

SPECIAL ISSUE INTRODUCTION: DESCRIBING AND UNDERSTANDING CHANGES IN DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES IN LATIN AMERICA BETWEEN 2012 AND 2021: A MACRO PERSPECTIVE

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1. INTRODUCTION

In a context of democratic backsliding, a citizenry that remains committed to democratic principles and values—even when its members are dissatisfied with politics and governance—can be critical to staving off democratic decline. In Latin America, however, democratic legitimacy is eroding. Two key metrics reported in the LAPOP Lab's AmericasBarometer,¹ support for and satisfaction with democracy, declined sharply in 2016 compared to prior years and have remained low in the intervening years (Lupu *et al.*, 2021). In the aftermath of the COVID-19

1. The AmericasBarometer by the LAPOP Lab, www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop.

pandemic, support for centralizing power in the executive (e. g., through executive coups) increased across the region (Lupu & Zechmeister, 2021). How does democratic backsliding shape these attitudinal trends? And, what implications do these shifting public attitudes have for the future of democracy in the region?

The papers in this special issue build on the results of study that we conducted on behalf of NORC at the University of Chicago, using survey and contextual data to describe the evolution of democratic attitudes in 16 countries between 2012 and 2021. The study used cluster analysis to group the citizens of these countries into groups with distinct patterns of democratic attitudes, and then identified the most salient attitudinal, demographic, and socioeconomic characteristics of citizens in each group. The contributors to this special issue then wrote papers describing changes in democratic attitudes in each country and examining how changes in citizen attitudes caused or reflected changes in local political, economic, and security contexts. The contributions to this special issue thus examine changes at the macro level, attempting to explain variation in aggregate public opinion over time.

In this introductory essay, we first present the theoretical background and motivation for the original cross-national study. We then describe the study's research approach and summarize the main findings from the cluster analysis. Finally, we outline the contextual factors that are important to explain over-time changes in democratic attitudes across many of the countries studied and provide illustrative examples.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

In a context of global and regional democratic backsliding, where domestic and foreign actors are actively undermining democracy, it is important to ask how *citizens* can serve as a backstop to democratic backsliding. Can citizen attitudes bolster democracy in Latin America?

This question is not merely an academic curiosity. Scholars have shown a «thermostatic» link between public support for democracy and its provision, with declining citizen demand for democracy preceding declines in democratic quality. When support for democracy increases, in contrast, the quality of democracy tends to rise in later years (Claassen, 2020). This relationship between abstract measures of democratic support and general measures of democratic quality also extends to more acute antidemocratic actions, like coups d'état. For example, individuals who express support for military coups in the abstract are more likely to engage in anti-democratic activity, like voting for authoritarian populist leaders (e. g., Cohen *et al.*, 2023). And governments heed these antidemocratic sentiments: where the public is more supportive, elites are more likely to engage in anti-democracy activities, up to

and including coups d'état (Casper & Tyson, 2014; Cassell *et al.*, 2018; Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán, 2013; Pérez-Liñán & Polga-Hecimovich, 2019).

To understand how public opinion shapes downstream democratic outcomes, we start with political «legitimacy»: citizens' belief that the political system in which they live is right and proper, deserving of respect and obedience. To be legitimate, political systems must enjoy both «diffuse» and «specific» support Easton (1965, 1975) «Specific support» refers to support for the particular politicians holding office and existing institutions as they currently operate. It should thus rise and fall as government offices change party control, and as specific office-holders do well or poorly. Popular incumbents can take advantage of their high levels of specific support to reshape the political order, chipping away at the quality of democracy bit by bit. By contrast, «diffuse support» refers to attitudes toward the broader institutions and principles that govern the country. As a result, diffuse support should stay relatively stable over time. This diffuse support, in the words of Easton, constitutes a «reservoir of favorable attitudes or good will that helps members to accept or tolerate [government] outputs to which they are opposed» (Easton, 1965, p. 273).²

To better understand how citizen attitudes improve political systems' resilience to threats by specific actors, we focus on five attitudes that are core to the Eastonian conception of diffuse support.³ First, we examine support for democracy in the abstract, using a standard «Churchillian» question that asks to what extent respondents agree that «democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government.» Although scholars debate the merits of this measure (e. g., Kiewiet de Jonge, 2016; Mishler & Rose, 1998; Rose *et al.*, 1998),⁴ it is a standard question tapping democratic support that has been asked consistently across survey projects and over time, making it especially useful for tracking public support for democracy.

