

# *Support for Coups in the Americas: Mass Norms and Democratization*

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## ABSTRACT

Coups d'état, once a common end for democracies in the Americas, have declined sharply in recent years. This article investigates whether overall public support for coups is also in decline. Examining 21 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean from 2004 to 2014 helps to evaluate two alternative theses on democratization: Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán's 2013 normative regime preferences theory, which inquires (but does not test) whether public opinion can signal to elites a reluctance or willingness to support a coup; and classic modernization theory (Inglehart 1988; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). We find a substantively meaningful effect of democratic attitudes on coup support and a weak effect for national wealth, from which we infer that evolving elite values and preferences are paralleled at the mass level and that together, those two trends play a stronger role in the consolidation of democratic regimes than does modernization.

*Keywords:* military coups, mass norms, democratic consolidation, public opinion

Coups d'état, once commonplace in the Americas, have declined sharply in recent decades. Is this change accompanied by diminishing citizen support for coups? If so, what determines that changing opinion, and do these factors help explain regional trends in coup support? This article examines two overarching theses. One is normative regime preferences theory, which aims to explain why democracies and dictatorships emerge, survive, or collapse, focusing on elites' embracing democracy for its intrinsic value (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013; Pérez-Liñán and Mainwaring 2013).<sup>1</sup> The other is classic modernization theory (Inglehart 1988; Inglehart and Welzel 2005), which predicts democratic emergence based on a combination of values held by the mass public.

While explicitly rejecting arguments about modernization's effects on mass political culture by Inglehart and Welzel (2005), Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán

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(2013, 2) nonetheless contend that public opinion plays a key role in democratic breakdown and stability. Indeed, they argue that countries that have developed strong support for democracy are largely vaccinated against successful military coups.

[i]n competitive regimes, public opinion is one of the most valuable resources that actors can employ. It often sways powerful actors one way or the other in regime battles. For example, it is unlikely that a successful coup could occur in the face of solid public support for democracy. Conversely, democracy is more likely to be imperiled if large parts of the public turn against it. In democracies, public opinion routinely limits what leaders can do . . . . (2013, 12)

Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán do not, however, test this public opinion thesis in their initial work.<sup>2</sup> However, in a follow-on article, Pérez-Liñán and Polga-Hecimovich (2017) extend Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán's initial theory (2013) to explain two types of presidential downfalls: military coups and presidential impeachments. While still focusing predominantly on elite-level and structurally based explanations, Pérez-Liñán and Polga-Hecimovich explicitly hypothesize that the public contributes to democratic (in)stability. They claim that "mass protests indicate that major social forces are against the government, and motivate opposition elites to overthrow the president" (2017, 4). These authors offer an indirect test of the role of public opinion by incorporating an aggregate measure of social mobilization, but they do not utilize a direct measure of public opinion. This article fills that gap.<sup>3</sup>

While a definitive test of the influence of mass norms on elite actions remains an elusive goal of political science, this article advances our understanding of the connection between them by investigating whether overall trends in support for coups in Latin America comport better with the normative regime preferences argument of Mainwaring, Pérez-Liñán, and Polga-Hecimovich or with the modernization-cultural argument of Inglehart and Welzel. These are not, of course, mutually exclusive possibilities, as both exert effects. However, we aim to determine whether one explanation better predicts levels of and trends in coup support. Although the study focuses on elites, we expect that the normative regime preferences explanation will better explain mass orientation toward coups in our sample. The modernization-cultural approach has a useful focus on mass preferences, but we find evidence in our data that it does not account for the change in preferences over time, as Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán argue (2013, 1).

To better compare the utility of these explanations, this study employs a large set of survey data from 21 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean for the period 2004–2014, amounting to 122,348 individuals analyzed. We utilize a direct measure of respondent support for coups as the central dependent variable, rather than using inferred preferences or indirect measures (such as aggregate measures of social mobilization). The results show that one of the most destructive mechanisms of democratic breakdown—coups—has, over time, lost support among the region's mass publics.<sup>4</sup> We find a substantively meaningful effect of democratic attitudes on coup support and a weak effect for national wealth. From this, we infer that evolving

values and preferences of the elites are paralleled at the mass level and, together, play a stronger role in the consolidation of democratic regimes than modernization theory would predict.

## **THEORY: BRINGING THE PEOPLE BACK IN**

For decades, political scientists have attempted to demonstrate the role of public opinion in determining national-level public policies and elite behaviors, starting with the classic work of Miller and Stokes (1963). Later analysis, for example, Page and Shapiro (1983), concluded that public opinion was likely to move policy in the United States when opinions were large and stable and based on a salient issue (175), as coups certainly have been in Latin America. Further evidence at the sub-national level of the public opinion–outcome connection comes from Gibson (1988), who found that individual U.S. states with more repressive political cultures during the McCarthy era were more likely to enact repressive policies.

