



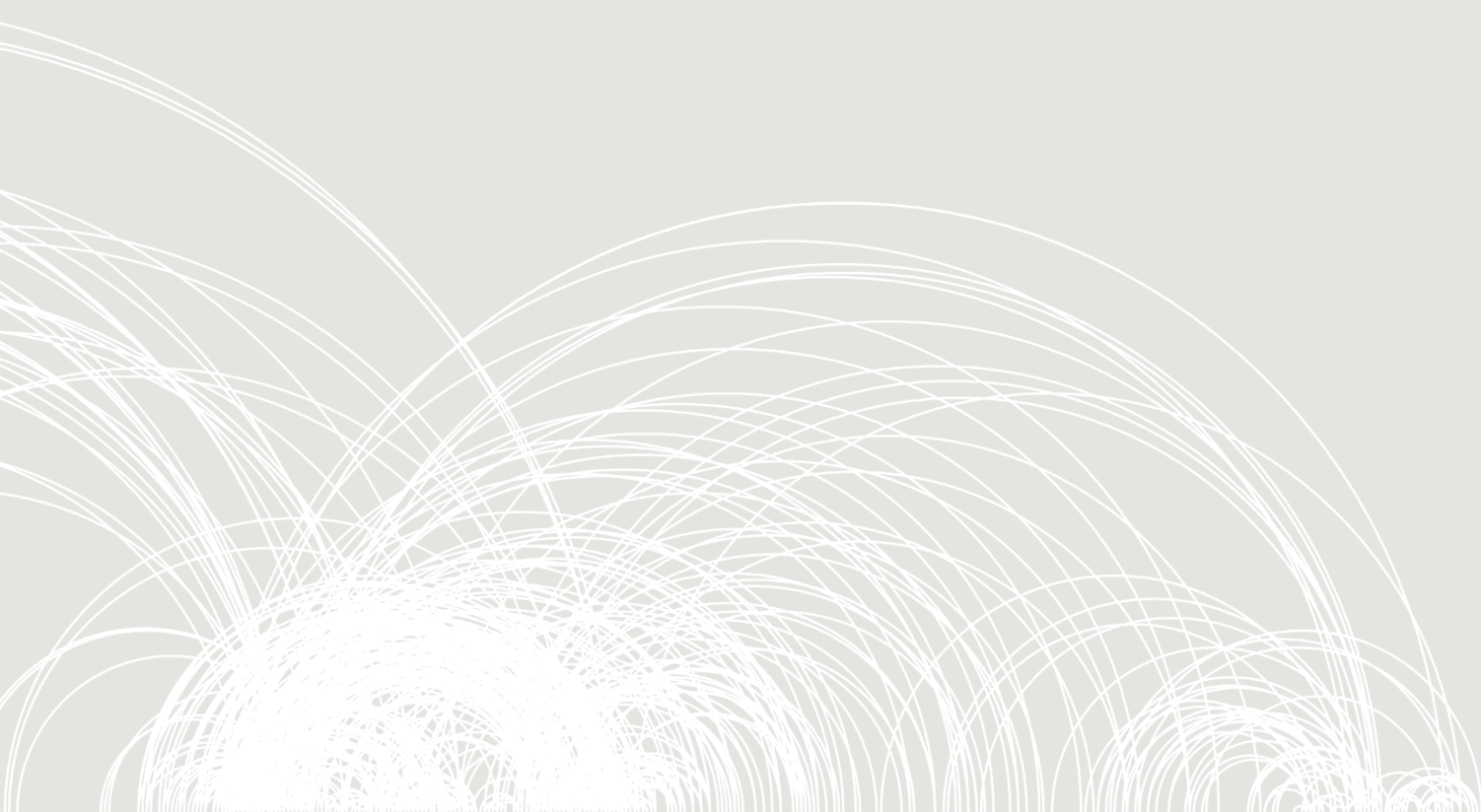
FINAL REPORT

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Analysis of Trends in Democratic Attitudes: Bolivia Report

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Analysis of Trends in Democratic Attitudes: Bolivia Report

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Acronyms

ALP	Plurinational Legislative Assembly
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
LAPOP	Latin American Public Opinion Project
MAS	Movimiento al Socialismo
OAS	Organization of American States
TCP	Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal
TSE	National Electoral Tribunal

Presentation

In recent years, governance, political crises, insecurity, and longstanding issues of corruption, inequality, and lackluster economic performance have eroded democratic legitimacy and trust in government in Latin America. Indeed, 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.”¹ Support for and satisfaction with democracy declined sharply in 2016 compared to prior survey rounds and remained low in 2018-2019. 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.²

In a context of global and regional democratic backsliding, in which domestic and foreign actors are actively working to undermine democracy, a citizenry that remains committed to democratic principles and values—even if dissatisfied with politics and governance—can be critical to staving off democratic decline. A citizenry with highly democratic attitudes is more likely to discourage those in power from undermining democracy from within. Perhaps more importantly, citizens with highly democratic attitudes are less likely to support authoritarian candidates at the ballot box in the first place, and more likely to mobilize against elite actions that undermine democracy.

