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**DELEGATING AWAY DEMOCRACY: HOW GOOD
REPRESENTATION AND POLICY SUCCESSES CAN
UNDERMINE DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES**

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**DELEGATING AWAY DEMOCRACY: HOW GOOD REPRESENTATION AND
POLICY SUCCESSES CAN UNDERMINE DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES**

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ABSTRACT

Theories of democratic legitimacy argue that people who believe that the government is well managed and that the government represents their interests are likely to defend the democratic status quo. Principal-agent theory predicts, however, that these same groups are also more likely to support the executive taking steps to restrict free speech or opposition rights via delegative democracy. Citizens who feel represented by an ideologically sympathetic and competent executive may be willing to delegate to him or her authority to restrict the opposition, even at the expense of civil rights. Survey data from eighteen Latin American countries from 2006 to 2012 are consistent with the principal-agent hypothesis; those who voted for the ruling party in the previous election or who perceive that the economy is strong are more likely to favor restrictions on civil rights for regime opponents. Political winners are particularly likely to display low levels of tolerance for expressions of opposition in polarized party systems. Thus, for democracy to prosper, it must not only satisfy the losers of political and economic processes but also find ways to encourage winners to exercise restraint.

RESUMEN

Las teorías de la legitimidad democrática sostienen que la gente que cree que el gobierno se maneja bien y que representa sus intereses es probable que defienda el statu quo democrático. Sin embargo, la teoría sobre las relaciones entre principales y agentes predice que es probable que estos mismos grupos acepten que el ejecutivo adopte medidas que restrinjan la libertad de expresión o a los grupos de oposición a través formas delegativas de democracia. Los ciudadanos que se sienten representados por un poder ejecutivo afín y competente pueden estar dispuestos a delegar en él la autoridad para restringir a la oposición, aún a expensas de los derechos civiles. Existen datos de encuestas en 18 países de América Latina entre 2006 y 2012 que son consistentes con la hipótesis de principal y agente: es más probable que aquellos que votaron por el partido de gobierno en la elección previa o que perciben que la situación económica es sólida apoyen las restricciones de los derechos civiles de los opositores al régimen. Quienes resultan ganadores en contiendas políticas son particularmente proclives a exhibir bajos niveles de tolerancia en sistemas de partidos polarizados. De este modo, para prosperar, la democracia debe no solamente satisfacer a los derrotados en los procesos políticos y sociales sino encontrar formas de contener a los ganadores.

Democracies face two primary threats. The first comes from the rejection and overthrow of democratic institutions by disgruntled actors via a coup and installation of an unelected leader. The second threat to democracy is from within, as elected leaders seek to consolidate power and restrict their opponents. An undemocratic executive limits the opposition's ability to organize among and speak freely to the electorate, restricts debates in the media, and, in an extreme case, may restrict competition to the point that it becomes an authoritarian regime, even as elections continue to be held (Levitsky and Way 2002). This latter form of democratic breakdown has become increasingly common, as more democracies have been broken down by executives consolidating their authority over electoral processes than have been overthrown by a coup since the third wave of democracy crested in 1991 (Ulfelder 2010).

Yet the extant literature on why individual citizens support democratic overthrow has largely focused on attitudes toward the overthrow of democracy by outsiders. Theories of democratic legitimacy, building on work by Lipset (1994) and Easton (1975) among others, argue that it is democracy's losers who have come to view democracy as illegitimate who support its dismantling. Specifically, people (1) for whom democracy has not brought desired outcomes such as economic prosperity, social peace, or clean government or (2) who are at the losing end of electoral struggles and living under a leader they disagree with may become willing to support a coup or other interruptions of the democratic order.

I argue that the extant literature's focus on bad performance and election losers provides little leverage to explain why people might support the reduction of electoral checks on the executive and the harassment of political opposition groups. In fact, to understand how executives hollow out democracy we might need to turn the extant literature on democratic legitimacy on its head. If democracy is threatened by political actors consolidating power within the government, then the problem is not a lack of legitimacy but a surplus of legitimacy when citizens acquiesce to the executive taking these steps. In particular, I propose that citizens who perceive benefits under the current balance of powers are those most likely to support the further consolidation of power and influence in the executive to prevent these gains from being eroded. Citizens who see the sitting executive as a representative of their interests or who observe positive policy outcomes under him or her may thus be less protective of the rights of opponents who might rock the boat and endanger the current prosperity, while seeing few disincentives to further empowering a leader whom they support. While good performance and perceived

representation may reduce the threats of coups, they may also create opportunities for actors within the regime looking for permission to consolidate their powers.

I test my argument about the pernicious effects of good performance and winning using surveys conducted in Latin America between 2006 and 2012. I find that citizens who perceive the economy as strong and whose favored candidate won the previous election tend to be less protective of civil rights, free speech, and opposition political rights. The gap is particularly large in polarized party systems, with winners becoming less tolerant of the infringement of civil liberties as the difference between them and their opponents grows. The sustainability of democracy thus requires more than its losers consenting to its continuance; its winners must exercise restraint in exercising their powers.

EXISTING THEORIES OF HOW REPRESENTATION AND SHORT-TERM PERFORMANCE STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY

Democracy is valued both as a good in itself and because citizens expect it to deliver tangible benefits (Easton 1975). Democracy is strengthened when its basic principles are accepted, that is, if most citizens believe in fairness, equality, and political tolerance as broad principles (e.g., Prothro and Grigg 1960; Inglehart and Welzel 2003). These values are fostered by economic development (see Inglehart and Welzel 2003) and especially by the expansion of education, as educated individuals tend to be substantially more supportive of the democratic ideal (e.g., Lipset 1994; Norris 1999; Mishler and Rose 1999; Kligeman, Fuchs, and Zielonka 2006; Huang, Chang, and Chu 2008; Ceka and Magalhães 2016). High levels of social capital also buoy support for democratic norms (Booth and Seligson 2009).

Yet part of citizens' support for or rejection of democracy is also contingent upon the quality of governance that democracy produces. Democracy is valued not merely for giving people a "say" in policy but because electoral accountability will provide politicians with incentives to provide good public policies while allowing voters the chance to throw incompetent governments out (e.g., Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes 1999). It is the promise of an improved quality of life that leads many people to support democracy (Bratton and Mattes 2001; UNDP 2004), and when democracy fails to deliver the goods, disenchantment creates opportunities for challengers to the democratic system. For example, democracies are often judged by whether they bring economic development. Democracies can and do survive recessions, but economic

crises tend to make the collapse of democracy more likely (Przeworski et al. 2000, 109; Feng 1997), especially if the country is poor. Under conditions of economic upheaval voters will initially punish the ruling party, but a sufficiently long or severe crisis can delegitimize all existing parties, the institutions of government, and the basic democratic norm of using elections to select leaders (see Norris 1999). Citizens demand more from democracy than economic prosperity, however; they also value good governance, honesty, and efficiency. Voters who perceive that corruption persists, who do not perceive an improvement in government services, or who believe that crime continues to be a problem under democracy are less trusting of democratic institutions, less satisfied with democracy, and less likely to endorse democracy as an ideal (e.g., Evans and Whitefield 1995; Bratton and Mattes 2001; Seligson 2002).

Moving beyond performance, citizens may also expect that democracy will lead to increased representation of their interests and support democracy if they feel they are being well represented (Aarts and Thomassen 2008). Yet not all views are represented equally in a democracy, because elections delineate winners and losers, especially in winner-take-all elections for the executive. Voters who supported a losing political party thus suffer both the emotional blow of defeat and the real policy consequences of living under a government whose views and interests are different from their own (e.g., Anderson et al. 2005). Election losers are less trusting of institutions, less likely to say they are satisfied with democracy, and less likely to say that democracy is the best system of government. If elections do not result in citizens' views being represented, they may begin to look for non-electoral ways to make themselves heard. The negative effects of losing on democratic support may be even larger in new democracies where the rules of the game are less established and where diffuse support for democracy does not backstop the regime.

Thus existing literature on democratic values argues that support for the democratic status quo and rejection of coups increases with education but is also contingent upon policy and election outcomes, with individuals who perceive the economy to be strong and governance to be good and who support the sitting executive displaying highest levels of support for democracy. These basic patterns have been found in advanced industrialized democracies (Ferrín and Kresi 2016), Eastern Europe (Klingemann, Fuchs, and Zielonka 2006), Latin America (Booth and Seligson 2009), and Africa (Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2005). Yet in the next section I

show that the degree to which these theories apply to the weakening of democratic competition by political insiders remains an open question.

