ISSN: 1852-9003 - eISSN: 2660-700X
DOI: https://doi.org/10.14201/rlop.2023122

Vol. 12, N.º 2 (2023)

# RLOP

## Revista Latinoamericana de Opinión Pública

WAPOR LATINOAMÉRICA

Ediciones Universidad Salamanca

RLOP

**Revista Latinoamericana de Opinión Pública**

ISSN: 1852-9003 - eISSN: 2660-700X - DOI: https://doi.org/10.14201/rlop.202312 - CDU: 3 (1-69 IBEROAMÉRICA) - IBIC: Opinión pública y encuestas (JPVK); Latinoamérica (1KL) - BIC: Public opinion & polls (J); Latin America (1KL) -BISAC: Political Science / Public Affairs & Administration (POL017000); Regional / Latin America (RG130)

Vol. 12, N.º 2 (2023)

EDICIONES UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA
http://revistas.usal.es/index.php/1852-9003



SECRETARÍA DE REDACCIÓN
Revista Latinoamericana de Opinión Pública
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Ediciones Universidad Salamanca

Texto impreso diponible bajo demanda en:
https://www.amazon.es/

Maquetación: Intergraf

RLOP
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ISSN: 1852-9003 - eISSN: 2660-700X
DOI: https://doi.org/10.14201/rlop.31897

# 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'etat. For example, individuals who express support for military coups in the abstract are more likely to engage in antidemocratic 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'etat (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 officeholders 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 predefined 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 clustered 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.

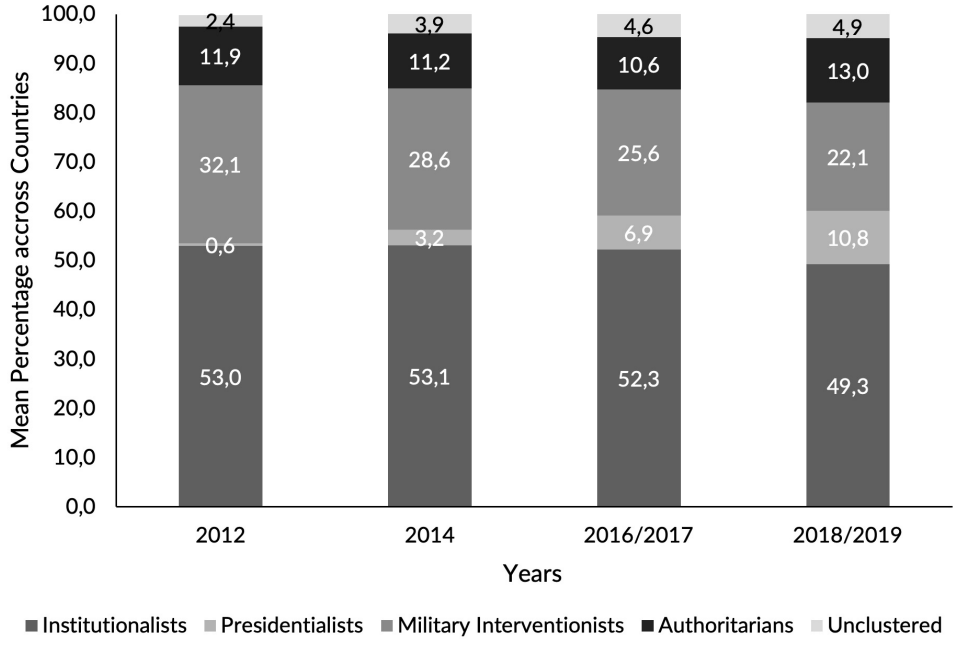
7. We recruited country experts for Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay and Peru.

## 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 authoritarian[8]) 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 Institutionalist 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 Institutionalist 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 Institutionalist 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 | 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?<br>*Response options: Seven-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disagree to (7) Strongly agree.* |
| Opposition to military coups[2] | 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…<br>JC10. When there is a lot of crime<br>*Response options: (1) A military take-over of the state would be justified; (2) A military takeover of the state would not be justified.* |
| | 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…<br>JC13. When there is a lot of corruption<br>*Response options: (1) A military take-over of the state would be justified; (2) A military takeover of the state would not be justified.* |
| Opposition to executive aggrandizement[2] | 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?<br>*Response options: (1) Yes, it is justified; (2) No, it is not justified.* |
| | 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?<br>*Response options: (1) Yes, it is justified; (2) No, it is not justified.* |
| Tolerance of protest and regime critics | 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.<br>*Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.* |

| Democratic Attitudes[1] | Americas Barometer Items[3] |
|---|---|
| | 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.<br>*Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.* |
| | 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?<br>*Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.* |
| | D4. How strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people appearing on television to make speeches?<br>*Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.* |
| Support for democratic inclusion | 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?<br>*Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.* |

[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.

# ARTÍCULOS

Special Issue

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

ISSN: 1852-9003 - eISSN: 2660-700X
DOI: https://doi.org/10.14201/rlop.31378

# PERU: DEEP POLITICAL DISSATISFACTION WEAKENS SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

## *Perú: la profunda desafección política debilita el apoyo a la democracia*

## *Peru: profundo descontentamento político enfraquece o apoio à democracia*

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Submission: 2023-04-29
Accepted: 2023-10-01
First View: 2023-11-06
Publication: 2023-12-31

***Keywords:***
*Peru; Support for Democracy; Satisfaction with Democracy; Political Dysfunction; Political Representation*

**Abstract**
This paper analyzes support for democratic attitudes in Peru using data from the AmericasBarometer. It finds that democratic attitudes in Peru are consistently low, when compared to regional means. It also shows that the proportion of respondents holding consistent democratic values has decreased in the last decade or so. We attribute this decline to the growing dissatisfaction with the performance of the political system, as measured by the Satisfaction with Democracy item. We argue that this discontent expresses a dual failure of political representation: presidents do not follow the mandate they were given, and voters have no opportunity to castigate them and their parties at election time. In addition, the decision of the fujimorista party in Congress in 2016 to resort to extraordinary measures in confronting the executive branch opened a period of naked power political still affecting Peru. The failed presidency of Pedro Castillo, who disappointed even his own supporters, and this failed attempt to shut down Congress have deepened the crisis of representation.

*Palabras clave:*
*Perú; apoyo a la democracia; satisfacción con la democracia; disfunción política; representación política*

**Resumen**
Este artículo analiza el apoyo a actitudes democráticas en el Perú, usando los datos del Barómetro de las Américas. El trabajo encuentra que las actitudes democráticas en el Perú son consistentemente bajas cuando se las compara con los promedios regionales. El artículo muestra también que la proporción de entrevistados que tienen actitudes democráticas consistentes ha decrecido en la última década. Nosotros atribuimos esa caída a la creciente desafección con el desempeño del sistema político, medido a través del indicador de Satisfacción con la Democracia. Argumentamos que este descontento expresa una falla doble de representación política: los presidentes no siguen el mandato que se les da y los votantes no tienen la oportunidad de castigar a ellos y sus partidos al momento de las elecciones. Más aún, la decisión del partido fujimorista en el Congreso en 2016 de usar medidas extraordinarias en su enfrentamiento con el poder ejecutivo abrió un periodo de disfunción política que aún afecta al país. La fallida presidencia de Pedro Castillo, quién desilusionó incluso a sus propios seguidores, y su fallido intento de cerrar el Congreso, han profundizado esta crisis de representación.

*Palavras-chave:*
*Peru; apoio à democracia; satisfação com a democracia; disfunção política; representação política*

**Resumo**
Este artigo analisa o apoio às atitudes democráticas no Peru, utilizando dados do Barômetro das Américas. Constata que as atitudes democráticas no Peru são consistentemente baixas quando comparadas com as médias regionais. O artigo mostra também que a proporção de entrevistados que têm atitudes democráticas consistentes diminuiu na última década. Atribuímos este declínio ao crescente descontentamento com o desempenho do sistema político, medido através do indicador Satisfação com a Democracia. Argumentamos que este descontentamento expressa um duplo fracasso da representação política: os presidentes não cumprem o mandato que lhes foi conferido e os eleitores não têm a oportunidade de puni-los e aos seus partidos em época de eleições. Além disso, a decisão do partido Fujimori no Congresso, em 2016, de utilizar medidas extraordinárias no seu confronto com o poder executivo abriu um período de disfunção política que ainda afeta o país. A presidência fracassada de Pedro Castillo, que decepcionou até os seus próprios seguidores, e a sua tentativa fracassada de fechar o Congresso, aprofundaram esta crise de representação.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Democracy returned to Peru in 2000, when President Alberto Fujimori resigned via fax from Japan (Cameron, 2006). Popular pressure forced his two Vice Presidents to resign and Valentín Paniagua, President of Congress, assumed the presidency on an interim basis. The first round of new elections was held in April 2001 and the runoff in June. Alejandro Toledo won the presidency by defeating Alan García. Since then, presidential elections have regularly been held every five years. The record of five democratically elected presidents in a row is historic; never in Peru's 200-year history has such a succession of democratic elections occurred (Carrión, 2022b).

However, Peru's democracy is not well, as it persists amid severe political dysfunction.[1] The 2016 election produced a divided government. The combination of a minority President with an overreaching Congress controlled by an obstructionist majority marked the beginning of institutional instability. The 2021 general elections brought Peru to a perilous point. As in 2016, the runoff polarized voters and produced another divided government. Keiko Fujimori, Alberto's daughter, claimed her father's legacy and offered a right-wing alternative to the "communist threat." Pedro Castillo represented the informal coalition of those rejecting the fujimorista legacy and those embracing radical left-wing politics. Observers expected a narrow election but did not anticipate that the loser would reject the result. Keiko Fujimori refused to acknowledge defeat on the false premise that there was fraud in the vote count. Peruvian democracy survived because: 1) electoral institutions refused to buckle to the antidemocratic pressure and 2) the international community acknowledged that no serious irregularities had occurred. In its 2022 report, Freedom House acknowledged the successful elections and restored Peru's "free" status (Freedom House, 2022).

Still, problems remained during the presidency of Pedro Castillo.[2] His government was an unmitigated disaster, marked by incompetence and widespread accusations of corruption. His lackadaisical approach to governing produced a high turnover of ministers, unprecedented in the Peruvian context. By the end of his short-term presidency, he had named five prime ministers and appointed at least 78 ministers (Coca Pimentel, 2022). Conservative forces in Congress, on the other hand, unable to accept their electoral defeat and Castillo's legitimacy, devoted most of their time to trying to remove Castillo on the flimsiest of excuses, at least initially. When the Attorney General office started to seriously investigate the corruption surrounding the presidency, Congress initiated a third impeachment proceeding.

On December 7, as he was facing this new vote of no confidence, President Pedro Castillo announced on television that he was shutting down Congress and would rule by decree until new congressional elections were held. Peruvian institutions reacted swiftly to the threat. The armed forces refused to comply with Castillo's orders, and Congress quickly removed him from office. He was arrested under the accusation of rebelling against the constitutional order and Dina Boluarte, his vice president, took over. Peru's democracy reached a perilous point, and barely survived.

1. We define political dysfunction simply as political instability, i.e., the unscheduled but not necessarily unconstitutional change in the leadership of the executive branch and/or the dissolution of the existing legislature.
2. To understand the context of the 2021 election in Peru and the rise of Pedro Castillo see Asencio *et al.* (2021).

The transition to the Boluarte presidency was constitutionally valid. However, significant sectors of Peruvian society — who felt that their votes had been invalidated — rejected her government. Many citizens, especially those residing in the areas that voted overwhelmingly for Pedro Castillo in 2021, took to the streets to voice their displeasure. Public opinion polls showed that important segments of the public did not consider Castillo's move as a coup and, in fact, believed him to have been the victim of a legislative coup.[3] These protests were met with unprecedent violence, and at least 67 people died as a result (Briceño, 2023). Although the demands were varied, some people wanted Boluarte's immediate resignation and Castillo's return. Many wanted to dissolve Congress. The vast majority of Peruvians wanted early elections,[4] but a dysfunctional Congress could not muster enough votes to satisfy this demand (Carrión, 2023). In reaction of these developments, Freedom House downgraded Peru to "partly free" in its 2023 report (Freedom House, 2023). Two well-known Peruvian political scientists write that Peru's democracy has been hollowed out by "power dilution" (Barrenechea & Vergara, 2023: 82).

The extreme fragility of Peru's democracy does not occur in a vacuum. We show here that, two decades after Peru's democratic transition, nondemocratic attitudes have increased. We suggest that the reason lies in voters' deep political discontent with the performance of the political system. We use the variable satisfaction with democracy (SWD) as our general indicator of political discontent. While there is a healthy debate about the merits and flaws of this indicator (Canache, Mondak, & Seligson, 2001; Linde & Ekman, 2003; Kim, 2009; Howell & Justman, 2013; Ferrín, 2016; Foa, Klassen, Slade, Rand, & Collins, 2020; Daoust & Nadeau, 2021; Ridge, 2022; Singh & Mayne, 2023), we agree with those who argue that SWD can be properly used as an indicator of mid-level political support, located between support for incumbents and the political regime as a whole (Singh & Mayne, 2023: 194). We document below how SWD has declined steadily in Peru in recent years, in a pattern that distinguishes this country from the regional average.

Our argument is that growing political discontent expresses deep failures of political representation and increasing political dysfunction. Elections in post-2000 Peru have not resulted in greater political representation. Voters elect candidates who promise "security oriented" messages (more state intervention to address human insecurities) but get governments that privilege "efficiency"

3. In a poll conducted in early January of 2023 by the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos (henceforth IEP), about 30 percent of the respondents approved of Castillo's attempted coup, and 41 percent declared to be in favor of Castillo's move to dissolve Congress (IEP, 2023a).
4. Polls conducted by IEP in January and February of 2023 show that about 90 percent of respondents wanted early elections in 2023 or 2024 (IEP, 2023b).

(Stokes, 2001). In addition, the widely noted absence of political parties and the banning of immediate reelection deprive voters to hold presidents and their parties accountable. This dual failure of representation fuels political disenchantment. We bring together into a single framework of representational failure issues that have been explored individually in several important works that we cite in the respective section. In addition, heightened inter-branch conflict has led to political dysfunction that further undermines citizen trust in their representatives.

In this article, we map the recent evolution of democratic and nondemocratic attitudes in Peru and use regional averages to provide a context. We do not claim that support for democracy in Peru has fallen more compared to the rest of the region. What we want to stress is that support for democracy in Peru is consistently lower than the regional average and that it has declined in the last 15 years. We argue that the deterioration of attitudes supportive of democracy is driven by political discontent caused in part by failures of representation and political dysfunction that emanate from the absence of political parties. This political discontent has increased dramatically in Peru in the last decade or so. The implicit claim we make is that the lower levels of support for democracy found in Peru are to be attributed to contextual factors rather than deep-seated authoritarian values. We buttress this claim in an indirect fashion, by showing that democratic and nondemocratic attitudes ebb and flow and therefore they are more likely to be associated with evaluations of regime performance (for which we use SWD as an indicator) than enduring authoritarian values.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the first section, we discuss the results of NORC's cluster analysis of democratic attitudes in Peru using the 2012–2021 waves of the AmericasBarometer survey. This analysis gives us a bird's eye view that includes only four surveys, given data availability. In the second section, we disaggregate and expand the timespan for the analysis of some of these variables by utilizing all the rounds of the AmericasBarometer surveys conducted in Peru (2008-2021). These two sections show a trend of increasingly nondemocratic attitudes, especially in support for executive aggrandizement. In the third section, we explain this trend by tracing citizen dissatisfaction with the way democracy is working in Peru. We then discuss two reasons for this dissatisfaction: failures of representation and political dysfunction caused by severe inter-branch conflict. A concluding section ends the paper.

## 2. CLUSTERS OF DISTINCT DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES IN PERU

NORC at the University of Chicago used data from the AmericasBarometer and cluster analysis to classify Peruvians into groups with specific profiles

regarding democratic attitudes.[5] The aim of this analysis is to maximize similarity within each cluster while maximizing dissimilarity between clusters. One advantage of cluster analysis compared to other classification schemes is that it is highly inductive, meaning that it lets surveyed Peruvians speak for themselves without making assumptions in advance about how to group them. The introduction to this volume provides detailed information regarding the study's methodology. Five democratic attitudes were included in the analysis:

- *Support for democracy:* The extent to which Peruvians agree or disagree that "democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government."
- *Opposition to military coups:* Whether Peruvians believe it would be justified for the military to take power in a military coup in certain circumstances.
- *Opposition to executive aggrandizement:* Whether Peruvians believe it would be justified for the president to close Congress and the Supreme Court and govern without them.
- *Tolerance of protest and regime critics:* The extent to which Peruvians support the right to protest and other political rights of regime critics.
- *Support for democratic inclusion:* The extent to which Peruvians support the political inclusion of homosexuals.

Questions to measure all five attitudes were available in four survey waves (2012, 2014, 2017, and 2019). Only three attitudes were available in 2021: support for democracy, opposition to military coups, and opposition to executive aggrandizement. The 2021 cluster analysis results are therefore not directly comparable to those of prior waves and are not discussed in this paper. The Appendix presents the main cluster analysis results for all waves.

The cluster analysis identified three clusters in 2012 and four clusters each in 2014, 2017, and 2019. In all waves, a small share of respondents was not classified into any cluster.[6] Unclustered individuals are dissimilar from each other and from those included in other clusters. To facilitate comparisons over survey waves, the resulting clusters can be grouped into four families that share a set of defining characteristics (we use the labels as named by the editors):

- *Institutionalists (including both institutionalists and democratic 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.

5. For a full explanation of the technique and a justification of the labels given to each cluster see Cohen & Camacho's introduction to this issue.
6. The proportion of unclustered respondents was 3.5 percent in 2012, 6.3 percent in 2014, 5.7 percent in 2017, and 5.8 percent in 2019.

- *Military Interventionists:* Individuals in this cluster family exhibit full opposition to executive aggrandizement but no opposition to coups.
- *Presidentialists:* Individuals in this cluster family exhibit full opposition to coups but no opposition to executive aggrandizement.
- *Authoritarians:* Individuals in this cluster family are characterized by basically no opposition to both coups and executive aggrandizement.[7]

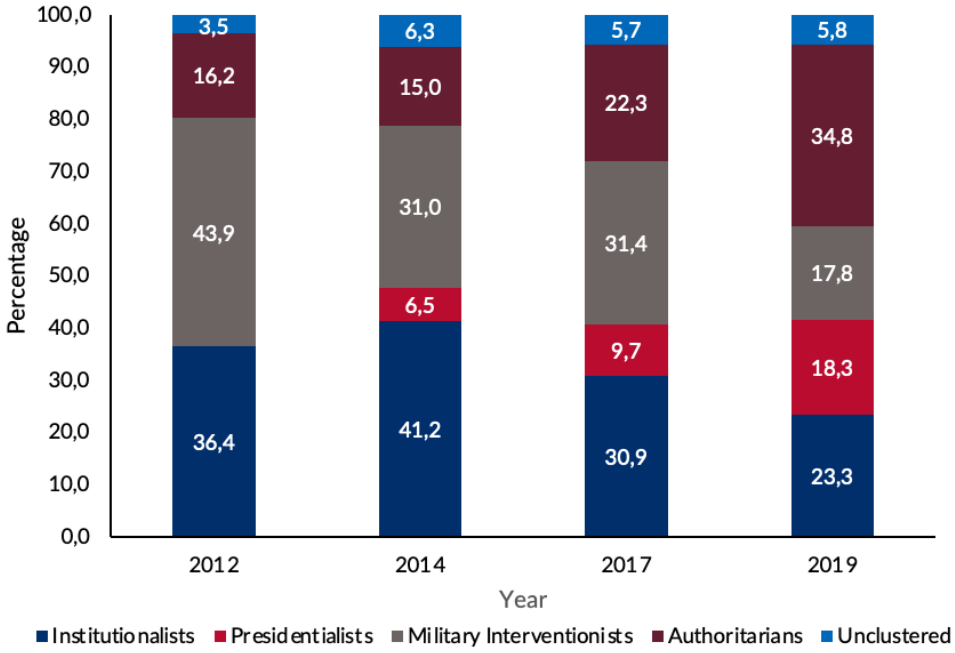
Figure 1 shows the evolution of these families between 2012 and 2019. The first clear trend is the growth of the authoritarian cluster family. While this cluster comprised only 16.2 percent of respondents in 2012, they make up 34.8 percent of respondents in 2019. This cluster exhibits low support for democracy as a political regime, has very little to no opposition to both military coups and executive aggrandizement, and professes low support for democratic inclusion.[8] The other noticeable change is the growth of the presidentialists cluster, which increased from 6.5 percent of respondents in 2017 to 18.3 percent in 2019. This cluster is characterized by relatively high support for the idea of democracy (in their answers to the question of Support for Democracy as a regime), very high opposition to military coups, average support for democratic inclusion and the right to protest, but no opposition to the expansion of presidential power.

A third finding is the substantial reduction in the proportion of military interventionists. This cluster comprised about 43.9 percent of the sample in 2012 but only 17.8 percent in 2019. This cluster is primarily characterized by a strong endorsement of military coups but a strong opposition to executive aggrandizement. This group has a moderate-to-high level of support for democracy and middling levels of support for the right to protest and the democratic inclusion of historically marginalized groups. We also note the reduction of institutionalists over time. This grouping comprised 36.4 percent of respondents in 2012 and 23.3 percent in 2019, with some fluctuations in between. This cluster aggregates respondents who exhibit high support for democracy and the rejection of both military coups and executive aggrandizement.

The Institutionalists are the ones most consistently opposed to military coups while also exhibiting the highest or very high support for the idea of democracy (in the question of regime endorsement) as the least bad of political regimes. They also tend to score higher than other clusters in tolerance of protest and regime critics and support for democratic inclusion. This cluster comprised 36.4 percent of the sample in 2012, but only 23.3 percent in 2019. This is a worrisome

7. Only in 2012 did "authoritarians" show some degree of opposition to military coups. It all other rounds, they fully endorsed coups. See Table A.1 in the appendix.
8. The attitudinal profile of each cluster in each year of the surveys can be found in the Appendix.

**Figure 1. Evolution of Cluster Families, 2012–2019**




*Source*: NORC at Chicago, data from the AmericasBarometer by the LAPOP Lab, www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop, waves 2012-2019.

development because it indicates a decline of the group of people who consistently hold democratic attitudes. Unfortunately, this decline is consistent with the weakening of support for democracy as a political regime, as we discuss in the next section.

NORC at the University of Chicago's cluster analysis also identified the variables that significantly distinguish each cluster from all others. The variables examined include gender, income, race, education, experience with violence and corruption, political efficacy, and political participation. All clusters are statistically significantly different from the others on a few of these variables in each wave, but there are few patterns that hold across the 2012–2019 waves. Moreover, most statistically significant differences are substantially small, which suggests that the demographic and other characteristics examined do not structure attitudes toward democracy in a meaningful way.

With these limitations in mind, we found that military interventionists tended to be younger. The share of young people (18–29 years) among that cluster is higher than among the rest of the sample. Military interventionists also have

fewer average years of education than the rest of the sample. Additionally, presidentialists tend to be wealthier: the share of people in the lowest wealth quintile among this cluster is lower than among the rest of the sample.

The main conclusion of this cluster analysis is that the grouping with the most consistent democratic and institutionalist views has declined over time whereas those holding more authoritarian attitudes have grown.

## 3. SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRATIC VALUES OVER TIME

To provide a closer and more extended look at the evolution of democratic attitudes in Peru, we examine three variables individually: support for democracy as a regime type, support for military coups, and support for executive aggrandizement. We compare Peru's trajectories with other countries in Latin America to better understand the significance of these changes.[9]

### *3.1. Support for Democracy*

Every AmericasBarometer survey since 2006 shows that Peruvians exhibit lower support for democracy in the abstract than the regional average.[10] In some years the gap between Peruvians and Latin Americans is substantial (2006, 2010, and 2021) and in others less so, but support for democracy is consistently low in Peru (represented by a solid line in Figure 2 and the following), when compared with the region (represented by a dashed line in Figure 2 and the others). Moreover, the difference in means for each of the reported years is statistically significant.[11] Overall, the highest level of support for democracy among Peruvians was registered in 2008 (62.5 percent), which was about 12 percentage points higher than what was found in 2019 and 2021. When the trajectories of the support for democracy in Peru and Latin America are compared, one notices that there was a noticeable decline in both Peru and the region between 2014 and 2016.

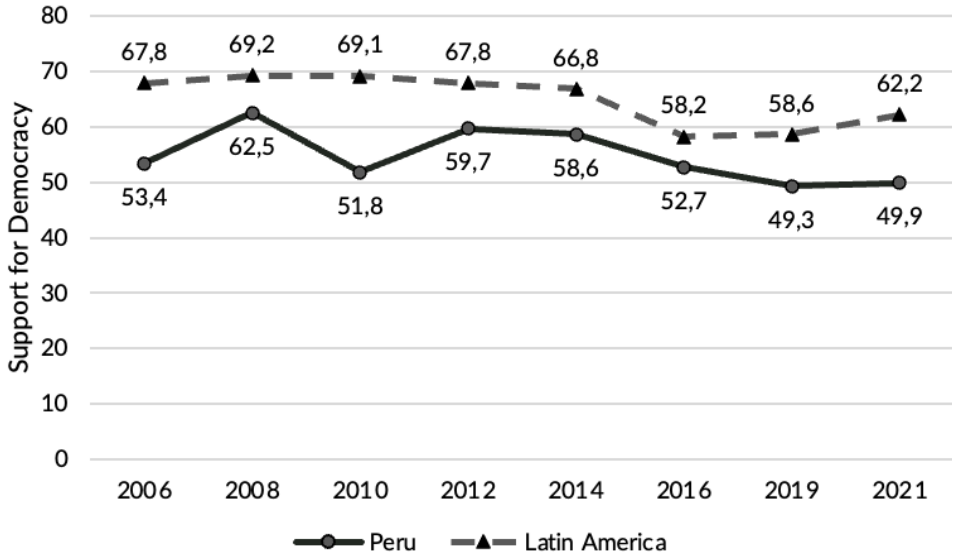
9. In all figures, "Latin America" excludes English- and Dutch-speaking countries. Peru is also excluded from the calculation of the average. Because surveys were not conducted in Venezuela in the 2018-2019 and 2021 rounds, we also exclude this country from the regional averages. The data start in 2006, the first year the AmericasBarometer survey was conducted in Peru.

10. The AmericasBarometer surveys use a seven-point Likert scale in this question, where one signifies strong disagreement and seven signifies strong agreement. In this paper, "support for democracy" is operationalized as the percentage of respondents who select values five, six, or seven in the scale. Values one to four are coded as "no support for democracy."

11. The 95 percent confidence intervals of the respective means do not intersect. The confidence intervals are not reported in the graphs but are available upon request.

However, while the average of support recovers in Latin America between 2016 and 2021, the decline continues in Peru (although it remained unchanged between 2019 and 2021).

**Figure 2. Peru and Latin America: Support for Democracy, 2012–2021**




*Source*: AmericasBarometer, version GM_20211108_authors.

### *3.2. Support for Military Coups*

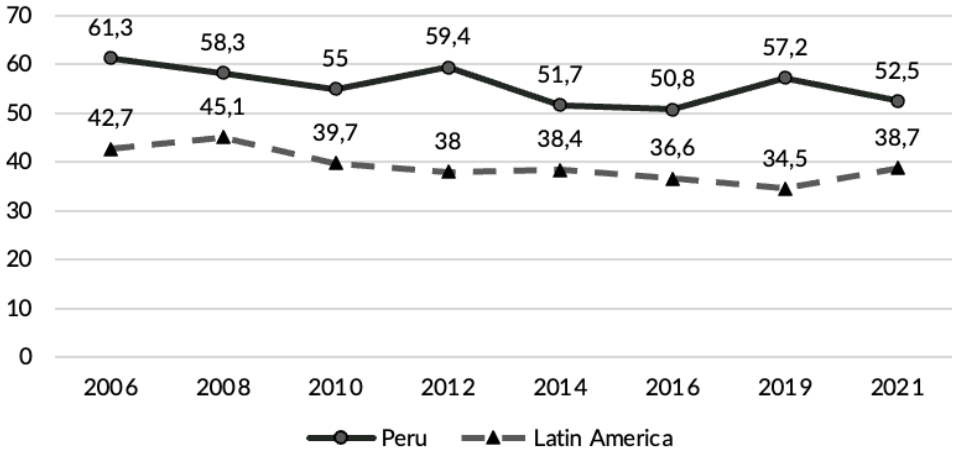
Another way to probe the strength of democratic convictions is to ask people about their willingness to support the democratic regime during difficult times. In this case, the question is whether military coups could be justified when there is widespread corruption.[12] Unfortunately, and consistent with the weak endorsement of democracy that we found, Figure 3

suggests that potential support for the interruption of democracy is high in Peru. As in the previous case, support for the democratic option is consistently lower in Peru than in the rest of the region: between 2006 and 2021, support for

12. The survey question asks: "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 when there is a lot of corruption?" The options are "yes, it would be justified" and "no, it would not be justified."

military coups when there is a lot of corruption ranged from 50 to 60 percent in Peru, compared to the regional average of between 34 and 45 percent. In each of these years, the difference in means was statistically significant. Perhaps the good news here is that support for military coups has dropped a bit in 2021 in comparison to 2019, a year that saw a noticeable increase in relation to 2016. But even in 2021, support for military coups in cases of high corruption is almost 14 percentage points higher in Peru than the regional average. We have argued elsewhere that this greater predisposition to support military intervention under this condition is related to the larger concern Peruvians have about corruption as their country's most pressing problem and their widespread belief that an overwhelming majority of public officials and politicians participate in it (Carrión *et al.*, 2020). Considering that every elected president since 2001 has been investigated for corruption tells how salient the issue of corruption is for most Peruvians.

**Figure 3. Support for Military Coups When There Is Widespread Corruption in Peru and Latin America, 2012–2021**



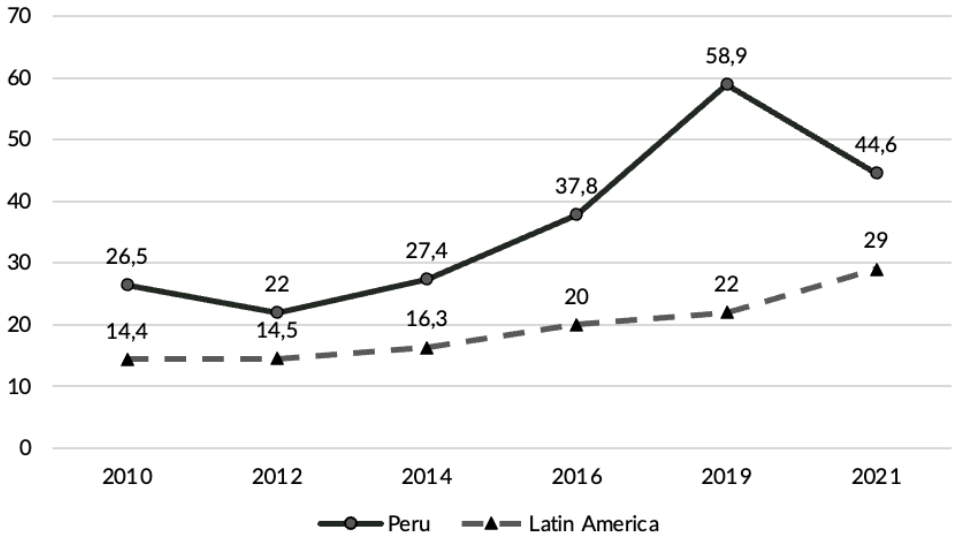

*Source*: AmericasBarometer, version GM_20211108_authors.

### *3.3. Support for Executive Aggrandizement*

Democratic backsliding, or the weakening of democracy "from within" as chief executives abuse their formal and informal prerogatives to aggrandize their power, is a contemporary global trend (Bermeo, 2016; Lührmann & Linberg, 2019; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Carrión, 2022a). Peru unfortunately has a long history of backsliding. On April 5, 1992, President Alberto Fujimori, with support of the

armed forces, shut down Congress, dismissed the Supreme Court, and informed the nation that he would rule by decree (Conaghan, 2005; Carrión, 2006). Figure 4 shows that Peruvians have a strong disposition to support the aggrandizement of executive power, especially when the incumbent is popular.[13] As in the previous cases, the differences of the means found in Peru and the region are statistically significant for each of the reported years. It also worth mentioning that the level of support for executive aggrandizement via the shutting down of Congress is lower than that of support for military coups in cases of widespread corruption. In 2010, about one in four respondents (26.5 percent) said that the President shutting down the legislative and judicial branches would be justified when the country is facing "very difficult times." That was almost twice as much as the regional average (14.4 percent). In 2019, support for the extraconstitutional increase in executive power reached its highest point (58.9 percent) at a time when a popular president (Martín Vizcarra) was confronting an overreaching congress. This

**Figure 4. Support for Executive Aggrandizement in Peru and Latin America, 2012–2021**




*Source*: AmericasBarometer, version GM_20211108_authors.

13. The specific question measuring this attitude is "Do you believe that when the country is facing very difficult times it is justifiable for the president of the country to close the Congress/Parliament and govern without Congress/Parliament?" The options were "yes, it is justified" and "no, it is not justified." Data are not available before 2010.

statistic was more than 30 percentage points higher than the regional average for that year. In 2021, with a new Congress in place and an interim president in charge, that level of support fell, but was still 15.6 percentage points higher than the regional average.

Inter-branch conflict has become, as we discuss later, a central feature of Peruvian politics in the last decade. Each branch has utilized "the nuclear option" available to them (either removing the president or dissolving Congress) as part of this confrontation. The data reported in Figure 4 show that there is potential support for a highly popular president to move antidemocratically against Congress. In the case of Vizcarra, when he dissolved Congress in late September of 2019, his action was not openly unconstitutional and was later approved by the Constitutional Tribunal, but there was enough uncertainly about its constitutionality because he argued that Congress has "tacitly" denied him a vote of confidence.

## 4. WHY ARE NONDEMOCRATIC VALUES GROWING? DECLINING SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY

In the preceding sections we showed that the percentage of institutionalists has decreased in the last decade, while the percentage of Peruvians in less-democratically-inclined clusters has increased. We also documented a general decrease in support for democracy in the abstract and an increase in support for executive aggrandizement. While support for military coups remained relatively stable in this period, it is quite high: about half of Peruvians would justify a military coup when corruption is high. Why has the total proportion of people holding nondemocratic attitudes increased between 2012 and 2021?

The short answer is that there is growing political discontent with the performance of the political system. How do we capture this disappointment or discontent? We argue that the best indicator is the general question about satisfaction "with the way democracy works in Peru."[14] There is a healthy debate in the public opinion literature about the satisfaction with democracy (SWD) item and its utility. Some have criticized SWD for failing to indicate what dimension of political support is measuring and even suggested that "the item should not be included on future surveys" (Canache, Mondak, & Seligson, 2001: 526). Others disagree and argue that this item does not try to measure support for the principles of democracy; instead, it is one indicator of literal "support for the performance of

14. The specific question measuring this attitude is "In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the way democracy works in Peru?" The response options were "very satisfied," "satisfied," "dissatisfied," and "very dissatisfied." Figure 5 plots the percentage of respondents who choose "very satisfied" or "satisfied."

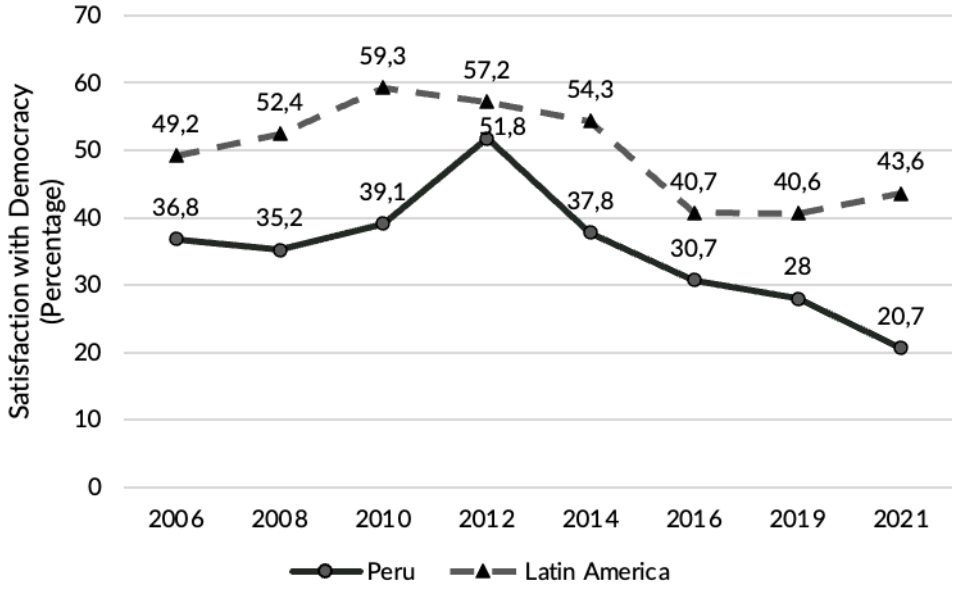
a democratic regime" (Linde & Ekman, 2003: 401). In a recent and exhaustive review of the vast literature on the topic, Singh and Mayne (2023: 194) conclude that "a consensus has emerged among SWD scholars that the standard item is a mid-level indicator of popular support… lying between more diffuse support related to regime-type preferences and commitments and support for specific actors and institutions." We agree with this conclusion even though we recognize that SWD is contaminated with assessments of regime as well as incumbents' performance (Canache, Mondak, & Seligson, 2001; Wagner, Schneider, & Hall, 2009; Daoust & Nadeau, 2021). We do not need to adjudicate whether regime-level or government-level assessments are more important in determining SWD. We use it here to make a more limited claim: that it is an indicator of political discontent that captures assessments of regime as well as incumbent's performance.

Figure 5 shows that SWD in Peru has plummeted in recent years, when compared with the regional average. In 2012, slightly over 50 percent of respondents felt satisfied with the way democracy was working in Peru. A decade later, that satisfaction more than halved, dropping to 20 percent. Although we also see a downward trend in Latin America overall, the regional decline stabilized between 2016 and 2021. That was not the case in Peru, where the decrease in SWD levels, which had already fallen quite dramatically since 2012, dropped by an additional 10 percentage points between 2017 and 2021. Recurring issues of representation and the political dysfunction opened after the 2016 election are partly responsible for this decline, as we show below.

Figure 5 dispels the idea that Peruvians are "always unhappy with the system." SWD seems to capture not only assessments of regime performance but also evaluations of the incumbent. There was a marked increase in SWD between 2006 and 2012, as Peru's economy grew at record levels, poverty diminished, and standards of living generally improved (Carrión & Palmer, 2014). Data from the AmericasBarometer confirm that Peruvians were being more optimistic regarding their economic outcome. The 2006 poll conducted in Peru showed that 27.1 percent of respondents described their current economic situation as "bad" or "very bad." When a similar question was asked in 2012, that percentage dropped to 15.2 percent. In 2012, 85 percent described their economic situation as "good" or "fair," quite a contrast from the 73 percent who had reported similar condition in 2006. During his two first years in office, Ollanta Humala was quite a popular president and started a series of social programs as part of his campaign promises to deliver greater social inclusion (Perú–Ministerio de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social, 2012). SDW grew accordingly, as we can see in Figure 5. Certainly, Peru still faced significant developmental challenges, and the political system was largely operating without parties with national reach and societal penetration. And Humala ended his administration with very low levels of approval and the sense of disillusionment was generalized. The cycle of political dysfunction opened in 2016

is still ongoing, as we discuss below, and has led to a significant drop in SWD. In 2021, only about two in ten Peruvians proffered to be satisfied with democracy.

**Figure 5. Satisfaction with Democracy in Peru and Latin America, 2012–2021**




*Source*: AmericasBarometer, version GM_20211108_authors.

We argue that two factors drive this political discontent: the dual crisis of political representation and the political dysfunction that emanates from severe inter-branch conflict. These are not the only factors of political discontent but are the ones that speak more directly to citizen engagement with the political sphere.

## 5. THE DUAL CRISIS OF REPRESENTATION

Despite Peru's clear success in holding free and fair elections since the fall of Fujimori in 2000, elections are not "inducing representation," to use the language of Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes (1999: 16). Elections are expected to foster representation at two levels. First, voters are asked to choose among competing political platforms, and elected representatives are expected to deliver on the promises they make. This is what Maning and colleagues call "the mandate conception of representation" (Manin, Przeworski, & Stokes, 1999: 30). But elections also give voters the opportunity to punish politicians and their parties for their

failure to deliver on their promises. Manin and co-authors denote this as "the accountability conception of representation" (*ibid.*: 40). In Peru, political representation fails at this dual task. Elected leaders frequently pursue policies that are different from what they promise on the campaign trail (Dargent & Muñoz, 2012: 264; Vergara & Encinas, 2016: 160-161), and voters have no opportunity to punish them at the ballot box (Vergara & Watanabe, 2016: 149; 2019: 32).

Of course, Alberto Fujimori was a prime example of bait-and-switch candidates who run against neo-liberalism but adopt it once in power (Stokes, 2001). What is surprising is that this phenomenon of "mandate violation," as Stokes calls it, continues after his fall. Alejandro Toledo (2001-2006), Alan García (2006-2011), and Ollanta Humala (2011-2016) ran on political platforms that offer more state intervention, or what Stokes (2011: 2) labels as "security-oriented campaign messages," but ended up embracing the neo-liberal economic orthodoxy prevalent in Peru since the early 1990s, policies described as "efficiency-oriented" (Stokes, 2001). Toledo ran a campaign marked with populist overtones, playing up his indigenous origins, and offering to fight poverty, create jobs, fight corruption, and the satisfaction of basic human needs (Schmidt, 2002: 344). However, Toledo would not deliver on the promise of reducing social and economic inequalities (McClintock, 2006). Alan García offers another example of policy switch. As a candidate, he offered economic reforms with a degree of greater state intervention but respecting democracy and the market (Vergara, 2007: 93). Once in government, García fully embraced economic policies that rest on the exploitation and export of natural resources. Despite his promises, and like Toledo, García paid little attention to economic redistribution and institutional reform. He opted instead for a discourse of order and authority and criticized those who opposed his extractivist policies (Tanaka & Vera, 2008: 352).

The 2011 elections pitted Keiko Fujimori against Ollanta Humala, who ran this time on a more moderate platform promising social inclusion and a "Great Transformation" in democracy. The electoral outcome showed that there was pent-up demand for a candidate offering significant economic reform to reduce inequality (Levitsky, 2011; Tanaka, Barrenechea, & Vera, 2011). Humala won 18 of Peru's 25 departments, losing in the most developed areas.[15] He was the poor people's candidate. His election represented a rejection of the establishment and hope for more inclusive socioeconomic policies (Dargent, 2011). Humala tried to deliver on his promises of greater social inclusion, but he eventually provided more continuity than change in policy terms (Dargent & Muñoz, 2012: 246). As with previous administrations, he let technocrats in charge of the finance ministry. His

15. Ollanta Humala won in districts located in the bottom three quintiles of the Human Development Index, whereas Keiko Fujimori prevailed in the top two quintiles (Zacharias, Sulmont, & Garibotti, 2015).

government ultimately failed to satisfy voters' expectations of greater social inclusion (Barrenechea & Sosa Villagarcía, 2014; Meléndez & Sosa Villagarcía, 2013; Carrión, 2022b). When faced with an economic slowdown, Humala did not change pre-existing economic policies, despite his campaign promises.[16] Accordingly, his popularity, which hovered between 50 and 60 percent during his first year in office, fell to the low 30s by the second year and settled at about 20 percent by the end of his presidency (Muñoz & Guibert, 2016: 328).

In sum, Presidents Toledo, García, and Humala governed during years of significant economic growth. Social spending grew from 2007 on, but the economic policy continued to be on "autopilot" (Meléndez & Sosa Villagarcía, 2013). Modernization occurred and poverty declined, but while these presidents offered on the campaign trail policies that called for greater state intervention and more redistributive policies, their governments delivered continuity rather than change. José Luis Ramos (2022: 63) puts this situation in stark terms, "victory is achieved with the vote, but in the end those who lost govern." Not surprisingly, these governments became so unpopular that each of their political parties nearly faded from the political arena at the end of their terms. President Humala's failure holds particular significance because he ran on a platform that promised greater equality for Peruvians residing in the poorest areas of the country. The subsequent lack of progress deepened cynicism and discontent among his supporters.

Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (colloquially known as PPK in Peru), won the presidency in 2016 in a campaign characterized by a different political dynamic. The race was not about promises of greater income redistribution or social inclusion. It was a contest between those who defended the Fujimori legacy and those who rejected it. Veronika Mendoza, the leftist leader who came in third, threw her support behind center-right PPK because he represented the rejection of *fujimorismo*. And yet, once in the presidency, PPK adopted a conciliatory approach towards the *fujimorista*-controlled Congress. To avoid being impeached, he cut a deal with a faction of the *fujimorista* party (led by Keiko's brother) to save his presidency. This led him to pardon Alberto Fujimori (the Constitutional Tribunal eventually invalidated the pardon). The very act of freeing the symbolic leader of the party against which he ran is yet another example of representational failure, in this case betraying the anti-*fujimorista* vote. This betrayal doomed PPK, for the left filed another impeachment motion in March 2018, and PPK resigned the presidency when it was clear that few of his former supporters would defend him.

The victory of Pedro Castillo in the 2021 elections marks a watershed moment. The victory of a rural teacher and radical union leader, representing a

16. Peruvians joked that the only "great transformation" occurring during the Humala administration was his own.

self-described Marxist party with a rather tenuous commitment to pluralistic democracy, was prima facie evidence that, despite all its flaws, Peru's electoral democracy was real. Despite the deep fears of the establishment, Castillo took office as he was the undisputable winner of the runoff. Symbolically, he represented the presidency of the Indigenous and those who had been historically marginalized from the centers of power. His campaign motto was "no more poor people in a rich country." His disinterest in matters of governance, however, belied that promise. He made no attempts to change the orthodox economic policy, nor did he offer congressional legislation to raise taxes to increase funding for existing social programs. Almost a year after taking office, only 19 percent of Peruvians approved of his performance in office. In November of 2022, weeks before his ill-advised coup against Congress, his popularity rate barely exceeded 30 percent (IEP, 2022a). He had a mandate for a more progressive agenda, but his inattention to governing prevented him from any serious policy initiative.

Toledo's party no longer exists. García's historic party, the APRA, lost its electoral registration in 2021 due to poor electoral performance (it regained it in 2023). Humala's party is a shell of its former self. PPK's party is nonexistent. Castillo resigned from the party who took him to victory. Voters could not punish any of these presidents at the polls because they were prevented from running for immediate reelection. But the incumbent parties could not be punished either because they did not put forward a presidential candidate in the subsequent election. This was true in 2006, 2011, 2016, and 2021. This is a failure of representation as accountability. Some scholars denote this as "weak vertical accountability" and argue that it "drives Peruvians' deep dissatisfaction with politics" (Vergara & Watanabe 2019: 32). The electoral system provides perverse incentives that weaken political parties and favor fragmentation. Party-switching, access to free media, "party substitutes" (free agents), the success of local-based parties, and legislation that bans immediate reelection have prevented the development of strong parties (Zavaleta, 2014; Levitsky & Zavaleta, 2016). Indeed, the absence of political parties — noted by so many observers of Peruvian politics (Levitsky & Cameron, 2003; Tanaka, 2005; Crabtree, 2010) — has a pernicious consequence for representation because it disconnects presidents from voters, depriving them of their right to punish presidents' policy switches and their bad performance in office (Vergara & Watanabe, 2016: 153). Perhaps the most important "cost" of this absence is that voters have no chance "to vote retrospectively" (Zavaleta, 2014: 147). This dual failure of representation in Peru fuels political discontent.

With the demise of parties, we see the rise of outsiders and the turning of political parties into mere labels with no societal implantation (Zavaleta, 2014; Levitsky & Zavaleta, 2016). And the end-result of banning reelection is not only

the vanishing of parties *but also* of politicians (Barrenechea & Vergara, 2023: 82). This explains the chasm between politics and society, between presidents and voters, that several authors have pointed out (Muñoz & Guibert, 2016: 335; Barrenechea & Vergara, 2023: 85; Dargent & Muñoz, 2012: 255; Vergara & Watanabe, 2016: 153).

## 6. INTER-BRANCH CONFLICT AND POLITICAL DYSFUNCTION

Issues of representation have been combined in recent years with political dysfunction, fueling even more citizen disenchantment with politicians. Divided government — different parties (or coalitions) in control of the executive and the legislature — is a frequent occurrence in presidential systems. In Peru, unfortunately, it has led to crisis of governance (Kenney, 2004). In 1992, for instance, Fujimori could not or would not find accommodation with a Congress where his party lacked a majority, leading him to shut it down unconstitutionally (Kenney, 2004; Conaghan, 2005; Carrión, 2006). With the return to democracy in 2000, the first three presidents (Toledo, García, and Humala) did not enjoy an outright majority in Congress but their delegations were strong enough to build majority coalitions, although they thinned as time went by due to party switching and party fragmentation in Congress, enduring problems in Peru (McNulty, 2017: 577; Muñoz & Guibert, 2016: 329).

This situation changed dramatically in 2016, when PPK won the presidency by 41,000 votes, but Keiko Fujimori's Fuerza Popular obtained a large congressional majority (73 of 130 seats in the unicameral legislature). Unable to process her defeat, Keiko Fujimori used that legislative majority to obstruct PPK's presidency. In fact, she announced that her party would use it to turn its party platform into laws, tacitly stating that she intended to govern from Congress (El Comercio, 2016). Instead of seeking an alliance with a center-right president who was close to her own ideological leanings, she and her party decided to engage in open confrontation. The *fujimorista* majority flexed its congressional muscles to censure competent ministers, like Jaime Saavedra, the education minister. When Marilú Martens, also education minister, was impeached by the *fujimorista* majority, PPK made it a matter of confidence, which ultimately led to the censure of the cabinet headed by Fernando Zavala, in September 2017.

The confrontation escalated when the *fujimoristas* tried to vacate PKK due to "permanent moral incapacity", over undisclosed ties with the Brazilian construction firm Odebrecht revealed in December 2017. Although this effort failed, as noted previously, the *fujimoristas* crossed a red line. The only other recent time that a Congress had taken a vote to remove a president using the "moral incapacity" clause was in 2000, when Alberto Fujimori had already left the country and

faxed his resignation from Japan.[17] The use of this procedure to remove a minority president raised the stakes of political conflict and opened a cycle of political dysfunction still affecting Peru. Congress tried again in March 2018, citing promises of public works that PPK and his ministers had made to some members of Congress in exchange for their votes against the first impeachment. Confronted with evidence of the dealings, and without political support given his pardon of Alberto Fujimori, PPK resigned after less than two years in office. The congressional "nuclear option" against presidents had been used and it will remain part of the standard political arsenal in the following years.

PPK's replacement, his vice president Martín Vizcarra, was a more seasoned politician and understood that the *fujimorista* opposition was not going to end with PPK's demise. Soon after being sworn as president, Vizcarra took the initiative and leveraged popular antipathy toward the *fujimorista*-dominated Congress to gain the upper hand. He too would resort to another "nuclear option" — the dissolution of Congress — in the face of congressional reluctance to support his policies. The Fujimori-enacted Constitution of 1993 has strong presidentialist overtones and gives chief executives the power to dissolve Congress and call for new legislative elections if Congress votes down two questions of confidence. This is a powerful tool that forces the legislature to agree with key policy initiatives, including constitutional reforms, if they come as a "matter of confidence."[18]

Vizcarra used this mechanism to force Congress to allow a referendum on political reform that sanctioned, among other things, the banning of immediate congressional reelection. This was a very popular measure that solved an inexistent problem, given the low rates of reelection, and had unintended consequences by shortening the time horizons of legislators. The inter-branch conflict continued and when Vizcarra posed as a matter of confidence a bill to regulate the selection of magistrates to the Constitutional Tribunal, Congress passed it *after* it elected the new members using the old legislation. Vizcarra considered that such move was a "de facto" rejection of the matter of confidence and therefore he announced, on September 20 19, that he was dissolving Congress and calling for new congressional elections. Discounting the unconstitutional dissolution of Congress that Fujimori declared in 1992, this was the first time that a president used this mechanism to dismiss Congress. Vizcarra's interpretation was controversial,

17. In 1914 Congress had called for a vote on those grounds against Guillermo Billinghurst. When he tried to dissolve Congress to avoid impeachment, the military moved against him (Levitt, 2012: 9). In 1992, after Fujimori shut down Congress, many of its members met in a private house and voted to remove him from the presidency. It was a symbolic gesture with no practical effect (Carrión 2022a: 113).
18. In 2021 Congress passed a law that watered down significantly this provision by delineating the kind of issues that could qualify as a vote of confidence. Constitutional reforms are no longer allowed to be submitted as a matter of confidence (Canal N, 2021).

so it was challenged, but the Constitutional Tribunal approved it. Years later, in June of 2023, a new Constitutional Tribunal issued a ruling establishing that only Congress can explicitly state the sense of its approval or rejection of any vote of confidence (Tribunal Constitutional del Perú, 2023). Under the new criteria, Vizcarra's action in 2019 would not have passed constitutional scrutiny.

Thus, the inter-branch conflict initiated by the *fujimorista* party's decision to play power politics against PPK had turned into an open conflict by 2019, when both Congress and the Executive have used their respective nuclear options to prevail against the other. The political dysfunction deepened even more after 2019. The January 2020 congressional elections resulted in another highly fragmented Congress. Despite a dramatic shift in seat allocation, the conflict between the executive and the legislature did not end.[19] The pandemic did not pause this dysfunction either. In November 2020, a majority from different ideological persuasions, led by the center right Acción Popular party, impeached President Vizcarra over corruption allegations. As there was no replacement Vice President, Congress appointed its own President, Manuel Merino, as interim chief executive. Peruvians saw this as an open power grab and mobilized in the thousands, all over the country, to demand Merino's resignation (Zárate, 2020). In the face of this unprecedented popular rejection, Merino resigned less than a week after he was sworn into office. Congress then voted Francisco Sagasti, from the small and centrist Partido Morado, to complete Vizcarra's term.

In downgrading Peru's political status from "free" to "partly free" in its 2021 report, Freedom House noted that the change was "due to extended political clashes between the presidency and Congress since 2017 that have heavily disrupted governance and anticorruption efforts, strained the country's constitutional order, and resulted in an irregular succession of four Presidents within three years" (Freedom House, 2021). A poll conducted after Vizcarra's dismissal documented Peruvians' lack of trust in their institutions: 65 percent of respondents said that no party represented them, and 60 percent said that no political leader did so (IEP, 2020). This political dysfunction was not only an institutional failure caused by the short-term calculations of political actors but also an obstacle for implementing an agenda that put the reduction of social inequalities and the development of the poorest regions at its center. Political immobilism is perhaps the most corrosive consequence of this inter-branch conflict. Citizen concerns with rampant corruption among public officials and politicians and widespread fears associated with crime undermine support for democracy (Carrión, Zárate, Boidi & Zechmeister, 2020; Carrión & Balasco, 2016).

19. The *fujimoristas* lost their majority and most of their seats (73 to 15). Congress was now under control of a group of center-right, personalistic, and clientelist parties. A religious millenarist party obtained 15 seats.

It is in this context of crisis of representation and severe inter-branch conflict that the 2021 presidential elections took place. Eighteen candidates split the vote in the first round with the candidates who made it to the runoff collectively receiving 38 percent of the vote. Over 60 percent of voters were to choose a candidate that was not their first choice for president.