To respond to the challenge of eroding democratic attitudes in cooperating countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, NORC at the University of Chicago (NORC) conducted a study that examines how democratic attitudes have evolved in the recent past. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following questions:

- Can the citizens of Latin America and the Caribbean be classified into groups with distinct patterns of democratic attitudes?
- What are the most salient attitudinal, economic, and other characteristics of the citizens in each group, and especially those groups that hold worrisome democratic attitudes?
- How have the groups and democratic attitudes evolved in the past ten years? What system-level, contextual factors have contributed to changes over time in patterns of democratic attitudes?

To answer the first two questions, NORC identified trends in democratic attitudes between 2012 and 2021 using cluster analysis, a classification technique described in greater detail below, to group citizens into “clusters” with distinct democratic attitudes. The team then identified the demographic, socioeconomic, geographic, and other characteristics differentiating the citizens in

¹ Castorena, O., & Graves, S. L. 2019. “Support for Electoral Democracy.” In Zechmeister, E. J., & Lupu, N. (Eds.). *Pulse of Democracy*. Nashville, TN: LAPOP, p. 23.

² Lupu, N., & Zechmeister, E. J. 2021. “The Pulse of Democracy in 2021.” In Lupu, N., Rodríguez, M., & Zechmeister, E. J. (Eds.). *Pulse of Democracy*. Nashville, TN: LAPOP, p. 2-5.

each cluster from the rest of the population using data from the last five waves of the AmericasBarometer³ (2012, 2015, 2016-2017, 2018-2019, 2021) for each country. To address the third question, NORC recruited experts in the politics of each country to make sense of the cluster analysis results and examine the relationship between democratic attitudes and political, economic, and social developments over time.⁴

This report presents the analysis for Bolivia. It was authored by Daniel E. Moreno (Senior Researcher, Ciudadanía, Comunidad de Estudios Sociales y Acción Pública). Study coordinators Luis A. Camacho, Mollie Cohen (Assistant Professor, Department of International Affairs, University of Georgia), and Ingrid Rojas (Research Scientist, NORC at the University of Chicago) revised the report to ensure alignment with the study objectives.

³ The AmericasBarometer by the LAPOP Lab, www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop.

⁴ NORC recruited experts through an open call for contributors issued in December 2021. The call targeted academics and researchers with advanced degrees in political science or other social science at institutions in LAC and beyond. Subsequent targeted recruiting efforts relied on NORC's academic and professional networks. NORC ultimately recruited experts for 12 of 16 countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, and Peru.

Introduction

The second decade of the 21st century has been one of contrasts for Bolivian society and 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. COVID-19 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 report analyzes data from five rounds of the AmericasBarometer survey, from 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019, and 2021, and 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 by incumbents at the expense of democratic institutions. The report then shows how public opinion changed in response to salient social, political, and economic developments. For much of 2012-2021, Bolivian politics was marked by 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 report 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 NORC's cluster analysis results; the second section employs process tracing⁵ to identify the most relevant contextual and historical factors driving trends in Bolivians' democratic attitudes during the last decade; and the final section concludes.

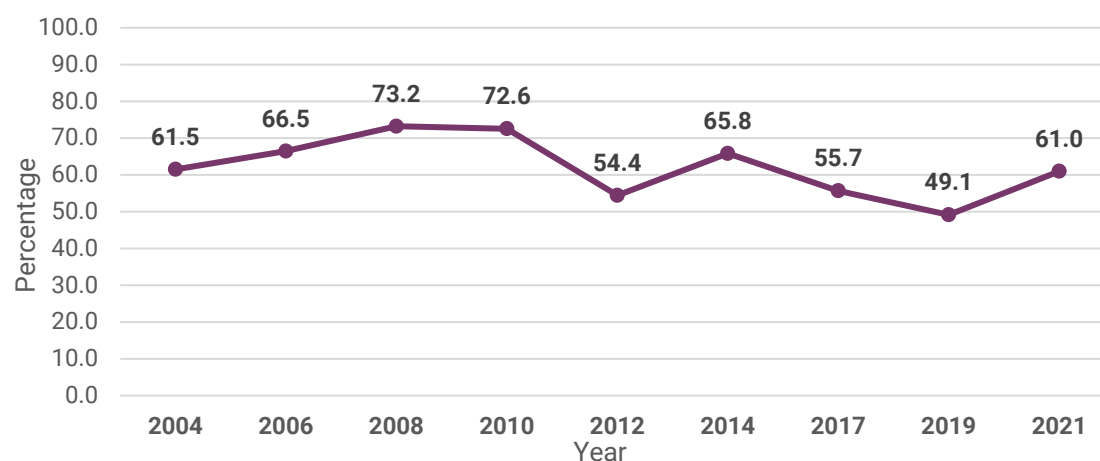
Patterns of Support for Democracy

This report focuses on the last ten years. 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.

⁵ Collier, D. 2011. "Understanding Process Tracing." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44 (4): 823–830.