Relatedly, Bartels (1991) found significant evidence that mass opinion influenced defense spending during the Reagan administration. In a similar vein, Canes-Wrone (2006) contends that under certain conditions, presidents were more likely to “pander” to the public by taking the most popular opinion among the masses. More recently, however, Gilens and Page (2014, 564) found that ordinary people “have little or no independent influence” on U.S. policy, thus contradicting Page’s earlier work. While research in this contested field has not reached definitive conclusions for the United States and far less so for other countries, there is evidence that public opinion may influence elite outcomes in certain circumstances.

We recognize that more needs to be done in this field to cement a link between mass attitudes and elite actions. Therefore, our central claim is modest, but one we hope will serve as a basis to build on: we explore how much the mass public would support coups and identify trends in that support over the past decade. Second, we examine the dynamics of coup support before the one coup (Honduras) and the police uprising (Ecuador) that occurred within the timeframe of our data. And third, we examine the evidence of whether mass attitudes toward coups in Latin America parallel the elite trends that Mainwaring et al. have uncovered.

Accordingly, while we certainly agree with Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán that ordinary citizens rarely play a direct role in perpetrating breakdowns, we hypothesize that public opinion matters in one of two ways.<sup>5</sup> First, economic conditions, mass protests, and government hypercorruption can create conditions in which military elites, as a representative and component of the middle class, step in to restore order and probity, executing a classic “middle-class military coup” (Nun 1967). José Nun’s thesis has been a bedrock explanation for instances of coups in Latin America for half a century. Middle classes, fearing unrest brought on by radical student or labor groups, call on the military to intervene to reestablish order.

Second, a more contemporary approach has mass publics signaling in many additional ways that they would support (or oppose) a military coup (Casper and

Tyson 2014). Coup attempts in Venezuela in 2002 and Turkey in 2016 confronted strong citizen opposition, aided by social media and modern mass communication capabilities, and both ultimately failed. In contrast, the successful coup in Chile in 1973 involved important middle-class elements, who repeatedly signaled to the military their support of a coup. Evidence suggests that the coup plotters heard this signal loud and clear (Linz and Stepan 1978; Valenzuela and Valenzuela 1986).<sup>6</sup>

Gibson makes the theoretical, and to some extent the empirical, case that “opinion is important in the policy process because it delimits the range of acceptable policy alternatives” (1988, 522). In the context of our broader interest in democratization, we see mass support for coups as an often necessary condition for the emergence and success of elite conspiracies to topple democracy. Based on this framework, if the public strongly supports a coup, as we show was the case in Honduras, that gives would-be coup plotters a green light. On the other hand, in cases where public opinion is trending firmly against a coup, as we show prevailed in Ecuador, this should limit the prospects of those who seek to disturb the civil order.

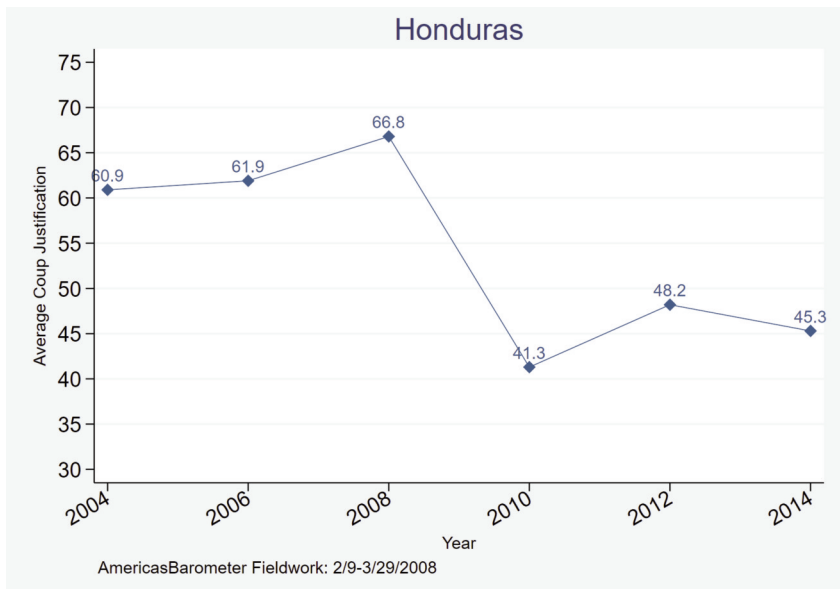
## ILLUSTRATIVE CASE STUDIES: COUPS AND PUBLIC OPINION

We begin with two illustrative cases to suggest that our data are consistent with the possibility of mass signaling to elites. In Honduras, elites engineered a successful coup in 2009. In Ecuador, a police uprising, categorized by some scholars as a coup, failed in 2010.<sup>7</sup>