Castillo was another example of a minority president, given that the conservative opposition had control of Congress. As in 2016-2019, the legislature assumed an aggressive stance again the executive, seeking to remove Castillo on the flimsiest of excuses. President Castillo, as noted, was uninterested in governing and frequently use his bully pulpit to attack Congress and the media. He quickly faced credible accusations of corruption. On the day Castillo was to present his defense in Congress against a third motion to vacate him due to permanent moral incompetence, he took to the airways to announce that he was dissolving Congress and was going to rule by decree until new congressional elections were held. His effort was an empty gesture, and, in his isolation, he was quickly removed from office and arrested. This episode fueled a wave of mobilization in the regions that have heavily voted for him. They felt that their votes have been overridden by the congressional majority, even though it was Castillo who tried to end Peru's democracy. Heightened inter-branch conflict ended up worsening deficits of political representation and fueling political discontent in the process.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Dahl (1971: 1) writes that responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens is "a key characteristic of democracy". Pitkin (1967: 209) similarly argues that representation is "acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them". If both Dahl and Pitkin are correct, then Peru's democracy is deeply flawed. For the reasons we noted above, political representation is defective. Governments usually do not follow the general platforms they offer in the campaign trail and, due to the absence of political parties and no immediate reelection rules, voters did not have the opportunity to castigate the party or the candidate at election time. This dual failure of representation, as mandate and accountability, along with the political dysfunction created by intense executive-legislative conflict, have fostered political discontent and weakened support for democracy in Peru.

NORC at the University of Chicago's cluster analysis indicated that, between 2012 and 2021, the percentage of Peruvians who can be classified as institutionalists has decreased while the percentage of Peruvians in less-democratically-inclined clusters has increased. We also documented a general decrease in support for democracy in the abstract and an increase in support for executive

aggrandizement. While support for military coups remained relatively stable, it is high: a whopping one in two Peruvians would justify a military coup when corruption is high.

We argue that political discontent, caused among other things by representational failures and political dysfunction, is driving this declining support for democracy. We measure political discontent by employing the traditional SWD item. While acknowledging the shortcomings of SWD, we believe that this indicator taps mid-level assessments of political performance, one that combines in unknown proportions evaluations of the political system and the incumbents. After increasing between 2008 and 2012, the years of economic bonanza and promises of greater social inclusion with Humala, SWD drops significantly from 2012 to 2021. To the accumulated effects of the dual crisis of representation we now add the cycle of political dysfunction opened in 2016. The result is a steady decline in SWD and, in so doing, a weakened support for democracy.

In this paper we discuss two of the key reasons behind deep political discontent. The first is the dual failure of representation. Failure to get the kind of government citizens voted for, and failure to have the opportunity to punish the elected leaders and their parties for their policy switches. The second is heightened inter-branch conflict, which produces political dysfunction and immobilism. We do not claim that political discontent is entirely driven by these two factors. Levitsky (2011: 88) correctly notes that state weakness is a central reason for political discontent in Peru (see also Mainwaring, 2006). The bureaucratic capacity of the state is low in Peru and severe state failures in the delivering of basic services such as health and education are manifestations of this weakness. In addition, the state and the political system do not yet offer "the full inclusion of marginalized social groups" by granting them full rights (McNulty, 2017: 574). If we stress here aspects more associated with the performance of the political system, it is because they have gotten worse in recent years, fueling political discontent.

In an unexpected development, the constitutional succession that put Dina Boluarte as president at the end of 2021 — which caused so many protests in parts of Peru — has resulted in a reduction of inter-branch conflict. While Congress is still largely controlled by center-right forces, and Boluarte was elected as part of Pedro Castillo's leftist coalition, they seemed to have found a working relationship. Both Congress and President Boluarte share an interest in not holding early elections and stay in their respective offices until 2026. This arrangement may ease the inter-branch conflict that characterized Peru since the 2016 but deepens the crisis of representation that we have discussed. After a highly contested election that pitted an anti-establishment candidate against an establishment defender, the losers seem to be governing again.

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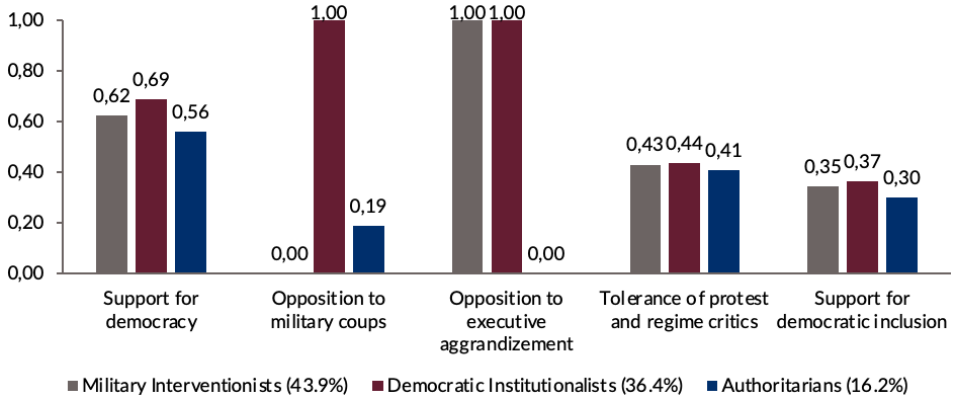
## APPENDIX. CLUSTER ANALYSYS RESULTS

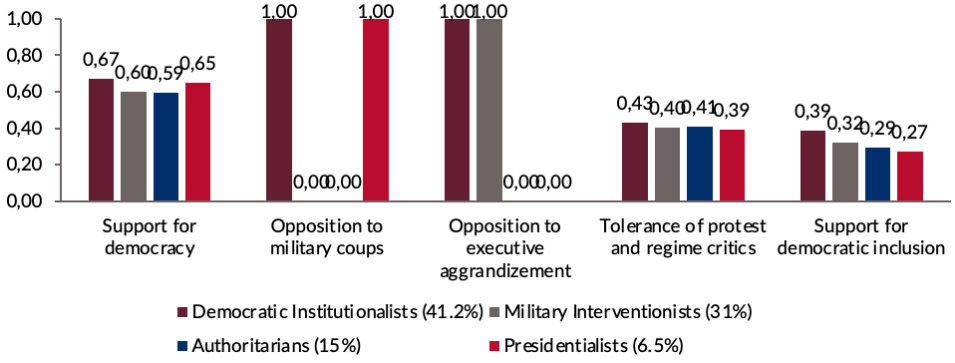
The bar graphs below present the main results of the cluster analysis. There is one bar graph per wave studied: 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019, and 2021. The bars indicate the average scores for the attitudes for each cluster. All attitude scores range from zero (least democratic) to one (most democratic). The percentages next to each cluster label in the legend indicate the share of respondents that was classified into the cluster. Thus, the graphs allow for comparing the clusters in terms of their democratic attitudes and their relative size.

**Figure A.1. 2012 Cluster Results**



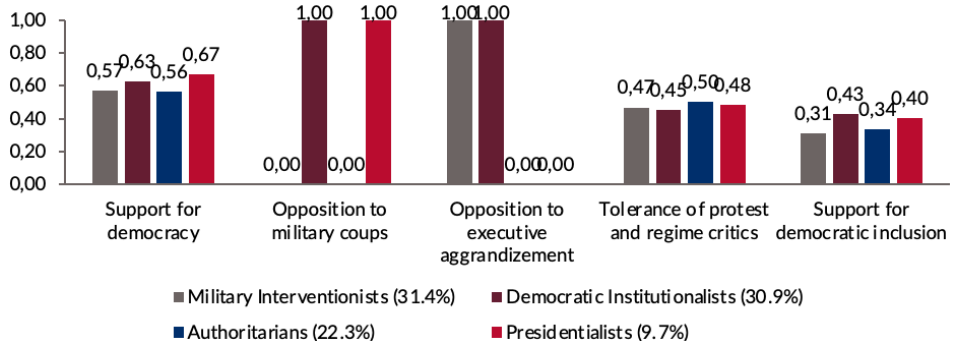

*Source*: NORC at Chicago, data from the AmericasBarometer by the LAPOP Lab, www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop, waves 2012-2019

**Figure A.2. 2014 Cluster Results**



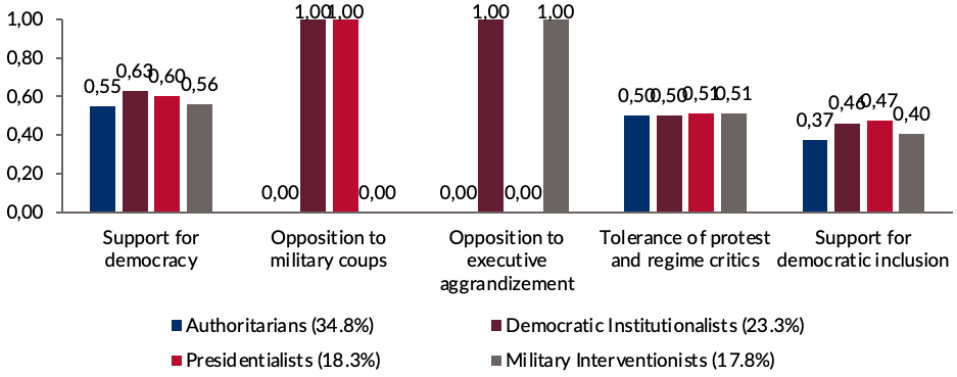

*Source*: NORC at Chicago, data from the AmericasBarometer by the LAPOP Lab, www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop, waves 2012-2019

**Figure A.3. 2017 Cluster Results**



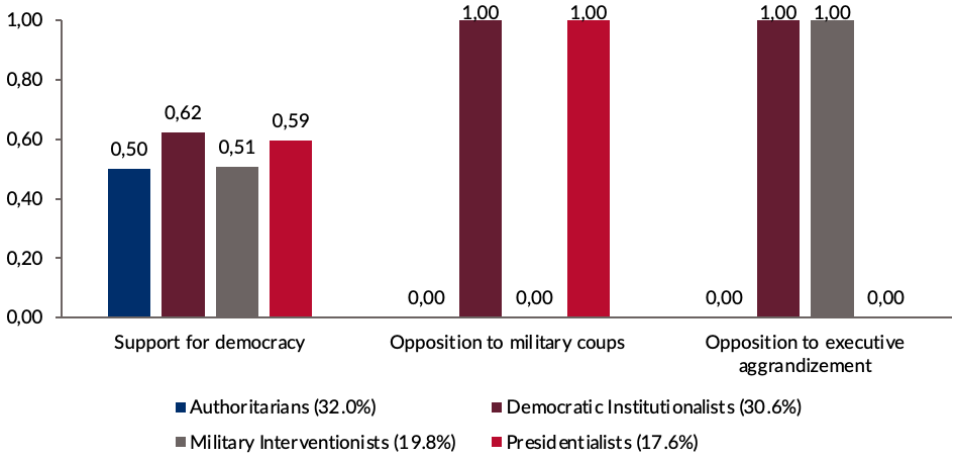

*Source*: NORC at Chicago, data from the AmericasBarometer by the LAPOP Lab, www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop, waves 2012-2019

**Figure A.4. 2019 Cluster Results**




*Source*: NORC at Chicago, data from the AmericasBarometer by the LAPOP Lab, www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop, waves 2012-2019

**Figure A.5. 2021 Cluster Results**




*Source*: NORC at Chicago, data from the AmericasBarometer by the LAPOP Lab, www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop, waves 2012-2019

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# PERU: DEEP POLITICAL DISSATISFACTION WEAKENS SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

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Carrión, J., & Zarate, P. (2023). Peru: Deep Political Dissatisfaction Weakens Support for Democracy. *Revista Latinoamericana de Opinión Pública*, *12*(2), 25-54. https://doi.org/10.14201/rlop.31378

ISSN: 1852-9003 - eISSN: 2660-700X
DOI: https://doi.org/10.14201/rlop.31382

# DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES IN PANAMA (2012-2021)

## *Desarrollo de las actitudes democráticas en Panamá (2012-2021)*

## *Desenvolvimento de atitudes democráticas em Panamá (2012-2021)*

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Submission: 2023-11-29
Accepted: 2023-05-02
First View: 2024-01-12
Publication: 2023-12-31

***Keywords:***
*Panamá; Democracia; Valores; Actitudes; Martinelli*

**Abstract**
How have the attitudes of citizens towards democracy in Panama evolved? What explains the decline in democratic values among the population? This paper describes the evolution of attitudes in Panama between 2012 and 2021 and examines the political dynamics that have contributed to changes in attitudes over time. To describe the evolution of democratic attitudes, we draw on cluster analysis, which identified groups of citizens with distinct patterns of democratic attitudes in each of five waves of AmericasBarometer data. The central finding that emerges from the cluster analysis is that there are significant drops in support for democracy and tolerance since 2014. In the analysis we discuss in the light of theory a possible influence of former President Ricardo Martinelli (2009-2014) on the overall high support for democracy and democratic institutions in 2012, and a possible legacy of his administration on the subsequent evolution of democratic attitudes between 2014 and 2021.

*Palabras clave:*
*Panamá; Democracia; Valores; Actitudes; Martinelli*

**Resumen**
¿Cómo han evolucionado las actitudes de los ciudadanos hacia la democracia en Panamá? ¿Qué explica el declive de los valores democráticos entre la población? Este artículo describe la evolución de las actitudes democráticas en Panamá entre 2012 y 2021 y examina las dinámicas políticas que han contribuido a los cambios en ellas a lo largo del tiempo. Para describir la evolución de las actitudes democráticas, recurrimos al análisis de clusters, que identificó grupos de ciudadanos con patrones distintos de actitudes democráticas en cada una de las cinco olas de datos del Barómetro de las Américas. El hallazgo central que surge del análisis de clusters es que hay caídas significativas en el apoyo a la democracia y la tolerancia desde 2014. En el análisis discutimos a la luz de la teoría una posible influencia del expresidente Ricardo Martinelli (2009-2014) en el alto apoyo general a la democracia y las instituciones democráticas en 2012, y un posible legado de su administración en la posterior evolución de las actitudes democráticas entre 2014 y 2021.

*Palavras-chave:*
*Panamá; Democracia; Valores; Atitudes; Martinelli*

**Resumo**
Como evoluíram as atitudes dos cidadãos em relação à democracia em Panamá? O que explica o declínio dos valores democráticos entre a população? Este artigo descreve a evolução das atitudes no Panamá entre 2012 e 2021 e examina a dinâmica política que contribuiu para as mudanças nas atitudes ao longo do tempo. Para descrever a evolução das atitudes democráticas, recorremos à análise de clusters, que identificou grupos de cidadãos com padrões distintos de atitudes democráticas em cada uma das cinco ondas de dados do Barômetro das Américas. A principal conclusão que emerge da análise de agrupamento é que há quedas significativas no apoio à democracia e à tolerância desde 2014. Na análise, discutimos, à luz da teoria, uma possível influência do ex-presidente Ricardo Martinelli (2009-2014) no alto apoio geral à democracia e às instituições democráticas em 2012, e um possível legado de sua administração na evolução subsequente das atitudes democráticas entre 2014 e 2021.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Panama transitioned to democracy in 1989, later than most other countries in Latin America. Despite this, Panamanian democracy is recognized in several indexes for being above average in Latin America and the Caribbean (Altman & Pérez-Liñán 2002; Alcántara Sáez 2007; Barreda 2011). The Freedom House index ranked Panama in 2022 with a score of 83/100, ranking only below Uruguay, Chile, Costa Rica, Belize, and Argentina in the region (Freedom House 2022). The Democracy Index by The Economist Intelligence Unit indicated in 2021 that Panama was only surpassed by Uruguay, Costa Rica, Chile, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and Brazil (The Economist Intelligence Unit 2021). In the Latin American Democracy Development Index by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Panama

was rated only below Uruguay, Chile, Costa Rica, and Peru in 2016 (Konrad Adenauer Foundation 2016).

But how have the attitudes of citizens towards democracy in Panama evolved? This paper describes the evolution of democratic attitudes in Panama between 2012 and 2021 and examines the political dynamics that have contributed to the changes in attitudes over the period. In that description we will point out a marked decline in democratic values in 2014, the last year of Ricardo Martinelli's government (2009-2014). It is a noteworthy case that in a country that has such good democratic indicators and a much better economy than most countries in the region there was a significant part of the population that adopted positions contrary to democratic values. What explains the sudden decline in democratic values among the population?

To describe the evolution of democratic attitudes, we draw on cluster analysis, which identified groups of citizens with distinct patterns of democratic attitudes in each of five waves of AmericasBarometer data. To enrich the analysis, we also examine the evolution of support for democracy and tolerance for the political participation of regime critics. To identify the political dynamics that have contributed to changes in attitudes, we trace the linkages between political developments and public opinion.

The central finding that emerges from the cluster analysis is that the 'Institutionalists' cluster, who oppose both executive aggrandizement and military coups make up the largest group in all survey waves in the period of study. However, additional examination of democratic attitudes shows significant drops in support for democracy and tolerance in 2014. In the analysis we discuss a possible influence of former President Ricardo Martinelli (2009-2014) on the overall high support for democracy and democratic institutions in 2012, and a possible legacy of his administration on the subsequent evolution of democratic attitudes between 2014 and 2021. It's possible that the enormous popularity of Martinelli and his administration increased support for democracy, while his pugilistic political style weakened political tolerance thanks to the antagonism created by his leadership. However, measurements of democratic attitudes prior to 2012 are lacking and we cannot conclusively test that hypothesis.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The first section presents a brief recapitulation of the discussion on the change in democratic attitudes and the effects of populism and its strategic antagonism on citizen attitudes. The second section examines the evolution of democratic attitudes using cluster analysis based on data from the AmericasBarometer surveys conducted from 2012 to 2021, complemented by trend analysis of key attitudes over the same period. The third section turns to historical analysis of Panama's recent political dynamics to explain these temporal variations and, specifically, the sudden decline of 2014. The final section concludes.

## 2. WHY THE CHANGE IN DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES?

Why do citizens change their attitudes towards democracy? There is a body of literature that draws attention to the growing distance between democracy as a system of governance and broad segments of the citizenry (Montero, Gunther & Torcal, 1999; Norris, 1999; Pharr, Putnam & Dalton, 2000; Torcal, 2006; Torcal, 2016; Kriesi, 2020). Among these authors, some people suggest potential explanations such as generational shifts (Foa & Munck, 2016; Monsivais, 2020), dissatisfaction with democracy stemming from economic stagnation and increasing inequality (Córdova & Seligsson, 2010), and even a natural response of civic spirit within democracy, recognizing the possibility of dissent (Alexander & Welzel, 2022; Norris, 2022; Voeten, Krogh & Walsh, 2022).

However, these responses are more characteristic of gradual processes and do not account for sudden shifts in democratic attitudes, as was the case in at least 2006 and 2014 in Panama. To explain such abrupt changes, it makes sense to consider the outcomes of affective polarization resulting from populist strategies that hinge on antagonism. High support for democracy in the abstract along with low tolerance for opposition are characteristics associated with having a populist leader in power, the development of affective polarization that does not conceive of the political contender as valid (Heit & Nicholson, 2012; McCoy & Sumer, 2019; Summer, McCoy & Luke, 2021; Torcal & Carty, 2023). Such a presidency can help to increase support for democracy while lowering the tolerance for others to politically contest the incumbent leader's rule.

All of this ultimately points to the antagonism inherent in certain populist leaderships. This antagonism involves the formation of an opposition around a "we" versus "them" dynamic, allowing for the articulation and creation of identities when different positions and political projects come into conflict. The problem arises because this opposition deepens a "friend versus enemy" logic that has consequences for democratic attitudes such as tolerance and the recognition of plurality. The other begins to be perceived as a threat that must be eliminated (Schmitt, 1932; Laclau, 2005; Laclau, 2008; Canovan, Appleton, 2021).

In the next section we will examine the evolution of democratic attitudes in Panamá using cluster analysis based on data from the AmericasBarometer surveys conducted from 2012 to 2021, complemented by trend analysis of key attitudes over the same period.

## 3. DESCRIBING DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES

We used data from the AmericasBarometer and cluster analysis to classify Panamanians into groups or «clusters» with distinct attitudinal profiles. The aim is

to maximize similarity *within* each cluster while maximizing dissimilarity *between* clusters. One advantage of cluster analysis compared to other classification schemes is that it is highly inductive, meaning that it lets respondents «speak for themselves» without making assumptions in advance about how to group them. Annex 1 provides detailed information regarding the study's methodology. Five democratic attitudes are used to generate clusters:

- *Support for democracy*: The extent to which respondents agree or disagree 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 in certain circumstances.[1]
- *Opposition to executive aggrandizement:* Whether respondents believe it would be justified for the president to close Congress and 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 regime critics.
- *Support for democratic inclusion:* The extent to which respondents support the political inclusion of homosexuals.

All five attitudes are available in the first four AmericasBarometer survey waves (2012, 2014, 2016, & 2018). Only three attitudes—support for democracy, opposition to military coups, and opposition to executive aggrandizement—are available in 2021 because the survey included a limited set of questions. The 2021 cluster analysis results are therefore not comparable to those of prior waves and not discussed in the report. Annex 2 presents the main cluster analysis results for all waves.

The cluster analysis identified three clusters in 2012 and four clusters in each of 2014, 2016, and 2018. In all waves, a share of respondents—the «unclustered» group—was not classified into any cluster. To facilitate comparisons over survey waves, the resulting clusters can be grouped into four «cluster families» that share a set of defining characteristics:

1. Regarding respondents who express they would support—i.e., not oppose—a military coup under certain circumstances, it should be mentioned that this idea is more symbolic than real. Although military regimes have existed in Panama, a Constitutional Reform of 1992 established that the country would not maintain an army.

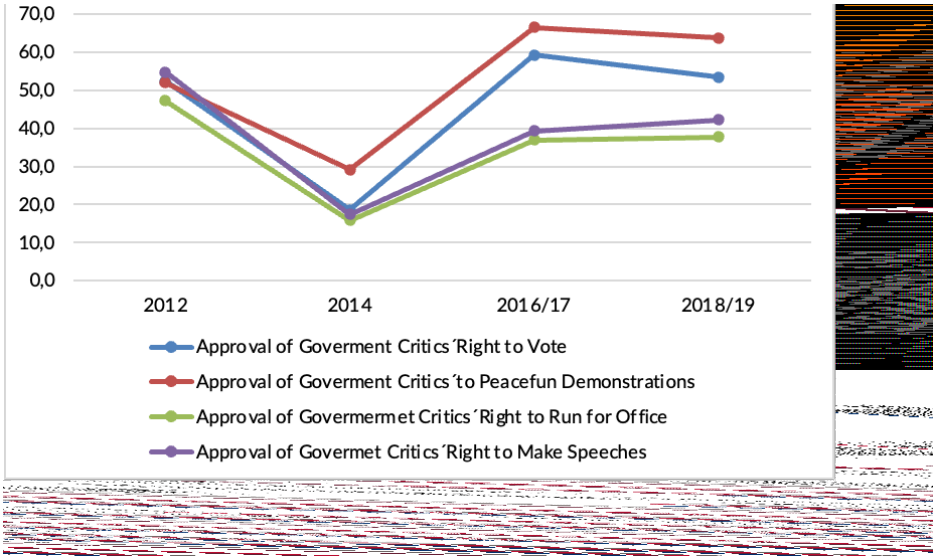
- Institutionalists: Individuals in this cluster family are characterized by full opposition to coups and executive aggrandizement. In this sense, they represent «ideal» democratic citizens compared to the other cluster families.
- Presidentialists: Individuals in this cluster family exhibit full opposition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

Figure 1 shows the relative size of these cluster families over time. Four points are noteworthy. First, Institutionalists make up the largest cluster in all years, suggesting a relatively high level of support for democratic institutions and practices throughout the decade under study. Second, the share of Institutionalists declines significantly across survey waves, dropping from a high of 80.8 percent of respondents in 2012 to a low of 55.4 percent in 2018. Third, the declining share of Institutionalists corresponds with increases in Presidentialists and Authoritarians. Presidentialists first appear as a distinct cluster with 8 percent of respondent in 2014 and increase to 12.7 by 2018. Authoritarians increase from 0.2 percent in 2012 to 9.6 percent in 2014 and then remain relatively stable. Finally, it is at least worth mentioning that the Military Interventionists are the second most important group during the entire period studied. This is striking because since the transition to democracy there has been no national army. What can be understood is that even without an army some of the values of the pre-transition dictatorship persist.

The cluster analysis identified the demographic, socioeconomic, geographic, and other characteristics that significantly distinguish respondents in each cluster from the rest of the sample for each survey wave. The study examined several variables, including age, gender, wealth, race, education, crime victimization, corruption victimization, political efficacy, and political participation. While respondents in all clusters are statistically significantly different from others in a few variables in each wave, there are no stable patterns across all waves and the differences are substantially small. This suggests that the demographic, socioeconomic, geographic, and other characteristics examined do not structure attitudes toward democracy in a meaningful way. These caveats aside, we do find some recurrent statistically significant differences across two or more waves that are worth highlighting.

We focus on the variables that differentiate Institutionalists from all other respondents. First, Institutionalists tend to be slightly older. In 2012 and 2014, the percentage of respondents in the 60 and over age bracket was higher

**Figure 1. Evolution of Clusters, 2012-2018**




*Source*: AmericasBarometer.

among Institutionalists than among the rest of the sample. In 2016 and 2018, the percentage of respondents in the 18 to 29 age bracket was lower among Institutionalists than among the rest of the sample. Second, Institutionalists tend to be wealthier. In three of the four waves (2012, 2014, & 2016), the percentage of respondents in the highest wealth income was higher among Institutionalists than among the rest of the sample. Lastly, Institutionalists tend to have experienced less crime and corruption. In three of the four waves (2012, 2014, & 2016), the percentage of respondents who reported having been victim of a crime in the past 12 months was lower among Institutionalists than among the rest of the sample. Similarly, in three of the four waves (2012, 2016, & 2018), the percentage of respondents who reported having been asked for a bribe in the past 12 months was lower among Institutionalists than among the rest of the sample.

The declining share of Institutionalists shown in Figure 1 corresponds to three major trends in public opinion: a decline in support for democracy, a drop in opposition to military coups and opposition to executive aggrandizement, and an erosion of political tolerance.

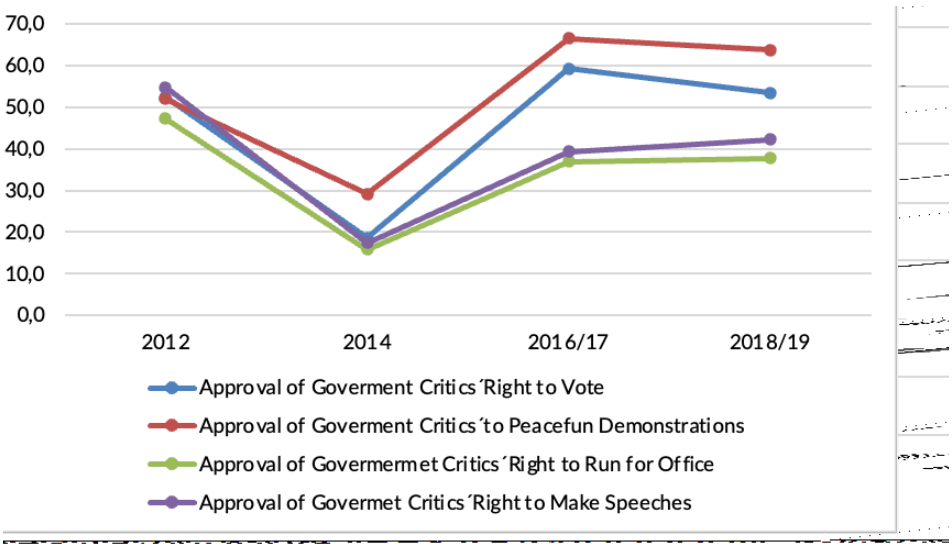
In 2012, 65.3 percent of Panamanians claimed to support the idea that democracy was the best form of government—this is the highest percentage throughout the period under study. By 2014, things had changed drastically; support for democracy fell by more than 18 percentage points, to just 47.1

percent. This drop coincided with the end of President Ricardo Martinelli term, a Panamanian businessman and politician who enjoyed high levels of popularity throughout his term in office (2009-2014). In 2016, support for democracy rebounded to 58.1 percent but only to decline again 53 percent in 2018. The following year saw the end of Juan Carlos Varela's presidency (2014-2019). By 2018, Varela's popularity had drop as he was mired in the region-wide Lava Jato and Odebrecht corruption scandals.

In the historical series of LAPOP, the year with the highest level of satisfaction with democracy (77.7 percent), greatest pride (57.0 percent) and support (58.0 percent) for the political system coincides with the beginning of the Ricardo Martinelli's legislature (2010).

Figure 2 displays responses to the survey questions capturing respondents' attitudes towards military coups and executive aggrandizement. It shows an erosion of support for basic democratic institutions. For example, in 2012, 79.9 percent of respondents thought that a military coup when corruption is high would not be justified and by 2018, this percentage had decreased to 65.5 percent. Similarly, in 2012, 91.2 percent of respondents thought that the Executive closing the Legislature in very difficult times would not be justified and by 2018, this percentage had decreased to 74.6 percent.

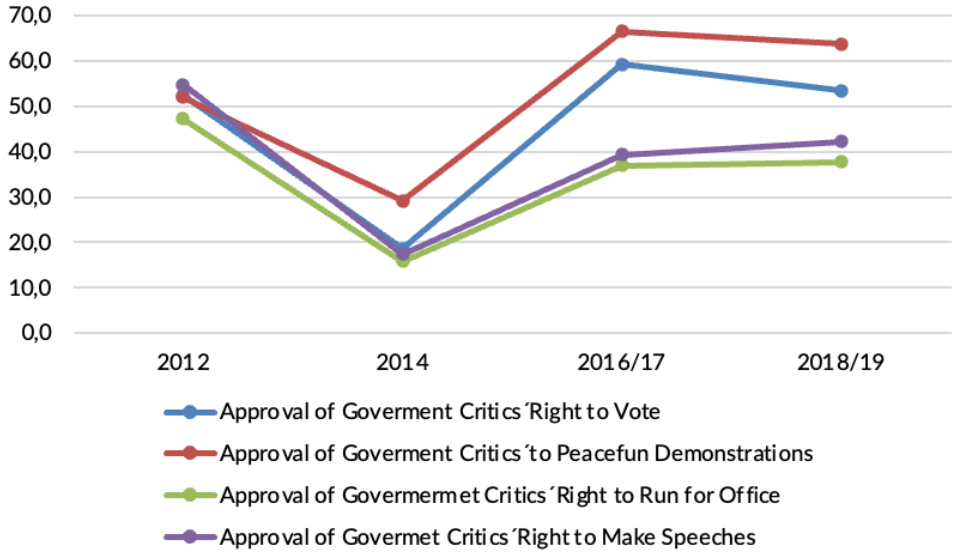
**Figure 2. Opposition to Military Coups and Executive Aggrandizement, 2012-2018**




*Source*: AmericasBarometer.

A third important trend relates to political tolerance, as measured by several questions that ask whether regime critics should be afforded political rights. As shown in Figure 3, tolerance was relatively low in 2012 and dipped significantly in the 2014. Tolerance improved substantially and remained relatively stable in subsequent years.

**Figure 3. Tolerance of Panamanians to the Political Participation of Regime Critics, 2012-2018/19**




*Source*: AmericasBarometer.

In the next section we discuss in the light of theory a possible influence of former President Ricardo Martinelli (2009-2014) on the overall high support for democracy and democratic institutions in 2012, and a possible legacy of his administration on the subsequent evolution of democratic attitudes between 2014 and 2021. Following his departure from office in 2014, support for key institutional principles, as well as for democracy itself, declined significantly. Likewise, the weak support for regime critics enjoying political rights in 2014 stems from the strong support for Martinelli, a populist leader who sought to discredit and delegitimize his political rivals. However, it should be clarified that the absence of specific data on democratic attitudes prior to Martinelli's arrival to power prevents us from testing this hypothesis.

## 4. CONJUNCTURE, DISRUPTIVE LEADERSHIP AND DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES

Since the invasion and transition and until the Martinelli presidency Panama's political system has been dominated by two major parties, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD, party founded by General Omar Torrijos) and the Panameñista Party (heir to the legacy of Arnulfo Arias). For many years, these parties presided over a stable political system recognized in several indexes for being above average in Latin America and the Caribbean. In that regard Panama's democracy and party system have been a formally representative game that has been recognized for its exceptionality. For example, Loxton (2022) considers that the Panamanian case is a rare case of democratization by military invasion where an authoritarian party (PRD) later became electorally viable.

But it is not without consequence that, although the Panamanian democracy works in electoral terms, it is based on a trajectory in which, unlike Uruguay and Costa Rica, inequality has prevailed (Bohigues, 2021). Panama had also been distinguished by few programmatic changes and many consensuses and pacts (Brown Arauz & Perez, 2019). The political system has been characterized by political stability among political parties, which have expressed limited programmatic differences, shaping the field of debate with high ideological homogeneity (Dabène, Nevache, Wintgens & Brown-Araúz, 2023). Politically represented parties have been ideologically homogeneous, as indicated by the findings of the "Latin American Elites Project (PELA-USAL)" conducted by the University of Salamanca. The farthest left classification in the historical series is held by the PRD with a score of 5.12 obtained in 2012, and the farthest right result was recorded by the CD in 2004 with a score of 6.55, leaving the entire series with a narrow 1.43 margin of variation, implying a very low level of polarization. Notably, no major leftist political party has achieved parliamentary representation since 1990 and the system has been unable to discuss and include new public agendas (Brown Araúz & Perez, 2019). Political stability has come at the cost of the exclusion of new actors in representation, bringing with it problems of legitimacy and satisfaction (Brown Araúz and Luna Vásquez 2013; García-Rendón and Subinas, 2022).

All this is explained in part by the low representativeness and inclusiveness of the new political actors in the electoral system, which favors large parties and excludes small ones. The combination of low-magnitude electoral districts, a seat allocation formula that tilts the balance in favor of larger parties, and relevant disparities in terms of political financing, nullified the political game for emerging actors (Guevara Mann 2004; Brown Arauz 2005; Sonnleitner, 2010; Brown Arauz 2020).

Important economic and social changes are added to the context before Martinelli. Eleven years after the transition, control of the Panama Canal was

definitively returned to the country, marking a fundamental milestone in Panama's development. Subsequently, between 2004 and 2018, Panama experienced an average annual growth rate of 7.0 percent, compared to 3.3 percent for Latin America as a whole (Astudillo, Fernández and Garcimartín, 2019). This resulted in Panama entering the short list of high-income countries in the region in 2017. Nonetheless, persistent inequality continues to exist in Panama, as evidenced by asymmetric access to basic services, a dual labor market, and poor social protection, among other indicators (Cecchini, Holz and Mojica, 2020).

All this context is necessary to note in order to understand how Ricardo Martinelli's leadership could explain the changes in democratic attitudes during the study period. Martinelli is a non-traditional political who managed to break that party consensus at the time of the country's economic boom, creating ties and attitudes towards the system that were not present with traditional party links.

But how did the former president could impact these attitudes? For two particular reasons: First, many of Martinelli's supporters tied their assessment of democracy with the development of this president's political career. His first years in government saw high support among citizens, boosting support for democracy, while his exit from government coincided with a disillusionment with democracy for not allowing his project to continue. In short, Martinelli's supporters may have reasoned as follows: «if Martinelli is in government, democracy works well and has my support. However, if he is not in government, then democracy does not work as well and does not have my support.». This assumption does not apply exclusive to Martinelli. As we describe below, a somewhat similar dynamic of expectations and disappointments was evident during the government of Martín Torrijos (2004-2009).[2]

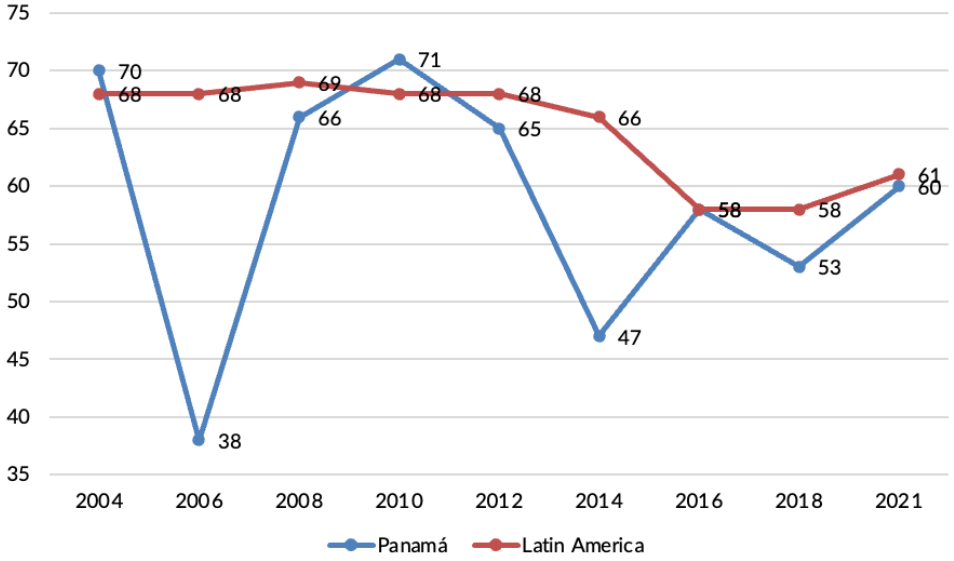
Secondly, Martinelli's leadership normalized a confrontational, polarizing political style where traditional politicians, especially the opposition, business, and Martinelli's critics, including the media, were ridiculed and delegitimized. This leadership style eroded tolerance for the opposition and their political rights among some sectors of the Panamanian citizenry.

To situate recent dynamics in the longer-term trends, Figure 4 shows support for democracy in Panama relative to the regional average for Latin America starting in 2004. The figure shows that support for democracy in Panama has at times deviated from regional trends by a wide margin. In 2006, during Torrijo's presidency, support for democracy dropped to a record low of 38 percent, or 30 percentage points below the regional average. In 2014, at the end of Martinelli's

2. Torrijos was the son of General Omar Torrijos, who ruled Panama from 1968 to 1981 and founded the PRD in 1979.

presidency, support for democracy fell to 47 percent, almost 20 points below the Latin American average. What explains the large deviations from regional trends in 2006 and 2014?

**Figure 4. Support for democracy in Latin America and Panama, 2004-2021**




*Source*: AmericasBarometer.

We discuss that in both cases, short-term declines in democratic support could be related to domestic political events that call into question the performance of democratic institutions. Low support for democracy in 2006 coincided with three things. The first was a referendum on the expansion of the Panama Canal. At the time, large swaths of the population were not feeling the benefits that Omar Torrijos had promised for all society following the return of the canal to Panamanian control six years earlier. The second was the transformation of the pension system from a solidarity system to a mixed one introducing individual retirement accounts in Panama for the first time. The third was the disappointment that Martin's government represented in comparison with his father. While Torrijos Sr. has been historically associated with an era of national development, Martin failed to satisfy in terms of popularity such a legacy. These three things may have increased the perception of lack of protection or abandonment among broad sectors suffering from social vulnerability, dramatically lowering support for democracy.

To understand the low level of support for democracy in 2014, and the general trends in Panamanians' democratic attitudes between 2014 and 2018, we examine Martinelli's leadership. Specifically, we describe how his leadership affected both citizens' views about democracy and their tolerance for the rights of political opponents.

Martinelli's election in 2009 broke with the partisan balance that the PRD and the Panameñista Party had enjoyed since the transition to democracy in 1989 (Brown Arauz, 2014). Despite being part of the Panamanian business elite, Martinelli was often characterized as a political outsider who emerged from the circles of economic power (Brown Araúz & Rosales, 2015). His emergence broke the culture of party pacts and consensus, introducing political antagonism into the system. While this was related to the rise of personalist and disruptive leaders across the region, it also responded to the unique political, social, economic, and historical characteristics of Panama. Martinelli managed to establish a division between the «them» of the previous parties and economic elites and the «us» of himself and his supporters, thus strengthening the bond with his followers and polarizing the political climate. The ex-president provided the Panamanian people with a compelling explanation of the origins of their problems, attributing responsibility to the political parties. His leadership was grounded in antagonism between a hardworking populace and a corrupt political elite that only worked when seeking self-benefit (Brown Araúz & Nevache, 2023).

The first outstanding feature of Martinelli's government was successful economic performance, with nominal GDP growth per year averaging over 10 percent during his administration. Poverty dropped from 33 percent in the first year of his presidency to 26 percent in his final year (Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, 2022). Martinelli claimed that his administration's increased spending in monetary transfers via direct subsidies to citizens made poverty reduction possible. (CEPAL, 2022). These economic policies entailed major growth in public spending, with an increase of 8 billion dollars, and this resulted in a 60 percent increase in the public debt of the non-financial sector—a milestone for a country with a very restrained fiscal policy (Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, 2022). These economic policies proved disruptive in a country known for financial discipline, little inclination toward government spending or debt, and a firm rejection of subsidies.

In addition, Martinelli carried out significant public works projects, such as the construction of a subway, airports, and highways, as well as the second and third phases of the coastal beltway in Panama City, a space with sports fields and many recreational and meeting spaces for citizens. These works improved the connectivity of the working classes with their jobs. They also fostered recreation in the heart of the city, improving the living conditions of a sizable economically vulnerable population. It is partly due to these achievements that Martinelli's

popularity remained high during his term, reaching 54 percent in 2013, a high figure for a Latin American president approaching the end of its term at the time. (El País, 2013).

It is possible that Martinelli influenced democratic attitudes between 2012 and 2021 through an association of support for democracy and presidential approval and favorability. In 2010, just one year into Martinelli's term, Panamanian citizens registered their highest support for democracy since the AmericasBarometer's inception, with 71 percent voicing support for democracy. This was only the second time that democratic support was above the Latin American average, the other being 2004, the first year of the Martin Torrijos government. Support was 70 percent then. Both were the first year of government for presidents who took office during economic boom times, claiming to represent something different from the prior government. This gives some indication that attitudes toward democracy could be related to public support for incoming governments—a recognition of being satisfied with the results of democracy at that moment. Thanks to his leadership style and popularity, Martinelli could be linked to the evaluation of Panama's democracy. The 2010 and 2012 questions on democratic attitudes were inextricably related to attitudes about Martinelli's figure, his administration, and his policies.

How can we explain the decline in support for democracy in 2014 along with the erosion of tolerance for the political rights of regime critics? During his administration, Martinelli entered public disputes and confrontations with opposition sectors, businessmen, and the media. Regarding his political adversaries, a sharp rift opened with his own vice-president, Juan Carlos Varela, due to competing electoral interests in 2014 (BBC, 2014). Regarding businessmen, he accused them of not paying taxes and called them «*empresaurios*», a demeaning play on words combining «*empresario*» (businessman) with «*dinosaurio*» (dinosaur). His remarks about the media were constantly pejorative. Martinelli's rhetoric aimed at delegitimizing his adversaries, and this, we believe, affected democratic values among his followers. As shown in first section, between 2012 and 2014, approval of regime critics' right to vote dropped by 34 percentage points (to 18.6 percent), approval of critics' right to protest dropped by 23 points (to 29.1 percent), approval of critics' right to run a candidate dropped by 31 points (to 15.8 percent), and approval of critics' right to give political speeches dropped by 37 points (to 17.4 percent).

Beyond rhetoric, Martinelli's actions likewise dealt a blow to democratic attitudes. In the last year of this term, he was accused of illegally intercepting the communications of his political opponents and the media (Swissinfo, 2021). In March of 2013, the Electoral Ethical Pact was signed by representatives of the Catholic Church, the media, and members of the political parties, but Martinelli's party (Cambio Democrático) opted not to sign. Also during his administration, the

security services were militarized in what has been considered a detriment to the democratic stability of the country (Guevara Mann, 2016), and Martinelli and his sons have since been accused of multiple cases of corruption (Pérez, 2017). The latest development in this regard is that his sons were convicted in the United States for receiving bribes from the construction company Odebrecht while their father was in power, a clear sign of the cloak of corruption surrounding his mandate (BBC, 2022).

It's possible that he same popularity that contributed to high support for democracy in 2010 and 2012 became a double-edged sword for democracy in 2014. In that year, Martinelli left power, succeeded by his former ally and now rival Varela. To some, democracy no longer seemed as valuable, with only 47 percent of Panamanians supporting it, while military coups were not so strongly rejected, and the political rights of regime critics were afforded thought to have less right of participation.

Martinelli has remained politically relevant after leaving office, and subsequent corruption scandals have not undermined his support. A recent poll ranks Martinelli as the candidate with the highest support for the 2024 election. (Gordon, 2022). To explain the former president's invulnerability to scandals and criticism, a common phrase repeated by the media and citizens is that «he stole, but he achieved.» (Claramente CM, 2018). For his followers, «he achieved» is the relevant point, while for his detractors «he stole» is more important. On March 23, 2019, Martinelli referred to this slogan on Twitter, clarifying that he did indeed «achieve» and asking followers to pay no attention to «unproven» corruption accusations. (Martinelli, 2019).

In sum, it's possible that Martinelli broke the traditional culture of consensus and pacts in Panama's still-young democracy and split the political chessboard in two sections: his supporters and his detractors. (Laclau, 2014). As a consequence, citizen attitudes and values, as well as democratic institutions themselves, could have been influenced by the popular former president. While support for democracy and tolerance for the political rights of regime critics have been in an upward trajectory since 2014, they remain below the high levels experience before and during Martinelli's presidency. However, again, we cannot conclusively test that hypothesis for lack of data.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Cluster analysis identified a sizable segment of the Panamanian citizenry that is committed to democratic institutions, opposing both military coups and executive branch-driven democratic ruptures. The results show that this 'Institutionalists' segment comprises the largest share of respondents in all survey

waves, an encouraging finding. At the same time, the share of institutionalists declined between 2012 and 2018, corresponding to declines in rejection of military interventions and executive aggrandizement. We also observe short-term dips in support for democracy and in political tolerance in 2014.

Interestingly, the second most important group in the period studied are the Military Interventionists. What can be understood is that even without an army some of the values of the pre-transition dictatorship persist. This could be assumed to be a generational issue that will be changing but unfortunately the young people are the ones who adopt the positions furthest from democracy in relation to the rest of the population.

Compared with the rest of Latin America, Panama registered weaker support for democracy (lower by 20 percentage points) in 2014. This was the year of Martinelli's departure from power, and we believe that trends in democratic support could be related to his role in Panama's political system. Martinelli was able to connect his own political favorability with the popular support given to democracy.

In 2022, and following many scandals and allegations of corruption, Martinelli is currently campaigning for the next presidential election (2024), and this gives testimony to the strength of connection he has achieved with Panama's citizenry. During his term in office, Martinelli presented solutions and direct answers to the citizens' demands for improved wellbeing while breaking with the traditional political parties, the media, and the powerful elite families. This marked a major shift from the two-party political system that had proven lethargic in responding to the country's social and economic needs. Thus, after Martinelli's first year of government, support for democracy was three points above the Latin American average (71 percent); in the year he left power (2014), support for democracy was 20 percentage points below the regional average (47 percent). The identification of his personal leadership with an acceptance of democracy can thus be said to break with regional dynamics in terms of democratic attitudes.

Martinelli's discourse, his actions, and his style of political leadership altered the ways in which his followers conceive of democracy. He introduced a strategy of antagonism against his rivals that broke with the political balance in place since the transition to democracy, characterized by alternation between two complementarity major parties and a period of stability, consensus, and pact-building. Martinelli's rhetoric tended toward strong disqualification of all his political rivals. In this political climate, Martinelli's followers and his opponents both had to face the dilemma of how to coexist in democracy where the ideas of «the other» are judged unworthy of expression, even in the public and electoral spheres. The decline in the values of tolerance for the political rights of the opposition since the end of his administration could illustrate the impact that this president's leadership has had on democratic attitudes in general.

The Panamanian political system has employed the call for consensus and dialogue as a means of resolving conflicts, but with uncertain outcomes when it comes to addressing the structural imbalances affecting the most vulnerable sectors (Brown Aráuz & Pérez, 2019; García-Rendón & Subinas, 2023). Simultaneously, Panamanian society has operated with a conspicuous absence of politics, understood as the discussion of public affairs, and has been characterized by the primacy of private interests in conflict resolution (García-Rendón & Subinas, 2023). Democracy cannot survive without consensus, but it also requires that conflict is expressed in the form of differentiated options. The absence of political pluralism in a society that neglects the demands of vulnerable sectors provides fertile ground for the emergence of leaderships that introduce antagonistic logics into the fields of contention, thereby impacting democratic attitudes. Regardless of whether Martinelli is permitted to run in the 2024 election, he has already paved the way for other actors to take up his pugilistic political strategy. Elite confrontation and polarization will likely continue to shape Panamanian public opinion on democracy for years to come.

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# APPENDIX

## Annex 1. Attitudes about democratic interruptions in Panamá (2010-2021)

| Name | Values | 2010 | 2012 | 2014 | 2016/17 | 2018 | 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| jc10 | Coup is Not Justified when Corruption is High. | 73.5% (1,082) | 79.9% (1,149) | 67.2% (939) | 67.0% (507) | 65.5% (472) | 57.0% (452) |
| | Coup is Justified when Corruption is High. | 26.5% (390) | 20.1% (288) | 32.8% (459) | 33.0% (250) | 34.5% (249) | 43.0% (341) |
| jc15a | Executive is Not Justified to govern without legislative during crisis. | 91.2% (1,341) | 95.8% (1,373) | 79.4% (1,162) | 77.2% (1,129) | 74.6% (554) | 71.0% (1,116) |
| | Executive is Justified to govern without legislative during crisis. | 8.8% (129) | 4.2% (59) | 20.6% (302) | 22.8% (334) | 25.4% (189) | 29.0% (455) |
| jc10 | Coup is Not Justified when Crime is High. | 25.2% (373) | 84.0% (1,205) | 70.9% (992) | 67.1% (471) | 70.2% (548) | --- |
| | Coup is Justified when Crime is High. | 74.8% (1,108) | 16.0% (230) | 29.1% (408) | 32.9% (231) | 29.8% (233) | --- |
| jc16a | Is Not Justified for Executive to Dissolve the Supreme Court of Justice. | 92.4% (1,338) | 96.5% (1,379) | --- | --- | 71.0% (535) | --- |
| | Is Justified for Executive to Dissolve the Supreme Court of Justice. | 7.6% (110) | 3.5% (50) | --- | --- | 29.0% (218) | --- |

* Missing values are not presented in the table; only valid percentages (SPSS) are included.

*Source*: AmericasBarometer.

## Annex 2. Democratic Attitudes in Panamá (2012-2018)

| Name (Spa.) | Values | 2012 | 2014 | 2016/17 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| disidentevotar | Approval of Government Critics' Right to Vote. | 52.3% (680) | 18.6% (275) | 59.2% (889) | 53.4% (823) |
| | Disapproval of Government Critics' Right to Vote. | 47.7% (619) | 81.4% (1,206) | 40.8% (613) | 46.6% (718) |
| disidenteprotest | Approval of Government Critics' to Peaceful Demonstrations. | 52.0% (722) | 70.9% (1,058) | 66.5% (1,003) | 63.7% (979) |
| | Disapproval or neutral of Government Critics' to Peaceful Demonstrations. | 48.0% (666) | 29.1% (435) | 33.5% (505) | 36.3% (558) |
| disdentecandidatizar | Approval of Government Critics' Right to Run for Office. | 47.2% (632) | 15.8% (237) | 36.9% (552) | 37.7% (576) |
| | Disapproval or neutral of Government Critics' Right to Run for Office. | 52.8% (707) | 84.2% (1,259) | 63.1% (945) | 62.3% (950) |
| disidentediscurso | Approval of Government Critics' Right to Make Speeches. | 54.7% (733) | 17.4% (260) | 39.4% (588) | 42.2% (650) |
| | Disapproval or neutral of Government Critics' Right to Make Speeches. | 45.3% (607) | 82.6% (1,237) | 60.6% (906) | 57.8% (891) |

* Missing values are not presented in the table; only valid percentages (SPSS) are included.

*Source*: AmericasBarometer.

RLOP
Revista Latinoamericana de Opinión Pública

Ediciones Universidad Salamanca

# DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES IN PANAMA (2012-2021)

Sergio García-Rendón and Jon Subinas

García-Rendón, S., & Subinas, J. (2023). Peru: Development of Democratic Attitudes in Panama (2012-2021). *Revista Latinoamericana de Opinión Pública*, *12*(2), 57-78. https://doi.org/10.14201/rlop.31382

ISSN: 1852-9003 - eISSN: 2660-700X
DOI: https://doi.org/10.14201/rlop.31385

# TRENDS IN DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES: BOLIVIA 2004-2021

## *Tendencias en las actitudes democráticas: Bolivia 2004-2021*

## *Tendências nas atitudes democráticas: Bolívia 2004-2021*

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Submission: 2023-05-05
Accepted: 2023-10-24
First View: 2023-12-11
Publication: 2023-12-31

***Keywords:***
*Bolivia; democracy; democratic legitimacy; political crisis*

**Abstract**
After more than a decade of political stability, in 2019 Bolivia suffered a major political crisis that ended with the resignation of a long-standing President, amidst popular unrest after a questioned election. While the crisis was the immediate result of a questionable attempt by the President to skip constitutional term limits, its roots can be found in the declining rates of support and satisfaction with democracy among citizens and in the polarization reaching democratic support. Using survey data from LAPOPs AmericasBarometer, this article finds that national averages for different measures for democratic support show declining trends, and, perhaps more importantly, they also show high levels of polarization, with supporters of the president showing radically different attitudes that those who are critics of the government, particularly during critical times. Cluster analyses performed on the same data indicate that the proportion of individuals who share attitudes that can be considered as "institutionalists" has been declining, while the proportion of those who support extra-powers for the executive and authoritarian alternatives, has increased. The article concludes discussing some risks for Bolivian democracy within its citizens' attitudes towards democratic institutions.

*Palabras clave:*
*Bolivia; democracia; legitimidad democrática; crisis política*

**Resumen**
Después de más de una década de estabilidad política, en 2019 Bolivia sufrió una importante crisis política que terminó con la renuncia de un presidente de larga data, en medio de disturbios populares después de unas elecciones cuestionadas. Si bien la crisis fue el resultado inmediato de un intento cuestionable del Presidente de saltarse los límites constitucionales de mandato, sus raíces pueden encontrarse en las tasas decrecientes de apoyo y satisfacción con la democracia entre los ciudadanos y en la polarización que llega hasta el apoyo democrático. Utilizando datos de encuestas del Barómetro de las Américas de LAPOP, este artículo encuentra que los promedios nacionales para diferentes medidas de apoyo democrático muestran tendencias decrecientes y, quizás más importante, también muestran altos niveles de polarización, con partidarios del presidente mostrando actitudes radicalmente diferentes a las de aquellos que son críticos del Gobierno. Los análisis de conglomerados realizados con los mismos datos indican que la proporción de personas que comparten actitudes que pueden considerarse "institucionalistas" ha ido disminuyendo, mientras que la proporción de quienes apoyan poderes adicionales para el ejecutivo y las alternativas autoritarias ha aumentado. El artículo concluye discutiendo algunos riesgos para la democracia boliviana dentro de las actitudes de sus ciudadanos hacia las instituciones democráticas.