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.⁶ After the crisis, support for democracy bounced back to 61.0 percent in 2021, an increase of almost 12 percentage points from 2019.⁷

Figure 1: Support for Democracy in Bolivia, 2004–2021



Beyond the evolution of support for democracy, previous research has shown that citizens’ relationship with democracy has become highly contingent on their political preferences.⁸ This has produced “fragmented legitimacies,” gaps in views about democracy between those who support the incumbent and those who do not.⁹ 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, satisfaction with democracy among government supporters, government critics, and those with neutral views diverged between 2006 and

⁶ 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. Schwarz, V., Arequipa, M., Choque, M., Córdova, E., Monasterio, I., Moreno, D., Soto, D., Osorio, D., Vargas, G., Villanueva, A., & Zuazo, M. 2019. *20 años de cultura política en Bolivia. Ciudadanía/ASDI*; Zechmeister, E. J., & Lupu, N. (Eds.). 2019. *Pulse of Democracy*. Nashville, TN: LAPOP. 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, D. E. 2021. “The Curse Among Citizens: Corruption, Democracy and Citizen Participation in the Andean Region.” In B. Schorr & G. Damonte (Eds.). *Andean states and the resource curse: institutional change in extractive economies*. Taylor and Francis.

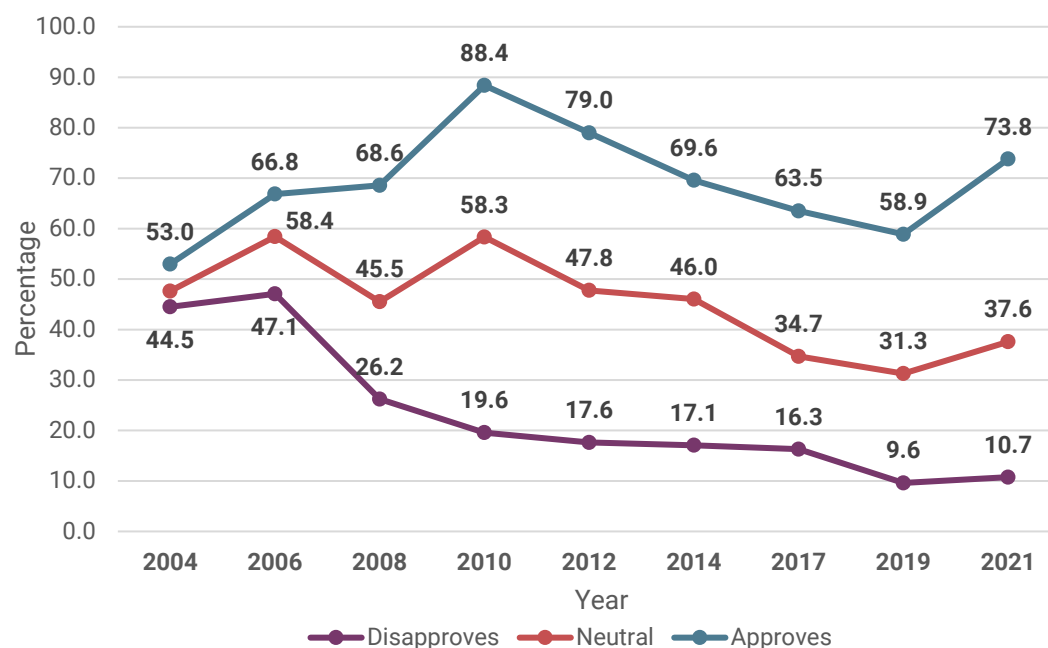
⁷ Individuals who answered five, six, and seven on the original seven-point scale were identified as supporting democracy, compared to those who gave answers ranging from zero to four.

⁸ Anderson, C., Blais, A., Bowler, S., Donovan, T., & Listhaug, O. 2005. *Losers’ Consent: Elections and Democratic Legitimacy*. Oxford University Press; Monsiváis-Carrillo, A. 2020. “Permissive Winners? The Quality of Democracy and the Winner–Loser Gap in the Perception of Freedoms.” *Political Studies* 70 (1): 173-194; Singer, M. 2018. “Delegating Away Democracy: How Good Representation and Policy Successes Can Undermine Democratic Legitimacy.” *Comparative Political Studies* 51 (13): 1754–1788.

⁹ Moreno Morales, D. E., & Osorio Michel, D. 2022. “¿Legitimidades fragmentadas? Apoyo a la democracia en la región andina.” *Colombia Internacional* 110: 51–88.

2010.¹⁰ Since then, the gap in satisfaction with democracy for the two groups has remained very wide.

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



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. As a result, to understand support for the political system, we must consider groups of attitudes, 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 similar 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.

¹⁰ 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.

NORC used 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. NORC used five democratic attitudes 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 comparable to those of prior waves and not analyzed here.¹¹ Annex 2 presents the main cluster analysis results for all waves.

The cluster analysis identified three clusters in 2012 and four clusters in 2014, 2017, and 2019.¹² In all waves, a share of respondents was not classified into any cluster. To facilitate comparisons over survey waves, we grouped the resulting clusters into four cluster families that share a set of defining characteristics:

