BOX 2.1 **A Note on Interpreting Statistical Findings—Survey Research**

In evaluating survey data throughout the book, we take into account **statistical significance**, which indicates the probable accuracy of findings from a survey based on a sample of a larger population. We also present the **confidence interval (CI),** represented by the small bracket (or error bar) across the end of each bar in the graph, which gives the range of variation above or below the observed scale mean within which the actual value for the population should fall. These recognize that samples may diverge from what one would find if able to query the entire population. All surveys should note sample size, sample methodology, statistical significance, and confidence interval. (Extensive details about sample designs may be found at www.LapopSurveys.org.) Observations whose error bars overlap each other are not statistically different from one another.

- For example, in Figure 2.2, the confidence interval for the mean of U.S. citizens overlaps those for Costa Ricans, Argentines, Chileans, Panamanians, and Venezuelans. The U.S. mean is, however, significantly lower than that of Uruguay.
- A note below each graph indicates the standard of statistical probability for the analysis in the graph. A 95% confidence interval (CI) means that the real value for the population will fall within the error bracket 19 times out of 20; a 99% confidence interval indicates likely accuracy within the bracketed range of 99 times out of 100. The survey research industry standard is a 95% confidence interval. Our very large samples, however, usually permit the more accurate 99% standard when comparing many nations.