*Palavras-chave:*
*Bolívia; democracia; legitimidade democrática; crise política*

**Resumo**
Depois de mais de uma década de estabilidade política, em 2019 a Bolívia sofreu uma grande crise política que culminou com a demissão de um Presidente de longa data, no meio de agitação popular após uma eleição questionada. Embora a crise tenha sido o resultado imediato de uma tentativa questionável do Presidente de ultrapassar os limites constitucionais dos mandatos, as suas raízes podem ser encontradas no declínio das taxas de apoio e satisfação com a democracia entre os cidadãos e na polarização que alcançou o apoio democrático mesmo. Utilizando dados de pesquisas do Barômetro das Américas do LAPOP, este artigo conclui que as médias nacionais para diferentes medidas de apoio democrático mostram tendências decrescentes e, talvez mais importante, também mostram altos níveis de polarização, com os apoiadores do presidente mostrando atitudes radicalmente diferentes daqueles que estão críticos do governo. As análises de agrupamento realizadas sobre os mesmos dados indicam que a proporção de indivíduos que partilham atitudes que podem ser consideradas "institucionalistas" tem diminuído, enquanto a proporção daqueles que apoiam poderes extra para o executivo e alternativas autoritárias aumentou. O artigo conclui discutindo alguns riscos para a democracia boliviana nas atitudes dos seus cidadãos em relação às instituições democráticas.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The second decade of the 21st century has been one of contrasts for Bolivian society and for Bolivian democracy. An initial period of political stability and economic growth overseen by an increasingly dominant president was followed by the erosion of electoral institutions and the rule of law. This ultimately led to a

serious political crisis amidst a failed election, a presidential resignation, and a subsequent caretaker government. The COVID-19 pandemic brought further havoc to Bolivian politics, delaying much-needed national elections and extending a transitional administration marred by errors and corruption. Late in 2020, national elections successfully took place, resulting in a new national government and resolving the institutional crisis.

Despite the institutional recovery, Bolivians' relationship with democracy and its institutions remains tenuous. This work analyzes data from five rounds of the AmericasBarometer survey, from 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019, and 2021, and also includes the discussion of data from LAPOP's survey rounds conducted in 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2010. The research shows that although Bolivians' support for and satisfaction with democracy recovered slightly in 2021, the population has become increasingly willing to support anti-democratic actions at the expense of democratic institutions. The article then shows how public opinion changed in response to salient social, political, and economic developments. For much of the period between 2012 and 2021, Bolivian politics was marked by economic and political stability, combined with increasingly visible authoritarian tendencies from the national government, based on the personalistic rule of President Evo Morales. A second critical moment emerged at the end of the decade, when a serious political crisis combined with the health and economic crises resulting from COVID-19.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows: the first section presents major patterns of support for democracy in Bolivia during the last ten years, using the author's analysis of AmericasBarometer data and cluster analysis results; the second section points to the most relevant historical events to identify the forces driving trends in Bolivians' democratic attitudes during the last decade, combining this with the discussion of relevant cluster analysis and other survey data results; and the final section concludes presenting the major challenges for democratic legitimacy in Bolivia for the immediate future.

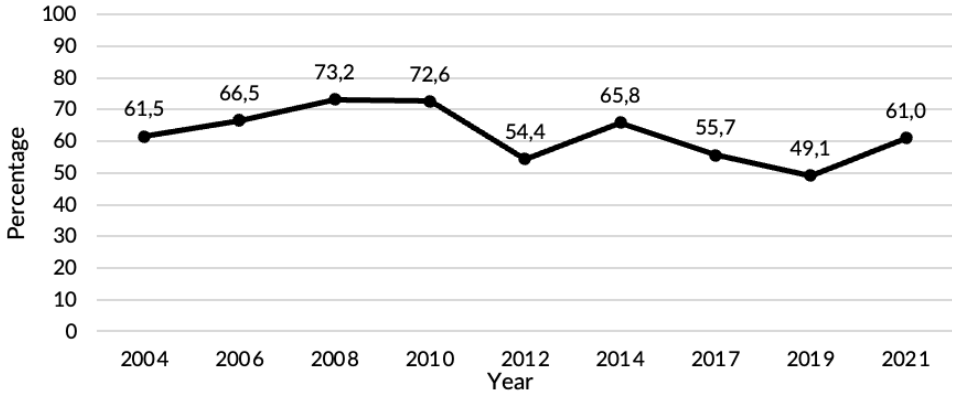
## 2. PATTERNS OF SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

This article focuses on the last ten years of Bolivians' support for democratic institutions. However, understanding the evolution of support for democracy in Bolivia requires consideration of a slightly longer period, starting with the collapse of the old party system (2003–2005), the election of popular, long-serving left-wing President Morales in 2005, and the approval of a new Constitution in 2009.

Figure 1 presents the evolution of the percentage of Bolivians who agree with the statement that "democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government." Support for democracy increased during the

first decade of the century and reached its highest levels in 2010, when almost three-fourths of the public answered that they preferred democracy over other forms of government. From then on, support for democracy decreased, despite a temporary increase in 2014. Support for democracy reached its lowest level, 49.1 percent, in 2019, shortly before the failed 2019 elections, which led to an institutional crisis.[1] After the crisis, support for democracy bounced back to 61.0 percent in 2021, an increase of almost 12 percentage points from 2019.[2]

**Figure 1. Support for Democracy in Bolivia, 2004–2021**



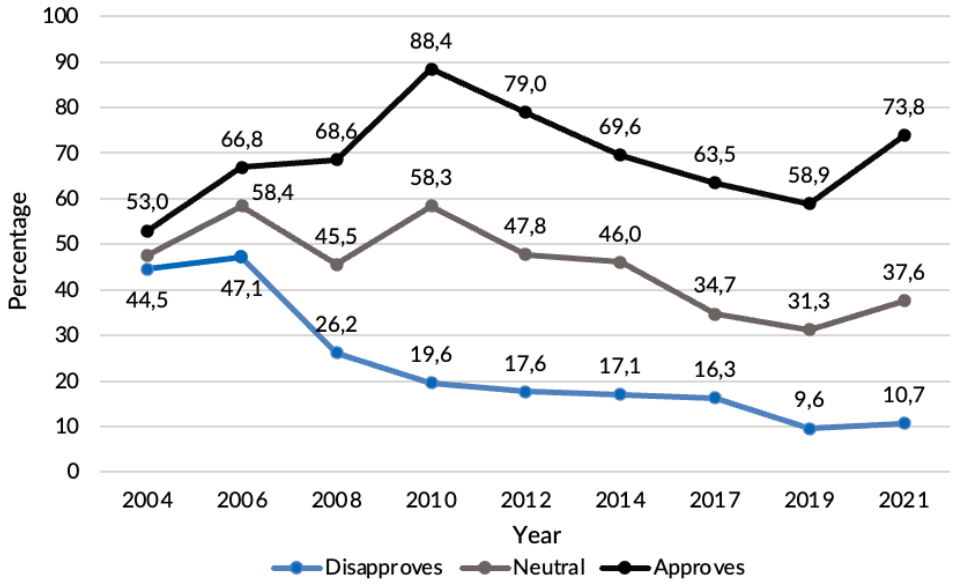

*Fuente*: AmericasBarometer, by LAPOP

Beyond the evolution of support for democracy, previous research has shown that citizens' relationship with democracy has become highly contingent on their political preferences (Anderson *et al.*, 2005; Monsiváis-Carrillo, 2020; Singer, 2018). This has produced "fragmented legitimacies," gaps in views about democracy between those who support the incumbent and those who do not (Moreno Morales & Osorio Michel, 2022). Since Morales and the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) took control of the national government in 2006, differences in satisfaction with democracy among those who approve of his performance and those who disapprove it became increasingly pronounced. As Figure 2 shows,

1. The initial increase in the 2000s followed by reversal and continued decline in the 2010s is a pattern that can be observed in most legitimacy indicators in Bolivia and across Latin America. See, for instance, (Schwarz *et al.*, 2019). This pattern might be related to the economic boom and 2014 bust that increased international prices for the commodities exported by the region in the early 21st century (Moreno Morales, 2021).
2. Individuals who answered five, six, and seven on the original seven-point scale were identified as supporting democracy, compared to those who gave answers ranging from zero to four.

satisfaction with democracy among government supporters, government critics, and those with neutral views diverged between 2006 and 2010.[3] Since then, the gap in satisfaction with democracy for the two groups has remained very wide (and it has even increased for 2021).

**Figure 2. Satisfaction with Democracy in Bolivia, by Approval of the Performance of the Executive, 2004–2021**




*Fuente*: AmericasBarometer, by LAPOP

Satisfaction with democracy varies widely, depending on individuals' political preferences. The gap in satisfaction with democracy among those who approve of the president's job performance and those who do not has increased from 8 percentage points in 2004 to 63 percentage points in 2021. This suggests that citizens' relationship with democracy is conditioned by other key political attitudes, particularly the relationship of the person with a polarizing figure; in the Bolivian case, satisfaction with democracy became increasingly dependent on the approval of Evo Morales' government. This finding suggests that, to understand

3. The original question was asked using a four-point Likert scale for satisfaction. The figure compares those who are "very satisfied" and "satisfied" to those who are "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied". Executive performance approval includes respondents who "approve" and "strongly approve" of the president's job performance.

support for the political system, we must consider attitudes by different social groups or "types" of citizens, not just yearly changes in national averages.

Cluster analysis is a data analysis technique that overcomes the limitations of examining single data points while preserving a reasonable degree of simplicity. Cluster analysis assigns individuals to groups of respondents with similar democratic attitudes, resulting in coherent groups of individuals with corresponding attitudes. Its aim is to maximize similarity *within* each cluster *while* maximizing dissimilarity between clusters. One advantage of cluster analysis compared to other classification schemes is that it is highly inductive, meaning that it lets respondents speak for themselves without making assumptions in advance about how to group them.

This article employs data from the AmericasBarometer and cluster analysis to classify Bolivians into groups or clusters with distinct attitudinal profiles. Annex 1 provides detailed information regarding the study's methodology. Five democratic attitudes were used to generate clusters:

- *Support for Democracy:* The extent to which respondents agree or disagree 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 in certain circumstances.
- *Opposition to Executive Aggrandizement:* Whether respondents believe it would be justified for the President to close Congress and the Supreme Court and govern without them.
- *Tolerance of Protest and Regime Critics:* The extent to which respondents support the right to demonstration and other political rights of regime critics.
- *Support for Democratic Inclusion:* The extent to which respondents support the political inclusion of homosexuals.

Questions to measure all five attitudes were available in the first four AmericasBarometer survey waves (2012, 2014, 2017, and 2019). Only three attitudes were available in 2021 because the survey included a limited set of questions: support for democracy, opposition to military coups, and opposition to executive aggrandizement. The 2021 cluster analysis results are therefore not fully comparable to those of prior waves and not analyzed here.[4] Annex 2 presents the

4. Because of COVID-19, LAPOP changed survey modes in 2021 and used computer-assisted telephonic interviews rather than the face-to-face interviews traditionally employed in the AmericasBarometer (Lupu *et al.*, 2021).

main cluster analysis results for all waves, including tables with the relationship of those clusters with other variables.

The cluster analysis identified three clusters in 2012 and four clusters in 2014, 2017, and 2019.[5] In all waves, a share of respondents was not classified into any cluster. To facilitate comparisons over survey waves, resulting clusters are grouped into four cluster families that share a set of defining characteristics:

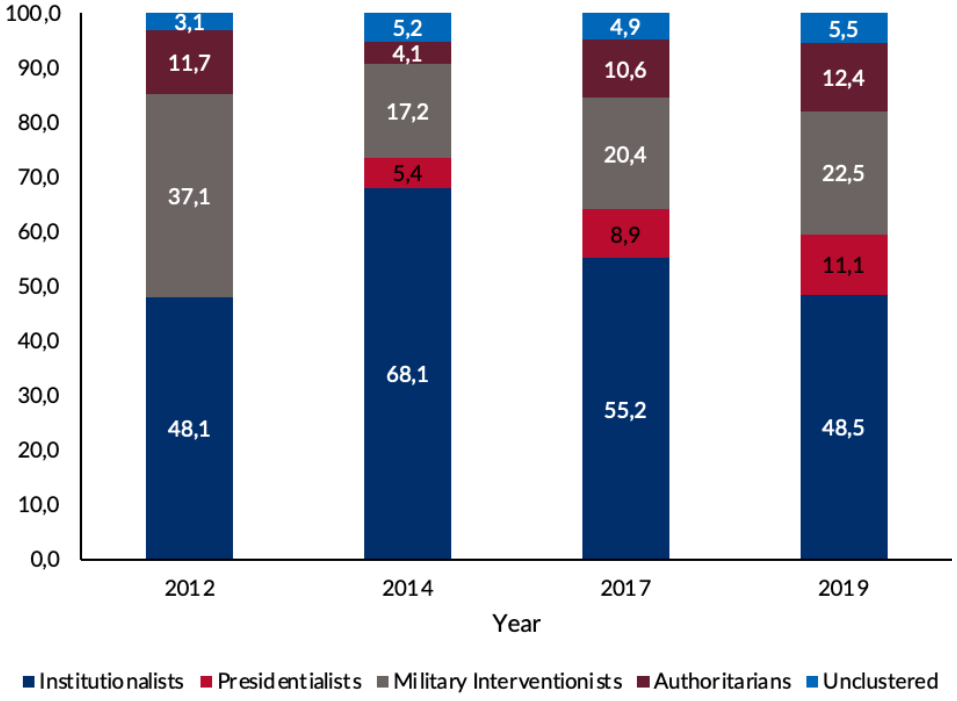
- *Institutionalists (including democratic institutionalists and institutionalists):* Individuals in this cluster family are characterized by full opposition to coups and executive aggrandizement. In this sense, they represent "ideal" democratic citizens compared to the other cluster families.
- *Presidentialists:* Individuals in this cluster family exhibit full opposition to coups but less-than-full opposition to executive aggrandizement.
- *Military Interventionists:* Individuals in this cluster family exhibit full opposition to executive aggrandizement but less-than-full opposition to coups.
- *Authoritarians:* Individuals in this cluster family are characterized by less-than-full opposition to both coups and executive aggrandizement.

Figure 3 shows the relative size of these cluster families between 2012 and 2019 and the three main trends in Bolivians' democratic attitudes. First, the share of institutionalists, individuals who oppose both military coups and executive aggrandizement, initially increased from about one-half to two-thirds of respondents in 2014 before decreasing in later survey rounds.[6] Second, the share of individuals who would support a military coup under some circumstances (military interventionists) declined from 37.1 percent of the population in 2012, to 17.2 percent in 2014, and accounted for 22.5 percent of the population in 2019.[7] Third, the share of presidentialists and authoritarians increased during the last three survey rounds; their combined share increased from 9.5 to 23.5 percent of respondents.[8]

Using cluster analysis, the demographic, socioeconomic, geographic, and other characteristics that significantly distinguished respondents in each cluster from the rest of the sample for each survey wave were identified. The study examined several variables, including age, gender, wealth, race, education, crime victimization, corruption victimization, political efficacy (the belief that politicians respond to citizens' preferences), and political participation. While respondents in all clusters were statistically significantly different from others in a few variables

5. The cluster analysis identified two clusters in 2021.
6. In 2021, institutionalists made up 46.3 percent of respondents.
7. In 2021, military interventionists made up 22.6 percent of respondents.
8. In 2021, authoritarians made up 31.2 percent of respondents and presidentialists did not appear as a distinct cluster.

**Figure 3. Evolution of Cluster Families, Bolivia 2012–2019**




*Fuente:* NORC at the University of Chicago, with LAPOP's AmericasBarometer data

in each wave, there were few stable patterns across all waves and the differences were substantially small. This suggests that the demographic, socioeconomic, geographic, and other characteristics examined structure attitudes toward democracy, but do so rather weakly. These caveats aside, we do find some recurrent statistically significant differences that are worth highlighting.

In all years, institutionalists were significantly less likely than other Bolivians to report being the victim of a crime in the past 12 months. Starting in 2014, institutionalists were also significantly less likely to have experienced crime and been asked to pay a bribe. These gaps are sizeable, although they vary across time. In 2019, the most recent year for which comparable data are available, 26.0 percent of institutionalists reported being the victim of a crime in the past year, compared to 30.3 percent of other Bolivians. 59.7 percent of institutionalists reported being asked to pay a bribe in the prior year, compared to 76.6 percent of individuals in other categories. This pattern is consistent with research linking crime and corruption victimization to depressed democratic attitudes. Institutionalists

were also older and more educated across the time series. In 2019, about 27.7 percent of institutionalists were between 18-29 years, compared to 39.0 percent of all other Bolivians. Institutionalists had 11.6 years of education on average, compared to 10.8 years for other Bolivians.

Military interventionists were significantly more likely to report being the victim of a crime in the past 12 months compared to other Bolivians. This pattern persisted across survey waves and was significant in all years examined here, except for 2014, when military interventionists were more likely to live in neighborhoods where crime had occurred. In 2019, 34.6 percent of military interventionists reported being the victim of a crime in the past year, compared to 26.3 percent of other Bolivians.

Military interventionists also expressed lower presidential job approval in all years, and these differences were significant in all years but 2014. In 2019, 37.5 percent of military interventionists approved of the president's job performance, versus 48.8 percent of other Bolivians. But 37.5 % is still a very large share of those who would approve of a military coup that are also satisfied with the executive, which would seem even counterintuitive. Likewise, only in 2016 the level of executive approval is different among institutionalists than among the other attitude clusters. This is a puzzling and extremely interesting fact considering that at least some levels of support for democracy are highly dependent of how people feel about Morales and his government, as Figure 2 shows. Some of the implications of this finding are discussed later in the paper.

## 3. SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS AND DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES

The decade between 2012 and 2021 brought several events that are relevant to understanding Bolivians' attitudes toward democracy. For much of the decade, Bolivian politics was marked by political stability, combined with increasingly visible authoritarian tendencies from the national government based on Morales' personalistic rule. A crisis emerged at the end of the decade, when political, health, and economic challenges manifested from COVID-19 coincided, but the crisis was ultimately resolved by a new national election. Thus, two distinct phases can be identified during the decade, one that is part of a longer era of political stability and a second one marked by political crisis and, later, recovery.

## 4. POLITICAL STABILITY, ECONOMIC GROWTH AND THE "MESSIANIC TEMPTATION"

Figure 1 above shows that average support for democracy increased substantially with Morales' election in 2005.[9] The collapse of a party system that was viewed as corrupt and exclusionary by many Bolivians was succeeded by a government elected with over 55 percent of the vote. Morales was not only popular, but also represented poorer social groups traditionally excluded from the country's mainstream politics, such as the urban lower classes, *campesinos*, and Bolivia's sizable indigenous population.[10] Morales' election injected the political system with a burst of legitimacy that overflowed into most of the country's political institutions. A new constitution, greater state involvement in the economy, and wider participation for indigenous groups were among the most important items on Morales' political agenda.

A Constitutional Assembly was elected in 2006 and a new constitution was approved in 2009 after much heated debate, fulfilling Morales' promise of institutional renewal. Morales was elected again under the new constitution that year for a five-year term with an even larger share of the national vote (64.1 percent). At the same time, MAS controlled most government institutions, at both the national and the subnational levels.[11]

In 2011, high court judges were popularly elected for the first time following the innovative, though risky new selection mechanism for judicial authorities enshrined in the new constitution. Under the new mechanism, the legislative branch, the Plurinational Legislative Assembly (ALP), is responsible for selecting the candidates for the elections. Since MAS controlled the ALP with a two-thirds majority, they were able to select the candidates. Even if the election yielded a majority of null votes, it resulted in the appointed of MAS-favorable judges to the Supreme, Constitutional, and Agro-Environmental courts as well as to the Judiciary Council.

9. This trend has been also noted elsewhere (Moreno Morales *et al.*, 2012).
10. While the Bolivian Constitution defines a single "Indígena – Originario – Campesino" category for referring to descendants of pre-Columbian peoples in the country, not all individuals self-identifying as indigenous are small agricultural producers (campesinos), and there are many "campesino" individuals and communities who do not share the cultural traits of indigenous groups. As a result of this contradictory definition, increasing tensions among campesinos and indigenous communities have emerged after the approval of the new constitution, particularly regarding access to and control of land. For a further discussion of indigenous identities in Bolivia see (Moreno Morales, 2019b).
11. Despite this positive outlook for MAS, some early tensions arose within the governing coalition, with some indigenous groups breaking from the party over plans to build a major road through Isiboro Sécure Indigenous Territory and National Park in 2011.

The MAS's political success was undoubtedly fueled by a booming economy: national gross domestic product (GDP) grew yearly on average by 4.7 percent between 2005 and 2012, with a peak of 6.1 percent in 2008. At the same time, inequality declined significantly (the Gini coefficient dropped from 0.6 in 2005 to 0.47 in 2012), as did the proportion of the population living in extreme poverty, from 38.2 to 21.6 percent.[12] As a result of the decrease in poverty, the middle classes substantially grew and became an increasingly important political bloc.

The first data point fully analyzed here, the survey from 2012, reflects this economic boom. Democratic institutionalists represented just under half of the population, a proportion that grew over the following years. The relatively lower share of institutionalists could be related to the novelty of the constitution, approved just three years earlier, and to the fact that most government institutions were being transformed to comply with the new constitution. These were times of transformation and the final shape of Bolivia's new democratic institutions was still being defined. The 2014 AmericasBarometer survey was conducted between March and May 2014, six months before a new national election that would end the first presidential term under the new constitution. Many of the new institutions defined in the 2009 Constitution were finally taking form. This was arguably the best moment for Morales' presidency. He enjoyed high levels of popular approval, a booming economy, and his party controlled the legislature, the judiciary, and most other government institutions.

Between 2012 and 2014, the economy kept growing fast, with GDP growth reaching a historic high of 6.8 percent in 2013, followed by 5.5 percent in 2014. Extreme poverty decreased an additional 4.5 percentage points to 17.1 percent, although inequality increased slightly, as the Gini index reached 0.48.

In 2014, the share of institutionalists also reached a high of 68.1 percent. Support for democracy was high across all groups even though, as shown in Figure 2, satisfaction with democracy varied widely with approval of the performance of the executive. Also in 2014, presidentialists emerged as an identifiable cluster. They are characterized by a combination of ambiguous support for military coups and ample support for the executive closing the legislature and governing alone. Their arrival was likely a reflection of the emergence of authoritarian tendencies within the national government led by Morales.

But what is perhaps more interesting in this period is the weak statistical relationship between the cluster composition of Bolivian society and the variable

12. Official GDP data can be downloaded from the National Statistics Institute of Bolivia at: https://www.ine.gob.bo/index.php/estadisticas-economicas/pib-y-cuentas-nacionales/producto-interno-bruto-anual/producto-interno-bruto-anual-intro/. Gini coefficient data comes from the same source, based on household surveys, at: https://www.ine.gob.bo/index.php/estadisticas-economicas/encuestas-de-hogares/.

most directly related with the personal figure of Evo Morales: presidential approval. While military interventionists tend to have lower levels of presidential approval, the actual numbers are not much smaller and often not statistically different, than other clusters. As a matter of fact, the share of military interventionists who also approved Morales' government was even higher than the percentage of democratic institutionalists that approved the executive. This means that military interventionists were not a group simply opposed to Morales, but they shared some common attitudes independent of who the incumbent was. At least in reference to the variables that determine cluster composition, support for military coups and executive aggrandizement, democratic attitudes were not strongly conditioned at this point by the feeling of what the President was doing.

Morales won a third time in the 2014 elections with 61.4 percent of the national vote and MAS again won a supermajority in the legislature. Morales was able to run, even though one transitory article of the 2009 Constitution specifically stated that his first term (2005–2009) should count against the new two-term limit and he should have been term-limited. However, his popularity and his party's majoritarian control of the Legislative guaranteed the acceptance of this candidacy. Morales started his third consecutive term in January 2015.

Despite Morales' success at the national level, the electoral map showed a country divided between urban and rural areas. MAS received overwhelming support from voters in the countryside (reaching 100 percent of the vote in some areas) and from poorer voters in smaller cities and in the outskirts of large urban areas. However, opposition parties won more support in cities, where the wealthier population and many members of the new middle class live. In the 2015 subnational elections MAS won in almost all of Bolivia's rural municipalities but lost in eight of the ten largest cities.

During his third term, Morales' stature grew even larger, shadowing emerging leaders from popular sectors and consolidating him as an irreplaceable leader within MAS and its affiliated organizations. His image was widely reproduced and printed in outlets ranging from the national airline's catering packages, urban mass transportation, and public works across the country. During those years, dozens of schools, stadiums, and public infrastructure projects were named after Morales and his relatives.

Under this increasing personalistic regime, clearing the way for Morales to run for reelection in 2019 became a priority for MAS; for many party representatives, it became an obsession. A 2016 referendum proposed by a group of legislators put before voters a constitutional reform to lift the two-consecutive-terms limit on presidential reelection. After a heated campaign, 51.3 percent of voters opposed the reform, which was officially defeated.

Between 2014 and 2017 the Bolivian economy continued to grow, but at a slower rate than during previous years. GDP growth was 4.9 percent, 4.3

percent, and 4.2 percent, respectively. The percentage of the population living in extreme poverty remained stable and inequality again declined, with the Gini index reaching 0.43 by 2017.

The cluster composition of democratic attitudes in Bolivia in 2017 reflected the moment. The proportion of respondents sharing institutionalist attitudes was still a majority (55.2 percent), but there were other clearly defined groups with contrasting attitudes: military interventionists, authoritarians, and presidentialists. Average support for democracy receded partly because of a poor institutional performance, which started to show deficits particularly in independence and credibility.

It is relevant that only in the 2017 survey round, there is a positive statistically significant relationship between the cluster composed by "democratic institutionalists" and presidential approval. Only at this point in time does executive approval seems to partially explain institutionalist attitudes towards democracy.

## 5. POLITICAL CRISIS AND INSTITUTIONAL RECOVERY

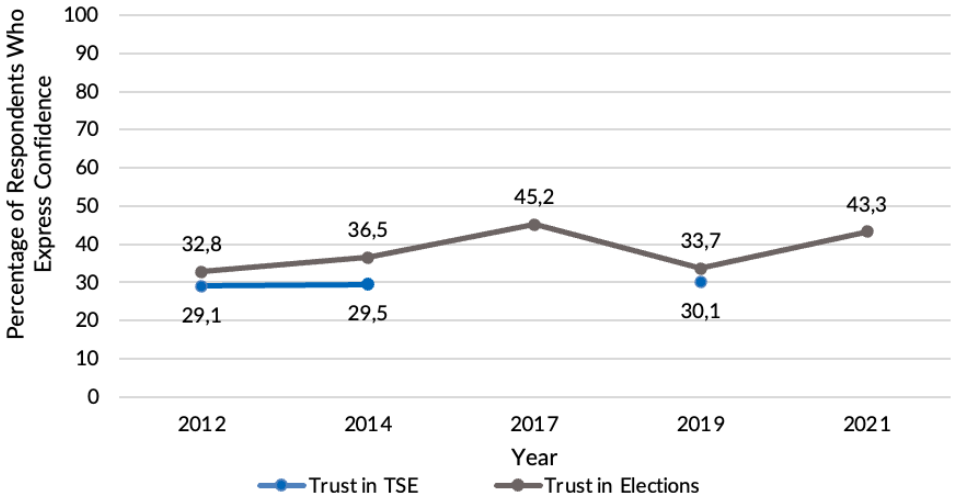
Instead of looking for a new candidate for the next presidential election, MAS insisted instead on a third presidential reelection with the previously successful Morales-García ticket. The Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal (TCP) received a request from MAS legislators asking it to declare that the term limits defined in the 2009 Constitution were in violation of Morales' political rights as guaranteed by the San José agreement, to which Bolivia is a subscriber. In November 2017, the Constitutional Court, elected in 2011 from the list of candidates selected by the MAS-controlled ALP, declared the term limit articles in the constitution "inapplicable", thus clearing the way for Morales' reelection to a fourth consecutive term. The TCP's decision contributed to the rapid erosion of Bolivians' trust in electoral institutions, as it implied the overruling of a popular vote (the 2016 referendum). This decision proved to be consequential, negatively affecting many Bolivians' beliefs in democracy and in the efficacy of elections as a means for decision-making.

In 2018, the national government passed a law requiring that all political parties conduct a primary election to select their candidates for the 2019 presidential election. The National Electoral Tribunal (TSE) organized and conducted primaries in January 2019. Without exceptions, all running parties presented only one presidential pre-candidate, so the primary featured unopposed tickets across the board; Morales ran as MAS's single candidate. This single-candidate primary election, combined with the TCP's decision to allow Morales to run for a fourth term, likely contributed to declining public views of the legitimacy of elections and of the TSE itself.

With the results of the primary elections officially published, and following the TCP's ruling, the TSE accepted Morales' candidacy. By doing so, members of the Electoral Tribunal reversed the results of the referendum they had administered only three years earlier, further debilitating the legitimacy of the TSE, which had already suffered following the resignation of its chairwoman and from evident technical limitations.[13]

As a result of this political environment, trust in elections and the TSE had both reached historic lows when the AmericasBarometer survey was conducted between March and May 2019. The country was headed into one of the most delicate elections in decades with rock-bottom trust in electoral institutions. Only three in every ten individuals expressed trust for the TSE, and only one in three expressed trust in elections. Figure 4 shows the evolution of public trust in each of these institutions between 2012 and 2021.[14]

**Figure 4. Trust in Elections and Trust in the TSE in Bolivia, 2012–2021**




*Fuente*: AmericasBarometer, by LAPOP

13. In the ensuing institutional conflict, most Bolivians agreed that the TSE should respect the 2016 referendum results over the TCP sentence (Moreno Morales, 2019a). The decision to accept Morales' candidacy was highly unpopular and legally and institutionally controversial.
14. The questions were originally asked using a seven-point scale, which we have recoded so that values of five, six and seven indicate "trust" and values of one through four indicate "not trust." Trust in the TSE was not asked in 2017 and 2021.

Results from the 2019 survey show a democratic system on the verge of collapse in many respects. Not only had support for democracy fallen to a historic low, but it had also decreased for all clusters. Trust in elections and trust in the TSE had also dropped to their lowest average values since LAPOP started measuring these items late in the 1990s. At the same time, the proportion of institutionalists decreased, the percentage of military interventionists increased to 22.5 percent, and the share of authoritarians and hardcore presidentialists also increased in comparison to 2017.

Also, and perhaps more relevant, in 2019, presidential approval played a more important role determining cluster composition. Military interventionists became more statistically related with disapproval of the executive, while presidentialists, willing to accept executive aggrandizement but no military action, also started to have distinct levels of presidential approval.

Public distrust in the election was palpable months before the 2019 election. The national voter registry was questioned by many, due to some irregularities in the National Identification Service, and because the number of registered voters grew unevenly in favor of rural areas, where the vote is often controlled by MAS-affiliated *campesino* unions[15] and where voter registration rates had also historically been lower than urban areas.[16] MAS regularly used state resources for its campaigns, which produced a deeply unequal contest. Pre-electoral polls almost unanimously showed that Morales would not win the first-round election and that a run-off election would be necessary to determine the winner for the first time since new constitution was approved in 2009.[17] In light of these events, many believed that the only way Morales could win in the first round was by conducting large-scale electoral fraud, which was also plausible in the minds of many Bolivians given the low levels of trust in elections and the TSE.

Election Day 2019 (October 20) was mostly peaceful. In the evening, preliminary results published by the Electoral Tribunal indicated that there would be a run-off election, as expected. However, the vote count was abruptly interrupted overnight. When it was re-established almost a day later, the trend

15. This is what is known as the "organic vote"; the organization collectively decides who to vote for and all individuals are required to comply with that decision. It is a common political practice in Bolivian rural areas with strong union presence.
16. Many allegations of irregularities and wrongdoing related to the biometric voter registry have been made in recent years, but most have lacked evidence. One more credible accusation came from a former member of the TSE, who resigned and argued that there was an urgent need to audit the registry and complained about the TSE's lack of independence.
17. The 2009 Bolivian Constitution states that the President is elected with more than 50 percent of the national vote, or with more than 40 percent of the vote with a margin of at least 10 percent over the second-place candidate. If this does not happen, a run-off election is held between the top-two vote getters.

had changed: Morales appeared to have won in the first round. This fact triggered demonstrations in cities across the country, with many middle-class Bolivians and mostly young people protesting an election they believed was rigged.

After denying any wrongdoing, the national government was forced to call for an electoral audit from the Organization of American States (OAS), and publicly obliged to accept its results as "binding". OAS published its preliminary report on November 10, 2019 in a climate of generalized social unrest. The audit team had found significant electoral irregularities and suggested that the election be repeated.[18] After these findings were made public, Bolivia's military commanders and the workers unions' leadership suggested Morales resign. He did so and fled to México, where he was granted political asylum. Most other MAS authorities in the executive and the legislature also resigned amid escalating violence, including mutual confrontations and attacks between citizen groups.

With the resignation of most authorities in the line of presidential succession, Bolivia experienced a power vacuum for over two days, resulting in high-tension climate of uncertainty and violence. On November 12, Jeanine Añez, Second Vice President of the Senate, assumed the Presidency in an irregular and frail presidential succession. Añez came to power at the head of a caretaker provisional government, with the goal of pacifying a country that was at the brink of a civil war. The caretaker government was supposed to facilitate national elections as soon as possible. Most national political actors and international actors recognized and supported the new government. On November 24, the Legislative Assembly, still controlled by MAS, declared the October elections null, opening the door for a new election that would restore the institutional order lost during the crisis.[19]

The provisional government faced protests from MAS supporters in different regions and responded with violence. Police and military interventions resulted in the deaths of dozens of individuals. According to the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts for Bolivia, which was created by the Interamerican Commission for Human Rights, serious human rights violations took place in Bolivia between September and December 2019. The state was responsible for the disproportionate and excessive use of force.[20] These acts raised social tensions even more and reinforced a sense of polarization among the Bolivian public.

18. The final OAS Electoral Integrity Report went further, affirming that the OAS audit team had detected "incontrovertible evidence of an electoral process marred by grave irregularities and the actions of a tribunal that threatened the transparency and integrity of the vote. It is on the basis of this evidence that we reiterate the impossibility of validating the results of the October election." Organization of American States. 2020. Electoral Observation Missions General Elections 2019 and 2020 Plurinational State of Bolivia Final Report.

19. There are many recounts of the events that led to the 2019 political crisis. For more detailed references, see (Brockmann, 2020; Lehoucq, 2020; Mayorga, 2020; Wolff, 2020).

20. Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts for Bolivia. 2021. *Informe sobre los hechos de violencia y vulneración de los derechos humanos ocurridos entre el 1 de septiembre y el 31 de diciembre de 2019*.

The new executive worked with the Legislative Assembly to appoint new members to the TSE, which restored some of the trust the Electoral Tribunal had lost before and during the failed election. The new TSE authorities quickly began planning the election, which was scheduled for May 2020. However, due to COVID-19, the election was postponed, first until September 2020, and then until October 2020. Finally, the election was scheduled for October 18, almost exactly a year after 2019's failed election.

The 2020 election was successfully organized and executed, bringing a general sense of relief after the traumatic events of the previous year. Luis Arce, the MAS candidate, won the first-round election with 55.1 percent of the national vote over a fragmented anti-MAS opposition. Añez initially stood as a candidate, but she later withdrew after competing for the anti-MAS vote with the establishment candidate Carlos Mesa and Luis Fernando Camacho, a leader of the 2019 protests from the Santa Cruz region (who would later be elected governor of that Department). Arce campaigned on a moderate platform, highlighting positive economic performance during his term as Morales' Minister of Economy. This was a clear contrast with the disastrous economic results under Añez, due to a combination of improvisation, poor leadership and COVID-19. Emphasizing the need for economic stability and political reconciliation, Arce's campaign was able to appeal to both MAS's hardcore voters and the urban middle classes that were most economically affected by COVID-19, and thus won the election by a large margin.

The new government was inaugurated shortly after the election. Subnational elections took place a few months later, in March 2021, to select local authorities after more than six years. These two successful elections brought closure to a political crisis that deeply affected the way Bolivians relate to each other and to the political institutions that allow democracy to work[21].

The COVID-19 health crisis was coming under control by the time Arce took power —the worst moments took place during the transitional government, when the disease was still largely unknown and the country's health system was underprepared for such an event. However, COVID-19 produced a deep economic crisis: Bolivia's GDP contracted by 8.8 percent in 2020, resulting in a slight increase in poverty and inequality.

The 2021 AmericasBarometer survey took place after the political crisis and 2020 elections. The economy was also doing better, as GDP grew by 6.1 percent in 2021. This environment was much more conducive to foster democratic attitudes, and that was clearly reflected in the data. Average support for democracy increased for each of the cluster groups and the share of Bolivians

21. For a detailed account of the electoral processes of 2020 and 2021 see (Romero Ballivian, 2022). Salvador Romero led the Electoral Tribunal between late 2019 and 2021.

expressing that democracy is the best political regime increased to 61 percent in 2021 (Figure 1). Trust in elections recovered from its historic low two years prior, although it was still low in absolute terms, at just 43 percent (see Figure 4). Satisfaction with democracy also increased among both critics and supporters of the national government, though the gap between these two groups is still very large (Figure 2).

Despite this relatively positive news, the scars of the political crisis can be seen in Bolivia's polarized society. Democratic satisfaction is much higher for respondents who approve of the president's performance compared to those who disapprove. The relative size of the institutionalist group is large but does not reach half of the population. Additionally, groups with authoritarian tendencies, both those who support executive aggrandizement and military intervention, represent larger shares of the population than in any other previous round of the AmericasBarometer. However, presidential approval does not show a statistically significant effect on cluster composition, which seems to be contributing to defusing potentially conflictive levels of polarization.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Analyses of public opinion data identified that support for democracy in Bolivia has been on a downward trend since 2010. Satisfaction with democracy has also broadly eroded but remained strong among President Morales' supporters. The cluster analysis found that the share of institutionalists, who oppose both military coups and executive aggrandizement, was larger in 2012 and 2014 than in later years. At the same time, the share of military interventionists, individuals who would support a military coup under some circumstances, declined from about one-third to one-fourth of the population between 2012 and 2019. Lastly, the combined share of presidentialists and authoritarians increased from 9.5 percent in 2014 to 23.5 percent in 2019.

But what is probably more relevant for the discussion of democratic support is that cluster composition is not always statistically related to presidential approval, a variable that it is known to weight heavily under the personalistic government of Morales. Only in 2017 the cluster of democratic institutionalists became composed of Morales supporters, and it was not until the 2019 survey round that both presidentialists and military interventionists showed clearly opposing statistical relations with executive approval. This suggests that, despite the overwhelming presence of Morales in Bolivian politics during the time of period considered in the analysis, attitudes towards democracy don't necessarily depend on people's views of the executive.

This finding also contributes to the discussion on the measurement of democratic support. The weakness of the statistical dependence of attitudes towards democracy and presidential approval suggests that the LAPOP questions and cluster analysis employed in this paper are really tapping into a more diffuse level of democratic support. And the attitudes towards democracy (either positive or negative) that are registered by those measures are not directly and instrumentally dependent on who the winner of an election is.

Bolivians' relationship with democracy during the last decade can be divided into two different periods. During the first period, the country enjoyed political stability and economic growth; this success fed some authoritarian tendencies, focused mainly on the *caudillo* figure of a populist president that became irreplaceable for some. During the second period, trust in electoral institutions eroded deeply and attitudes towards democracy became polarized, so much that the country plunged into a political crisis, with a presidential resignation and a transitional government that faced the worst of COVID-19. However, democracy prevailed and Bolivia's political system regained some of its legitimacy, opening an opportunity to reconstruct democratic institutions.

Bolivian democracy has shown itself to be surprisingly resilient. However, it still faces many threats, one of which is the undemocratic attitudes of Bolivian citizens. Polarized support of the president has resulted in the enormous differences in satisfaction with democracy by party preference. This is a matter of concern, as democracy requires the acceptance and consent of the losing side. The reality that much of the population can be classified as either authoritarians or military interventionists should raise alarms over the type of political culture that Bolivia and its political system are fostering. However, the fact that clusters of attitudes towards democracy do not always coincide with the polarizing trends, can be understood as a relatively good sign for a democracy that seems to be supported by its citizens beyond who gets elected.

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## ANNEX 1. METHODOLOGY

Cluster analysis was employed to classify citizens into clusters with distinct attitudinal profiles. 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. This work uses Hierarchical Density-Based Clustering (HDBScan) as developed by Campello, Moulavi, and Sander.[22] HDBScan identifies groups of observations that are closely packed together in space and leaves outliers unclassified. HDBScan only requires one parameter—the minimum size of a cluster—and chooses the number of clusters endogenously through a hierarchical process that retains the most stable clusters. We employed Mahalanobis distances as the criteria for computing the distance metric used by HDBScan.

By using cluster analysis, we let survey respondents speak for themselves instead of making assumptions in advance about how to group them. We did not forcibly group observations that did not belong together by predefining acceptable combinations of attitudes or setting arbitrary cut-offs for scores to classify respondents into a given cluster. However, our analysis has one main limitation: the variables used are not continuous and do not share a common scale. Ideally, we would conduct cluster analysis with continuous variables that can be standardized to ensure comparability.

The democratic attitudes used for this analysis include support for democracy, opposition to military coups, opposition to executive aggrandizement, tolerance of protest and regime critics, and support for democratic inclusion. Table A1.1 presents the full wording of the AmericasBarometer questions we used to measure each democratic attitude. We use these questions to create attitudinal scores, ranging from zero (least democratic attitude) to one (most democratic attitude). When more than one question is available for a given democratic attitude, we calculate the attitudinal score by averaging responses.

22. Campello, Ricardo, Davoud Moulavi, and Jörg Sander. 2013. "Density-based clustering based on hierarchical density estimates." *Pacific-Asia conference on knowledge discovery and data mining*. Springer. p. 160-172.

## Table A1.1. AmericasBarometer Items and Underlying Democratic Attitudes

| Democratic Attitudes[1] | Questions |
|---|---|
| Support for democracy | 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?<br>*Response options: Seven-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disagree to (7) Strongly agree.* |
| Opposition to military coup[s2] | 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…<br>JC10. When there is a lot of crime<br>*Response options: (1) A military take-over of the state would be justified; (2) A military takeover of the state would not be justified.* |
| | 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…<br>JC13. When there is a lot of corruption<br>*Response options: (1) A military take-over of the state would be justified; (2) A military takeover of the state would not be justified.* |
| Opposition to executive aggrandizement[2] | 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?<br>*Response options: (1) Yes, it is justified; (2) No, it is not justified*. |
| | 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?<br>*Response options: (1) Yes, it is justified; (2) No, it is not justified.* |
| Tolerance of protest and regime critics | D1. There are people who only say bad things about the form of government of Bolivia, 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.<br>*Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.* |
| | 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.<br>*Response option s: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.* |

| Democratic Attitudes[1] | Questions |
|---|---|
| | D3. Still thinking of those who only say bad things about the form of government of Bolivia, how strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people being permitted to run for public office?<br>*Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.* |
| | D4. How strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people appearing on television to make speeches?<br>*Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.* |
| Support for democratic inclusion | 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?<br>*Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.* |

[1] In the 2021 round of the AmericasBarometer, only questions ING4, JC13, and JC15A were included in the survey. Item JC13 was administered to one-quarter of the sample and JC15A to one-half of the sample. About 24 percent of the sample was asked the two questions. We used this portion of the sample to conduct cluster analysis.

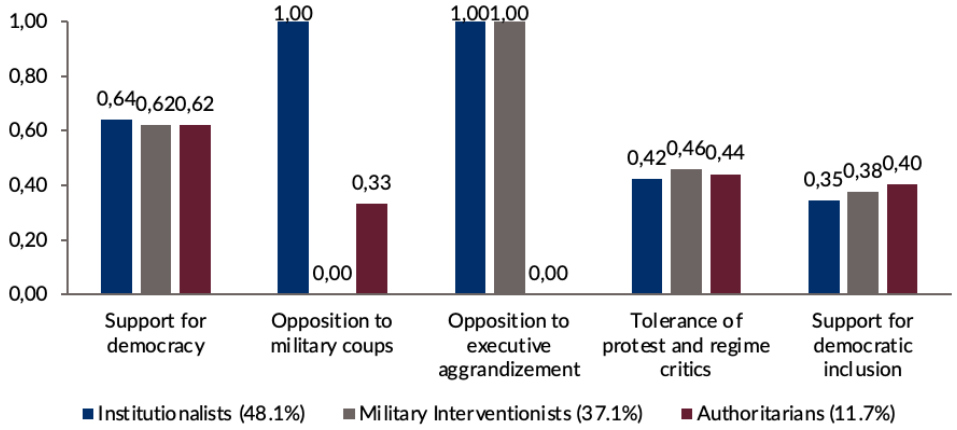
[2] For the 2012-2019 waves, opposition to military coups and opposition to executive aggrandizement included up to two questions each (JC10 and JC13, and JC15A and JC16A, respectively). In 2012, respondents were asked all four questions. In 2014, respondents were asked JC10, JC13, and JC15A (JC16A was missing). In 2017, respondents were asked either JC10 or JC13 (split sample) and JC15A (JC16A was missing). In 2019, respondents were asked either JC10 and JC15A or JC13 and JC16A. We verified that responses to JC10 and JC13 had similar distributions. To ensure consistency across years, we artificially created a split sample by randomly taking the value of one of the two questions for each respondent in 2012 and 2014.

*Source*: Own elaboration

## ANNEX 2. 2012–2021 CLUSTER RESULTS

The bar graphs below present the main results of the cluster analysis. There is one bar graph per wave studied: 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019, and 2021. The bars indicate the average scores for the attitudes for each cluster. All attitude scores range from zero (least democratic) to one (most democratic). The percentages next to each cluster label in the legend indicate the share of respondents that was classified into the cluster. Thus, the graphs allow for comparing the clusters in terms of their democratic attitudes and their relative size.

**Figure A2.1. 2012 Cluster Results**




*Source:* NORC at the University of Chicago, with LAPOP's AmericasBarometer data

**Table A2.1. 2012 cluster results (percentage of individuals in cluster within each category)**

| | Democratic Institutionalists | Military Interventionists | Ambivalent Military Interventionists | Ambivalent Presidentialists | Presidentialists |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Female | 50.37% | 52.91% | 45.79% | 48.56% | 47.33% |
| Age: 18-29 | 36.68%** | 43.28% | 39.05% | 50.94%* | 50.18%* |
| Age: 30-59 | 50.36% | 46.68% | 51.12% | 38.23%** | 38.63%* |
| Age: 60+ | 12.96%*** | 10.04% | 9.83% | 10.83% | 11.19% |
| Race: white | 6.27% | 5.06% | 3.38% | 6.25% | 4.10% |
| Race: mestizo | 71.58% | 74.71% | 73.68% | 83.87%*** | 78.46% |
| Race: indigenous | 17.57% | 12.59%** | 11.73% | 7.43%*** | 10.86% |
| Race: black | 0.20% | 0.46% | 0%*** | 0%*** | 0%*** |
| Race: others | 4.38% | 7.17% | 11.21%** | 2.44%* | 6.58% |
| Rural area | 35.53% | 31.55% | 28.48% | 25.56% | 25.5% |
| Wealth Index Quintile - Poorest | 15.36% | 18.26% | 21.19% | 24.13% | 2.02%*** |

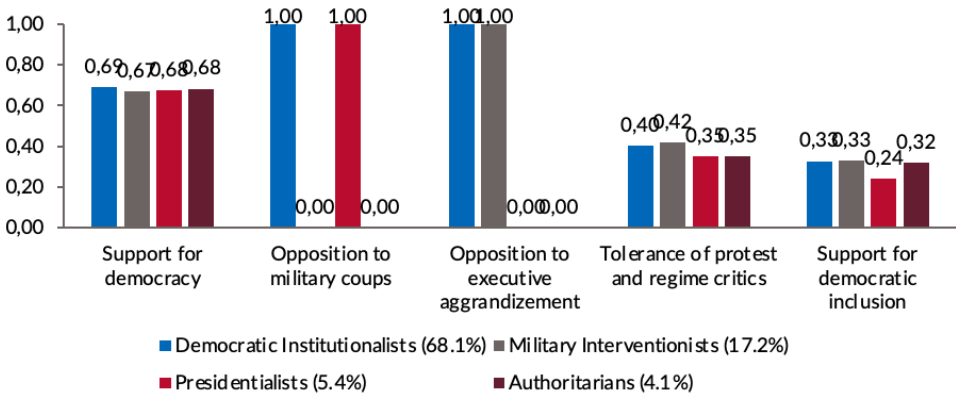
| | Democratic Institutionalists | Military Interventionists | Ambivalent Military Interventionists | Ambivalent Presidentialists | Presidentialists |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wealth Index Quintile - 2 | 26.14% | 29.40% | 25.87% | 8.18%*** | 33.52% |
| Wealth Index Quintile - 3 | 15.04% | 14.21% | 14.99% | 17.37% | 18.36% |
| Wealth Index Quintile - 4 | 20.39% | 14.9%** | 22.62% | 49.03%* | 31.92% |
| Wealth Index Quintile - Richest | 23.06% | 23.24% | 15.33% | 1.30%*** | 14.19% |
| Years of education | 9.61 | 9.74 | 9.89 | 10.6 | 9.88 |
| Victim of a crime in the past 12 months | 21.15%*** | 31.04% | 24.58% | 36.30% | 39.36% |
| Percentage of people in neighborhood who was a victim of a crime | 25.8%*** | 28.07% | 27.28% | 30.15%* | 30.97%* |
| Number of corruption instances | 82.81% | 83.98% | 71.26%** | 98.91% | 101.35% |
| Percentage of people in neighborhood who was a victim of a corruption instance | 46.62% | 44.47% | 38.44%*** | 47.15% | 48.97% |
| Approve the performance of the Executive | 26.45% | 21.30%* | 16.37%** | 26.66% | 22.31% |
| Understand important political issues | 23.06%** | 25.52% | 24.20% | 29.36% | 29.27% |
| Believe that those who govern are interested in what people think | 19.29%* | 19.3% | 28.02%* | 26.82% | 29.99% |
| Voted in the last presidential election | 80.2% | 79.53% | 76.68% | 73.14%* | 78.34% |

| | Democratic Institutionalists | Military Interventionists | Ambivalent Military Interventionists | Ambivalent Presidentialists | Presidentialists |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participated in a demonstration or protest march in the past 12 months | 13.14%*** | 17.43% | 15.24% | 13.55% | 21.87% |
| Attended a city council meeting in the past 12 months | 9.39% | 12.39% | 5.39%** | 6.34%* | 11.53% |
| Attends meetings of a community improvement association | 50.84% | 50.83% | 47.27% | 57.59% | 55.91% |

Note: Tests of statistical significance between individuals in a given cluster vs. all other individuals. Bootstrapped std. errors with 500 replications. * = p < 0.1, ** = p < 0.05 , *** = p < 0.01

*Source*: NORC at the University of Chicago, with LAPOP's AmericasBarometer data

**Figure A2.2. 2014 Cluster Results**




*Source*: NORC at the University of Chicago, with LAPOP's AmericasBarometer data

## Table A2.2. 2014 cluster results (percentage of individuals in cluster within each category)

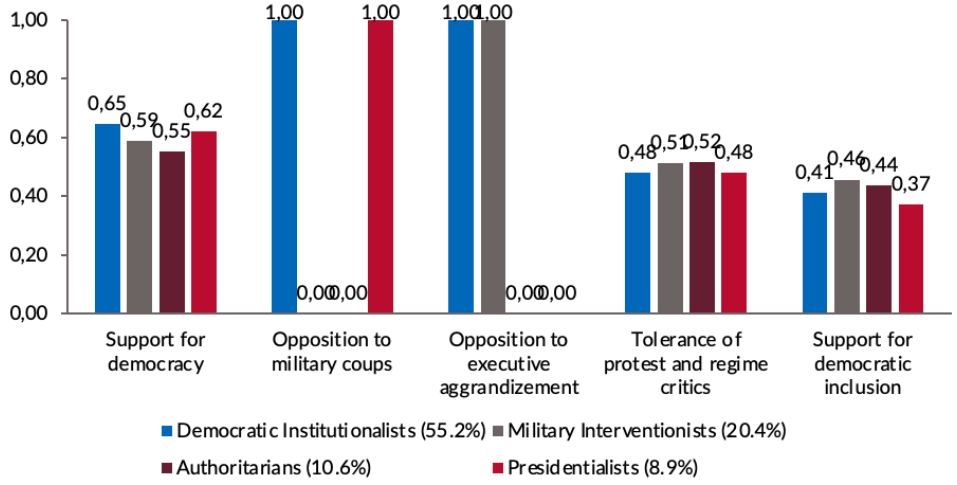
| | Democratic Institutionalists | Ambivalent-Military Interventionists Presidentialists | Ambivalent Military Interventionists | Military Interventionists |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Female | 49.63% | 48.38% | 52.12% | 47.79% |
| Age: 18-29 | 28.17%*** | 31.82% | 42.32%** | 42.27%** |
| Age: 30-59 | 56.57%** | 51.71% | 47.07%* | 42.69%** |
| Age: 60+ | 15.26%** | 16.47% | 10.61% | 15.04% |
| Race: white | 5.63% | 5.16% | 5.62% | 4.32% |
| Race: mestizo | 70.96% | 66.99% | 68.34% | 77.51% |
| Race: indigenous | 19.28% | 24.64%* | 20.88% | 13.71%* |
| Race: black | 0.26% | 0%*** | 0.86% | 0%*** |
| Race: others | 3.87% | 3.20% | 4.29% | 4.47% |
| Rural area | 31.56% | 27.50% | 31.46% | 29.30% |
| Wealth Index Quintile - Poorest | 20.3%** | 20.25% | 17.60% | 21.55% |
| Wealth Index Quintile - 2 | 19.03% | 21.55% | 21.19% | 14.94% |
| Wealth Index Quintile - 3 | 18.99% | 16.64% | 19.41% | 22.47% |
| Wealth Index Quintile - 4 | 21.03% | 24.97%* | 18.52% | 21.89% |
| Wealth Index Quintile - Richest | 20.64% | 16.60%** | 23.28% | 19.15% |
| Years of education | 10.21 | 9.73** | 9.88 | 9.22*** |
| Victim of a crime in the past 12 months | 19.49%*** | 28.13%** | 18.52% | 29.04%* |
| Percentage of people in neighborhood who was a victim of a crime | 21.55% | 23.82%* | 22.92% | 24.36%** |

| | Democratic Institutionalists | Ambivalent-Military Interventionists Presidentialists | Ambivalent Military Interventionists | Military Interventionists |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of corruption instances | 37.52%*** | 62.44%* | 50.37% | 75.91%** |
| Percentage of people in neighborhood who was a victim of a corruption instance | 28.80%*** | 32.79%* | 34.18%** | 33.71%* |
| Approve the performance of the Executive | 51.90% | 61.62%*** | 57.93% | 53.85% |
| Understand important political issues | 26.41% | 25.80% | 33.70% | 33.11% |
| Believe that those who govern are interested in what people think | 27.39%** | 37.29%** | 40.63%*** | 31.84% |
| Voted in the last presidential election | 79.50%*** | 76.29% | 66.34%** | 69.58% |
| Participated in a demonstration or protest march in the past 12 months | 14.01%* | 16.33% | 20.87% | 22.02% |
| Attended a city council meeting in the past 12 months | 11.63% | 13.08% | 10.17% | 8.44% |
| Attends meetings of a community improvement association | 46.73% | 52.06%* | 42.40% | 51.77% |
| Vote authoritarian candidate | 0.10% | 0.15% | 0%*** | 0%*** |