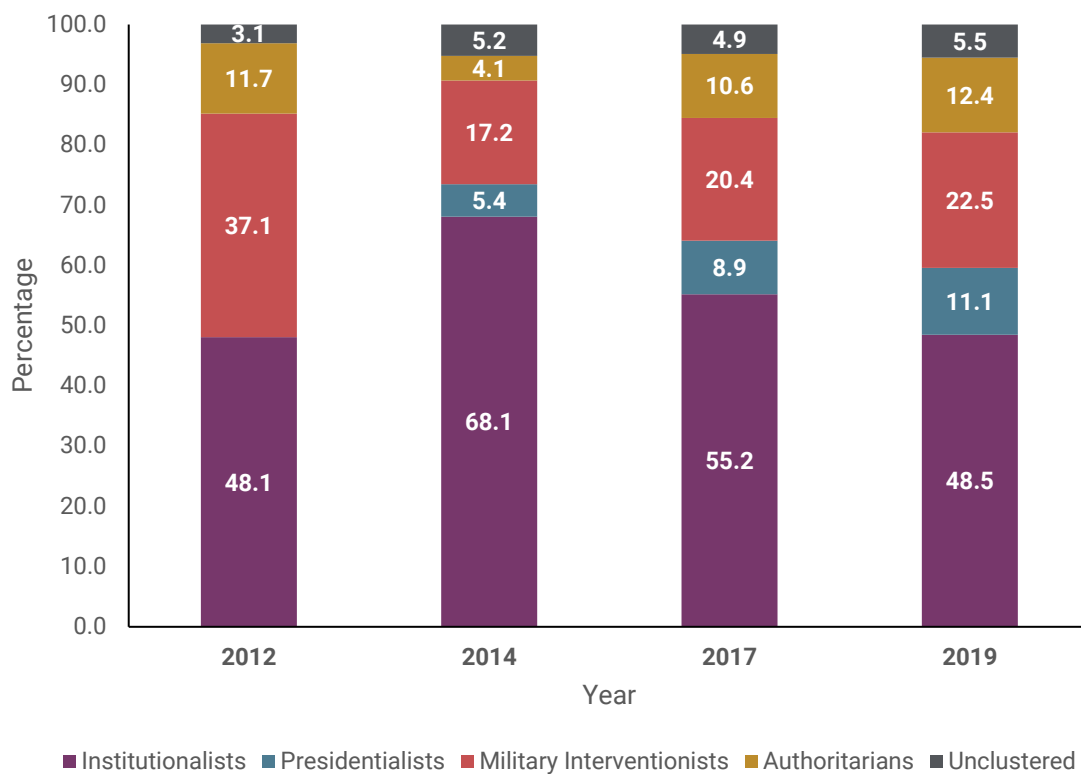
- *Institutionalists (including democratic institutionalists and institutionalists)*: Individuals in this cluster family are characterized by full opposition to coups and executive aggrandizement. In this sense, they represent “ideal” democratic citizens compared to the other cluster families.
- *Presidentialists*: 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.

¹¹ 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, N., Rodriguez, M., & Zechmeister, E. J. (Eds.). *Pulse of Democracy*. Nashville, TN: LAPOP, p. 106-107.

¹² The cluster analysis identified two clusters in 2021.

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.¹³ 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 2019.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

Figure 3: Evolution of Cluster Families, Bolivia 2012–2019



NORC's 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 citizens' 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.

¹³ In 2021, institutionalists made up 46.3 percent of respondents.

¹⁴ In 2021, military interventionists made up 22.6 percent of respondents.

¹⁵ In 2021, authoritarians made up 31.2 percent of respondents and presidentialists did not appear as a distinct cluster.

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 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.

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 the Morales' personalistic rule. A crisis emerged at the end of the decade, when political, health, and economic challenges manifested from COVID-19, but the crisis was ultimately resolved by a new national election.

Political Stability, Economic Growth and The “Messianic Temptation”

Figure 1 above shows that average support for democracy increased substantially with Morales' election in 2005.¹⁶ 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 robust indigenous population.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸

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.

The MAS's political success was undoubtedly fueled by a booming economy: national gross domestic product (GDP) grew 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.¹⁹ As a result of the decrease in poverty, the middle classes substantially grew and became an increasingly important political bloc.

¹⁶ This trend has been also noted elsewhere. Moreno Morales, D. E., Córdova Eguívar, E., Schwarz Blum, V., Vargas Villazón, G., & Garrido Cortés, J. 2012. *Cultura política de la democracia en Bolivia. Hacia la igualdad de oportunidades*. Ciudadanía-LAPOP.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ 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/>.

The first year analyzed here, 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.

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 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 control of the ALP guaranteed the acceptance of this candidacy. Morales started his third consecutive term in January 2015.

Despite Morales' success 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.

Dozens of schools, stadiums, and public infrastructure projects were named after Morales and his relatives.

Clearing the way for Morales to run for reelection in 2019 became a priority for MAS. A 2016 referendum 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.

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 national authorities' lack of commitment to democracy and its institutions.

Institutional Crisis and Recovery

Instead of looking for a new candidate for the next presidential election, MAS instead insisted 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. The overruling of a popular vote (the 2016 referendum) affected 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. Each party presented only one candidate, so the primary featured unopposed tickets across the board, with Morales as MAS's candidate. This farcical 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, they 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.²⁰

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 every three expressed trust in elections. Figure 4 shows the evolution of public trust in each of these institutions between 2012 and 2021.²¹

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



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.

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,

²⁰ In the ensuing institutional conflict, most Bolivians agreed that the TSE should respect the 2016 referendum results over the TCP sentence. Moreno Morales, D. E. 2019. "21F y 28N: Referéndum, fallo constitucional y conflicto institucional." In I. Monasterio (Ed.), *Foro Regional 11. Política, habitabilidad e innovación. Miradas ciudadanas en el eje metropolitano de Bolivia*. Ciudadania-CERES-Los Tiempos. https://www.ciudadaniabolivia.org/sites/default/files/archivos_articulos/F.R. Política habitabilidad e innovación.pdf. The decision to accept Morales' candidacy was highly unpopular and legally and institutionally controversial.