THREATS TO DEMOCRACY FROM INSIDE THE REGIME

Meaningful electoral contestation is a key element of nearly all visions of democracy (Coppedge and Gerring 2011). Elections alone are not enough; the ruling party must face the possibility of defeat if elections are to work as mechanisms of accountability. Thus democracy requires that ruling parties do not seek to limit who runs against them and that votes should be tabulated fairly. Moreover, competitive elections require that all political parties, including those critical of the regime, should have the right to hold meetings, organize, and speak publicly. These general civil rights of speech and association also help to promote accountability between electoral periods, as opposition parties can voice criticism of the ruling party and can organize within other branches of the government to block ruling-party initiatives. Yet many regimes have proven that they can sufficiently restrict electoral competition via intimidation, the harassment of opposition leaders, and fraud to effectively establish an “electoral authoritarian” regime (Schedler 2006). Regimes can also prevent opposition organization outside of electoral periods by jailing opposition leaders under the guise of protecting public security and can stifle debate by restricting and harassing media outlets that criticize the regime by denying them licenses or prosecuting reporters under libel laws. Even if regimes do not fully establish authoritarian regimes, when the state’s coercive institutions are used to suppress civil liberties, the possibilities for vertical accountability are weakened. Weakening opposition movements also reduces the possibilities for organized oppositions to use democratic institutions to oppose the government, weakening horizontal accountability as well. These steps go beyond majoritarian democratic principles that center policy-making authority in the executive and instead undermine the procedural basics of democracy itself.

Recent examples from Latin America illustrate the variety of ways in which governments can restrict civil liberties and weaken elements of electoral democracy.¹ Consider, for example, protections of press freedom. The Venezuelan government has tried to shape media coverage by

¹ Obviously these kinds of techniques may be used in other regions, as observers of Russia, Turkey, Hungary, and many other countries can attest. I focus here on Latin America because that is the source of the survey data analyzed here.

refusing to renew the license of several opposition-friendly radio and television stations² and has used “insult laws” to restrict criticism of government officials, which has led many journalists to self-censor to avoid prosecution (Atwood 2006). The 2008 reform to the Ecuadorian constitution gives the government the right to regulate media content, and the government has also expanded its media holdings to now include five television stations and several newspapers (and has also banned public agencies from buying advertising in media that have criticized the government; see Mason 2012). The Ecuadorian government seized control of the Gamavisión television station in 2009 and “Critical media figures are regularly harassed, sued, intimidated, and jailed” (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2015, 118; see also Mason 2012). In multiple other countries, including Chile³ and Panama,⁴ slander laws have been used to limit government critics, although some of these steps have been taken by local governments and not the national government. The Honduran media agreed in 2013 to self-censor their coverage of violence, because otherwise they would have risked facing legal action that would have compelled them to.⁵ In 2013 the Bolivian government brought criminal charges against several media outlets for allegedly mischaracterizing the president’s comments on social problems. Facing such potential charges, 47 percent of reporters in Bolivia report that they engage in self-censorship.⁶ These examples represent a broader trend within the region, reflected in indicators of civil liberty protections. Freedom House ranks press freedom around the world,⁷ and one of their indicators is a measure of “political pressures and controls on media content (including harassment or violence against journalists or facilities, censorship, self-censorship, etc.). If we look at countries’ average scores between 2001 and 2003 and compare them to the average a decade later, there were declines in fifteen of the eighteen countries. A similar picture emerges from the Cingranelli and Richards

² See <https://www.cpj.org/americas/venezuela/> for various examples.

³ Mason (2012).

⁴ https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/panama#.VO6X4fnF_ng.

⁵ https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/honduras#.VO6Yx_nF_ng.

⁶ https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/bolivia#.VO6bxPnF_ng.

⁷ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/freedom-press-2014>. The rankings are prepared by experts inside Freedom House. The experts score political restrictions as follows: “Under the political environment category, we evaluate the degree of political control over the content of news media. Issues examined include the editorial independence of both state-owned and privately owned outlets; access to information and sources; official censorship and self-censorship; the vibrancy of the media and the diversity of news available within each country; the ability of both foreign and local reporters to cover the news freely and without harassment; and the intimidation of journalists or bloggers by the state or other actors, including arbitrary detention and imprisonment, violent assaults, and other threats.”

(CIRI) measure of whether “freedoms of speech and the press are affected by government censorship, including the ownership of media outlets,” where the average rating for press freedom fell in fifteen of the eighteen countries between the 2000–2002 and 2009–2011 periods (Cingranelli, Richards, and Clay 2014).

Similar challenges to civil liberties have occurred as governments limit rights to association, which can make it difficult to organize political or social movements. For example, in recent years Nicaraguan NGOs that monitor human rights violations or that have otherwise criticized the government have reported legal harassment.⁸ In Venezuela unions and other civil society organizations have accused the government of meddling in their internal elections.⁹ Other less extreme examples exist as well, as certain groups may find it difficult to receive permits, have their charters denied, or see their leaders face legal harassment. Looking broadly across the hemisphere, the CIRI dataset has a measure that codes on an ordinal 0–2 scale the degree to which the rights of political parties, trade unions, and cultural organizations are subject to government limitations or restrictions in practice. The average score for the hemisphere in 2000 and 2002 was 1.74, but it fell to 1.46 in 2009–2011, with nine of the eighteen countries experiencing lower rankings over this period, while only four improved.

Finally, several countries have seen active harassment of opposition candidates. Regimes may follow the classic advice of how to respond to scandals that Brazil’s Getúlio Vargas gave over half a century ago—“For my friends, anything; for my enemies, the law”—and selectively prosecute opposition party leaders while ignoring corrupt acts by members of their own party (Weyland 2013; Corrales 2015). Thus accusations of illegal behavior are a widespread political tactic. Some of the most prominent opposition-party leaders in Venezuela have been jailed in recent years as they have participated in protests against the Maduro regime. In 2004 the Mexican attorney general asked the congress to strip opposition candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the immunity to prosecution that he enjoyed as mayor of Mexico City in what was widely perceived as an attempt to disqualify him from being able to run for president in 2006.

As we consider issues of restricting free speech and opposition rights and the resulting consolidation of executive authority, we might ask why citizens support these steps either tacitly by not protesting or by supporting popular referenda that institutionalize them. The extant

⁸ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/wha/119167.htm>.

⁹ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/wha/119177.htm>.

literature suggests four main individual-level variables to explain levels of support for democracy: education, levels of social capital, views of government performance, and electoral support for the ruling party. The first two variables are expected to correlate with acceptance of broad democratic norms, and so they too should be correlated with support for contested elections and free speech protections. I doubt, however, that the latter two variables have the same effect. Bad performance and being on the losing end of an election may lead citizens to consider supporting a military coup to overthrow the existing order, but the establishment of an electoral autocracy or smaller steps to restrict speech and opposition rights seek to lock the status quo in place and thus seem unlikely goals for those who dislike the current regime. Why would those who think that the system is performing badly or who do not support the incumbent want to make it more difficult to criticize and challenge the regime?

Instead, I argue that a strong economy that distributes benefits to the citizenry, institutions that enforce the rule of law, and elections in which people feel represented may provide leeway and leverage to foes of democratic procedures and horizontal accountability within the regime as they seek to consolidate their authority. In particular, I develop here an argument that builds on principal-agent theories of delegation to understand when citizens might be willing to weaken vertical and horizontal accountability.

PRINCIPAL-AGENT THEORY OF HOW CITIZENS VIEW THE DELEGATION RISKS IN DELEGATIVE DEMOCRACY

People are willing to give agents discretion to act on their behalf because this allows for efficiency gains due to the agents' expertise and specialization (e.g., Vickers 1985). However, most forms of delegation are plagued by problems of time inconsistency and preference divergence, whereby agents can potentially betray the trust of their principals and work to pursue their own goals (e.g., Brehm and Gates 1997). To minimize these potential issues, principals either need to (1) ensure that their representatives have similar interests to theirs or (2) monitor and punish representatives who deviate from the principals' ideals. Thus, principals will monitor their agents' performance and delegate continued authority to them or even increase it once they have credible information about the representatives' competence or if the agents can show that

they share the principals' values.¹⁰ Actors who desire to receive greater authority thus have incentives to make their priorities relatively transparent and to make costly signals of their competence (Snyder and Ting 2005).

Questions of executive authority overreaches can easily be thought of as a similar principal-agent dilemma. The widespread concern with *delegative* democracy is that executives to whom power is delegated as agents of the electorate will be able to undermine horizontal or vertical control and use this power to benefit themselves while making their removal difficult (O'Donnell 1994).¹¹ As Sartori reminded us, "He who delegates his power can also lose it" (1987, 30). Voters and elites contemplating delegating authority thus face risks of agency loss if presidents use those powers to enrich themselves or to pursue policies that differ from their mandates. Elections provide voters with chances to assess potential representatives' interests and abilities and sanction incumbents who mismanage their authority (Stokes 2001; Strøm 2000), but post-hoc accountability does not reduce the difficulty in evaluating the incumbent, nor can it make up for negative consequences of having delegated authority to an agent who mismanaged it (Fearon 1999). Moreover, strong presidents may be able to manipulate elections in such a way that their removal becomes difficult.