In addition to this explicit, abstract expression of support for the political system, we also examined several measures of attitudes about less ambiguous democratic practices, principles, and procedures on which democracy depends.

2. This is not to suggest that support for democracy does not wax or wane; rather, it should be less prone to abrupt peaks and valleys than measures of support for specific democratic actors.

3. Our cluster analysis excluded attitudes like «system support» (Booth & Seligson, 2009) and «satisfaction with democracy» (e. g., Canache *et al.*, 2001), which are located midway between the diffuse and specific ends of the system support spectrum.

4. Abstract survey questions about citizens' «support for democracy» may be prone to social desirability concerns, thereby inflating actual support for the political system (e. g., Kiewiet de Jonge, 2016). Furthermore, this measure does not account for differing conceptions of what democracy means for different citizens (e. g., Rose *et al.*, 1998; Mishler & Rose, 2001), which can also bias reported levels of support. While we recognize these limitations, we included the question in our analysis following a long standing practice in support for democracy scholarship.

For example, democratic governments are by definition chosen by the public, not imposed by the military. Expressing support for military coups is thus an attitude that is fundamentally at odds with democratic principles. We therefore examine public opposition to military coups. To do so, we used a long-standing AmericasBarometer series that asks respondents whether it would be justified for the military to take power in a military coup in certain circumstances.

Related, we examined citizen opposition to «executive aggrandizement»—the gradual expansion of power by elected presidents until democracy is no longer recognizable (Bermeo, 2016; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Executive aggrandizement represents the mirror image of military coups. While military coups remove incumbent presidents from power, extreme executive aggrandizement removes horizontal checks on the executive. By undermining the courts and the legislature, for example, the president redefines their role as a coequal governing partner to a dictator in all but name. In recent years, fairly elected Latin American presidents from across the political spectrum have used this mechanism to undermine the quality of the democracies that elected them. From Peru's Alberto Fujimori to Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and Nayib Bukele in El Salvador, the winners of fair democratic elections have leveraged support from their political base to engage in this kind of backsliding. To measure support for executive aggrandizement, we examined two AmericasBarometer questions that ask respondents whether it would be justified for the president to shutter and govern without the Congress and the Supreme Court.

The first three measures address public support for the *institutional rules* that underlie democracy. However, liberal democracy requires more than support for its fundamental political institutions. It is also fundamental that citizens view *their fellow citizens*—especially those with whom they disagree—as legitimate participants in politics with a right to express their opinion and have it weighed equally by those in power (e. g., Dahl, 1971). This means that citizens in democracies must have—and there should be public consensus in support of—universal suffrage and the freedoms of speech, assembly, and conscience necessary for full practice of democratic citizenship (Carlin & Singer, 2011; Schedler & Sarsfield, 2007).

Certainly, these values are important for theoretical reasons; however, there is also reason to expect that a citizenry that is relatively more tolerant will be protective against democratic backsliding. Citizens who support others' right to protest may resist would-be authoritarian leaders who crack down on dissent (e. g., Aytaç & Stokes, 2019), while those who are most intolerant might support large-scale state violence against dissenters. And while attitudes toward sexual minorities may not directly predict democratic change, tolerance of dissent and support for inclusion are elements of the psychological trait of authoritarianism, which predicts voting for authoritarian candidates across Latin America, the United States, and Europe (Cohen & Smith, 2016; Hetherington & Weiler, 2018; Smith et al., 2021).

