



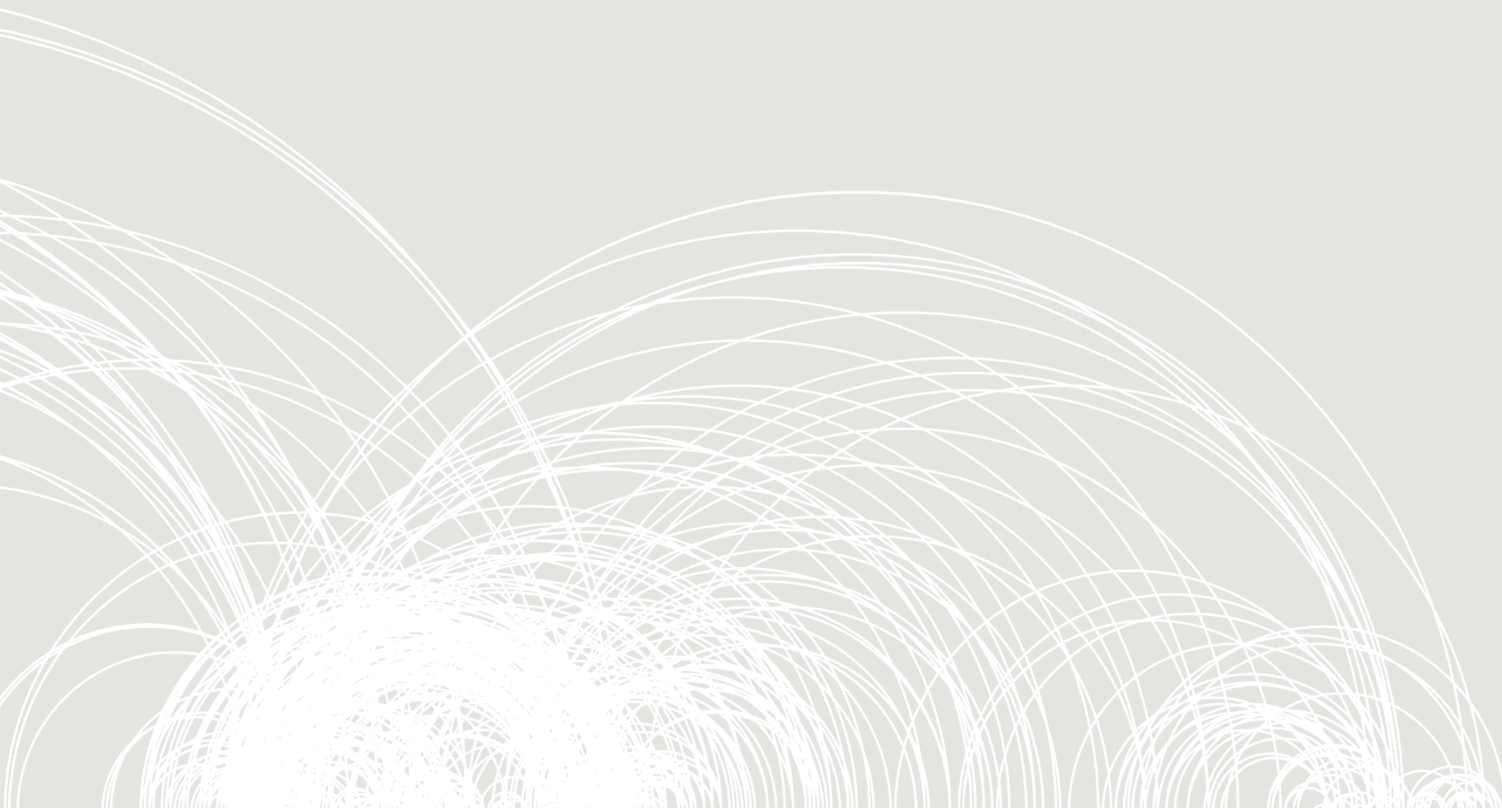
FINAL REPORT

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Analysis of Trends in Democratic Attitudes: Colombia Report

Presented by:

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Analysis of Trends in Democratic Attitudes: Colombia Report

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Table of Contents

Presentation	1
Introduction	3
Patterns of Support for Democracy and Other Attitudes	4
Trends Across Clusters	6
Demographic Composition	10
Contextual Factors and Public Opinion	11
The End of Civil War and the Emergence of New Issues	11
Inequality and Its Discontents	12
A State Crisis and the Decrease in Support for Democracy	13
International Backsliding	16
Conclusions.....	18
References.....	20
Annex 1. Methodology	24
Annex 2. 2012–2021 Cluster Results.....	27

List of Exhibits

Figure 1. Evolution of Cluster Families Over Time	5
Figure 2. Average Support for Democracy by Cluster.....	7
Figure 3. Average Tolerance for Regime Critics by Cluster	8
Figure 4. Support for Protests	9
Figure 5. Average Support for Democratic Inclusion by Cluster Over Time.....	10
Figure A2.1. 2012 Cluster Results	28
Figure A2.2. 2014 Cluster Results	29
Figure A2.3. 2016 Cluster Results	30
Figure A2.4. 2018 Cluster Results	31
Figure A2.5. 2021 Cluster Results	32

List of Tables

Table A1.1. AmericasBarometer Items and Underlying Democratic Attitudes 24

Acronyms

HDBScan	Hierarchical Density-Based Clustering
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
LAPOP	Latin American Public Opinion Project
US	United States

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 each cluster from the rest of the population using data from the last five waves of the

¹ Castorena, Oscar, and Sarah L. Graves. 2019. “Support for Electoral Democracy.” In Zechmeister, Elizabeth J., and Noam Lupu (Eds.). *Pulse of Democracy*. Nashville, TN: LAPOP, p. 23.

² Lupu, Noam, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister. 2021. “The Pulse of Democracy in 2021.” In Lupu, Noam, Mariana Rodríguez, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister (Eds.). *Pulse of Democracy*. Nashville, TN: LAPOP, p. 2-5.

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 Colombia. It was authored by Sandra Botero (Associate Professor of Political Science, Universidad del Rosario) and Laura Gamboa (Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Utah). 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

In the past decade, Colombia has undergone significant transformations. Domestic and international watershed developments, such as the 2016 peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the wave of democratic backsliding in the region, and the consolidation of authoritarianism in neighboring Venezuela fueled shifts in attitudes toward democracy in the country.

This study describes the evolution of democratic attitudes in Colombia between 2012 and 2021, and identifies the system-level, contextual factors that have contributed to changes in attitudes over time. To describe the evolution of democratic attitudes, we draw on NORC's cluster analysis, which identifies groups of citizens with distinct patterns of democratic attitudes in each of five waves of AmericasBarometer data complemented with observational data (i.e., individual survey questions and democracy datasets) that capture developments from 2018 up to 2021. To identify the contextual factors that have contributed to changes in attitudes, we trace the linkages between recent political, economic, and social developments and public opinion.

Collectively, the data suggest a decline in Colombian's commitment to democracy. The cluster analysis reveals two seemingly contradictory trends. On the one hand, support for democracy—i.e., the normative belief in the principles of the regime rather than its specific outputs—has decreased over time across clusters. On the other hand, institutionalists—individuals who oppose military coups and executive aggrandizement—make up the largest cluster in every year analyzed and increase in size over time. Additional data and our own analysis reinforce the notion that Colombian's commitment to democratic principles is weakening.

This decline in Colombian's commitment to democracy is understandable considering recent developments. The peace agreement with the FARC opened up space to voice discontent over pervasive socioeconomic inequalities, which were aggravated by COVID-19. Colombians feel that democracy is not working. Additionally, the worldwide crisis of democracy and the autocratization of neighboring Venezuela has further contributed to decreased levels of support for democracy.

The remainder of this report is organized in three sections. First, we describe attitudinal changes across time. Then we explain how the peace process, the saliency of new cleavages, and the international context have shaped public opinion. Finally, we provide a tentative conclusion regarding whether the described attitudinal changes can contribute to significant system-level political developments.

Patterns of Support for Democracy and Other Attitudes

In this section, we summarize the results of the cluster analysis. NORC used data from the AmericasBarometer and cluster analysis to classify Colombians into groups or clusters with specific patterns of democratic attitudes. The aim of this analysis is to maximize similarity *within* each cluster while maximizing dissimilarity *between* clusters. One advantage of cluster analysis compared to other classification schemes is that it is highly inductive, meaning that it lets surveyed Colombians “speak for themselves” without making assumptions in advance about how to group them. 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 protest 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 are available in the first four AmericasBarometer survey waves (2012, 2014, 2016, and 2018). Only three attitudes were available in 2021: support for democracy, opposition to military coups, and opposition to executive aggrandizement. The 2021 cluster analysis results are therefore not directly comparable to those of prior waves. Annex 2 presents the main cluster analysis results for all waves.