Our theory suggests that in Honduras, we should observe a high and growing level of coup justification. Figure 1 shows what we expect: Hondurans’ support for coups peaked in the AmericasBarometer public opinion surveys in 2008; nearly 60 percent of Honduran respondents reported then that they would have justified a hypothetical coup. Alternatively, in the failed police uprising in Ecuador, we expect to see declining support for coups before the attempt. Figure 2 demonstrates that the failed police uprising there occurred at a low point of citizen justification of coups, which had declined from a remarkably high 74.1 percent in 2001 to approximately 50 percent in the 2010 AmericasBarometer survey, conducted a few months before the uprising.<sup>8</sup>

The Honduran and Ecuadorian examples suggest that citizen signaling may well have played a role in elite decisionmaking, as Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán’s theory suggests.<sup>9</sup> Our theory suggests that coup plotters in Honduras were emboldened by attitudes strongly against the incumbent president, while in Ecuador, public opinion supported the president and correspondingly weakened the insurgents. Thus, while our illustrations from Honduras and Ecuador suggest that public opinion matters when it comes to coups, one cannot definitively test that hypothesis. Instead, this study provides extensive data analysis that helps fill in the gap for the normative regime preferences argument.

Figure 1. High Coup Justification in Honduras



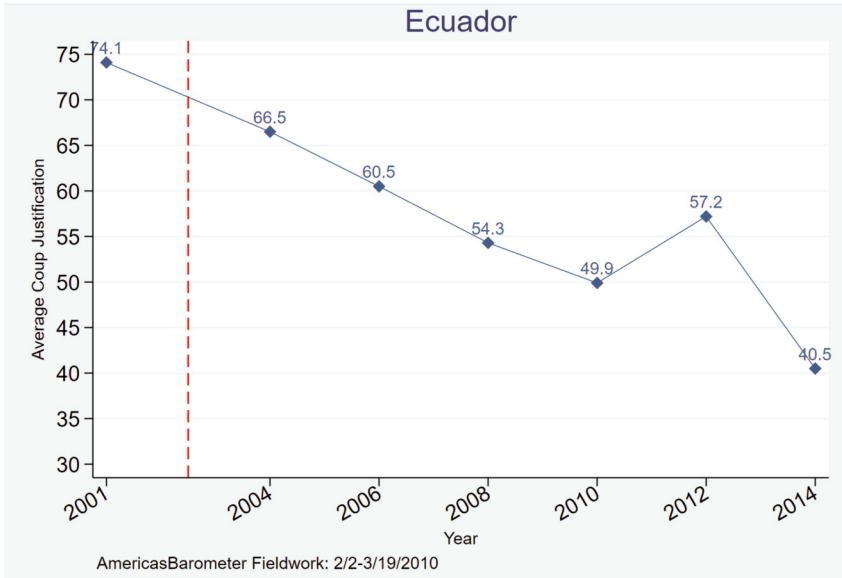
## MEASURING JUSTIFICATION FOR A COUP

With these cases in mind, we empirically analyze competing explanations of citizen support for coups and, further, why such support steadily declined from 2004 to 2014 in the Americas. Our analysis tests whether generalized democratic norms, as suggested by Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán, affect individuals' willingness to support democratic breakdown via a coup, or whether modernization (Inglehart 1988; Inglehart and Welzel 2005) still offers explanatory power.

To test the normative preferences argument, we include individual attitudes toward democracy and presidential approval, plus the age of democracy in each country, which we interpret as a blunt measure of elite norms. To assess modernization theory, we include a measure of national-level wealth. In addition to these two overarching theoretical frameworks, we include several factors that extant literature expects to influence individuals' willingness to justify a coup: system support, demographics, and socioeconomic predictors. Finally, we include controls directly relevant to our dependent variable, including respondents' trust in the military, the perception of elite corruption, and perception of crime in one's neighborhood. To anticipate our results, we find that democratic norms exert strong downward pressure on attitudes toward coups, privileging the normative regime preference argument over modernization theory.

