A Political Autonomy index of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education. European and Latin American countries compared

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Quality assurance and the age of regulatory governance

1990s: Development of the regulatory state: privatizations, fiscal crisis, liberalization of trade, etc. they contributed to its expansion in most regions of the world…

Boom of regulatory instruments, innovative regulatory designs (partly linked to NPM), regulation of markets and social risks (even beyond market issues), bureaucratic innovation, new policy-making procedures, science & professionalism, etc.

Quality assurance as a review process of programs or entities to meet acceptable standards, monitoring its progress and enforcing its accomplishment

The emergence of the higher education regulatory state (King 2007)

New instruments of public intervention for this sector, based on regulatory governance practices

Aiming to foster quality by establishing standards and close supervision of educational activity

States step away from direct intervention in higher education management and control

Development of separate administrative units (agencies) to take care of supervisory tasks

Creation year of Quality Assurance Agencies
1960-2016, 120 agencies

Europe — LAC — Rest of the world — TOTAL
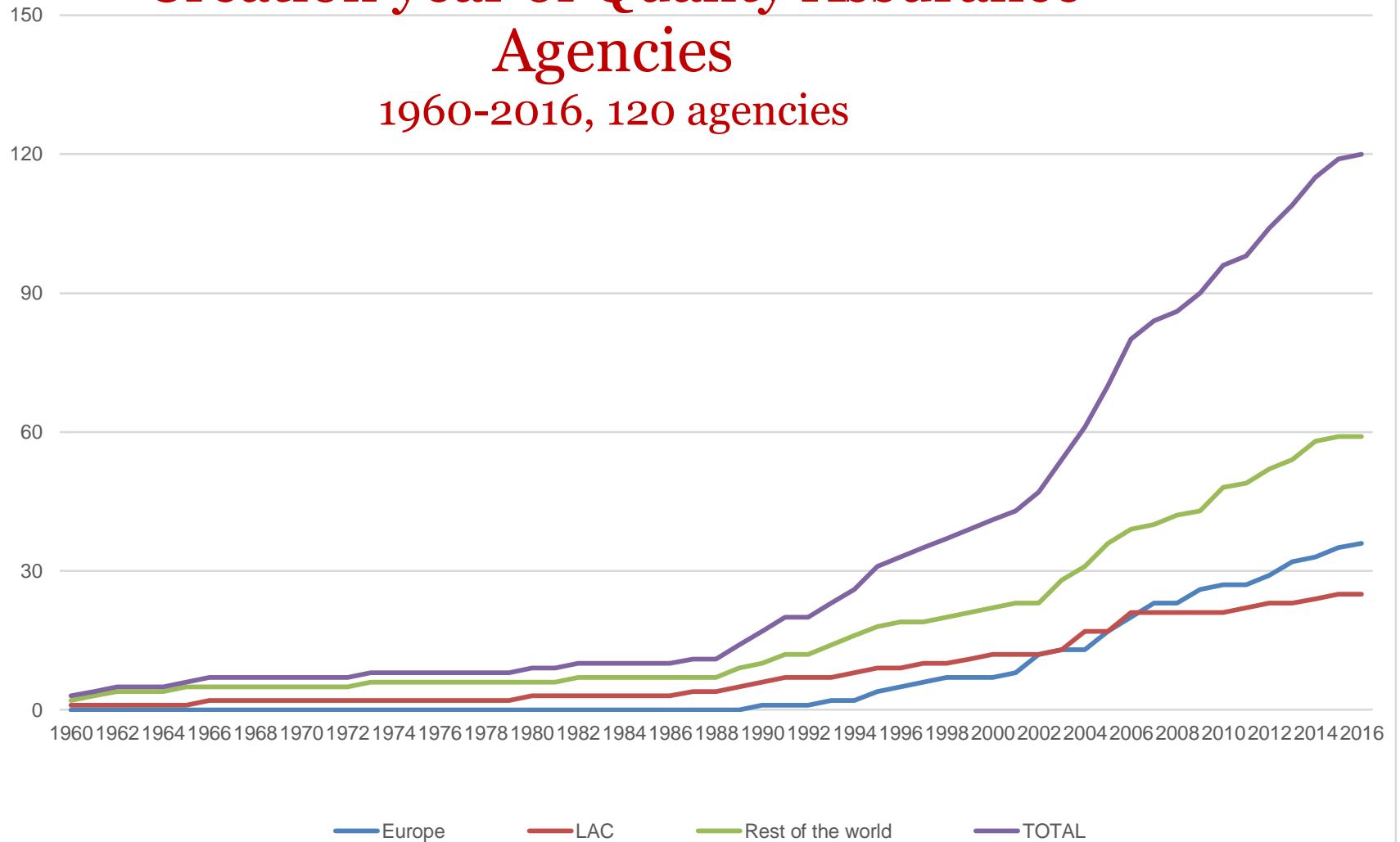
Quality Assurance Agencies

They are formally separated from governments, but most remain of public nature, have their own organizational structure, and rely on strong professional capacities to make decisions

Separating quality agencies from the executive enhances their credibility in countries where most universities are public

Progressively this agency model was adopted by many countries in the world, by means of diffusion mechanisms

Quality Assurance Agencies has become the standard procedure to implement the regulatory instruments in the sector

Drivers of QAAs diffusion

Tradition of private accreditation agencies in the US, directly promoted by universities, since early XX century

Multi-sector diffusion of regulatory agencies worldwide, across continents and sectors (utilities, finances, social risks, etc.)