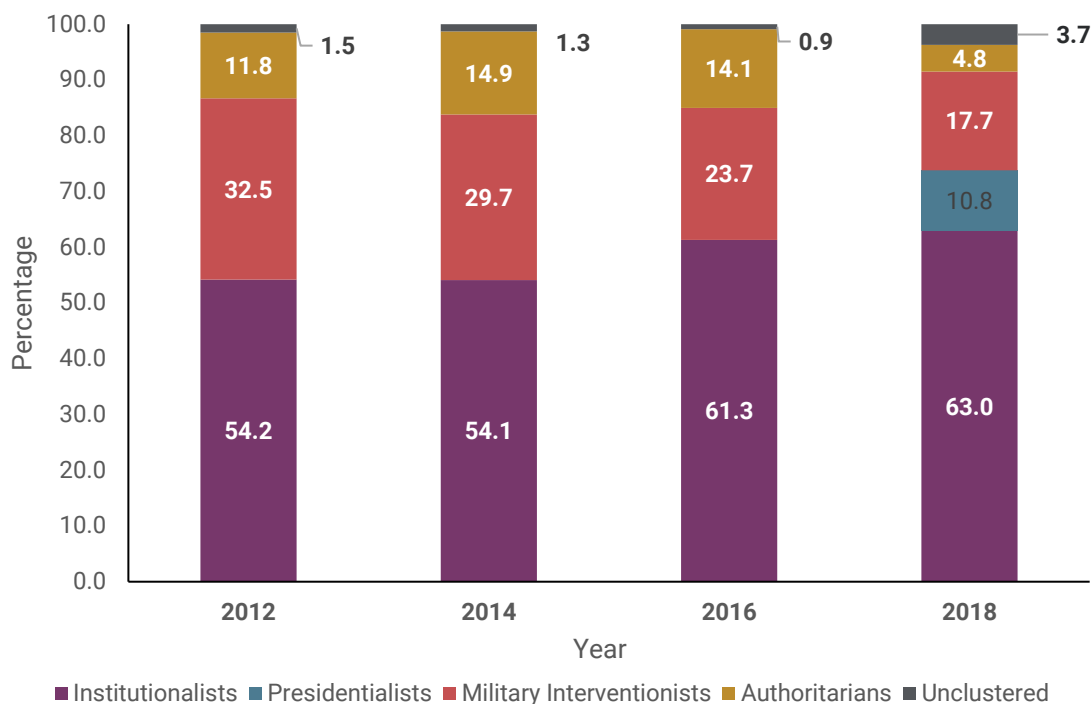
The cluster analysis identified three clusters in 2012, 2014, and 2016 and four clusters in 2018. In all waves, a small share of respondents was not classified into any cluster. Unclustered individuals are dissimilar from each other and from those included in other clusters. To facilitate comparisons over survey waves, we group the clusters into four families that share a set of defining characteristics:

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

- *Military Interventionists*: Individuals in this cluster family exhibit full opposition to executive aggrandizement but less-than-full opposition to coups.
- *Presidentialists*: Individuals in this cluster family exhibit full opposition to coups but less-than-full opposition to executive aggrandizement.
- *Authoritarians (including both authoritarians and ambivalent-military interventionist presidentialists)*: Individuals in this cluster family are characterized by less-than-full opposition to both coups and executive aggrandizement.

Figure 1 shows how the relative size of these cluster families evolved between 2012 and 2018. Institutionalists make up the largest group across time. In parallel, the percentage of respondents in the military interventionist and authoritarian family has decreased over time. Presidentialists appear as a distinct cluster for the first time in 2018, at the same time the share of the military interventionist and authoritarian families declined.

Figure 1: Evolution of Cluster Families Over Time



The appearance of presidentialists in 2018 coincided with an overall increase in support for executive aggrandizement among Colombians. For example, between 2012 and 2018, the percentage of respondents who believed it would be justified for the President to close Congress and govern without it increased from 12.8 to 15.9 percent; this percentage increased further in 2021, to 35.17 percent. Similarly, between 2012 and 2018, the percentage of respondents who believed it would be justified for the President to close and govern without the Constitutional Court increased from 11.18 to 23.9 percent. (This question was not included in the 2021 survey.)

As mentioned above, the 2021 results are not directly comparable to previous years. However, it is important to note that the less-democratic clusters seemed to have gained ground on democratic institutionalists since 2018. Democratic institutionalists made up 63.0 percent of respondents in 2018 and only 49.5 percent in 2021. By contrast, the share of presidentialists increased from 10.8 to 15.0 percent, and authoritarians accounted for 17.7 percent of Colombians (up from 4.8 in 2018). The percentage of respondents classified as military interventionists remained stable at around 17.7.

NORC analyzed these clusters across time in two dimensions: the evolution of scores on the five democratic attitudes for the various clusters, and the cluster's significant demographic, socioeconomic, and attitudinal characteristics across time. We discuss the results of these analyses in the next subsections.

Trends Across Clusters

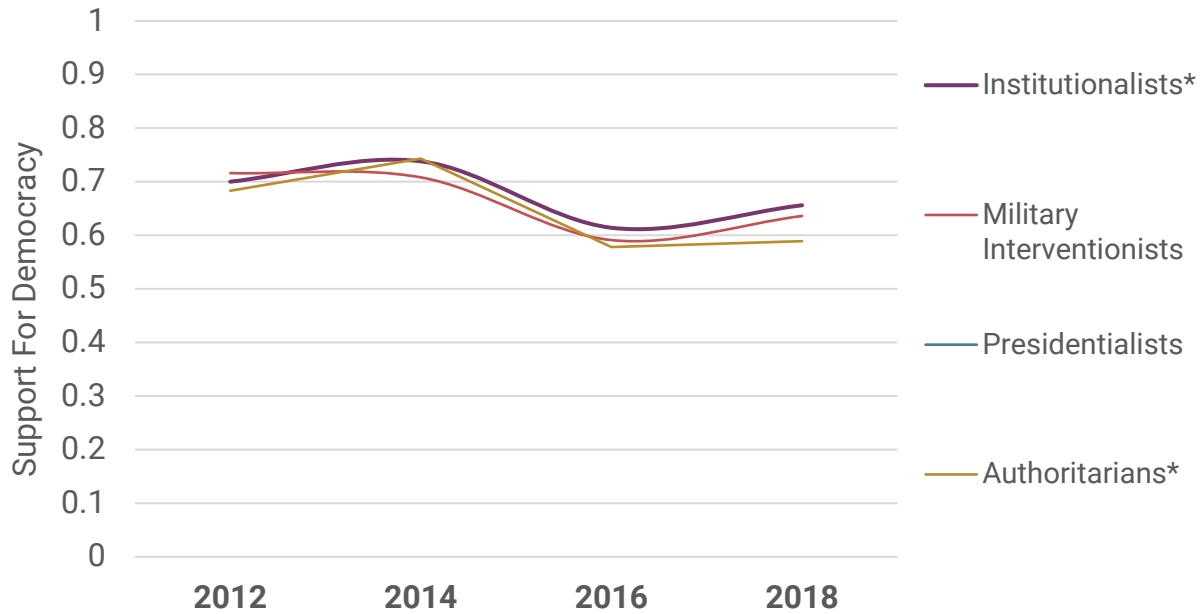
Three major attitudinal transformations emerged from tracking the attitude scores: support for democracy decreased across all clusters; tolerance for protest and regime critics remained stable; and support for democratic inclusion remains stable.

In line with global trends, some of the results of the cluster analysis indicate a downward trend in support for democracy in Colombia.⁵ As shown in Figure 2, all cluster families show lower levels of support for democracy in 2018 than in 2012. Support is measured on a scale that goes from zero (no support) to one (full support). Respondents in the institutionalist cluster family scored 0.70 in 2012 and 0.66 in 2018. As a family, authoritarians went from 0.68 in 2012 to 0.56 in 2018. Among military interventionists, support declined from 0.72 in 2012 to 0.57 in 2018.

Although differences in the underlying data make it hard to compare, support for democracy across the clusters remained relatively stable from 2018 to 2021. Democratic institutionalists scored 0.67, authoritarians scored 0.57 and military interventionists scored 0.57. Only the presidentialist cluster experienced meaningful changes: their support for democracy declined from 0.65 in 2018 to 0.56 in 2021.

⁵ Foa, Roberto Stefan, and Yascha Mounk. 2017. "The Signs of Deconsolidation." *Journal of Democracy* 28 (1): 5–15; Wike, Richard, and Janell Fetterolf. 2018. "Liberal Democracy's Crisis of Confidence." *Journal of Democracy* 29 (4): 136–50; Claassen, Christopher. 2020. "Does Public Support Help Democracy Survive?" *American Journal of Political Science* 64 (1): 118–34.