²¹ 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.

where the vote is often controlled by MAS-affiliated *campesino* unions and where voter registration rates had also historically been lower than urban areas.²² 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 2009.²³ 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 indicated that there would be a run-off election as expected. However, the vote count was abruptly interrupted overnight, and when it was re-established almost a day later, the trend had changed. Morales appeared to have won in the first round. This triggered demonstrations in cities across the country, with many middle-class Bolivians and mostly young people protesting an election they believed was rigged.

After initially denying any wrongdoing, the national government was forced to call for an electoral audit from the Organization of American States (OAS). 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.²⁴ After these findings were made public, Bolivia's military commanders and the workers unions suggested Morales resign. He did and fled to Mexico, 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 uncertainty and violence. On November 12, Jeanine Añez, Second Vice President of the Senate, assumed the Presidency in an irregular and delicate 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 ALP, 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.²⁵

²² 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.

²³ 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.

²⁴ 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*.

²⁵ There are many recounts of the events that led to the 2019 political crisis. For more detailed references, see Brockmann, E. 2020. "Tentativa de toma gradual del poder: Prorroguismo fallido y transiciones." In M. Fernando (Ed.). *Crisis y cambio político en Bolivia*.

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.²⁶ These acts raised social tensions even more and reinforced a sense of polarization among the Bolivian public.

The new executive worked with the ALP to appoint new members to the TSE, which restored some of the trust the TSE 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 successful, 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. 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 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 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.

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 prone to foster democratic attitudes, which was clearly reflected in the data.

Octubre y noviembre de 2019: La democracia en una encrucijada. OXFAM-CESU; Lehoucq, F. 2020. "Bolivia's Citizen Revolt." *Journal of Democracy* 31 (3); Mayorga, F. 2020. *Crisis y cambio político en Bolivia. Octubre y noviembre de 2019: La democracia en una encrucijada.* OXFAM-CESU; Wolff, J. 2020. "The Turbulent End of an Era in Bolivia: Contested Elections, the Ouster of Evo Morales, and the Beginning of a Transition Towards an Uncertain Future." *Revista de Ciencia Política* 40 (2). <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-090X2020005000105>.

²⁶ 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.*

Average support for democracy increased for each of the cluster groups and the share of Bolivians 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.

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. NORC's 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 interventions, 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.

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 so deeply 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.

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Annex 1. Methodology

NORC employed cluster analysis 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. NORC used Hierarchical Density-Based Clustering (HDBScan) as developed by Campello, Moulavi, and Sander.²⁷ 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.

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? <i>Response options: Seven-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disagree to (7) Strongly agree.</i>

²⁷ 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.

DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES ¹	QUESTIONS
Opposition to military coups²	<p>Some people say that under some circumstances it would be justified for the military of this country to take power by a coup d'état (military coup). In your opinion would a military coup be justified...</p> <p>JC10. When there is a lot of crime</p> <p><i>Response options: (1) A military take-over of the state would be justified; (2) A military takeover of the state would not be justified.</i></p>
	<p>Some people say that under some circumstances it would be justified for the military of this country to take power by a coup d'état (military coup). In your opinion would a military coup be justified...</p> <p>JC13. When there is a lot of corruption</p> <p><i>Response options: (1) A military take-over of the state would be justified; (2) A military takeover of the state would not be justified.</i></p>
Opposition to executive aggrandizement²	<p>JC15A. Do you believe that when the country is facing very difficult times it is justifiable for the president of the country to close the Legislative Assembly and govern without the Legislative Assembly?</p> <p><i>Response options: (1) Yes, it is justified; (2) No, it is not justified.</i></p>
	<p>JC16A. Do you believe that when the country is facing very difficult times it is justifiable for the president of the country to dissolve the Supreme Court and govern without the Supreme Court?</p> <p><i>Response options: (1) Yes, it is justified; (2) No, it is not justified.</i></p>
Tolerance of protest and regime critics	<p>D1. There are people who only say bad things about the form of government of 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.</p> <p><i>Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.</i></p>
	<p>D2. How strongly do you approve or disapprove that such people be allowed to conduct peaceful demonstrations in order to express their views? Please read me the number.</p> <p><i>Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.</i></p>
	<p>D3. Still thinking of those who only say bad things about the form of government of Bolivia, how strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people being permitted to run for public office?</p> <p><i>Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.</i></p>

DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES ¹	QUESTIONS
	<p>D4. How strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people appearing on television to make speeches?</p> <p><i>Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.</i></p>
<p>Support for democratic inclusion</p>	<p>D5. And now, changing the topic and thinking of homosexuals, how strongly do you approve or disapprove of homosexuals being permitted to run for public office?</p> <p><i>Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.</i></p>

¹ In the 2021 round of the AmericasBarometer, only 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.