Survey data from the AmericasBarometer carried out by LAPOP have consistently shown that beyond the traditional economic issues, two concerns predomi-

Figure 2. Low Coup Justification in Ecuador

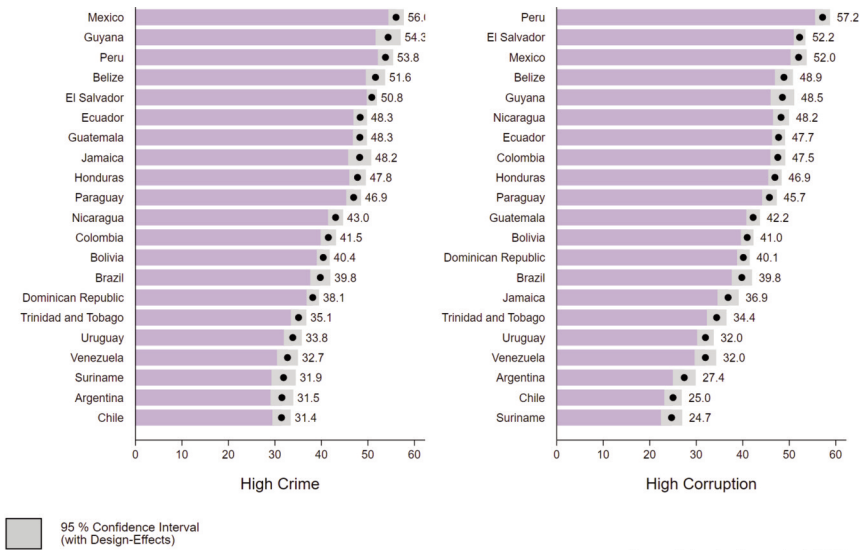


nate when citizens are asked to identify the most important problem their country faces: crime and corruption.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the LAPOP surveys have regularly asked whether a coup would be justified under conditions of high crime or high corruption: “Some people say that under some circumstances 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 or not justified under the following circumstances? 1) When there is a lot of crime? 2) When there is a lot of corruption?”<sup>11</sup> We code coup justification dichotomously: individuals who would not justify a coup, and individuals who would support a hypothetical coup under conditions of either high crime or high corruption.<sup>12</sup>

## COUP JUSTIFICATION: LEVELS AND TRENDS

How much support for coups exists among the citizens of Latin America and the Caribbean? Figure 3 displays the average level of each component of our coup justification index over six waves of our survey, conducted in even-numbered years from 2004 to 2014.<sup>13</sup> We omit the United States, Canada, Barbados, and the Bahamas, owing to the absence of key survey questions, and exclude Costa Rica, Panama, and Haiti because they do not have national armies. That still leaves us with wide coverage of 21 Latin American and Caribbean countries, comprising 122,348 cases.

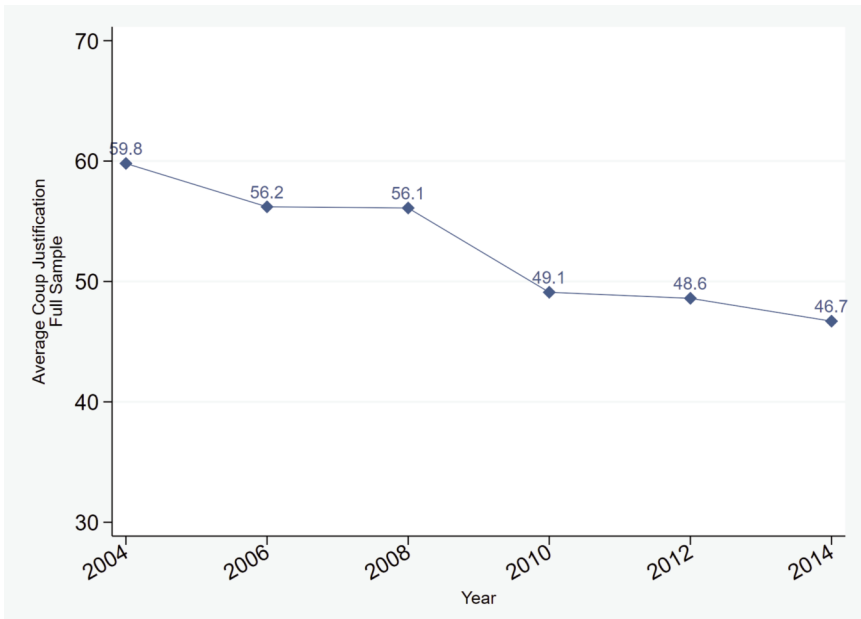
Figure 3. Coup Justification (Percent) Under High Crime And High Corruption, 2004–2014



We found that of the voting-age populations of these countries, 44.1 percent agreed that high levels of crime, and 43.1 percent agreed that high levels of corruption would justify a coup.<sup>14</sup> We note wide variation across the Americas, falling as low as one-quarter of the population and as high as more than half. While these levels of coup justification are interesting in themselves, we also examine the trend over time. Figure 4 shows that from 2004 to 2014, the combined regional mean percentage of crime- and corruption-justified coup support declined 13 percent.<sup>15</sup> We explore the factors that determine these levels and trends.