Note: Tests of statistical significance between individuals in a given cluster vs. all other indivuals. Bootstrapped std. errors with 500 replications. * = p < 0.1, ** = p < 0.05 , *** = p < 0.01

*Source*: NORC at the University of Chicago, with LAPOP's AmericasBarometer data

**Figure A2.3. 2017 Cluster Results**




*Source*: NORC at the University of Chicago, with LAPOP's AmericasBarometer data

**Table A2.3. 2017 cluster results (percentage of individuals in cluster within each category)**

| Variable | Democratic Institutionalists (54.8% of Bolivians) | Military Interventionists (19.8% of Bolivians) | Authoritarians (10.7% of Bolivians) | Presidentialists (8.7% of Bolivians) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Female | 47.19%** | 58.98%*** | 55.25% | 44.9% |
| Age: 18-29 | 30.99%** | 41.92%*** | 34.25% | 28.57% |
| Age: 30-59 | 54% | 49.7% | 54.7% | 49.66% |
| Age: 60+ | 15.01% | 8.38%*** | 11.05% | 21.77%** |
| Race: white | 9.94% | 7.49% | 12.71% | 8.16% |
| Race: mestizo | 60.8% | 60.48% | 57.46% | 61.9% |
| Race: indigenous | 12.42% | 13.17% | 13.81% | 13.61% |
| Race: black | 2.38% | 3.59% | 3.87% | 2.72% |
| Race: others | 14.47% | 15.27% | 12.15% | 13.61% |
| Rural area | 31.75% | 27.25%* | 35.91% | 29.93% |

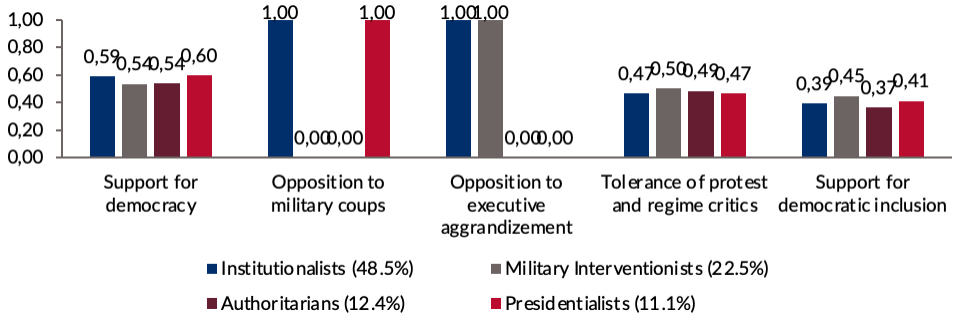
| Variable | Democratic Institutionalists (54.8% of Bolivians) | Military Interventionists (19.8% of Bolivians) | Authoritarians (10.7% of Bolivians) | Presidentialists (8.7% of Bolivians) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wealth Index Quintile - Poorest | 18.01%*** | 24.24% | 26.67%* | 26.71% |
| Wealth Index Quintile - 2 | 18.12% | 19.7% | 15.56% | 21.23% |
| Wealth Index Quintile - 3 | 22.05% | 17.58%* | 22.78% | 22.6% |
| Wealth Index Quintile - 4 | 20.31% | 19.7% | 19.44% | 15.07%* |
| Wealth Index Quintile - Richest | 21.51%** | 18.79% | 15.56% | 14.38%** |
| Years of education | 11.48*** | 10.88 | 9.99*** | 9.73*** |
| Victim of a crime in the past 12 months | 27.11% | 34.43%*** | 31.49% | 19.73%*** |
| Percentage of people in neighborhood who was a victim of a crime | 28.24% | 29.68%* | 28.77% | 28.43% |
| Number of corruption instances | 68.14%*** | 78.44% | 95.58%* | 98.64% |
| Percentage of people in neighborhood who was a victim of a corruption instance | 40.29% | 41.29% | 41.5% | 42.12% |
| Approve the performance of the Executive | 49.02%*** | 35.76%*** | 48.33% | 45.52% |
| Understand important political issues | 47.41% | 45.26% | 46.55% | 38.46%** |

| Variable | Democratic Institutionalists (54.8% of Bolivians) | Military Interventionists (19.8% of Bolivians) | Authoritarians (10.7% of Bolivians) | Presidentialists (8.7% of Bolivians) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Believe that those who govern are interested in what people think | 43.31% | 41.52% | 46.63% | 47.14% |
| Voted in the last presidential election | 87.26%** | 82.63%* | 80.66%* | 87.76% |
| Participated in a demonstration or protest march in the past 12 months | 16.41% | 16.77% | 23.76%* | 17.01% |
| Attends meetings of a community improvement association | 50.11% | 47.9% | 53.04% | 59.18%* |

Note: Tests of statistical significance between individuals in a given cluster vs. all other indivuals. Bootstrapped std. errors with 500 replications. * = p < 0.1, ** = p < 0.05 , *** = p < 0.01

*Source*: NORC at the University of Chicago, with LAPOP's AmericasBarometer data

**Figure A2.4. 2019 Cluster Results**




*Source*: NORC at the University of Chicago, with LAPOP's AmericasBarometer data

## Table A2.4. 2019 cluster results (percentage of individuals in cluster within each category)

| Variable | Democratic Institutionalists | Military Interventionists | Authoritarians | Presidentialists |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (47.2% of Bolivians) | (21.2% of Bolivians) | (12.1% of Bolivians) | (10.6% of Bolivians) |
| Female | 47.98% | 52.10% | 48.53% | 47.75% |
| Age: 18-29 | 27.58%*** | 43.42%*** | 38.73% | 34.27% |
| Age: 30-59 | 56.05%*** | 49.02% | 45.1%* | 46.07% |
| Age: 60+ | 16.37%* | 7.56%*** | 16.18% | 19.66%* |
| Race: white | 7.93% | 6.16%** | 10.29% | 12.36% |
| Race: mestizo | 62.59% | 65.27%* | 57.84% | 55.06%* |
| Race: indigenous | 12.72% | 10.92% | 11.76% | 11.24% |
| Race: black | 3.15% | 4.76% | 2.45% | 4.49% |
| Race: others | 13.60% | 12.89% | 17.65% | 16.85% |
| Lives in rural area | 30.48% | 31.37% | 36.76% | 30.34% |
| Wealth index quintile: 1 (Poorest) | 17.07%*** | 16.90% | 31.86%*** | 25.57%* |
| Wealth index quintile: 2 | 20.38% | 19.72% | 20.59% | 22.16% |
| Wealth index quintile: 3 | 22.68% | 21.41% | 17.16%* | 22.16% |
| Wealth index quintile: 4 | 18.47% | 19.15% | 17.16% | 18.18% |
| Wealth index quintile: 5 (Richest) | 21.40% | 22.82% | 13.24%*** | 11.93%*** |
| Years of educational attainment | 11.64*** | 11.64** | 9.70*** | 10.01*** |

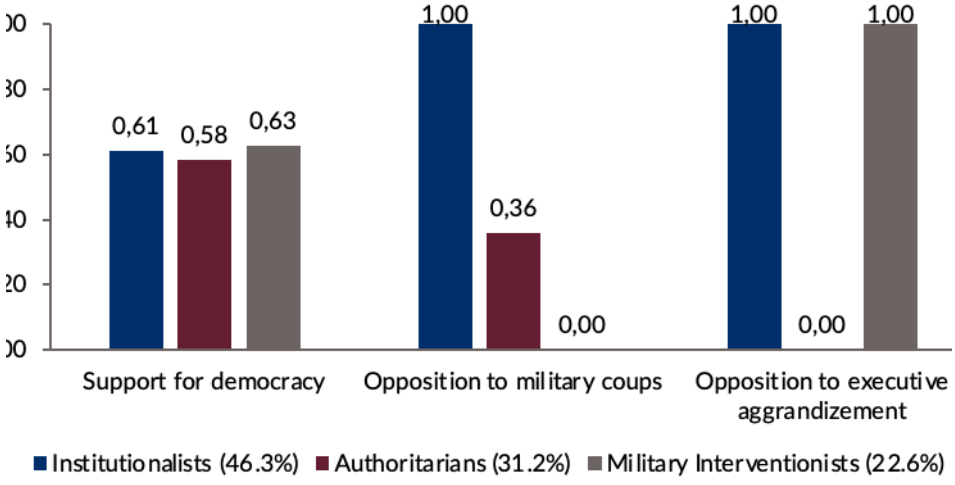
| Variable | Democratic Institutionalists (47.2% of Bolivians) | Military Interventionists (21.2% of Bolivians) | Authoritarians (12.1% of Bolivians) | Presidentialists (10.6% of Bolivians) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Was victim of a crime in the past 12 months | 25.31%** | 32.77%** | 26.96% | 21.35%* |
| People in neighborhood who were victim of a crime | 28.11% | 27.53% | 29.01% | 27.63% |
| Number of corruption instances experienced in the past 12 months | 59.82%*** | 71.43% | 75% | 66.29% |
| People in neighborhood who experienced at least one corruption instance | 37.74% | 37.79% | 38.98% | 38.08% |
| Approves of the performance of the President | 46.13% | 37.01%*** | 49.51% | 60.67%*** |
| Believes that they understand important political issues | 42.71% | 38.75% | 37.31% | 34.46%** |
| Believes that those who govern are interested in what people think | 43.41% | 38.7%* | 40.30% | 42.86% |
| Voted in the last presidential elections | 84.76%*** | 78.71% | 73.53%** | 77.53% |
| Participated in a demonstration or protest in the past 12 months | 13.73%*** | 19.89%* | 18.14% | 14.61% |

| Variable | Democratic Institutionalists (47.2% of Bolivians) | Military Interventionists (21.2% of Bolivians) | Authoritarians (12.1% of Bolivians) | Presidentialists (10.6% of Bolivians) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Attends meetings of a community improvement association | 51.51% | 49.30% | 60.78%*** | 50.56% |

Note: Tests of statistical significance between individuals in a given cluster vs. all other individuals. Bootstrapped std. errors with 500 replications. * = p < 0.1, ** = p < 0.05 , *** = p < 0.01

*Source*: NORC at the University of Chicago, with LAPOP's AmericasBarometer data

**Figure A2.5. 2021 Cluster Results**




*Source*: NORC at the University of Chicago, with LAPOP's AmericasBarometer data

## Table A2.5. 2021 cluster results (percentage of individuals in cluster within each category)

| Variable | Institutionalists (46.3% of Bolivians) | Authoritarians (31.2% of Bolivians) | Military Interventionists (22.6% of Bolivians) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Female | 51.92% | 49.89% | 55.95% |
| Age: 18-29 | 28.18%** | 36.01% | 40.08%* |
| Age: 30-59 | 61.82%** | 55.95% | 48.52%** |
| Age: 60+ | 10% | 8.05% | 11.40% |
| Race: white | 7.50% | 13.04% | 9.78% |
| Race: mestizo | 58.74% | 51.66% | 56.32% |
| Race: indigenous | 23.06% | 19.52% | 22.58% |
| Race: black | 1.68%* | 3.55% | 4.56% |
| Race: other | 9.02% | 12.23% | 6.76% |
| Rural area | 13.25% | 13.37% | 16.53% |
| Wealth Index Quintile - Poorest | 17.96% | 23.62% | 21.19% |
| Wealth Index Quintile - 2 | 20.99% | 17.50% | 20.49% |
| Wealth Index Quintile - 3 | 19.84% | 20.19% | 19.74% |
| Wealth Index Quintile - 4 | 19.04% | 22.35% | 17.56% |
| Wealth Index Quintile - Richest | 22.17% | 16.35% | 21.01% |
| Level of education: None | 2.28% | 1.29% | 0%*** |
| Level of education: Primary | 13.85% | 13.16% | 13.52% |
| Level of education: Secondary | 44.43%*** | 63.32%*** | 51.52% |
| Level of education: Tertiary | 39.43%*** | 22.23%*** | 34.96% |
| Number of corruption instances experienced in the past 12 months | 0.14 | 0.14 | 0.1 |

| Variable | Institutionalists (46.3% of Bolivians) | Authoritarians (31.2% of Bolivians) | Military Interventionists (22.6% of Bolivians) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Approves of the performance of the President | 30.38% | 37.22%* | 26.15% |

Note: Tests of statistical significance between individuals in a given cluster vs. all other individuals. Bootstrapped std. errors with 500 replications. * = p < 0.1, ** = p < 0.05 , *** = p < 0.01.

*Source*: NORC at the University of Chicago, with LAPOP's AmericasBarometer data

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Revista Latinoamericana de Opinión Pública

Ediciones Universidad Salamanca

# TRENDS IN DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES: BOLIVIA 2004-2021

Daniel E. Moreno Morales

Moreno Morales, D. E. (2023). Trends in Democratic Attitudes: Bolivia 2004-2021. *Revista Latinoamericana de Opinión Pública*, *12*(2), 81-117. https://doi.org/10.14201/rlop.31385

ISSN: 1852-9003 - eISSN: 2660-700X
DOI: https://doi.org/10.14201/rlop.31387

# THE RESILIENCE OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES UNDER DIFFICULT CONDITIONS. THE CASE OF GUATEMALA 2012-2021

## *La resiliencia de los valores democráticos bajo condiciones difíciles. El caso de Guatemala 2012-2021*

## *A resiliência de valores democráticos sob condições difíceis. O caso da Guatemala 2012-2021*

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Submission: 2023-05-07
Accepted: 2023-12-04
First View: 2023-12-30
Publication: 2023-12-31

***Keywords:***
*democratic attitudes; satisfaction with democracy; cluster analysis; Guatemala*

**Abstract**
This article describes the evolution of democratic attitudes in Guatemala between 2012 and 2021 and identifies, at the political system level, the contextual factors that have contributed to changes in attitudes over time. For this purpose, we trace the linkages between recent political, economic, and social development indicators/trends and public opinion data. Based on cluster analysis of nationally representative survey data, we group of citizens with distinct patterns of democratic attitudes. Those "institutionalists", who express consistent support for democratic institutions, comprise the largest share of respondents in all the examined years, although that share decreases in the more recent surveys. The research sustains that democratic values among Guatemalans are resistant despite the establishment's attempts to hinder anti-corruption processes. Civic mobilization demanding accountability, justice, and respect of electoral results confirm this democratic resilience, despite the institutional setbacks.

*Palabras clave:*
*actitudes democráticas; satisfacción con la democracia; análisis de clusters; Guatemala*

**Resumen**
Este artículo describe la evolución de las actitudes democráticas en Guatemala entre el 2012 y el 2021 e identifica, al nivel del sistema político, los factores contextuales que han contribuido a los cambios actitudinales en el tiempo. Para este propósito, se analizan los vínculos entre el desarrollo político, económico y social reciente y datos de opinión pública. En base a "*cluster* análisis" de datos de encuestas representativas a nivel nacional, agrupamos a los ciudadanos según distintos patrones de actitudes democráticas. Aquellos "institucionalistas", quienes expresan apoyo consistente con las instituciones democráticas, conforman la proporción más grande de entrevistados en todos los años, aunque con una caída en las encuestas más recientes. Se considera que los valores democráticos entre los guatemaltecos son resistentes a pesar de los intentos del *establishment* de obstaculizar procesos anti-corrupción. Movilizaciones cívicas demandando rendición de cuentas, justicia y respeto a los resultados electorales evidencian esta reserva democrática, a pesar de los retrocesos en materia institucional.

*Palavras-chave:*
*atitudes democráticas; satisfação com a democracia; análise de cluster; Guatemala*

**Resumo**
Este artigo descreve a evolução das atitudes democráticas na Guatemala entre 2012 e 2021 e identifica, no sistema político, os fatores contextuais que contribuíram para as mudanças atitudinais ao longo do tempo. Para tanto, são analisados os vínculos entre desenvolvimento político, económico e social e dados de opinião pública. Com base na análise de cluster de dados de pesquisas de opinião pública representativas a nível nacional, agrupamos os cidadãos de acordo com diferentes padrões de atitudes democráticas. Os "institucionalistas", que expressam um apoio consistente às instituições democráticas, constituem a maior proporção de entrevistados em todos os anos, embora tenha ocorrido uma queda nas pesquisas de opinião pública mais recentes. Os valores democráticos entre os guatemaltecos são vistos como resistentes, apesar das tentativas do establishment de obstaculizar os processos anti-corrupção. As mobilizações cívicas que exigem prestação de contas, justiça e respeito aos resultados eleitorais evidenciam esta reserva democrática, apesar dos retrocessos em matéria institucional.

## 1. INTRODUCTION*

Many recent reports on Guatemala's political regime written in the last years have alerted about a democratic backsliding (e. g. Stuenkel, 2023), that is a state-led deterioration of political institutions that sustain democracy (Bermeo, 2016).

* The author acknowledges support from the Agencia Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo-Chile (ANID; SIA Project SA77210008 and FONDECYT Regular Project 1220193) and from the Centre for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies (COES; CONICYT/FONDAP/151330009). The research supporting this article was partially sponsored by Central European University Foundation of Budapest (CEUBPF). The theses explained herein represent the ideas of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CEUBPF. The author would like to thank María José Ibáñez for excellent research assistance, and two anonymous reviewers for their generous and constructive feedback.

Relevant progress in the fight against high-level corruption (of the type that, for example, led to the incarceration of former president Otto Pérez Molina in 2015), were hampered by the counter offensive of the criminal oligarchy that has controlled Guatemalan politics since the 1996 Peace Agreements established after the civil war (Schwartz & Isaacs, 2023). In the latest electoral process, this criminal-oligarchic elite attempted to continue ruling the country by manipulating the supply of presidential candidates. The Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) and the attorney-general's office (*Ministerio Público* – MP), along with the courts, established arbitrary sanctions to candidates that did not align with the interests of the traditional elites, presumably with the consent of the incumbent president Alejandro Giammattei. National and international pessimism had already spread when, surprisingly, a social-democrat and apparently inconsequential candidacy grew from 2.9 % of voting intention in the last polls before first-round election, (Meléndez & Perelló, 2023) up to winning the presidency in a ballotage by a landslide (60.9 % of the valid vote). Despite constant and varied reactions of corrupted elites to impede Bernardo Arevalo's triumph, the majoritarian support behind this candidacy made victory inevitable. How is it possible that, under a corrupt and authoritarian clique governing the country by replicating wartime institutions designed to undermine the formal functions of the state in favor of corrupt elites (Schwartz, 2022), and considering a weak party system, a progressive anti-establishment and new political party came to power despite unfair and uncompetitive elections?

Part of the explanation of these surprising electoral results points to the resilience of democratic values in a significant share of Guatemalans. Guatemala's political culture has been shaped by the legacies of authoritarian rule. In comparison to other Latin American countries, Guatemala's public opinion stands out by showing higher levels of trust in the Armed Forces, low interest on and scarce knowledge of politics, and low levels of participation in political parties (Azpuru, 2023). However, during the period under study (2012-2019), around half of the population classifies as ideal democrats sharing full opposition to military coups and presidential aggrandizement (Introduction to the special issue). The existing assessments of democratic backsliding in Guatemala have focused on the role of state actors but has underestimated the importance of political culture characteristics in society as a resource for confronting backsliding and for democratic resilience. When the Guatemalan citizenry found specific political opportunities for expressing their strong democratic values (e. g. backing judicial processes against corrupt politicians or voting in favor of democratic candidates), their democratic commitment becomes clearer to political observers.

The purpose of this paper is to show some evidence about long-standing political culture characteristics of Guatemalan society than can help explain why, under certain conditions, the attempts of corrupt and authoritarian elites to control

power do not succeed. Social protest manifestations (2015 citizens' unrest backing anti-corruption fighting) and massive voting for anti-establishment candidates (2023 Arévalo's surprising election) are a couple of instances of democratic resistance from below in a political context dominated by corrupt elites. These two events are far from "surprising" and might be better understood as manifestations of Guatemalans' civic culture triggered by political opportunities. Based on cluster analysis of public opinion data, this paper explores the democratic demand side of Guatemalan society in the last decade, and how these shared values can be positively employed to oppose democratic backsliding.

## 2. CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

Guatemala's political culture has been shaped by the legacies of authoritarian rule. Leftist political organizations were banned for long periods until the 1996 peace agreement, and the political parties that have competed under democratic rules since then mostly represent elite interests (Gálvez, 2000). In a context of post-conflict reconstruction, the integration of democratically organized communities did not reach ideal standards (Sieder, 2007). To mobilize the electorate, political parties used to hire political entrepreneurs and brokers who rely on vote buying and intimidation tactics to secure electoral support (Gonzáles-Ocantos *et al.*, 2020). Not surprisingly, international organizations tend to refer to Guatemala as a "corporate mafia state" built on a coalition of traditional oligarchs, police and military officials, and common criminals (Amnesty International, 2002). Specially, in the last decades, a "criminal oligarchy" –a power concentration derived from illicit and licit wealth– has grown stronger (Schwartz & Isaacs, 2023) through the use of civil war legacies that designed the "wrong kind" of political institutions to undermine the formal functions of the state, directing them in favor of private interests (Schwartz, 2022).

When it comes to the political regime, liberal democratic indicators showed a positive increased since the democratization process started in 1986 until 2015, when they decayed rapidly (V-Dem, 2023). In the last years, regarding the political system, Guatemala can be characterized as a democracy where informal political institutions often trump formal institutions and allow corrupt powers to dominate, civil society is fragmented, and the state is generally weak. Guatemala's party system exhibits high levels of electoral volatility, highly personalized parties, and declining legitimacy of political parties and elections (Sánchez, 2008). The generalized disillusionment with political institutions has left Guatemala as a potential case for the rise of populism, the style that has characterized recent presidents like Jimmy Morales (Althoff, 2019) and political leaders like Carlos Pineda (Meléndez-Sánchez & Gamboa, 2023).

Under these structural and institutional conditions, upholding democratic values has been difficult. However, since the early 2010s, the period under study, two developments were key to challenge the criminal oligarchy control-schema and gave optimism to democratic forces, one that is probably comparable to the one experienced during the signing of the peace accords in 1996. First, a series of trials related to human-rights violations committed during the civil war by members of the army, that brought dictator Efraín Ríos Montt and other members of the high-ranked military rankings to national court. Actually, the specialized literature on post-transitional justice has shown the positive role played by Guatemalan High Courts in the prosecution of Human Rights violations and other armed-conflict crimes years after they were committed and apparently sealed by the elites (Gutiérrez, 2015). Second, the increasing recent judicialization of Guatemalan politics, with trials of corrupt high-ranking politicians, that despite the transition from an authoritarian rule to democratic standards, took advantage of their access to power to set up corruption rings. The latter case, that was accompanied by a wave of citizens' public demonstrations in favor of the process, merits some explanation.

The International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (*Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad en Guatemala*, CICIG) was created in 2007 at the request of the Guatemalan government and with the support of the United Nations. CICIG helped launch over 200 investigations into hundreds of government officials and more than 30 criminal organizations. Its greatest impact was perhaps achieved through the corruption charges against then-president Otto Pérez-Molina in 2015, who subsequently resigned and is currently under arrest.

One of the major consequences of the anti-corruption drive was an unprecedented civic mobilization of Guatemalans demanding accountability and justice. In 2015, hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans took to the streets to protest impunity and violence. During approximately twenty weeks, people demonstrated as individuals mobilizing against corruption rather than as representatives of their social organizations, which explains the non-violent tone that made participation increase (Bennet, 2016). These demonstrations took place simultaneously with similar civic movements in El Salvador and Honduras and were framed as a "democratic spring" in Central America (e. g. Swchwartz & Isaacs, 2023). Although the CICIG's work received social support, it also provoked its own opposition. According to personal interviews conducted to United Nations officials, CICIG had the capacity to "polarize" Guatemala[1]. Political parties of the establishment –not benefited from CICIG's investigations– and their followers attacked the CICIG's

1. Personal interviews conducted to two former United Nations' officials in Guatemala City during the first week of August 2023.

prestige by stigmatizing it as partisan. The then-president Jimmy Morales did not renew the CICIG's mandate in 2019, stalling the advances of an accountability shock to a political system characterized by rampant corruption and abuse of power. Under Giammattei's tenure, MP lawyers associated with the CICIG were fired, consolidating a severe setback on the fight against corruption. However, the citizens' defense of the CICIG had demonstrated the existence of solid democratic forces among Guatemalans despite the authoritarian and corrupted manipulations of the elites.

This study describes the continuities and fluctuations of democratic attitudes in Guatemala between 2012 and 2021 and identifies the system-level, contextual factors that have allowed to expose publicly the democratic resilience present at the individual-level. To describe the trends of democratic attitudes, this research draws on National Opinion Research Center's (NORC) cluster analysis, which identifies groups of citizens with distinct patterns of democratic attitudes in each of the five waves of the Americas Barometer data, a methodology described in the introduction to this special issue. To enrich the analysis, we also examine the evolution of public opinion on specific issues like satisfaction with democracy and presidential approval. To identify the contextual factors that have contributed to bring out these attitudes, we trace the linkages between recent political, economic, and social developments and public opinion.

Three main findings emerge from the cluster analysis and additional examination of survey data. First, institutionalists, who express consistent support for democratic institutions (and are opponents to coups and executive aggrandizement), comprise the largest share of respondents in all years, albeit with a decline in more recent surveys. Second, support for democracy is moderate and stable in all clusters during the period under study, while support for inclusion and tolerance are lower. Third, these data show that as the level of democracy declined in Guatemala, support for democracy also waned. However, the support for democracy in Guatemala in the period under study (2012-2021) is resilient despite democratic setbacks at the regime level and citizens' disillusionment operated by the legitimation of impunity in events such as the dissolution of CICIG in 2019.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. First, we analyze the evolution of support for democracy and other democratic attitudes using NORC's cluster analysis. In addition to describing the relative size of clusters over time, we examine the evolution of specific democratic attitudes across clusters as well as the clusters' salient socioeconomic characteristics. In the following section, we examine additional public opinion data on support for and satisfaction with democracy to further document and explain the recent deterioration of the political institutions in the country. The final section summarizes the main findings and describes some consequences of recent events on trust in political institutions.

## 3. CLUSTER ANALYSIS: METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

The empirical public opinion evidence of this article follows NORC's methodology for cluster analysis (see Introduction) to classify Guatemalans into groups or "clusters" with distinct attitudinal profiles. The aim is to maximize similarity within each cluster while maximizing dissimilarity between clusters. As explained in the introduction to this special issue, one advantage of cluster analysis compared to other classification schemes is that it is highly inductive, meaning that it lets respondents speak for themselves without making assumptions in advance about how to group them. This cluster analysis used the five democratic attitudes to generate clusters explained in the introduction of this special issue: support for democracy, opposition to military coups, opposition to executive aggrandizement, and tolerance of protest and regime critics. NORC's methodology groups into four families that share a set of defining characteristics: institutionalists (including institutionalist and inclusionary institutionalists), military interventionists, presidentialists, and authoritarians[2]. The introduction of the special issue provides more detailed information regarding the study's methodology.

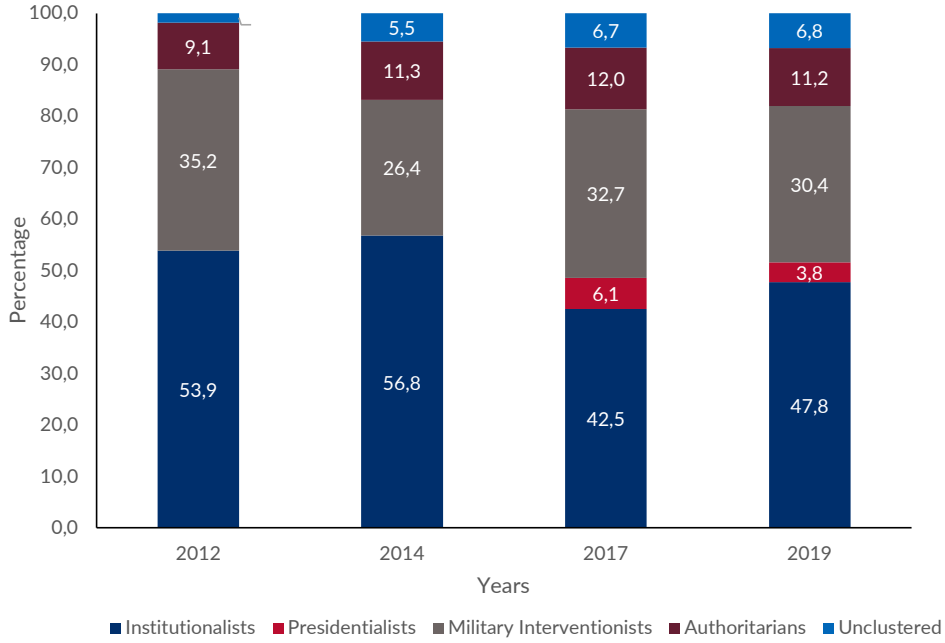
### *A) Cluster Shares Over Time In Guatemala*

Figure 1 shows the relative size of these cluster families in Guatemala from 2012 to 2019. Institutionalists make up the largest group during the period under study (53.9 percent in 2012, 56.8 percent in 2014, 42.5 percent in 2017, and 47.8 percent in 2019). While this cluster is also the largest overall in the region (53 % in 2012, 53.1 % in 2014, 52.3 % in 2016/2017, and 49.3 % in 2018/2019), there are important features that make it more relevant for understanding Guatemala. The institutionalist cluster's predominance is one of the central features of contemporary Guatemalan politics despite elite-level events that have failed to fulfill the democratic promises made by the anti-corruption advances. The citizen protests' wave in 2015 –an anti-corruption mobilization triggered by CICIG's investigations– was interpreted as a new era of citizen accountability and an important sign of progress in a country taken over by corruption rings (Beltrán, 2016). Disappointment with the impunity backlash, and the subsequent dissolution of CICIG, may have contributed to a decline in support for democratic institutions and to the decrease of the share of the institutionalist cluster to below 50 percent of the population between 2014 and 2017 (below the Latin America standards). That being said, it remains significantly higher than the corresponding shares of

2. The following percentages of individuals remained unclustered: 1.8 % (in 2012), 5.5 % (in 2014), 6.7 % (in 2017), and 6.8 % (in 2019).

military interventionists. This should be understood as evidence of a democratic commitment among Guatemalans.

**Figure 1. Evolution of Cluster Families, 2012-2019**




*Source:* LAPOP Lab. 2023.

Military interventionists –those individuals that exhibit less than full opposition to military coups but full opposition to executive aggrandizement– made up around one-third of the population in the 2012-2019 period. In 2012, 35.2 percent of the sample was grouped into this category. Although this percentage fell to 26.4 two years later, it reached 32.7 in 2017 and 30.4 in 2019. This confirms the persistence of demand for military "mano dura" as well. Although a major variation within this cluster from 2014 and 2017 (more than 6-point increase) might be presumably tied to a reaction towards impunity regarding the corruption crimes revealed by CICIG. A hypothetical reasoning at the individual level could have been that if democratic elected political leaders were not willing to secure anti-corruption processes, military interventions might. Although support for mano dura used to be linked to insecurity or crime victimization in Guatemala (e. g. Azpuru & Zeichmeister, 2014), we cannot rule out that this specific noticeable increase could have a relationship with citizens' disappointment with

civilian rulers, especially since this cluster also expresses full opposition to executive aggrandizement.

Authoritarians –those individuals characterized by full opposition to both military coups and executive aggrandizement– remained stable at between 9.1 and 12.0 percent of the population during the 2012-2019 period. While institutionalists and military interventionists have fluctuated more due to advances and setbacks on anti-corruption measures, support for more extensive authoritarian erosion appears untouched by any of these events. Finally, presidentialists –those individuals characterized by less full opposition to executive aggrandizement but full opposition to military coups– were first identified as a distinct group in 2017 when they comprised 6.1 percent of the sample and fell to 3.8 percent in 2019. Perhaps Jimmy Morales' refusal to renew CICIG's mandate for another four-year period might have decreased the group of Guatemalans not fully opposed to executive aggrandizement.

### *B) Trends In Democratic Attitudes Across Clusters*

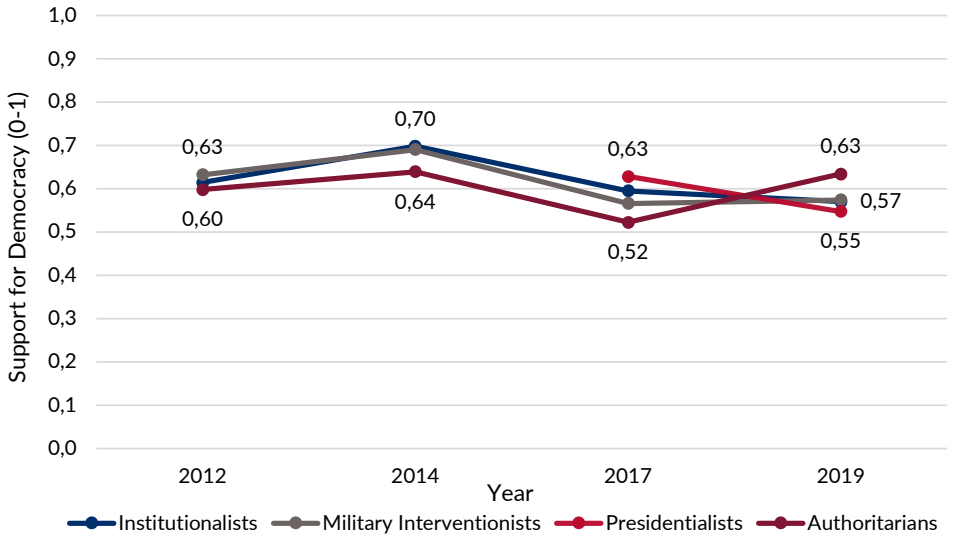
This section describes the evolution of each cluster's average democratic attitudes scores. It focuses on support for democracy, tolerance of protest and regime critics, and support for democratic inclusion. Scores range from zero to one, with higher values indicating more democratic attitudes. Opposition to military coups and opposition to executive aggrandizement are not discussed because their averages do not vary within clusters[3].

Figure 2 plots the evolution of average support for democracy across clusters. It shows that levels of support for democracy among institutionalists were medium-to-high and similar to those in other clusters. Military interventionists and presidentialists displayed considerable support for democracy despite their respective support of military coups and executive aggrandizement. Changes in average scores for these clusters followed the general trend. Authoritarians also exhibited relatively high levels of support for democracy, but their evolution was different. Average support for democracy fluctuated in accordance with national

3. As discussed above, scores for opposition to military coups and opposition to executive aggrandizement are the defining characteristics of the various clusters. Institutionalists have full opposition to coups and full opposition to executive aggrandizement, and corresponding values of one for both attitudes. Military interventionists have no opposition to coups and full opposition to executive aggrandizement, and corresponding values of zero and one. Presidentialists have full opposition to coups and no opposition to executive aggrandizement, and corresponding values of one and zero. Authoritarians have no opposition to coups and no opposition to executive aggrandizement, and corresponding values of zero for both attitudes.

trends from 2012 to 2017 but deviated in 2019. While support for democracy among the rest of the clusters dropped from 2017 to 2019 (0.60 to 0.57 among institutionalists, 0.58 to 0.57 among military interventionists, 0.63 to 0.55 among presidentialists), it increased from 0.52 to 0.63 among authoritarians.

**Figure 2. Evolution of Support for Democracy by Cluster Family**

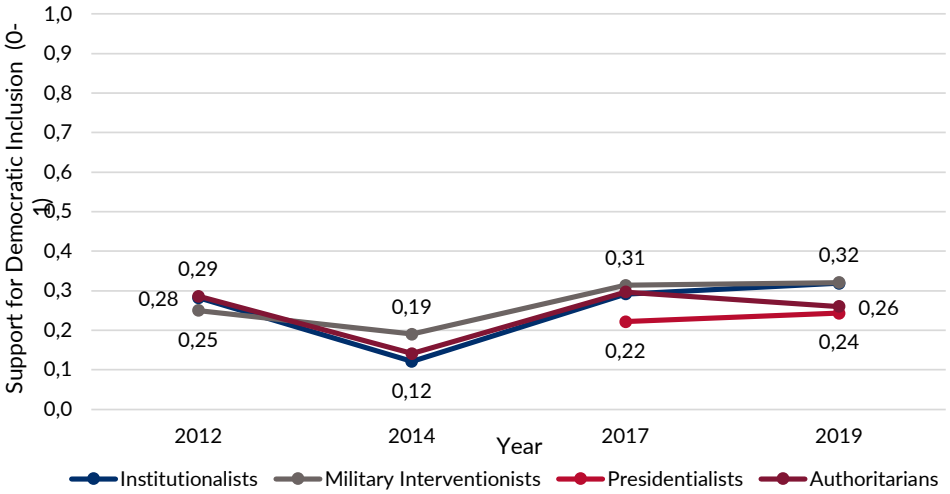



*Source:* LAPOP Lab. 2023.

Figure 3 shows that average support in favor of minorities (such as homosexuals) in the recognition of their political participation rights, a topic in which Guatemala shows the lowest support in the Americas (Rodríguez, 2021). The trends are rather similar across clusters between 2012 and 2019 (reduction of the support between 2012 and 2014, increase between 2014 and 2017, and stabilization between 2017 and 2019), with the exception of 2019's drop (from 0.30 to 0.26) among authoritarians. For previous research on this topic in Guatemala (e. g. Azpuru & Zeichmeister, 2014), we know that the two major variables that explain positions in favor of homosexuals' participation in politics are religiosity and education, but these factors have not changed dramatically in the period under study according to LAPOP's data (Rodríguez, 2021). It is important to mention that during the period of analysis, Jimmy Morales –an evangelical comedian connected with Christian networks, media outlets and churches– emerged as a political figure, first, and was later elected president, trying to politically capitalize a social conservative agenda including his opposition to LGTB rights (Althoff, 2019). His

right-wing populist character might have taken advantage of the weak support for democratic inclusion of minorities shown for the period under study.

**Figure 3. Evolution of Support for Democratic Inclusion by Cluster Family**

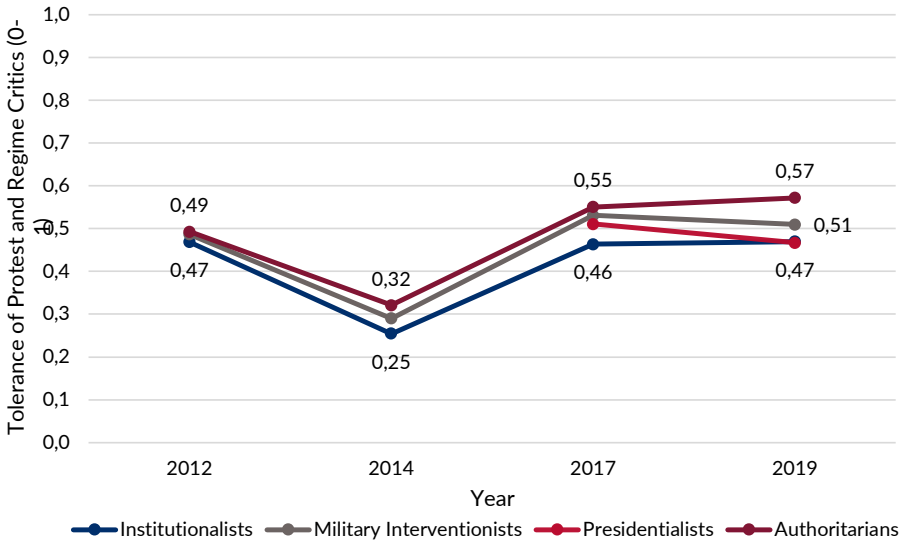



*Source:* LAPOP Lab. 2023.

Figure 4 shows the evolution of average scores for tolerance of protests of individuals that criticize the regime across clusters. We observe a dramatic increase between 2014 and 2017 across clusters (institutionalists from 0.25 to 0.46, military interventionists from 0.30 to 0.52, and authoritarians from 0.32 to 0.55) and relative stability thereafter (institutionalists from 0.46 to 0.47, military interventionists from 0.52 to 0.51, and authoritarians from 0.55 to 0.57), except for a decrease among presidentialists (from 0.51 to 0.47). As noted earlier, Guatemala's democratic spring occurred when CICIG's investigations gained public notoriety. Thousands of Guatemalans participated in demonstrations against the political establishment, not only criticizing the Pérez-Molina government but demanding accountability and justice. These events likely shaped the tolerance for protests and regime critics across all clusters. By 2014, the Attorney's General Office and CICIG had brought charges against judges that issued "illegal judicial decisions" to protect criminal networks and corrupt officials (Batz, 2022). By then, the initial manifestations of the Guatemalan democratic spring were gaining public attention, which was reflected in the attitudinal changes of individuals. A noticeably characteristic of Guatemalan protests is that the anti-corruption rethoric (at least in this cycle of protests) included both progressive and conservative civil society

groups, ranging from human rights movements to religious, anti-abortion and anti-LGTB agendas (Pereyra *et al.*, 2023) which manifest its powerful impact on the national political process. Even the effect of anti-corruption claims at the national level have had an impact on how organized younger generations –specially in Mayan communities– have challenged the political culture of impunity at the level of municipal governments (Burrell *et al.*, 2020).

**Figure 4. Evolution of Tolerance of Protest of Regime Critics by Cluster Family**




*Source:* LAPOP Lab. 2023.

## *C) Cluster Characteristics*

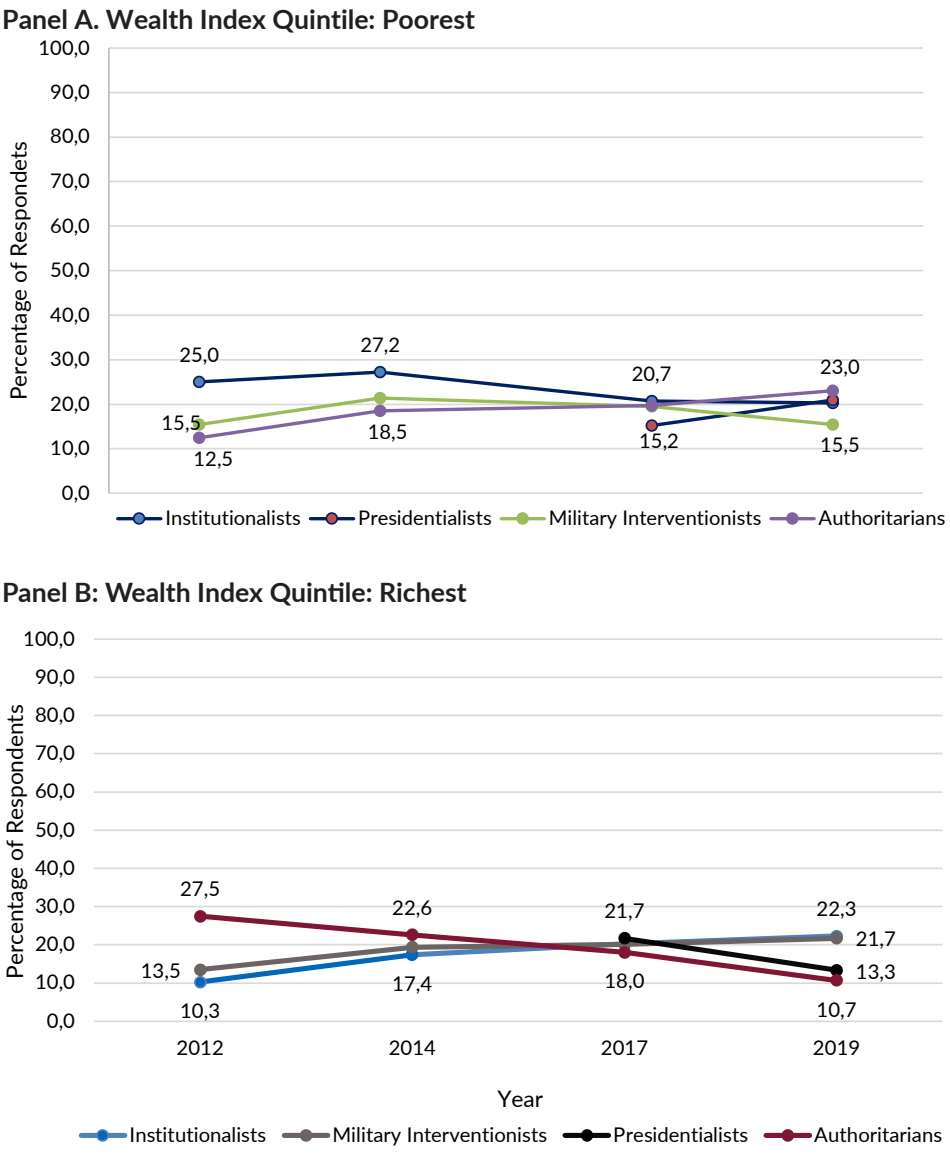
NORC's cluster analysis for Guatemala identified the demographic, socioeconomic, geographic, and other characteristics that significantly distinguish respondents in each cluster from the rest of the sample for each survey wave. The study examined several variables, including age, gender, wealth, race, education, crime victimization, corruption victimization, political efficacy (the belief that politicians respond to citizens' preferences), and political participation. There are few stable patterns across clusters in all waves, and the differences among clusters are substantially small. These caveats aside, there are some interesting differences to focus on.

Differences among clusters are not merely a matter of democratic values; structural factors might have an impact on their configuration. Accordingly, it is necessary to analyze income and education as indicators of the clusters' socioeconomic status. Regarding income, Figure 5 shows the evolution of the percentage of respondents at the bottom, poorest wealth quintile (Panel A) and the top, richest wealth quintile (Panel B) across clusters in Guatemala. First, the percentage of institutionalists in the poorest quintile declined from 25.0 to 20.3 between 2012 and 2019 (although with a temporary increase to 27.1 in 2014), while the percentage of institutionalists in the richest quintile increased from 10.3 to 22.3. In contrast, the percentage of authoritarians in the poorest quintile increased from 12.5 to 23.0. Two contradictory trends in two opposed groups in terms of wealth. Second, the share of authoritarians in the poorest quintile (Panel A) increased steadily from 12.5 in 2012 to 23.0 % in 2019. Again, in the richest quintile, a reversed trend is found: the percentage of authoritarians declined from 27.5 to 10.7 in the same period. The economic patterns are less clear for military interventionists and presidentialists[4]. Also, presidentialists follow a similar pattern to the authoritarians: an increase among the poorest (from 15.2 % in 2017 to 22.0 % in 2019) and a decreased among the richest (from 21.7 % in 2017 to 13.3 % in 2019). While among the poorest quintile, Institutionalist resist, Authoritarians (and Presidentialists) grow along the period. Among the richest quintile, Institutionalist gain terrain, while Authoritarians (and Presidentialists) decrease. Although more systematized information is needed, the patterns show a relationship between democratic values and wealth income that should be explored in further research. As a plausible consequence, the increase in democratic values among the elites can explain why the corrupted oligarchies cannot continue abusing arbitrary measures regarding the fate of the political regime.

Figure 6 shows the evolution of the average years of schooling across clusters, which reflects a slight upward trend. There are clear, noteworthy trends for institutionalists and military interventionists, with Guatemalans in both clusters becoming more educated over time. Among institutionalists, the average number of school years increased from 6.8 in 2012 and 6.1 in 2014 to 8.5 in 2017 and 8.5 in 2019. Among military interventionists, the average number of school years increased from 7.0 in 2012 and 6.5 in 2014 to 8.0 in 2017 and 8.3 in 2019. Since 2014, Authoritarians remain the least educated cluster. Presidentialists also decline from 7.6 in 2017 to 7.2 in 2019 and, also, remain the least educated group. Since 2017, Institutionalists are noticeable as the most educated cluster.

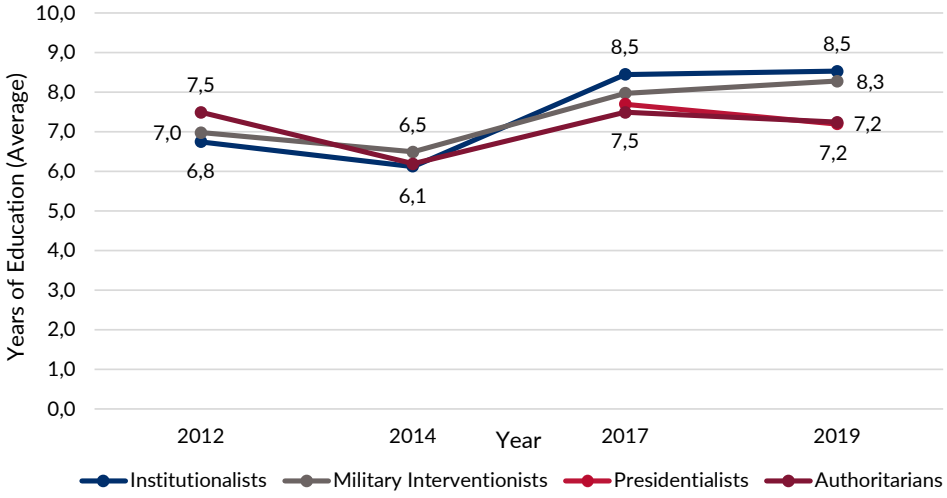
4. Military interventionists, in the poorest quintile, passed from 15.5 % in 2012, to 20.3 % in 2014, to 20.0 % in 2016, and went back to 15.5 in 2019 (Panel A). In the richest quintile, this group increased from 13.5 % in 2012 to 20.0 % in 2014, to 20.2 % in 2017 and 21.7 % in 2019 (Panel B).

## Figure 5. Evolution of Percentage of Clusters in Poorest and Wealthiest Quintiles




*Source:* LAPOP Lab. 2023.

**Figure 6. Evolution of Averages of Years of Education by Clusters**




*Source:* LAPOP Lab. 2023.

## 4. UNDERSTANDING CHANGE IN SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY

In this section we examine changes over time in satisfaction with democracy between 2004 and 2021. While the cluster analysis sheds light on changes in democratic attitudes in Guatemala, additional analysis of satisfaction with democracy allows for a clearer understanding of the factors shaping Guatemalan's views about democracy. To assess levels of satisfaction with democracy, the Americas Barometer asks: "In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the way democracy works in [country]?" In Figure 7, we plot the percentage of respondents who say they are either "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the functioning of democracy in Guatemala. We also plot the percentage of Guatemalans who approve of the executive because of the incumbent's performance. We also show the incumbent in power at the time of each survey wave.

On the one hand, satisfaction with democracy reached its highest levels –in the period under analysis– following the electoral defeat of former dictator Rios Montt in 2003 (50-51 % in 2004 and 2006, respectively) and the citizen mobilization related to the anti-corruption investigations of CICIG during the 2015 democratic spring (55 % in 2017). On the other hand, periods of low satisfaction

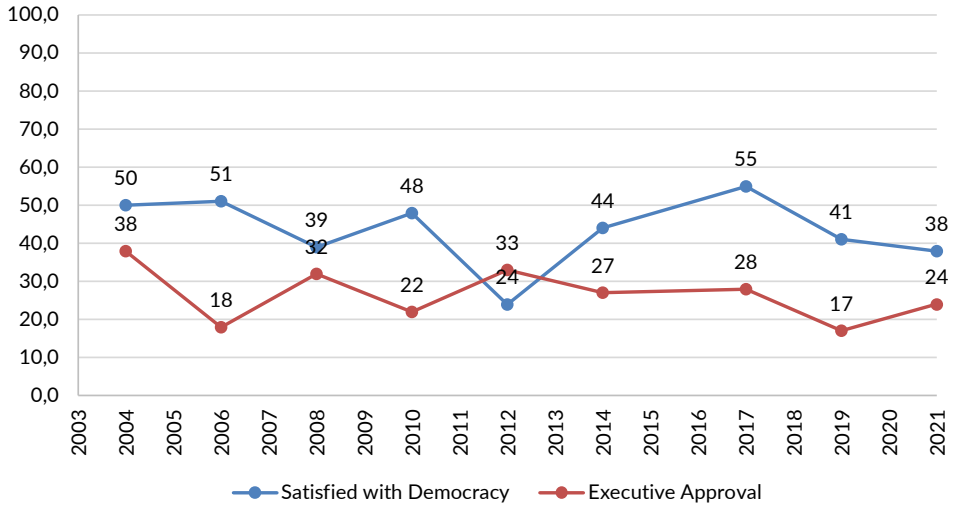
with democracy (39 % in 2008, and 24 % in 2012) come after the end of the tenures of Berger and Colom respectively, both of whom had poor approval ratings before leaving power (Berger 18 % in 2006, and Colom 22 %). The disillusionment with these two presidents (that might have been affected, among other factors, the dissatisfaction with democracy) comes in hand with moderate expectations of their substitutes. Colom in 2008 and Pérez Molina in 2012 started with 32 and 33 % of approval respectively, but with a declining satisfaction with democracy. We can identify a pattern between 2004 and 2012: Presidents start their administrations with their corresponding higher ratings ("honeymoons") but leave office with mediocre levels of approval. Disappointment with leaving rulers tend to decrease -among other factors- democratic support during these years[5].

We want to detail the reasons why citizens' disappointments with Berger and Colom, respectively, might have contributed to a decrease in democratic satisfaction after their respective tenures. Oscar Berger was elected in 2003 through a broad political platform (the Great National Alliance) as a democratic alternative to Montt's political legacy, the Christian right-wing conservative Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG). During the Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1996), previous administrations committed human rights abuses, massacres, and other crimes. Therefore, Berger's administration was expected, among other issues, to implement transitional justice mechanisms, reform the army, and recognize the state's responsibility for war crimes, but his administration turned out to be conservative in comparison to those expectations. Although his government attempted to develop a national reconciliation process, and agreed to the creation of CICIG, it did not necessarily meet the majoritarian hopes. Also, a state with weak capacities (in terms of resources and infrastructure) has had serious problems in delivering public goods which also contributed to the citizenship's disappointment (Sánchez, 2023). The sum of these factors added to the deterioration of hopes. Accordingly, Berger's approval ratings fell from 38 percent in 2004 to 18 percent in 2006.

Alvaro Colom's administration (2008-2012) was disappointing to the leftist camp that had elected him as the first left-wing president in 53 years. Originally elected with 53 percent of valid votes in 2007, his approval ratings dropped from 32 to 22 percent from 2008 to 2010. Although the government of Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza (UNE) (Colom's party) did not challenge the democratic political regime, the then-president was involved in apparent crimes of embezzlement of public funds and fraud in the purchase and subsidy of buses for a transportation system implemented during his term. These issues were investigated by

5. In Guatemala, Americas' Barometer surveys were consistently conducted during the first months of the year (February 2008, January-March 2010, March-April 2012, April-May2014, February-May 2017, and January-March 2019) reflecting the periods of presidential "honey moons" in those years were new presidents took office (for example, Colom in 2008, and Pérez Molina in 2012).

**Figure 7. Satisfaction with the Functioning of Democracy and Executive Approval, 2004–2021**




Note: "Satisfied with Democracy" is defined as the sum of the percentages of "Very Satisfied" and "Satisfied" responses.

*Source:* LAPOP Lab. 2023.

the Attorney General Office and CICIG[6]. However, levels of satisfaction with democracy remained high (48 percent in 2010) probably due to the intensive social programs implemented with clientelistic criteria. Emblematic social programs, actually, reinforced long-standing forms of exclusionary citizenship (Dotson 2014). These policies did not help sustainhigh levels of popularity for Colom nor for Sandra Torres, Colom's wife and First Lady, who had intentions to follow her husband in the presidency. The Constitutional Court ultimately banned her from running in the following election.