Principal-agent theories of delegation imply that citizens, aware of the risks inherent in the concentration of power, should be more likely to take this risk under two general circumstances. The first is that voters should be more likely to delegate powers to executives *who they believe share their interests*. Citizens can assess politicians' policy preferences through their campaigns, their public statements, and in the case of those in power by their policy agenda in office. Individuals who voted for the sitting executive have decided that this candidate is the one, out of the available options at least, who represents their interests and values and is the most competent. As a result, these winning voters may be more willing to delegate additional powers to their preferred candidate than those voters who opposed him or her in the previous election. Similarly, electoral winners may have less tolerance for opposition to "their candidate" in the streets, media, or other institutions of government. Even if the political opposition could potentially play a valuable role in monitoring the incumbent's behavior to ensure he or she does

¹⁰ These considerations appear to govern the delegation of powers to presidents by constitution writers (Carey and Shugart 1998) and legislatures (Cox and Morgenstern 2001).

¹¹ Yet voters and institutions have proven surprisingly good at enforcing accountability: see, e.g., Stokes (2001) and Mainwaring and Welna (2003).

not deviate from the public's interests, the ability of outside actors to work as a "fire alarm" on agents' behavior is limited if the principals do not believe the monitors share their values or are more likely to be honest than their preferred candidate is (Lupia and McCubbins 1994).

The second condition that may increase citizens' willingness to delegate authority is when policy outcomes *demonstrate the sitting executive's competence*. Executives who have been able to preside over a strong economy, a clean government, or a low crime rate can make a more credible claim that increasing their power will result in further good outcomes. Moreover, they can portray those who would limit their authority or agitate against their policies as rocking the boat and threatening these good outcomes. This argument may not be completely credible; institutions that induce bargaining between the government and the opposition tend to achieve greater congruence between government outcomes and citizen preferences (e.g., Powell 2000) and reduce economic volatility (Haggard and McCubbins 2001). However, if a president claims that he or she needs, deserves, and can be trusted with authority, it will be those who think the incumbent will continue to produce good results who will be most likely to believe such a claim. Citizens who evaluate the incumbent's performance highly may be more tolerant of delegation of authority and of electoral manipulations that keep him or her in power while being less tolerant of the opposition.

So while electoral exclusion, a lack of ideological representation, and poor governance and economic outcomes may lead citizens to sour on democracy and perhaps even lead them to support an authoritarian alternative from outside the current administration, consolidation of power in the executive may be perfectly acceptable to those who are content with the direction of the country and who support the executive or his or her policies despite any authoritarian tendencies. While bad times may facilitate the election of populist leaders who propose a new way forward and the adoption of risky policies, good times may smooth the rewriting of the constitution and other steps taken to expand prerogatives over other areas of the government from within the sitting executive.

These predictions diverge from extant theorizing on delegative democracy. Much of that work has focused on structural factors that undermine democratic legitimacy. Many scholars link democratic attitudes to levels of development and democratic experience and argue that Latin America's citizens may be more tolerant of executive dominance than citizens in more established democracies (e.g., Wiarda 2005; Inglehart and Welzel 2003). Education may also

lead citizens to reject all forms of authoritarian behavior, either from outside the executive or within it. However, the short-term factor that has received the most attention in explaining the rise of delegative democracy has been economic and political crises. Poor outcomes that delegitimize existing institutions may lead desperate citizens to accept political “strongmen” who promise electoral changes or to support political reforms that would otherwise be considered too risky (Weyland 2002). Fujimori’s 1992 *autogolpe* in Peru, for example, was popular because citizens held the traditional parties responsible for the economic crisis and expected that Fujimori’s subversion would lead to prosperity (Tuesta 1999; Stokes 2001).

Yet while a crisis may make citizens more willing to accept the risk of delegating authority to a political unknown, the principal-agent theory also reminds us that people delegate authority to outsiders such as Fujimori in a crisis not only because of the crisis but (1) because they feel that the outsider represents their interests in a way that previous actors did not and (2) because the crisis occurred due to policies that were enacted before the outsider was elected, meaning that it does not provide information about the new president’s competence.¹² Thus assessments of performance outcomes early in the government’s term may have only a weak connection to how respondents view steps the regime might consider to restrict electoral competition. My principal-agent approach implies, however, that the continued delegation of that authority and institutional reforms that would make it permanent depend upon successful policy outcomes. This performance is necessary for centralizing reforms to become consolidated, not just initiated. Fujimori’s *autogolpe* in the midst of a political crisis and his cultivated reputation as a break from the bankrupt parties of the past, for example, won him only transitory support (Morgan 2003). His success in passing constitutional reforms that centralized power around him and then his reelection in 1995 were thus (in the first case) dependent upon his success in restoring economic prosperity for the middle class and reducing the threat from Sendero Luminoso and then (in the second case) in redistributing wealth to the poorest segment of the electorate (Tuesta 1999; Roberts and Arce 1998). Citizens who perceived him as representing their interests supported him, while those who had not yet seen benefits from him withheld their support (as poor voters still suffering the effects of the shock therapy did in the 1993 constitutional referendum) (Graham and Kane 1998). However, this support only lasted until he

¹² Presidential approval studies show that voters discount retrospective assessments early in the president’s term because he or she had little effect on those outcomes (Singer and Carlin 2013).

could no longer sustain his performance legitimacy; by 2000, the wavering economy and decline of terrorism's salience made citizens less likely to automatically delegate authority to him or tolerate corruption (Weyland 2000; Schmidt 2000; Carrión 2006). Thus while it was frustration with poor performance that led citizens to support a political outsider initially, it was only when he could prove his competence that citizens approved of measures to consolidate that authority. I believe this is part of a general pattern: perceived representation and good policy outcomes are associated with positive evaluations of the institutional status quo but with negative attitudes toward horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms.

Several recent empirical studies provide some preliminary support for this argument. In a study of democratic attitudes in Africa, Moehler (2009) finds that election losers are more willing to defend institutions from challenges from the executive. Carlin and Singer (2011) find that presidential approval is positively associated with a willingness to reduce horizontal checks and balances on the president. But this evidence is based on a limited number of questions and cases. I thus test this argument using a series of questions from Latin America on different elements of civil liberties.

DATA AND METHODS

I test my argument with data from AmericasBarometer surveys conducted biennially in Latin America by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) at Vanderbilt University.¹³ I rely on these surveys because they contain multiple measures of attitudes towards the civil liberties and opposition rights that are the focus of this paper. The primary aim of the AmericasBarometer is to measure support for democracy in the region. As such, their surveys not only contain the standard measures of democratic support that are commonly included in cross-national surveys but also contain a wide battery of questions about restricting free speech and the scope of government power that are ideal for understanding why people might be willing to see restrictions on democratic protections.

The surveys are nationally representative studies based on complex (stratified and clustered) samples of a standard minimum of 1,500 voting-age individuals who are interviewed in their homes. The analyses of these data take sample design features into account by weighting the data such that they are representative of the nation and then weight each country equally. The

¹³ See <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/>.

AmericasBarometer project employs an intensively pre-tested core of questions asked in the same way, according to the same protocol across countries. In recent waves the data have been collected with handheld devices that allow for the instantaneous use of translations of the survey instrument into multiple native languages. In the analyses that follow, I focus on attitudes in eighteen presidential Latin American countries,¹⁴ beginning in 2006 and continuing through 2012 to hold presidentialism constant. The sample differs somewhat across analyses, however, because not all topics are covered in all waves of the survey.

Measuring Support for Civil Liberties

My main interest is in whether citizens support the principles of free speech and opposition rights that are necessary for competitive elections to function well. The principal-agent framework developed here should also explain support for consolidating policy-making authority in the executive, an action which may go against the principles of liberal democracy but which are consistent with a majoritarian view. Yet empowering the executive to restrict civil liberties is inherently anti-democratic. The AmericasBarometer has several sets of questions on these topics.

There is a battery of questions on *tolerance for civil liberties*, where respondents were asked four questions in which they were to consider people who “only say bad things about [the country’s] form of government, not just the incumbent government but the system of government.” Then respondents were asked about the civil rights that should be given to these critics, expressing their agreement with these groups having protected civil rights on a ten-point scale (emphasis is in the original):

- “How strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people’s **right to vote**?”
- “How strongly do you approve or disapprove that such people be allowed **to conduct peaceful demonstrations** in order to express their views?”
- “Still thinking of those who only say bad things about the (country) form of government, how strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people being permitted **to run for public office**?”
- “How strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people appearing on television **to make speeches**?”

¹⁴ Argentina was added to the survey with the 2008 wave. The eighteen countries on which I focus are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

While these questions are focused on the opposition generally, they ask specifically about the rights to vote and being “allowed” and “permitted” to engage in free speech, and so the questions tap into the ways in which governments can potentially regulate speech and competition in a country.

