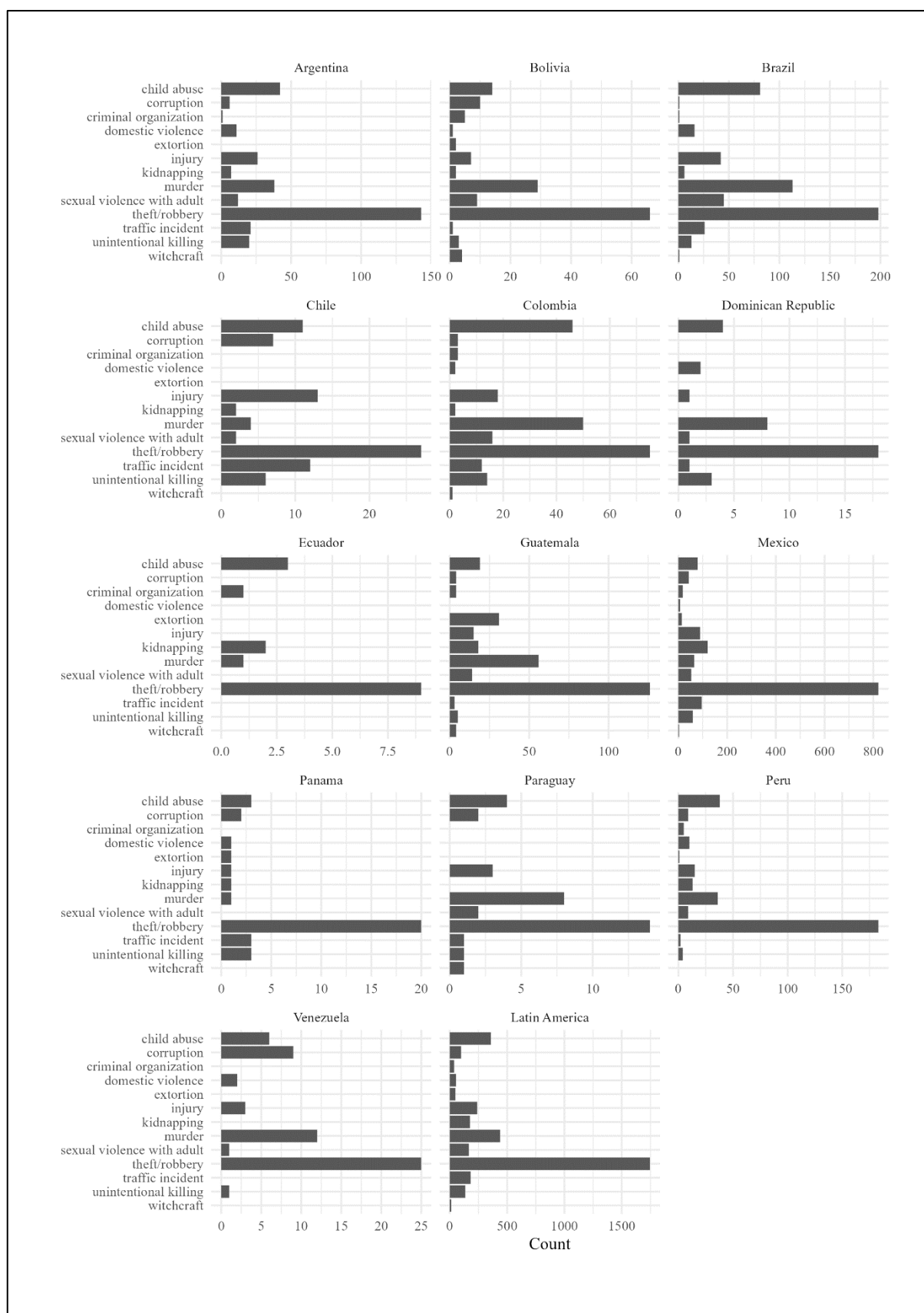
After theft, alleged murder (439 cases) and child abuse (359 cases) were the most often mentioned wrongdoings giving rise to lynchings. In Brazil and Colombia, murder and child abuse are more frequent relative to theft. Cases of child abuse have the potential to generate moral outrage in the community and thus mobilize large crowds. While child abuse and sexual violence against adults was relatively often reported as catalyst, we did not find systematic evidence of behavior deemed sexually inappropriate, such as the stigmatization of homosexuality or premarital sex. Surprisingly, traffic accidents, for example reckless and drunken driving, have also given rise to a substantial number of lynching incidents (182 cases).

The catalysts of lynching may well have shifted over time together with a general cultural change. For example, lynching due to allegations of witchcraft are rare today (14 cases reported), but were relatively common in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at least in Mexico (Kloppe-Santamaría, 2020), and still seem to be common in places such as Papua New Guinea (Forsyth, 2018).

Although Latin America, particularly countries like Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil, are plagued by organized crime, lynchings of members of criminal organizations are rare (38 cases). Smaller groups of kidnappers were targeted relatively often (176 cases). However, the alleged wrongdoings giving rise to lynching show that mobs prefer to attack isolated petty delinquents, as they may fear repercussions from criminal organizations.



Figure 5. Number of reported wrongdoings that gave rise to lynching by country<sup>12</sup>



<sup>12</sup> Countries with less than 5 cases in each year are excluded. Multiple options are possible for a single event.

In most reported cases (69%), only one person was targeted by the lynch mob. In 18%, it was two persons. More than five persons were targeted only in exceptional cases. This speaks to the strong asymmetry between perpetrators and targets, which facilitates the act of violence. Some authors even argue that asymmetry is a definitional aspect of lynching (Vilas, 2008).