From 2012 onwards, this previously detailed pattern changed. The evolution of satisfaction with democracy took a dynamic much more independent from the performance of the presidents and more associated with the fight against corruption. This period is characterized by the increasing visibility of CICIG's in revealing the association between mafias and political elites, and the corresponding

6. BBC Mundo 2018. "El expresidente de Guatemala Álvaro Colom será enjuiciado por cargos de corrupción en el plan de modernización del transporte público". https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-43254025.

consequences on presidential instability and the politicization of this institution's performance.

Former general Pérez-Molina and his personalistic party (Patriotic Party) won the 2011 general elections but did not finish his tenure due to corruption scandals. An important point of his campaign was to offer 'mano dura' to fight crime. International prosecutors sponsored by the United Nations through CICIG along with the Attorney General's Office in Guatemala (Ministerio Público–MP) investigated Pérez-Molina's participation in a corruption ring called "La Línea", which was made public in September of 2015. As a result, he had to resign from the Presidency in 2015 amid intense social protests. After the interim tenure of Alejandro Maldonado (September 2015-January 2016), and likely influenced by the Guatemalan democratic spring provoked by CICIG's investigations and corruption trials, satisfaction with democracy reached a peak of 55 percent in 2017. Obviously, some other factors might have intervened in this rise, but noticeable the anti-corruption public manifestations were an event associated with democratic sensibilities among Guatemalans.

Levels of satisfaction with democracy went up from 24 % in 2012 (the lowest in the period under study) to 44 % in 2014 and 55 % in 2017, in the same period in which the CICIG-and the MP's office made important advances. This process –that ended in 2019 when then-president Morales refused to renew the CICIG's mandate– was supported by active citizens' mobilization which, in turn, had positively influenced optimism toward democracy among Guatemalans. A nationally representative survey conducted in mid-2016 indicated that 66.7 % of Guatemalans considered that the objectives of the social protests held the year before were achieved. Also, most Guatemalans noticed a cultural change, since 84.7 % considered that after the protests there was more availability to organize and protest, and 78.2 % that people had lost fear to protest (Donis 2016)[7]. Optimism was overwhelming. According to the same source, 83 % of Guatemalans was willing to protest in favor of CICIG and MP, 8 points higher that the share of individuals willing to protest for demanding public goods (Donis 2016).

However, the authoritarian counteroffensive perpetrated by the criminal oligarchy (Schwartz & Isaac 2023) rapidly spread pessimism among the Guatemalan citizenship. The governments of President Jimmy Morales (2016-2020), a former comedian and political outsider, and Alejandro Giammattei (2020-), a perennial presidential candidate who was elected after his fourth attempt, have been poorly regarded by citizens (17.3 percent approval in 2019 and 24.1 percent in 2021, respectively). Morales was investigated for irregularities during his electoral

7. In the same survey, 41.2 % of people interviewed considered that the main reason of the protest was to "fight against corruption", followed by "the resignation of Otto Pérez Molina". (Donis, J. 2016).

campaign and was involved in corruption scandals (Batz, 2022). Giammattei has also been investigated for irregular campaign financing, among other charges (Kitroeff, 2021). An aura of corruption has covered the last two administrations, which is reflected in the declining trend seen in their approval ratings, and in the political system in general (including legislative and courts), which might have also contributed to the fading satisfaction with democracy.

Other variables that might have potentially impacted on presidential approval ratings and satisfaction with the functioning of democracy are inflation, poverty, unemployment, or crime rates. We do not count with the systematic data to test these variables' influence on democratic satisfaction, so we cannot confirm or discard their impact. But we have developed a reasonable idea regarding how political corruption appears to be one of the driving factors behind the levels of satisfaction with democracy in Guatemala. Before the anti-corruption protests of 2015, levels of satisfaction to democracy in the country were below the regional average (44 % vs 52 % in 2014), but this share surpassed the regional average after the social unrest (55 % vs 41 % in 2017). However, after the oligarchic elite's counteroffensive, the corresponding percentage decreased to the regional levels and remained the same (41 % in 2019) (Castonera & Rosario, 2021). This comparison with regional trends reinforces the argument in favor of the impact of social protests on the peak of democratic satisfaction.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This article uses cluster analysis and additional survey results to examine trends in democratic attitudes in Guatemala. It shows that while institutionalists, who oppose both executive aggrandizement and military intervention in politics, constitute the largest group throughout the period under study –as in the rest of Latin America. But, although the size of this cluster and the support for democracy have declined in recent years, these indicators reveal the resilience of a democratic commitment among Guatemalans during episodes of harsh democratic backsliding at the regimen level. This commitment is expressed when political opportunity allows. The recent election of Bernardo Arévalo (Movimiento Semilla) as president –via a ballotage held in August 20th 2023– and the following defense of this electoral results are excellent examples of the match between democratic demand and democratic supply, despite the attempts of predominant members of the establishment to block his election and access to power.

The article relates these trends to domestic political events, focusing on Guatemala's anti-corruption efforts. Citizen mobilization against corrupt politicians temporarily bolstered –among other factors– democratic values. However, when impunity prevailed, disappointment with democracy grew. Most Guatemalans

have fluctuated between institutionalists and military interventionists, reflecting the country's uneven progress toward democracy, evidence that goes in line with those who claim the weakness of democratic values in the country (e. g. Azpuru, 2023). Actually, in this context, conservative and "mano dura" values contribute to support for military intervention as a valid alternative[8]. Structural factors, such as economic and social inequality, have hindered the growth of more liberal values and democratic beliefs. We do not deny the fact that Guatemala's democratic political culture is weak (especially compared to others in the region), but it has enough resistance to support anti-corruption processes and back democratic projects in specific critical junctures. Even anti-establishment electoral movements that use to represent authoritarian or illiberal agendas in other countries of the region (Meléndez, 2022), in Guatemala can embody democratic hopes, like the case of Movimiento Semilla.

Before concluding, it is worthy to briefly discuss the implications of recent political events on support for domestic political institutions. CICIG's investigations triggered citizen protests that positively affected democratic values: the institutionalist cluster along with this judicial process, and tolerance of protest of regime critics increased, even among authoritarians and military interventionists. However, the demand for accountability has also had negative consequences for institutional legitimacy. The level of distrust toward elections and political parties has increased in recent years, even before the 2023 general elections that had irregular exclusions of presidential candidates by the electoral authorities. Distrust of political parties reached 71 % in 2019 and distrust of elections reached 53 percent in 2021. Distrust toward the three branches of government is correlated, suggesting that the public views political institutions as lacking credibility in general, rather than limiting these perceptions to parties and elections. Distrust of the legislature tended to be higher than distrust of the other two branches from 2004 until 2017. However, political scandals involving Presidents Morales and Giammattei have affected the executive's credibility as well. In the last two surveys analyzed, distrust of the executive reached its highest level in the time span analyzed (63 % in 2019 and 62 % in 2021).

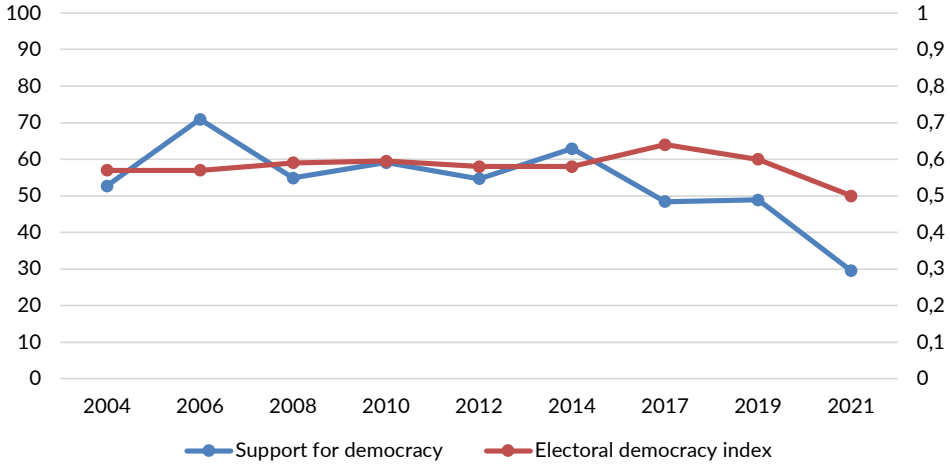
Meanwhile, the institutions of electoral democracy have been eroded by the latest incumbents, which have had a negative effect on the levels of support to democracy. To justify this argument, we consider the evolution of the Electoral Democracy Index (V-Dem) for the same period of analysis under study. This index captures at least four issues corresponding to the electoral dimensions of representative democracy: rulers are responsive to citizens based on the electoral

8. Guatemala ranks among the four highest tolerance to a "self-coup", after El Salvador, Perú and Haiti. 38 % of respondents would justify a president ruling without a parliament (Castonera & Rosario, 2021).

competition mandate, freedom of operation for political and civic society organizations, free and clean elections, and elections that affect the composition of the chief executive of the country.

Figure 8 illustrates the changes in levels of support for democracy in Guatemala from 2004 to 2021 and the evolution of the Electoral Democracy Index from V-dem for the same period. The comparison between public opinion data and the evolution of indicators of electoral democracy shows a shared pattern: stability above the midpoint (50 % for public opinion data and 0.5 for the 0-1 electoral democracy index) from 2004 until 2017. From 2017 through 2021, simultaneous to the revelation of corruption scandals by the CICIG, both indicators drop, especially support for democracy. Although support for democracy in Guatemala hovered mostly around 50 % until 2017, it has since decreased substantially. In fact, the last categorization of V-Dem (2022), Guatemala is considered an electoral autocracy.

**Figure 8. Support for Democracy and Electoral Democracy Index, 2004–2021**




*Source:* LAPOP Lab. 2023.

In sum, the Guatemalan "democratic spring" is an example of the resilience of democratic values among an important share of citizens that can be fundamental for strengthening democratic processes initiated at the elite level (like CICIG's anti-corruption investigations or pro-democratic presidential candidates), even in face of the attempts of criminal oligarchies to hamper them. The civic defense of the results of legitimate elections after the victory of Arévalo from a systematic attempt of prosecutors and judges to subvert these elections should be consider as a new examplar of the activation of this democratic strength. In October 2023, indigenous movements, social organizations and thousands of individuals

mobilized throughout the country, and blocked roads in almost a third of the municipalities as part of a general strike in defense of democracy (Meléndez-Sánchez & Gamboa, 2023). This kind of extraordinary civic reactions should be considered as an obstacle to authoritarian projects and prevents (at least temporarily) the consolidation of authoritarian rulers like those in Venezuela or Nicaragua, or at least respond to democratic backsliding steps performed from the top. This democratic resilience, however, coexists with increasing distrust in political institutions, parties, and elections, critical institutions for liberal democracy that tend to be controlled by a corrupt establishment.

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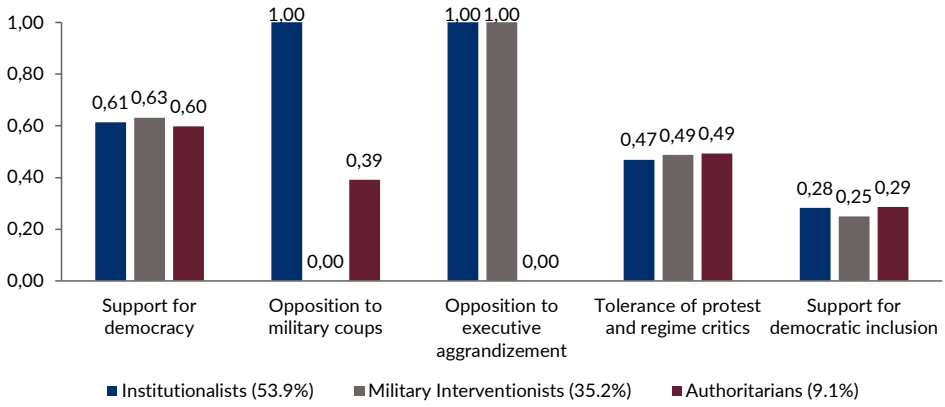
## ANNEX 1. 2012-2021. CLUSTER RESULTS

The bar graphs below present the main results of the cluster analysis. There is one bar graph per wave studied: 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019, and 2021. The bars indicate the average scores for the attitudes in each cluster. All attitude scores range from zero (least democratic) to one (most democratic). The percentages next to each cluster label in the legend indicate the share of respondents that was classified into the cluster. Thus, the graphs allow for comparing the clusters in terms of their democratic attitudes and their relative size.

Institutionalists make up just over half the share of the sample (53.9 %), more than five times that of authoritarians (9.1 %), and 18.9 percentual points over military interventionists. Support for democracy is remarkably similar across the three clusters, just above the 0.6 mark. Tolerance for protests and regime critics is just below the 0.50 mark for all clusters. Lastly, support for democratic inclusion only reaches less than one third of its maximum potential score (Figure A1.1).

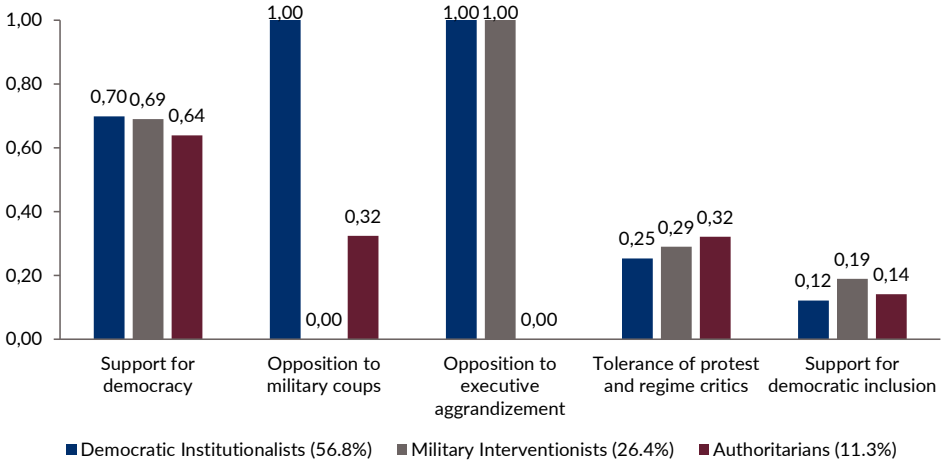
**Figure A1.1. 2012 Cluster Results**




*Source:* LAPOP Lab. 2023.

Compared to 2012, the distribution of shares changes in 2014. Institutionalists and authoritarians remain somewhat stable, but the share of military interventionists drops by 8.8 percentual points. Support for democracy increases slightly across clusters, but tolerance for protests and critics decrease significantly in all groups, as does support for democratic inclusion (Figure A1.2).

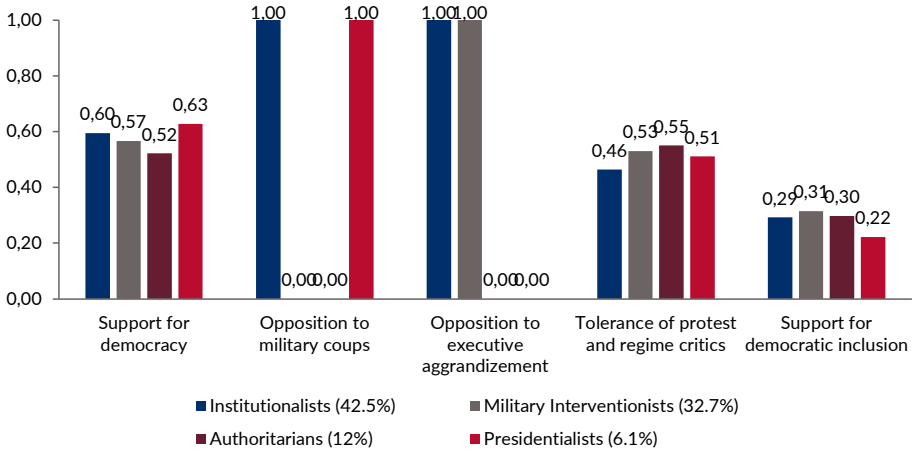
**Figure A1.2. 2014 Cluster Results**




*Source:* LAPOP Lab. 2023.

Regarding 2017, the overall share of institutionalists drops by 14.3 points and military interventionists rise by 6.3 points. Support for democracy decreases across clusters while tolerance for protests increases in all groups. A new cluster of Presidentialists was included in the analysis for the first time. Support for democratic inclusion recovers similar levels to those of 2012.

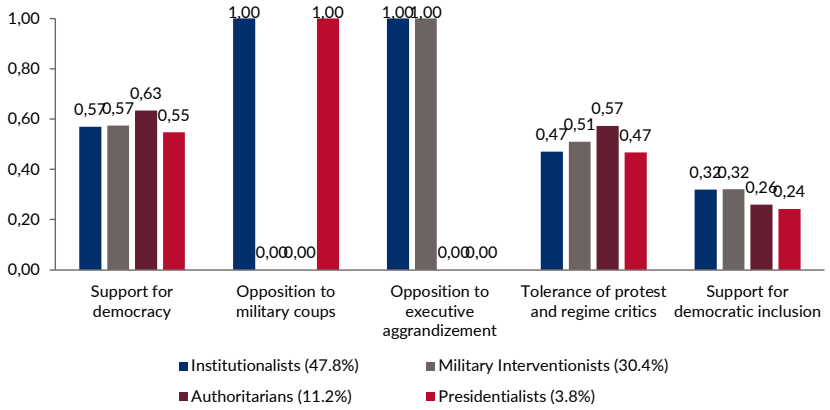
**Figure A1.3. 2017 Cluster Results**




*Source:* LAPOP Lab. 2023.

In 2019, institutionalists regain 5.3 percentual points of their previously measured share (albeit still below their 2012 level of 56 % of the total share) and presidentialists lose ground. Tolerance for protests and support for democratic inclusion remain stable across clusters.

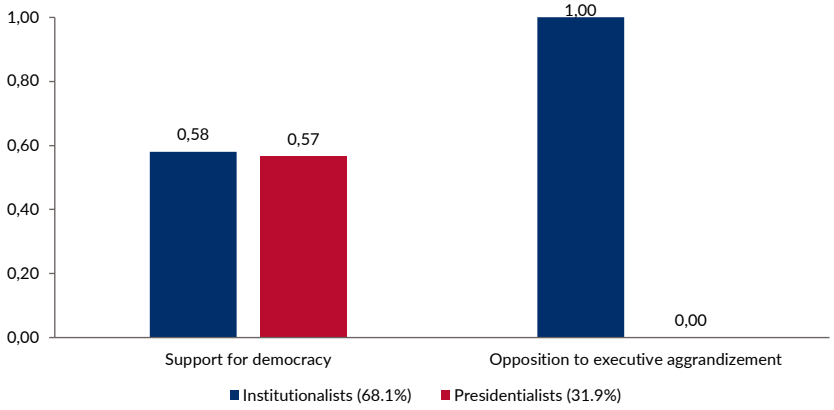
**Figure A1.4. 2019 Cluster Results**




*Source:* LAPOP Lab. 2023.

Finaly, in 2021, Institutionalists become clearly dominant with 68.1 %, more than doubling the share of those categorized as presidentialists. Support for democracy reaches similar percentages in both groups.

**Figure A1.5. 2021 Cluster Results**




*Source:* LAPOP Lab. 2023.

RLOP
Revista Latinoamericana de Opinión Pública

Ediciones Universidad Salamanca

# THE RESILIENCE OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES UNDER DIFFICULT CONDITIONS. THE CASE OF GUATEMALA 2012-2021

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Meléndez, C. (2023). The Resilience of Democratic Values Under Difficult Conditions. The Case of Guatemala 2012-2021. *Revista Latinoamericana de Opinión Pública*, *12*(2), 119-144. https://doi.org/10.14201/rlop.31387

ISSN: 1852-9003 - eISSN: 2660-700X
DOI: https://doi.org/10.14201/rlop.31391

# MILITARISM, AUTHORITARIANISM AND CORRUPTION: POST-COUP HONDURAS AND THE DECLINE OF DEMOCRACY

## *Militarismo, autoritarismo y corrupción: Honduras pos-golpe y el declive de la democracia*

## *Militarismo, autoritarismo e corrupção: Honduras pós-golpe e o declínio da democracia*

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Submission: 2023-05-09
Accepted: 2023-10-31
First View: 2023-12-11
Publication: 2023-12-31

***Keywords:***
*democratic backsliding; authoritarianism; Honduras; corruption; economic decline*

**Abstract**
This paper uses the Americas Barometer survey series, 2004-2021, consisting of national probability surveys representative of the voting age population to examine the evolution of democratic political culture in Honduras. As our analysis indicates, there has been significant democratic backsliding since 2009. Many of the events we trace in our analysis –the decline of rule of law, rising violence, illegitimate elections, the generalized environment of repression, endemic corruption, and economic decline– are largely the consequences of the 2009 coup and reflect the underlying structural and political conditions that help explain the unprecedented electoral victory of Xiomara Castro in 2021.

***Palabras clave:***
*retroceso democrático; autoritarismo; Honduras; corrupción; decadencia económica*

**Resumen**
Este artículo utiliza la serie de encuestas del Barómetro de las Américas, 2004-2021, que consiste en encuestas nacionales de probabilidad representativas de la población en edad de votar para examinar la evolución de la cultura política democrática en Honduras. Como indica nuestro análisis, desde 2009 se ha producido un importante retroceso democrático. Muchos de los acontecimientos que rastreamos en nuestro análisis –el declive del Estado de derecho, el aumento de la violencia, las elecciones ilegítimas, el ambiente generalizado de represión, la corrupción endémica y el declive económico– son en gran medida las consecuencias del golpe de Estado de 2009 y reflejan las condiciones estructurales y políticas subyacentes que ayudan a explicar la victoria electoral sin precedentes de Xiomara Castro en 2021.

***Palavras-chave:***
*retrocesso democrático; autoritarismo; Honduras; corrupção; declínio econômico*

**Resumo**
Este artigo utiliza a série de pesquisas Barômetro das Américas, 2004-2021, que consiste em pesquisas de probabilidade nacionalmente representativas da população em idade de votar para examinar a evolução da cultura política democrática em Honduras. Como nossa análise indica, houve um retrocesso democrático significativo desde 2009. Muitos dos eventos que acompanhamos em nossa análise – o declínio do Estado de Direito, o aumento da violência, as eleições ilegítimas, o ambiente generalizado de repressão, a corrupção endêmica e o declínio econômico – são em grande parte as consequências do golpe de 2009 e refletem as condições estruturais e políticas subjacentes que ajudam a explicar a vitória eleitoral sem precedentes de Xiomara Castro em 2021.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, governance, political crises, insecurity, and longstanding issues of corruption, inequality, and lackluster economic performance have eroded democratic legitimacy and public trust in government in Latin America. The 2019 *Pulse of Democracy* report from the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) states that "the region has settled into a malaise with respect to public views of democracy" (Castorena and Graves, 2019). Support for and satisfaction with democracy have declined since 2016 and have remained relatively low ever since. While support for democracy remained steady between 2018-2019 and 2021, support for centralizing power in the executive increased in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Lupu and Zechmeister, 2021).

For the past decade, political scientists have been grappling with the backsliding of democracy in countries across the globe. While there is little consensus on the causes of democratic backsliding or the perhaps more apt "autocratization" of democracies (Lürhmann and Lindberg, 2019) scholars have focused on explanations ranging from political polarization to economic determinants to the capacity of state institutions to international influence (Coppedge *et al.*, 2022). Other studies

have focused on the role of leaders. In Latin America's recent past, that might have referred to military coups. As Levitsky and Ziblatt note, today's democracies are far more likely to be autocratized by democratically elected leaders (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). This frequently takes the form of leaders who present themselves as challengers to the status quo, undermining liberal democratic norms (rule of law, pluralism, tolerance, free expression) in order to consolidate power. Even well-established democracies have not been immune from this phenomenon. These efforts may have ideological appeal in some contexts, but as Applebaum notes such illiberalism is "a mechanism for holding power, and it functions happily alongside many ideologies." (Applebaum, 2020). One little explored aspect of this backsliding is the impact on support for democracy.

Honduras has been no exception to this trend. Over the past fifteen years, Honduras' backsliding has been characterized by a civilian coup, a president who eschewed the constitution to run for a second term, an extremely flawed, if not fraudulent, election, the remilitarization of security, and the capture of civilian politicians and institutions by criminal elements. What is the impact of this backsliding on citizen support for democracy?

This paper uses the LAPOP survey series consisting of national probability surveys representative of the voting age population to examine the erosion of democratic political culture in Honduras. Our analysis finds significant democratic backsliding as a result of the political, economic, and social consequences of the military coup that ousted President Manuel Zelaya in 2009.

As indicated in the introduction to the Special Issue, the underlying project used cluster analysis[1] to group citizens with distinct patterns of democratic attitudes, and then identify the most salient attitudinal, demographic, and socioeconomic characteristics in each group. As described in the introduction, the analysis identified four distinct groups: institutionalists, presidentialists, military interventionists, and authoritarians. And focused on five key attitudes: support for democracy, opposition to military coups, opposition to executive aggrandizement, tolerance of protests and regime critics, and support for democratic inclusion.[2]

In the case of Honduras, however, the cluster analysis was inconclusive. Beyond differences in their opposition to military coups and executive aggrandizement. We observed limited variation in the average scores for the other three attitudes across clusters and differences were not consistent across years. Additionally, while respondents in all clusters were statistically significantly different from others on a few variables in each wave, most differences were substantively small. This suggests that demographic, socioeconomic, geographic,

1. The methodology is explained in the introduction to the Special Issue.
2. See introductory essay for a detail operationalization of each attitude.

and other characteristics examined do not meaningfully structure attitudes toward democracy in Honduras. In fact, the introduction to the Special Issue indicates the analysis for the region found "no meaningful differences in levels of support for democracy, tolerance of protest and regime critics, and support for democratic inclusions across clusters."[3]

These caveats aside, we did find some recurrent statistically significant differences across all waves that are worth highlighting. First, institutionalists tended to be older than other Hondurans; the percentage of respondents in the 18-29 age bracket was lower among institutionalists than the rest of the sample. Second, institutionalists experienced less crime and corruption than other respondents; the percentage of respondents who reported having been the victim of a crime or asked to pay a bribe in the past 12 months was lower among institutionalists than the rest of the sample.

To supplement the cluster analysis, we use LAPOP data to examine aggregate-level trends in six democratic and political attitudes: satisfaction with democracy, support for democracy, support for military coups when corruption is high, tolerance for regime critics, presidential approval, and support for the president closing congress during difficult times. The main takeaways from this analysis were:

- Satisfaction with democracy reached its highest level in 2010 and has been in a steady decline since then. Support for democracy saw a dramatic increase between 2012 and 2014 but has since been on a downward trajectory.
- The percentage of Hondurans who support a military coup under conditions of high corruption reached a high of 55 % in 2008, prior to the military coup of 2009, and has remained relatively stable around 40 % since 2010.
- Responses to questions regarding political tolerance often reflect the current political context, especially dissatisfaction with and opposition to the incumbent. Not surprisingly, political tolerance increased significantly between 2012 and 2018 as opposition to President Hernández increased.
- Presidential approval declined significantly after Hernández's inauguration in 2014 amid growing dissatisfaction with corruption, violence, authoritarianism, and economic growth. At the same time, support for the president closing congress in times of difficulty increased. Along with increasing tolerance for the political rights of government critics, these trends indicate growing polarization around Hernández.

We find that public opinion has shifted significantly in recent years. Declines in satisfaction with democracy and increases in citizens' willingness to support

3. See Special Issue Introduction.

presidential power grabs are particularly concerning. To identify how the political context has contributed to changes in attitudes, we examine how the deteriorating rule of law, rising violence, illegitimate elections, generalized repression, endemic corruption, and economic decline —all of which are largely consequences of the 2009 coup— have contributed to changes in public opinion. Many of the events we trace in our analysis reflect the underlying structural and political conditions that help explain the unprecedented electoral victory of Xiomara Castro in the November 2021 presidential elections. The contextual factors chosen for our analysis correspond also to those found by the broader project to influence democratic backsliding in the region. For example, crime victimization was associated with support for authoritarian values; governing crises reduce support for democratic attitudes; economic crises erode support for democracy; and high levels of corruption also explain declining support for democratic values. The evidence presented in this study confirms these trends for the case of Honduras.

## 2. THE CONTEXT OF DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING IN HONDURAS

Honduras' journey to democracy has not been an easy one, and consolidating democracy has been particularly challenging. As the brief historical overview below describes, socioeconomic factors, international influence, weak institutions, and a powerful, illiberal elite have been serious impediments to the consolidation of democracy in Honduras.

Honduras has long been among the poorest countries in Latin America and among the most violent. While Honduras escaped the civil wars that plagued some of its neighbors, its path to democracy has been a difficult one. Historically, political power was formally held by one of two traditional elite-controlled parties, the Liberal and National parties, with the military frequently intervening to "correct" policies it disagreed with. The military occupied the presidency almost continuously from 1963 through 1982. While a transition from military to civilian-led governments was made in the early 1980s, that resulted in nominal electoral democratization with regular elections, political contestation was dominated by the two traditional parties that controlled the state through a network of patronage and corrupt practices. Even after the transition to civilian rule, the military continued to play an outsized role in politics. Thus, democratic governance in Honduras is characterized by militarism, authoritarianism, corruption, and weak institutions.

By the time Liberal Manuel "Mel" Zelaya took office in 2006, Honduras had experienced seven consecutive democratic elections and four peaceful electoral turnovers between the traditional parties. In March 2009 President Zelaya called for a national referendum on whether to convene a constituent assembly.

Congress successfully challenged the constitutionality of the poll, which banned referenda six months prior to any election. The subsequent power struggle between Zelaya, the courts, and the armed forces ultimately resulted in a military coup on June 28, 2009. The armed forces kidnapped Zelaya, expelled him to Costa Rica, and presented Congress with a forged resignation letter, which Congress accepted. Roberto Micheletti, the president of the National Congress, became interim president for the remainder of Zelaya's term. National elections were held on schedule in November 2009 despite a wave of repression and the suspension of key constitutional freedoms, including freedom of expression, freedom of movement, and freedom of association.

The military coup that ousted President Zelaya marked a significant turning point in Honduran democracy and initiated a spiral of decline which saw the country immersed in 12 years of corruption, violence, and authoritarianism through the presidencies of Porfirio Lobo (2010-2014) and Juan Orlando Hernández (2014-2022) of the National Party. Legislation passed under the Lobo administration expanded militarized policing powers and created two new dedicated units. Under Hernández, the military once again become a major actor in the Honduran economy and oversaw several key government agencies. Consequently, the military is arguably in its most powerful position since the 1980s.

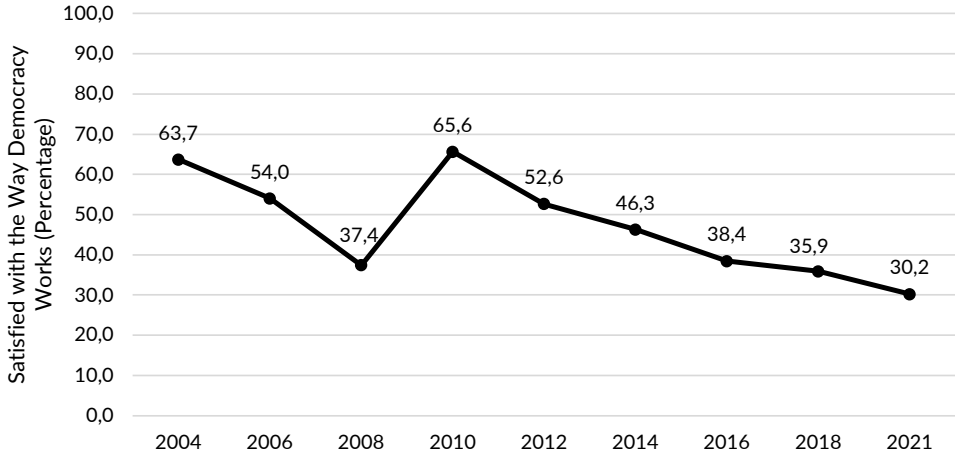
Following the coup, violence against opposition groups and civil society increased significantly. Military and police engaged in arbitrary detentions, "cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment" of anti-coup protestors, and attacks against journalists and media outlets (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2009). Journalists have routinely been threatened, intimidated, arrested, injured, or killed. According to the National Commissioner for Human Rights (CONADEH), more than 80 journalists have been murdered in the past two decades (2020). Honduras also became one of the most dangerous countries in the world for environmental activists, and defenders of indigenous and other minority rights.

At the same time, rule of law and democratic institutions weakened in the post-coup era. Lawmakers routinely subverted the rule of law and institutions to suit their own goals, erasing checks and balances, manipulating elections, and undermining public trust. Criminal networks exploited Honduras' weak governing institutions and gaps in its security architecture. Drug cartels and gangs such as MS-13 and 18th Street Gang run extortion rackets in the country's impoverished urban areas and have turned the rural areas of the Caribbean coast into a regional transit hub for drug trafficking. The post-coup environment offered drug trafficking organizations (DTO's) the opportunity to become deeply entrenched throughout the country. Soon, DTO's controlled not only territory, but had infiltrated state institutions from the mayoral level to Congress to security agencies to the presidency.

## 3. PATTERNS OF SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

The results of the 2021 Americas Barometer for Honduras reflect the weakness of democratic culture in this Central American country. The results indicate that only 30 % of Hondurans were satisfied with the way democracy works. This was the lowest level of satisfaction since the survey began in 2004 and represents a precipitous decline since the measurement peaked in 2010. Figure 1 shows that prior to the 2009 coup satisfaction with democracy was declining significantly from a high of 63.7 % in 2004, when the series began, to a low of 37 % in 2008, just prior to the coup. Ironically, the data indicates a significant increase in satisfaction with democracy post-coup –reflective perhaps of opposition to President Zelaya's policies and a widespread perception that his ouster would in fact open possibilities for democratization. However, those hopes did not materialize and satisfaction with democracy soon declined precipitously reaching the lowest level in the series in 2021.

**Figure 1. Satisfaction with Democracy**[4]



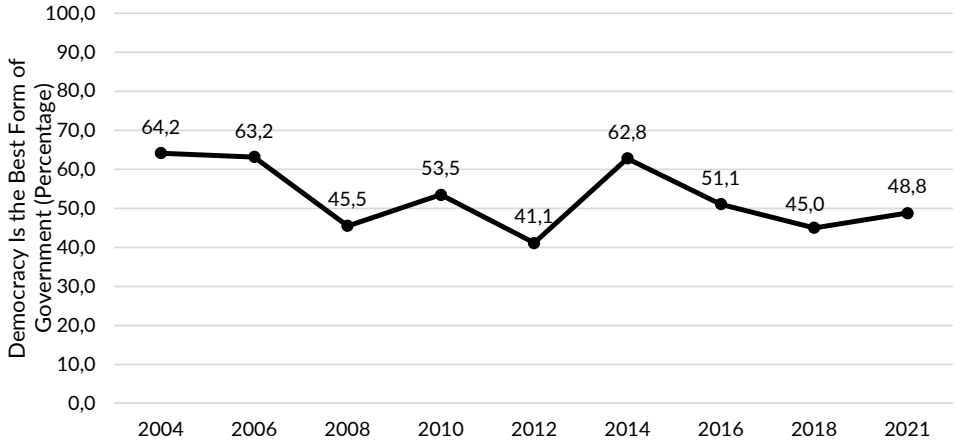

*Source*: Authors' elaboration using AmericasBarometer data, https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/.

By 2021, less than half of Hondurans (49 %) agreed with the proposition that, despite its problems, democracy was the best form of government, well below the regional average of 61 %. Figure 2 indicates that support for democracy has

4. PN4. In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the way democracy works in Honduras? ( % satisfied with democracy).

fluctuated from a high of 64 % in 2004 to a low of 41.1 % in 2012. Just prior to the coup there was a significant decline to 45.5 %, with an increase to 53.5 % in 2010. Support for democracy saw a dramatic increase between 2012 and 2014, but it has declined since then, with a slight increase in 2021 but well below the support exhibited at the start of the series.

**Figure 2. Support for Democracy**[5]

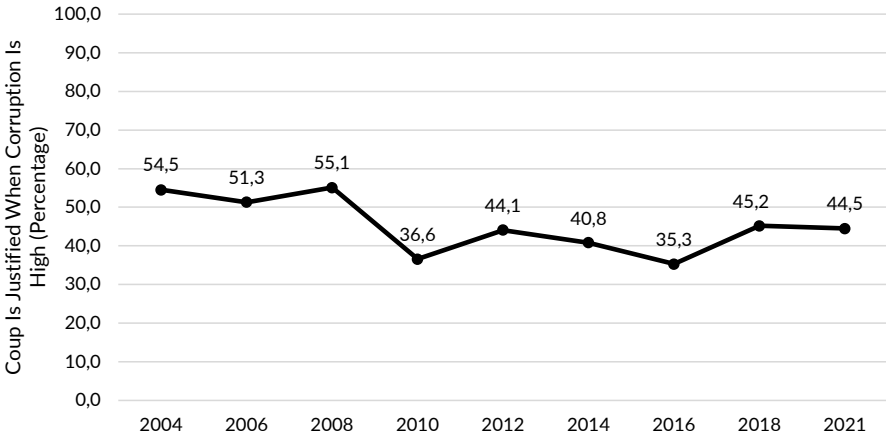



*Source*: Authors' elaboration using AmericasBarometer data, https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/.

Nearly 45 % of Hondurans in 2021 expressed a willingness to support a military coup under conditions of high corruption. Figure 3 shows that support for a military coup under conditions of high corruption reached a high of 55 % in 2008, prior to the military coup of 2009, and then declined to 36 % in 2010 –presumably due to the effects of an actual coup. The percentage of Hondurans who support a military coup under conditions of high corruption has remained relatively stable at about 2 in 5 since 2010.

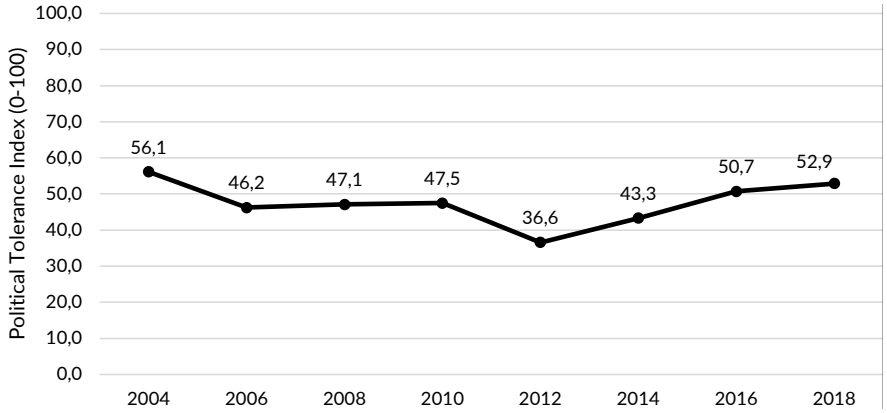
5. ING4. Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? "1" Strongly Disagree – "7" Strongly Agree Figure shows those who answered "5" through "7."

**Figure 3. Coup is Justified when Corruption Levels are High**[6]




*Source*: Authors' elaboration using AmericasBarometer data, https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/.

**Figure 4. Tolerance over Time**[7]

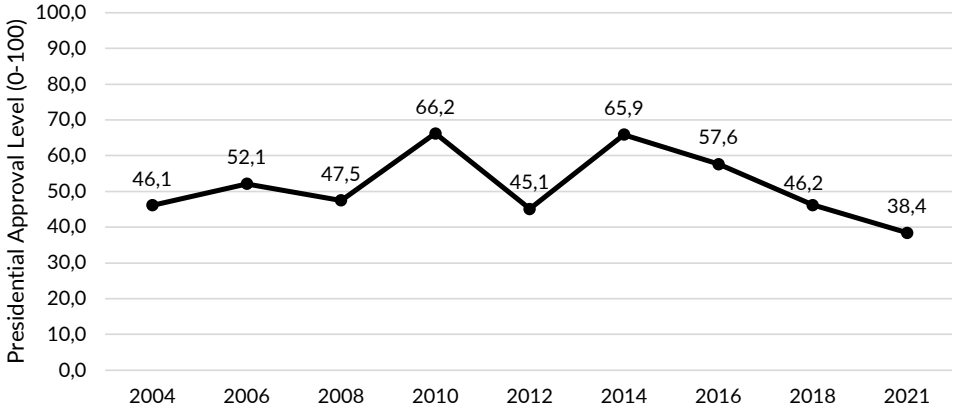



*Source*: Authors' elaboration using AmericasBarometer data, https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/.

6. JC13. 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… When there is a lot of corruption.
7. D1. There are people who only say bad things about the form of government of Honduras, 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.

Figure 4 shows that the level of tolerance of regime critics increases significantly between 2012 and 2018. No doubt, this reflects the increasing opposition across multiple sectors of society and polarization from President Hernández's regime. The high level of tolerance for critics in 2021 could explain the success of Ms. Castro in capturing a significant majority of the population in her presidential campaign. Attitudes expressed in the LAPOP surveys manifest themselves in the context of politics as increasing dissatisfaction and opposition to the extant regime are reflected in electoral outcomes.

**Figure 5. Presidential Job Approval[8]**




*Source*: Authors' elaboration using AmericasBarometer data, https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/.

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.

D3. Still thinking of those who only say bad things about the form of government of Honduras, how strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people being permitted to run for public office?

D4. How strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people appearing on television to make speeches?

(Questions are measured on Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve. As with standard LAPOP indices, each average response to these four questions is calculated and recoded so that the resulting variable goes from 0 to 100, where 0 represents very low tolerance and 100 represents very high tolerance. The responses for each component have also been recoded from 0 to 100 for the graph. Cronbach's alpha for an additive scale of the four variables is very high (.84) and principal component analysis indicates that they measure a single dimension.

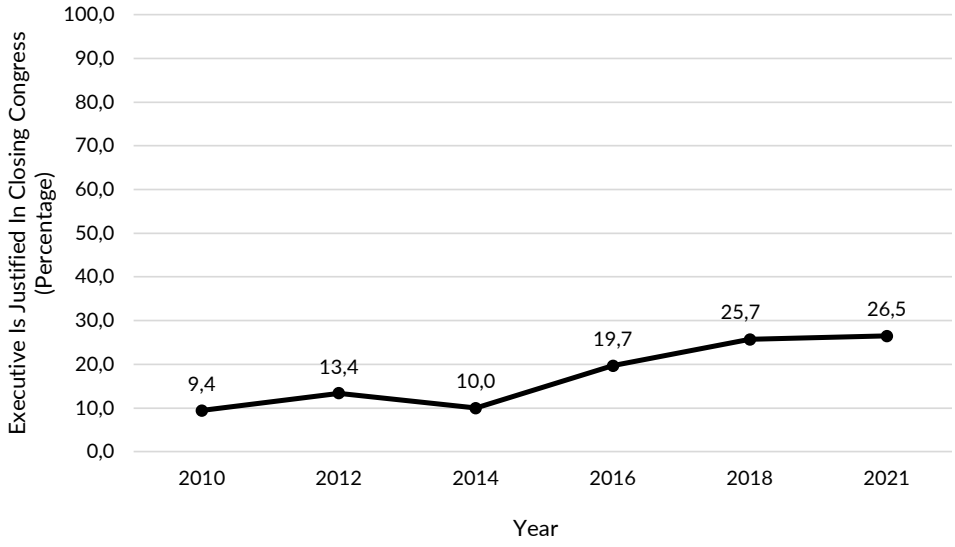
8. Speaking in general about the current government, would you say that the work that President Juan Orlando Hernández is doing is...?: [Read alternatives]

(1) Very good (2) Good (3) Neither good nor bad (regular) (4) Bad (5) Very bad (Figure shows responses recoded into a 0-100 scale).

Figure 5 shows the precipitous decline in presidential approval since 2014 –a year after Juan Orlando Hernández first came to power. Losing nearly half of the support reflects the dissatisfaction among Hondurans with the corruption, violence, authoritarianism, and economic decline perpetuated during the President Hernández's administration.

One of the characteristics of authoritarian populism is the consolidation of executive power and the continued weakening of institutions of popular representation, such as Congress. The results presented in Figure 6 reflect a precipitous increase in the percentage of Hondurans who support the president closing Congress when the country "faces difficult times." In the 2021 poll, 26.5 % of Hondurans approved of the closure of Congress, this figure reflects a 17 % increase from 2010 when the question was first asked. This result, together with the deterioration in satisfaction with and support for democracy, as well as the erosion in the approval of the work of the executive reflect the profound weakness in the culture of democracy in Honduras.

**Figure 6. President Justified in Closing Congress**[9]




*Source*: Authors' elaboration using AmericasBarometer data, https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/.

9. 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 Congress/Parliament and govern without Congress/Parliament?

## 4. DETERMINANTS OF PRESIDENTIAL JOB APPROVAL

We argue that corruption, crime, economic decline, and institutional weakness led to a generalized sense of dissatisfaction with the incumbent regime that in turn contributed to the electoral victory of Xiomara Castro. While the LAPOP data does not permit a direct test of voting behavior, since no such question was included in the 2021 data, we are able to examine the factors that impact presidential job approval. Our assumption is that the decline of President Hernández's approval laid the political context within which the 2021 elections were held and thus contributed to generating an overwhelming desire for change. In order to examine the factors that impact presidential approval we ran a multivariate regression analysis with presidential job approval as the dependent variable. We test the impact of several independent variables: crime and corruption victimization, perception of insecurity, negative perceptions of both the national and personal economy, support for executive aggrandizement, satisfaction and support for democracy, and justification of a coup under conditions of high corruption.

Table 1 shows the regression coefficients. The results indicate that crime victimization, negative perceptions of the national economy, satisfaction with and support for democracy, sex and education are all statistically significant factors. The R-squared indicates that 26.8 % of the variance in presidential job approval is explained by our independent variables. As expected, respondents who are victims of crime and perceive the national economy more negatively express significantly lower approval of the incumbent president. The results presented in the introduction to the Special Issue indicate that "support for the incumbent shapes citizen support for, and satisfaction with, democracy more broadly; the more popular the incumbent, the higher the average level of support for democracy."[10] We know from the earlier results that in Honduras satisfaction with and support for democracy have declined significantly since 2010 and 2014 respectively. The effect of this phenomenon seems to generate the paradoxical results in which citizens who express support for and satisfaction with democracy are more likely to support the incumbent president. Given the polarizing nature of President Hernández, and the numerous political, social, and economic crises the regime generated, these findings help explain the deep democratic crisis in which the country found itself prior to the 2021 elections.

10. Special Issue Introduction.

**Table 1. Determinants of Approval of President's Job Performance[11]**

| | |
|---|---|
| Crime Victimization | -0.114** (0.0315) |
| Corruption Victimization | -0.015 (0.0287) |
| Perception of Insecurity | -0.074 (0.0365) |
| Negative Perception of Personal Economy | -0.072 (0.0441) |
| Negative Perception of National Economy | -0.205*** (0.0543) |
| Executive is Justified in Closing Congress | -0.055 (0.0283) |
| Satisfaction with Democracy | 0.208*** (0.0268) |
| Abstract Support for Democracy Index | 0.097* (3.986) |
| Coup is Justified when Corruption is High | -0.117** (0.0250) |
| Sex | 0.089* (2.488) |
| Education | -0.129** (1.861) |
| Age | 0.066 (0.0817) |
| Observations | 558 |
| $R^2$ | 0.268 |

*Source*: Authors' elaboration using AmericasBarometer data, https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/.

11. Because of the limitations of the 2021 survey, this analysis uses the 2018 round. The findings are still relevant to understanding the underlying influences on the erosion of support for the extant government and thus setting the political context for the 2021 elections.

## 5. LINKING DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES TO NATIONAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

As demonstrated in the sections above, attitudes towards democracy have been in decline for more than a decade. In this section we will 1) address the contextual factors that contributed to changes in support for democracy and 2) examine the extent to which changes contributed to significant system-level political developments.

Our analysis is guided by the realities of the Honduran political system. The Honduran party system is deeply clientelistic, and tightly controlled parties are effectively elite patronage networks. This means that Honduran elections are party-centered rather than candidate-centered. While the establishment of the Liberty and Refoundation Party (LIBRE) following the 2009 coup ultimately disrupted the National-Liberal duopoly, individual candidates remain less important than party alliances. Moreover, these elite patronage networks have become deeply entwined with organized crime, using state resources (including state security apparatus) to enrich elites and suppress opponents.

As discussed in the Introduction, Honduran politics since the coup has been dominated by militarism, authoritarianism, and corruption. This environment has played a significant role in declining satisfaction and support for democracy, presidential approval ratings, coup tolerance and tolerance for regime critics. Below, we focus on four factors that we believe have affected support for democracy and other indicators: 1) high crime rates, 2) corruption, 3) illegitimate elections, and 4) economic decline and rising poverty.

## 6. HIGH CRIME

High crime can have a significant negative impact on attitudes towards democracy. Violence in Honduras exceeds epidemic levels. The World Health Organization (WHO) considers a homicide rate of 10 per 100,000 to be an epidemic. For nearly two decades, Honduras has had one of the highest homicide rates in the world. In 2012, the homicide rate was more than 90 per 100,000. In 2020, the reported homicide rate was 38 per 100,000, though homicide rates in some municipalities exceed 80 per 100,000.

Multiple actors engage in violence in Honduras, though many of them are known to collude with one another. Excluding interpersonal violence, the main perpetrators of violence in Honduras are drug trafficking organizations, transnational street gangs (*maras*), security forces, and para-statal actors, including death squads. Honduras is a major transshipment location for cocaine traveling from South America to the United States. Since 2009, there has been

a serious proliferation of drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) throughout the country. Many of these DTOs have known working relationships with the state and agents of the state, including the police, armed forces, elected politicians, and powerful business interests. Honduras is also home to two large transnational street gangs, Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18 (18th Street Gang), both of which originated in Los Angeles, California in the 1980's. Drug cartels and gangs frequently overlap in territory throughout Honduras. This contributes to elevated levels of violence in various departments. Both organized crime syndicates and gang prey upon individuals and business alike, demanding extortion payments, engaging in human trafficking, participating in assault, murders, and sexual violence, and (in the case of gangs) engaging in forcible recruitment (Welsh, 2017). According to Honduras' Education Ministry, over 200,000 children dropped out of school between 2014 and 2017, many as a result of gang violence. Since 2010, more than 90 teachers have been killed (Diaz, 2019).

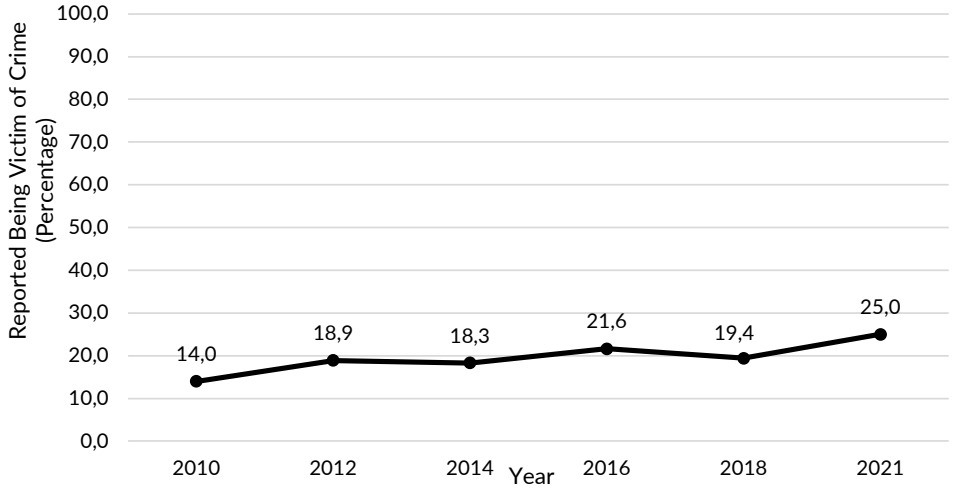
While young males make up the majority of homicide victims, violence against women and girls is a serious problem in Honduras. Women and girls are often subjected to physical and sexual violence by organized crime syndicates, gangs, intimate partners, family members, and agents of the state. Honduras' femicide rate, which refers to the murder of women, is one of the highest in the world. According to the Observatorio de derechos Humanos de las Mujeres, the femicide rate in 2018 was 8.22 per 100,000 (2019). Femicides among women aged 20-29 were notably higher than other age groups.

In the immediate aftermath of the 2009, dozens of protestors and activists were killed by state forces with impunity (Comisión de la Verdad y la Reconciliación, 2011). Post-coup violence in Honduras is also characterized by a high level of targeted assassinations, including journalists, human rights workers, environmental activists, and land defenders. More than 120 environmental activists were killed in Honduras from 2010 to 2016 (Global Witness, 2017). Among them was Lenca indigenous leader and Goldman Environmental Prize winner Berta Cáceres. Despite the international attention surrounding her case, the killings continued. In 2019, Honduras had the highest per capita assassinations of environmental activists with 14 killings. Another 17 were killed in 2020. Since the 2009 coup, more than 60 journalists have been murdered. Between 2009 and 2017 there were 264 reported murders of LGBT+ people in Honduras, 58 % of whom were gay men and 32.5 % were trans people (Amnesty International, 2017). One study found that Honduras had the highest numbers of transgender murders per capita in the world, more than double the rate of the second highest country (TransGender Europe, 2015).

While it is not clear that this type of violence has the same impact on attitudes towards democracy that crime victimization does, targeted political violence can have a chilling effect on organizing, dissent, and political participation. It is also

indicative of weak state capacity, which can undermine public trust in institutions and system support.

**Figure 7. Crime Victimization over Time**[12]




*Source*: Authors' elaboration using AmericasBarometer data, https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/.

Honduras currently has the second highest homicide rate in Latin America. Successive administrations attributed much of this violence to gangs, though it was clear that gangs were only responsible for a portion of the violence. To combat violence, politicians have adopted a "Mano Dura" approach using the police and the military. However, mano dura policies have not reduced levels of criminal violence, but they have placed a burden on Honduras' prison system (InSight Crime, 2021). Thus, increasing human rights abuses, corruption within the police and the military, and increased dissatisfaction with the government.

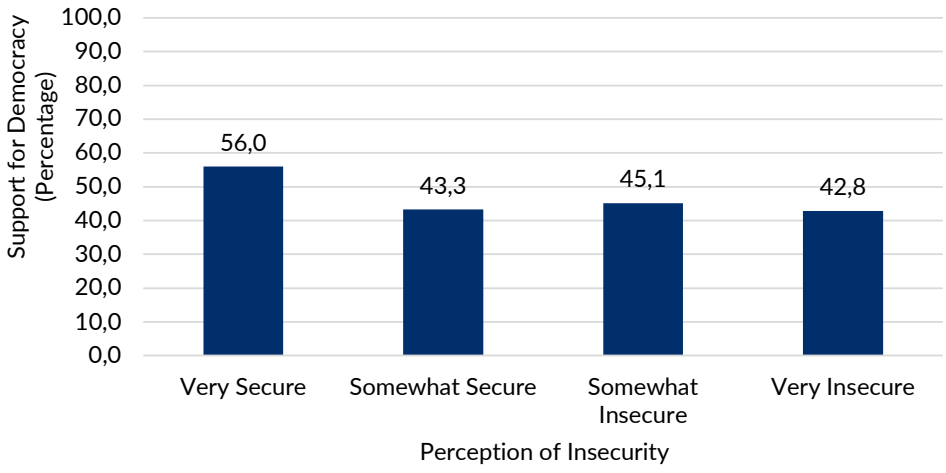
As shown in Figure 7, the rate of self-reported crime victimization has increased steadily since the 2010 survey wave.[13] Fourteen % of Hondurans in 2010 said they were a victim of crime, rising to 25 % by 2021, making Honduras fifth among all countries surveyed in the 2021 wave. Analysis of the data indicates

12. VIC1EXT. Now, changing the subject, have you been a victim of any type of crime in the past 12 months? That is, have you been a victim of robbery, burglary, assault, fraud, blackmail, extortion, violent threats, or any other type of crime in the past 12 months? (1) Yes (2) No ( % who says "yes").
13. In 2010, the question wording for the crime victimization item was changed, thus comparisons to earlier survey waves are not possible.

that respondents living in cities with higher levels of education tend to report being victims at a higher rate than those in rural areas or with less education.