We therefore examine public tolerance of protest and regime critics, as well as support for democratic inclusion. We measured tolerance of protest and regime critics using five AmericasBarometer questions that gauge respondents' support for the right to demonstration and the political rights of regime critics—i. e., those «who only say bad things» about a country's system of government. We measured support for democratic inclusion using an AmericasBarometer question asking respondents for their level of approval with «homosexuals» being allowed to run for office.

Although our decision to examine specific measures was driven by existing scholarship, our specific approach, which we detail in the following section, differs. We used an inductive cluster analysis approach to identify the attitudinal profiles—i. e., the combinations of these attitudes—that are more prevalent among citizens. This inductive approach recognizes the weakly constrained, inconsistent nature of belief systems (Converse, 1969): rather than forcing citizens into pre-defined combinations of attitudes, we wanted survey respondents to «speak for themselves.» In doing so, the cluster analysis departs from standard approaches to the analysis of democratic attitudes that focus on change in aggregate levels of support across time or on variation across citizens (and time). We instead follow the example of studies that have used this and other inductive approaches to identify democratic support profiles in Latin America (Carlin, 2011; Carlin & Singer, 2011; Schedler & Sarsfield, 2007).

2.1. Research Approach

The cross-national study used cluster analysis and data from the five most recent waves of the AmericasBarometer (2012, 2015, 2016-2017, 2018-2019, 2021) to classify citizens into clusters with distinct attitudinal profiles in each of 16 countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, and Peru.

Cluster analysis entails analyzing a collection of heterogeneous objects and grouping them in smaller, homogenous clusters according to two or more measurable attributes. The aim is to maximize similarity *within* each cluster while maximizing dissimilarity *between* clusters. There are several variants of cluster analysis. Our study used Hierarchical Density-Based Clustering (HDBScan) as developed by Campello, Moulavi, and Sander (2013). HDBScan identifies groups of observations that are closely packed together in space and leaves outliers unclassified. HDBScan requires one key parameter, the minimum size of a cluster,⁵ and

5. Different model iterations used different thresholds; the final models estimated used a minimum threshold of 3 % of the sample.

chooses the number of clusters endogenously through a hierarchical process that retains the most stable clusters. The study employed Mahalanobis distance to measure similarity between observations.

As previewed above, we used the five democratic attitudes listed below for the cluster analysis. Table A in the Appendix presents the full wording of the AmericasBarometer items used to measure each attitude.

Support for democracy: The extent to which respondents agree with the statement that «democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government».

- Opposition to military coups: Whether respondents believe it would be justified for the military to take power in a military coup under certain circumstances.
- Opposition to executive aggrandizement: Whether respondents believe it would be justified for the president to close Congress or the Supreme Court and govern without them.
- Tolerance of protest and regime critics: The extent to which respondents support the right to protest and other political rights of individuals who criticize the regime.
- Support for democratic inclusion: The extent to which respondents support the political inclusion of homosexuals.

The choice of attitudes was informed by both theoretical and practical considerations. With respect to the former, we focused on attitudes tapping into support for core democratic principles, that is, attitudes commonly used to measure diffuse support for democracy (Easton, 1965; Easton, 1975). We therefore excluded attitudes like satisfaction with democracy and support for regime institutions, which tap into both diffuse and specific support (Booth & Seligson, 2009). Our choices were constrained by the need to measure attitudes consistently across countries and survey waves; we are therefore limited to survey items that appeared in the core questionnaire in all five waves.

The analysis has two main limitations: the variables used are not continuous and they do not share a common scale.⁶ Indeed, opposition to military coups and opposition to executive aggrandizement are especially coarse measures that take only two possible values (support or opposition). These variables therefore contribute disproportionately to the cluster classifications. Finally, some of the survey questions we used are not pure measures of democratic attitudes. For example, questions tapping support for military coups ask respondents if they believe coups would be justified when there is a lot of crime or a lot of corruption. Response to

6. Ideally, cluster analysis should be conducted with continuous variables that can be standardized to ensure comparability.

these items likely reflect attitudes toward crime or corruption, in addition to support for coups per se.