In selecting our dependent variable, we assume that higher public support for coups indicates a process of weak democratic consolidation more broadly, in line with Pérez-Liñán and Polga-Hecimovich (2017). While coup support is only one indicator of this process, we find evidence that people who support coups also tend to support other forms of radical change. In 2004, the AmericasBarometer survey asked about support for radical preferences, defined as either staunch defense of the status quo or support for revolutions, versus a preference for gradual reforms. We find that in all ten countries represented in our sample in 2004, there was a negative correlation between support for coups and preference for gradual reform. We corroborate the finding using several pre-AmericasBarometer datasets and find this to be the case with few exceptions.<sup>16</sup>

Figure 4. Average Coup Justification (Percent) in the Americas, 2004–2014



### Explaining Coup Support

The analysis tests the normative regime preferences and modernization-cultural arguments. The primary aim is to evaluate whether normative preferences for democracy matter for regime outcomes (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013; Pérez-Liñán and Polga-Hecimovich 2017) or whether modernization-cultural explanations (Inglehart 1988; Inglehart and Welzel 2005) better explain both levels of and trends in coup justification in the Americas.

For the former theory, we rely on both individual- and aggregate-level measures, because we are explicitly testing whether the theory can apply at the individual level; and for the latter, we exclusively examine a national-level predictor: national wealth. To test the normative regime preferences argument at the individual level, we rely on a survey question that has been used as a measure of democracy norms worldwide: “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?” (Rose and Mishler 1996). We acknowledge that this relationship is intuitive but argue that there are sound theoretical reasons for examining it. Importantly, “An explanation based on normative preferences could be treated as obvious only if we claimed that these preferences always explained outcomes. . . . Some actors do not have normative preferences” (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013, 53).

We think this is especially true at the individual level. Indeed, we find variation across subgroups: urban residents, the economically privileged, and those with sec-



ondary or postsecondary education display the strongest (negative) association between normative preferences on the one hand, and coup support on the other. Thus the importance of norms is not evenly distributed within populations.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, we cannot rule out reverse causality, given the nature of survey questions—it is difficult, if not impossible, to find a valid instrument that predicts normative preferences but has no bearing on coup justification. However, we can look at empirical distinctions, such as correlations and means.<sup>18</sup>

We include two other indicators derived from the normative regime preferences argument. Following Pérez-Liñán and Polga-Hecimovich's 2017 measure of presidential support in the legislature, we include a measure of individuals' approval of the incumbent president. We expect high presidential approval to negatively affect support for military coups, but we predict that its effect will be limited compared to normative preferences, which should discourage coups irrespective of presidential approval. If coup justification were merely dislike for incumbent executives, we should see significantly more coups or coup attempts under unpopular executives.

We also include the age of democracy in each country. Przeworski's analysis of democratic versus coup-generated government changes (2015) argues that democracy is habit-forming. Once democratic elections take place and incumbents leave office without a fight, the process is likely to become routine, thus reducing the frequency of coups. We see this measure as a plausible macrolevel test of our individual-level measure of democratic norms: citizens of democracies become habituated to democracy and develop congruent values, contributing to stability (Rustow 1970; see also Jackman and Miller 2004).<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, we anticipate that as the age of democracy increases, support for coups should decrease (Booth and Richard 2015; Booth and Seligson 2009; Svobik 2015).

An important alternative to the normative regime preferences argument is modernization theory, which long ago proposed that as countries developed economically, they would move away from authoritarian rule and toward democracy (Lipset 1959, 1981, 1994). Recent analyses find some evidence of a link between higher economic development and lower support for coups because of the intervening effect of higher socioeconomic development on higher democratic norms (Lehoucq and Pérez-Liñán 2013; Londregan and Poole 1990; O'Kane 1981), while Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2013) find a null effect at the elite level. Yet both Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2013) and Pérez-Liñán and Polga-Hecimovich (2017) find a positive effect for GDP growth on regime consolidation. We include a test for the effect of economic modernization (measured as the log of GDP per capita PPP) to see if our individual-level findings comport with the mixed elite-level findings.<sup>20</sup>

### Additional Explanations

This study's chief contribution is to articulate the role of the individual, which the above theories speculate about but do not test directly. Accordingly, we analyze several attitudes relevant to coup justification that were not relevant or not testable at the elite level. We first examine system support, which we see as complementary to our analysis of democratic norms. Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán describe how "a normative preference builds a reservoir of support that enables competitive regimes to survive when times are hard. It is a procedural legitimacy that helps democracy withstand periods of weak performance" (2013, 39).