In the beginning of the data collection, we defined four focus countries to estimate the time to completion of the dataset. These countries include the three most populous countries Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia, and Guatemala, as a country known for a high lynching prevalence. For these countries, we coded an expanded list of variables. Due to time and financial constraints, we could not code this expanded list of variables for all countries, as the data collection would have become overly time consuming. We report descriptive statistics for some of the variables that were only coded in these four focus countries. For these four countries, 91% of the targets (2562 individuals) were male and 9% female (246). Males are also more often killed in lynchings than females (24% vs. 14%). The most often targeted age group are young adults (see Table I). In cases where information was available, the main target was between 18 and 35 years old (60% of cases). Both sex and age group distributions mirror work on lynching victims in the US (Bailey & Tolnay, 2015).

*Table I: Target's age*

<b>Age group</b>	<b>Number of individuals (Percentage of total reported individuals)</b>
Under 18	245 (17%)
18-35	877 (60%)
36-60	330 (22%)
61 and above	17 (1%)
Events with no report	967

#### *5.4. The perpetrators*

How many people take part in a lynch mob? This variable was collected for all countries. For those cases where we were able to capture this information, we find 24% of lynching events involve groups with less than 20 participants, 46% between 20 and 99 participants, and 30% with more than 100 participants (Table II). Large variation in the number of mob participants is common across contexts, including in the US (Smångs, 2016). Some extreme and rare events involve more than a thousand participants. For example, 2500 villagers burned two alleged kidnappers in Guatemala in 2010.

*Table II: Size of "lynch mob"*

<b>Size</b>	<b>Number of events (Percentage of total reported events)</b>
20 and less participants	397 (25%)
20 to 99 participants	723 (46%)
100 and more participants	446 (29%)
No report	1252

There is some debate about the role of the state in lynchings. Tolerance of lynching by state agents can facilitate lynching, such as in the historical US South (Kato, 2015)<sup>13</sup>. For the four focus countries, news reports indicate that the state acted against lynching in 1438 cases and in favour in only 21 cases. However, the pressure applied by local lynch mobs seems to be influential, as in most cases it is the targets of lynch mobs that are arrested (1085 reported arrests of targets), not the lynching perpetrators (68 reported arrests). In 20 cases, there are arrests of both targets and perpetrators.

Nevertheless, when state agents get involved, violence tends to be less severe, as evidence from the four focus countries suggests. With no state involvement, 66% of lynchings resulted in a fatal outcome, while when state agents were present 14% resulted in a fatality. An initial descriptive analysis of our four focus countries does therefore not suggest that state agents systematically tolerate or even promote lynching violence. While state agents acquiesce in some cases, they usually act against lynch mobs. This is different from other cases and time periods when state agents have more often collaborated with lynch mobs, as for example in post-revolutionary Mexico (Kloppe-Santamaría, 2020) and Indonesia (Jaffrey, 2019).

Another debate in the literature concerns the relationship between lynching and the customary law of indigenous communities, particularly in Guatemala (Mendoza, 2008; Sieder, 2011) and Bolivia (Yates, 2017). In Guatemala, we found evidence of participation of indigenous communities in 44 of 261 cases (17%), in Mexico in 26 of 1134 cases (2%). In Colombia and Brazil, we did not find evidence of participation of any indigenous communities. Overall, there is thus little evidence to suggest that indigenous populations are the main driver of lynchings in Latin America. Guatemala – and perhaps Bolivia for which we have no systematic information – are exceptions where indigenous communities were more often involved in lynchings. In contrast to common media narratives, even in those countries, most cases of lynching do not seem to be related to indigenous communities. However, we do find that events involving indigenous groups might be more deadly. For those cases in which

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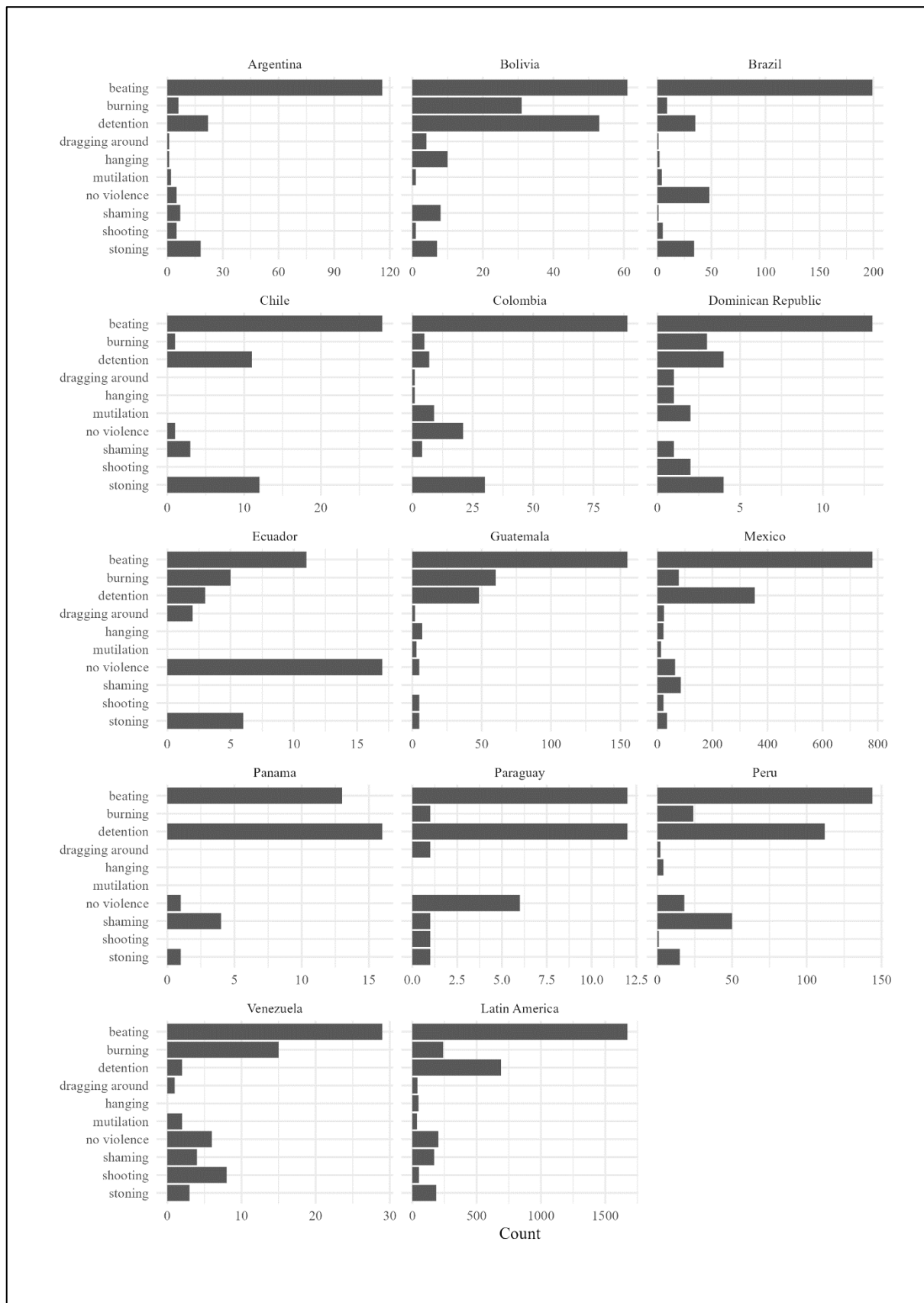
<sup>13</sup> In the “New South” of the US, authorities more often intervened to stop threatened lynchings (Beck, Tolnay & Bailey, 2016).