The connection between crime and support for democratic values has been extensively studied with evidence suggesting that crime victimization, but particularly perception of insecurity, are key factors in determining democratic attitudes (Pérez, 2004, 2011; Seligson, 2003, Fernandez *et al*., 2010; Blanco *et al*., 2013; Ceobanu *et al*., 2011). The evidence from Honduras is mixed, while crime victimization does not seem to have a statistically significant impact on support for democracy, perception of insecurity does. Figure 8 shows the correlation between levels of perceived insecurity in respondents' neighborhood and support for democracy using 2021 data. Respondents who expressed high levels of security in their neighborhoods were significantly more likely to support democracy than Hondurans who were less secure. It is important to note that the relationship varies across survey waves with 2008 and 2010 showing increases in support for democracy for the most insecure respondents.

**Figure 8. Support for Democracy and Perception of Insecurity (2021)**




*Source*: Authors' elaboration using AmericasBarometer data, https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/.

## 7. CORRUPTION

Like violence, corruption in Honduras is also endemic. Links to organized crime, particularly drug trafficking, permeate Honduran state institutions, from local government to police to high-ranking politicians, including the office of the

president. Honduran officials extract benefits from both the private sector and the criminal sector, including gangs and traffickers of illicit goods, in exchange for legislation or protection. Sarah Chayes describes Honduras as a "kleptocratic network" wherein "corruption is the operating system" (Chayes, 2017).

Much of this corruption was facilitated by the deliberate weakening of democratic institutions. During its twelve years in power, and with a solid majority in Congress, the National Party strengthened its control of the country's main institutions. In 2012, when Hernández was president of Congress, he led a successful effort to expel four of the five magistrates of the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court after they quashed a security initiative launched by former president Lobo. In 2015, the same court, by then stacked with judges close to the ruling party, struck down a constitutional article limiting presidents to one term in office, arguing that it violated the candidate's human rights. This allowed President Hernández to run for a second term in the 2017 elections. The erosion of checks and balances on executive power over the past decade –and particularly the weakening of judicial oversight– has created fertile ground in Honduras for corruption and state collusion with actors engaged in illicit activities.

In 2015 it was revealed that President Juan Orlando Hernández and high-ranking members of the National Party were implicated in an elaborate kickback scheme that drained the Social Security Institute of more than $300 million. Some of those funds were used for Hernández's 2013 election campaign, some went to the National Party (Wade, 2015). In response to those revelations, tens of thousands of Honduras marched in cities every Friday evening throughout the country for months. The Indignados, or outraged as the movement was called, demanded Hernández's resignation and the creation of an anti-impunity commission similar to the one in Guatemala.

Soon, U.S. federal court began to actively pursue high-ranking members of the Honduran government on money laundering, drugs trafficking, and weapons trafficking charges. In 2017, former Investment Minister and prominent businessman Yankel Rosenthal pleaded guilty in U.S. federal court to laundering money for the Cachiros drug trafficking organization (Department of Justice, 2017). In November 2018 the president's brother, Juan Antonio, "Tony", Hernández, a former congressman, was arrested on drug trafficking and weapons charges in Miami. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, Hernández "bribed law enforcement officials for sensitive information to protect drug shipments and solicited large bribes from major drug traffickers (Drug Enforcement Agency, 2018). During his trial prosecutors also presented evidence that Hernández's 2013 campaign received $1.5 million of funding from drug proceeds, as well as a million dollars from Mexican drug kingpin, El "Chapo" Guzmán. "Tony" Hernández was convicted of drug trafficking, weapons charges, and lying to authorities in October 2019. In March 2021, he was sentenced to life in prison (Department of Justice, 2021a).

On October 26, 2019, only days after "Tony" Hernández's conviction, Nery Lopez Sanabria, whose ledgers were used in the trial against Hernández, was brutally murdered in a maximum-security prison in Honduras. In December 2019, Lopez's attorney was murdered. Three days after that the warden of the facility was murdered. Geovanny Fuentes Ramirez, who testified to paying bribed to President Hernández and other high-ranking officials in connection to drug trafficking, was convicted in the Southern District of New York on multiple charges, including conspiracy to traffic cocaine and arms possession, in March 2021 (Department of Justice, 2021b).

On February 14, 2022, the U.S. Department of Justice requested the extradition of former president Hernández on drug trafficking and weapons charges. Hernández was arrested the following day, just two weeks after he left office. He was extradited to the U.S. in April. His extradition was followed by that of his former police chief Juan Carlos Bonilla (El Tigre), who was accused of facilitating the cocaine trafficking into the U.S. on behalf of President Hernández (Department of Justice, 2020).

Finally, the wife of former president Porfirio Lobo, Rosa Bonilla, was convicted by a Honduras court in March 2022 (for a second time) of embezzlement of more than $1million while her husband was president. Bonilla and Lobo had already been designated ineligible for entry to the United States for corruption and bribery from drug traffickers.

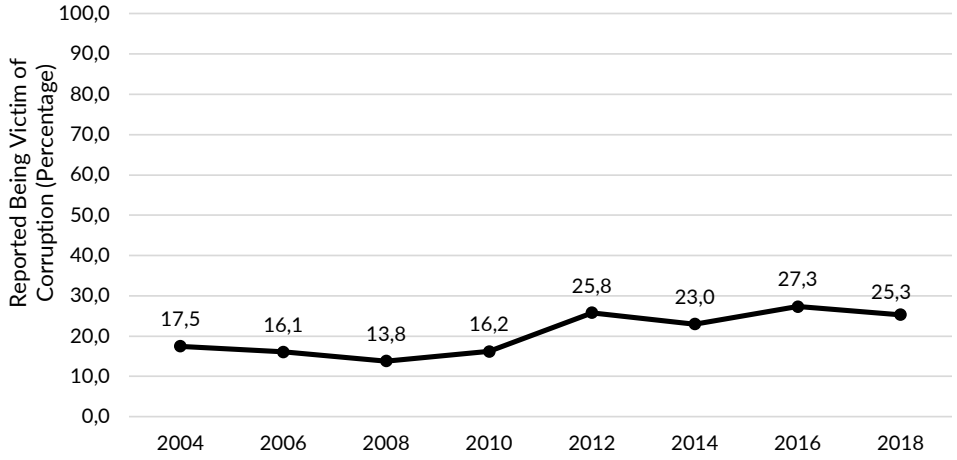
In addition to high-level corruption, police and security forces play a vital role in sustaining the country's criminal networks. This is particularly important because citizens may feel the direct impact of the criminality of these actors, either as their immediate victims or through the failure of institutions to protect citizen security. According to Sarah Chayes, Honduran police "rarely seem to work in the interests of the ordinary population." In addition to their relationships with gangs and drug traffickers, police also engage in low-level corruption and extortion where they extort citizens directly. Honduran security forces have been involved in the extrajudicial killing (or social cleansing) of street children, suspected gang members, student protestors, and other civilians over the past two decades (Chayes, 2017). They are also known to harass and target political opponents, journalists, human rights workers, land rights defenders, and members of the LGBT+ community.

Figure 9 shows the changes in the rate of corruption victimization[14] across time. The graph indicates a steady increase in the number of Hondurans who

14. "Since 2004, LAPOP's AmericasBarometer has measured corruption victimization via an index of individuals' experience with being asked for a bribe in a variety of institutions. If a person reports that, in the last 12 months, they were asked for a bribe by a police officer, government employee, someone at work, someone in the court system, a public health service provider, and/or by someone

say they have been asked for a bribe at least once in the previous year. The rate increased significantly between 2010 and 2012 and remained above 20 % for the rest of the series.

**Figure 9. Victimization by Corruption Over Time**

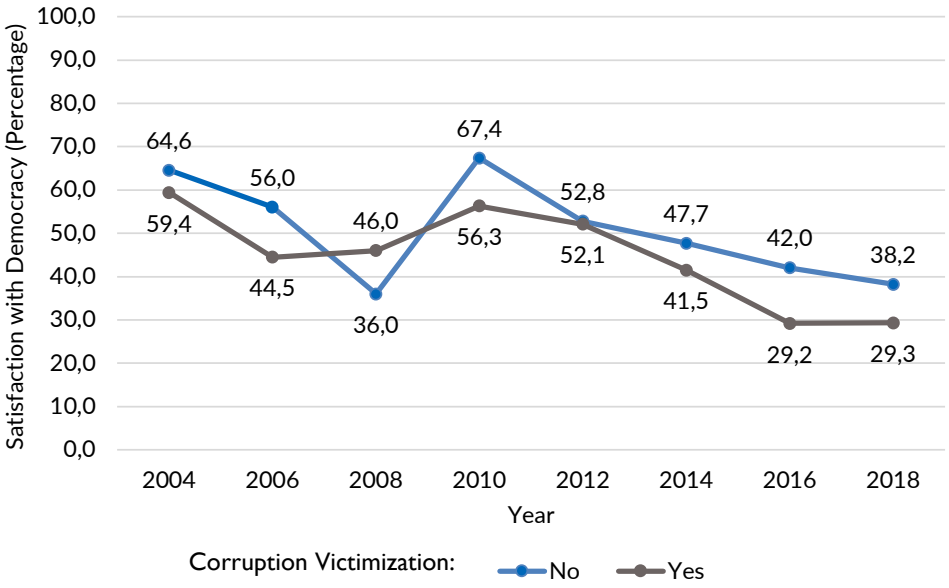



*Source*: Authors' elaboration using AmericasBarometer data, https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/.

While the bivariate relation between corruption victimization and support for democracy is often small and not statistically significant, corruption seems to have a significant effect on satisfaction with democracy in Honduras. Figure 10 shows the extent to which those who have been victims of corruption are more likely to express less satisfaction in the democratic system. Only in 2008 and 2012 did corruption victims express greater satisfaction, although in the latter the difference is very small. As the cases of corruption received greater attention, and President Hernández and his administration were further implicated in corruption scandals, we see (1) a decline in satisfaction with democracy (which we see in Figure 1 as well) and (2) an increased in the statistically significant difference between Hondurans that experienced corruption and those that did not on satisfaction with democracy.

at a school - then they are categorized as being the victim of corruption." The survey items used to make the overall corruption victimization variable are: EXC2, EXC6, EXC11, EXC13, EXC14, EXC15, and EXC16. See, Claire Q. Evans, "Spotlight on Corruption Victimization in Latin America and the Caribbean," LAPOP Spotlight Series, December 2020, https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/spotlights/Spotlight-Evans-CORVIC-eng_final.pdf.

**Figure 10. Satisfaction with Democracy and Corruption Victimization Over Time**




*Source*: Authors' elaboration using AmericasBarometer data, https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/.

Additionally, the data demonstrates that Hondurans' satisfaction with democracy and approval of presidential performance declined as corruption allegations became more pronounced starting in the 2012 survey. Likewise, coup support under high corruption and tolerance of regime critics simultaneously increased during this period.

## 8. ILLEGITIMATE ELECTIONS

The 2009, 2013, and 2017 elections were characterized by varying degrees of irregularities, some of which were so significant that they led many to question the validity of the outcome. We believe this has an impact of citizens' appraisals of democracy.

Following the 2009 coup, Honduras was governed by an interim president who suspended a variety of constitutional rights that are essential to ensuring free and fair elections, including freedom of association, freedom of expression, and freedom of movement. Regardless, he 2009 national elections were held on schedule just five months after the coup. Unsurprisingly, voter turnout was under

50 %. National Party candidate Porfirio Lobo won 56.6 % of the vote. His party also won a majority, 71 seats, in congress.

As targeted assassinations of political candidates and party activists persisted, rights groups expressed concern regarding the climate of fear and intimidation surrounding the 2013 vote. More than 20 LIBRE candidates and activists were killed in the lead up to the election, three of them the week of the election and another the week following. Nearly 70 lawyers and 29 journalists were killed during the Lobo administration, though few cases were investigated and there were only 4 convictions (Frank, 2013). In sum, there is a climate of intimidation throughout the country.

Additionally, Honduras was at the height of its homicide epidemic with national homicide rates exceeding 80 per 100,000 in 2012 and 2013. National Party candidate Juan Orlando Hernández seized upon the homicide epidemic in his campaign, promising "a soldier on every corner." As president of congress, Hernández oversaw the expansion of militarized policing and was credited as the architect of the Military and Public Order Police (MPOP).

Hernández's chief competitor was Liberty and Refoundation Party (LIBRE) candidate Xiomara Castro de Zelaya, the wife of deposed president Mel Zelaya. LIBRE was formed in 2011 by a coalition of groups who opposed the coup. Thus, the two primary political parties of 2009 faced off at the ballot box. The election was marred by allegations of vote buying, intimidation, and other irregularities. Both Hernández and Castro claimed victory on election night, magnifying an already tense environment. Hernández was elected with 36.8 % of the vote, defeating Castro who won almost 29 %. LIBRE claimed that the National Party had engaged in fraud at the polling centers, citing significant discrepancies between tally sheets and the TSE results. The dispute further undermined the integrity of Honduran elections.

We do note a significant increase in support for democracy between the 2012 (41.1 %) and 2014 (62.8) surveys, as seen in Figure 2. We believe this can be attributed to two factors. First, the mobilization of voters and civil society surrounding the 2013 elections likely contributed to an increase in system support. The 2013 elections, whatever their flaws, were the first competitive elections since the 2009 coup. Voter turnout increased 9 points from 2009. Second, Hernández enjoyed a brief honeymoon period during the initial months of his presidency in 2014, which was directly linked to his new security policies (Panting, 2014). We note that his approval rating (66 %) exceeded his vote share and likely contributed to the brief increase in support for democracy.

That honeymoon period was short-lived as a result of corruption allegations (discussed above) and ongoing political machinations. In 2015 the Constitutional Court, packed with Hernández loyalists, ruled that the prohibition on presidential reelection was unconstitutional. This decision enabled Hernández to run for a

second, albeit questionable, term in 2017. Hernández faced Salvador Nasralla of the Anti-Corruption Party (PAC), who allied with LIBRE, and Luis Zelaya of the Liberal Party, among others.

When it appeared that Hernández was losing during the vote count (reported by one TSE official that Nasralla's lead was "irreversible"), it was announced that the computer system had failed, and the vote count was halted for several days. When the vote count resumed, Hernández was leading –against all statistical probability (Wade, 2017). The Supreme Electoral Tribunal delayed the announcement of the first count –in which the ruling National Party was losing by a small margin– for several hours. But Hernández's fortunes reversed during a weeklong vote count, and electoral authorities declared the president the winner several days after the balloting. The Organization of American States, which had election observers on the ground, called for a new election citing extensive irregularities including deliberate interference with the voting system. The opposition accused the governing party of fraud and called for roadblocks and protests to contest the results. The state responded with lethal force. A month of protests left 23 dead and 1,351 detained. The Honduran government declared a state of emergency and issued a curfew. Hernández was declared the winner on December 17, 2017, with 42.6 % of the vote to Nasralla's 41.4 %.

The 2017 post-electoral crisis showcased the extent of public dissatisfaction in the country. Months-long protests erupted again in May 2019, first over the privatization of health services and then over the revelations from the "Tony" Hernández trial.

Among the clusters, there is a notable increase in tolerance for regime critics following the 2013 elections. Tolerance for regime critics increased from 36.6 in 2012 to 52.9 in 2018. We attribute this increase to the growing dissatisfaction with corruption and the illegitimacy of elections. Tolerance increased alongside the growing protest movements in the country. Among the clusters, Military Interventionists had the highest level of protest participation in 2016 and 2018.

The 2021 presidential elections marked a watershed moment for Honduras. They marked the first time that a woman had won the presidency, and the first time since the 19th century that someone from outside the duopoly of the National and Liberal parties had won. The elections pitted Xiomara Castro of the LIBRE party against the mayor of Tegucigalpa and National Party standard-bearer, Nasry Asfura. Former vice president, Yani Rosenthal was the candidate of the Liberal Party.

The elections occurred under an environment of violence, intimidation, and the threat of fraud. The opposition was determined to prevent a repeat of 2017. One lesson was that a divided opposition left the door open for a National Party victory with a plurality of the vote. A divided opposition also invited further manipulation by the ruling party. In the end, the two leading opposition candidates,

Xiomara Castro, and Salvador Nasralla, agreed to form a unified opposition ticket with the former as presidential candidate and the latter as vice-president. The electoral campaign again was mired in violence with dozens of candidates and party activists killed during the campaign.

Turnout increased from 59 % in 2017 to 68 % of the electorate. In the end, a massive mobilization of opposition forces motivated by the unpopularity of President Hernández and the economic and social effects of the pandemic led to a resounding victory for Ms. Castro. Castro won about 51 % of the votes, with the National Party obtaining 36 %. The Liberal Party was relegated to third place with less than 10 %. Several minor party candidates received the remaining votes.

## 9. ECONOMIC DECLINE

Economic performance has an important effect on democratic attitudes and public opinion in Honduras. Satisfaction with democracy, support for democracy, and presidential approval ratings deteriorated as the Honduran economy experienced difficulties following the 2009 coup.

During the Zelaya administration (2006–2009), the government expanded social programs, including low interest loans, school fee abolition, and free school lunches; increased public sector wages; and reduced oil import costs through an agreement with Petrocaribe (Ruhl, 2018). This combination of policies marked a departure from the neoliberal economic policies that had persisted since the 1990s and contributed to a 6.6 % increase in gross domestic product (GDP) in 2006 and a 6.3 % increase in 2007. Perhaps more importantly, Zelaya's policies contributed to a reduction in poverty rates, which remained below 60 % between 2006 and 2009.

The Lobo and Hernández administrations sought a return to neoliberal economic policies by offering new incentives for foreign investment and reducing public expenditures. The 2011 "Honduras Is Open for Business" conference was aimed at attracting new investment in the post-coup economy. Subsequent legislation offered new protections to investors and new tax benefits. At the same time, the government began to pursue privatization in the education and health sectors, which resulted in widespread student protests in 2015. The police responded with excessive force, killing four students, some as young as 13. Government expenditures on health and education declined from 21 % in 2013 to 17 % in 2017. Protesters again took to the streets between April and June 2019, when trade unions mobilized in response to reforms enacted by Congress that would lead to mass privatization and layoffs in the health and education sectors.

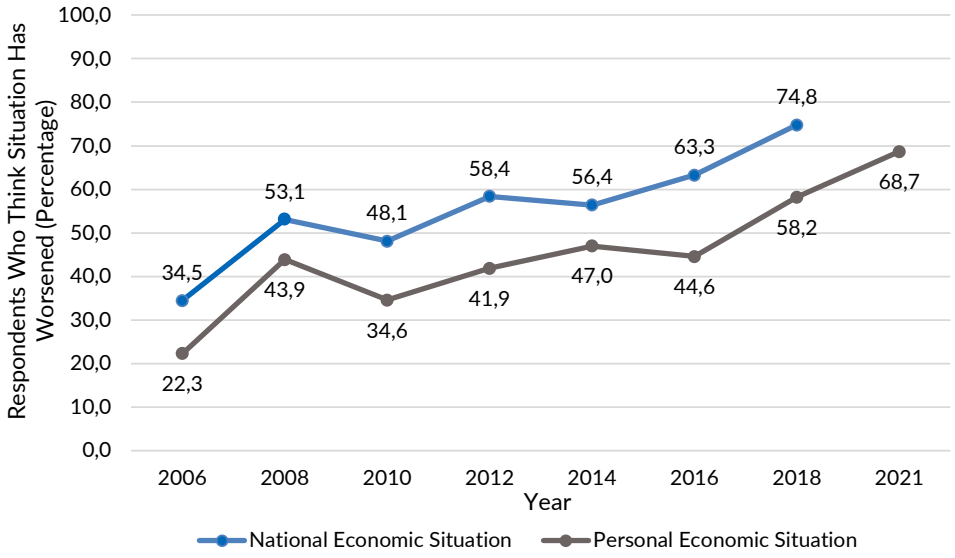
Thus, economic policy proposals have generated multiple, prolonged protests. We note that these protests have coincided with growing political tolerance.

Poverty increased after the 2008 global recession and 2009 coup, despite continued GDP growth. In 2009, 58.8 % of households lived in poverty; by 2012 that number had increased to 66.5 % (Montalvo, 2019). Poverty trended downward for the remainder of the decade, dipping below 60 % in 2019. However, in 2020, following COVID-19 and two back-to-back hurricanes, poverty increased to over 70 % of the population. Honduran migration, which jumped sharply from 2018 to 2019 after growing steadily since 2012, increased significantly from 2020 to 2021 before declining somewhat in 2022. The economic impact of COVID-19 exacerbated poverty and pre-existing food insecurity which, along with violence and corruption, was a major driver of migration (Bermeo and Leblang, 2021). Results from the 2021 AmericasBarometer show that intentions to migrate reached their highest rate in the series, with more than half (54 %) saying they intended to live or work abroad. More than half (55 %) identified lack of economic opportunities as the most important reason for intending to migrate. Food insecurity, specifically, is a key motivating factor for having intentions to emigrate (Perez *et al.*, 2021).

The AmericasBarometer data demonstrated this economic deterioration. The number of Hondurans who said their family income did not cover basic needs increased significantly from 53.1 % in 2012 to 71 % in 2014 and 75.1 % in 2018. By 2018, economic concerns had replaced security as the most serious problem confronting the country, according to respondents. When asked whether the national economy has worsened, improved, or remained the same, Hondurans were increasingly likely to say that it had gotten worse.[15] Figure 11 depicts the steady, significant increase in negative appraisals of the national economy. In 2010, 48.1 % said it had gotten worse; in 2018, 74.8 % said the same, and this question was not asked in 2021. Figure 11 also shows that Hondurans increasingly felt that their personal economic situation had deteriorated in the past year, rising from 34.6 % in 2010 to 58.2 % in 2018 and 68.7 % in 2021.[16]

15. The survey question used is SOCT2. "Do you believe the current economic situation in the country is improved, the same or worse than 12 months ago?" The graph shows the percentage of respondents who indicated that the national economy was worse than 12 months ago.
16. The survey question used is IDIO2. "Do you believe that your own personal economic situation is better, same, or worse than 12 months ago?" The graph shows the percentage of respondents who indicated that their personal economic situation was worse than 12 months ago.

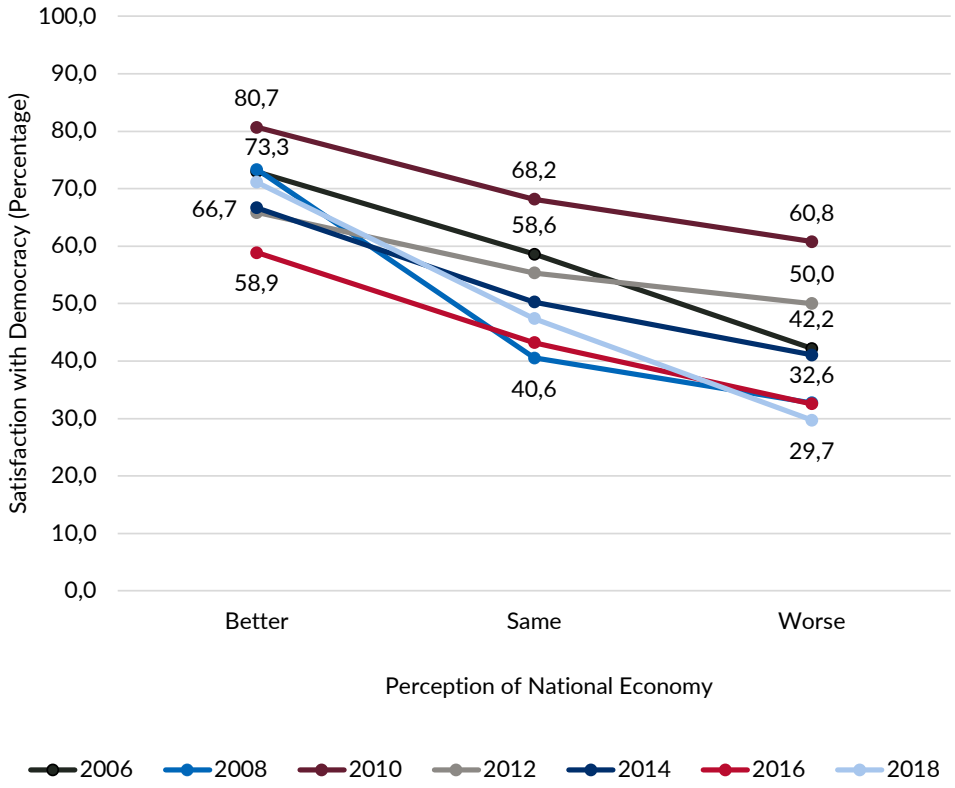
**Figure 11. percentage of Hondurans Who Think the Economic Situation Has Worsened in the Previous 12 Months**




*Source*: Authors' elaboration using AmericasBarometer data, https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/.

Figure 12 illustrates the connection between satisfaction with democracy and evaluations of the national economy. It shows that satisfaction with how democracy is working declined significantly as the evaluation of the national economy deteriorates. This pattern holds for every year surveyed. For example, in 2018, there was a 40-point difference in democratic satisfaction between respondents who perceived an improving economy and those who believed the economy is deteriorating. In analyses not reported here, we found that personal economic situation evaluations were similarly related to satisfaction with democracy. We found similar results for support for democracy and presidential job approval. In brief, the survey evidence shows a clear connection between economic perceptions and support for the political regime.

**Figure 12. Satisfaction with Democracy by Perception of National Economy Over Time**




*Source*: Authors' elaboration using AmericasBarometer data, https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/.

## 10. CONCLUSION

Countries throughout Latin America have experienced democratic backsliding in the past decades. For most of these countries, the main actors who have contributed to this erosion have been democratically elected politicians. Illiberal elites from across the political spectrum have undermined democratic norms and rule of law in order to protect or promote their own interests. Whether using crime as a cover for militarism in El Salvador or México or seeking to extend their time in office as in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela to name a few, or to undermine trust in elections as in Brazil or Guatemala, elected officials have

routinely undermined democracy in the region –and citizen opinion has followed suit. Honduras is no exception to these trends.

Since the 2009 coup, Honduran politics has been mired in militarism, violence, and corruption. Within a few years, Honduras had become a narco-state. Elected officials from the presidency down to local mayor's offices became entrenched with criminal organizations. This is the context within which one must understand patterns of support for democracy within the country.

The erosion of democratic institutions continued after the coup and accelerated significantly in 2012. During his tenure, President Hernández effectively erased checks and balances on state power by exerting growing influence over the judiciary and electoral institutions and appointing intimate allies as high-level state officials. The net effect has been to heighten polarization, increase public distrust of political elites and fuel recurrent tides of unrest. Lacking trust in elections and with few other means to influence policy, demonstrations became vehicles for expressing anti-government sentiments. Unsurprisingly, satisfaction with democracy plummeted while coup and protest tolerance increased.

The deterioration in executive approval in Honduras has been dizzying since 2014, the first year of President Juan Orlando Hernández's administration. The results of the poll in 2021 reflect the lowest approval in the work of the executive since the series began and could help us understand part of the electoral results of November 28, 2021, when opposition leader Xiomara Castro won the presidential elections. The decline in perceptions of President Hernández's work reflects the economic, political, and social deterioration that the last four years of his presidency represented, and especially the aftermath of the pandemic.

Years of organizing and growing political acumen resulted in a profound shift in the 2021 elections, clearly a referendum on the corruption and mismanagement of the Hernández years. The 2021 elections presented Honduras a real opportunity to shed the legacy of authoritarianism, militarism, violence, and corruption that have plagued the country for decades. Though early in her presidency, Castro will not easily change the structural deficiencies that have historically characterized Honduran political culture. Indeed, the Castro administration has itself been plagued by ongoing structural violence and corruption. The consequences of that for popular support for democracy could be dire as Honduras enters its next critical juncture.

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RLOP
Revista Latinoamericana de Opinión Pública

Ediciones Universidad Salamanca

# MILITARISM, AUTHORITARIANISM AND CORRUPTION: POST-COUP HONDURAS AND THE DECLINE OF DEMOCRACY

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Pérez, O. J., & Wade, C. J. (2023). Militarism, Authoritarianism and Corruption: Post-Coup Honduras and the Decline of Democracy. *Revista Latinoamericana de Opinión Pública*, *12*(2), 147-177. https://doi.org/10.14201/rlop.31391

ISSN: 1852-9003 - eISSN: 2660-700X
DOI: https://doi.org/10.14201/rlop.31414

# ANTI-DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES, THE WINNER-LOSER GAP, AND THE RISE OF THE LEFT IN MEXICO

## *Actitudes antidemocráticas, la brecha entre ganadores y perdedores y el ascenso de la izquierda en México*

## *Atitudes antidemocráticas, a lacuna entre vencedores e perdedores e a ascensão da esquerda no México*

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Submission: 2023-05-20
Accepted: 2023-11-29
First View: 2024-01-9
Publication: 2023-12-31

***Keywords:***
*winner-loser gap; democracy; democratic norms; Mexico*

**Abstract**
Weak support for democratic norms and institutions poses a serious challenge to the survival of democracy. Studies of public opinion often assume that citizens hold politicians accountable for respecting democratic norms. This study examines citizens' attitudes toward democracy in Mexico. It focuses on the 2018 election as a critical juncture when Andrés Manuel López Obrador (MORENA) won the presidential election on his third attempt. Data from the LAPOP's Americas Barometer (2012-2019) show that—consistent with the loser-winner gap literature —President López Obrador's supporters increased their satisfaction with democracy after the 2018 election. However, unlike most voters who elected winners of elections, they did not become more committed to democracy. Even in some cases, after 2018, AMLO voters are more likely than other partisan groups to suppor t anti-democratic interventions, particularly support for a coup when crime is high. The findings of this study contribute to our understanding of the winner-loser gap in the context of Mexico's democratic erosion. Although the results of this paper are based

on exploratory evidence, they highlight that an important portion of voters is willing to sacrifice democracy and support their co-partisans' actions that undermine democracy.

*Palabras clave:*
*brecha ganador-perdedor; democracia; normas democráticas; México*

**Resumen**
El débil apoyo a las normas e instituciones democráticas plantea desafíos importantes para la sobrevivencia de las democracias. Un supuesto clave en los estudios de opinión pública es que los ciudadanos rinden cuentas a los políticos cuando no respetan las normas democráticas. El presente estudio examina las actitudes de los ciudadanos hacia la democracia en México. Se centra en las elecciones de 2018 como un momento crítico cuando Andrés Manuel López Obrador (MORENA) ganó las elecciones presidenciales en su tercer intento. El presente artículo se basa en datos del Barómetro de las Américas de LAPOP (2012-2019) y, consistente con la literatura sobre la brecha entre perdedores y ganadores, encontramos que después de las elecciones de 2018, los partidarios del presidente López Obrador aumentaron su satisfacción con la democracia. Sin embargo, a diferencia de la mayoría de los votantes que eligen a los ganadores de las elecciones, los votantes de AMLO aumentaron su compromiso normativo con la democracia. Incluso, en algunos casos, después de 2018, los votantes de AMLO tienen más probabilidades que otros grupos partidistas de apoyar intervenciones antidemocráticas, en particular el apoyo a un golpe de estado cuando la criminalidad es alta. Los hallazgos de este estudio contribuyen a nuestra comprensión de la brecha entre ganadores y perdedores en el contexto de la erosión democrática en México. Si bien los resultados de este artículo se basan en evidencia exploratoria, resaltan que una porción importante de votantes está dispuesta a sacrificar la democracia en beneficio de sus intereses partidistas y apoyar acciones iliberales que socavan la democracia.

*Palavras-chave:*
*lacuna perdedores e vencedores; democracia; normas democráticas; México*

**Resumo**
O fraco apoio às normas e instituições democráticas representa desafios significativos para a sobrevivência democrática. Uma premissa fundamental em estudos de opinião pública é que os cidadãos responsabilizam os políticos pelo respeito às normas democráticas. O presente estudo examina as atitudes dos cidadãos em relação à democracia no México, com foco nas eleições de 2018 como um momento crítico, quando Andrés Manuel López Obrador (MORENA) venceu a eleição presidencial em sua terceira tentativa. Com base em dados do Barômetro das Américas da LAPOP (2012-2019), descobrimos que, em consonância com a literatura sobre a lacuna entre perdedores e vencedores, os apoiadores do Presidente López Obrador aumentaram sua satisfação com a democracia após as eleições de 2018. No entanto, ao contrário da maioria dos eleitores que escolheram os vencedores das eleições, eles não se tornaram mais comprometidos com a democracia. Em alguns casos, após 2018, os eleitores de AMLO são mais propensos do que outros grupos partidários a apoiar intervenções antidemocráticas, especialmente o apoio a um golpe em momentos de alta criminalidade. Os resultados deste estudo contribuem para nossa compreensão da lacuna entre vencedores e perdedores no contexto da erosão democrática no México. Embora os resultados deste artigo se baseiem em evidências exploratórias, eles destacam que uma parte importante dos eleitores está disposta a sacrificar a democracia e apoiar ações iliberais e partidárias que minam a democracia.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Weak support for democratic norms and institutions poses significant challenges for the consolidation of democracy. A key assumption in studies of public opinion is that citizens hold politicians accountable for respecting democratic norms (Lippman 1925, Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Public disapproval and punishment of incumbents' authoritarian behavior are important checks on incumbents' actions (Helmke and Levitsky. 2006). If voters do not punish politicians who violate democratic norms, politicians may feel emboldened to continue their attacks, leading to democratic decline.

The present study examines citizens' attitudes toward democracy in Mexico. It focuses on the 2018 election as a critical juncture when Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) won the presidential election on his third attempt. During the 2018 presidential campaign, López Obrador denounced the main parties in Mexico— the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the National Action Party (PAN)—for being part of a corrupt elite that robbed him of the presidency in 2006 and 2012 (Bruhn, 2012) and impoverished Mexico with neoliberal policies and widespread corruption. In his third attempt to win the presidential elections, he won with 53 percent of the vote and his coalition won a majority in Congress. His historic victory in 2018 was an outcome of a strong rejection of the country's major parties exacerbated by affective polarization (Castro Cornejo 2023), particularly negative partisanship against the PRI and the PAN. López Obrador was able to build a broad coalition of voters (Aguilar 2021; Aparicio and Castro Cornejo 2021) and received support equally from men/women, lower-educated/highly-educated voters, younger and older generations, rural/urban voters—who rejected the major parties in Mexico.

López Obrador was inaugurated on December of 2018. Since taking over government, as different studies argue, Mexico has faced democratic threats from López Obrador's illiberal agenda: he has concentrated power in the executive; attacked the courts, the bureaucracy, and the electoral authorities; he weakened autonomous government institutions and undermined institutional checks and balances (Aguilar Rivera 2022, Albertus and Grossman 2021, Mainwaring and Pérez Liñán 2023, Monsiváis Carrillo 2023, Petersen and Somuano 2021, Sanchez Talanquer and Greene 2021). In this context, it is important to analyze how the Mexican public views violations of democratic norms. Relying on data from the LAPOP's Americas Barometer (2012-2019) and, consistent with the loser-winner gap literature (Anderson et al 2005, Blais and Gelineau 2007), we find that after the 2018 presidential election, President López Obrador's supporters increased their satisfaction with democracy. However, unlike most voters who elected winners of elections, they are more likely than other partisan groups to support anti-democratic interventions, particularly support for a coup when crime is high.

The findings of this study contribute to our understanding of the winner-loser gap (Anderson *et al.* 2005, Cantú and Ponce 2015) in the context of democratic erosion in Mexico. While recent literature has analyzed López Obrador's voters weak institutional trust after winning the election (Monsiváis-Carrillo 2023), we focus on their support for undemocratic elite actions. Consistent with recent literature, the results of this paper highlight the importance of not only studying the losers' postelection attitudes—who are usually more disaffected with democracy after losing an election (Anderson *et al.* 2005)—but also the winners' attitudes, particularly their commitment to democracy (Cohen *et al.* 2022, Singer 2018). Electoral victories can increase voters' satisfaction with democracy but can also provide a base of support for politicians' future actions that violate democratic norms (Claasen 2020, Cohen *et al.* 2022). While the results of this paper rely on exploratory evidence, they highlight that an important portion of voters is willing to sacrifice co-partisan interests over democracy (Graham and Svolik 2020) and support illiberal actions that undermine democracy (Singer 2018).

This paper is structured as follows. The first section discusses literature on democratic attitudes and the loser-winner gap. We provide a general overview on democratic attitudes in Mexico that focus on elite attacks against government institutions after the 2018 presidential election. Relying on data from LAPOP's Americas Barometer (2012-2019) we analyze different indicators of democratic commitment—satisfaction with and support of democracy—highlighting the attitudes of the winners of the election after López Obrador's historic victory. The final section concludes with some thoughts about the future of democracy in Mexico.

## 2. LOSERS, WINNERS, AND PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

A key assumption in studies in public opinion is that citizens serve in a democracy to hold politicians accountable with respect to democratic norms (Lippman 1925; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Carey *et al.* 2022). As seminal research in comparative politics argue, (Dahl 1956; Almond and Verba 1963), democracy only survives when citizens hold strong pro-democratic values. While a democratic regime provides formal checks and balances to constrain the power of the executive, the public's disapproval and punish of incumbents' authoritarian behavior also constitute an important check on incumbent actions to erode democracy (Helmke and Levitsky 2006). As Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) argue, if voters do not punish politicians who violate democratic norms, politicians will feel emboldened to continue, which could lead to the decline of democracy.

Recent studies question this assumption arguing that realistically it is hard to expect that ordinary people to check authoritarian ambitions of elected politicians (Graham and Svolik, 2020; Carey *et al.* 2022; Svolik, 2019; Touchton *et al.* 2020). As Svolik argues, electoral competition can confront voters with a choice between two valid but conflicting considerations: democracy and partisan interests. Under this scenario, an important portion of voters will be willing to sacrifice democratic competition in favor of electing a co-partisan candidate who champions their partisan interests (Graham and Svolik 2020). This partisan bias is consistent with the winner-loser gap literature which highlights that voters who support a winning candidate differ systematically from those who support a losing candidate. For example, winners of the election are more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction with democracy after election day (Blais and Gelineau 2007) but also support for democracy (Bowler and Donovan 2002), institutional trust (Moehler 2009), trust in elections (Maldonado and Seligson 2014), attitudes towards electoral integrity (Cantú and Ponce 2015), and the general political system (Bowler and Donovan 2002) in both established and young democracies (Norris 1999).

In this study, we focus primarily on voters' democratic attitudes—satisfaction with and support for democracy—and the winner-loser gap in the context of the recent confrontations between President López Obrador's administration and democratic institutions in Mexico. Satisfaction with democracy is an expression of approval of the democratic regime which tends to increase or decrease during elections (Blais and Gelineau 2007). As different studies highlight, there is both an expressive and programmatic component of winning an election that makes voters happier since their party won the election and their preferred policies will be implemented in the future government (Anderson *et al.* 2005, Blais, Morin, and Singh 2017). This increased satisfaction with democracy is particularly experienced by those voters who are ideologically close to the resulting government (Curini *et al.* 2012), those who support the leading party of the electoral coalition (Singh *et al.* 2012) and when voters have strong partisan attachments to the winning parties (Singh 2014).

Moreover, elections can overcome deficits of representation (Blais *et al.* 2017). In the case of Mexico, this mechanism is particularly important since AMLO repeatedly accused that the results of the 2006 and 2012 presidential election were the result of electoral fraud, and thus unrepresentative of the people's will (Bruhn 2012, Castro Cornejo 2023). Regardless of the merit of this accusation, López Obrador's consistent accusations against electoral institutions increased grievances against the political system, making AMLO voters perceive that the political process was unfair to them (Cantú and Garcia Ponce 2015; Ugues Jr. and Medina Vidal 2015; Monsiváis-Carrillo 2023). Once their co-partisan candidate was able to win the presidency in his third attempt, one would expect that their satisfaction with democracy would increase.

Given this discussion, we expect that voters who support the winning party are generally more supportive of democracy than those who support parties that lose the election, what the literature refers as the winner-loser gap (Anderson and Tverdova, 2001; Norris, 1999). Moreover, given the historic victory of MORENA's candidate López Obrador, we expect that his voters will be the most likely to report satisfaction with democracy and even support for democracy in abstract after the 2018 presidential election.

*Hypothesis 1. Winners (AMLO voters) are more likely than losers (PAN/PRI voters) to report higher levels of satisfaction with democracy than losers of the election after the 2018 presidential election.*

We also present a second hypothesis that accounts for partisan support for non-democratic actions, even among supporters of a democratically elected president. While the theoretical expectation from the loser-winner gap literature is that winners will increase democratic commitment, recent literature suggest that this is not always the case (Cohen *et al.* 2020; Singer 2018). While they can support democracy on the abstract, they can also be tolerant and enthusiastic about their co-partisan's illiberal actions once in power. In other words, these voters can report high levels of satisfaction with democracy and, simultaneously, prioritize partisan interests over democracy and support illiberal actions that seek to undermine democracy (Graham and Svolik 2020). Understanding when these two mechanisms are at play adds to our understanding of the winner-loser gap in elections. While the literature highlights the importance of alleviating the electoral losers' concerns—e. g. their distrust of elections—since they can damage the legitimacy of the political system, winners' postelection attitudes are very consequential for democratic survival and consolidation. They can provide a base of support for politicians' future actions that violate democratic norms (Claasen 2020).

This type of behavior would be particularly likely among partisans who support elites who demonstrate weaker commitment to democracy. As most public opinion literature argues, attitudes are not formed in a vacuum: they reflect a combination of political predispositions and elite communication (Zaller 1992). Since voters are motivated to interpret information through a partisan lens (Bartels 2000) and given López Obrador's rhetoric and behavior against democratic institutions, it is likely that his voters did not increase their level of commitment to democracy after the historic victory in the 2018 presidential election. Rather, they would likely to support undemocratic actions like executive aggrandizement.

*Hypothesis 2. Winners (AMLO voters) are more likely than losers (PAN/PRI voters) to report support undemocratic actions after the 2018 presidential election.*

In the next sections, we evaluate the public attitudes towards democracy after López Obrador won the 2018 presidential election, particularly focusing on the winner-loser gap.

## 3. DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC OPINION IN MEXICO

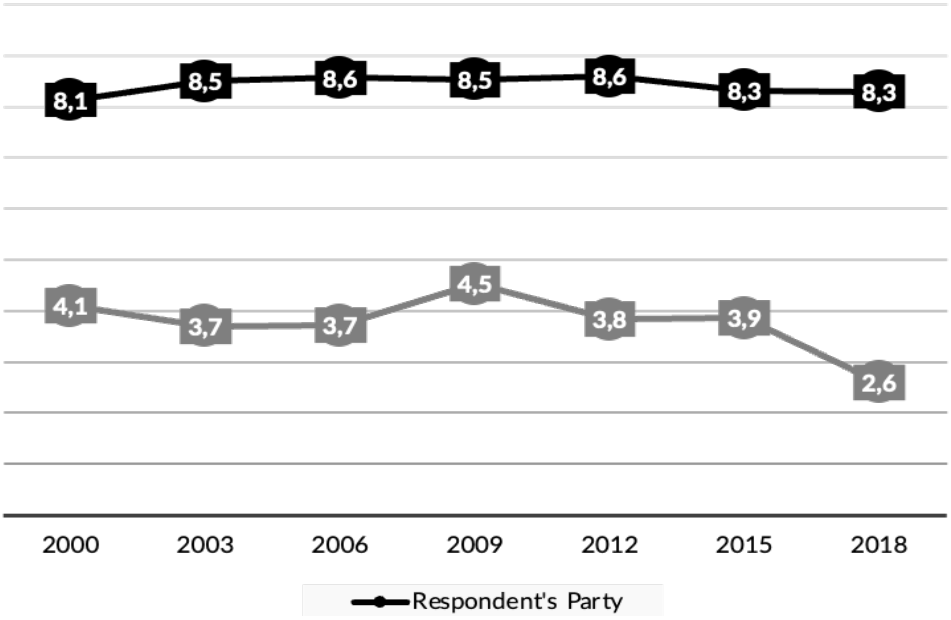
Before the 2018 presidential election, the party system in Mexico was one of the most stable in Latin America (Mainwaring 2018).[1] Although Mexico has only been considered a democracy since 2000, its political parties have existed for decades. The authoritarian successor party (PRI), and the center-right PAN and the center-left PRD opposition parties were key actors during Mexico's democratic transition from 1988 through 2000. After democratization, the PRI, PAN, and PRD continued as key actors in governing, negotiating electoral reforms, and channeling social demands. (Flores-Macías 2018; Langston 2017). The three major parties had relatively strong party organizations, meaningful party labels, and partisanship levels were well above the regional average (Castro Cornejo 2019).

The 2018 presidential election represents a break with the traditional party system. MORENA and its candidate, López Obrador, won the country's presidency with 53 percent of the votes (far more than the last three presidential elections) and the constitutional legislative majority together with its partisan allies in the Chamber of Deputies and Senate. López Obrador had already been a presidential candidate in 2006 as a PRD candidate when he lost the election to Felipe Calderón, the candidate for the National Action Party (PAN), by less than one percent of the vote share. Following his resignation from the PRD, López Obrador founded, along with his political allies, a personalist party—the National Regeneration Movement or Morena—which backed his third bid for the presidency. In 2018, his campaign focused primarily on denouncing the corruption of the PRI and PAN governments, energizing the internal market, and repealing the neoliberal structural reforms approved by the «Pact for Mexico» during the six-year term of Enrique Peña Nieto. His successful campaign can partially be attributed to voters' negative evaluations of the national economy, public safety, and corruption: two thirds of the electorate considered the national economy, public safety, and corruption worse than under the previous governments (Beltrán *et al.* 2020).

1. For the period 1990–2015, the party systems of Mexico, Uruguay, the Dominican Republic, and Chile registered almost perfect stability in the main contenders in their presidential elections. When additional indicators (interparty electoral competition and stability of the parties' ideological positions) are added, Uruguay, Mexico, and Chile are the most stable party systems in Latin America (Mainwaring 2018).

Relevant for this study, since Mexico's transition to democracy in 2000, affective polarization—which can be defined as intense dislike between partisans of the different party options (Druckman and Levendusky, 2019)— has gradually increased, driven primarily by an increase of out-party animus. While the average feeling thermometer (on a 0-10 scale) of the respondents' party remained stable, the average feeling thermometer of opposing parties was 4.1 in 2000 and had decreased to 2.4 by 2018 (figure 1). This context offered López Obrador the ideal political environment to politicize voters' grievances: a polarized party system, an effective framing that denounced the corrupt elite (the «PRIAN»), and an angry electorate ready to be mobilized against the major political parties (Castro Cornejo, Beltrán, and Ley, 2019).

**Figure 1. Affective Polarization in Mexico (2000-18). Average Feeling Thermometer Ratings (0: Very Bad; 10: Very Good). Among voters who self-identify with a political party**




*Source*: Mexican Election Study (Beltrán *et al.* 2020).

López Obrador's government was inaugurated on December the 1st with a solid presidential approval of between 75 and 80 percent, which remained positive in the next few years of his presidency—around 60 percent—according to several polling firms in Mexico.

### *3.1. Elite Attacks on Democratic Institutions in Mexico*

Recent political leaders have discovered they can earn short-term political capital by attacking democratic institutions, especially electoral authorities (Langston 2020). Despite regular alternations of power by Mexico's three main traditional parties before 2018, and the ability of a new party to take the presidency in 2018, the democratic credentials of electoral authorities—like the National Electoral Institute and the Federal Electoral Tribunal— have been under constant attack from the President López Obrador.

When political representation is effective, citizens are likely to channel their demands via political parties, accept elections as the legitimate path to accessing power, and adhere to election outcomes, whether their party won or lost (Bruhn 2012). The 2006 presidential election, the first after Mexico's transition to democracy in 2000, was the first representation crisis in Mexico's young democracy, which exposed its lack of consolidation. After López Obrador, then-candidate of the PRD, lost the election, he denounced the results as fraudulent, organized massive protests, and refused to accept the outcome of the election (Aparicio 2009).

As commitment to democratic principles eroded at the elite level, satisfaction with parties and the party system declined at the mass level. The 2006 post-election crisis provided a compelling narrative that AMLO would use during his next two attempts to win the presidency in 2012 and 2018. He continually claimed that Mexico had been kidnapped by a corrupt elite, a «political mafia» («mafia del poder» in Spanish: Dussauge 2021; Sarsfield 2023) formed by the PAN, the PRI (the «PRIAN» as he colloquially refers to both parties), and the business sector, which together had allegedly impoverished Mexico through neoliberalism and rampant corruption. In the 2012 presidential election, López Obrador once again alleged massive electoral fraud favoring the PRI's candidate, Enrique Peña Nieto. Given these events, it is not surprising the important winner-lower gap within the Mexican public in public evaluations of electoral institutions (Ugues Jr. and Medina Vidal 2015, Monsiváis-Carrillo 2023) and electoral integrity (Cantú and Garcia Ponce 2015).

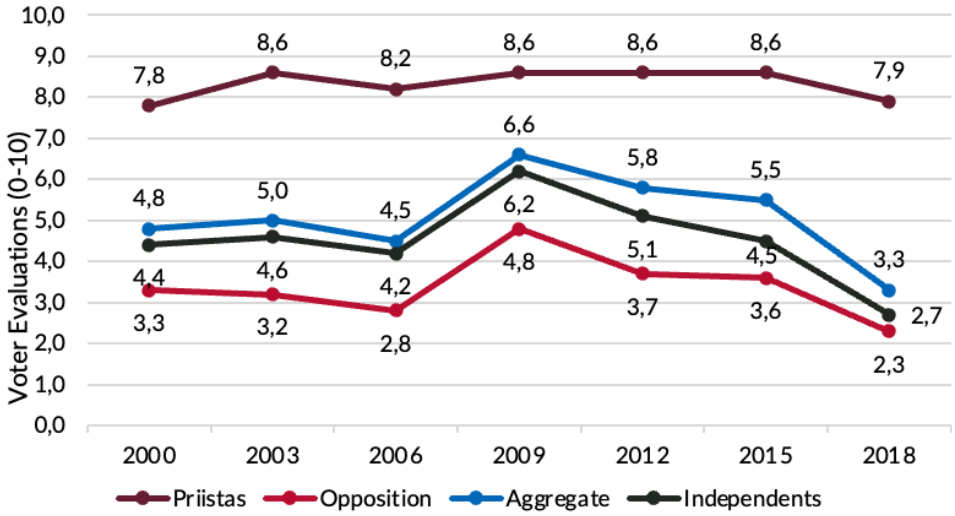
Unlike in 2006, after the 2012 presidential election, leaders of the PRD did not join him in mobilizing against the elected government. Instead, the more pragmatic faction conceded and helped forge a political agreement with the PRI and PAN, known as the «Pact for Mexico,» to approve economic reforms after a decade of congressional gridlock. The «Pact for Mexico» passed structural reforms designed to strengthen economic competition, improve education, and open the energy sector to foreign investment. While the Pact for Mexico was successful in passing a raft of constitutional changes and enabling legislation, it created two interrelated problems: the increasing ideological convergence of the three major parties in Mexico, and a perception of shared governance, fueled by interparty

agreements, that weakened programmatic linkages between citizens and the party system (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). AMLO condemned the PRD's collaboration with the PRI government and denounced his party for «betraying the people» by approving neoliberal reforms with the PAN and PRD in Congress. He eventually resigned from the party and founded his own political movement, MORENA, in 2014. This political decision was pivotal since AMLO now enjoyed autonomy from party institutions and could run as an anti-establishment candidate.

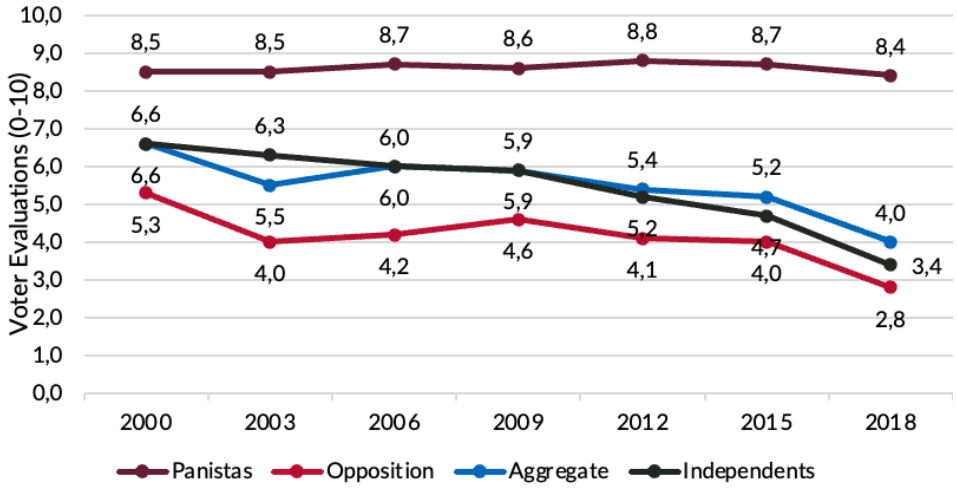
General discontent with political parties as channels of representation drove citizens away from the traditional three-party system. As a result, data from the Mexican Election Study (Beltrán *et al.* 2020) show that voters' evaluations of the PRI and the PAN, based on a 0 to 10 scale, showed the most negative results since the democratic transition. As shown in Figure 2 (Panel A), while PRI supporters maintained a favorable view of their party, other voters' evaluations declined from a high of 6.5 in 2009, when the PAN held the presidency, to a low of 2.0 by the 2018 presidential election. A similar trend emerges for PAN party supporters. Panel B of Figure 9 shows that PAN supporters reported high levels of support for their party (around 8.5) over time, but the party's appeal to other voters fell over the course of the decade to approximately 3.0 by 2018.

**Figure 2. Evaluations of Main Parties in Mexico, 2000–2018**

**A. Voter Evaluations of the PRI Party**



**B. Voter Evaluations of the PAN**




*Source*: Mexican Election Study (Beltrán *et al.* 2020)

Since his government was inaugurated, López Obrador has concentrated power in the executive, attached the courts and bureaucracy (Albertus and Grossman, 2021), weakened autonomous government institutions, and undermine the division of powers (Aguilar 2022, Petersen and Somuano 2021). While his party controls the Congress, his government has sought to weaken the Judiciary as a democratic check by appointing loyalists to the Supreme Court, forcing the resignation of a Supreme Court justice with ties to past administrations and seeking to extend the Supreme Court chief justice's term—who was perceived as loyal to the President and, constitutionally, can only serve a single four-year term (Villanueva Ulfgard 2023). More recently, he tried to weaken the independence of the country's electoral authority, reducing the Electoral Institute's budget which would force the Institute to cut staff and close offices across the country a year before the largest election in the nation's history (2024). The Supreme Court invalidated part of this electoral reform championed by President López Obrador because of serious violations in legislative procedure. Moreover, as recent studies suggest (Sánchez Talanquer 2020; Sánchez Talanquer and Greene 2021), his government has eroded the conditions for pluralistic politics and public deliberation, given López Obrador's propensity to demonize the opposition and critical media, as well as his general inability to recognize dissenting views as legitimate.