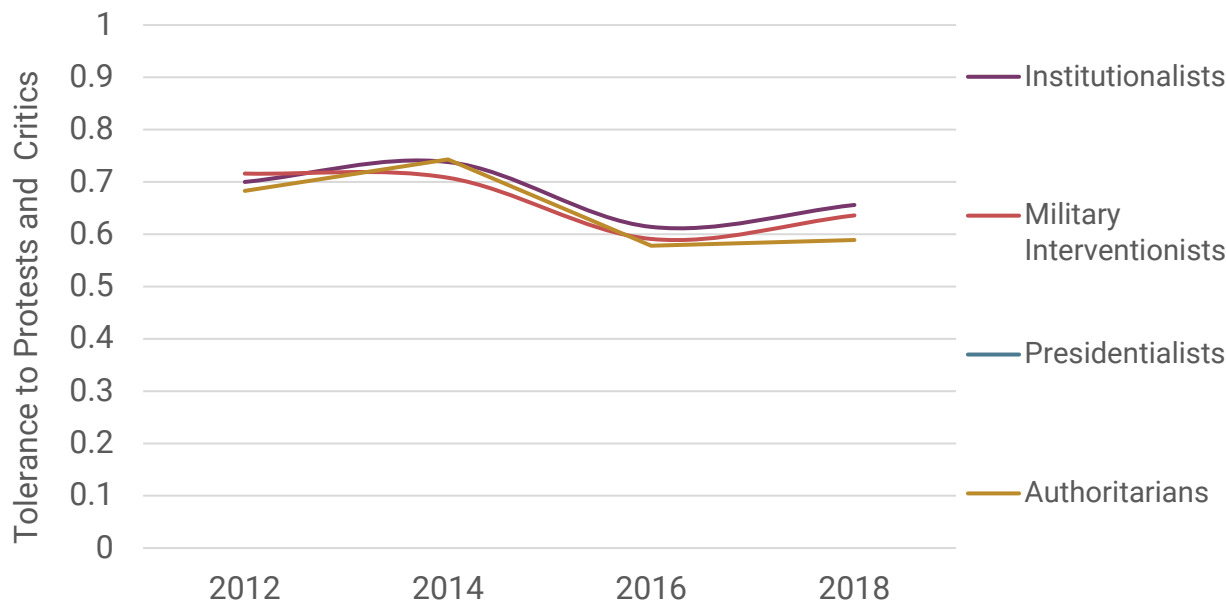
Figure 2: Average Support for Democracy by Cluster



Note: We are graphing cluster families. Institutionalists include Institutionalists (2012-2016) and Democratic Institutionalists (2018). Authoritarians include Authoritarian (2018) and Ambivalent-Military Interventionists Presidentialists (2012-2016).

While support for democracy decreased, tolerance for protests and critics of the political regime remained relatively stable (see Figure 3; tolerance is measured on a scale that goes from zero (no tolerance) to one (full tolerance)), decreasing between 2012 and 2016 but trending up in 2018. The tolerance scores for institutionalists decreased from 0.7 in 2012 to 0.61 in 2016 and increased to 0.66 in 2018; tolerance among military interventionists decreased from 0.72 in 2012 to 0.59 in 2016 and increased to 0.63 in 2018; and tolerance among authoritarians decreased from 0.68 in 2012 to 0.58 in 2016 before increasing to 0.60 in 2018. According to these data, most Colombians became slightly less tolerant of protests and regime critics in 2016, but slightly more tolerant after.

Figure 3: Average Tolerance for Regime Critics by Cluster

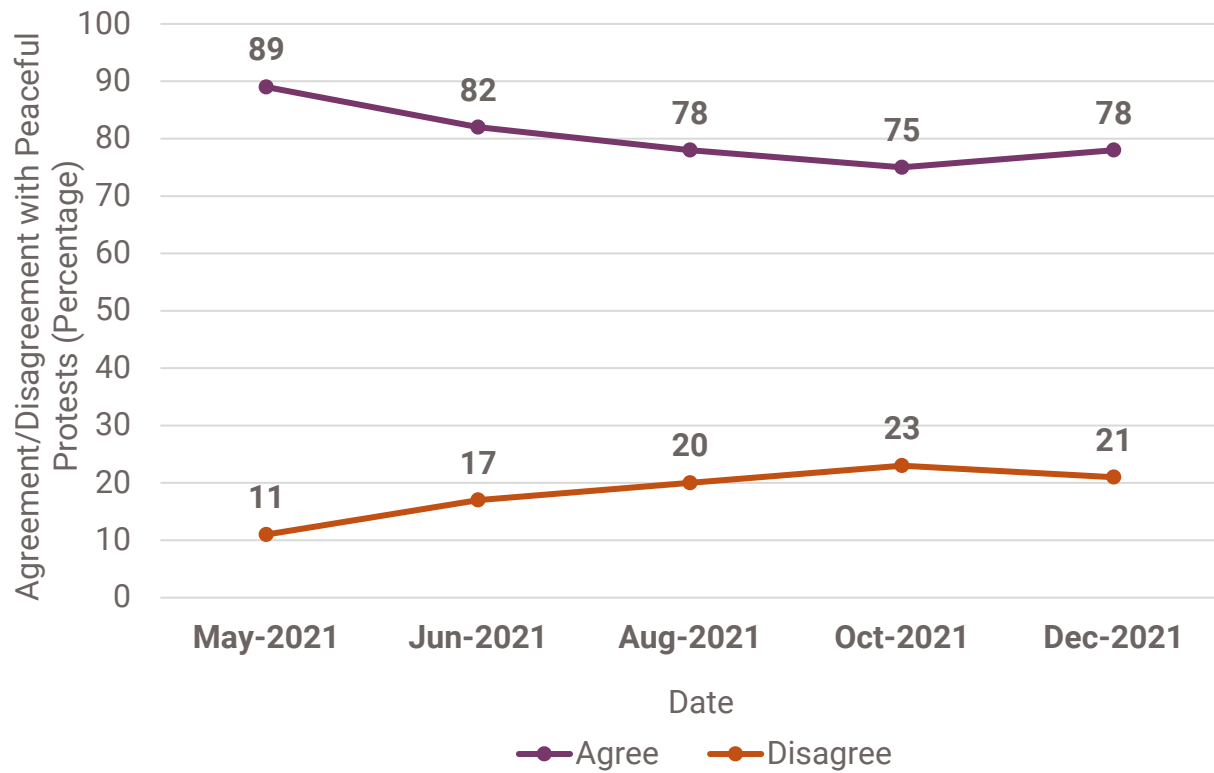


Note: We are graphing cluster families. Institutionalists include Institutionalists (2012-2016) and Democratic Institutionalists (2018). Authoritarians include Authoritarian (2018) and Ambivalent-Military Interventionists Presidentialists (2012-2016).

The data described above is consistent with trends in Colombia’s political landscape. Though the number of yearly social mobilizations had been rising slowly since the turn of the century, most of these episodes were not massive or sustained.⁶ However, starting in 2019, Colombia saw an unprecedented wave of protests. Very quickly, then, contentious political action has become an important tool in a country that does not have a history of frequent public protest. Although the AmericasBarometer did not ask questions regarding tolerance of protests and regime critics in 2021, other sources suggest that tolerance for demonstrations has risen since. For example, the 2021 Invamer poll, shown in Figure 4, found that support for protests never dropped below 75 percent in 2021.

⁶ Barrera, Victor. n.d. “Diagnostico Nacional.” In *Transformación de Conflictos Sociales y Paz Territorial. Diagnóstico Participativo*, 27–40. Bogota: Policia Nacional/ Centro de Investigacion y Educacion Popular Programa Por la Paz/APAZ.

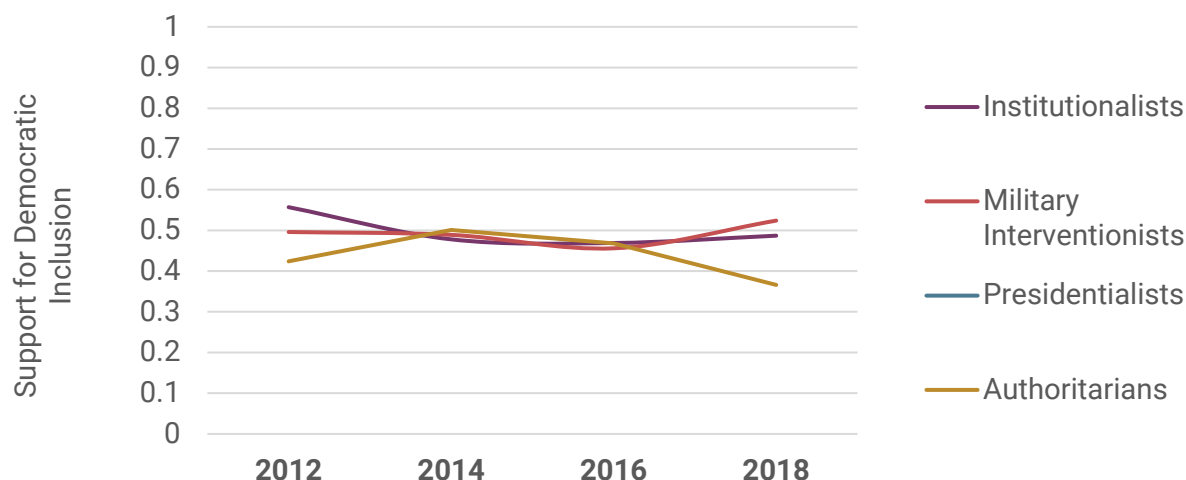
Figure 4: Support for Protests



Note: The survey asked respondents if they agreed or disagreed with public demonstrations or protests.