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

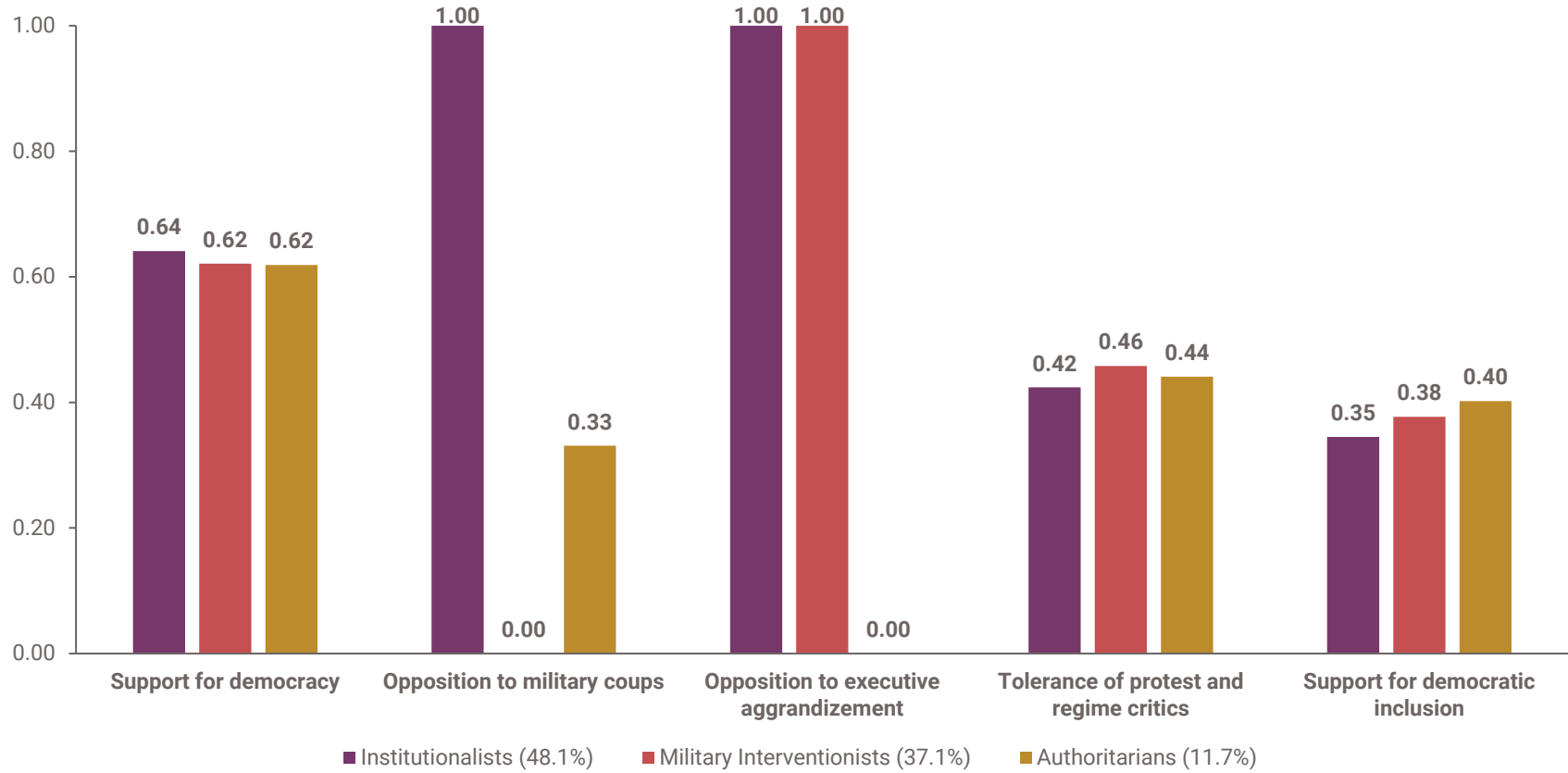


Figure A2.2: 2014 Cluster Results