Support for the norms of free speech and political rights for all is mixed in Latin America. The average scores on the 0–9 scale range between 4.2 (allowing critics to run for office) and 5.2 (allowing critics to protest), and on all four questions at least 19 percent of respondents placed themselves on the three lowest levels of disagreement that these civil liberties should be extended to people who criticize the system. Answers to the four questions strongly covary (Chronbach’s $\alpha=0.86$), and so I combine them into a single additive scale where high values represent support for civil liberties.

The 2006 AmericasBarometer survey contained a separate battery of questions that focused on *general protections of free speech* without specifying if these were for regime critics or not. Respondents were asked whether they would agree or disagree with various laws on a 10-point scale. Some of the questions asked about laws generally, while others specifically asked about “the government”:

- “To what degree do you approve or disapprove of a law prohibiting public protests?”
- “To what degree do you approve or disapprove of a law prohibiting the meetings of any group that criticizes the national political system?”
- “To what degree would you approve or disapprove if the government censored television programs?”
- “To what degree would you approve or disapprove if the government censored books in public school libraries?”
- “To what degree would you approve or disapprove if the government censored any of the media that criticized it?”

I have recoded these questions so that high values represent *protection of free speech*. The average level of support for free speech generally is higher than it was in the tolerance for civil liberties question that asked specifically about people who criticize the regime; all five questions have average scores above 6 on the 0–9 scale. Yet if we look at how many people gave the lowest three answers, we again see substantial portions of society who are willing to let free speech be restricted, with shares of between 8.5 percent who would approve of the government censoring critical media to 15 percent who would have that level of agreement with a law

banning protests. Again I combine these items into a single additive scale (Chronbach's $\alpha=0.79$).

Finally, I look at a more general measure of respect for opposition rights by analyzing whether the respondent wants to *protect the rights of opposition parties*. In the 2008–2012 waves of the survey, respondents were asked to express their level of agreement or disagreement on a 7-point scale with the following question:

“Taking into account the current situation of this country, and using that card, I would like you to tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: It is necessary for the progress of this country that our presidents limit the voice and vote of opposition parties, How much do you agree or disagree with that view?”

There is general support for opposition party rights on average: the modal answer (26.7 percent) was a strong belief that the president should not limit opposition parties, while only 8.2 percent strongly agreed that the president should be able to limit opposition parties. Yet 46.8 percent of respondents placed themselves in the lowest four rungs on the scale, and in general many respondents placed themselves in the middle of the scale in a position that shows that they do not completely reject the possibility of opposition parties facing limits on how much they are able to participate in the public sphere.¹⁵

These three sets of questions are coded such that high values represent pro-democracy values: allowing critics to organize and protest, allowing free speech generally, and specifically protecting the rights of opposition parties from presidential control. While the existing literature suggests that good regime performance and supporting the winning candidate will build support for democratic norms, my delegation theory suggests that these forces will be correlated with openness to restricting speech and opposition rights.

Baseline: Modeling Support for the Democratic Status Quo

I expect that the correlates of these attitudes will differ from those of standard democratic attitude questions. To check this intuition, I model support for two standard measures of diffuse support for democracy. The first one is a direct question asking respondents about whether *democracy is the best system*. Building on Churchill's famous dictum, respondents were asked:

¹⁵ This question also straddles the issue of vertical and horizontal accountability, since respondents do not specify if they want to limit opposition parties' voice in the streets or in formal institutions.

“Now we will use a similar ladder, but this time 1 means ‘strongly disagree’ and 7 means ‘strongly agree.’ A number in between 1 and 7 represents an intermediate score. ... 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?”

The variable is coded so that high values represent support for democracy. Stated support for democracy is widespread in the region (Booth and Richards 2015, 116). Just over 50 percent of respondents expressed one of the two highest levels of agreement with the statement, while fewer than 17 percent gave one of the three lowest levels.

A second measure looks at whether the respondent would support or *reject a military coup* in a time of crisis. Specifically, respondents were offered three separate scenarios and were asked if a coup could be justified if regime performance was bad:

“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 there is high unemployment?
- When there is a lot of crime?
- When there is a lot of corruption?

(0) A military take-over of the state would be justified or (1) A military take-over of the state would not be justified.”

A majority of respondents to each question said that a coup would not be justified, although the percentage of respondents rejecting a coup in the face of unemployment (81.3) was much higher than the number who rejected one in the face of rising crime (55.6) or corruption (57.8).

Rejection of a coup in these scenarios might imply that the respondent does not believe a coup would solve the problem (which might be a reasonable assumption, given the mixed record of many military regimes in the hemisphere), but it also might imply that the respondent places greater value on democracy than on the economic and social benefits that a coup might potentially promise. While levels of opposition to coups differ across the three scenarios, individuals who reject coups in one scenario are likely to reject coups in other scenarios as well (average bivariate $r=0.53$, Chronbach’s $\alpha=0.78$), so I sum answers to the three questions to form an additive scale where high values represent a rejection of coups.

The final measure also asks the respondent to consider democracy against alternatives to it, specifically by asking if having an elected leader is more or less important than having a

strong leader. Booth and Seligson (2009) call this variable *opposition to authoritarian rule*.

Respondents were asked:

“There are people who say that we need a strong leader who does not have to be elected by the vote of the people. Others say that although things may not work, electoral democracy, or the popular vote, is always best. What do you think? (0) We need a strong leader who does not have to be elected [or] (1) Electoral democracy is the best.”

Just as with the questions asking about opposition to coups and whether democracy is the best system, an overwhelming majority of respondents (85.5 percent) gave the pro-democracy answer. While the question does not ask about preferences for a strong elected leader compared to a weak elected leader, it confirms the basic norm that elections are essential for legitimacy in the region.

TABLE 1

CORRELATIONS OF MEASURES

	Democracy Is the Best System	Reject a Coup	Tolerance of Civil Liberties	Protect Free Speech	President Should Not Limit the Opposition (7-Point)
Reject a Coup	0.136				
Tolerance of Civil Liberties	0.191	0.069			
Protect Free Speech	0.097	0.126	0.107		
President Should Not Limit the Opposition (7-Point)	0.080	0.113	0.144		
Reject Unelected Strongmen (Binary)	0.188	0.121	0.075	0.099	0.074

The extant literature suggests that these three measures should be positively correlated with education and social trust and thus that they should be positively correlated with support for other democratic norms, such as support for competitive elections and free speech. That is what we see at the individual level (Table 1). Yet the bivariate correlations among these measures are

relatively weak, which may reflect potential differences in how these variables respond to election outcomes and perceived government performance.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Our main theoretical interest is in two sets of independent variables: perceived representation in the executive and evaluations of economic and governance outcomes. In conceptualizing representation, I focus on the most commonly used measure (e.g., Anderson et al. 2005): previous votes for the incumbent. I operationalize voters' previous electoral choices from their responses to the question "For which candidate did you vote for President in the last presidential elections?" In countries where two rounds of elections are held, voters were directed to focus on the first round of voting. From this open-ended question, I generate a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 for those who voted for the party that held office at the time of the survey and also a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if the respondent reported abstaining or casting a blank vote, making the baseline those who supported a losing candidate.¹⁶ Individuals who do not remember for whom they voted are excluded from the analysis. The extant literature suggests that people who voted for the winning party experience psychological and tangible policy benefits from seeing their party elected and governing that make them more likely than loser supporters to express satisfaction with democracy or a belief that it is working. I argue that these individuals should also be more likely to support the idea of delegating power to the president that potentially threatens civil liberties and horizontal accountability.¹⁷

¹⁶ This measure of previous voter choice is the most commonly used indicator of winner-loser status in the literature. However, it is worth noting that this variable is the respondent's *recalled* vote choice and, as such, is measured with some error. I find a correlation between the estimated share of presidential support for the survey year and the percentage of the vote that the winning candidate received that is positive ($r=0.378$) but far from perfect. Moreover, if we look at the swings in the estimated electoral support for presidents that are covered in at least two surveys, we find an average difference of 9 percentage points across survey waves; evidence that it is not stable over time within presidencies (although its standard deviation is smaller than is the swing over time in government approval). A portion of these swings are a function of government popularity; as the president is more popular at the time of the survey, the number of people who reported voting for the incumbent president goes up. We also see that the polls generally tend to overstate the number of people who supported the president; in an average survey-year the estimated share of the valid vote going to the incumbent is 10 percent higher than the share of the valid vote that the president actually received.

¹⁷ Given concerns about recalled vote choice, I have measured support for the incumbent in four other ways as robustness checks: self-identifying with the incumbent's party, self-identifying with a left-right position that is similar to the incumbent's, approving of the government, and approving of the

In making these comparisons, I follow the lead of Anderson et al. (2005) and focus most of my attention on the differences between winners and losers while generally giving little attention to abstainers because we have divergent expectations about individuals who don't participate. On the one hand, individuals who abstained have not experienced the joy of winning or the pain of losing, and so we might expect abstainers to have attitudes that lie between these two groups. Yet abstention often stems from either a lack of political awareness or an alienation from the democratic system (e.g., Grönlund and Setälä 2007) and, as such, we often find that individuals who abstain have particularly negative views about democratic rights and practices. Thus for abstainers, negative views about democracy might be driving their political behavior and not be the result of it, and they will not be discussed much in the analysis.