Source: Invamer (2021).

Support for inclusion also remained relatively stable between 2016 and 2018 (see Figure 5). Scores for institutionalists and authoritarians decreased from 0.56 to 0.49 and 0.42 to 0.37, respectively, while scores for military interventionists increased from 0.50 to 0.52.

Figure 5: Average Support for Democratic Inclusion by Cluster Over Time

Note: We are graphing cluster families. Institutionalists include Institutionalists (2012-2016) and Democratic Institutionalists (2018). Authoritarians include Authoritarian (2018) and Ambivalent-Military Interventionists Presidentialists (2012-2016). Possible values range from zero (no support) to one (full support).

Demographic Composition

NORC's cluster analysis also identified variables that significantly distinguish each cluster from all others. The variables examined include gender, income, race, education, experience with violence and corruption, political efficacy, and political participation. All clusters are statistically significantly different from the others on a few of these variables, but there is no discernible pattern that holds across all waves. Moreover, most statistically significant differences are substantively small, which suggests that the demographic and other characteristics examined do not structure attitudes toward democracy in a meaningful way.

With these limitations in mind, we find that across waves institutionalists are distinct from other clusters in their exposure to crime. They are less likely to have been the victims of a crime or live in a neighborhood where a large percentage of people are victims of crime. We also find that members of the military interventionist cluster are significantly younger and more urban than other clusters. Starting in 2016, military interventionists are also less likely to approve of the executive. Notwithstanding intriguing it is hard to interpret these results in a broader context.

While using AmericasBarometer data for cluster analysis allows for comparisons across countries and over time, it also comes with important methodological limitations. First, more specific survey items characterizing attitudes of a given country could provide a more precise, context-sensitive picture, but these are often lacking in cross-national surveys.⁷ Second, by

⁷ In the case of Colombia, for example, we might explore affinity with *uribismo*/Álvaro Uribe, the country's right-wing leader. Because this cluster analysis focused on cross-national comparability, and because of the constraints that shape decisions about which questions are included on large survey projects each survey round, surveys do not always systematically incorporate locally-specific survey items that consistently tap these country-specific attitudes. Bogliacini, Juan, Miguel García Sánchez, and Rosario Queirolo. 2022. "El desarrollo dependiente: treinta años de opinión pública en América Latina." *Colombia Internacional*, April. <https://doi.org/10.7440/colombiaint110.2022.01>.

using cluster analysis, we lose considerable nuance about how political events shaped attitudinal change; such nuance is more readily captured by analyzing responses to individual survey questions.

Contextual Factors and Public Opinion

In this section we discuss the key contextual factors that help explain some of the major shifts in democratic attitudes observed among Colombians in the last decade. The overall weakening in Colombians' commitment to democracy and parallel sustained support for protest and demand for inclusion can be better understood in the context of a larger crisis of democratic representation. Three elements help us understand these patterns: the peace accord with the FARC guerrilla; the politicization of socioeconomic inequality; and the influence of international patterns of democratic backsliding on Colombia.

The End of Civil War and the Emergence of New Issues

For decades, politics in Colombia revolved around the armed conflict. At the national level, elections were usually fought between those who favored negotiations and those who favored armed confrontation, which obscured socioeconomic issues.⁸ Successful peace negotiations between Juan Manuel Santos' (2010–2018) government and the FARC guerrillas (2012–2016) changed this dynamic.⁹ According to the *Observatorio de la Democracia*, conflict went from being the top concern for 46.8 percent of Colombians in 2010 to being a secondary issue ten years later, when only 8.7 percent of the sample identified the armed struggle as the country's most important problem.¹⁰

Indeed, as peace negotiations advanced and the FARC demobilized, new issues rose to the forefront of political discussions, new local leaderships emerged in areas that had been under illegal armed actors' control and—perhaps most importantly—a distinct socioeconomic cleavage began to gain salience. The peace negotiations shifted the armed conflict to the background of public discussions, allowing national electoral politics to pivot to these other issues.

The presidential race in 2018, which was the first to be contested after the peace accords were signed, marked the entrance of the left as an electoral force at the presidential level. The left's candidate, Gustavo Petro, ran on an explicitly progressive agenda on both social and economic

⁸ Subnational politics had a different dynamic (Milanese and Albarracín 2022); Wills Otero, Laura. 2014. "Colombia: Analyzing the Strategies for Political Action of Alvaro Uribe's Government, 2002-10." In *The Resilience of the Latin American Right*, edited by Juan Pablo Luna and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, 194–215. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

⁹ Gamboa, Laura. 2019. "El reajuste de la derecha colombiana. El éxito electoral del uribismo." *Colombia Internacional*, July.

¹⁰ Plata Caviedes, Juan Camilo, Carlos Arturo Ávila García, and Miguel García Sánchez. 2021. "Colombia un país en medio de la pandemia 2020. Democracia e instituciones." Bogotá: Observatorio de la Democracia/USAID.

issues.¹¹ Candidate Ivan Duque of the right-wing *Centro Democrático*, a party that had opposed the peace negotiations, won in the runoff with 53 percent of the vote. Petro came in second, winning an impressive 41 percent of the vote. Four years later, in 2022, Petro ran for a third time and won, becoming the first leftist president in the country's history. His coalition, the *Pacto Histórico*, had obtained a major victory in the congressional elections earlier in the year, becoming one of the two biggest coalitions in the legislature. These electoral results, clearly favorable to the left, suggest that a major shift is afoot in Colombian politics.

Inequality and Its Discontents

The emergence of the left as a national electoral force is also closely linked to the politicization of Colombia's deep socioeconomic inequality. National-level indicators suggested that Colombia was doing well around 2010: poverty had been in steady decline since the turn of the century, literacy rates were above 92 percent and improving, and health and education coverage were also on upward trends. In parallel with these improvements, however, Colombia was also consolidating the dubious distinction of becoming the second-most unequal country in Latin America in 2010 and most-unequal country in 2021, with a Gini coefficient of 0.54 for both years.¹²

This national-level indicator masks deeper inequalities across locales and demographic groups. In 2002, the poorest 40 percent of the population accounted for only 9.4 percent of the national income. By 2018, almost 20 years later, the poorest 40 percent's share of the national income had barely increased to 11.6 percent, suggesting a lack of redistribution of resources and the extreme concentration of income in wealthy sectors.¹³ Other indicators paint an equally dismal picture. For example, Otero Bahamón shows that only 2.2 percent of urban men in Colombia were illiterate in 2018, compared to 31.7 percent of indigenous women in the Caribbean region. On average, rural indigenous populations face worse conditions, as do inhabitants of the Pacific and Caribbean region compared to the Andean region.¹⁴

COVID-19 brought the painful consequences of such deep inequality to the center of Colombian politics, as poverty increased swiftly and dramatically following government-mandated lockdowns in early 2020. The shutdown crippled a highly informal economy and washed away any gains made in the previous decade in terms of poverty and inequality reduction. After years of slow but steady declines since 2012, the percentage of Colombians living below the poverty line in 2021 increased to 42.3 percent, 1.5 percentage points above 2012.¹⁵ The pandemic not only generated new urgent needs and grievances but magnified already existing ones.

¹¹ Gamboa 2019.

¹² World Bank. n.d. "World Development Indicators." Washington, D.C.: The World Bank. <http://wdi.worldbank.org>.

¹³ Otero Bahamón, Silvia, Liney Álvarez Altamiranda, Andrés Miguel Sampayo, Daniel Toro González, Tania Isabel Jiménez Castilla, and Jorge Luis Alvis. 2022. "Análisis de la desigualdad de ingresos en Colombia y en cuatro ciudades intermedias Barranquilla, Bucaramanga, Pereira y Cartagena: 2002-2018." Universidad del Rosario.

¹⁴ Otero Bahamón, Silvia. 2021. "¿Qué es lo subnacional de la desigualdad subnacional? Una mirada interseccional a la desigualdad en Latinoamérica." *Revista de Ciencia Política* 41 (1): 103–33.

¹⁵ Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística. 2022. "Pobreza monetaria y grupos de ingreso en Colombia. Resultados 2021." April 26, 2022. <http://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/pobreza-y-condiciones-de-vida/pobreza-monetaria>.

The most forceful manifestation of the emergence of these new issues was the wave of protests that shook Colombia between 2019 and 2021.¹⁶ Demonstrations ebbed and flowed over three years: protests peaked in November 2019, in September–November 2020, and again in April 2021. Hundreds of thousands of citizens marched in small and large cities across the country, defying pandemic restrictions, often for several weeks at a time.

The demonstrations were triggered by specific government policies and actions: an unpopular reform to the national pension system in 2019, outrage at Javier Ordoñez’s murder by police officers in 2020, and an unwelcome tax overhaul in 2021.¹⁷ Though the protests were sparked by different events and encompassed a wide variety of specific demands, they were interconnected by important underlying grievances: a regressive tax structure, changes to public goods provision, and overlooked state violence and corruption.¹⁸ The post-pandemic economic crisis and the government's repressive response only added fuel to the fire.