For each country and survey wave, the cluster analysis identified between three and six sizable groups. In all countries and years, a small share of respondents was left unclustered as they were both dissimilar from each other and from those included in other clusters. To facilitate comparisons across time, we grouped the resulting clusters into four families that share some defining characteristics:

- **Institutionalists:** Individuals in this cluster family are characterized by full opposition to military coups and executive aggrandizement. They represent «ideal» democratic citizens compared to the other cluster families.
- **Military Interventionists:** Individuals in this cluster family express full opposition to executive aggrandizement but less-than-full opposition to coups.
- **Presidentialists:** Individuals in this cluster family exhibit full opposition to coups but less-than-full opposition to executive aggrandizement.
- **Authoritarians:** Individuals in this cluster family are characterized by less-than-full opposition to both coups and executive aggrandizement.

We then conducted differences in proportions and differences in means tests to identify the demographic, socioeconomic, geographic, and other characteristics differentiating the citizens in each cluster from the rest of the population. The characteristics we examined include gender, age, area of residence, wealth, years of education, crime victimization, corruption victimization, presidential approval, internal and external political efficacy, and political engagement (e. g., voting in the last presidential election and attending city council meetings).

Finally, country case study authors made sense of the cluster analysis results from 12 of 16 countries,⁷ analyzing additional public opinion data in some cases, and examined the relationship between democratic attitudes and political, economic, and social developments over time. Drawing on theories of public opinion, secondary sources, and their own analysis, the authors crafted essays linking changes in public opinion over time to various contextual factors including political and social polarization, corruption probes and scandals, and governance and economic crises. The papers in this special issue are adapted from these essays.

We identified experts for the country case studies through an open call. The findings summarized below draw from all case studies even though only seven studies are included in this special issue.

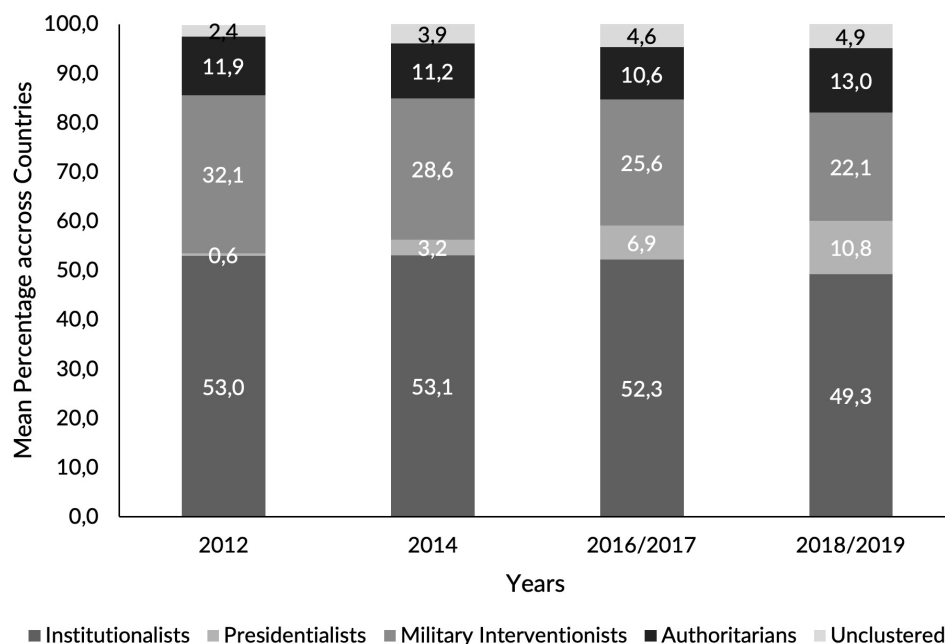
7. We recruited country experts for Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay and Peru.

3. MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE CLUSTER ANALYSIS

3.1. Finding 1: Institutionalists Make Up the Largest Cluster Family

Figure 1 presents the average distribution of the cluster families, aggregated across countries, for each survey year. We note that there is substantial variation across countries that underlies these averages. Still, some region-wide trends are worth noting. In most countries and years, Institutionalists, who oppose both executive aggrandizement and military coups, make up the largest share of respondents. However, this group rarely constitutes a majority of the public in a given country and year. Military Interventionists, who oppose executive aggrandizement but do not oppose military coups, make up the next largest group in most cases. This cluster usually accounts for about one-fifth to one-third of the population in a given country and year. The share of citizens in the remaining cluster families varies more widely across countries and over time.

Figure 1. Cluster families aggregated across countries, 2012-2018/19



Source: own elaboration.

3.2. Finding 2: The Number of Presidentialists Is Increasing

In most countries, the share of Institutionalists and Military Interventionists has declined over time. At the same time, Presidentialists, who oppose military coups but support moves by the President to shutter Congress or the Courts, emerged as a small but growing group in many of the countries analyzed. Meanwhile, the size of the Authoritarian cluster, comprising those who support both military coups and executive aggrandizement, varies widely across countries but remained relatively stable over time in most countries.

3.3. Finding 3: The Cluster Families Are Not Correlated with Stated Support for Democracy

We find no meaningful differences in levels of support for democracy, tolerance of protest and regime critics, and support for democratic inclusion across clusters. The finding pertaining to support for democracy is particularly surprising, as we expected that it would be an important factor in defining clusters. However, Institutionalists, Military Interventionists, Presidentialists, and Authoritarians all express similar levels of support for democracy across countries and over time. On its face, this finding may seem contradictory: supporting the extralegal removal of democratically elected leaders—the attitude that differentiates citizens across categories in our analysis—is to support the breaking of the democratic order. However, the word «democracy» is not defined in the item, and past research shows that «democracy» means different things to different people. For example, while some citizens understand the concept of democracy as the guarantee of certain rights and liberties, others define democracy by the rules that govern the selection of leaders. Still others focus on the *outputs* of the political system—e. g., economic prosperity or security (e. g., Baviskar & Malone, 2004; Carrión, 2008; Canache, 2012; König *et al.*, 2022). For some citizens, then, illegally removing elected officials from office is consistent with their understanding of democracy in some circumstances.

3.4. Finding 4: Crime Victimization and Presidential Approval Are Associated with Membership in the Authoritarian and Presidentialist Cluster Families

For the most part, attitudinal, demographic, and socioeconomic characteristics did not consistently predict how citizens were clustered across countries and survey waves. However, we do note two patterns. First, consistent with research

that links crime victimization to increased support for hardline anti-crime policies that violate civil and human rights (Visconti, 2020), in many countries and years, crime victims were more commonly classified as Authoritarians. Second, consistent with research showing that many citizens will justify anti-democracy actions that benefit their preferred political team (Cohen *et al.*, 2023; Graham & Svolik, 2020), Presidentialists expressed higher average levels of presidential approval in many countries and years.

4. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO CHANGE IN DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES

4.1. Factor 1: Polarization

Polarizing (often authoritarian⁸) leaders in several countries shape citizens' tolerance of interruptions to the democratic order. Support for the incumbent also shapes citizen support for, and satisfaction with, democracy more broadly: the more popular the incumbent, the higher the average level of support for democracy. Where incumbents are polarizing, views of the incumbent shape support for executive aggrandizement and military coups. Those who support the incumbent approve of maneuvers to keep the leader in power (*i. e.*, executive aggrandizement), while opposing actions that would remove the leader (*i. e.*, military coups). This tendency leads to an increase in the share of Presidentialists in the population where polarizing figures have entered office. At the same time, citizens who oppose polarizing leaders tend to express higher support for military coups, while opposing executive aggrandizement, resulting in an increase in the share of Military Interventionists. In some cases, these anti-democracy profiles emerge from the Authoritarian cluster, which shrinks when there is a polarizing incumbent. However, this is not always the case: in some countries, Military Interventionists and Presidentialists emerge at the cost of the Institutional cluster.