I measure government performance on three key dimensions: economic performance, crime, and corruption in their countries. These three issue areas are consistently ranked by Latin Americans as the most pressing problems facing their countries (e.g., Singer 2013). In all three cases, I focus on indicators of general trends instead of personal experiences, because the former are more easily generalizable to regime-level dynamics while personal experiences might have idiosyncratic causes (Carlin, Singer, and Zechmeister 2015). The extant literature has generally argued that good governance has a larger effect on democratic attitudes than the economy does (Evans and Whitefield 1995; Bratton and Mattes 2001). Yet in the case of Latin America, the electoral impact of corruption and scandals is mitigated when the economy is good (e.g., Zechmeister and Zizumbo-Colunga 2013; Carlin, Love, and Martínez-Gallardo 2014). The implication is that citizens in the region, many of whom face high levels of economic vulnerability, value economic successes more than they disapprove of bad governance, and so we might expect the economy to have the largest impact on this sample.

In the case of economic performance, I use a question that asks citizens about how the national economy has changed in the past year, coded so that high values represent a positive view of the economy:

government's policy actions. Of the fifteen correlations between government support and the three measures of support for civil liberties and electoral contestation, fourteen of them are significant at conventional levels and negative. These results are available in a web appendix on the author's website (<http://polisci.uconn.edu/person/matthew-singer/>).

“Do you think that the country’s current economic situation is better than, the same as, or worse than it was 12 months ago? (2) Better, (1) Same, (0) Worse.”¹⁸

To measure crime, I look at how safe respondents feel in their neighborhood. To facilitate the comparison of this variable to the economic performance and representation variable, high values are coded so that they represent good security outcomes.

“Speaking of the neighborhood where you live and thinking of the possibility of being assaulted or robbed, do you feel very safe, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe? (3) Very safe, (2) Somewhat safe, (1) Somewhat unsafe, (0) Very unsafe.”

Finally, corruption is measured by looking at the perceived frequency of corruption in a country. Again, the question is coded so that high values represent good governance outcomes.

“Taking into account your own experience or what you have heard, corruption among public officials is: (0) Very common, (1) Common, (2) Uncommon, or (3) Very uncommon?”

As I focus on the effect of representation and perceived performance on attitudes towards the democratic system, I control for demographic factors that are expected to also shape a commitment to democratic principles. The most important of these variables is *education*, which is expected to lead to greater demand for the personal free-speech rights that undergird democracy as well as tolerance for others exercising those rights. I measure education by controlling for the number of years of education the respondent completed, which can be as little as 0 (true for 4 percent of respondents) and is capped at 18.

While education is the demographic variable that has received the most attention, I control for other considerations as well. I measure the respondent’s *wealth* by looking at household ownership of a series of household goods¹⁹ and then conducting a factor analysis to identify which goods distinguish the most well-off households from other households, while

¹⁸ While I control for baseline levels of government support, one might worry that these measures are endogenous to the levels of government support that generated the dependent variables. Thus in Table A5 of the web appendix (see the author’s website: <http://polisci.uconn.edu/person/matthew-singer/>), I replace them with the average perception of the national economy, level of insecurity, and level of corruption control in the region in which the respondent lived (following Zechmeister and Zizumbo-Colunga 2013). While the economic perceptions measure does not have a significant correlation with democratic attitudes in the two analyses based on a cross-section of cases from 2006, the analyses that pool multiple observations per country show that support for civil liberties/opposition rights are lower in regions where the economy is widely seen to be doing well.

¹⁹ Respondents were asked if they own a phone, a TV, a refrigerator, indoor plumbing, an indoor bathroom, a washing machine, a computer, a motorcycle, and the number of cars they own.

incorporating differences in the kinds of wealth that are possible in urban and rural areas given differences in infrastructure. (A well-to-do person in a rural area where electricity is scarce may own fewer electronic appliances, for example, than a poor person living in an urban center.) I also the diffusion of goods across countries into account.²⁰ On the basis of this factor analysis, respondents are divided into quintiles of wealth within their country. Thus, this variable can be used to compare individuals within countries but does not capture levels of wealth across them. I control for the respondent's *gender* by including a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if the respondent is female. For *age* I include five dummies for various age cohorts (26–35, 36–45, 46–55, 56–65, 66+), using those under the age of 25 as a baseline. For *ethnicity*, the only question that is available in all waves of the survey is one that asks “Do you consider yourself white, mestizo, indigenous, black, mulatto, or of another race?” to which the survey in Venezuela adds the category of “moreno.” On the basis of this question I create dummy variables that differentiate respondents from the excluded category of “white.” Finally, I include a dummy variable for living in a *rural* area that is based on each country's census definitions and was coded by the LAPOP team at the time the survey was collected.

In crafting these models, I have tried to keep them (relatively) parsimonious, intentionally excluding variables other scholars often include in their models such as political knowledge and political participation that may reflect democratic attitudes instead of helping to cause them and variables such as life satisfaction that cannot be tied to a specific government output. I do however follow several scholars (e.g., Booth and Seligson 2009) and add a control for the degree to which individuals believe *other people can be trusted*²¹ as a measure of interpersonal trust that is often cited as a component of a more general level of social capital but whose association with democratic attitudes is debated (see Cleary and Stokes 2009, 4–8).

Finally, in each of the individual-level models I add country-specific dummy variables. These variables that capture omitted factors that make some countries have deeper levels of commitment to democratic principles. These dummy variables control for these unmeasured country-specific factors. They also have the effect of making each of the regression analyses within-case analyses that look at differences within each country while also controlling for clustering at the country level in the standard errors. There is additional clustering within

²⁰ See Córdova (2009).

²¹ “And speaking of the people from around here, would you say that people in this community are (3) very trustworthy, (2) somewhat trustworthy, (1) not very trustworthy, or (0) untrustworthy...?”

countries at the level of country-years, so I use robust standard errors that adjust for that clustering. In alternative specifications I have modeled these variations as hierarchical models with error terms that nest individuals inside country-years and then inside countries; the substantive conclusions are consistent across specifications.

RESULTS

I hypothesized that while education and social trust will be correlated with all forms of pro-democratic attitudes, supporters of election winners and those who perceived good government performance would be more likely to say they like democracy and to reject coups but be less likely to express support for protecting free speech and civil liberties or for preserving opposition party rights. Table 2 presents the baseline models of support for the democratic status quo, while Table 3 models support for the civil liberties and opposition rights that should help facilitate vertical accountability.

As expected, individuals with higher levels of education tend to express higher levels of support for democratic values across the board, with education correlating with a belief in democracy as the best system, rejection of coups, and rejection of unelected strongmen and also with support for free speech rights, civil rights, and opposition party rights. Individuals who express trust in other people also tend to significantly agree with all these broad democratic norms. Thus, education and social capital are correlated with most forms of diffuse support for democracy's norms. Levels of diffuse support for democracy also tend to be higher for the wealthy and for men, while the effects of age vary. The young express the least consistent support for electoral democracy or for to opposition party rights but express the highest levels of political tolerance. Ethnicity has an inconsistent effect.

TABLE 2

SUPPORT FOR THE DEMOCRATIC STATUS QUO

	Democracy Is the Best System	Reject a Coup	Reject Unelected Strongmen
	[1]	[2]	[3]
Voted for the Winner	0.045 (0.031)	0.184*** (0.049)	0.090* (0.045)
National Economy Is Getting Better	0.148*** (0.018)	0.108*** (0.021)	0.147*** (0.029)
Feels Secure in Neighborhood	0.073*** (0.010)	0.096*** (0.014)	0.025 (0.019)
No Corruption in Government	-0.074*** (0.020)	0.018 (0.016)	-0.035 (0.028)
Interpersonal Trust	0.126*** (0.014)	0.075*** (0.018)	0.125*** (0.023)
Education	0.033*** (0.003)	0.034*** (0.005)	0.049*** (0.004)
Household Wealth	0.026*** (0.009)	0.021* (0.012)	-0.009 (0.012)
Female	-0.044*** (0.016)	-0.042* (0.017)	0.025 (0.019)
Abstained Last Election	-0.167*** (0.032)	0.070** (0.031)	-0.217*** (0.044)
Age 26–35	0.051* (0.022)	0.168*** (0.030)	0.048 (0.031)
Age 36–45	0.208*** (0.031)	0.345*** (0.036)	0.153*** (0.035)
Age 46–55	0.309*** (0.038)	0.476*** (0.046)	0.199*** (0.045)
Age 56–65	0.386*** (0.045)	0.611*** (0.052)	0.283*** (0.047)
Age 66+	0.495*** (0.051)	0.657*** (0.059)	0.413*** (0.060)
Mestizo	0.002 (0.026)	0.022 (0.026)	0.072 (0.040)
Indigenous	-0.016 (0.040)	-0.036 (0.046)	0.015 (0.067)
Black	0.071 (0.069)	-0.098* (0.048)	0.067 (0.089)
Mulatto	0.036 (0.069)	-0.046 (0.047)	0.112 (0.098)
Moreno	-0.014	0.017	0.426