We concur that normative preferences fulfill this function, but we believe that the addition of system support more fully captures the difference between output-based considerations during "hard times" and the intrinsic value of a democratic system in a way not easily measured at the elite level. We operationalize system support as an additive index of individual responses on five aspects of trust in the state, each measured on a seven-point scale (Booth and Seligson 2005, 2009; Seligson 2000; Seligson and Booth 2013). We expect an inverse relationship with respondents' willingness to justify coups: support for coups is not merely the love of the military but a more generalized lack of normative preference for democracy and lack of support for the system as it functions.

We also incorporate factors known to separate individuals regarding their support for the military. Education's effect, for instance, is well documented: individuals with higher education are, on average, less likely to support military intervention. We also include age, gender, the size of the city or town in which the respondent resides, and household wealth (measured by the presence or absence of household items).<sup>21</sup> Consistent with the extant literature, we expect greater coup support among younger citizens, rural dwellers, and the poor. We also expect coup support to be higher among women, drawing from extensive literature that shows that women are less supportive of democracy, or conversely, are more authoritarian (Carnaghan and Bahry 1990; García-Peñalosa and Konte 2014). With the possible exception of female gender, we expect these subgroups to be less likely to be receptive to the transmission of elite norms, either for lack of opportunity (rural, poor) or youthful resistance, and thus less likely to demonstrate the sort of signaling argument we suggest.

In addition, we include three controls. We think it obvious that individuals who express high trust in the military as an institution will be more likely to justify a military takeover. The reverse is also true: even though individuals may be deeply concerned about crime and corruption, if they do not trust those who would "rescue" the system, they will be unlikely to support a military solution.<sup>22</sup> Our analysis would suffer from omitted variable bias if we neglected to include this item.

We also incorporate respondents' evaluations of the amount of corruption prevalent in their country and the feeling of insecurity in their neighborhood (higher values indicate greater perceived corruption and insecurity). These specific indicators mirror the hypothetical conditions in our dependent variable, and have been shown to affect respondents' feelings toward the political system (Anderson

and Tverdova 2003; Canache and Allison 2005; M. Seligson 2002a, b, 2004, 2006), of which we think coup justification is a natural extension. Perceived insecurity has been shown to affect several other attitudes, including incumbent vote choice (Carreras 2013; Pérez 2003, 2015; Ungar 2007), so we believe it may also affect attitudes toward the regime. We expect both indicators to increase support for coups but to remain substantively behind attitudes toward the system.

## TWO-STEP MULTILEVEL MODEL

Because countless studies have reiterated the importance of context in determining outcomes, we employ a two-step multilevel model to test how the features of nations affect trends among our cases.<sup>23</sup> Another advantage of a two-step model is that it employs appropriate standard errors.<sup>24</sup> In a two-step model's first step, the individual-level dependent variable, in this case support for coups, is regressed on the individual-level explanatory variables and controls. This model evaluates a different intercept for each country in each survey wave, which becomes the dependent variable in the second step. The second step of the model then regresses the intercepts produced in the first step on national-level variables (Moehler and Lindberg 2009).

### First Step

Because we rely on intercepts of each country in each survey, the first step produces estimates of the baseline effect of support for coups when controlling for all explanatory variables and country-year interactions. Due to the dichotomous structure of the dependent variable, we employ a linear probability model.<sup>25</sup> Table 1 reveals, unsurprisingly, that trust in the military has the greatest predictive power. However, we also find a large effect for preference for democracy as the second most important determinant in the model, followed by system support. We conclude that individuals who embrace democracy for its intrinsic value and who have higher trust in the political institutions of their country are significantly less likely to support the overthrow of those institutions in times of high crime and corruption.

For the most part, demographic and socioeconomic factors behave as expected. By a wide margin, younger, less-educated citizens support hypothetical coups more. Females justify military intervention more than males, all else equal, as widely reported in the literature indicating that women are less supportive of democracy than men. On the other hand, family wealth and size of one's community of residence fail to affect coup justification significantly, which suggests that these beliefs are widely distributed across socioeconomic populations. While these results conform to our expectations, we explore these relationships further with a set of subgroup analyses. Because of space constraints, we do not present the empirical models; interested readers are directed to online appendix C. What we found particularly interesting is the picture that arose of women who support coups: urban, well-educated, and well-off women are more likely to support coups, which directly contrasts with the picture of coup supporters in the model as a whole.<sup>26</sup> In a smaller