International networks of experts and QAAs agencies that expanded the key characteristics of the agency model

Expansion of Regulatory Agencies, by sector clusters (1920-2016)

85 countries, 16 sectors

% accum FIN   % accum COMPT   % accum CB   % accum UTILIT   % accum RISK
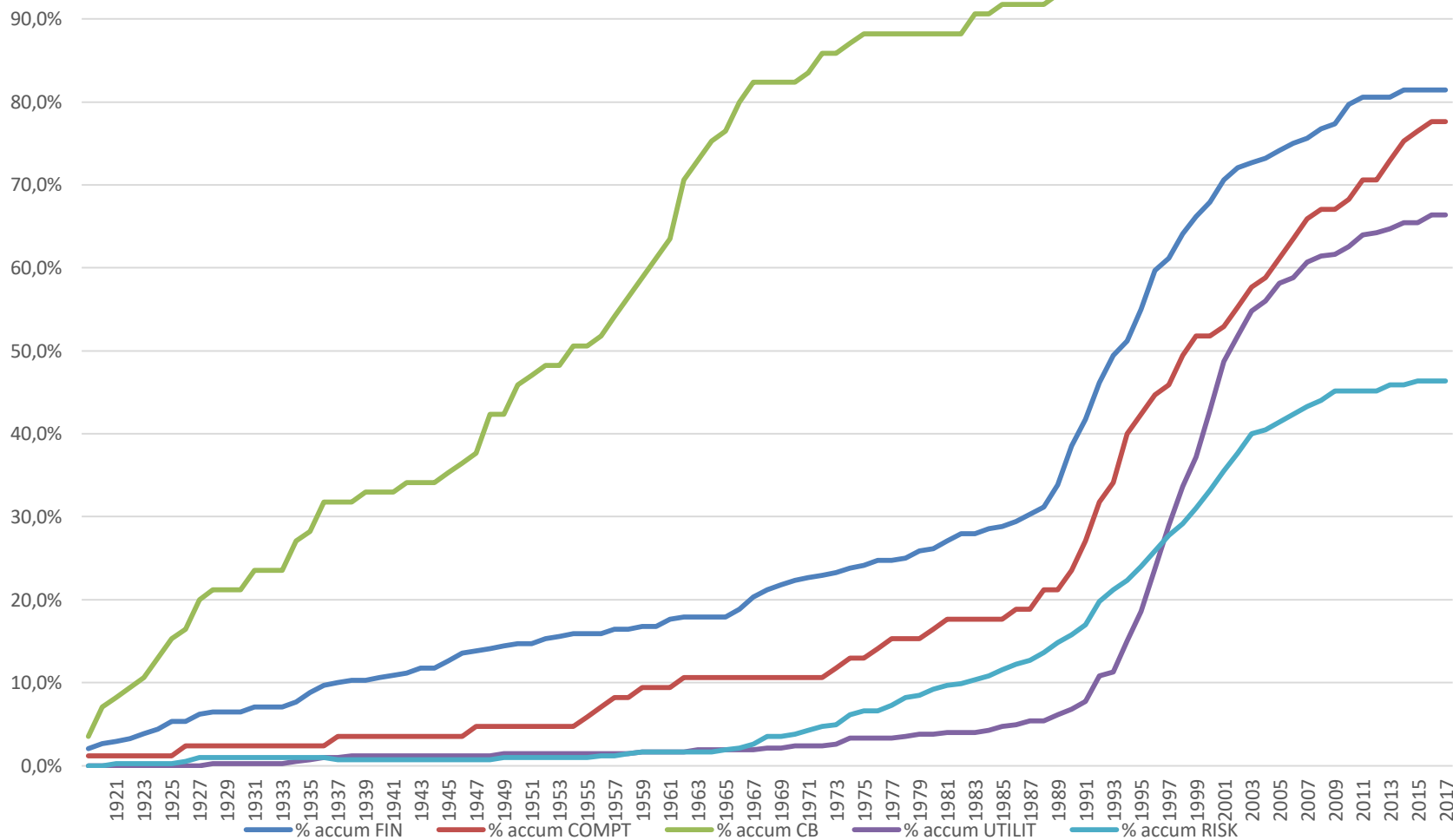
Expansion of Regulatory Agencies over the world, regional coverage (1920-2016)