	(0.072)	(0.077)	(0.280)
Other Ethnic	-0.088	-0.183***	-0.014
	(0.052)	(0.066)	(0.088)
Rural	-0.004	0.042	0.066
	(0.027)	(0.035)	(0.040)
Constant			0.870***
			(0.118)
Cut 1	-2.196	-0.205	
	(0.101)	(0.102)	
Cut 2	-1.528	1.030	
	(0.085)	(0.109)	
Cut 3	-0.684	1.615	
	(0.075)	(0.112)	
Cut 4	0.182		
	(0.074)		
Cut 5	0.971		
	(0.073)		
Cut 6	1.757		
	(0.077)		
Model Type	Ordered Logit	Ordered Logit	Binary Logit
Number of Observations	86978	71634	86833
Number of Country- Years	67	57	67
χ^2	2476.52***	3056.63***	2017.16***
Pseudo R ²	0.028	0.028	0.040

Country Dummies Deleted from the Table, Standard Errors Adjusted for Country-Year Clustering in Parentheses;

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

TABLE 3

PROTECTION OF CIVIL LIBERTIES

	Tolerance for Civil Liberties	Protect Free Speech	President Should Not Limit Opposition Parties
	[1]	[2]	[3]
Voted for the Winner	-1.077*** (0.213)	-1.567*** (0.191)	-0.416*** (0.035)
National Economy Is Getting Better	-0.370*** (0.107)	-0.509*** (0.115)	-0.189*** (0.024)
Feels Secure in Neighborhood	-0.025 (0.071)	0.122 (0.085)	0.015 (0.013)
No Corruption in Government	-0.396*** (0.090)	-0.819*** (0.093)	-0.130*** (0.023)
Interpersonal Trust	0.370*** (0.054)	0.032 (0.088)	0.033* (0.013)
Education	0.210*** (0.020)	0.254*** (0.022)	0.051*** (0.005)
Household Wealth	0.132** (0.041)	0.202*** (0.060)	0.048*** (0.008)
Female	-0.956*** (0.105)	-0.974*** (0.154)	-0.029 (0.015)
Abstained Last Election	-0.776*** (0.187)	-1.003*** (0.210)	-0.208*** (0.036)
Age 26–35	-0.306** (0.112)	0.144 (0.218)	0.074** (0.026)
Age 36–45	-0.287 (0.158)	0.225 (0.234)	0.201*** (0.028)
Age 46–55	-0.246 (0.180)	0.322 (0.265)	0.287*** (0.039)
Age 56–65	-0.324 (0.201)	0.499 (0.320)	0.341*** (0.041)
Age 66+	-0.689** (0.215)	0.290 (0.364)	0.368*** (0.051)
Mestizo	0.154 (0.162)	1.136*** (0.187)	0.021 (0.034)
Indigenous	-0.003 (0.295)	0.095 (0.378)	-0.035 (0.063)
Black	0.269 (0.251)	1.130** (0.422)	-0.051 (0.053)
Mulatto	0.282 (0.267)	-0.184 (0.495)	0.011 (0.087)

Moreno	-1.555 (1.003)		0.047 (0.051)
Other Ethnic	0.545 (0.545)	-0.229 (0.645)	-0.007 (0.101)
Rural	-0.287* (0.138)	-1.152** (0.190)	0.015 (0.030)
Constant	21.669 (0.786)	31.438 (0.493)	
Cut 1			-2.035 (0.148)
Cut 2			-1.302 (0.135)
Cut 3			-0.459 (0.124)
Cut 4			0.317 (0.120)
Cut 5			0.939 (0.119)
Cut 6			1.505 (0.120)
Model Type	OLS	OLS	Ordered Logit
Number of Observations	84551	15390	66759
Number of Country-Years	67	13	53
F/ χ^2	26.58***	44.58***	1640.40***
R ² / Pseudo R ²	0.061	0.085	0.018

Country Dummies Deleted from the Table, Standard Errors Adjusted for Country-Year Clustering in Parentheses; * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

Yet where the results in Table 2 and Table 3 most strongly diverge is with regards to the correlation between election/policy outcomes and diffuse democratic support. In Table 2, we see that election winners do not significantly differ from losers regarding acceptance of democracy as the best system, but election winners are more likely to reject either a military coup or an unelected strongman taking over. This is consistent with the evidence about election winners in other regions. Yet in Table 3 we see that winners are less likely to support civil liberties than losers are.²² Winners have less tolerance for people having the right to express criticism of the

²² Additional individual-level analyses use alternative conceptions of incumbent support to probe the robustness of these findings. These results mirror those reported here: individuals who self-identify with the ruling party, have similar left-right self-placements to the president's, approve of the government, or have positive evaluations of policy outcomes under the government have lower levels of support for civil liberties and checks and balances.

regime, are less likely to support free speech protections generally, and are less likely to reject steps that would formally limit the voice and vote of opposition parties. Instead it is the losers who seem more likely to stand up for the rights of free speech, association, and contestation that make vertical accountability possible.

To put these effects in perspective, we can compare the effects of winning an election or being optimistic about the economy with the effect of education. For example, the difference between election winners and election losers in their level of political tolerance is equivalent to the predicted effect of four years of schooling. The difference between winners and losers regarding protections of free speech is even larger, equivalent to six years of schooling. The drop in support for opposition party rights that is associated with winning the election is equivalent to the predicted gap between individuals with more than eight fewer years of schooling.

A similar dynamic exists with respect to economic performance. Positive views have a positive association with support for democracy and rejection of either a coup or an unelected strongman. Yet individuals who say that the economy is strong are significantly less likely to hold pro-democracy attitudes with regards to protecting civil liberties and free speech or advocating for opposition rights (in one of the two models). As the economy is seen to improve, people say they prefer democracy to autocratic rule but they become more willing to delegate the government authority to regulate protest or regulate the opposition. Fear of crime has a less consistent relationship with democratic attitudes, but individuals who think corruption is rare also tend to be less concerned about the government having the power to regulate challenges to its authority, whereas it is concern about corruption that leads people to stand up for the rights of opposition actors and the media.

Again, we put the effect of the economy in context by looking at its effect relative to education. A 1-point increase on the 3-point scale is correlated with an expected drop in political tolerance equivalent to that which would occur if the respondent had received one and a half fewer years of schooling. A similar change is predicted to result in a drop in support for free speech that is equivalent to two years fewer of schooling, while the effect of the economy on opposition rights is equivalent to less than a single year of school. Thus the effect of the economy in leading citizens to acquiesce to limits on political competition, while substantial, is smaller than is the effect of being an election winner.

In summary, across all these models we see that interpersonal trust and education are broadly associated with support for freedoms, opposition party rights, and institutional checks that are likely to check executive authority and strengthen both vertical and horizontal accountability. This is consistent with the larger literature on diffuse support for democracy. Yet as respondents feel that the incumbent represents their interests or see that the economy is growing, they become more willing to delegate additional authority to the incumbent and less willing to express support for civil liberties or free speech generally, much less opposition party rights or checks and balances.

Extension 1: Does Performance Have a Smaller Effect Early in the President's Term?

The data in Tables 2–3 confirm that while electoral winners and those who perceive the government to be performing well are more likely to support electoral democracy against its overthrow by political outsiders, they are more likely to acquiesce to restrictions on free speech and opposition rights that may pave the way for electoral autocracy. Yet the extant literature has proposed a counter narrative for how performance affects support for delegative democracy that focuses on the ability of a crisis to generate risk acceptance and a desire for a strong hand (Weyland 2000, 2013; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009). While I agree with the argument about the effect of a crisis, I believe that this argument overlooks voter assessments about responsibility for the crisis. Crises that occur at the start of a president's term may very well have their roots in policies that existed under the previous regime and thus do not tell voters about the incumbent's abilities; instead they may be further evidence that the previous ruling actors need to be sidelined from the policy process. Yet crises that occur later in the term can be laid at the incumbent's feet. While these later crises may create risk acceptance and desire for a strong hand, they should not lead citizens to invest those hopes in the incumbent. Instead, they should make citizens desirous for a political opening where alternative voices can be heard.