indigenous communities were involved, 74% ended with a fatal outcome, compared to 21% for the whole sample. This presents several important avenues for future research.

### *5.5.The violence*

What kinds of violence do lynch mobs use? While the exact types of violence are not always reported in the news reports, there are some patterns (Figure 6). We record beatings in 59% of all cases (1672 cases). Some form of forced detention is also common (24% and 690 cases). Often, alleged wrongdoers are for example tied to a traffic light and abandoned there. Burning was reported in 9% of the cases, stoning in 7%. Burning is conspicuously more common in Guatemala and Bolivia, perhaps contributing to more sensationalist news about lynching in those countries. Hanging was registered in 48 cases and shooting in 52 cases. As mentioned, the boundary condition for inclusion into the dataset is a clear threat of violence. In some cases, there is thus no actual violence inflicted, most often because the target escapes or is protected by authorities. Taken together, the data suggests that the most common forms of violence are those that most easily allow for evasion of individual responsibility.

Figure 6. Reported violence used by perpetrators by country<sup>14</sup>



Not all targeted persons in our dataset suffered direct physical consequences from the lynching (Table III). Roughly 20% remained uninjured, mostly because the police intervened in time, or the targeted person was able to escape. However, in 24% of the registered cases (543 cases), there was at least one fatality, and in 56% at least one of the targets suffered an injury. In 75% of the cases with a fatal victim, there was exactly one fatal victim, while in 25% of the cases it was more than one victim.<sup>15</sup> Journalists often immediately report a lynching when the physical harm suffered by the target is not yet clear. This explains a high number of cases without reports.

*Table III: Physical consequences*

Type	Number of events (Percentage of total reported events)
No injury	464 (20%)
Injury	1285 (56%)
Death	543 (24%)
No report	526

## 6. Application: Lynching and legitimacy

We offer a brief application to show how the LYLA data can be used. We focus on the relationship between state legitimacy and lynching. Prior research shows that when citizens perceive the government to be fair and just, they tend to comply with the law (Levi, 1997). But when citizens do not see states as legitimate authorities, in particular, when states fail to respond to what citizens perceive to be serious threats, they lose legitimacy, and support for violence and vigilante justice increases (Nivette, 2016; Cruz & Kloppe-Santamaría, 2019).

Several case studies indicate that lynch mobs arise in the absence of legitimate state authority to make justice and punish wrongdoers (Goldstein, 2003; Godoy, 2006; Yates, 2017; Smith, 2019; Jung & Cohen, 2020; Nussio & Clayton, 2023; Nussio, forthcoming). Yet a prior lack of data means there is limited evidence supporting this claim. The LYLA data allows us to examine if indeed *lynching is more likely to occur in areas with low state legitimacy*.

### 6.1. Measuring state legitimacy across Latin America

To capture variation in state legitimacy across Latin America, we created a province-level dataset covering the whole of Latin America, including geographic characteristics and average

<sup>14</sup> Countries with less than 5 cases in each year are excluded. Multiple options are possible for a single event.

<sup>15</sup> We registered the number of fatalities per event in the four focus countries, with the following distribution: 2 cases had 6 fatal victims, 3 had 5 victims, 10 had 4 victims, 32 had 3 victims, 81 had 2 victims and 384 had 1 victim.

attitudes concerning state legitimacy (see Appendix 5). Province-level measures of state legitimacy are based on all “AmericasBarometer” surveys<sup>16</sup>, which include approximately 200,000 respondents from 2002 to 2019.

We generate estimates of the levels of state legitimacy in each geographic unit by averaging the score individuals prescribe to a barrage of related questions. This method allows to measure the variation in legitimacy both across and within countries. To balance sufficient within-state variation with sufficiently large sample sizes, we use an intermediate unit of analysis, the “admin1” level which corresponds to the highest level of aggregation within a country. To increase the sample size of respondents for each unit, we collapse responses to the same question asked repeatedly for a series of surveys. Given the random sampling procedure of each survey and the relatively limited temporal variation in responses to questions about legitimacy, this is an appropriate procedure to reduce random variation. We thus generate a dataset that reflects a cross-section of Latin American provinces at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For future research, covariates with temporal variation would allow for more sophisticated analysis.

The selection of appropriate indicators is limited by the availability of existing measures. We focus on indicators of trust in institutions. Specifically, we measure legitimacy with trust in government, police, and justice, and whether courts can be considered fair (all originally on a 1-7 Likert scale). We aggregate responses to the province level (admin1, N=349). We also use an index that combines all four variables to reduce random variation<sup>17</sup>, and a measure derived from principal component analysis (the first component of all individual items).