85 countries - 16 sectors

Legend: % Lat Am — % EUR — % ASIA — % AFRICA — % Others
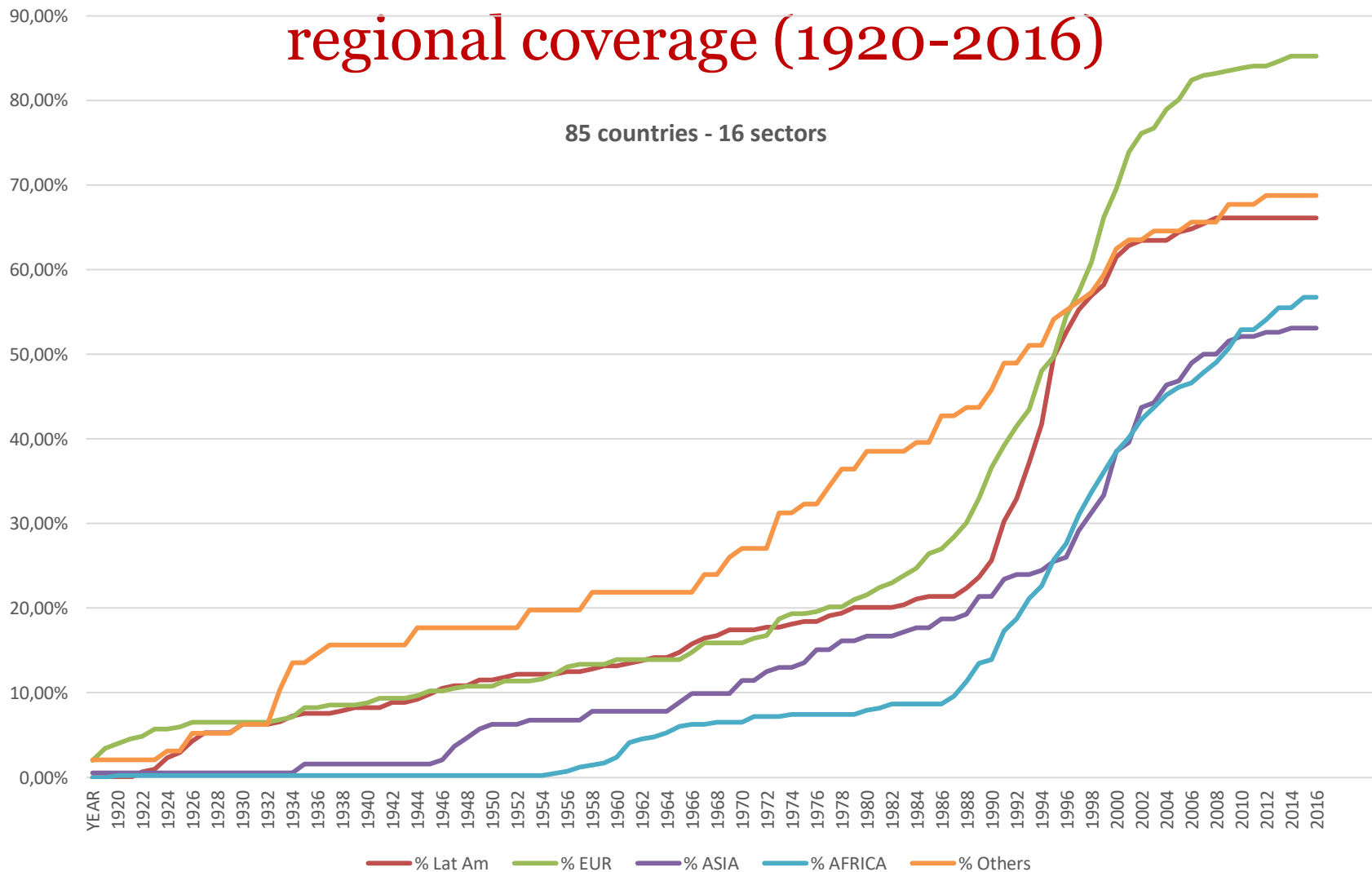
Data set and codification

Initial sample: 151 countries – 253 agencies

- Separate organizational structure
- Affiliates of regionl networks (ENQA, APQN, etc.)

Working sample: 105 countries – 122 agencies

- National or International scope
- General scope, not sectoraly specialized
- Public or hybrid character

This paper: only European and Latin American agencies

Variables considered (2017 reference year)

Year of establishment, name, membership

Instruments used to foster quality

Organizational and managerial variables

Agency head and board members

Accountability, scope of responsibilities

Sources of information:

- Legal provisions
- Website Information
- Networks' information
- Agencies' communication

Defining an index of QAAs political autonomy

We elaborate an Index to mesure political autonomy of QAAs

The index is based on identifying some formal characteristics of QAAs (38 variables)

Select variables to compose the index, organized in three clusters

- Political Independence
- Social Accountability
- Scope of Responsabilities

Political Independence cluster (16 variables)