The protests were cross-cutting in that they mobilized youth, organized workers, urban middle and lower classes, as well ethnic and other minorities. The diversity of participants underscores the pervasiveness of the deep-seated grievances that fueled the mobilizations. Colombia’s model of development has traditionally equated progress with macroeconomic development and stability, which has benefited urban elites but failed to improve the lives of historically marginalized groups.¹⁹ The protests signal the growing dissatisfaction of historically-excluded groups who have not reaped the benefits of economic stability or democratic order and have instead been increasingly marginalized and find themselves worse off following the pandemic. Their demands found support among younger urban middle- and lower-class individuals who are questioning these pervasive structural inequalities, even if they are not directly affected by them.

A State Crisis and the Decrease in Support for Democracy

The Colombian government and political elites have been unwilling or unable to address these pervasive and increasingly loudly voiced concerns, which has pushed Colombia into what Handlin defines as a state crisis: a situation in which the state’s inability to provide goods and services (e.g., security, infrastructure, functioning bureaucracy, and justice) combines with

¹⁶ Botero, Sandra, and Silvia Otero Bahamón. 2019. “El dividendo agridulce de la paz truncada en Colombia.” *The Conversation*. November 26, 2019. <http://theconversation.com/el-dividendo-agridulce-de-la-paz-truncada-en-colombia-127824>; Albarracín, Juan, and Laura Gamboa. 2021. “Colombia’s Police Are Cracking down on Protests. That May Be Backfiring.” *The Washington Post*, May 14, 2021.

¹⁷ On September 9, 2020, Ordoñez was involved in an altercation with police officers outside his home. The video of this exchange, in which police can be seen exercising undue force and Ordoñez begging for mercy, went viral. He died while in police custody after having been shocked multiple times with a stun gun and beaten by officers. See: *The Washington Post*, “In Colombia, a Death in Police Custody Follows a History of Brutality,” Oct 6, 2020.

¹⁸ Other related concerns included the implementation of the peace process and environmental demands. A full list of the diverse grievances in this protest cycle is available in Garzon et al. 2021. “El paro nacional y la movilización social en Colombia. ¿Cómo llegamos hasta aquí y qué puede venir?” Notas de Estabilización No. 4. Fundación Ideas para la Paz/Universidad del Rosario, p. 33.

¹⁹ García Montoya, Laura, and Arturo Chang. 2021. “La historia del ‘progreso’ que deja atrás a millones en Colombia: algunas lecciones de la movilización nacional.” *La Silla Vacía*. July 1, 2021. <https://www.lasillavacia.com/historias/historias-silla-llena/la-historia-del-progreso-que-deja-atras-a-millones-en-colombia-algunas-lecciones-de-la-movilizacion-nacional/>.

growing, and not necessarily unrelated, distrust in government institutions.²⁰ Reports from the *Observatorio de la Democracia* show that, on average, trust in government institutions has been decreasing over the last decade as well.²¹ In 2008 the mean support for the Congress, courts, and presidency was 4.59 on a scale of one to seven; in 2018 that number had decreased to 3.59, a 22 percent decline.

The cross-cluster decrease in support for democracy that we identified in the previous section is thus not surprising. The window of opportunity offered by the peace process, the growing relevance of socioeconomic issues enhanced by COVID-19, and the failed government response have compounded an already-mounting institutional crisis, fueling a deep dissatisfaction with democracy. AmericasBarometer data further support this claim: the surveys show that satisfaction with democracy in Colombia has decreased since 2012. In 2012, mean satisfaction with democracy was 2.54 on a scale of one to four; by 2021 that number had gone down to 2.03, an overall 21 percent decrease.

Institutionalists continue to show higher levels of support for democracy, even if this group is becoming less democratic over time. Their continued support for democracy at a higher rate despite the upheavals and turbulence of the recent decade signals some comfort with the status quo. As in the United States (US), democratic institutions in Colombia were built on political and economic exclusion.²² Present-day politics are rooted in the social and institutional dynamics devised during the National Front (1958–1974), an institutional arrangement in which leaders of the liberal and conservative parties agreed to evenly divide the presidency and all elected and unelected offices between themselves for 16 years in an effort to end several decades of partisan violence.

Though crucial to ending partisan warfare, the National Front excluded left-wing leaders and movements, which effectively put socioeconomic debates outside of the political arena, as the two main parties shared a common view of the economic model. In Sheri Berman's words, Colombia's democracy put liberalism ahead of popular participation; this agreement between elites checked majoritarian abuses by limiting citizen input and walling off crucial political and policy questions from the influence of voters by placing them in the hands of "experts."²³ Although the 1991 constitution marked a process of political transformation that improved upon the National Front institutions, it still curtailed critical socioeconomic debates. The drafters struck a bargain that entrenched a neoliberal economic model that prioritized growth over distribution, to the benefit of urban elites, while at the same time expanding the bill of rights, including socioeconomic rights, and creating institutions to enforce them. Impervious to the inequalities on which Colombia's economic growth has been built, high-income, educated individuals who are likely democratic institutionalists or institutionalists are more likely to feel democracy works well and to support the institutions that structure this arrangement because they benefit from them.

²⁰ Handlin, Samuel. 2017. *State Crisis in Fragile Democracies: Polarization and Political Regimes in South America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 38.

²¹ Rivera Rivera, Diana Alejandra, Juan Camilo Plata Caviendes, and Juan Carlos Rodríguez Raga. 2019. "Barómetro de las Américas: Colombia 2018. Democracy and Institutions." Bogota: Observatorio de la Democracia/USAID. https://obsdemocracia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/02_Ingles_Democracia2018_USAID_opt.pdf.

²² Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. New York: Crown Publishing.

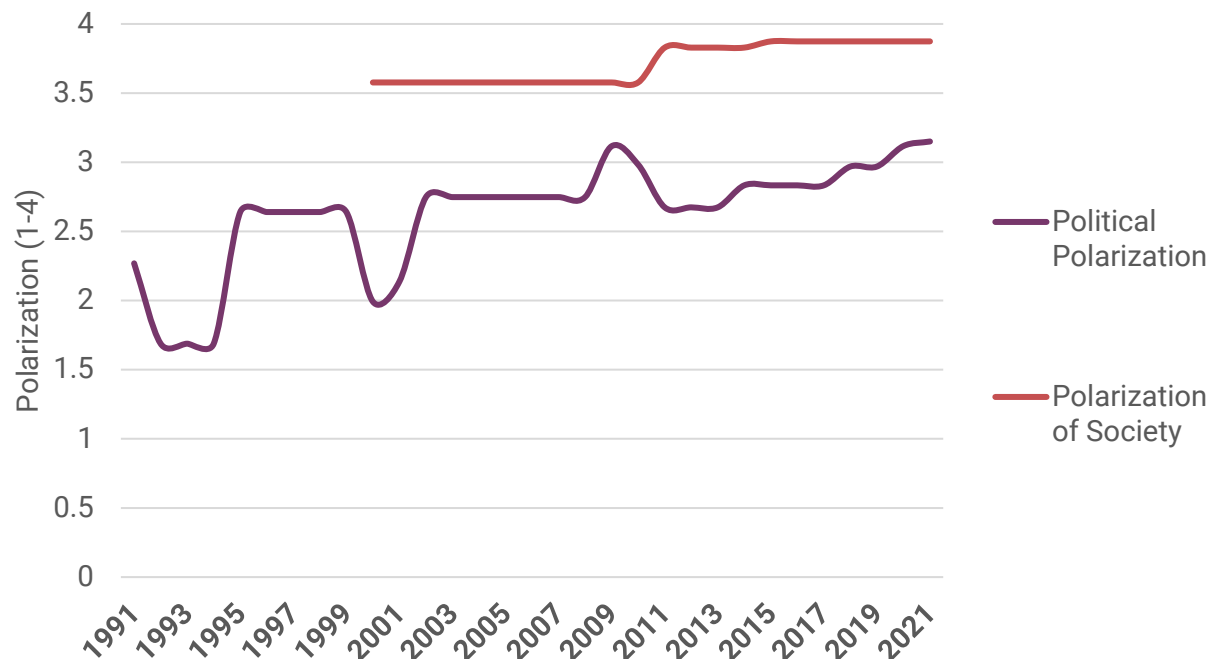
²³ Berman, Sheri. 2017. "The Pipe Dream of Undemocratic Liberalism." *Journal of Democracy* 28 (3): 29–38, p. 37.