Table 1. First-Stage Analysis, Individual-Level Determinants of Coup Justification

Normative Regime Preferences Theory		
Normative preference for democracy		-13.83*** (1.63)
Presidential approval		-7.14** (1.96)
New Contributions		
System support		-11.08*** (2.71)
Gender (female = 1)		1.60** (0.43)
Age		-0.37*** (0.04)
Education		-0.70*** (0.11)
Size of city		0.07 (0.33)
Wealth quintile		-0.41 (0.27)
Controls		
Trust in the armed forces		20.05*** (2.04)
Belief that corruption is widespread		.11 (1.34)
Neighborhood insecurity		8.32*** (0.99)
Constant		82.66*** (2.89)
Observations		122,348
R-squared		0.08

\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, ^ p<.10

Standard errors in parentheses. Linear probability model. Standard errors clustered by country.

Note: Year, country, and country-year fixed effects included but not presented.

sample, from 2006 to 2014, females increasingly justify coups the greater their interest in politics.<sup>27</sup>

Returning to table 1, our findings demonstrate that many respondents disapprove of their president sufficiently to support the military's stepping in. This result gives us pause, given the volatility of executive popularity in the region in recent years. Our analysis ends with 2014, but major recent events demonstrate the continuing salience of these attitudes: President Nicolás Maduro's attempts to close Venezuela's Congress, countrywide protests of corruption scandals implicating former president Otto Molina Pérez in Guatemala, and the impeachment of Brazil's Dilma Rousseff and intense popular reaction against political insiders in the vast, elite-led corruption machine. All have troubling implications for stability should cit-

izens wish the military to “throw the rascals out.” In a democracy riven with corruption and scandal, public coup support might be a double-edged sword—viewed as a tool to purge a poorly performing elected government.

Our measures allow us to consider whether governmental failure to provide for citizens’ safety or corruption influences coup justification. Living in a neighborhood perceived as unsafe significantly increases support for coups. Given the pervasively high crime rates in the Americas, this is also a potentially worrying finding: might military coups make a reappearance if crime continues to increase? We suggest that this might be possible if neighborhood insecurity becomes so widespread that it becomes ingrained. In some places, this may already be happening: in some countries, the military patrols jointly with the police, thereby effectively reminding civilians of a potentially positive effect of bringing the military back in. Nun’s 1967 argument would probably support this implication. Further research on the link between crime and willingness to support military coups is warranted.

We suspect that table 1’s null finding for corruption arises from the type of democratic breakdown in question. It is easier to understand how individuals who fear crime might support coups, given criminal violence rates and the growing practice by several regimes of deploying military units to accompany police patrols.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, combating corruption has never been a significant role for the region’s militaries. Furthermore, regional governments now tend to address corruption via impeachment or forced resignation, as occurred recently in Guatemala and Brazil.<sup>29</sup>

Figure 5 presents the average predicted value of coup justification in each country over each survey wave, revealing an overall regional trend of declining coup justification. Some countries experienced an uptick in the 2010 survey wave, probably in reaction to the sharp 2008–9 economic downturn. However, this slump did not affect all countries, as some of them experienced economic growth during this time.

## Second Step

The second step of the two-step model allows us to estimate the extent to which these contextual-level predictors affect the intercepts for each country in each survey wave.<sup>30</sup> The unit of analysis is each country in each survey wave, for a total of 88 observations. As table 2 demonstrates, the age of democracy fails to influence mean national coup justification. In contrast, (log-transformed) national wealth attains statistical significance at conventional levels, but the effect is substantively small.<sup>31</sup> A one-percent increase in national wealth is associated with a diminutive decline of only .065 in coup support.

So while modernization theory is empirically relevant in our analysis, it is not substantively meaningful for the scope of our data. (We suspect that a longer temporal span covering a greater range of economic growth would provide a better test.) Our finding diverges from Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán’s (2013), but we focus on individuals rather than elites. Individuals have been known to punish elites irrationally for things beyond their control (one could start with Achen and Bartels 2016). In any case, our findings suggest that over time, countries with growing national wealth may