	Variable	Categories/Indicators	Numerical coding
Agency head			
Var21	Agency head term of office - (years)	Number of years from (continuous variable, from 0 to 6)	0-6
Var22	Agency head appointment	(QA) Board	5
		Legislative only	4
		Legislative-Executive	3
		Executive Collectively	2
		President or Prime minister	1
		Minister (policy sector)	0
Var24	Agency head dismissal	Not possible	3
		Only for non-policy reasons	2
		Related to political changes	1
		No provision reason	0
Var25	Agency head renewal	Not possible	5
		Once	4
		More than once	3
		Not limited	2
		Possible, but not defined	1
Var26	Agency head professional requirement for appointment	Yes	1
		No	0
Agency board			
Var32	Agency board term of office - (in years)	Number of years from (continuos variable, from 0 to 6)	0-6
Var33	Agency board appointment	(QA) Board / Open Competition	5
		Legislative only	4
		Legislative-Executive	3
		Executive Collectively	2
		President or Prime minister	1
		Minister (policy sector)	0
Var35	Agency board dismissal	Not possible	3
		Only for non-policy reasons	2
		Related to political changes	1
		No provision reason	0
Var 36	Agency board renewal	Not possible	4
		Once	3
		More than once	2
		Possible, but not defined	1
Var37	Agency board professional requirement for appointment	Yes	1
		No	0

Social Accountability cluster (10 variables)

	Variable	Categories/Indicators	Numerical coding
Var38	The QA has an appeals commission	Yes	1
		No	0
Var41a	Civil society accountability- open consultations	Yes	1
		No	0
Var41b	Civil society accountability- consumers office	Yes	1
		No	0
Var41c	Civil society accountability- Public hearings	Yes	1
		No	0
Var 41d	Civil society accountability- Advisory council	Yes	1
		No	0
Var43a	Stakeholder's involvement- students and their organizations	Yes	1
		No	0
Var43b	Stakeholder's involvement- faculty (professors and/or researchers)	Yes	1
		No	0
Var43c	Stakeholder's involvement- students employer's	Yes	1
		No	0
Var 43d	Stakeholder's involvement- Administrative staff	Yes	1
		No	0
Var 43e	Stakeholder's involvement- Alumni	Yes	1
		No	0

Scope of responsibilities cluster (12 variables)

|	Variable	Categories/Indicators	Numerical coding
Var48a	Activities covered by QA- Graduate	Yes	1
		No	0
Var48b	Activities covered by QA- Postgraduate	Yes	1
		No	0
Var48c	Activities covered by QA- PhD	Yes	1
		No	0
Var48d	Activities covered by QA- Research	Yes	1
		No	0
Var49a	Quality processes put in place by the QA— Registration new institutions	Yes	1
		No	0
Var49b	Quality processes put in place by the QA— Accreditation of institutions	Yes	1
		No	0
Var49c	Quality processes put in place by the QA— Accreditation of courses/programs	Yes	1
		Not	0
Var49d	Quality processes put in place by the QA— Assessment of teaching staff	Yes	1
		No	0
Var49e	Quality processes put in place by the QA— Assessment of quality systems	Yes	1
		No	0
Var53	Capacity to elaborate norms	Yes	1
		No	0
V54	Capacity to impose economic sanctions	Yes	1
		No	0
V57	Capacity to grant or revoke licenses	Yes	1
		No	0