Colombia has seen an overall decrease in support for democracy which coincides with an overall increase in support for executive aggrandizement. We can glean important lessons from comparative research in our effort to understand what these shifts could mean. In other Latin American countries in the early 2000s, such as Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Nicaragua; in present-day Brazil, Mexico, and the US; and in some Eastern European countries like Hungary and Poland, state crises like the one in Colombia have fostered polarization.²⁴

Colombia is not the exception. In the past twenty years, the multiplicity of differences in Colombian society have increasingly aligned along a single dimension. This type of sorting (Carsey and Layman 2006) has erased cross cutting differences by enhancing in-group homogeneity and between-group differences, what Jennifer McCoy and others describe as polarization (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018; McCoy 2022). Indeed, data from the Varieties of Democracy project, presented in Figure 6, shows that polarization in Colombia has increased since 1991. More specifically, political polarization has risen by 86%, with only brief periods of de-polarization in 1991-1994, 2000, and 2010-2013. Social polarization has risen 8% with two key moments in 2011 and 2015.

²⁴ Handlin 2017.

Figure 6: Political and Society Polarization



Note: Political Polarization answers the question *Is society polarized into antagonistic, political camps?*; Polarization of Society answers the question *How would you characterize the difference of opinions on major political issues in this society?*

Source: V-Dem (2021)

Individuals for whom democracy has failed to deliver have mobilized in the streets in Colombia. However, many citizens who are less affected by Colombia’s deep-seated but obscured inequalities have had a distinct reaction to the protests. They too express an increased dissatisfaction with democracy, but for them, these mobilizations are unwarranted and threaten order and security. Fearful and polarized, these citizens are less likely to condemn anti-democratic moves such as executive power-grabs, as long as they help their “team” win.²⁵

International Backsliding

The decrease in support for democracy in Colombia cannot be explained solely via domestic variables. The contextual factors described above have evolved in tandem with an international

²⁵ Somer, Murat, and Jennifer McCoy. 2018. “Déjà vu? Polarization and Endangered Democracies in the 21st Century.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 62 (1): 3–15; Graham, Matthew H., and Milan W. Svobik. 2020. “Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States.” *American Political Science Review* 114(2), pp.392-409.

wave of autocratization. According to the Varieties of Democracy Index, the level of democracy enjoyed by the average citizen anywhere in the world is down to 1989 levels.²⁶

The international wave of autocratization has impacted Colombia in two ways. First, it has reduced the world's normative preference for democracy—that is, leaders' commitment and adherence to democracy. Though autocratization has happened across the world, cases like the US with Donald Trump (2017–2021), a populist leader with authoritarian tendencies, are of particular consequence to Latin America due to the US's geopolitical significance in the region.²⁷ During Trump's presidency, the US displayed a low normative preference for democracy and ceased to encourage democratic behavior in countries in its sphere of influence. Leaders in El Salvador, Honduras, Brazil, and Mexico took advantage of the opportunity to undermine checks and balances in their countries and to thwart international efforts to increase accountability.²⁸ This lack of regard for democratic politics also helped President Duque undermine checks and balances in Colombia. The Trump administration remained silent as Duque undermined the peace agreements and co-opted state institutions. In comparison, President Obama was quick to criticize President Alvaro Uribe's power grabs.²⁹

This wave of autocratization has also affected Colombia by aggravating Venezuela's political and economic situation. Over the past two decades, Venezuela moved from being one of the most stable, long-lasting democracies in Latin America to the second-most authoritarian regime in the region after Cuba. Democratic erosion and authoritarian consolidation unleashed a severe humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, which has had ripple effects across the region, especially in Colombia.

Venezuela and Colombia have been historically close, as they share a long and porous border along which people, goods, and resources have flowed for centuries. The erosion of democracy in Venezuela has hit Colombia hard on multiple levels. Not only has it hindered commerce, undermined security, and unleashed a refugee crisis, but it also helped fuel polarization. Right-wing elites in Colombia have been using their neighbors' situation as a cautionary tale, warning citizens against center, center-left, and leftist politicians whom they accuse of "Castro-Chavismo."³⁰ This catchphrase is used to discredit opponents by implying they are all in league with Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez. The narrative distorts the root causes of the Venezuelan crisis and disregards the success of center-left and left-wing governments in Uruguay, Chile, and Brazil.³¹

²⁶ Boese, Vanesa, Nazifa Alizada, Martin Lundstedt, Kelly Morrison, Natalia Natsika, Yuko Sato, Hugo Tai, and Staffan Lindberg. 2022. "Autocratization Changing Nature? Democracy Report 2022." Varieties of Democracy Institute. https://v-dem.net/media/publications/dr_2022.pdf.

²⁷ Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018.

²⁸ Gamboa, Laura. 2021. "¿Qué será de la democracia latinoamericana sin Trump?" *El Faro (Online)*, December 1, 2021. <https://elfaro.net/es/202012/columnas/25051/¿Qué-será-de-la-democracia-latinoamericana-sin-Trump.htm>.

²⁹ Gamboa, Laura. 2022. *Resisting Backsliding: Opposition Strategies Against the Erosion of Democracy*. Cambridge University Press.

³⁰ On the history and political uses of the term "castro-chavismo," see this interview with Victor Mijares and Luis Javier Orjuela: "Castrochavismo: mitos y realidades." April 24, 2018. Universidad de Los Andes. <https://uniandes.edu.co/es/noticias/en-el-campus/castrochavismo-mitos-y-realidades> Accessed May 12, 2022.

³¹ Toro, Francisco. 2018. "No, Venezuela Doesn't Prove Anything about Socialism." *Washington Post*, July 18, 2018. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/08/21/no-venezuela-doesnt-prove-that-socialism-will-bring-about-a-zombie-apocalypse/>

Right-wing politicians have used Venezuela's crisis as an electoral tool elsewhere, not only in Colombia.³² However, the crisis's consequences are far reaching in Colombia, where Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro have been portrayed as existential threats by right-wing politicians for decades. In Colombia, this discourse is used to delegitimize opponents, particularly those on the left, by portraying them as inept and morally corrupt.

Conclusions

NORC's cluster analysis suggests a decreased commitment to democracy among Colombians, but also the enduring presence of a set of individuals, institutionalists, who oppose anti-democratic maneuvers like coups and executive aggrandizement. These simultaneous developments are better understood in the context of an increasingly polarized polity that has been rocked by massive mobilizations and economic crises. The decline in commitment to democracy has been fueled by the changes brought by the peace process, the salience of new issues among the Colombian public, and the international wave of autocratization. These attitudinal changes may have contributed to significant system-level political developments, such as the June 2022 election of Colombia's first leftist president. Petro's victory is connected with, and best understood in light of, the changes described above.

Colombians' disenchantment with democracy was made evident at the ballot box. Following years of protests, weak governance, repression, economic crisis, and institutional discredit, citizens expressed their deep dissatisfaction with the status quo by electing two anti-establishment candidates to compete in the runoff: Petro, a veteran left-wing politician, former guerrilla member, Congressman, and Mayor of Bogotá; and outsider, businessman, and social media sensation Rodolfo Hernández. Their victories in the first round signaled voters' distrust in the political system and their desire to reshape the political arena by electing individuals different from those who had dominated Colombian politics for decades.

This historic victory for the democratic left in a country in which the left was long stigmatized for its association with armed guerrillas leaves Colombian democracy standing at a critical juncture. Petro's victory offers an opportunity to enhance Colombia's participatory democracy. He has promised major transformations. A clear sign of this commitment is his vice-presidential pick, Francia Márquez, an Afro-Colombian environmental leader and grassroots activist who became the first woman and first Afro-Colombian ever to hold the office. The new government's agenda includes significant adjustments to the economic model and increased representation for, and greater socioeconomic inclusion of, long-marginalized populations, including indigenous populations, Afro-Colombians, women, and other minorities.

However, Petro inherited a country with weakened institutions. President Duque's administration did significant damage to democracy by undermining institutions in order to advance his political

³² Rovira Kaltwasser, Cristóbal. 2019. "La (sobre)adaptación programática de la derecha chilena y la irrupción de la derecha populista radical." *Colombia Internacional*, July.

agenda.³³ Using and abusing of the powers of the presidency, he undermined the courts by questioning and stalling compliance with some rulings;³⁴ co-opted important oversight agencies, such as the Office of the Inspector General and the Attorney General's office;³⁵ and skewed the electoral playfield to advance his political agenda by systematically criticizing Petro and other institutional actors, such as the armed forces, in violation of Colombia's law.³⁶

Petro became president amidst this backdrop with a leadership style that some find concerning. Despite the reassurance of a long career in institutional politics, Petro has at times displayed antidemocratic tendencies. In the past, he has denied the legitimacy of his opponents, attacked media outlets that criticized him, and expressed willingness to use extra-constitutional means to advance his agenda.³⁷

Colombia stands at a crossroads. Amid a state crisis, in a country with weak governance and declining trust in institutions, Petro faces the double challenge of living up to his electors' high expectations of change and strengthening weak democratic institutions.

³³ Albarracín, Juan, Sandra Botero, and Laura Gamboa. 2022. "Colombia's New President Aims to Swing His Country Left. It Won't Be Easy." *The Washington Post*, June 30, 2022.

³⁴ El Espectador. "El lío jurídico y político que desató un pedido de perdón," Sept. 26 2020. <https://www.elespectador.com/politica/el-lío-juridico-y-politico-que-desato-un-pedido-de-perdon-articulo/>.