## 4. EMPIRICAL STRATEGY

To examine the loser-winner gap in democratic attitudes in Mexico, the next section analyzes different indicators of democratic commitment—satisfaction and support of democracy—that are part of LAPOP's AmericasBarometer (2008 to 2019, see table 1). We identify losers and winners by identifying respondents who reported that voted for the winning or the losing party/candidate in the previous presidential election. In particular, we identify PRI voters, PAN voters, and voters who supported Andrés Manuel López Obrador (voted for the PRD in 2006 and 2012 or MORENA in the 2018 presidential election). In the models reported in Appendix B, we also include control variables that can be associated with the dependent variables of this study: retrospective evaluations of the economy and sociodemographic variables like gender, age, if lives in a urban/rural municipality, or a victim or crime.

**Table 1. Democratic Attitudes in Mexico (LAPOP's Americas Barometer)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Satisfaction with democracy | In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the way democracy works in Mexico? |
| Support for democracy | 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?<br>7-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disagree to (7) Strongly agree. |
| Opposition to military coups | 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…<br>When there is a lot of crime<br>(1) A military take-over of the state would be justified; (2) A military takeover of the state would not be justified.<br>When there is a lot of corruption<br>(1) A military take-over of the state would be justified; (2) A military takeover of the state would not be justified. |
| Opposition to executive aggrandizement | 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?<br>(1) Yes, it is justified; (2) No, it is not justified. |

*Source*: AmericasBarometer.

In the next section, we show that support for democratic principles has become increasingly polarized along partisan lines over time. While most Mexicans

support democracy in the abstract, there is a growing constituency that supports the government's violation of democratic norms. Even though they are the winners of the last presidential election, in some cases, President López Obrador's supporters tend to support these illiberal actions more than other partisan groups.

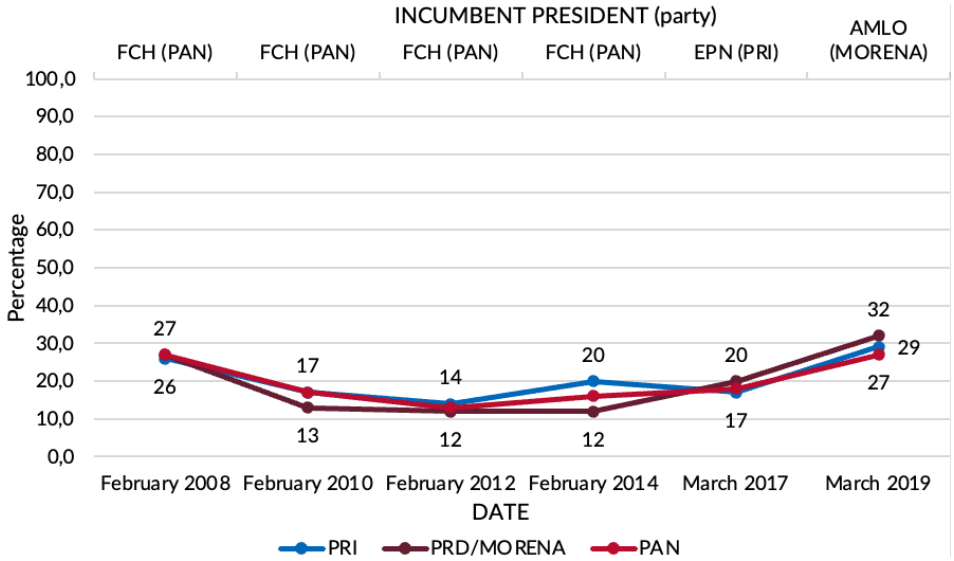
## 5. RESULTS

As previously discussed, many studies find that citizens who support election winners evaluate democracy more positively than those who support election losers: they are more satisfied with democracy and express greater confidence in democratic institutions (Anderson *et al.* 2005). Figure 3 plots satisfaction with democracy by partisan groups over time. Among President López Obrador's voters (PRD voters in 2006 and 2012 and MORENA voters in 2018), satisfaction with democracy was low in comparison to other partisan groups from 2008 to 2017, averaging only 29 percent across surveys. However, we observed a large jump from 20 to 49 percent in the 2019 survey, conducted after AMLO's election. Thus, consistent with hypothesis 1, satisfaction with democracy is linked to the results of the past election: attitudes about democracy among AMLO voters are far more positive when their party won (+29 increase). However, we do not see a decline in satisfaction with democracy among PAN and PRI voters, their satisfaction increases by 11 and 22 percentage points, respectively. In fact, differences in satisfaction with democracy among partisan groups are not statistically significant in 2018 (Appendix B). In other words, while AMLO voters significantly increased their satisfaction with democracy (as expected by the loser-winner gap literature), their levels of satisfaction do not differ from PAN and PRI voters in 2018; therefore, we cannot fully confirm hypothesis 1 given PAN/PRI voters' behavior. The increased satisfaction among losers of the election is probably related with the fact that the 2018 represented a historic election in Mexican politics, the first time the left won the Presidency, which made out-partisans of MORENA satisfied with the way democracy works, even though it was against their partisan interests.

We observe similar dynamics comparing measures of democratic support among PAN voters, PRI voters, and AMLO's supporters. Figure 4 shows levels of support for democracy (agreement with *«democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government»*) by partisan groups over time. After their loss in the 2012 presidential election, in 2014, AMLO voters reported the lowest support for democracy: 55 percent, compared to 67 percent among PRI voters and 72 percent among PAN voters. Support for democracy declined across all groups in 2017. That year, only 49 percent of previous AMLO voters agreed that democracy is better than any other form of government, compared to 64 and 54 percent for PAN and PRI voters, respectively. This year also saw a widening gap

in democratic support between AMLO voters and PRI and PAN supporters, of 15 and 25 percentage points, respectively.

**Figure 3. Satisfaction with Democracy by Partisan Group, 2008–2019. In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the way democracy works in Mexico?**



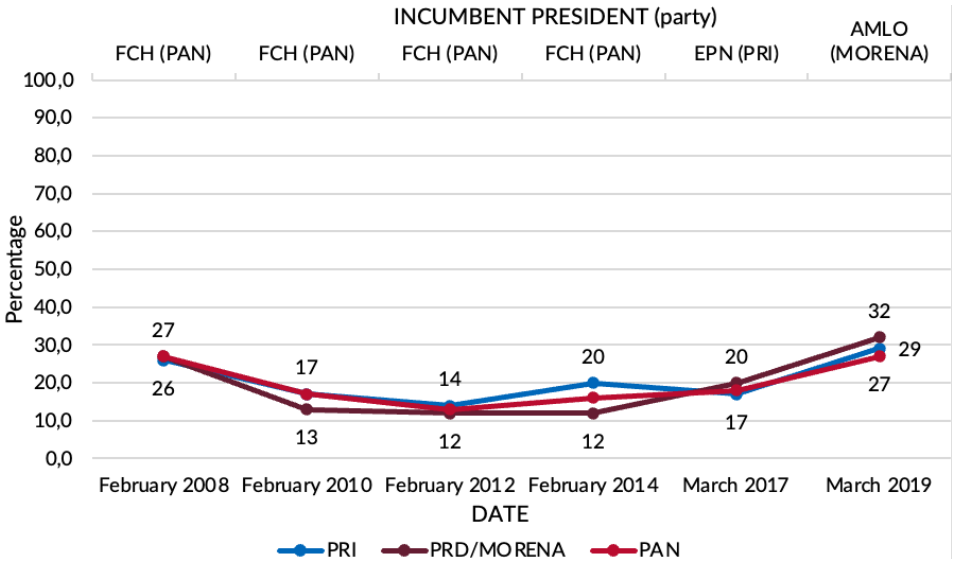

Note: Satisfaction calculated by summing the percentages of «Satisfied» and «Very Satisfied» responses. FCH = Felipe Calderón Hinojosa; EPN = Enrique Peña Nieto; AMLO = Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

*Source*: AmericasBarometer.

However, following AMLO's 2018 victory, his supporters became winners, and their support for democracy increased substantially from 49 to 67 percent, a gain of 18 percentage points from 2017. Indeed, in 2019, AMLO supporters expressed significantly higher support for democracy than PRI—61 percent—and PAN—58 percent—voters. The differences are statistically significant compared to AMLO voters' support for democracy (Appendix B).

At this point, AMLO voters seem to follow the theoretical expectations of the loser-winner gap literature: after election day, they are more satisfied with democracy and they express even stronger support for democracy, at least, in the abstract. Next, we examine specific indicators of support for anti-democratic actions since we can find potential variation in support for hypothesis 2: general support for democracy but support for specific illiberal actions that weaken

**Figure 4. Support for Democracy by Partisan Group, 2008–2019. Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government.**



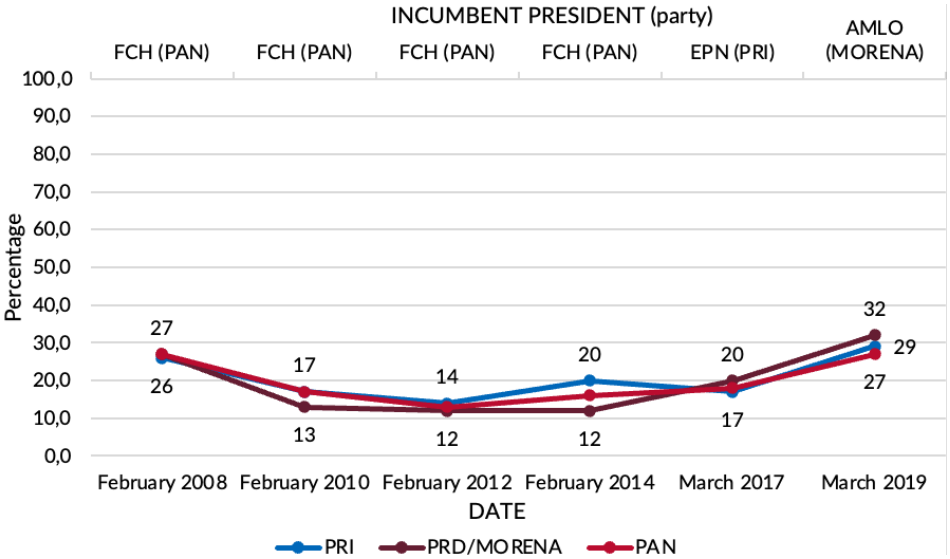

Note: Support calculated by summing the percentages of «Somewhat Agree,» «Agree» and «Strongly Agree» responses. FCH = Felipe Calderón Hinojosa; EPN = Enrique Peña Nieto; AMLO = Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

*Source*: AmericasBarometer.

democracy. We specifically analyze support for executive aggrandizement and military coups. Figure 5 shows responses to the following question: «*Do you believe that when a nation is facing difficult moments, that the president of the country can justifiably shut down Congress and govern without the legislature*?» In the 2019 survey, President López Obrador's supporters even though they are winners of the elections, they are not less likely to justify shutting down the Congress. AMLO voters, in fact, behave as losers as the election since they are as likely as PRI and PAN voters to support such scenario. However, given that differences are not statistically significant, even though AMLO voters increase their support to shut down the Congress, in this indicator we cannot fully support hypothesis 2.

In other scenarios in which LAPOP's Americas Barometer measure respondents' views on executive aggrandizement, we see a larger partisan gap. For instance, figure 6 shows support for a military coup when crime is high and a clear loser-winner gap. We observe substantial declines from 2008, when roughly two-thirds of each partisan group expressed support for this type of action. We also observe important partisan divergence in more recent surveys. After the 2018

**Figure 5. Executive Aggrandizement – Support for Closing Congress by Partisan Group, 2008–2019. Do you believe that when a nation is facing difficult moments, that the president of the country can justifiably shut down Congress and govern without the legislature?**



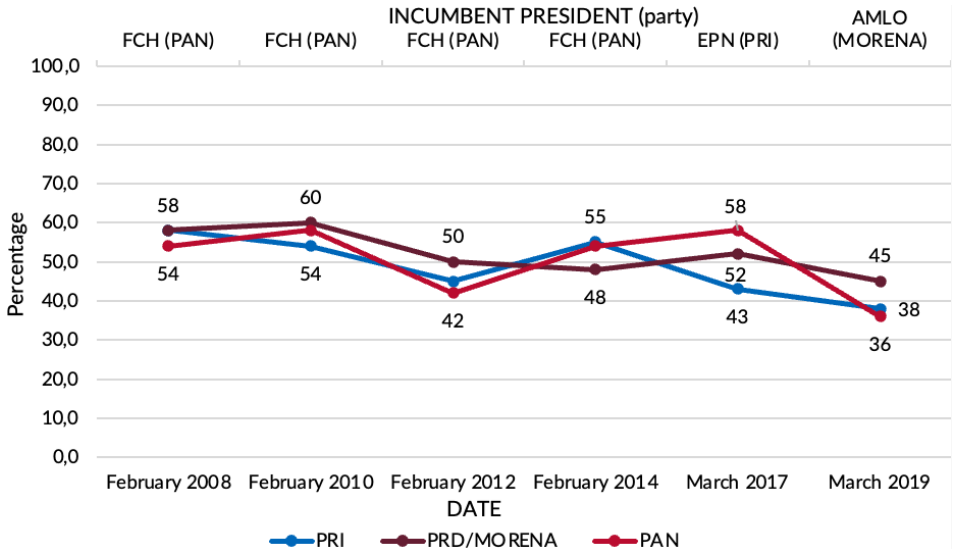

Note: FCH = Felipe Calderón Hinojosa; EPN = Enrique Peña Nieto; AMLO = Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

*Source*: AmericasBarometer.

presidential election, PAN and PRI supporters were less likely to favor a coup (at 35 percent and 27 percent, respectively), relative to AMLO voters, who continued to support a coup in the face of high crime (45 percent, statistically significant, Appendix B) after their candidate won the presidential election. These patterns strongly support hypothesis 2.

The increasing support for executive aggrandizement, particularly among incumbent voters in 2019, is likely related to the strong attachment to López Obrador among his voters. Because López Obrador has consistently criticized government institutions (Sánchez-Talanquer and Greene 2021, Monsiváis-Carrillo 2023), even after winning elections, they report low levels of support for democratic institutions. As such, his supporters do not behave like winners. In fact, this finding is consistent with other studies that find that MORENA partisans not only report support for actions that violate democratic norms but also low levels of institutional trust even after winning the election (Monsiváis-Carrillo 2023, INEGI 2021).

**Figure 6 Support for a Coup When Crime is High by Partisan Group, 2008–2019. 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 under the following circumstances: When crime is high**




Note: FCH = Felipe Calderón Hinojosa; EPN = Enrique Peña Nieto; AMLO = Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

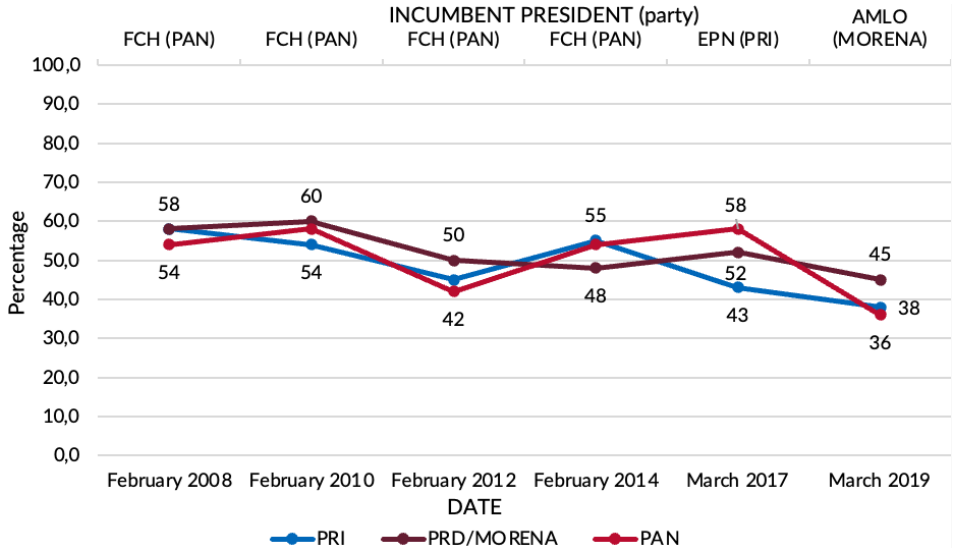
*Source*: AmericasBarometer.

Finally, Figure 7 shows support for another indicator of support for illiberal actions, in particular, coup by the military when corruption is widespread. We again observed a downward trend between 2008 and 2019. From 2017 to 2019, there was a decrease of the percentage of PAN voters (58 percent to 36 percent) and PRI voters (43 percent to 38 percent) who supported this anti-democratic intervention. However, once again, among MORENA voters, we saw a less pronounced decline between 2017 and 2019 (52 percent to 45 percent). In other words, about half of the incumbent President's supporters approved of the military seizing control when corruption is widespread. The differences, however, are not statistically significant (Appendix B), therefore, we do not find support for hypothesis 2 in this scenario.

Overall, we see that MORENA voters do not seem to behave like winners of the 2018 election, as expected by the loser-winner gap literature. While they are more satisfied with democracy—and even report stronger support for democracy

in the abstract—after the election, AMLO voters do not decrease their support for executive aggrandizement and, in fact, are more likely to support a coup than other partisan groups, particularly when crime is high.

**Figure 7. Support for a Coup When Corruption is Widespread by Partisan Group, 2008–2019. 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 under the following circumstances: When corruption is widespread**




Note: Satisfaction calculated by summing the percentages of «Satisfied» and «Very Satisfied» responses. FCH = Felipe Calderón Hinojosa; EPN = Enrique Peña Nieto; AMLO = Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

*Source*: AmericasBarometer.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined public attitudes toward democracy in Mexico. Contrary to expectations of traditional loser-winner gap literature that argues that winners tend to exhibit strong support for democratic institutions, a substantial proportion of AMLO voters express willingness to support for illiberal actions that undermine democracy. While they can support democracy on the abstract—even more satisfied with democracy after winning the presidential election—they can also be tolerant

and enthusiastic about their co-partisan's illiberal actions once in power. Particularly in conditions when crime is perceived to be high (Zechmeister and Lupu 2019), AMLO voters prioritize partisan interests over democracy (Singer 2018).

One explanation as to why supporters of the president would express support for a coup under such circumstances is that López Obrador as president has been a strong advocate of military involvement in civilian activities, such as building infrastructure (e. g. airports, trains, highways, etc), policing the airports and customs areas or the country's southern border to stop immigration surges, and playing a prominent role in domestic security. This alliance with the military, uncommon in recent Mexican history, may lead MORENA voters to understand military interventions as aligned with their preferences. Alternatively, the increased involvement of the military in public life may make Mexican citizens, and especially MORENA voters, more likely to view the military as a legitimate political actor that would be able to respond effectively to high levels of crime, particularly if those individuals have not seen improvement in their lives in recent years.

Overall, these results coincide with recent literature that survival of democracy (Singer 2018, Cohen *et al.* 2022, Monsiváis-Carrillo 2023) is more challenging that the literature normally assumes. While most literature is concerned about losers' post-election behavior, winners who support a candidate with hegemonic aspirations can be a base of support of politicians' future illiberal actions. While public opinion by itself does not directly break democracies, their support makes democratic backsliding more likely (Classen 2020). Like Bolsonaro voters in Brazil's 2018 presidential election (Cohen *et al.* 2022), election results in Mexico's 2018 presidential election could exacerbate tolerance or support for democratic erosion: weakening of checks and balances and pluralistic politics and support for executive aggrandizement.

In terms of the scope of the argument of this paper, it is important to highlight that the evidence discussed in this paper is exploratory. Future studies should try to identify why some AMLO voters support democracy in the abstract, but they are willing to support illiberal actions that weaken democracy. Elite cues are important to understand public opinion formation, and it is likely that some voters are more likely to be responsive to AMLO's rhetoric and support the attack on democratic institutions. In that sense, it is possible that voters who have been loyal to López Obrador across different elections, are more likely to express grievances against the political system and, therefore, support undemocratic actions. Similarly, those voters who are more polarized, particularly affectively polarized against PAN and PRI, are likely to prioritize partisan interests over democracy.

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# APPENDIX

## APPENDIX A. LAPOP'S AMERICASBAROMETER DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES ITEMS

| DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES | QUESTIONS |
|---|---|
| Support for democracy | 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?<br>Response options: Seven-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disagree to (7) Strongly agree. |
| Opposition to military coups | 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…<br>JC10. When there is a lot of crime<br>Response options: (1) A military take-over of the state would be justified; (2) A military takeover of the state would not be justified. |
| | 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…<br>JC13. When there is a lot of corruption<br>Response options: (1) A military take-over of the state would be justified; (2) A military takeover of the state would not be justified. |
| Opposition to executive aggrandizement | 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?<br>Response options: (1) Yes, it is justified; (2) No, it is not justified. |
| | 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?<br>Response options: (1) Yes, it is justified; (2) No, it is not justified. |

*Source*: AmericasBarometer.

## APPENDIX B

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Satisfaction | Support | Coup (crime) | Coup (corruption) |
| Winners (AMLO vs PAN/PRI) | 0.01 | 0.26** | -0.17*** | -0.08 |
| | (0.07) | (0.13) | (0.06) | (0.06) |
| Education | 0.01** | 0.05*** | 0.03*** | 0.02*** |
| | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) |
| Gender (Female vs Male) | -0.04 | -0.26*** | -0.11** | -0.03 |
| | (0.05) | (0.10) | (0.05) | (0.05) |
| Age | -0.00** | 0.01*** | 0.01*** | 0.01*** |
| | (0.00) | (0.00) | (0.00) | (0.00) |
| Municipality (Urban vs Rural) | -0.05 | 0.11 | -0.02 | 0.03 |
| | (0.06) | (0.12) | (0.06) | (0.06) |
| Economy | 0.13*** | -0.09 | -0.01 | 0.01 |
| | (0.04) | (0.07) | (0.03) | (0.03) |
| Victim Crime | -0.21*** | -0.05 | 0.02 | 0.12** |
| | (0.06) | (0.11) | (0.05) | (0.05) |
| Constant | 2.76*** | 4.01*** | 1.19*** | 0.88*** |
| | (0.21) | (0.40) | (0.19) | (0.18) |
| Observations | 879 | 892 | 431 | 448 |
| R-squared | 0.05 | 0.05 | 0.12 | 0.07 |

*Source*: Authors' analysis.

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Ediciones Universidad Salamanca

# ANTI-DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES, THE WINNER-LOSER GAP, AND THE RISE OF THE LEFT IN MEXICO

Rodrigo Castro Cornejo and Joy Langston

Castro Cornejo, R., & Langston, J. (2023). Anti-Democratic Attitudes, the Winner-Loser Gap, and the Rise of the Left in Mexico. *Revista Latinoamericana de Opinión Pública*, *12*(2), 179-202. https://doi.org/10.14201/rlop.31414

ISSN: 1852-9003 - eISSN: 2660-700X
DOI: https://doi.org/10.14201/rlop.31567

# Liberal Democratic Support in Contemporary Brazil: A Descriptive Exploration

## *Apoyo a la democracia liberal en el Brasil contemporáneo: Un estudio exploratorio descriptivo*

## *Apoio à democracia liberal no Brasil contemporâneo: Um estudo exploratório descritivo*

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Submission: 2023-06-22
Accepted: 2023-11-17
First View: 2023-12-07
Publication: 2023-12-31

***Keywords:***
*support for democracy; Brazil; cluster análisis; public opinion*

**Abstract**
How do democratic attitudes map onto politic-economic context? We examine this question with a decade's worth of high-quality data on public opinion and democratic quality in Brazil. From this empirical foundation, we analyze the observable implications of four theoretical perspectives – democratic culture, performance-based instrumentality, winners' consent, and thermostatic dynamics. Our results suggest that during the periods of economic boom and bust, instrumental performance-based perspectives appear moste valid. But during the recent era of democratic backsliding, the evidence is more compatible with two models: one in which supporters of the incumbent tolerate the

erosion of civil liberties and political rights, and another model that predicts an attitudinal backlash against falling levels of democracy during the final years of the Bolsonaro government. These conclusions are tentative. More data is required to substantiate them and more rigorously test their empirical expectations.

*Palabras clave:*
*apoyo a la democracia; Brasil; cluster análisis; opinión pública*

**Resumen**
¿Cómo es que las actitudes democráticas se relacionan con el contexto político y económico? Examinamos esta pregunta con base en datos de una década sobre la opinión pública y la calidad democrática en Brasil. A partir de esta base empírica, analizamos las implicaciones observadas de tres modelos teóricos: el instrumental basado en el desempeño del gobierno, el consentimiento de los vencedores y la dinámica termostática. Nuestros resultados sugieren que, durante los períodos de expansión y crisis económica, una perspectiva instrumental basada en el desempeño parece más válida. Pero durante una época reciente de retroceso democrático, las evidencias son más compatibles con los otros dos modelos: 1) los partidarios del Gobierno toleran la erosión de las libertades civiles y los derechos políticos, 2) una reacción negativa a la caída de los niveles de democracia en los últimos años contra el gobierno de Bolsonaro. Estas conclusiones son provisionales, pero son necesarios más datos para fundamentar y probar con mayor rigor según sus expectativas empíricas.

*Palavras-chave:*
*apoio à democracia; Brasil; análise de cluster; opinião pública*

**Resumo**
Como é que as atitudes democráticas se relacionam com o contexto político e econômico? Examinamos esta questão com base em dados de uma década sobre a opinião pública e a qualidade democrática no Brasil. A partir desta base empírica, analisamos as implicações observáveis de três modelos teóricos – o instrumental baseado no desempenho do governo, o do consentimento dos vencedores e o da dinâmica termostática. Os nossos resultados sugerem que durante os períodos de expansão e crise econômica, a perspectiva instrumental baseadas no desempenho parece mais válida. Mas durante a recente era de retrocesso democrático, as evidências são mais compatíveis com os outros dois modelos: 1) apoiadores do governante toleram a erosão das liberdades civis e dos direitos políticos, 2) a reação negativa à queda dos níveis de democracia nos últimos anos do governo Bolsonaro. Estas conclusões são provisórias, pois são necessários mais dados para os fundamentar e testar com mais rigor as suas expectativas empíricas.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Democracies require mass support to thrive. Many theories connect democratic support and politic-economic context, but firm conclusions are difficult to draw. This study seeks to describe the levels and dynamics of democratic attitudes over the last ten years in Brazil and toexamine how well they conform to expectations derived from three analytic perspectives seeking to understand democratic support: 1) an "instrumental" perspective focusing on

whether democracy delivers desirable outcomes like sustained economic progress, political stability, and public safety; 2) a "winners' consent'' perspective focusing on citizens' preferences regarding who is in power; and 3) a "thermostatic" perspective, focusing on the advancement and erosion of the rights of political minorities. Data limitations preclude us from conducting rigorous tests of these competing analytic perspectives and, thus, from making any strong overarching claims about what drives democratic public opinion in Brazil. Nevertheless, our case study can help assess the leverage these analytic perspectives bring to the debate by uncovering evidence that corroborates or refutes them.

We begin this exploratory exercise by showing how various indicators of democratic support vary over five waves of the AmericasBarometer from 2012 to 2019. Next, we inspect these dynamics more deeply by decomposing the Brazilian public into distinct profiles of democratic support derived inductively via cluster analysis. Then we analyze potential connections between Brazilians' shifting support for liberal democracy and Brazil's shifting political-economic context. Results are broadly consistent with the notion that democratic support leads to more favorable context for democracy, while highlighting new theoretical wrinkles and key areas for future exploration.

## 2. LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN BRAZIL: ATTITUDINAL INDICATORS

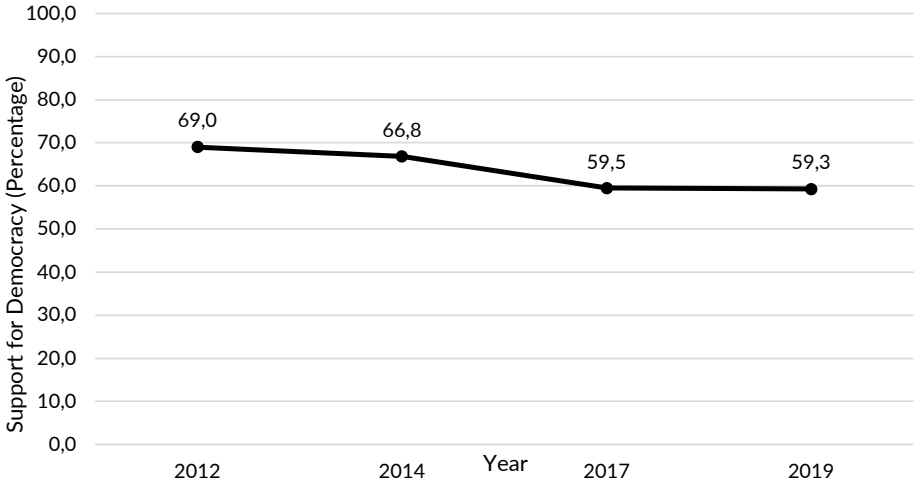
Like the other case studies in this special issue, we examine the following five sets of attitudes[1]:

- *Support for democracy*: The extent to which Brazilians agree with the statement that "democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government".
- *Opposition to military coups*: Whether Brazilians believe it would be justified for the military to take power in a military coup under certain circumstances.
- *Opposition to executive aggrandizement*: Whether Brazilians believe it would be justified for the president to close Congress and the Supreme Court and govern without them.
- *Tolerance of protest and regime critics*: The extent to which Brazilians support the right to protest and other political rights of individuals who criticize the regime.
- *Support for democratic inclusion*: The extent to which Brazilians support the political inclusion of homosexuals.

1. For details about the variables, see Appendix A.

These attitudinal categories were chosen based on two criteria. First, they reflect support for a liberal form of democracy, in which elections determine who governs, citizens enjoy free speech, and political rights are broadly inclusive. Second, items tapping these categories were available on the AmericasBarometer from 2012 to 2019, permitting articles in this special issue to compare across Latin America and the Caribbean. Whatever defects these items have must be weighed against these benefits.

**Figure 1. Support for Democracy, Brazil, 2012–2019**



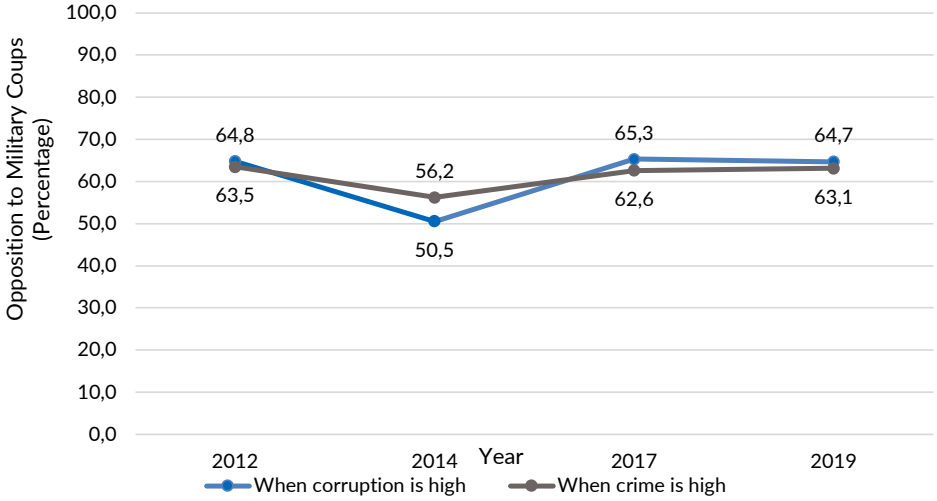

*Source*: LAPOP AmericasBarometer.

*Note:* The original seven-point scale was recoded so that points 5, 6, and 7 represent those who support democracy.

Figure 1 shows the evolution of support for democracy between 2012 and 2019. Brazilians started the 2010's with strong aggregate support for democracy: almost 70 percent of Brazilians supported democracy in the abstract in 2012. From there, stated democratic support declined before leveling off in 2019, 10 percentage points below its 2012 level (59.3 percent).

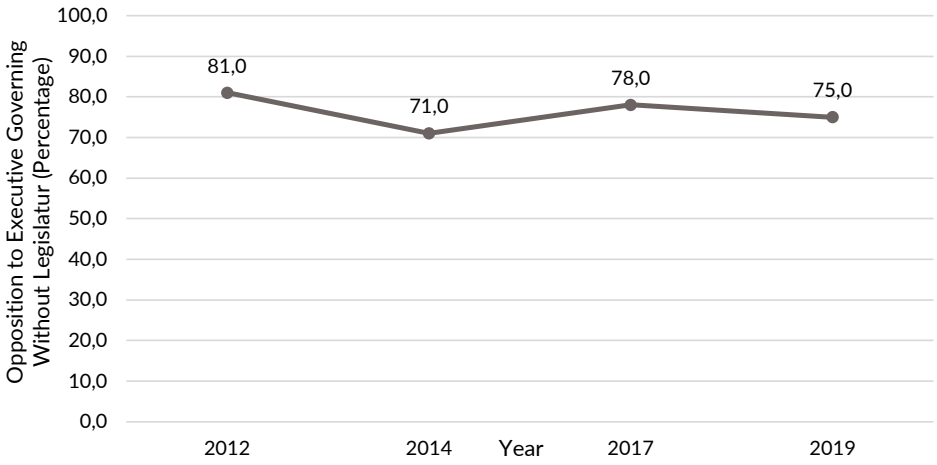
The percentage of Brazilians who opposed military coups varied over time (Figure 2). Under circumstances of both high corruption and high crime, Brazilians' opposition to military intervention dropped by roughly 15 percentage points between 2012 and 2014 before returning to previous levels in 2017 and 2019. Some-what similarly, the percentage of Brazilians who opposed executive aggrandizement fell dramatically in 2014 and improved somewhat in 2017, only to sag there-after (Figure 3).

**Figure 2. Opposition to Military Coups, Brazil, 2012–2019**




*Source:* LAPOP AmericasBarometer.

**Figure 3. Opposition to Executive Governing without Legislature, Brazil, 2012–2019**



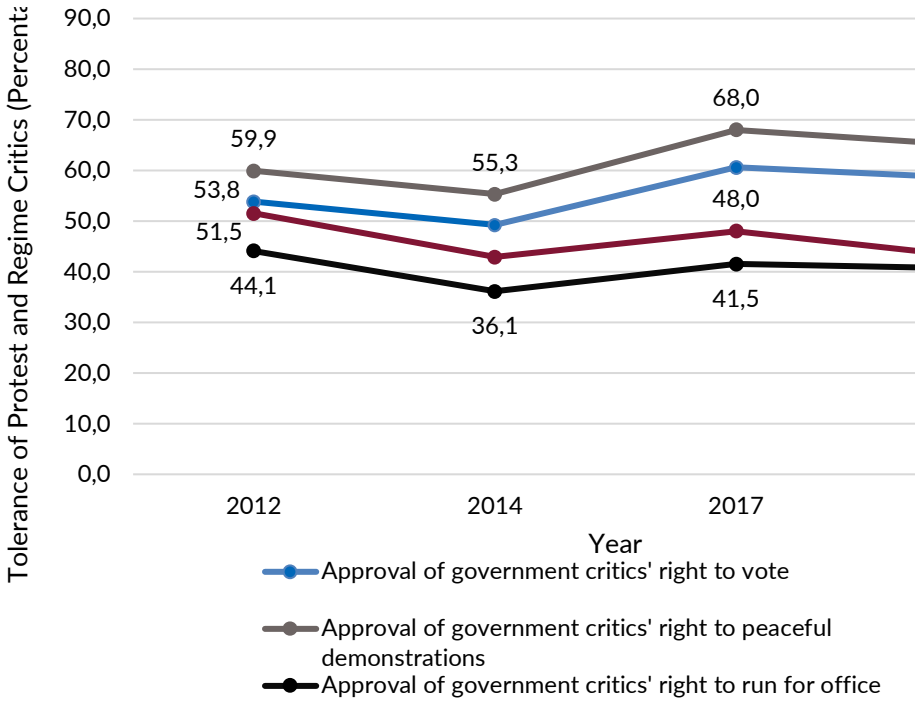

*Source:* LAPOP AmericasBarometer.

The dynamics of mass opposition to executive aggrandizement (Figure 3) mirror those of opposition to military coups under high corruption. Namely,

Brazilians' opposition to the executive governing without the Legislature fell dramatically in 2014, recuperated in 2016, only to sag thereafter.

The percentage of Brazilians who approved of the political rights and civil liberties of regime critics was generally high. However, approval of regime critics' right to run for office was low relative to the other rights depicted, whereas support for their right to peacefully demonstration was relatively high. All five indicators followed the same trend in this period, with support falling between 2012 and 2014, rising by 2017, and declining modestly again by 2019 (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Tolerance of Protest and Regime Critics, Brazil, 2012–2019**




*Source:* LAPOP AmericasBarometer.

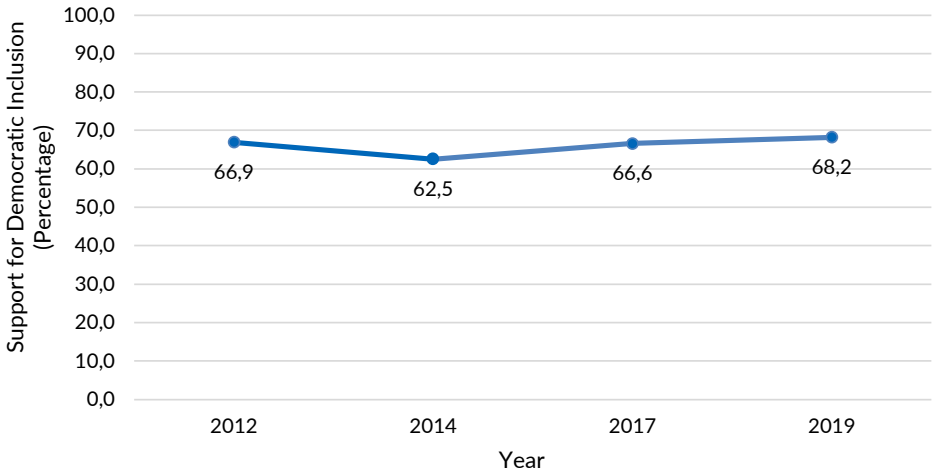
*Note:* The original 10-point scale was recoded so that points 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 represent those who approve.

Tolerance of the political rights and civil liberties of regime critics has been generally high in Brazil (see Figure 5). Approval of regime critics running for public office is low relative to the other rights depicted, whereas support for protest rights is relatively high. All five indicators exhibited S-shaped

variation in this period, with support falling in 2014, rising in 2016, and falling again by 2018.

Like the other indicators, the percentage of Brazilians who supported democratic inclusion fell from 2012 to 2014 (Figure 5). However, it has climbed steadily since then. Importantly, in any given survey year, about two in every three respondents approved of homosexuals' right to run for office.

**Figure 5. Support for Democratic Inclusion, Brazil, 2012–2019**




*Source:* LAPOP AmericasBarometer.

*Note:* In the variable on homosexual' rights, the original seven-point scale was re-coded so that points 5, 6, and 7 represent those who approve. In the variable about political leaders, the percentages of "disagree" and "strongly disagree" were added.

## 3. DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDE PROFILES IN BRAZIL, 2012–2019

The preceding section provided a time-lapse picture of five attitudinal dimensions of liberal democracy in Brazil. We now turn to a more sophisticated analysis of the profiles of democratic support at large. Liberal democrats should, by definition, hold broadly liberal orientations on all five dimensions. Yet, individuals may hold liberal orientations to only some, or even none, of those dimensions.

Recognizing this possibility, we employ cluster analysis to identify the most dominant democratic attitudinal profiles among the Brazilians. The aim of this method is to maximize attitudinal similarity within each cluster while maximizing attitudinal dissimilarity between clusters. In doing so, we allow

the survey data to "speak" for itself without making assumptions in advance about how to group citi-zens' attitudes (e. g., Schedler and Sarsfield, 2007; Carlin, 2011; Carlin and Singer, 2011). The introduction to this special issue provides detailed information regarding the study's methodology as well as a set of validation tests.[2] We follow this approach for four biennial waves (2012, 2014, 2017, 2019) of the AmericasBarometer conducted in Brazil. Our cluster analysis included the five democratic attitudes discussed in the preceding section: support for democracy, opposition to military coups, opposition to executive ag-grandizement, tolerance for protest and regime critics, and support for democratic inclusions.

Questions measuring all five attitudes were available in the first four survey waves (2012, 2014, 2017, and 2019). Only three attitudes were available in 2021: support for democracy, opposition to military coups, and opposition to executive aggrandizement. The 2021 cluster analysis results are therefore not directly comparable to those of prior waves and not discussed in this report. The appendix presents the main cluster analysis results for all waves.

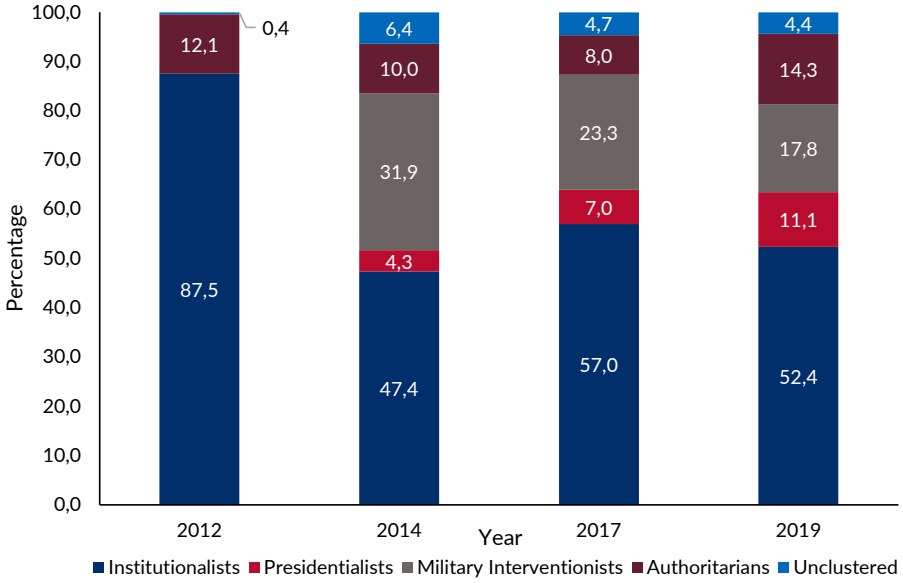
The cluster analysis identified two clusters in 2012 and four clusters each in 2014, 2017, and 2019. In all waves, a small share of respondents was not classified into any cluster. Unclustered individuals were dissimilar from each other and from those included in other clusters. To facilitate comparisons over survey waves, the resulting clusters can be grouped into four groupings that share a set of defining characteristics:

- *Institutionalists:* Individuals in this group of clusters are characterized by full opposition to military coups and executive aggrandizement. They more closely represent "ideal" democratic citizens than any of their counterparts . This grouping includes institutionalists, democratic institutionalists, and ambiva-lent institutionalists.
- *Military Interventionists:* Individuals in this cluster grouping exhibit full opposition to executive aggrandizement but less-than-full opposition to coups.

2. As the authors of the introduction say, cluster analysis refers to a suite of classification techniques used extensively in market research, some social and natural sciences, and computer science. Cluster analysis entails analyzing a collection of heterogeneous objects and grouping them into smaller, more homogenous clusters according to two or more measurable attributes. Of its several variants, we employ Campello *et al.* (2013)'s Hierarchical Density-based Clustering (HDBScan). HDBScan relies on density clustering, effectively finding clusters of different shapes and sizes and calculates each point's outlier score (GLOSH) to identify ungrouped observations. Its main advantages are that the identified clusters maximize the sum of individual cluster stabilities, and it chooses the number of clusters inductively. The only parameter HDBScan users must enter is the minimum cluster size(as a percentage of the sample). Our choice of three percent produces a few medium-size clusters for Brazil and the other countries in this special issue. Since responses to political preference questions tend to correlate, we selected Mahalanobis distances for HDBScan's distance metric.

- *Presidentialists:* Individuals in this classification exhibit full opposition to coups but less-than-full opposition to executive aggrandizement.
- *Authoritarians:* Individuals in this cluster grouping are characterized by less-than-full opposition to both coups and executive aggrandizement.

**Figure 6. Evolution of Cluster Families, Brazil, 2012–2019**




*Source:* LAPOP AmericasBarometer.

*Note:* The Institutionalists grouping includes Institutionalists, Inclusive Institutionalists, and Democratic Institutionalists. The Military Interventionists grouping includes Military Interventionists and Ambivalent Military Interventionists. The Authoritarians grouping includes Authoritarians and Ambivalent Authoritarians.

Figure 6 presents the results of the cluster analysis. Three findings stand out. First, results from 2012 indicate that Brazilians were rather homogeneous in their democratic attitudes: 87.5 percent of respondents were classified as ambivalent institutionalists, displaying high support for democracy, medium-to-high opposition to military coups, and full opposition to executive aggrandizement (see Figure A1 in the appendix). In later years, the cluster analysis was able to identify more dis-tinct attitudinal profiles, and institutionalists ceased to display ambivalent attitudes. Second, between 2014 and 2019, the share of institutionalists increased slightly, from 47.4 percent of respondents to 52.4 percent. Third, between 2014 and 2019, the share of military interventionists and presidentialists

shifted. Military interventionists decreased from 31.9 percent to 17.8 percent, while presidentialists increased from 4.3 percent to 11.1 percent. The share of authoritarians remained relatively stable throughout the period under analysis.

Our cluster analysis identified the demographic, socioeconomic, geographic, and other characteristics that significantly distinguished respondents in each cluster from the rest of the sample for each survey wave. The study examined several variables, including age, gender, wealth, race, education, crime victimization, corruption victimization, political efficacy (the belief that politicians respond to citi-zens' preferences), and political participation. While respondents in all clusters were statistically significantly different from others in a few variables in each wave, there were few stable patterns across all waves and the differences were substantially small. This suggests that the demographic, socioeconomic, geographic, and other characteristics examined do not structure attitudes toward democracy in a meaningful way. These caveats aside, we did find some recurrent statistically significant differences that are worth highlighting.

### *3.1. Institutionalists*

Brazilians classified as institutionalists best approximate ideal-typical liberal democrats. Brazilians in this group oppose both military coups and executive aggran-dizement. They are the group most tolerant of protest and regime critics, though still at only modest levels. Citizens in this group are also highly supportive of democratic inclusion. From 2012 to 2018, institutionalists compose the largest group, ranging between 47.2 to 87.5 percent of the sample.

Women were proportionally more likely to be classified as institutionalists in 2017 and 2019, potentially in reaction to President Dilma Rousseff's impeachment and President Michel Temer's subsequent rollback of gender equality in government. Bucking trends elsewhere, (Foa and Mounk, 2016), Brazilian youth (aged 18–29) became more prevalent among the institutionalists in 2017, while older Brazil-ians became less prevalent. Institutionalists had more average years of schooling than other Brazilians in 2017 and 2019. In 2019, they expressed significantly less approval of the president than others (43.2 percent vs. 60.3 percent) and were less likely to believe that those in government are interested in what people think (33.5 percent vs. 41.2 percent).

### *3.2. Military Interventionists*

Military interventionists hold many common attitudes with institution-alists, including robust support for democracy and democratic inclusion, moderate levels

of tolerance of dissent, and unanimous rejection of executive aggrandize-ment. However, military interventionists are far more permissive of the military stepping in during times of high corruption and high crime. Military intervention-ists are typically the second-most-populous attitudinal cluster in Brazil, ranging from 17.8 percent of the sample to 31.9 percent.

Demographically, the military institutionalist category displays a few distinct traits. In 2019, this grouping included a lower percentage of whites and a higher percentage of black Brazilians. Attitudinally, military interventionists showed diverg-ing forms of political efficacy in 2019. They expressed the least confidence in their understanding of important political issues (low internal efficacy), yet they had significantly more faith that the government is interested in what people think than other Brazilians (high external efficacy).

### *3.3. Presidentialists*

Presidentialist Brazilians oppose military coups, but they believe the president would be justified in dissolving the legislature or Supreme Court and governing without them during "very difficult times". Presidentialists have moderate support for democracy and democratic inclusion and their support is lower than the other clusters. Presidentialists represented a small but growing portion of the population, at 4.3 percent of respondents in 2014, to 7.0 percent in 2017, and 11.1 percent in 2019.

No specific characteristic distinguishes presidentialists from their fellow citizens. Presidentialists registered some of the lowest levels of education of all Brazilians in 2019. Their presidential approval ratings swung wildly, from 7.6 percent for then-President Temer in 2017, to 61.9 percent for President Jair Bolsonaro in 2019. Presidentialists personify the anti-establishment, anti-democracy segment of the Brazilian populace. Their ranks expanded following the ouster of President Rousseff from the long-ruling Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT). They harshly disapproved of her establishment Vice President and successor (Temer), and they championed the authoritarian-populist (Bolsonaro), who painted the political class as corrupt, elitist, and out of touch with ordinary Brazilians.

### *3.4. Authoritarians*

Authoritarians believe the military would be justified in interrupting democratic politics in certain circumstances. They would also justify the president dissolving the legislature or Supreme Court and governing without them if the country faces "very difficult times." Authoritarians nonetheless hold moderate support for

democracy and democratic inclusion. The percentage of Brazilians in this category ranged from a low of 8.0 percent in 2017 to a high of 14.3 percent in 2019.

In 2012 and 2019, the proportion of white Brazilians was significantly higher among authoritarians than among the rest of the sample, and the proportion of black and brown Brazilians was lower. Authoritarians also stood out by holding a significantly higher level of approval for Presidents Temer (2017) and Bolsonaro (2019) compared to other Brazilians.

## 4. EXPLAINING LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDINAL DYNAMICS IN BRAZIL

What explains these attitudinal trends? Highly variable democratic attitudes and mixed attitudinal profiles are not uncommon in relatively new democracies (see reviews in Borba and Ribeiro Cardoso, 2021 and König *et al*., 2022). In this section we identify potential explanations for changes in democratic attitudes in Brazil over time and analyze them in light of the temporal dynamics observed. We caution, however, that our conclusions will necessarily be tentative. Data limitations prevent more systematic empirical tests and, in turn, inferences.

At least three analytic perspectives can shed light on this phenomenon. According to an instrumental or performance-based perspective, volatile democratic attitudes are expected where democracy has not delivered sustained economic progress, political stability, and public safety (e. g., Lipset, 1959; Easton, 1965, 1975; Magalhães, 2014). Until then, citizens may view democracy instrumentally.That is, they may assess democracy on its ability to provide desirable economic, political, and social outcomes (Bratton and Mattes 2001; Claassen and Magalhães, 2022; Fuks, Casalecchi, and Ribeiro, 2019; Katz and Levin, 2016; Mattes and Bratton, 2007). Given Brazil's inconsistent track record on these matters, many Brazilians may continue to ask, "what has democracy done for me lately?".

The winners' consent perspective argues that citizens show greater support for democratic institutions when their preferred leader or party is in power (Cohen *et al*., 2022; Singer, 2022). However, this support can be shallow and accompanied by support for backsliding that advantages the incumbent. The winners' consent phenomenon makes democracy vulnerable to autocratizing leaders and, in turn, could produce variation in the nature, number, and social composition of profiles of dem-ocratic support over time.

Finally, democracy and democratic attitudes may be locked into a thermostatic relationship: increases in rights of political minorities lead to the rejection of democracy by the majority, and to increases in public support for democracy when these rights become accepted and are subsequently removed or threatened

(Claassen, 2020). Our Brazilian case study can contribute new insights into the debate surrounding this analytic perspective (Tai, Hu, and Solt, 2022).

## 5. THREE ANALYTIC PERIODS

We structure our exploration of changes in democratic support profiles in Brazil around three analytic periods. These periods represent what we call political-economic contexts because they present distinctive characteristics in terms of the state of the national economy, with variations in growth, inflation and unemployment rates, but also in political terms, with occurrences of scandals involving leaders and political parties, important variations in indicators of trust and political support, and an Impeachment process, as we remember below. The pre-2013 period represents the apex of economic and political performance. Fueled by the commodity boom, President Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva presided over a massive expansion of the Brazilian economy, stable prices and exchange rates, and major gains in poverty reduction. He passed the presidential sash to his protégé, Dilma Rousseff, in 2011. We refer to this as the boomtimes period.

However, boom led to bust. Rousseff suffered the "bad luck" of declining global commodity prices and, in turn, deteriorating domestic economic outcomes (Campello and Zucco, 2020). In 2013, demonstrations erupted in several Brazilian cities. Initially focused on public transportation fare hikes, they expanded to protest government corruption, police brutality, and lack of funding for education and healthcare. The following year, the Federal Police opened the Operation Lava Jato anti-corruption criminal investigation, which targeted key public officials and businesspeople. In 2015, at the beginning of Rousseff's second term, anti-corruption protests erupted across the country, many of them calling for her impeachment. Protests continued throughout 2016 and ended with Rousseff's removal and Temer becoming President. The Brazilian right, which has been reinventing itself and occupying the "public sphere" (Rocha, Solano, and Medeiros, 2021) since the beginning of the 2000s, was very active in these protests. With Brazil's political class in full-blown crisis, Judge Sérgio Moro convicted Lula of corruption for presumably receiving a condominium from a construction firm implicated in the Lava Jato scandal. This conviction plucked Lula out of the 2018 presidential race and into prison.

This period of deep political crises affected political elites, institutions, and parties, especially Lula and Rousseff's party, the PT. Since the massive demonstrations of 2013, the PT had been under heavy attack from the streets (Rousseff's sinking presidential approval) (Solano, Oliveira Rocha, 2019; Tatagiba, 2018), from the legislature (Rousseff's impeachment), and from the judiciary (Lula's imprisonment) (Limongi, 2023). At the same time, the economic crisis from

Rousseff's first term continued, with excessive public spending and unchecked inflation. Following Hunter and Power (2019), we refer to the time from the 2013 protests until Bolsonaro's 2018 election as the perfect storm period.