## *6.2. Analysis and findings*

We use linear regression models to estimate the relationship between indicators of state legitimacy and lynching across Latin America. The dependent variable consists of lynchings per million inhabitants. We logarithmically transform this variable to account for potential heteroscedasticity.<sup>18</sup> The independent variables are normalized, to facilitate comparability, and used in separate models.

We estimate, first, a “fixed effects” model adjusting for population size and country fixed effects and, second, a “control variables” model using an extended set of control variables and clustered standard errors, but no fixed effects. Country fixed effects for the province analysis

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<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/about-americasbarometer.php>

<sup>17</sup> Cronbach alpha of trust in government index is 0.81.

<sup>18</sup> Appendix 5 shows results without logging this variable.

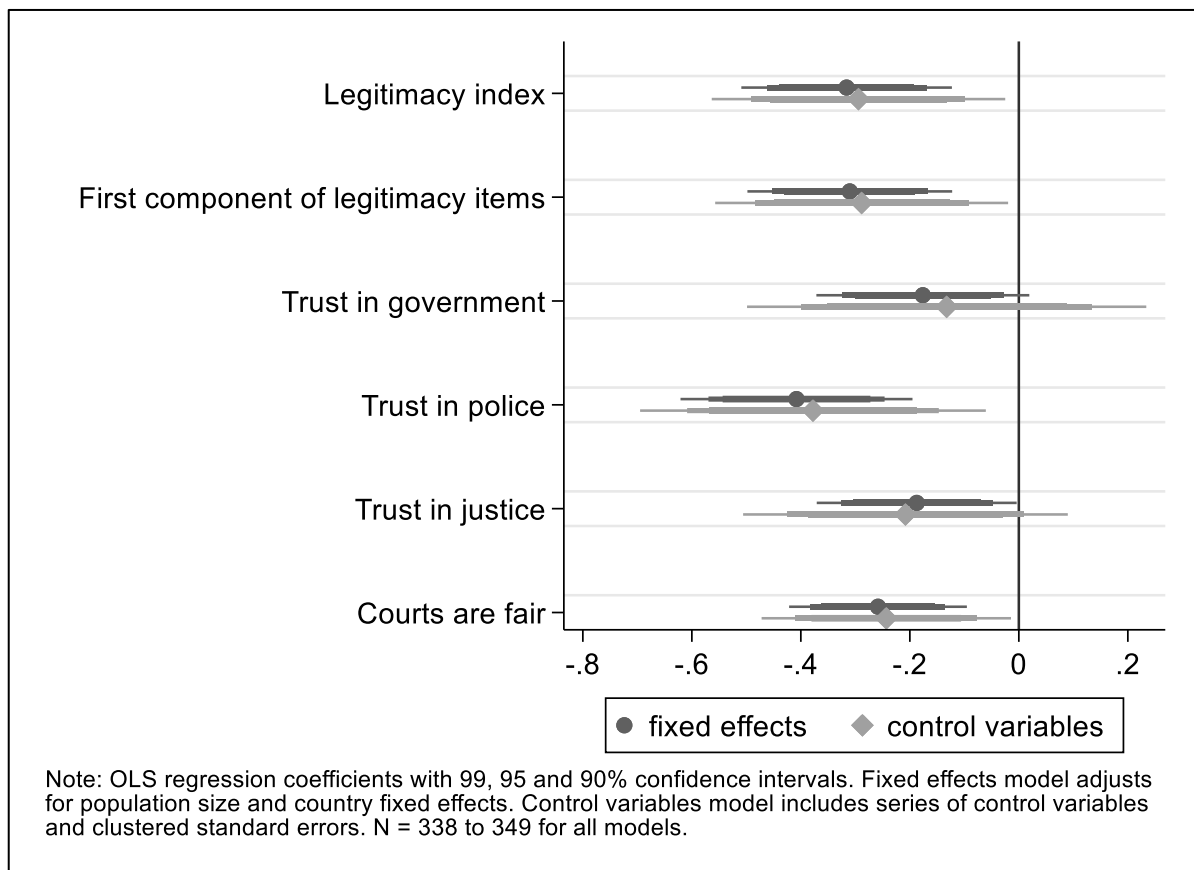
adjust for national level traits that affect the whole country and might influence lynching, including national laws, history of violence, and political system. Also, by including country fixed effects, we account for differences in reporting on lynching across countries. The “control variables” model includes an extended set of province-level control variables: surface area, distance to capital, homicide rate, car ownership as indicator of wealth, and urbanity. Control variables help account for potential confounding. We report the sources of these variables in Appendix 5.1.

We focus on the association between legitimacy and lynchings, rather than their causal relationship. In fact, lynchings may not only be caused by low legitimacy, but may contribute to illegitimacy. Hence, an association between the two may be the result of an endogenous relationship. Soifer (2012: 592) even argues that lynchings can be seen as an indicator of state weakness. Given the state of the research on lynching, examining the association between legitimacy and lynching provides an important piece of evidence. Future research should seek to disentangle the causal direction.

Figure 7 shows the coefficients along with their confidence intervals (full regression tables in Appendix 5.2). We see a negative relationship between indicators of state legitimacy and logged lynching per million inhabitants. For the legitimacy index, a 1 standard deviation reduction corresponds to roughly 25% additional lynchings per million (the average yearly lynching per million is 4.6). Using the first component of the four items from a principal component analysis, the result is very similar. The individual items show similar relationships, with the trust in government indicator showing the lowest and the trust in police indicator showing the largest coefficient. The two specifications (control variables and fixed effects) produce similar coefficients, suggesting that the results are not due to minor modelling choices.