The case study of El Salvador highlights this tendency. For many years, politics in El Salvador was dominated by two major political parties, ARENA and FMLN. Due to high-level corruption scandals and economic mismanagement, the parties' popularity declined significantly over time. In 2019, Nayib Bukele, a populist, leftist political outsider, won the presidential election. Bukele has since engaged in a series of actions that have undermined political and civil liberties. However, Bukele continues to be extremely popular among many citizens in El Salvador. It

8. We follow Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018's definition of authoritarian leaders): those who are weakly committed to the rules of democracy, do not accept the legitimacy of the opposition, tolerate the use of political violence, and are willing to violate their opponents' civil liberties.

is therefore unsurprising that a large portion of the Salvadoran population was classified as Institutionalists in the 2019 AmericasBarometer survey, and again in 2021—the incumbent, authoritarian president has come to be associated with democracy. This also helps to explain the increase in the share of the population classified as Presidentialists after Bukele’s election: Bukele supporters trust him to solve the most serious problems facing the country, even if that means bending the rules of the game and undermining the quality of democracy.

4.2. Factor 2: Corruption

A second factor that helps explain shifts in democratic attitudes in many Latin American countries is elite corruption. After explosive, cross-regional allegations of influence buying and rampant corruption became public in 2014,⁹ political corruption emerged as an important issue across the region. Pervasive corruption by incumbents, high-salience scandals, and the resulting prosecutions have led many citizens to view politicians with suspicion. This suspicion can metastasize, undermining support for establishment politicians and leading voters to support anti-establishment, often authoritarian, outsider candidates. Pervasive corruption can also serve as evidence that the political system does not work as intended, which can undermine citizens’ support for democracy.

The case study of Guatemala illustrates this dynamic (see Meléndez 2023, in this issue). The International Commission Against Corruption (CICIG) was founded in 2007 and engaged in widely publicized anti-corruption activities until it was dissolved in 2019. In 2015, these anti-corruption efforts reached their peak: incumbent president Otto Pérez Molina was removed from office and faced corruption charges. In this context, citizen satisfaction with democracy—which had demonstrated its ability to remove poorly behaving incumbents from power—increased, even as trust in the political establishment, and the proportion of Guatemalans in the Institutionalist cluster, declined. In 2019, anti-establishment President Jimmy Morales shuttered the CICIG in an apparent effort to halt investigations into alleged corruption by his administration. Satisfaction with democracy declined following that decision, but confidence in the executive did not improve. After Morales’ term ended, he was replaced by a second anti-establishment president, Alejandro Giammattei, who has also been investigated for alleged campaign finance violations. In brief, highly salient corruption scandals can create a vicious cycle. Corruption among political insiders can lead to distrust in establishment

9. The Panama Papers and the Odebrecht/Lava Jato scandal directly implicated leaders across the region and around the world in *quid pro quo* schemes exchanging policy concessions for kickbacks.

candidates and, eventually, the election of political outsiders. These inexperienced politicians, in turn, take advantage of their newfound political power and engage in corruption, depressing democratic public opinion further.

4.3. Factor 3: Governance Crises

Governance crises are a third factor that negatively affected democratic attitudes in several countries. Partisan gridlock in some countries has made standard mechanisms of democratic politics—for example, good faith negotiations among legislators and compromise—impossible. The inability of elected officials to govern leads citizens to view democracy and its institutions as incapable of meeting their basic needs. This, in turn, increases support for authoritarian alternatives.