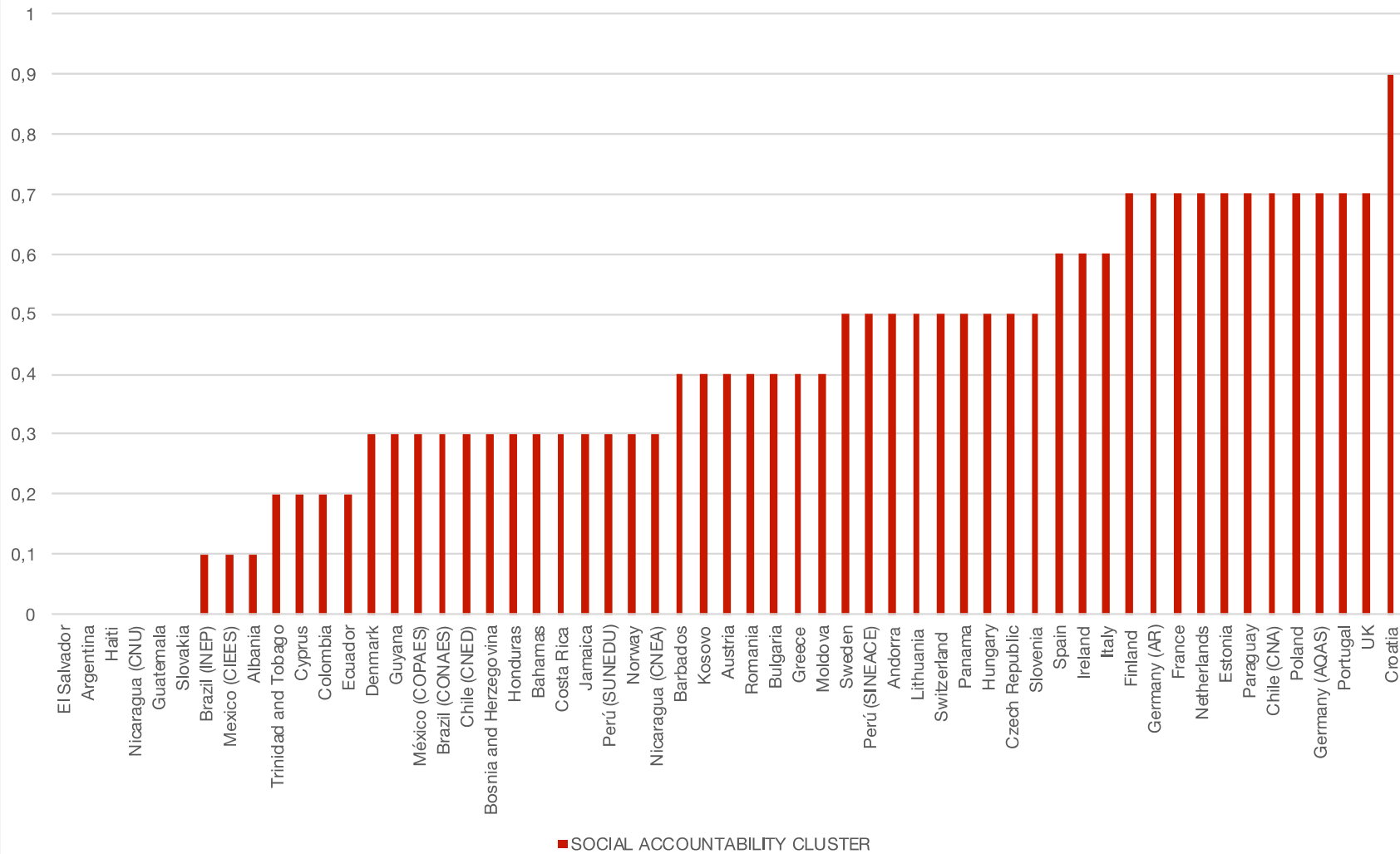# Elaboration of the Index

Values normalized [0-1]

Equal value for all variables, but:

- First Cluster: Head (40%), Board (40%) and Executive accountability (20%)
- Aggregate index on Political Autonomy
  - First cluster: political independence: 50%
  - Second cluster : Social accountability 25%
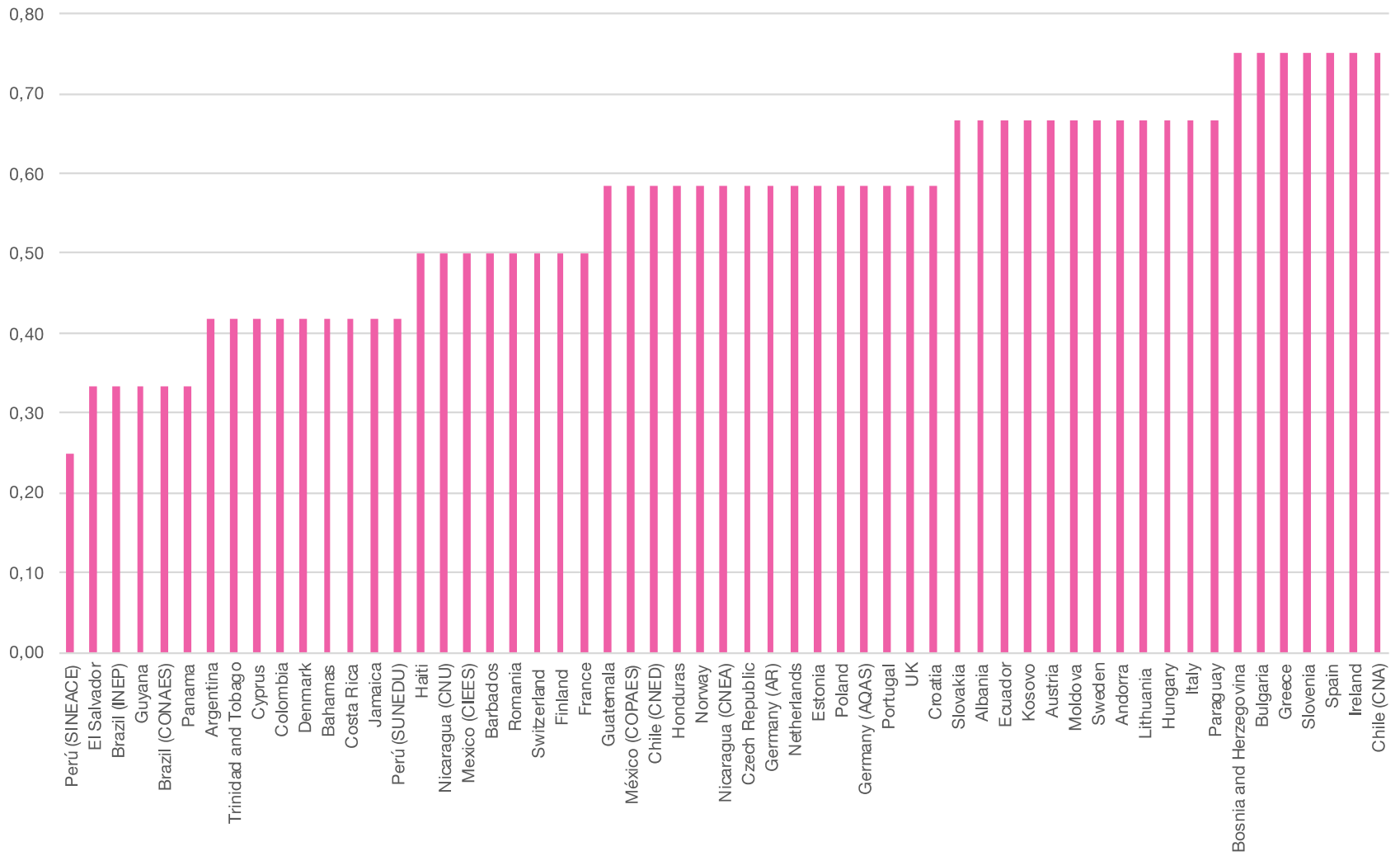 - Third cluster: Scope of Responsibilities 25%
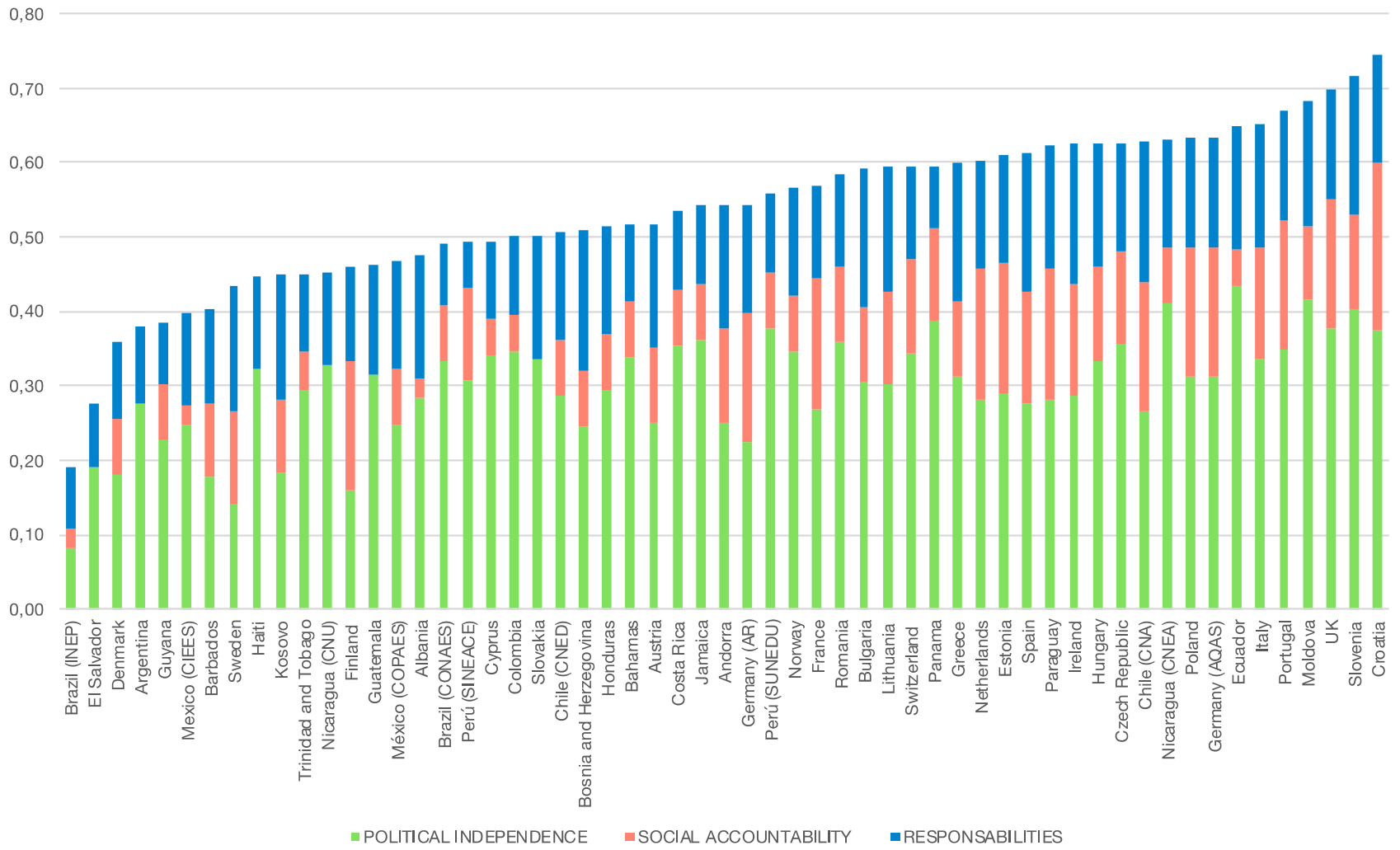
POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE CLUSTER
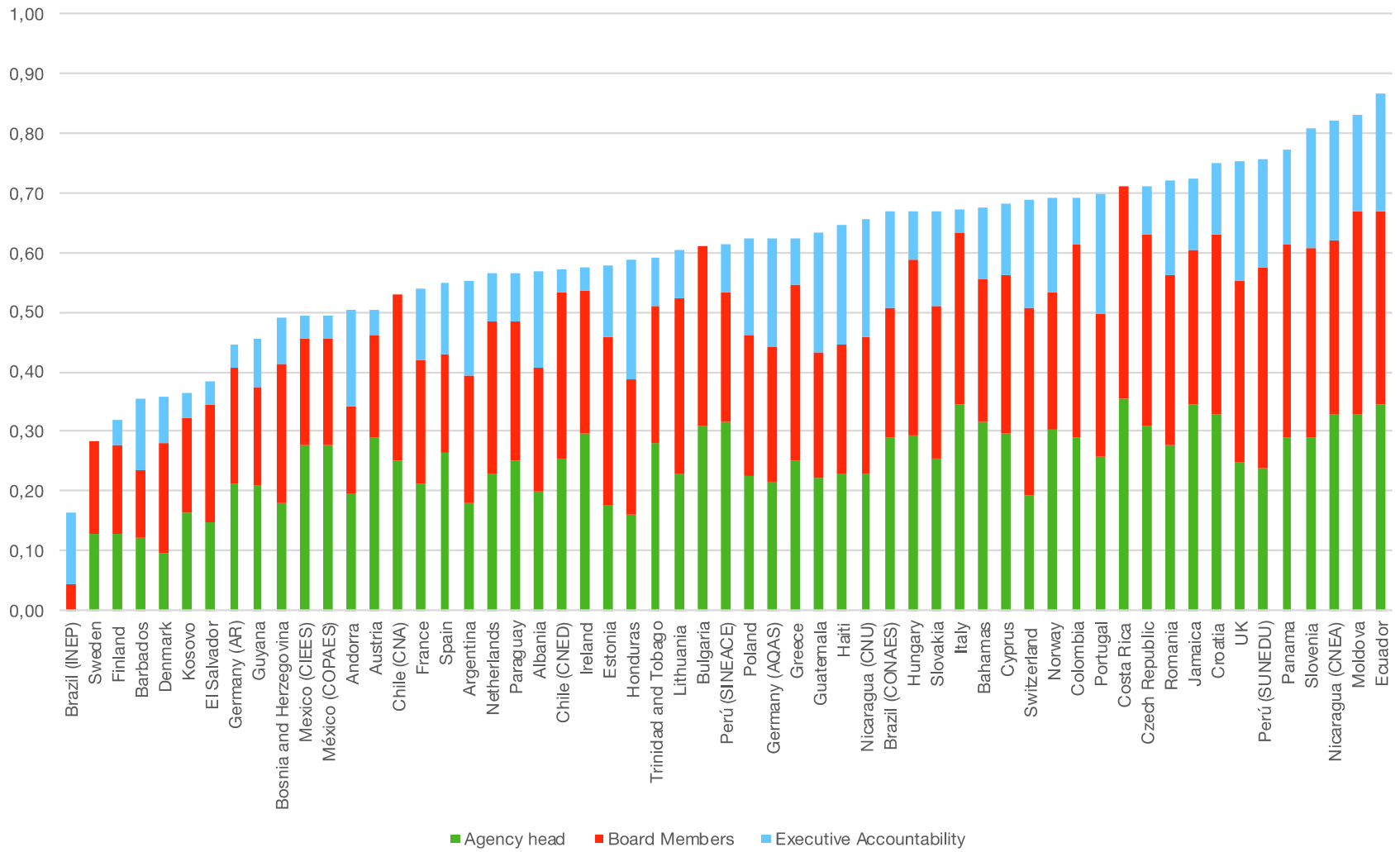
Legend: Agency head, Board Members, Executive Accountability

SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY CLUSTER

RESPONSABILITIES CLUSTER

QAAs POLITICAL AUTONOMY INDEX

Legend: POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE, SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY, RESPONSABILITIES

Agregate Results: Europe vs Latin America

		Agency head	Board Members	Executive Accountabi-lity	POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE CLUSTER	SOCIAL ACCOUNTABI-LITY CLUSTER	RESPONSABI-LITIES CLUSTER	QAAs POLITICAL AUTONOMY INDEX
EUROPE	Average	0,60	0,61	0,54	0,60	0,50	0,62	0,58
	Std Dev	0,16	0,14	0,30	0,14	0,20	0,09	0,09
LATIN AMERICA	Average	0,62	0,59	0,58	0,60	0,26	0,47	0,48
	Std Dev	0,20	0,18	0,34	0,16	0,20	0,13	0,11

- Very similar results as to political independence (first cluster)

- Higher social accountability in Europe compared to Latin America, but significant internal dispersion

- Scope of responsibilities also higher in Europe, more internal similarity in both regions
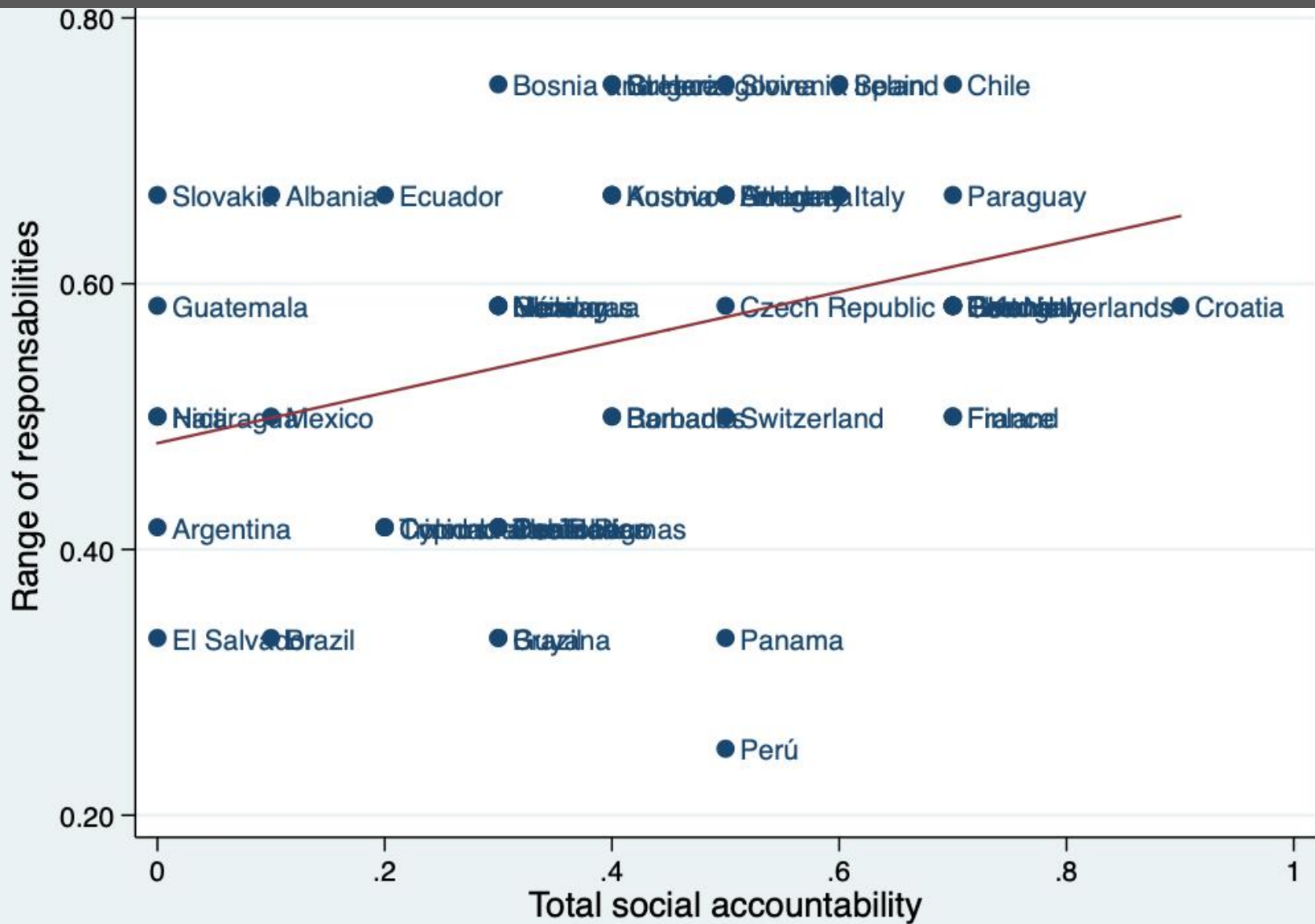
Concluding remarks

Identification of similarities and differences of agencies within and across regions

- Why political independence varies? Which factors are more relevant?
- How is political independence related to independence from universities?

There is not a strong convergence towards a similar institutional model, but agencies 'differences are not too large

Clusters do not show correlation: they capture different agencies' traits

European agencies show more responsibilities and more capacity to manage a plurality of stakeholders