Figure 7. State legitimacy and lynching per million inhabitants (log)



In additional analysis, we find that this relationship is specific to lynching and not to all forms of violence, as the state legitimacy index is not robustly related to homicide rates (Appendix 5). We thus find suggestive evidence that lynching is associated with a context of state illegitimacy, at the level of provinces across Latin America. These findings confirm previous insights and open several avenues for future research.

## 7. Conclusions

This article introduces a novel dataset on Lynching in Latin America (LYLA). The dataset covers reported lynching events, which we define as publicly displayed physical violence executed by a group of civilians against alleged wrongdoers. The data covers all Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries in Latin America between 2010 and 2019, and includes details such as the alleged wrongdoing, size of the mob, and type of violence deployed. The LYLA dataset is considerably broader in scope and more detailed than existing data sources. All events in the LYLA data are geo-coded and compatible with other spatial data, allowing for a fuller understanding of the causes and consequences of lynching. To this end, we provide an

empirical application which shows that lynching tends to be more common where state legitimacy is low.

The LYLA data complements a growing body of research on violence in Latin America – the world region with the highest homicide rates (UNODC, 2019). While anthropologists often focus on violence at the community level (Goldstein, 2003; Godoy, 2006), political scientists and economists have mainly focused on civil wars and organized crime, as main manifestations of the epidemic of violence across this subcontinent. The LYLA data thus provides an important addition to the literature on violence in Latin America and allows researchers to contrast their findings about other forms of violence with those for lynchings.

**Replication data:** The dataset, codebook, and do-files for the empirical analysis in this article can be found at <http://www.prio.org/jpr/datasets>. An interactive data tool can be found at <https://css-ethz.github.io/lyla/>.

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**Appendix to**  
**“Introducing the Lynching in Latin America (LYLA) Dataset”**

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**Contents**

1. Other data on lynching in Latin America
2. Lynching in Latin American law
3. Data collection procedures
4. Validation procedures
5. More detailed description of Application analysis
6. References

## 1. Other data on lynching in Latin America

In Latin America, several data collection efforts use different sources and varied means of operationalizing lynching. Here, we list some of the most important data collection efforts:

- In Brazil, two data collection efforts based on newspaper reports captured 1179 lynching events from 1980 to 2006 (NEV/USP 2007), and 2028 cases with 2579 victims spanning the period from 1945 to 1998 respectively (Martins 2015).
- In Guatemala, the United Nations Mission to the Guatemalan Peace Process collected evidence of 577 lynchings with 250 persons killed between 1996 and 2003 (MINUGUA 2000; see Mendoza 2008).
- In Mexico, researchers captured 1206 attempted and completed lynchings between 1988 and 2018, with 279 cases in 2018 alone (Rodríguez Guillén and Veloz Ávila 2019). State records in Mexico suggest that this might be a low estimate, as in the state of Puebla alone, a government agency recorded 305 lynching incidents between 2017 and 2018, with 42 people killed and 418 “rescued” (Puebla Hoy 2018). The report of the National Commission on Human Rights in Mexico further contains figures about lynching prevalence in four regions, drawing on a survey. Roughly 16% of the surveyed citizens were aware of a lynching in their locality in the previous 12 months (CNDH 2019, 71).
- The 2017 Venezuelan Violence Observatory annual report registered 2.4 people killed in lynchings per week, thus more than 120 lethal victims of lynching (Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia 2018).
- In Bolivia, Luna Acevedo (2016) identified 199 lynching events with 373 victims from 2005 to 2011 based on local newspaper reports.
- In Colombia, researchers found evidence of 102 lynchings only in the capital Bogotá in the month of August 2014 (Ariza 2019). This figure is based on the availability of detailed police reports about citizen arrests. The extremely large number of lynching incidents for a short period of time and exclusively focusing on Bogotá suggests that Ariza and his team pick up a lot of small incidents that are not covered in newspapers.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ariza and his team study police reports about legal citizen arrests from the mayor’s office in Bogotá for the month of August 2014. This was the only month that contained sufficient qualitative description of events to classify them as potential lynchings. According to their coding criteria, 102 cases (of a total of 1236 citizen arrest cases) constituted lynchings in the month of August 2014. Unfortunately, this kind of information is not available on a wider scale and does not allow for systematic comparison across time and space.

- Other studies report numbers on Ecuador (Guerrero 2000; Santillán 2008), Peru (Castillo Claudett 2000), Argentina (Gamallo 2020; González, Ladeuix, and Ferreyra 2011) and Bolivia (Vilas 2008).

Some of these data sources are used in our “Country reports” which are described below and used for validation of the LYLA dataset.



## **2. Lynching in Latin American law**

In the course of this research, we reviewed the existing legal codes in Latin America and did not find a typified crime corresponding specifically to lynching (see also CNDH 2019, 188). However, legal codes typify related practices (article numbers refer to the respective penal codes of each country).

The most conspicuous example is the Mexican constitution, which states: “No person can make justice on their own or use violence to claim a right” (art. 17). The related article 131 of the penal code also specifies the crime of a “motín” (akin to mutiny). Also, as a federal state, Mexico has additional legislation on the state level. In the state of Hidalgo, for example, a police protocol was officially adopted in 2019 to attend lynchings (Periódico Oficial del Estado de Hidalgo 2019). Furthermore, congressman José Porfirio Alarcón Hernández proposed to change article 321 of the Mexican penal code in line with what he described as lynching (Diario de los Debates de la Cámara de Diputados 2004). This initiative, which did not pass, was in response to the famous 2004 Tláhuac lynching of three policemen.

The Peruvian Penal code recognizes a crime of arbitrary justice administration, which specifically prohibits making self-justice (art. 417).

The Venezuelan penal code prohibits self-justice, but the punishment depends on the types of violence inflicted, for example homicide or injury (art. 271).

Guatemala (art. 39) and Uruguay (art. 65) specify a crime of “muchedumbre”, which involves the participation in a tumultuous assembly including the commission of crimes, which could amount to a lynching. In both cases, all the material participants of such an assembly are legally liable while the others are exempt from punishment.