³⁵ On the designation of the Inspector General (*Contralora*), see: CaracolTV. "Cercanía de organismos de control con Duque: ¿que peligro representa para la democracia?" August 26, 2020. <https://noticias.caracoltv.com/informes-especiales/cercania-de-organismos-de-control-con-duque-que-peligro-representa-para-la-democracia>; On the designation of the Attorney General (Fiscal General), see: Cuervo, Jorge Iván. "Los problemas en la elección del Fiscal General, más allá de Barbosa." July 13, 2020. <https://razonpublica.com/los-problemas-la-eleccion-del-fiscal-general-mas-alla-barbosa/>.

³⁶ La Silla Vacía. "En uno de cada tres discursos Duque hace campaña contra Petro y sus ideas." April 18, 2022. <https://www.lasillavacia.com/historias/silla-nacional/en-uno-de-cada-tres-discursos-duque-hace-campana-contra-petro-y-sus-ideas/> Accessed on June 30, 2022.

³⁷ Petro referred to Radio Cadena Nacional, a major Colombian news outlet, as "neo-Nazis" due to an op-ed that stated he had threatened private property several times throughout his various presidential campaigns. *El Colombiano*. "Neo-nazis en RCN: Trino de Gustavo Petro contra columnista de opinión preocupa a la FLIP." March 28, 2022. One of the clearest examples of extra-constitutionality was his proposal during the 2018 campaign to do away with the 1991 constitution. *Semana*. "Petro y su primera decisión como presidente sería convocar una Asamblea Constituyente." November 17, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYQLKXh6l9c> Accessed June 30, 2022.

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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.³⁸ 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>

³⁸ 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
<p>Opposition to military coups²</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>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>
<p>Opposition to executive aggrandizement²</p>	<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>
<p>Tolerance of protest and regime critics</p>	<p>D1. There are people who only say bad things about the form of government of Colombia, 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>

DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES ¹	QUESTIONS
	<p>D3. Still thinking of those who only say bad things about the form of government of Colombia, how strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people being permitted to run for public office? <i>Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.</i></p>
	<p>D4. How strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people appearing on television to make speeches? <i>Response options: Ten-point scale ranging from (1) Strongly disapprove to (10) Strongly approve.</i></p>
<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? <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. When some questions were only asked to a portion of the sample, we used the portion who answered the most questions.

² For the 2012-2018 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 2016, respondents were asked either JC10 or JC13 (split sample) and JC15A (JC16A was missing). In 2018, 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, 2016, 2018, 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