To explore these dynamics, I create a variable that ranges from 0–5 for how long the incumbent president was in office at the time of the survey, with “0” being 0–11 months, “1” being 12–23 months, etc., up to “5” being 60 months or more. Similar results obtain if we simply use the logged number of months the president had been in office. I interact this variable with economic performance, because this is the performance variable that has the most consistent

correlation with attitudes about checks and balances/opposition rights.²³ I expect that his or her interaction term will be negative, as time makes citizens more likely to use good performance as a reason to consider restrictions on opposition right or speech. Because this variable is measured at the country-year level, I estimate the models as hierarchical linear models with a cross-nested (country-year) variance structure, treating the dependent variables as continuous variables to make the computation simpler.

The results in Table 4 are consistent with expectations, as in each case there is a negative interaction effect between the time that the president has been in office and voter willingness to restrict speech rights or opposition freedoms. This effect is illustrated in Figure 1. In the first year, economic performance has no correlation with support for protecting free speech or civil liberties and has a slight negative effect on support for the opposition having a political voice. Yet over time the effect of good performance on support for these democratic norms is increasingly negative, such that economic performance becomes increasingly important in creating space for the government to repress the opposition and other critics. While these results do not provide evidence that inherited crises help presidents early in their terms, they do show that voters are careful to consider how strong of a signal economic outcomes are about the president's performance.

²³ Similar results obtain if I use the aggregate measure of sociotropic performance described in footnote 7 above (see web appendix 3 on the author's website (<http://polisci.uconn.edu/person/matthew-singer/>)).

TABLE 4

**THE EFFECT OF THE ECONOMY OVER TIME ON ATTITUDES ABOUT
PROTECTION OF CIVIL LIBERTIES**

	Tolerance For Civil Liberties	Protect Free Speech	President Should Not Limit Opposition Parties
	[1]	[2]	[3]
Voted for the Winner	-1.123*** (0.081)	-1.518*** (0.191)	-0.412*** (0.018)
National Economy Is Getting Better	0.040 (0.076)	0.309 (0.165)	-0.119*** (0.018)
Time in Office	0.293*** (0.033)	0.375 (0.324)	0.057*** (0.008)
Time*National Economy	-0.173*** (0.025)	-0.403*** (0.059)	-0.031*** (0.006)
Feels Secure in Neighborhood	0.020 (0.038)	0.117 (0.085)	0.018* (0.009)
No Corruption in Government	-0.356*** (0.040)	-0.803*** (0.093)	-0.132*** (0.009)
Interpersonal Trust	0.377*** (0.039)	0.033 (0.088)	0.027** (0.009)
Education	0.216*** (0.009)	0.255*** (0.021)	0.052*** (0.002)
Household Wealth	0.124*** (0.026)	0.193*** (0.060)	0.053*** (0.006)
Female	-0.953*** (0.066)	-0.972*** (0.153)	-0.026 (0.015)
Abstained Last Election	-0.828*** (0.091)	-0.997*** (0.210)	-0.195*** (0.020)
Age 26–35	-0.287** (0.096)	0.122 (0.218)	0.071*** (0.021)
Age 36–45	-0.262* (0.103)	0.231 (0.234)	0.200*** (0.023)
Age 46–55	-0.189 (0.114)	0.319 (0.264)	0.274*** (0.025)
Age 56–65	-0.255 (0.132)	0.501 (0.319)	0.325*** (0.029)
Age 66+	-0.580*** (0.154)	0.283 (0.363)	0.345*** (0.034)
Mestizo	0.148 (0.085)	1.115*** (0.186)	0.020 (0.019)

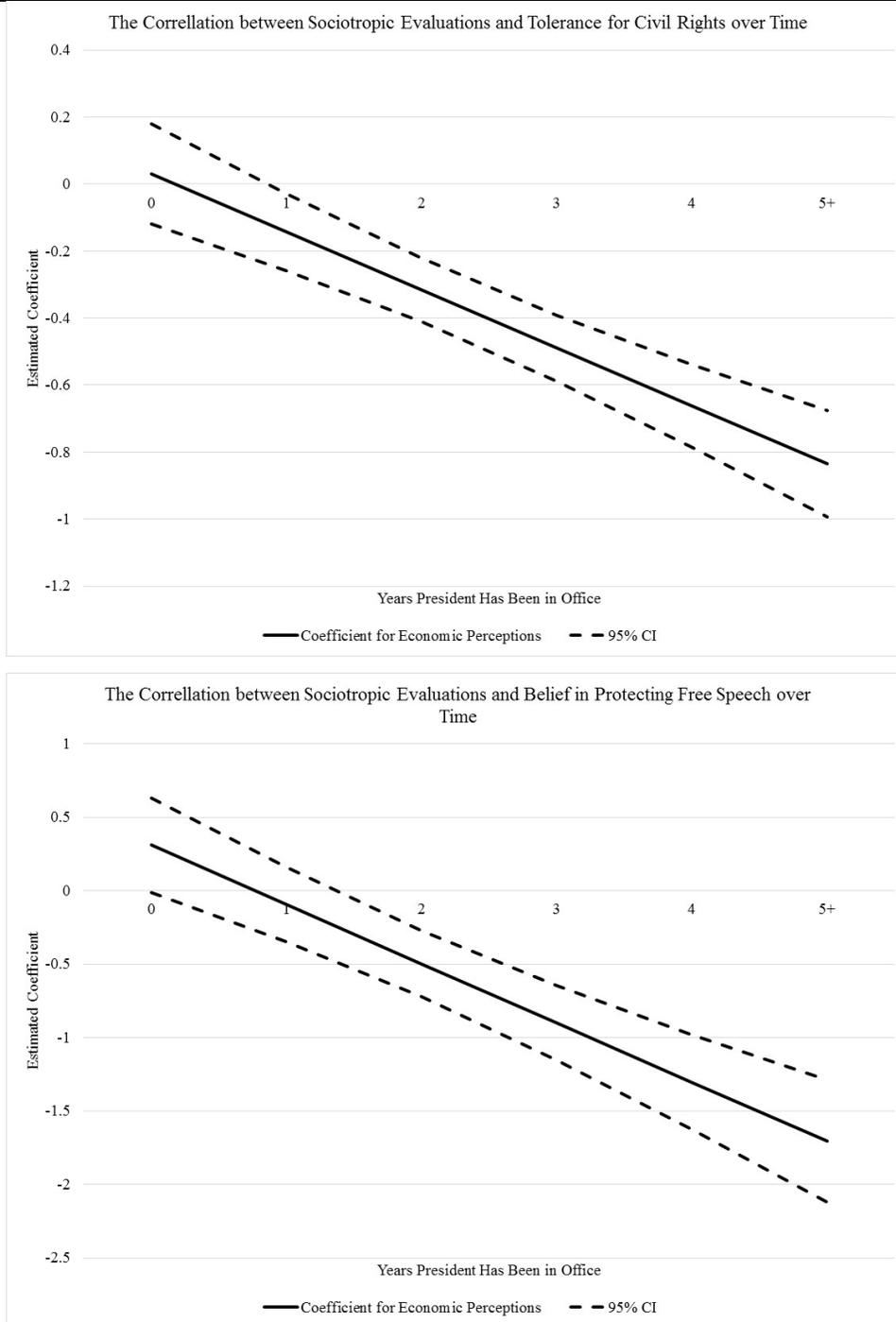
Indigenous	0.030 (0.164)	0.095 (0.376)	-0.059 (0.037)
Black	0.374* (0.180)	1.137** (0.421)	-0.064 (0.040)
Mulatto	0.525* (0.208)	-0.184 (0.494)	-0.001 (0.046)
Moreno	-1.119*** (0.320)		0.042 (0.068)
Other Ethnic	0.554 (0.288)	-0.207 (0.644)	0.008 (0.064)
Rural	-0.293*** (0.080)	-1.160*** (0.189)	0.012 (0.018)
Constant	21.571*** (0.628)	30.917*** (0.945)	3.192*** (0.089)
<hr/>			
Variance Component			
Country	4.004 (1.350)	4.518 (1.810)	0.075 (0.026)
Year	0.541 (0.406)		0.005 (0.005)
Level 1	90.860 (0.442)	88.978 (1.015)	3.552 (0.019)
<hr/>			
Number of Observations	84551	15390	66759
Number of Country-Years	67	13	53
χ^2	2030.69***	731.71***	2854.17***