A similar crime is specified in the Paraguayan penal code, which calls it disturbance of public peace (art. 234).

Several states typify in their penal codes injuries and homicides resulting from fights (“riñas”), for example Argentina (art. 35), Bolivia (art. 259), Costa Rica (art. 139), Ecuador (art. 470), Honduras (art. 119 and 137), and Nicaragua (art. 158).

The Penal Code of the Dominican Republic furthermore specifies a crime of “barbarism” which involves torture and may be related to lynching (art. 303).

In Brazil, there are mitigating circumstances for injuries and homicides perpetrated due to a relevant “social or moral value” (art. 65), which may be related to lynching.

The Colombian code has a wide-ranging specification of legitimate self-defense whereby the defense has to be proportional to the aggression (art. 32.6), in contrast to the more common legal prescription that the defense has to be proportional to the means necessary to defend

oneself, regardless of the type of aggression committed. This may be relevant for lynching events.

In Bolivia, there was a proposal to specifically include the crime of lynching in the penal code in 2013, which was rejected (Opinión Bolivia 2013). The proposing lawyer argued that the common practice of prosecuting lynchings with the crime of homicide was insufficient.

### 3. Data collection procedures

#### 3.1. Search string

Within the Factiva news archive, we restricted our search to articles that could potentially describe lynching events. Hence, we used relevant search strings. These search strings were largely identical across countries but included additional country-specific criteria to reduce noise. This way, we could produce a manageable amount of newspaper articles that our research assistants would go through and code according to a pre-established codebook. This is the basic search string we used on the Factiva website:

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( (Lynch*) or (Linch*) or (mano near5 propia) or (popular* near5 justic*) or (quema* near5 vivo*) or (atad* near5 poste*) or (Turba) or (tumulto) or (Mob) or (Stoning) or (Immolating) or (Apedrea*) or (Lapida*) or (vigilant* same (justic* or kill* or attack*)) or (Hanging near100 (dead or death or kill* or body)) ) not (Merill Lynch) not (Merrill Lynch) not (Meril Lynch) not (Merril Lynch) not (Merill Lynch) not (Merrill Linch) not (Meril Linch) not (Merrill Linch) not (Meryll Lynch) not (Merryll Lynch) not (Meryl Lynch) not (Merryl Lynch) not (Meryll Linch) not (Merryll Linch) not (Meryl Linch) not (Merryl Linch) not (Larry Lynch) not (David Lynch) not (James Lynch) not (Michael Lynch) not (Peter Lynch) not (Gabriel Lynch) not (Titulares de los diarios latinoamericanos) not (in=1814) not (fds=PEMEKS) not (fds=BCMEKS)
```

#### 3.2. News articles covered for each country and year

The coding of lynching events depends on the source one uses. To a certain extent, the identification of lynching events is a function of available news sources. This [document](#) presents the total amount of articles for each country contained in Factiva and the amount of articles that have a chance to contain information about lynching events (results generated with our search string). Varying levels of newspaper coverage depend mainly on the size and international importance of a given country. Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina are well covered while Central American countries are least well covered. Researchers can find information on a set of variables for each country and year from 2010 to 2019 (for Mexico, the years 2000-2009 and 2020-2021 are also covered).

The first variable (n\_doc\_ly) corresponds to the articles that research assistants read and coded (roughly 80,000 for the period between 2010-2019). These variables can be introduced for example into country-year analysis to adjust for coverage variation across time and space.

#### 3.3. Coding procedures

Events were coded with two versions of the codebook. First, Mexico, Guatemala, Brazil, and Colombia were coded with an extended version, covering a large amount of variables. Second, all other countries were coded with a shorter codebook covering less questions. Coverage for each variable is clearly stated in the separate Codebook. The most important variables covered are the date and coordinate of a given lynching event. The selection of news reports and review of articles by coders was the same for both types of countries.

As general guideline, we do not blindly follow language used by journalists but code events as lynchings depending on our definitional criteria, including the presence of (1) a group of civilians, (2) using violence, (3) against an alleged wrongdoer, (4) in a public display. The boundary condition for the violence used is a clear threat of lynching violence. Therefore, events that some may consider “attempted” lynching are also included in our dataset. Researchers who use the LYLA data are free to set a more demanding criterion for inclusion (for example only focusing on cases with a resulting injury or death).

## **4. Validation procedures**

In this Appendix, we examine the validity of the Lynching in Latin America (LYLA) dataset. The phenomenon we intend to capture with our dataset are lynching events in Latin America, defined as “publicly displayed physical violence executed by a group of civilians against alleged wrongdoers”. Given that there is no readily available systematic information about this phenomenon, we decided to collect data ourselves using the Factiva news sources repository.

### **4.1. Note on potential biases for future users of the LYLA data**

The real amount of lynching events in Latin America is unknown. Our data can thus not be considered a full representation of actual lynchings. They reveal a low estimate of actual lynching events, given that many cases are not reported. This is why we consistently speak of “reported lynchings”. Also, our data may represent a low estimate as we deliberately set a bar for classifying an event as lynching, perhaps higher than other analysts and journalists.

For most analysis focusing on relationships between lynching and other variables, underreporting is not the main problem, but systematic bias across units. Our data on *reported lynchings* covers the tip of the iceberg of the underlying phenomenon of *actual lynchings*. To draw valid inferences from this data, the units that we compare (for example years and geographical units) should have the same relationship between reported and actual lynchings (i.e. between the tip of the iceberg and the hidden part of the iceberg).

This assumption is not always satisfied. For example, there can be systematic differences in the relationship between actual and reported lynchings if the sources of information change from one year to the next (see description of Factiva source material above). Also, systematic differences can arise from differential news coverage across space (we have estimates of sources across countries). Cities, for example, have more journalists than rural areas, which may lead to an urban bias in our data. These sources of bias need to be addressed using appropriate statistical tools.

### **4.2. Validation using external data sources, Factiva coverage, and qualitative studies**

The validation of the LYLA data proceeds in three steps. First, we present external data on lynching in Latin America created by other researchers and institutions to assess how the LYLA data compares to these other sources. From these comparisons, we can make an informed guess about the validity of our data. Given that most additional data sources are based on national datasets, we undertake this data validation process for each country. For some countries, we can compare our data to several additional data sources. If appropriate data is

available, we present timelines and tables that compare our data to other data sources. While comparisons across different datasets sound relatively straightforward, we need to be aware of different lynching definitions and operationalizations. Generally speaking, we compare yearly numbers of lynching events (or lynching victims, depending on availability) and numbers of lynching events across provinces. With this procedure, we can assess the two crucial dimensions of variation for our analysis: space and time.

Second, we assess the overall amount of newspaper evidence on which our data is based, using the total amount of Factiva articles covering each country. This is important as encountering a lynching event is, in part, a function of the number of articles reviewed. With this procedure, we thus gain additional measures of lynching prevalence on the national and yearly scale and can compare these measures across countries.

Third, we qualitatively review relevant literature to identify whether we capture similar underlying phenomena. This is especially important for countries for which there is no additional data source.

As a result of this process, we compiled a country report for all countries with relevant additional data sources (we collapsed some of the countries with no additional information). These reports can be accessed [here](#).

#### **4.3. Survey-based validation in Mexico City**

One alternative to capture the prevalence of lynching is to tap into the local knowledge of residents. We therefore fielded a representative survey with 2183 adult Mexico City residents in February 2022, in partnership with a Mexican opinion survey company. We employed multi-stage sampling, first selecting 340 colonias (Mexico City has a total of 1800 colonias or neighborhoods) with probability proportional to size sampling (Skinner 2016), and then randomly selecting six or more households within each colonia.

The questionnaire contained a series of questions including one about local knowledge of a lynching-style incident. After presenting respondents with a vignette about the modal type of lynching (a male thief being punished by a group of bystanders), we asked them: “*Do you know or have you heard of such a type of event in your colonia, meaning neighbors punishing a criminal?*” Overall, 30.7% of the respondents in the Mexico City sample responded affirmatively.