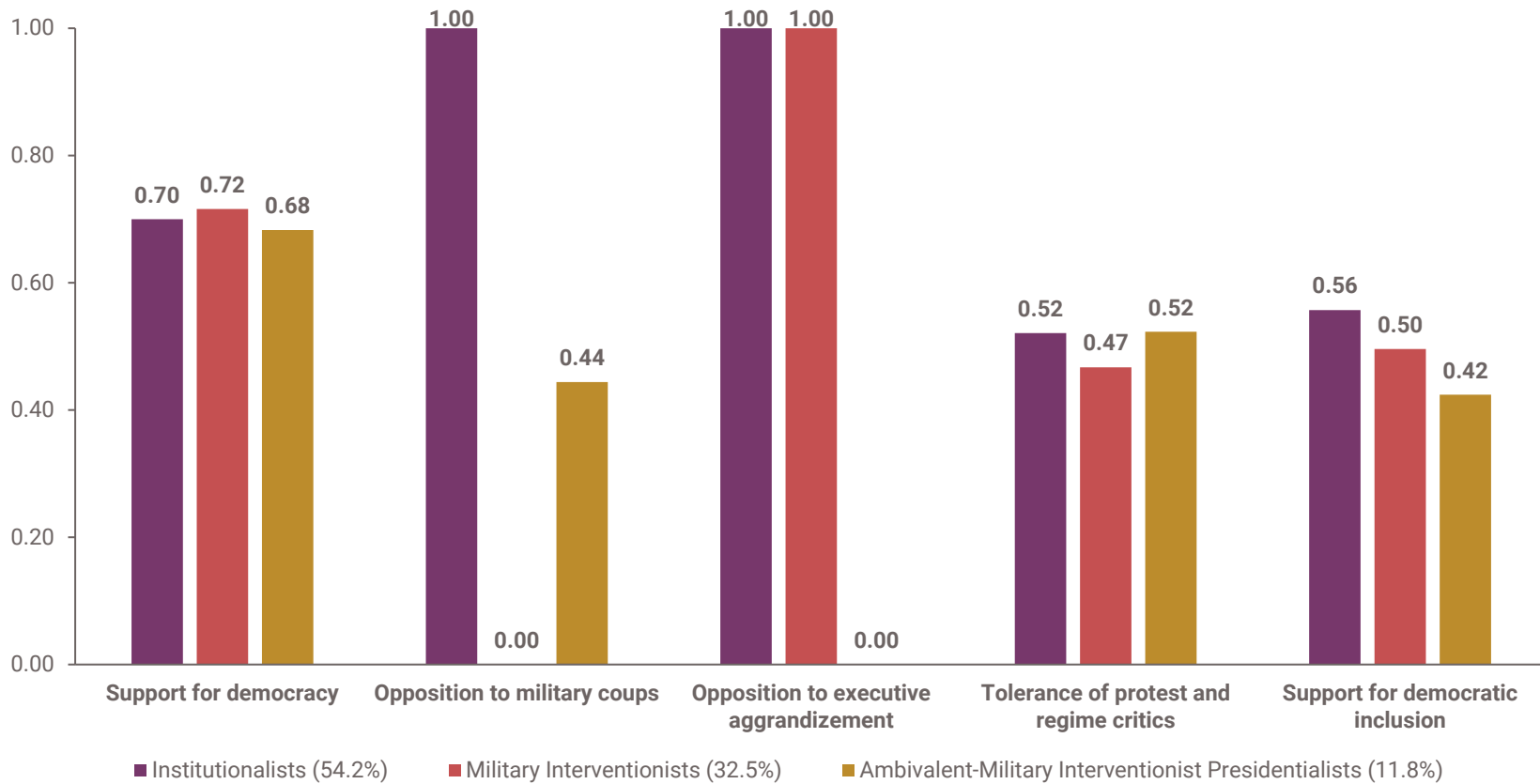


Figure A2.2. 2014 Cluster Results

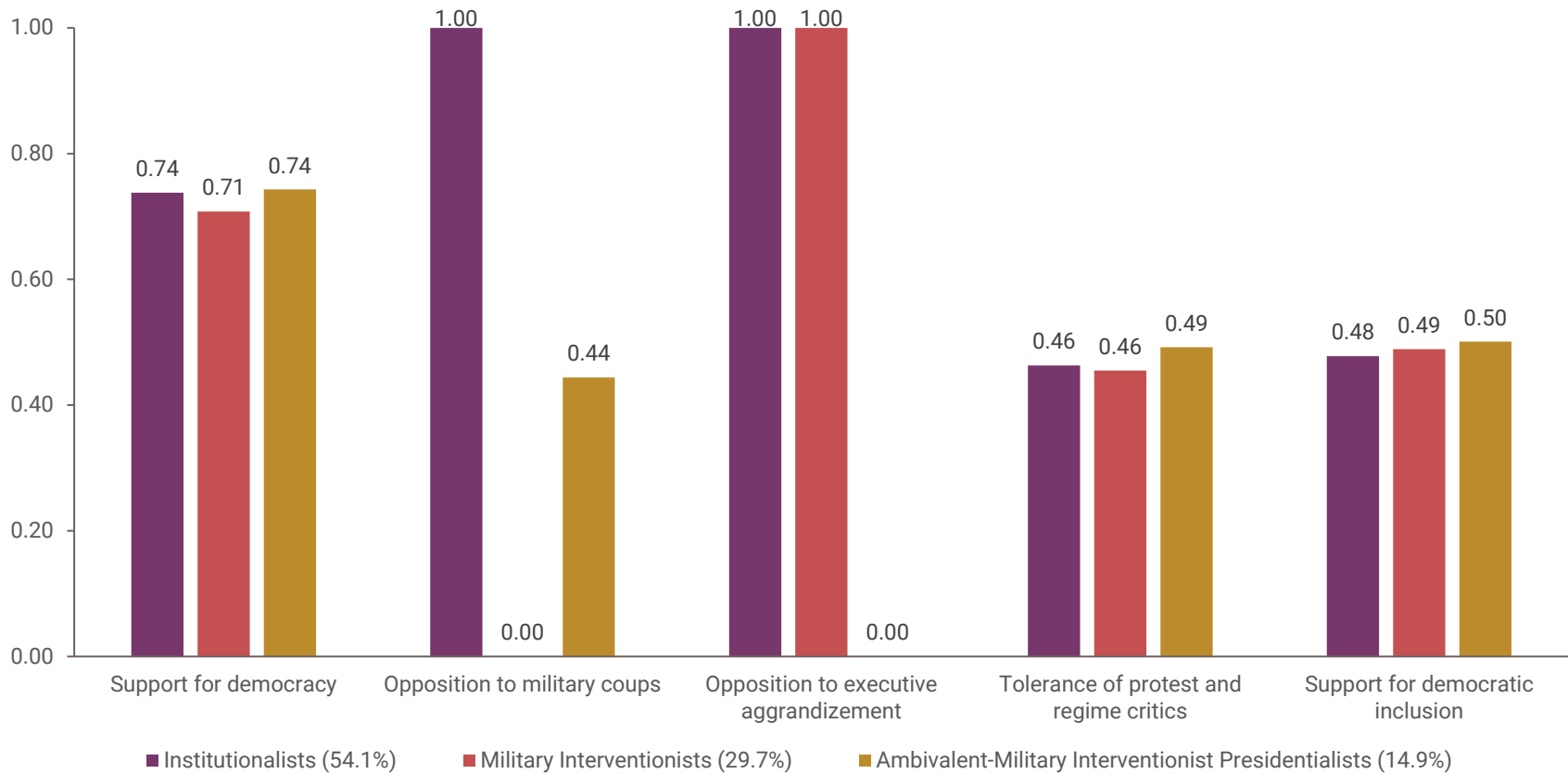


Figure A2.3. 2016 Cluster Results

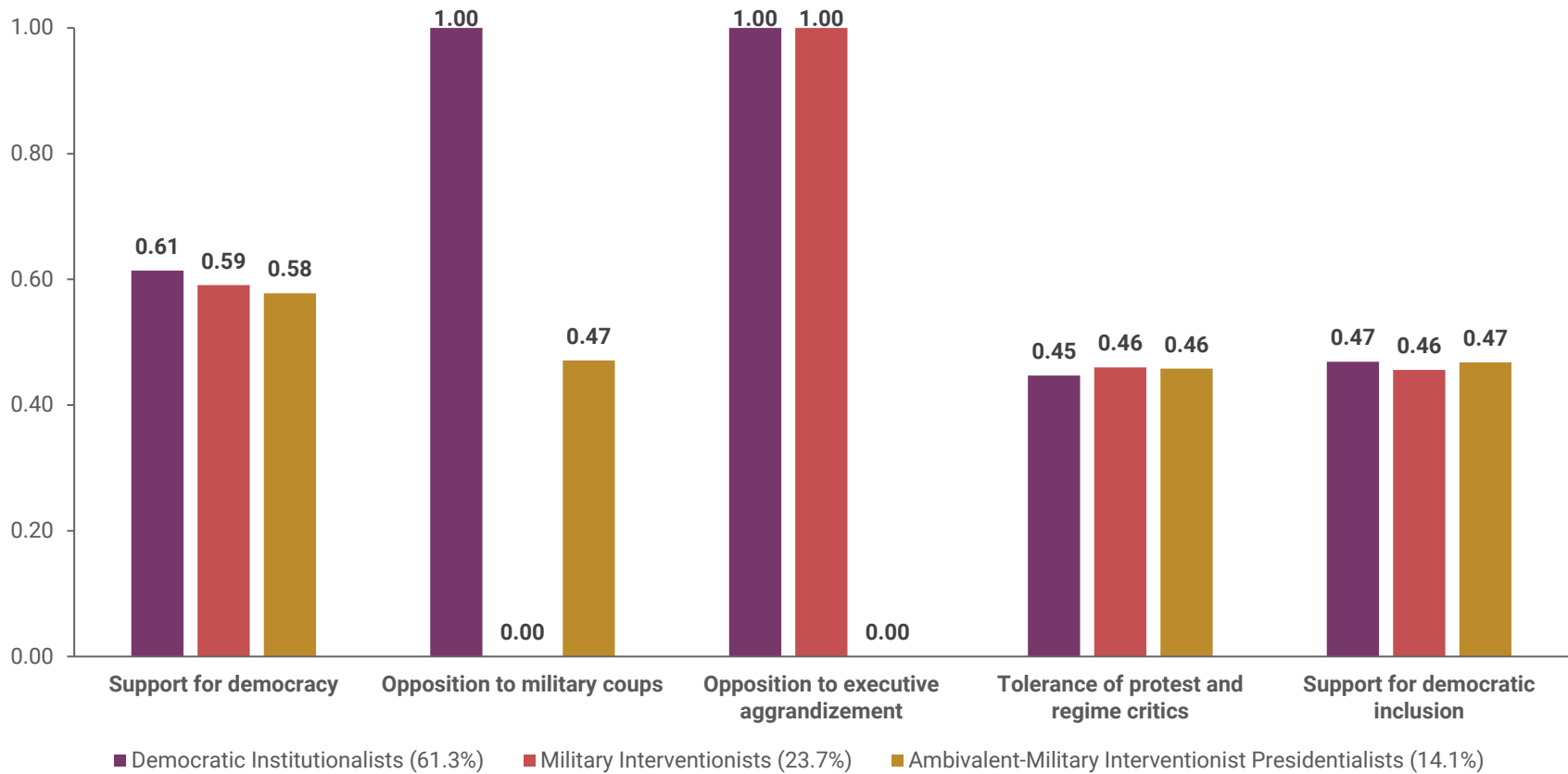


Figure A2.4. 2018 Cluster Results

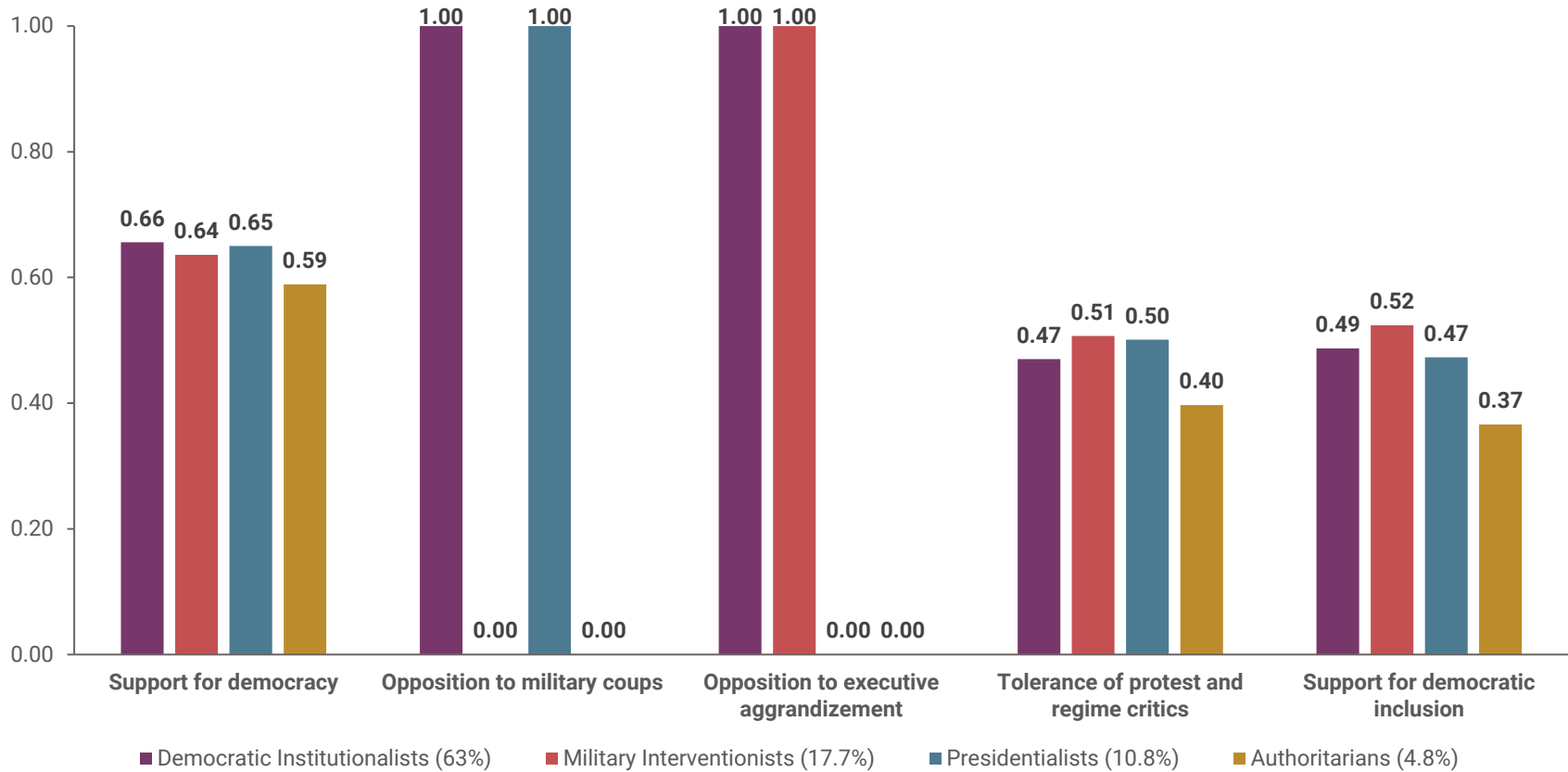


Figure A2.5. 2021 Cluster Results