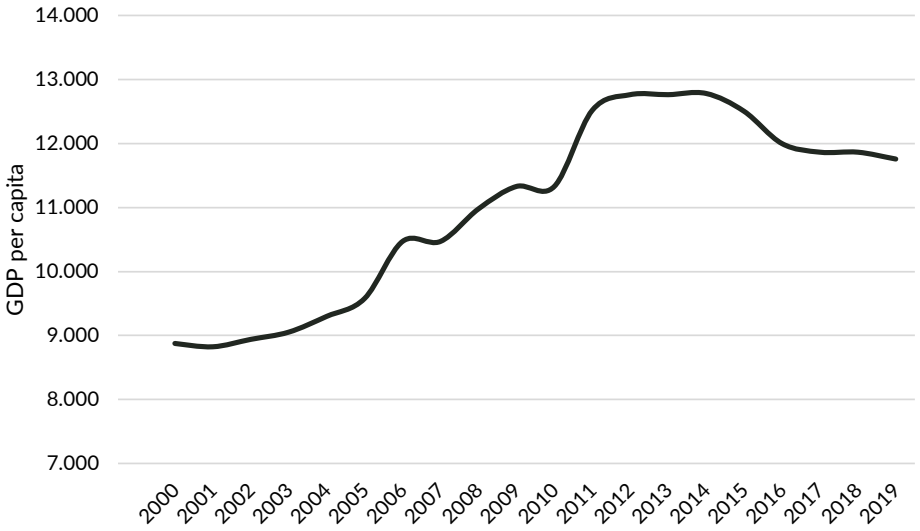
The third period encompassed Bolsonaro's time in office. Bolsonaro actively undermined democratic norms and institutions by denying the legitimacy of his political opponents, verbally attacking journalists and undermining indigenous property rights in the Amazon. He also sowed baseless doubt that Brazil's voting machines produced fraudulent results and threatened to cancel the 2022 elections unless they were supplemented with a paper ballot. Most strikingly, Bolsonaro incited a series of (often violent) anti-democracy protests in response to a high court judge vetoing his appointee for Director of Federal Police. During the protests, Bolsonaro declared "I am the constitution" and alluded to the possibility of the military stepping in to subvert this check on presidential authority. In defiance of a May 2020 court order to relinquish his cell phone to a corruption investigation, Bolsonaro threatened direct military interference to close Congress and the Supreme Court. After a period of being cowed by Bolsonaro's attacks on democracy, political institutions and society started reacting. The first clear signal of institutional reaction came from the Supreme Court, which opened investigations into fake news in 2018 and anti-democratic activities in 2021. We refer to the time since the election of Bolsonaro as the democratic backsliding period.

How well do the composition and distribution of democratic attitudes over time in Brazil comport with the analytic perspectives outlined above? We employ deductive reasoning to examine our three analytic perspectives against the data in these three analytic periods. As previously noted, lack of observations and an abundance of variables present enormous challenges for drawing confident conclusions about causal relationships. Hence, we cannot adequately test hypotheses and our interpretations must, therefore, be tentative.

### *5.1. Boomtimes*

Unfortunately, we only have comparable individual survey data from one year of Brazil's boomtimes, 2012. But economic data beginning in 2000 helps paint a picture of this period of tremendous economic expansion. Brazil's GDP per capita was over $12,500 by 2012 and still rising (Figure 7). That same year, the infamous mensalão scandal broke, uncovering monthly allowances purportedly paid to deputies to vote in favor of projects of interest to the Executive during the government of Lula da Silva. Unemployment (Figure 8) and inflation rates (Figure 9) were in the single digits.

**Figure 7. GDP per Capita in Brazil, 2012–2018**

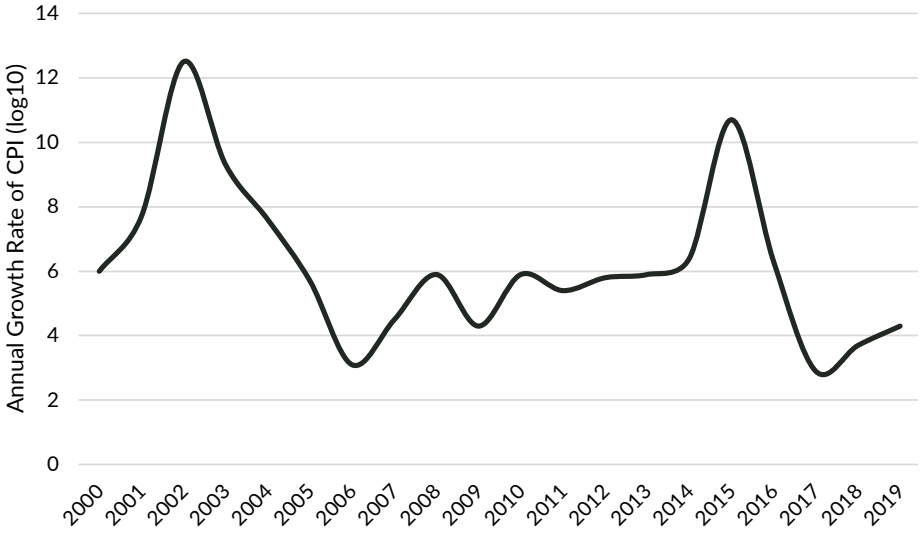



*Source:* Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

**Figure 8. Average Annual Unemployment Rate in Brazil, 2012–2018**


*Source:* Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

**Figure 9. Annual Growth Rate of the Consumer Price Index, Brazil, 2012–2018**




*Source:* Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.
*Note:* Calculated from December to December.

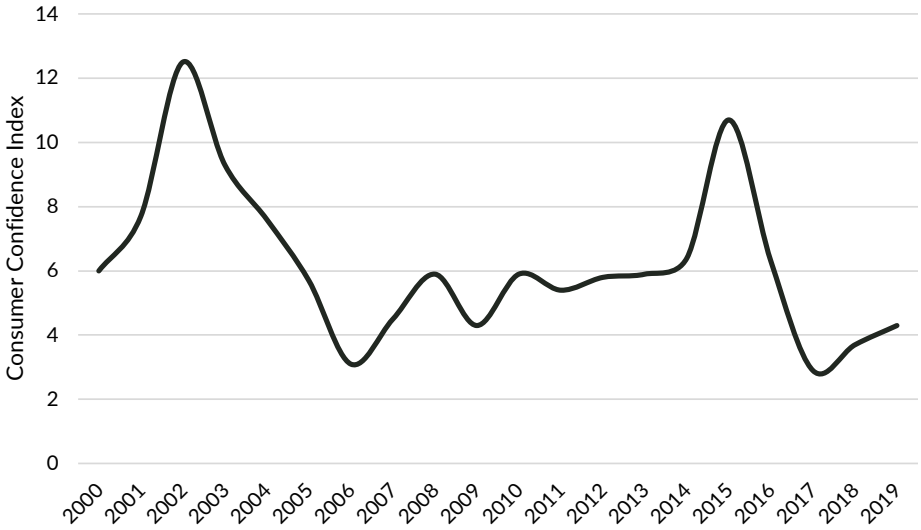
The performance-based perspective nicely predicts the distribution of democratic support profiles during the boomtimes. A very high percentage of Brazilians were institutionalists in 2012. Equally telling was their relative standing: institutionalists outnumbered authoritarians, the only other profile that emerged that year, more than 7:1. Improving socioeconomic conditions coincided with the dominance of institutionalist modes over more interventionist and authoritarian ones. While we cannot tell if the dominance of institutionalists in 2012 represented a change from prior waves, the distributions were consistent with what performance theories would predict in 2012.

Given that 87.5 percent of Brazilians fit the institutionalist profiles in 2012, and Dilma Rousseff was elected president in 2011 with 56.1 percent of the vote, there is little to suggest that whether or not one voted for or against the winner heavily determined these profiles. The thermostatic theory is difficult to assess without data before 2012. It would, nonetheless, predict that any rise (or fall) of democratic support should follow a fall (or rise) of levels of democracy. Yet V-Dem's Electoral and Liberal democracy components are essentially static throughout the boomtimes (see Figure 11 and 12 below). As such, democratic support appears to obey an instrumental, performance-driven logic at the tail end of the boomtimes period.

### *5.2. Perfect Storm*

The boomtimes were apparently not strong enough or long enough to buoy democratic attitudes through short-term performance failures. Political, economic, and social headwinds began buffeting Brazil between 2011 and 2012, as good economic times, characterized by low international interest rates and high commodity prices, came to an end (Campello and Zucco, 2021). Unemployment and inflation were somewhat slow to react, but citizens could read the writing on the wall. Figure 10 shows that consumer confidence nosedived by 43.9 points, or 40.5 percent of the previous total value, between December 2012 and April 2016. Impeachment proceedings began against Rousseff shortly thereafter.

**Figure 10. Consumer Confidence Index, 2012–2018 (December)**

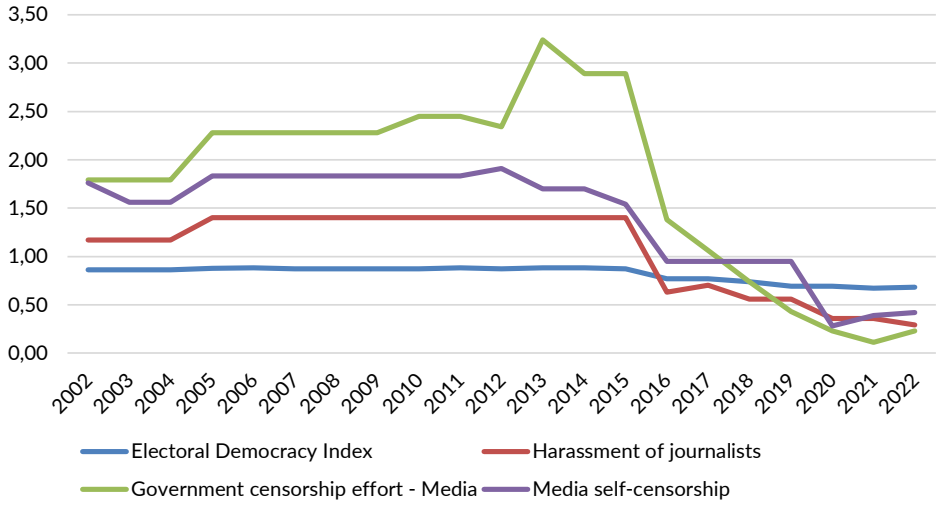



*Source:* Fundacão Getúlio Vargas.

Crises during the perfect storm coincided with spiraling democratic support. From 2012 to 2014, the ranks of the institutionalists shrunk by nearly half, to 47.4 percent of respondents, its lowest recorded point. Moreover, a crop of military interventionists emerged in 2014 and accounted for 31.9 percent of respondents, its highest recorded point. From 2014 to 2017, the share of institutionalists rebounded by roughly 20 % from its 2012 nadir. The proportion of military interventionists recoiled by about one quarter, and authoritarians regressed slightly, from 10 percent to 8 percent. Presidentialists, meanwhile, rose from 4.3 percent to 7.0 percent of the population.

The largest shift in democratic support profiles from 2012 to 2014 is fully consistent with an instrumental model that links democratic support to robust economic performance. Namely, pure institutionalist types appear to have mutated into hybrid presidentialist and military interventionist types. Pure authoritarians only contributed modestly to this shift: their ranks fell by just 2 percentage points. Economic performance may help explain the rise of presidentialists, but it cannot explain the uptick in institutionalists and the downtick in military interventions and authoritarians from 2014 to 2017.

**Figure 11. Electoral Democracy Index and Select Subcomponents of its Freedom of Association and Sources of Alternative Information Index**




*Source:* V-Dem.

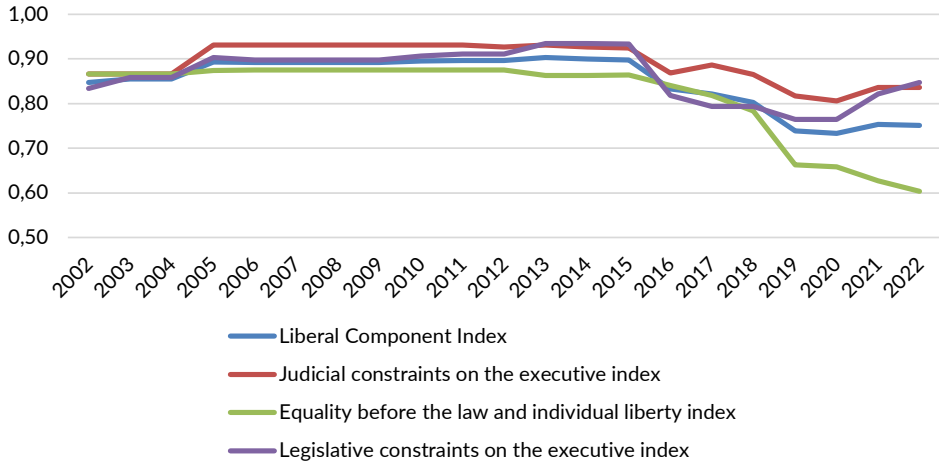
*Note:* 95 % confidence intervals excluded for ease of presentation. Compared to 2015, significant differences at the 95 % level register for the Electoral Democracy Index by 2016 and between 2017 and 2021; for the Government censorship effort - Media index by 2016, between 2016 and 2018, and between 2018 and 2021; for the Harassment of journalist index by 2016, and for Media self-censorship by 2016 and between 2019 and 2020.

Because the 2014-2017 interval encapsulates both the elected (then impeached), Dilma Rousseff and the unelected, Michel Temer, it is trickier to untangle. Nevertheless, let us consider the following evidence. First, lack of opposition towards coups d'etat, a hallmark of both the authoritarian profile and the military interventionist profile, subsided as an increasing number of Brazilians became presidentialists, i.e. they supported executive aggrandizement

but rejected military coups. This evidence is consistent with a winners' consent framework. Of course, these new presidentialists could just as easily have been Temer's allies – though he was famously unpopular – as scorned petistas who wished Rousseff had more power over an adversarial congress.

The evidence from the perfect storm period also comports with the thermostatic perspective's key prediction that a drop in democratic attitudes should precede a drop in levels of democracy. Indeed, a splintering of the ranks of institutionalist Brazilians from 2012 to 2014 preceded falling levels of V-Dem's Electoral and Liberal indexes of democracy from 2015, as depicted in Figures 11 and 12.

**Figure 12. V-Dem's Liberal Component Index and its Subindexes**




*Source*. V-Dem.

*Note:* 95 % confidence intervals excluded for ease of presentation. Compared to 2015, significant differences at the 95 % level emerged for the Liberal Component Index by 2018; for the Equality before the law and individual liberty index by 2019; and for the Legislative constraints on the executive index in 2019 and 2020. Judicial constraints do not differ significantly in this period.

Also suggestive of thermostatic dynamics are the growth in institutionalists and the decline in military interventionists and authoritarians from 2014 to 2017. That is, democratic erosion starting in 2015 was followed by Brazilians embracing democracy and rejecting bald-faced forms of authoritarianism. Although the growing ranks of presidentialists in this period tempers support for the thermostatic models, they compromised just 7 percent of the sample in 2017. Their continued growth in the era of democratic backsliding, described below, deserves more careful consideration.

In sum, all three analytic perspectives shed light on certain dynamics of democratic support during the perfect storm. Yet none alone is sufficient. Economic performance seems most plausible helpful between from 2012 to 2014, but winners' consent and, particularly, thermostatic models are most tenable from 2014 to 2017.

An instrumental performance perspective also receives partial support. The former might have predicted a rebound in institutionalists and a regression in authoritarians from 2014 to 2017 had all of the economic numbers pointed in the same direction. But they were quite mixed. GDP kept falling through 2017 and unemployment reached its local peak in 2017. Inflation, however, fell dramatically in 2017 and consumer confidence had begun to rebound. So while we cannot rule out the possibility that these latter indicators fueled more institutionalist support, languishing growth and unemployment rates do not permit a straightforward inference.

In sum, the dynamics of democratic support during the perfect storm period cannot easily be explained through any of these three analytic lenses.

### *5.3. Democratic Backsliding*

The perfect storm precipitated a period of democratic backsliding. Although not pictured here, Brazil's V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index – a combination of the Electoral Democracy Index (in Figure 11) and Liberal Component Index (in Figure 12) experienced a statistically significant drop from 0.79 in 2014 to 0.70 in 2016. This is roughly the same level as Brazil's more troubled neighbors, Argentina and Peru. By 2018, the index declined even further, to 0.62, reaching a statistical tie with Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama. Yet an examination of democratic support profiles from the perfect storm period to the democratic backsliding period reveals a series of nuanced developments. From 2017 to 2019, the percentage of institutionalists declined 5 percentage points, to 52.4 percent. The percentage of military interventionists also declined, by 6 points, to 17.8 percent. Yet the percentage of presidentialists increased by almost 50 percent, or 4.1 percentage points, to 11.1 percent. Authoritarians, for their part, ballooned from 8 percent to 14.3 percent of Brazilians.

A strict performance-based perspective gives us little purchase on these dynamics. Although GDP growth had yet to return, the economy had stabilized by 2018. Unemployment peaked in 2017. Inflation ticked up from 2017 to 2018 but was near historic lows, and well below rates registered during the economic boomtimes. Consumer confidence was steadily trending up, and by December 2018 stood 47 percent higher than in December 2015. Such economic good news would be expected, in the instrumental model, to bolster support for democratic institutions. It did not.

In the wake of the perfect storm, it appeared that Bolsonaro's populist-nationalist rhetoric (Almeida, 2019; Borges and Rennó, 2021; Tamaki, Braga, and Fuks, 2021) and illiberal ideas resonated enough with Brazilians to win him the presidency (Castanho Silva, Fuks, and Tamaki, 2022). Bolsonaro's support could be attributable to changes in the public's democratic attitudes (Cohen *et al*., 2022), the awakening of illiberal attitudes (Rennó, 2020; Castanho Silva, Fuks, and Tamaki, 2022), the activation of latent populist attitudes (Hawkins *et al*., 2018; Fuks, Ribeiro and Borba, 2021; Paiva, Krause and Lameirão, 2016), or some blend of these explanations (e. g., Rovira Kaltwasser and Van Hauwaert, 2020). We cannot fully assess these explanations here.

Overall, however, the growth of undemocratic attitudes is consistent with what Claassen (2020) calls a "backlash" —a reaction to a set of liberalizing policies, norms, and behaviors that increasingly menaced the privilege of a substantive, more conservative, segment of Brazilian society. This wave of illiberal attitudes coinciding with the rise of Bolsonaro, who openly attacked civil liberties, the separation of powers, and political and social tolerance on the campaign trail and while in office, is probably not a coincidence. While electoral and liberal democracy were already in retreat when Bolsonaro appeared on the scene, we suspect that this made democratic institutions an easier target for his attacks. Indeed, several V-Dem indices further eroded during his combative government, including government censorship, media self-censorship (Figure 11), and equality before the law and individual freedom (Figure 12).

Unfortunately, data limitations in the 2021 wave of the AmericasBarometer prevent us from adequately judging the flipside of Claassen's (2020) thermostatic proposition: that an expansion of illiberalism during the democratic backsliding period triggers a reverse backlash in which support for democracy grows. However, two pieces of evidence point in this direction. First, the continued rise in support for democratic inclusion (Figure 5) could be a leading indicator of a broader democratic reaction. Second, cluster analysis based on a reduced set of indicators suggest institutionalists rebounded in 2021 to comprise as much as 62.7 percent of the population; this would represent nearly a 15-percentage point increase over the early part of the perfect storm in 2014 (see Figure Appendix A5). While this result is suggestive, only time (and data) will tell whether we are witnessing a reverse backlash in defense of democracy.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Combining economic indicators, measures of democracy, and contextual information about the national politics of the last two decades, this work presents an overview of the dynamics of democratic in contemporary Brazil. It brings

evidence to bear on some of the most plausible explanations of the cross-sectional and temporal variation in democratic support in Brazil. It cannot, however, offer definitive conclusions given the small-n, macro-level, and longitudinal research design employed throughout this special issue. As such, the tentative inferences drawn here should not be taken as positive or dispositive of any of the three analytic perspectives we consider.

When we examine individual indicators of support for liberal democracy in Brazil, 2014 stands out as a watershed. Rates of support on each dimension reached their trough that year, except for stated support for democracy, which bottomed out in 2017. Similarly, all indicators except for support for democratic inclusion rose sharply in 2017 before again falling in 2019.

Despite this volatility, we found a prominent profile of institutionalists in Brazil that closely approximates that of an ideal-typical liberal democrats. Institutionalists ranged from 47 percent to 88 percent of the national sample in this period. The second-largest grouping was military interventionists, who varied between 18 percent and 32 percent, followed by authoritarians and presidentialists, who varied between 8 and 14 percent, and 4 and 11 percent, respectively.

The core of this study is an analysis of how these democratic profiles vary over three distinct periods of the recent Brazilian democratic history: boomtimes, characterized by economic expansion and good political performance of the federal government pre-2013; perfect storm, which comprises the troubled period from 2013 to the election of Bolsonaro in 2018; and democratic backsliding, marked by Bolsonaro's attacks on democratic norms and institutions.

Theories that emphasize economic and political performance help to explain the dynamics of support for democracy in the first two periods. The perfect storm period proved compatible with all three models of democratic support dynamics. But the instrumental economic performance perspective was wholly insufficient to explain the positive variations of indicators of democratic support during the democratic backsliding current period. Data from this period suggest a society divided between a group that reacts to former president Jair Bolsonaro's assaults on democracy and another group more loyal to illiberal forms of government.

We agree in principle that short-run democratic backsliding largely owes to elite decision-making (Haggard and Kaufman, 2020; Tai, Hu, and Solt, 2022; see also Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán, 2014). Bolsonaro's unilateral actions in office were clearly aimed at, and succeeded in, damaging democratic institutions and norms. Even out of office, Bolsonaro continues to shape the thoughts and actions of millions of faithful followers. Therefore, we believe that illiberal shifts in the political context altered, at least initially, the distribution and the dynamics of democratic attitudes in Brazil in more illiberal directions. We cannot rule out, however, the possibility of the causal arrow running in both directions.

Based on these exploratory analyses, we make the following tentative conclusions. Brazilians' belief systems became less coherent in the wake of the perfect storm. Since then, Brazil appears to be a divided society, with pushback against democracy and an embrace of alternative government structures on the one hand and growing niches of democratic reaction on the other. Bolsonaro's election in 2018 includes a demand component. A right-wing electorate was greatly activated by the prominence of non-economic issues, such as the fight against crime, the rejection of the legalization of abortion, and the expansion of the rights of the LGBT+ community (Rennó, 2020). Associated with the growing widespread anti-partisanship and anti-PTism (Fuks, Ribeiro and Borba, 2021; Paiva, Krause and Lameirão, 2016), this demand for anti-system candidates connected to the extreme right is compatible with the movement observed in the democratic support clusters.

One worry is that the typical left-right cleavage is beginning to overlap with the pro-democracy/anti-democracy cleavage, which reinforces societal division. A fragile democratic tradition contributed to an instrumental withdrawal of loyalty to the regime in the perfect storm period, while recent institutional erosion during the democratic backsliding period could have sparked backlash to defending democracy. More research is needed to test whether and to what extent this conclusion accurately captures reality.

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## APPENDIX

The table presents the questions used by LAPOP, as well as the original scales of the variables.

**Table A1. Question Wordings and Variables used in Scales**

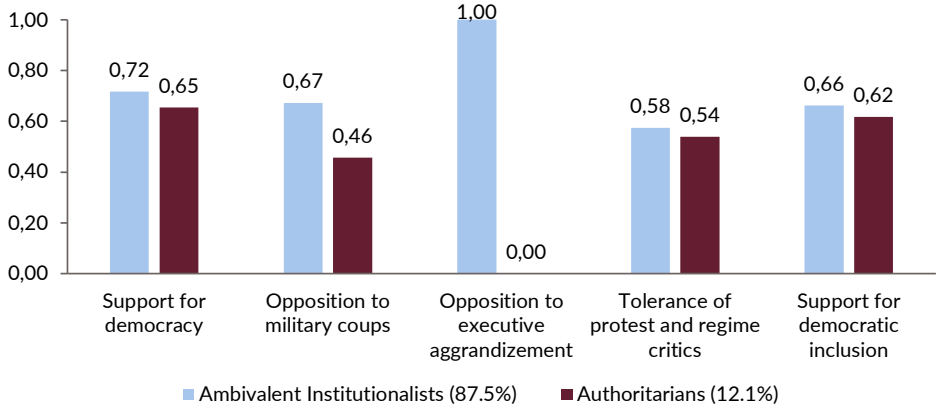
| Democratic Attitudes | Questions |
|---|---|
| Support for democracy | ING4. Changing the subject again, democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?<br>Response options: Seven-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disagree to (7) Strongly agree. |
| Opposition to military coups | 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…<br>JC10. When there is a lot of crime<br>Response options: (1) A military take-over of the state would be justified; (2) A military takeover of the state would not be justified. |
| | 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…<br>JC13. When there is a lot of corruption<br>Response options: (1) A military take-over of the state would be justified; (2) A military takeover of the state would not be justified. |
| Opposition to executive aggrandizement | 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?<br>Response options: (1) Yes, it is justified; (2) No, it is not justified. |
| | 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?<br>Response options: (1) Yes, it is justified; (2) No, it is not justified. |
| Tolerance of protest and regime critics | D1. There are people who only say bad things about the form of government of Brazil, 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.<br>Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve. |

| Democratic Attitudes | Questions |
|---|---|
| Tolerance of protest and regime critics | 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.<br>Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve. |
| | D3. Still thinking of those who only say bad things about the form of government of Brazil, how strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people being permitted to run for public office?<br>Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve. |
| | D4. How strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people appearing on television to make speeches?<br>Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve. |
| Support for democratic inclusion | 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?<br>Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve. |

*Source:* LAPOP AmericasBarometer.

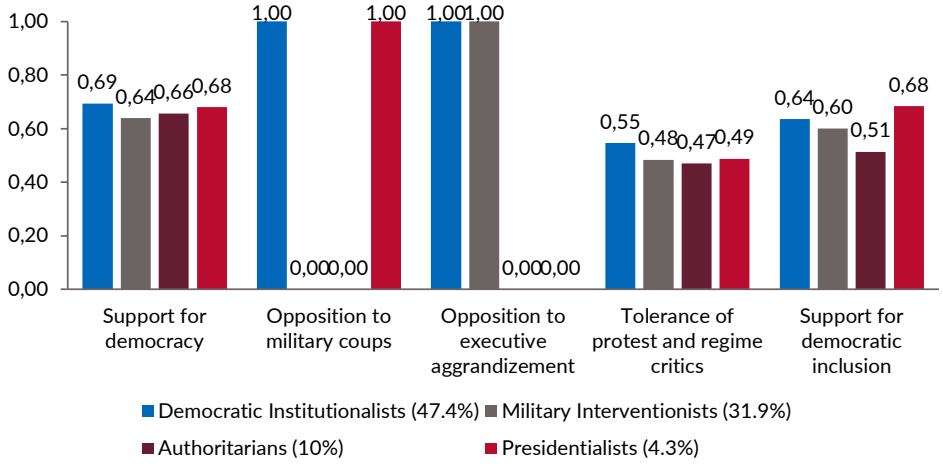
The bar graphs below present the main results of the cluster analysis. There is one bar graph per wave studied: 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019, and 2021. The bars indicate the average scores for the attitudes for each cluster. All attitude scores range from zero (least democratic) to one (most democratic). The percentages next to each clus-ter label in the legend indicate the share of respondents that was classified into the cluster. Thus, the graphs allow for comparing the clusters in terms of their demo-cratic attitudes and their relative size.

**Figure A1: 2012 Cluster Results**



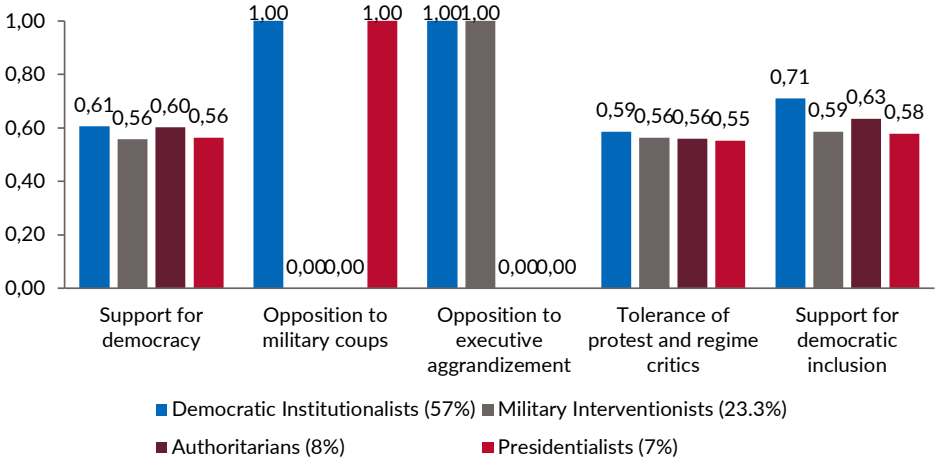

*Source:* LAPOP AmericasBarometer.

**Figure A2: 2014 Cluster Results**



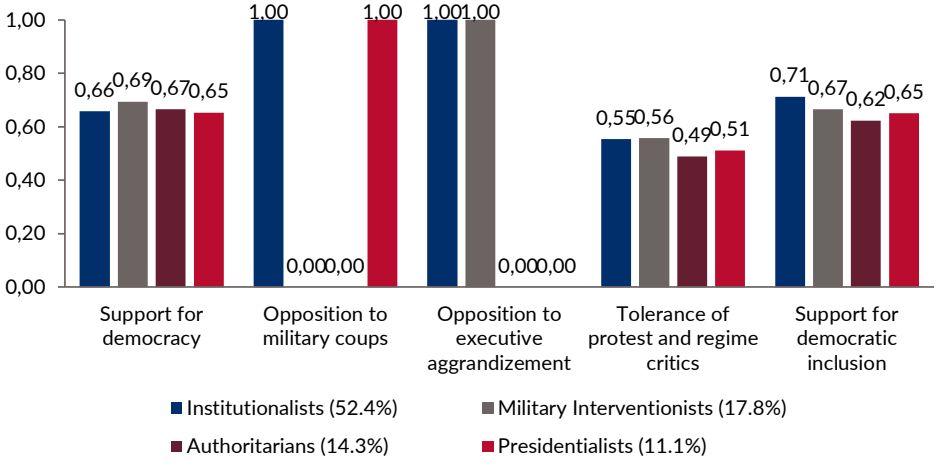

*Source:* LAPOP AmericasBarometer.

**Figure A3: 2017 Cluster Results**



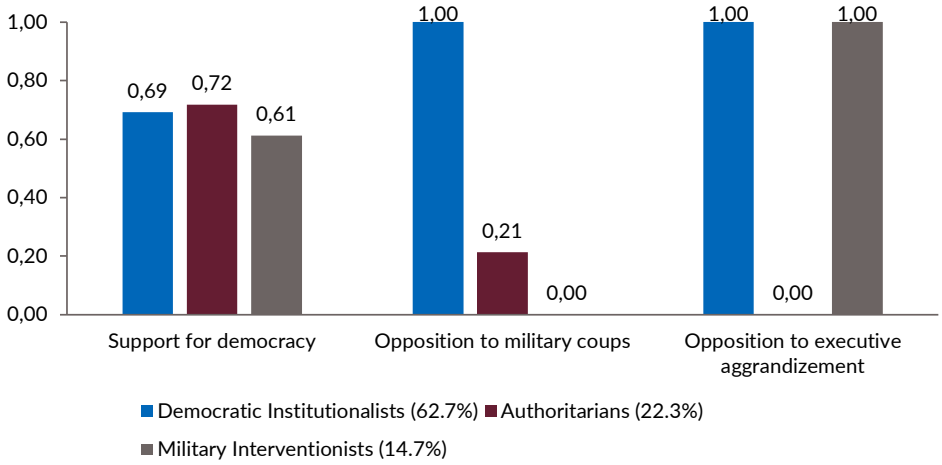

*Source:* LAPOP AmericasBarometer.

**Figure A4: 2019 Cluster Results**




*Source:* LAPOP AmericasBarometer.

**Figure A5: 2021 Cluster Results**




*Source:* LAPOP AmericasBarometer.

RLOP
Revista Latinoamericana de Opinión Pública

Ediciones Universidad Salamanca

# LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT IN CONTEMPORARY BRAZIL: A DESCRIPTIVE EXPLORATION

Ryan E. Carlin, Mário Fuks and Ednaldo Ribeiro

Carlin, R. E., Fuks, M. & Ribeiro, E. (2023). Liberal Democratic Support in Contemporary Brazil: A Descriptive Exploration. *Revista Latinoamericana de Opinión Pública*, *12*(2), 205-234. https://doi.org/10.14201/rlop.31567

# RESEÑAS

ISSN: 1852-9003 - eISSN: 2660-700X

# Asbel Bohigues. *Élites, radicalismo y democracia. Un estudio comparado sobre América Latina*. Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2021. 295 páginas. ISBN: 9788474768671.

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En las últimas décadas la agenda de investigación de los sistemas políticos en América Latina ha experimentado una notable mutación. De un interés por estudiar, a finales del siglo pasado, las quiebras de los gobiernos autoritarios y las transiciones democráticas (O'Donnell, Schmitter y Whitehead, 1994), se pasó, después, a dirigir la atención a los contextos y desafíos de consolidación de las nuevas democracias (Linz y Stepan, 1996) y, más recientemente, el foco se ha orientado a analizar la calidad de la democracia (Levine y Molina, 2011). Hoy, de nuevo, la cuestión de la supervivencia de la democracia es fuente de preocupación ante la llamada «tercera ola de autocratización» (Lührmann y Lindberg, 2019), que supone una erosión de la democracia «desde dentro» y afecta a varios países del área. Una de las claves interpretativas para abordar todas estas cuestiones es el papel de las élites políticas, en la medida en que sus acciones son relevantes para la vida de la ciudadanía y la configuración de un sistema de gobierno (Coller, Navarro y Portillo, 2016). Sin embargo, la atención que ha recibido esta temática en la literatura académica es muy inferior a la de otros componentes de una sociedad democrática, tales como las instituciones políticas o la ciudadanía. De modo que hay muchas cuestiones relativas a las características y el papel de las élites latinoamericanas pendientes de estudio.

En este contexto, el libro *Élites, radicalismo y democracia* (2021), de Asbel Bohigues, resulta particularmente bienvenido. Por un lado, porque constituye una excelente contribución al estudio de las élites políticas de América Latina y su rol en el desarrollo de la democracia, aportando novedosas reflexiones teóricas y evidencias empíricas. Por otro lado, porque la obra se publica en un momento en que el fenómeno del populismo se está extendiendo en la región, al igual que sucede en otras zonas del mundo, con los efectos nocivos que ello comporta para los partidos políticos y, en general, para la democracia (Weyland, 2021). De ahí que disponer de información detallada sobre las actitudes políticas de las élites

latinoamericanas y sobre cómo influyen en el desarrollo de la democracia resulte de especial relevancia.

La investigación de Asbel Bohigues presenta destacados puntos de conexión con la literatura «clásica» sobre los cambios de régimen político en la que se resalta el papel de las élites (O'Donnell, Schmitter y Whitehead, 1994; Linz y Stepan, 1996), pero da un paso más allá, en la medida en que se interesa por examinar el papel de las élites una vez que la democracia está ya instalada. Como el autor dice, «si se asume que las élites importan en los procesos democráticos como la quiebra, la transición y la consolidación, deberíamos concluir que también importan una vez que la democracia es el único juego en la ciudad» (Bohigues, 2021: 2). En particular, el propósito de su estudio es analizar la influencia de las élites en las distintas variedades de democracia (electoral, liberal, participativa, deliberativa e igualitaria), así como en la «democracia plena», esto es, aquel régimen con altos niveles de cada variedad. Esto muestra otra diferencia con respecto a las investigaciones pioneras sobre democratización: el análisis de Bohigues deja de lado categorías binarias (democracia-dictadura) y se apoya en una concepción multidimensional de democracia, que permite examinar en qué medida las élites pueden favorecer u obstaculizar los distintos componentes de la misma.

El análisis del papel de las élites en el desarrollo de las diferentes variedades de democracia se realiza a partir de un estudio comparado de 18 países latinoamericanos desde 1995 a 2015. Para ello, se recurre a una rica metodología que combina técnicas cuantitativas y cualitativas. En concreto, se acude, primero, a una técnica multivariante, HJ-Biplot, para examinar la relación de las variables referentes a las élites políticas (así como otras variables de control) con cada una de las variedades de democracia por separado. A continuación, se agrupan todas las variedades en un único índice, al que se denomina «plenitud de democracia», y se realiza un análisis comparativo cualitativo a fin de identificar diferentes vías hacia una democracia plena y no plena. Por último, se profundiza en una de las vías a la democracia identificadas en el análisis anterior a partir del estudio comparado de dos casos contradictorios. A través de un *process tracing* se pretende explicar por qué dos países, a pesar de contar con condiciones similares de acceso a una democracia plena, tienen, empero, resultados diferentes.

El libro Élites, radicalismo y democracia está estructurado en ocho capítulos. El primer capítulo es introductorio y traza una presentación general de la investigación: objeto y casos de estudio, objetivos, metodología, principales hallazgos y estructura del trabajo. El segundo capítulo expone el marco teórico, articulado en tres secciones. En la primera se revisa la literatura sobre democracia, calidad de la democracia y variedades de la misma. A continuación, se examinan los principales factores explicativos de la democracia aportados en la literatura. Por último, se aborda el estudio de las élites políticas y su relación con la democracia, y se justifican teóricamente tres conceptos básicos que se utilizarán al analizar esta relación.

Dos de ellos corresponden a características de las élites: el apoyo a la democracia y el radicalismo (entendido como ubicación en los extremos del espectro ideológico). El tercer concepto concierne a un aspecto del contexto en el que operan las élites: las coyunturas críticas. Se trata de aquellos momentos en los que se abre una ventana de oportunidad para que los actores políticos tengan mayor poder de decisión para afectar al sistema en su conjunto.

El tercer capítulo expone el diseño metodológico. Para dar respuesta a la pregunta de investigación sobre el papel de las élites en el desarrollo de las diferentes variedades de democracia se barajan tres hipótesis: i) el apoyo a la democracia y el radicalismo de la élite tienen efectos opuestos en las variedades de la democracia: el primero favorece a las variedades electoral y liberal, mientras que el segundo a las variedades deliberativa, participativa e igualitaria; ii) en interacción con otras variables, la presencia de radicalismo es suficiente y el apoyo a la democracia no es necesario para una democracia plena; iii) los efectos positivos del radicalismo y la democracia de la élite están mediados por su trayectoria democrática. Además de la selección de casos y la estrategia metodológica mixta adoptada, cuestiones ya comentadas, se precisan las fuentes de datos utilizadas. Para las variables dependientes (variedades de democracia) se acude a la base de datos de Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) y para las variables independientes (actitudes de las élites) a la base de datos del Proyecto de Élites Latinoamericanas de la Universidad de Salamanca (PELA-USAL). Conviene destacar la elaboración de dos índices por el autor. Uno es el índice de coyunturas críticas, construido a partir de la combinación de indicadores de estabilidad económica y política de cada país. El otro índice es el de democracia plena, fruto de agregar las cinco variedades de democracia de V-Dem. Ambos son útiles aportaciones metodológicas para futuras investigaciones.

El capítulo cuarto describe los ciclos políticos y económicos de los países latinoamericanos desde 1995 a 2015, así como la evolución de las variables clave de la investigación, tanto las relativas a las élites (apoyo a la democracia y radicalismo) como a las variedades de democracia (las cinco variedades y la democracia plena). En este recorrido se examina también la dinámica de las coyunturas críticas en la región. Todo ello se sustenta en información cuantitativa muy variada, presentada de forma ágil y visual.

Los tres capítulos siguientes son los más interesantes del libro y muestran los resultados del análisis del papel de las élites en las distintas variedades de democracia. Se comienza presentando (capítulo quinto) los hallazgos derivados del análisis multivariante a través de HJ-Biplot. Se constata que las variables relativas a las élites tienen una relación significativa con las variedades de la democracia en América Latina y, en general, conforme a la primera hipótesis. Así, se aprecia que el apoyo a la democracia está vinculado positivamente a los componentes electoral, deliberativo e igualitario de democracia, mientras que el radicalismo está asociado de forma positiva con la variedad igualitaria de democracia, pero no con la liberal.

Conviene subrayar también el efecto de la desigualdad: constituye un factor negativo para una democracia participativa e igualitaria pero positivo para una liberal y deliberativa. El hecho de que la desigualdad evidencie estos distintos efectos en las variedades de democracia, a pesar de las consecuencias negativas sobre la calidad democrática destacadas en la literatura (Bermeo, 2010), revela la utilidad de recurrir a concepciones multidimensionales de democracia como hace el autor.

El capítulo siguiente (sexto) recoge los resultados del análisis cualitativo comparado, en el que examinan las distintas configuraciones entre las variables analizadas para alcanzar una democracia plena y no plena. En todos los casos se detectan dos condiciones necesarias para que un país disfrute de una democracia plena: la ausencia de coyunturas críticas y el desarrollo económico. Asimismo, el análisis de las condiciones de suficiencia revela cuatro vías de acceso a una democracia plena, de las que cabe destacar dos por sus implicaciones teóricas. Una es la vía de la desigualdad, que consiste en una combinación de apoyo ciudadano y de la élite a la democracia, ausencia de radicalismo, pasado democrático y presencia de desigualdad. Se constata, de nuevo, que la desigualdad no necesariamente tiene efectos nocivos para la democracia: en interacción con ciertas condiciones, favorece la democracia plena. La otra vía es la radical democrática, que combina apoyo de la élite a la democracia, ausencia de volatilidad electoral y desigualdad, presencia de radicalismo y pasado democrático. El radicalismo tiene efectos positivos para la democracia, siempre que vaya de la mano de apoyo a la misma. Como indica el autor (2021: 186), «siempre y cuando las élites políticas no cuestionen la democracia, que sean radicales es positivo. En tanto ese apoyo desaparezca [...] resulta nocivo». Este resultado confirma la segunda hipótesis de trabajo.

Por lo general, la temática de la radicalización y la polarización ideológica de las actores políticos es percibida como algo negativo, asociado con situaciones de conflicto, confrontación o parálisis (Singer, 2016). Sin embargo, recientes estudios han evidenciado las consecuencias positivas de esta temática. Por ejemplo, en relación con la polarización ideológica se ha constatado que hace aumentar el compromiso político y la participación, contribuye a reducir la incidencia del personalismo del voto o ayuda a ampliar el nivel de democracia (una referencia a estudios concretos en Barreda y Ruiz, 2020). El trabajo de Bohigues se suma, pues, a esta nueva literatura que muestra cómo el radicalismo ideológico, bajo ciertas condiciones, comporta efectos beneficiosos para una democracia.

El último capítulo de la parte de resultados (capítulo séptimo) profundiza en la vía radical democrática, a partir de un análisis comparado de dos casos: Uruguay y El Salvador. A través de un *process tracing* se examina por qué ambos países, pese a compartir condiciones de acceso a una democracia plena, presentan diferencias notables en relación con la plenitud de sus democracias. El análisis comparado revela que la clave radica en la evolución del apoyo a la democracia por parte de la élite, en sintonía con la tercera hipótesis del estudio. Mientras que en Uruguay la

élite siempre la ha apoyado, esto ha llevado mucho más tiempo en El Salvador, lo que ha sido una losa para el desarrollo de la democracia en el país.

El libro finaliza con un capítulo en el que se sintetizan los principales hallazgos y conclusiones del trabajo, las principales contribuciones teóricas y metodológicas, y se plantean algunas avenidas futuras de investigación.

Del estudio de Bohigues hay que enfatizar, ante todo, sus novedosos aportes teóricos y empíricos sobre el papel de las élites políticas en la configuración de las democracias, que en algunos casos contradicen tesis extendidas en la literatura. Si bien su objeto de estudio es América Latina, brinda un marco conceptual y analítico robusto, extrapolable a futuras investigaciones sobre la democracia en otras regiones o a escala global. Pero el valor del trabajo no se agota aquí. El buen conocimiento de que hace gala el autor sobre América Latina, así como la claridad y el rigor con que expone todas las cuestiones teóricas y metodológicas hacen ampliar el público potencialmente interesado. Por ello, a partir de ahora, este libro debería aparecer en un estante destacado de toda buena biblioteca que se precie sobre política comparada latinoamericana.

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ISSN: 1852-9003 - eISSN: 2660-700X

# Taylor Boas. *Evangelicals and Electoral Politics in Latin America. A Kingdom of This World.* NewYork: Cambridge University Press, 2023. 315 pages. ISBN: 978-1-009-27507-1. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009275088.

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Las movilizaciones de grupos conservadores en contra de agendas liberales en materia de aborto y derechos de población LGBTQ o la educación sexual y enfoque de género en los currículos escolares, han sido frecuentes en la última década en América Latina. Algunos candidatos presidenciales y partidos políticos han logrado capitalizar el voto de estos grupos, particularmente evangélicos. Sin embargo, el éxito de grupos evangélicos en términos de representación en congresos ha sido diverso. Este libro de Taylor Boas busca explicar la variación en la representación de evangélicos en los casos de Brasil, Chile y Perú, partiendo de la constatación de que el tamaño demográfico de este grupo religioso da pocas luces. Por ejemplo en Argentina, donde la población evangélica ya se empina por el 15 %, solo una de 257 diputados y diputadas es evangélica[1].

A diferencia de Estados Unidos –y acelerado tras el triunfo de Trump en 2016– en América Latina los estudios sobre religión han tenido poca presencia en la ciencia política (la gran excepción es Brasil). Como da cuenta el mismo libro (8), más escasos aún son los estudios comparados en la materia, a pesar de que en las agendas que defienden grupos evangélicos tienden a ser las mismas en distintos países. En este sentido, el libro constituye una gran contribución para entender cuándo se politiza la identidad evangélica con potencial de tener expresión electoral.

El argumento de Boas plantea que las diferencias en la representación descriptiva de evangélicos en cargos nacionales (se centra en las cámaras de diputados y diputadas en el caso de Brasil y Chile y en el congreso unicameral en Perú) responden a la existencia o no de motivaciones para entrar en la arena electoral.

1. Francisco Llorens. «El 'partido evangélico' en Argentina, ¿un jugador clave en las elecciones 2023?» *El Cronista*, 7 de enero de 2023. https://www.cronista.com/economia-politica/de-juntos-al-frente-de-todos-crece-la-influencia-evangelica-en-la-politica-argentina/

Dos son las motivaciones o amenazas que han llevado a la politización de la identidad evangélica y su incursión en la arena electoral: igualdad legal con la Iglesia Católica y las políticas relativas a diversidad sexual y aborto.

La primera amenaza se refiere a los privilegios que históricamente ha tenido la Iglesia Católica en materias como tributos, estatus legal o acceso al sistema educativo, heredados de la época colonial. Los procesos de secularización y específicamente la separación entre el Estado y la Iglesia –lo que para Boas constituye la primera coyuntura crítica relevante– en algunos casos fueron pacíficos y las iglesias evangélicas no enfrentaron mayores dificultades para lograr la igualdad. En estos casos, los evangélicos no vieron necesidad de defender sus intereses en la esfera electoral. En otros países, en cambio, la Iglesia Católica se organizó para recuperar algunos privilegios despertando un sentido de amenaza entre los evangélicos, los que a su vez se volcaron a buscar la representación.

La segunda coyuntura crítica llegó en el siglo XXI tras el fortalecimiento de movimientos feministas y LGBTQ+ que lograron avanzar en agendas de expansión de derechos. Uniones civiles y matrimonio para personas del mismo sexo, liberalización del aborto, leyes de identidad de género y educación sexual y/o con enfoque de género han sido algunas de las políticas que han despertado oposición conservadora. Si es que esta oposición, que en múltiples casos ha implicado movilización social, se transforma o no en un esfuerzo electoral por parte de evangélicos, depende en buena medida de qué tan fuerte sea la presencia de católicos conservadores en el congreso.

Así, si en la primera coyuntura católicos y evangélicos estaban por definición en veredas opuestas, en los últimos años hemos visto como las viejas tensiones han cedido por la convergencia hacia agendas compartidas. De hecho, una característica de los nuevos movimientos conservadores en las batallas culturales relativas a género y sexualidad es la alianza católico-evangélica. En distintos países de la región hemos visto cómo líderes políticos católicos –como José Antonio Kast en Chile, Iván Duque en Colombia o Rafael López Aliaga en Perú– han apelado a una amplia identidad cristiana (244). Otros líderes como Jair Bolsonaro o Manuel Antonio López Obrador incluso han jugado con la ambigüedad en su propia identificación religiosa, como manera de aunar a votantes católicos y evangélicos.

Además de estas coyunturas, un tercer factor en el argumento es la existencia de divisiones políticas que atraviesen también a las comunidades evangélicas. Estas divisiones no dicen relación con las motivaciones para entrar en la política electoral, sino que existiendo la amenaza, divisiones profundas pueden afectar la capacidad de evangélicos de organizarse y, por tanto, su efectividad. Este argumento se desarrolla a raíz del caso peruano, donde el clivaje fujimorismo / antifujismorismo ha atravesado también al mundo evangélico desde mediados de los 90. Se podría pensar que el peronismo / antiperonismo podría representar un caso

similar de un clivaje que estructura la política y que dificultaría la conformación de un frente mayoritario.

En el planteamiento del autor, las explicaciones institucionales dominantes para entender la representación de minorías centradas en sistemas electorales y de partidos y el comportamiento de los votantes (si los evangélicos apoyan a correligionarios) pueden facilitar o dificultar la representación, pero son lógicamente posteriores ya que debe existir una motivación para ingresar en la esfera electoral. Así, factores institucionales y de oportunidad son relevantes (como se discute más abajo), pero secundarios en el argumento.

En términos metodológicos, el libro de Boas presenta un interesante diseño de métodos mixtos. La principal inferencia proviene de los casos de estudio de los tres países, utilizando *process tracing* para analizar el efecto de las distintas coyunturas críticas en las motivaciones de los evangélicos para entrar en política, cubriendo más de un siglo en la relación entre evangélicos, la política electoral y el Estado. Además, dado que la teoría se construyó en base a estos casos, en el capítulo 7 se testea el argumento en tres casos secundarios. Por otra parte, en el capítulo 2 realiza un análisis cuantitativo con el fin de evaluar las principales explicaciones alternativas para la representación evangélica –variaciones en el comportamiento de votantes e instituciones electorales. Este análisis incluye un experimento de encuesta y análisis de datos electorales y censales. Aunque poco explorado en la literatura metodológica, este diseño se puede entender como una forma de integración de métodos (Seawright, 2016).

Como se mencionó, el centro del análisis son los casos de estudio (capítulos 4-6). En el análisis histórico comparado buscamos relevar categorías analíticas que nos permitan entender los casos como producto de procesos similares, lo que necesariamente implica que otras variables quedan relegadas a lugares secundarios. En otras palabras, tratamos de simplificar la realidad para hacerla inteligible al análisis comparado. En los tres casos centrales del libro este proceso se realiza de manera inductiva, debiendo para eso acomodar las particularidades de cada país.

Por ejemplo, respecto a la primera coyuntura, el examen de los tres casos principales y los tres secundarios analizados en las conclusiones (Colombia, Costa Rica y Guatemala) permiten concluir que Brasil es un caso excepcional en la región siendo el único en que los evangélicos se organizaron electoralmente en la primera mitad del siglo XX para luchar por la igualdad religiosa. En el resto de los países la separación entre Estado e Iglesia Católica fue amistosa o la población evangélica era demasiado pequeña para montar una contraofensiva. En Colombia, algo se observó para el proceso constituyente de 1991 con el Movimiento de Unidad Cristiana y el Partido Nacional Cristiano compitiendo, logrando dos escaños y centrando su agenda en cuestiones de igualdad religiosa (230). Más allá de este caso, sin embargo, pareciera que en términos generales los efectos de la segunda coyuntura han estado más bien desligados de la primera. El caso de Costa Rica,

que en la elección de 2018 saltó a tener un 7 % a un 25 % de evangélicos en la Asamblea Legislativa, es tal vez el ejemplo más claro. En 2022, el partido del pastor evangélico y candidato presidencial Fabricio Alvarado (Nueva República), bajó su representación a la mitad, aunque aún por sobre las cifras históricas. De todas maneras, al estar estos procesos en gran medida en curso, resulta aún apresurado saber si esta coyuntura producirá cierta estabilidad en la representación de los evangélicos o si más bien estamos viendo su relevancia en elecciones específicas, pero con alta volatilidad.

En esta misma línea, el argumento respecto a los clivajes que atraviesan a comunidades evangélicas, limitando su capacidad de organización electoral, resulta bastante *ad hoc* al caso peruano. El autor muestra evidencia de cómo una corriente moderada se ha ubicado en el campo antifujimorista mientras que organizaciones más conservadores se han alineado con el fujimorismo, lo que impidió que actuaran de manera unificada en las discusión en torno a la igualdad religiosa en los años 2000 (200-201). Sin embargo, el vínculo entre estas diferencias políticas y teológicas y su impacto en la representación legislativa es menos claro. ¿No son simplemente la excesiva debilidad del sistema de partidos y la volatilidad electoral los factores clave que han dificultado una representación más organizada y estable de los evangélicos, factores que el mismo autor reconoce? (223).

Como todo libro que abre agendas de investigación, mencionaré dos cuestiones en las que se podría haber profundizado la discusión y teorización y que quedan como tareas pendientes. En primer lugar, el tema de la amenaza como motivación para la organización electoral y cómo se constituye esta amenaza. En la primera coyuntura era una amenaza material, mientras que en la segunda lo era a algunos valores centrales a las interpretaciones teológicas defendidas por evangélicos. Sin embargo, no se indica qué tan real o inminente debe ser la amenaza y esto varía según países, particularmente en la segunda coyuntura. Mientras que, en países como Chile, en la última década han existidos múltiples avances legislativos y de política pública en materia de género y derechos de la diversidad sexual, en otros como Perú los intentos han estado lejos de ser exitosos por la naturaleza conservadora de sus representantes. Por tanto, cabe reflexionar hasta qué punto la amenaza es real o endógena a la misma movilización de evangélicos. Pareciese que la sola existencia de ciertas agendas (y no su avance concreto) es suficiente para generar la amenaza.

En segundo lugar está la cuestión de las oportunidades para la movilización electoral. Como se mencionó, el libro se centra en las motivaciones, que son previas a los factores institucionales. Y aunque se reconoce la importancia de las oportunidades (242), no se elabora más. Los casos muestran que la relación parece no ser siempre secuencial, sino que existiría cierta interacción para poder explicar algunos casos de cambios en la organización de los evangélicos, ya que la existencia de oportunidades puede gatillar motivaciones latentes. Esto es algo que

está presente en los casos, por ejemplo, con el cambio en el sistema electoral en Chile en 2017 (169). Más recientemente, el proceso constituyente de 2021 constituyó una oportunidad para que evangélicos más progresistas se organizaran por primera vez, apelando a una motivación latente (el descontento con la politización de evangélicos en torno a agendas conservadoras) (Castillo *et al*., 2023). Los casos de estudio dejan claro cómo las asambleas constituyentes en particular han sido relevantes –en mayor o menor según el caso– en Brasil, Chile, Colombia y Perú.

En conclusión, el libro de Taylor Boas es una contribución fundamental al estudio de la politización de la identidad evangélica y su expresión en representación en los congresos nacionales en América Latina. Abre agendas y preguntas para seguir explorando un escenario político y social muy cambiante. Salvo el caso brasileño que ha tenido una bancada evangélica desde fines de los años 80 –y del caso de Guatemala, donde como explica el autor ha operado una lógica distinta y la presencia de legisladores evangélicos no se basa en su identidad religiosa–, en el resto de la región estamos frente a procesos muy recientes. Cómo respondan los actores políticos y cuáles sean las proyecciones de esta ola de movilización son preguntas que permanecen abiertas y para las cuales este libro nos da herramientas para seguir observando.

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RLOP
Revista Latinoamericana de Opinión Pública

ISSN: 1852-9003 - eISSN: 2660-700X - DOI: https://doi.org/10.14201/rlop.202312 - CDU: 3 (1-69 IBEROAMÉRICA) - IBIC: Opinión pública y encuestas (JPVK); Latinoamérica (1KL) - BIC: Public opinion & polls (J); Latin America (1KL) -BISAC: Political Science / Public Affairs & Administration (POL017000); Regional / Latin America (RG130)

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Fecha de publicación de este volumen: diciembre 2023

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ISSN 1852-9003
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