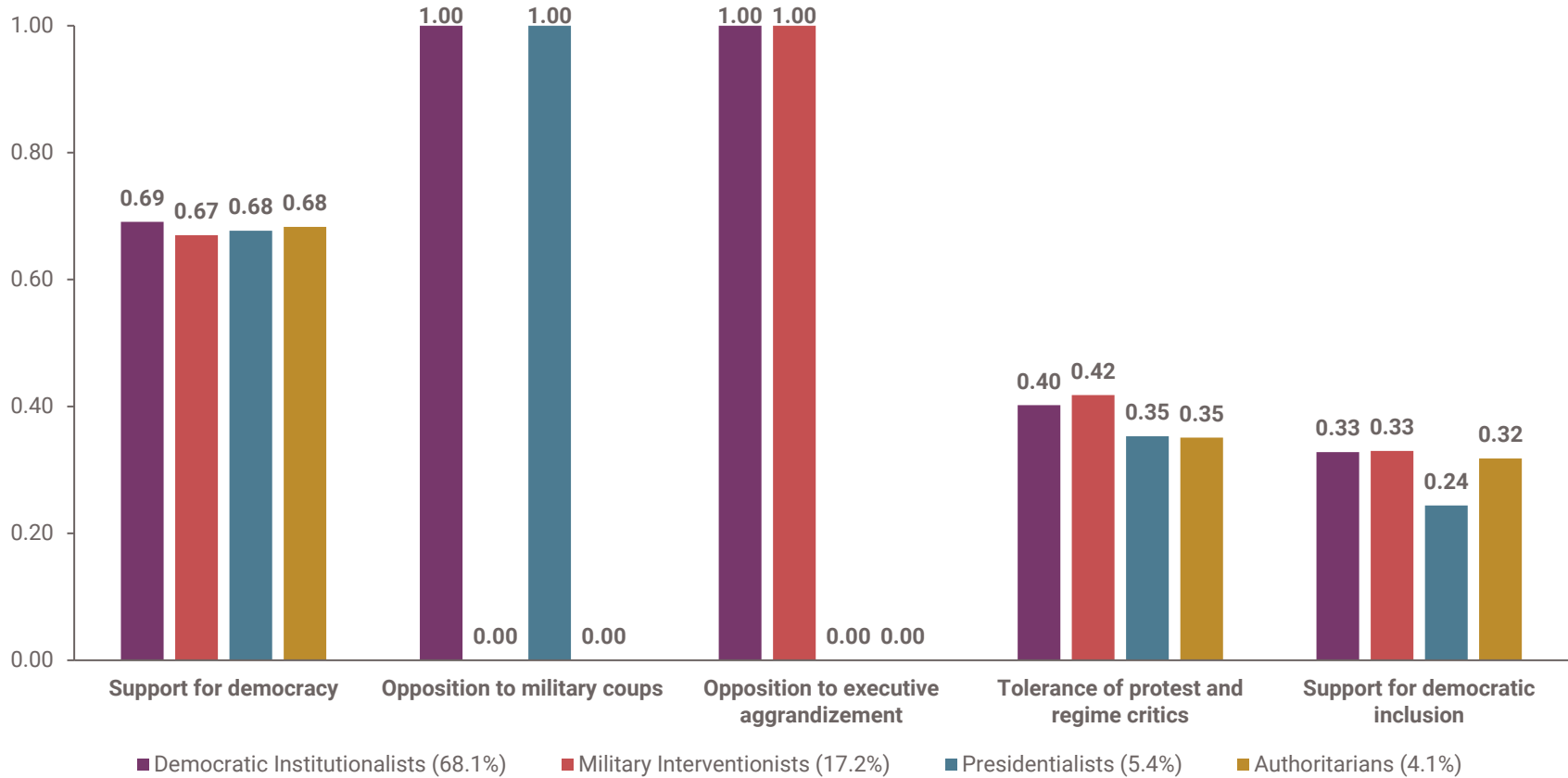


Figure A2.3: 2017 Cluster Results

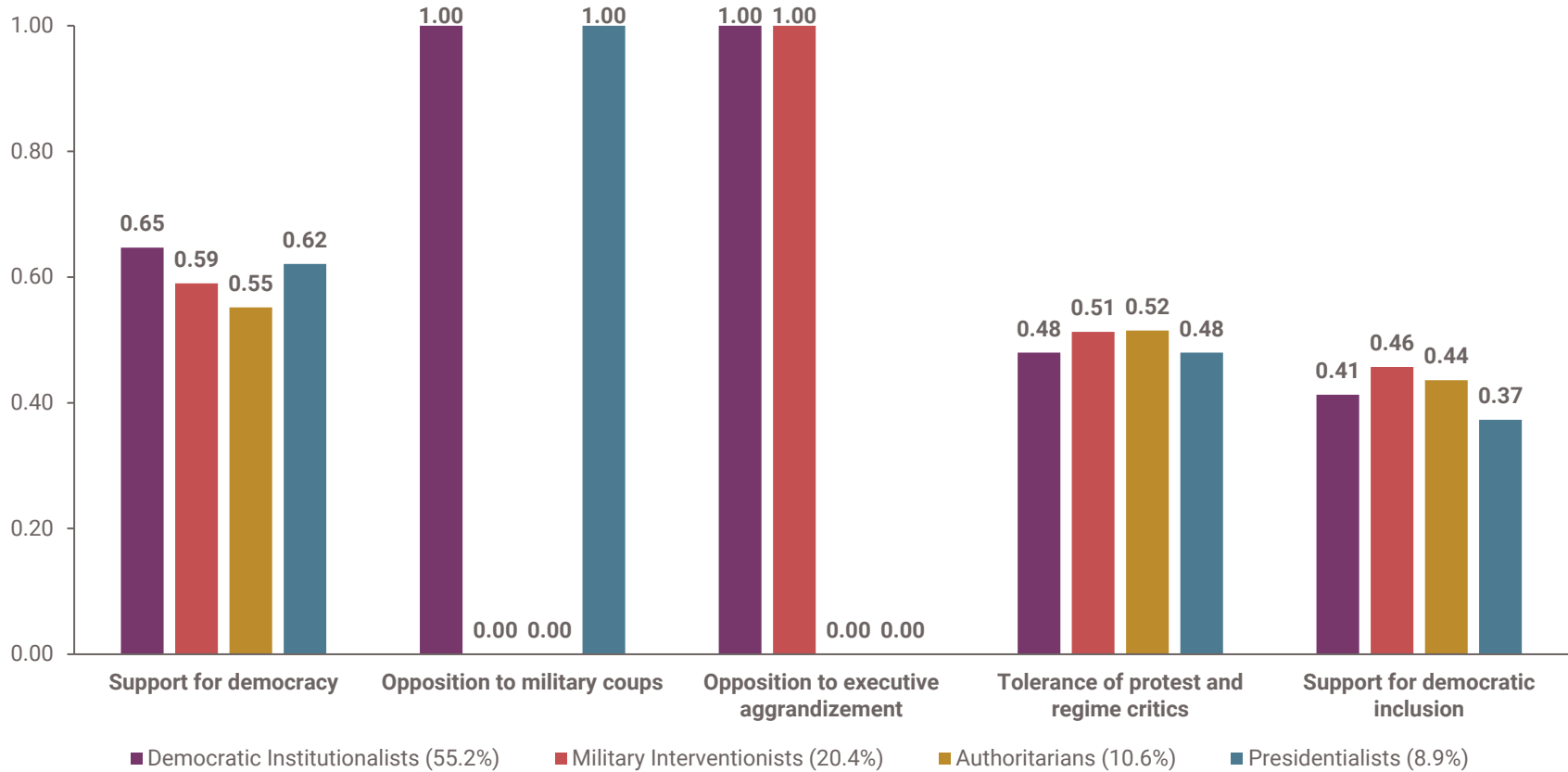