The case study of Peru exemplifies this tendency (see Carrión and Zárate 2023, in this issue). Like other countries in the region, Peru has struggled with a slowing economy, growing insecurity, and endemic corruption since the early 2010s. Aggravating these problems, Peru's divided government has been unable to govern effectively. Between 2018 and 2021, the country had five presidents, three of whom were impeached and removed by a Congress with rock-bottom approval. Support for and satisfaction with democracy in Peru were substantially lower than the average for the LAC region during this period, and support for anti-democracy ruptures to the democratic order (e. g., through a self-coup) was substantially higher. The cluster analysis reveals that Peru is one of few countries in the region in which Institutionalists represent less than 40 % of the public—and less than one-third of the public after 2014. Rather, Authoritarians, Military Interventionists, and Presidentialists make up the larger share of the Peruvian public from 2017 on. After this study was completed, incumbent president Castillo was removed from office following an attempted self-coup in 2022, and was replaced by Vice President Dina Boluarte. Her government faced widespread protests calling for new elections and responded with the disproportionate use of force. Congress has failed both to schedule prompt elections and to govern effectively on other issues. In brief, Peruvian political dysfunction led to anti-democracy shifts in public opinion, combined with continued political dysfunction, has further undermined citizens' faith in democracy.

4.4. Factor 4: Economic Crises

Finally, in most countries examined, economic booms were linked to improved citizen support for democracy, while economic crises undermined support. Past research has shown this pattern across world regions and over time. Poor economic

performance, growing poverty, and persistent inequality undermine public faith that representative democracy can solve a country's most pressing issues. When the economy improves, so do citizens' lives and, in turn, their confidence in democracy as a system of government. With the end of the region-wide commodity boom in 2014, many Latin American countries experienced slowed growth. In the following years, economies across the region struggled and, during the COVID-19 pandemic, plunged into acute crises.

Economic inputs are a key background condition in most of the countries examined in the case studies. The importance of economic booms and busts is especially clear in the case of Brazil (see Carlin, Fuks, and Ribeiro 2023, in this issue). In 2012, the Brazilian economy was strong, and the Institutional cluster represented the largest category in the population. However, when commodity markets crashed in 2014, so too did Brazilian consumer confidence. The national GDP declined, and unemployment increased. Observing the state of their nation, many Brazilians appear to have questioned whether and how democracy had improved their material wellbeing. These doubts, in turn, undermined support for the political system, leading the Institutional cluster to shrink. Shortly after the commodity market fell, a series of high-salience corruption scandals swept across the nation, further undermining faith in the governing elite. This situation created a «perfect storm» for an anti-democracy candidate, like rightist authoritarian populist Jair Bolsonaro, to emerge. The election of Bolsonaro led to significant democratic decline in the following years, as his administration undermined key freedoms. While Brazil's languishing economy was not the proximate cause of Bolsonaro's election (or his actions once in office), the economy is an important background condition that, combined with other issues (e. g., corruption scandals), created circumstances in which anti-democracy tendencies can flourish.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Our central conclusions are both substantive and methodological. Substantively, the results indicate that stated support for democracy in many Latin American countries has become decoupled from opposition to anti-democracy actions, like military or self-coups. The term «democracy» means different things to different people, and the meaning that individuals ascribe to the term can change over time. These shifts in the meaning of democracy do not occur in a political vacuum. Savvy political leaders can manipulate the way the term «democracy» is used in public discourse, claiming to advance democracy while simultaneously undermining its basic tenets (*i. e.*, free and fair elections, civil and human rights, checks and balances). It is therefore critically important to analyze stated support for democracy in conjunction with support for more specific, anti-democracy actions.

A second substantive finding of our analysis is that the roots of support for democracy in Latin America are shallow. Citizens' support for the political regime is closely linked to the regime's performance in key areas. When the government fails to address unemployment or inequality, or when widespread corruption is revealed, citizens begin to view breaks with the rules that govern democracy as acceptable. Popular, polarizing incumbents are especially able to create conditions in which their supporters view anti-democracy actions as acceptable. From Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega to El Salvador's Nayib Bukele, to Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil or Evo Morales in Bolivia, incumbents across the region have taken advantage of their broad popular support to undermine core civil and political rights, all in the name of democracy.