We can use the average affirmative response to this question in each colonia to further validate our lynching event dataset. We correlate the average colonia-level response with different specifications of colonia-level lynching events drawn from the LYLA data: (1) a

binary indicator of whether there was a reported lynching or not in the whole period (2000-2022 February: 24% of colonias had a lynching), (2) the number of reported lynchings per colonia over the whole period (mean: 0.4), (3) whether there was a reported lynching from 2017 to February 2022 (16% of colonias), (4) whether there was a reported lynching from 2019 to February 2022 (12% of colonias), (5) lynchings per million inhabitants (mean: 30), and (6) the natural log of lynchings per million inhabitants.

Table A1 shows the respective correlation coefficients for the 340 covered colonias. While the coefficients are not large, there is a systematic correlation between the survey reported lynching measure and our lynching event data based on newspaper reports.

*Table A1. Correlation of LYLA event counts and survey responses (N=340 colonias)*

Variables	Surveyees who know
Lynchings yes/no	0.214***
Number of lynchings	0.174***
Lynchings after 2016	0.114**
Lynchings after 2018	0.112**
Lynchings per mio	0.172***
Log Lynchings per mio	0.210***

\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$

When interpreting these figures, readers should be aware of two important challenges for a validation process based on local survey measures: First, to tap into local knowledge, the survey question needs to refer to a small unit – in our case the colonia or neighborhoods. Using larger units – such as municipalities or states – is a less promising strategy as the sampling process may happen to produce a sample from a lynching prone-neighborhood in one unit and a less lynching-prone neighborhood in another unit. Requirements for sample sizes within units would therefore be very demanding for larger units with larger within-unit variation. Also, knowledge of what happens at the municipality or state level may be less accurate.

Second, without incurring significant costs, it is impossible to capture both a large number of units and a large number of individuals within each unit. We strike a balance at 340 colonias within Mexico City, which is an unusually large coverage for an opinion survey, and at least 6 respondents in each colonia.

Third, at the outset, it is unclear how accurate local knowledge about lynching events effectively is. If local knowledge is highly accurate across individuals, a small sample would suffice to capture the actual occurrence of lynching events in a given unit. However, within-unit variation is large in our case. Hence, the estimates we recover for each colonia are affected by random variation.

Despite these limitations, Table A1 shows that our lynching event data is systematically correlated with residents' knowledge of lynching on the Mexico City colonia level.



## 5. More detailed description of Application analysis

### 5.1. Variables and their sources

The following variables are used in the province level analysis:

- *State legitimacy indicators (trust in government, trust in police, trust in justice, Courts are fair)*: Measured on 1 to 7 Likert scale. Each individual province mean is calculated based on all available individuals living in that province. For trust in police, all provinces are based on at least 22 individuals, 95% of the provinces are based on 50 observations, and 91% on 100 observations. Source: <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/about-americasbarometer.php>
- *Area in km2*: Area of the province in square kilometers, calculated from polygon information.
- *Population size*: Mean population number from 2000-2019. Source: Instituto Igarapé. <https://homicide.igarape.org.br/>
- *Distance to capital*: Calculated as the distance from the province capital to the country capital, as a great circle distance.
- *Homicide rate*: Rate of homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. Source: Instituto Igarapé. <https://homicide.igarape.org.br/>
- *Road density*: Calculated as kilometers of roads divided by area in km2. Source for road kilometers: Center for International Earth Science Information Network - CIESIN - Columbia University, and Information Technology Outreach Services - ITOS - University of Georgia. <https://sedac.ciesin.columbia.edu/data/set/groads-global-roads-open-access-v2>
- *Owning a car*: Average response to the LAPOP question about household car owning. Source: Latin American Public Opinion Project: <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/about-americasbarometer.php>
- *Urbanity*: Calculated from coverage of urban areas in each PRIO grid cell. Original source: Globcover 2009. Accessed via: <https://grid.prio.org/#/download>

### 5.2. Additional analysis

Table A2. Full table output for Figure 7 (fixed effects model)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Legitimacy index	-0.32*** (0.07)					
First component of legitimacy items		-0.31*** (0.07)				
Trust in government			-0.18* (0.08)			

Trust in police				-0.41*** (0.08)		
Trust in justice					-0.19** (0.07)	
Courts are fair						-0.26*** (0.06)
Population size	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Constant	0.89*** (0.18)	0.91*** (0.18)	0.98*** (0.19)	0.88*** (0.18)	0.97*** (0.18)	0.94*** (0.18)
<i>N</i>	338	338	338	349	348	349
adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.47	0.47	0.45	0.44	0.42	0.43

Standard errors in parentheses

OLS models with country fixed effects and adjusting for population size. N varies due to non-response.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

*Table A3. Full table output for Figure 7 (control variables model)*

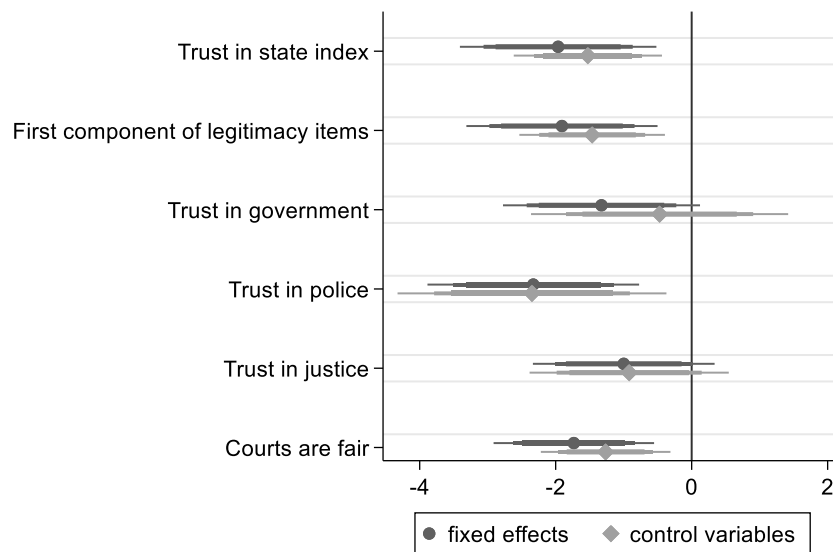
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Legitimacy index	-0.29** (0.09)					
First component of legitimacy items		-0.29** (0.09)				
Trust in government			-0.13 (0.13)			
Trust in police				-0.38** (0.11)		
Trust in justice					-0.21 (0.10)	
Courts are fair						-0.24** (0.08)
Population size	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Area km2	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Distance to Capital	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Homicide rate	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Road density	2.67 (1.74)	2.79 (1.74)	2.37 (1.87)	2.50 (1.56)	2.85 (1.78)	3.02 (1.76)
Owning a car	0.67 (0.65)	0.67 (0.65)	0.78 (0.70)	0.24 (0.65)	0.63 (0.62)	0.47 (0.65)
Urbanity	0.18 (0.13)	0.18 (0.13)	0.22 (0.12)	0.15 (0.11)	0.20 (0.13)	0.18 (0.14)
Constant	0.51 (0.27)	0.49 (0.27)	0.52 (0.31)	0.71* (0.32)	0.50 (0.30)	0.49 (0.28)
<i>N</i>	338	338	338	349	348	349
adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.18	0.17	0.12	0.22	0.14	0.15

Standard errors in parentheses

OLS models without clustered standard errors on country level. N varies due to non-response.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

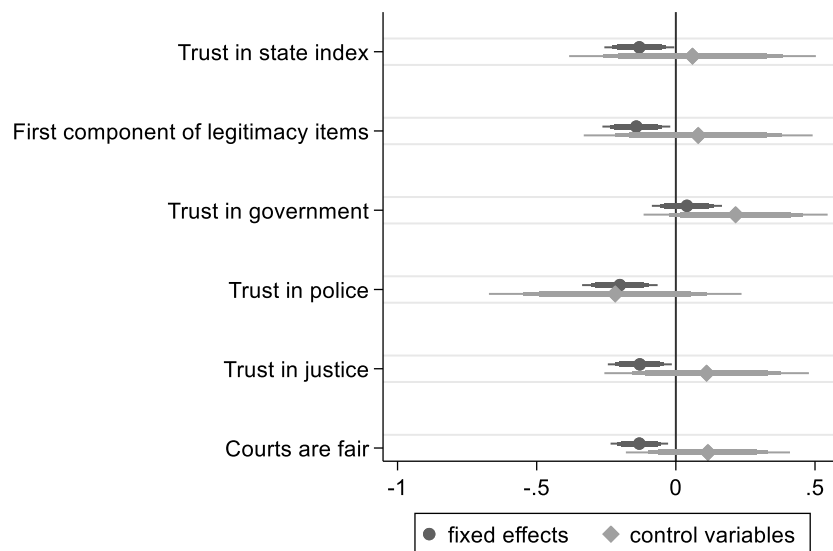
*Figure A1. State legitimacy and lynching per million inhabitants*



Note: OLS regression coefficients with 99, 95 and 90% confidence intervals. Fixed effects model adjusts for population size and country fixed effects. Control variables model includes series of control variables and clustered standard errors. N = 338 to 349 for all models.

Figure A1 displays the same model as Figure 7 in the main paper without logging the dependent variable.

*Figure A2. State legitimacy and homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants (log)*



Note: OLS regression coefficients with 99, 95 and 90% confidence intervals. Fixed effects model adjusts for population size and country fixed effects. Control variables model includes series of control variables and clustered standard errors. N = 338 to 349 for all models.

Figure A2 shows that indicators of state legitimacy are not robustly related to homicide rates. Results are similar for non-logged homicide rates.

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