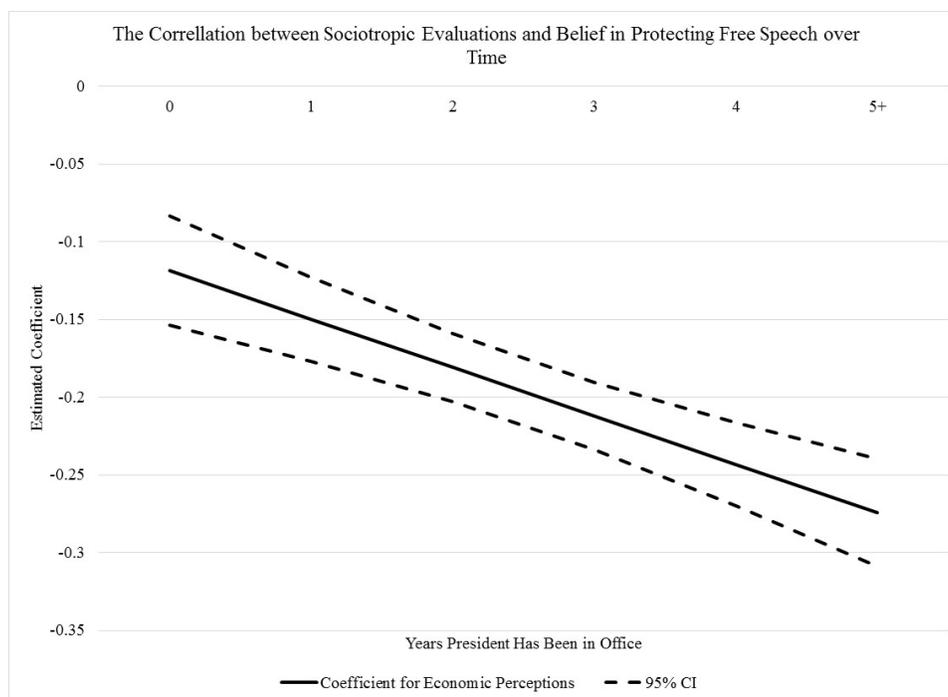
Hierarchical Linear Model, Standard Errors in Parentheses;

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

FIGURE 1

**THE EFFECT OF ECONOMIC PERCEPTIONS ON SUPPORT FOR FREE SPEECH AND
OPPOSITION RIGHTS CONDITIONAL UPON HOW LONG THE
PRESIDENT HAS BEEN IN OFFICE**





Extension 2: Political Polarization Makes Winners Less Protective of Opposition Rights

While the tendencies in Tables 2–3 display themselves on average, we might expect that political differences might further provoke contentious behaviors. In particular, the costs of allowing your rivals to govern/have an opposition voice might be relatively small if you are in general agreement with their policies, whereas the temptation to use undemocratic means may be larger for those who strongly disagree with their rivals.

I test this hypothesis by interacting the winner variable with Singer’s (2016) measure of ideological polarization, which is based on where members of parliament placed their party on the left-right scale in the Parliamentary Elites in Latin America surveys and weights divergence between parties according to their size. Large values represent higher levels of ideological differentiation within the party system. For ease of interpretation, I have centered the polarization variable at the sample mean (such that the variable for election winners captures their difference in an average country) and have also interacted it with the dummy variable for abstainers, such that the polarization variable measures the effect of polarization on political losers’ attitudes and then the polarization* winners variable tests how polarization changes the difference between losers and winners. Because polarization is measured at the country-year

level, I nest survey years inside of countries in hierarchical models, except for the questions that were only asked in 2006 in which the data cluster by country. The controls are the same as in previous tables.

The results in Table 5 suggest that polarization has very little effect on attitudes about the democratic status quo. Political losers become slightly more open to coups in polarized party systems than they are in the average country, but polarization does not affect the attitudes of either winners or losers regarding democracy as the best system or willingness to consider an unelected strongman.

TABLE 5

POLARIZATION AND THE WINNER-LOSER GAP IN DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES

	Democracy Is the Best System	Reject a Coup	Reject Unelected Strongmen	Tolerance for Civil Liberties	Protect Free Speech	President Should Not Limit Opposition Parties
Voted for the Winner	0.060*** (0.014)	0.109*** (0.010)	0.099*** (0.026)	-1.038*** (0.083)	-1.252*** (0.197)	-0.410*** (0.018)
Polarization Centered	-0.020 (0.069)	-0.071 (0.039)	0.044 (0.089)	-0.227 (0.408)	0.327 (0.766)	-0.001 (0.071)
Winner* Polarization	0.010 (0.017)	0.002 (0.012)	-0.035 (0.032)	-0.301** (0.101)	-0.744*** (0.230)	-0.150*** (0.022)

Results from hierarchical models with country-years nested inside of countries (except for the surveys of a single year). Includes controls for abstention, abstention* polarization, perceptions of the economy, crime, and corruption, and the other demographic controls in Tables 2–3. Standard errors in parentheses.

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

In contrast, polarization does have a significant effect on the gap between winners and losers with regards to civil liberties, free speech, and opposition rights. In an average country, winners are less tolerant of civil rights for regime critics than winners are. Losers are not significantly affected by the level of political polarization. Yet in the three models asking about civil liberties and opposition rights, polarization has a significantly more negative effect on winners. The most consistent effect is with regards to placing limits on opposition parties' voices and votes, as winners become significantly less supportive of opposition rights in contexts where policy positions are most polarized.

CONCLUSION

Sartori observes that “Democracies are difficult, they need to be nurtured and believed in” (1991, 118).²⁴ Short-term performance is an important component of democratic support. Good governance generates support for the existing status quo institutions. Representation is associated with satisfaction with existing institutions and support for democracy in general while election losers must consent to democracy’s continuance (e.g., Anderson et al. 2005). Economic recessions or electoral results that are not fully perceived as legitimate become threats to the democratic ideal.

This essay, however, suggests that democracy may be even more “difficult” than previously thought. While weak performance may undermine support for democracy, positive outcomes may embolden would-be dictators to attempt to consolidate their authority vis-à-vis political opponents or against other institutions. Election winners oppose changes to the status quo that might undermine their influence or displace their representatives but are willing to support changes to the status quo that delegate increased power to their faction. Individuals who agree with the policy goals of the executive are willing to suppress social and institutional forces that would impede that agenda. Finally, when governance is good, citizens may become willing to endow government actors with greater authority and influence to continue to enact their agenda, even at the expense of existing institutions and rights. Delegative democracy is thus more than just a cultural artifact; it reflects a considered process of delegation to a representative who has convinced citizens of his or her competence. Thus democracy requires more than the losers’ consent, it requires the winners’ forbearance and restraint. Citizens who distrust politics are necessary as a counterweight to the power-centralizing tendencies of supporters of popular executives (Cleary and Stokes 2009).

Most of the discussion in this paper has focused on the question of democratic stability. The principal-agent theory discussed here also has implications for broader questions of institutional reform that fall short of undermining democracy but increase the power of the ruling party. While many institutional reforms happen because crises increase demands for change

²⁴ While the present analysis has focused on democracies, authoritarian regimes may face similar challenges. Democracies and dictatorships are destabilized by bad short-term performance (Morrison 2014). And authoritarian regimes have to worry about internal power struggles leading forces within the regime to defect and establish a democracy—especially if any initial reforms have brought economic fruits (Przeworski 1991).

(Weyland 2002), strong performance can open opportunities for governing parties to propose modifications to the existing power structure. For example, in her study of electoral reforms, Remmer expected that recessions would generate institutional change because “economic failure is likely to lead to a re-evaluation of political rules” (2008, 20–21). However, she instead finds that “contrary to expectation, positive economic performance increases reform opportunities of all kinds, *presumably by enhancing support for ruling parties*” (ibid., 22, emphasis added). Popular parties have opportunities to amend electoral rules to make them less permissive when the economy is good. A similar dynamic may exist with the decision to lengthen or shorten presidential terms or amend the procedures governing reelection and in other institutional arenas. Unpopular leaders who attempt such steps risk outrage (or even removal as in Honduras), while popular leaders can amend the constitution in their favor (Corrales 2016). While the political values of tolerance, liberty, and limited government may behave like diffuse values in the abstract, as citizens are asked to consider their implementation in the current political sphere they must weigh both their underlying beliefs about democracy and also the specific question of to whom authority will be delegated. A person is willing to make exceptions to principles of tolerance and restraint if he or she believe the government will use their powers to deliver additional policies that the citizen prefers.

Moving forward, then, if support for consolidating executive power is higher among those individuals who have “won” under democracy, further work is needed to document how democracies can restrain winners. Protecting institutional checks and balances and the rights of citizens to exercise social control is in part an institutional problem (Schedler, Diamond, and Plattner 1999; Mainwaring and Welna 2003). However, unless institutional reform requires supermajorities, the sitting rulers may have the power to amend governing rules if the public does not protest. The threat of losing office in the future may deter winners from consolidating their power (Geddes 1994), but some delegative democrats may be able to sufficiently consolidate their power over electoral institutions and economic resources and demonize potential electoral opponents to remove that threat. Thus, democratic institutions may depend upon a sense of distrust on the part of citizens who believe that politicians represent their interests but who recognize that this may not always be the case, or upon the vigilant activism of elections’ and society’s losers. Finally, the same mechanisms that can build support for delegative democracy can undermine it if growth or governance suffers or a ruler alienates his or

her previous base; “institutions that ratify a transitory advantage are [only] likely to be as durable as the conditions that generate them” (Przeworski 1991, 88).

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