Methodologically, this study serves as a reminder that there are important challenges to using cluster analysis across time and national contexts. Most cross-national public opinion surveys use items with ordinal response scales. Moreover, these surveys generally do not include multiple items to measure a given underlying attitude, thus preventing the construction of continuous scales. These practices facilitate survey administration; however, they pose challenges for the use of cluster analysis, which is most reliable when it uses continuous variables. Indeed, we found that the results of the cluster analysis were not informative on their own. Making sense of the results required an analysis of contextual factors within countries (e. g., economic trends, the pervasiveness of corruption scandals) and trends in individual survey items (e. g., presidential approval, satisfaction with democracy) grounded in deep country expertise. The contributions to this special issue exemplify the importance of this deep expertise in individual country cases.

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APPENDIX. TABLE A: DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES AND AMERICASBAROMETER ITEMS

Democratic Attitudes ¹	Americas Barometer Items ³
Support for democracy	<p>ING4. Changing the subject again, democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? <i>Response options: Seven-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disagree to (7) Strongly agree.</i></p>
Opposition to military coups ²	<p>Some people say that under some circumstances it would be justified for the military of this country to take power by a coup d'état (military coup). In your opinion would a military coup be justified...</p> <p>JC10. When there is a lot of crime <i>Response options: (1) A military take-over of the state would be justified; (2) A military takeover of the state would not be justified.</i></p> <p>Some people say that under some circumstances it would be justified for the military of this country to take power by a coup d'état (military coup). In your opinion would a military coup be justified...</p> <p>JC13. When there is a lot of corruption <i>Response options: (1) A military take-over of the state would be justified; (2) A military takeover of the state would not be justified.</i></p>
Opposition to executive aggrandizement ²	<p>JC15A. Do you believe that when the country is facing very difficult times it is justifiable for the president of the country to close the Legislative Assembly and govern without the Legislative Assembly? <i>Response options: (1) Yes, it is justified; (2) No, it is not justified.</i></p> <p>JC16A. Do you believe that when the country is facing very difficult times it is justifiable for the president of the country to dissolve the Supreme Court and govern without the Supreme Court? <i>Response options: (1) Yes, it is justified; (2) No, it is not justified.</i></p>
Tolerance of protest and regime critics	<p>D1. There are people who only say bad things about the form of government of Mexico, not just the current government but the system of government. How strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people's right to vote? Please read me the number from the scale. <i>Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.</i></p>

Democratic Attitudes ¹	Americas Barometer Items ³
	<p>D2. How strongly do you approve or disapprove that such people be allowed to conduct peaceful demonstrations in order to express their views? Please read me the number. <i>Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.</i></p>
	<p>D3. Still thinking of those who only say bad things about the form of government of Mexico, how strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people being permitted to run for public office? <i>Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.</i></p>
	<p>D4. How strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people appearing on television to make speeches? <i>Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.</i></p>
Support for democratic inclusion	<p>D5. And now, changing the topic and thinking of homosexuals, how strongly do you approve or disapprove of homosexuals being permitted to run for public office? <i>Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.</i></p>

¹ In the 2021 round of the AmericasBarometer, only a small subset of items was included in the survey and included items were often administered to respondents in split samples. Included items and split samples vary across countries. Cluster analysis used the largest possible number of items and respondents in each country.

² Opposition to military coups and opposition to executive aggrandizement items were administered inconsistently across countries and waves. For example, in Mexico, in 2012, all items were asked to all respondents, while in 2018 respondents were asked either JC10 and JC15A or JC13 and JC16A. To ensure consistent measurement of the two attitudes, we verified that responses to JC10 and JC15A, and JC15A y JC16A had similar distributions, and artificially created split samples as needed.

³ Responses were coded and rescaled to generate attitudinal scores ranging from zero (least democratic attitude) to one (most democratic attitude). When more than one question was available for a given democratic attitude, the attitudinal score was calculated by averaging responses.

Source: own elaboration.