Figure A2.4: 2019 Cluster Results

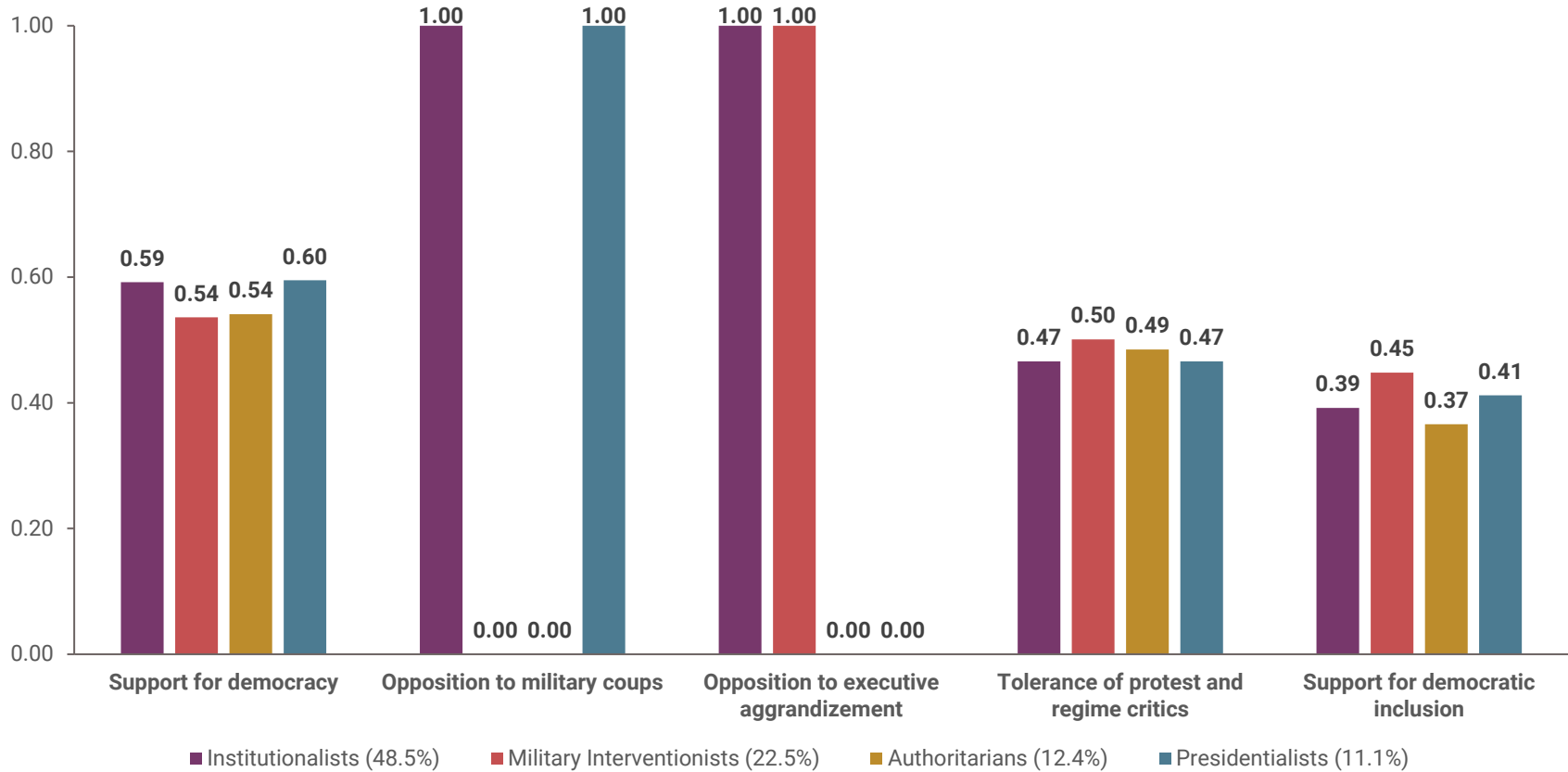


Figure A2.5. 2021 Cluster Results