Figure 5. Predicted Coup Justification by Country and Survey Wave

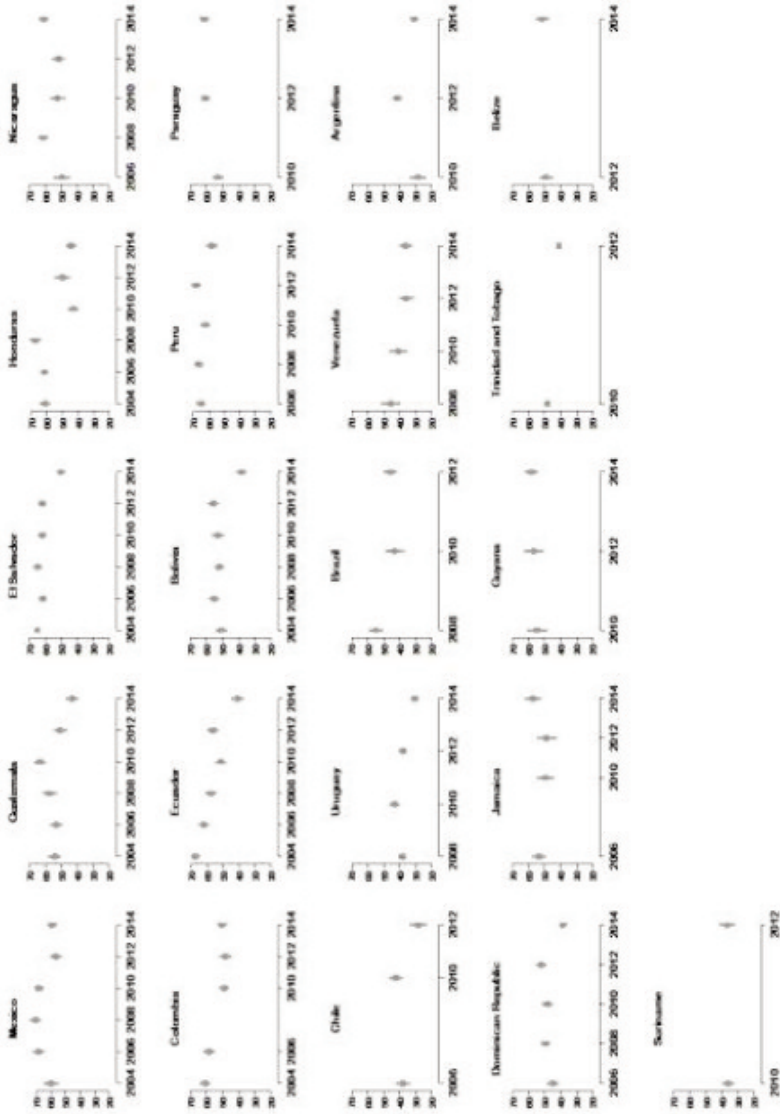


Table 2. Mean National Coup Justification: Two-Step National-Level Model

	Effect
Modernization-Cultural Theory	
Logged national wealth	-6.51*** (1.72)
Aggregate Test of Normative Regime Preferences Theory	
Age of democracy	-0.07 (0.06)
Constant	112.68*** (15.66)
Observations	88
R-squared	.16

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ ,  $^{\wedge}p < .10$   
Standard errors in parentheses.

see individual support for coups decline but not disappear. Several other factors play a stronger role in this relationship than economic modernization.

## WHAT AFFECTS SUPPORT FOR COUPS OVER TIME?

Figure 4 demonstrates declining average coup support in Latin America and the Caribbean from 2004 to 2014. We build on these findings by analyzing whether our hypotheses hold across time. This is particularly important because our macrolevel theory presumes that citizens' values evolve over time under the constraints of economic modernization or regime rules. Four countries deviate from the regional trend and show increases in coup justification over time: Paraguay (+25 units), Nicaragua (+10 units), Jamaica (+8.5 units), and Argentina (+5 units).<sup>32</sup> We suggest possible explanations for these increases, rooted largely in *sui generis* conditions for each case.

Relatively prosperous Argentina stands out, with its democratically inclined citizenry that nevertheless increasingly supports coups. This finding is probably because Argentines in recent years have evaluated most of their national democratic institutions (e.g., parties, legislature, courts) very poorly compared to other Latin Americans. This pattern mirrors trends in other developed democracies (Foa and Mounk 2016). Meanwhile, Paraguay and Jamaica are poorer countries beset by specific problems, and exhibit low individual satisfaction with how democracy performs. Jamaica experienced a recent economic slump and a violent crime rate that led to an insurrection in an area bordering the national capital. Paraguay faces violent insurgent activities by paramilitary groups, probably raising levels of perceived threat, factors known to drive antidemocratic attitudes powerfully (Carlin et al. 2015; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009).

In Nicaragua, the poorest country with a military in our sample, the 2008 economic slump appears to have driven a sharp increase in support for a coup in that year, which, on close inspection of our data, then fell back to pre-2008 levels and below. In 2014, Nicaraguans again perceived that their personal economic situations had eroded, and coup justification again rose (though less than in 2008). In sum, Nicaraguans have not steadily increased their coup justification as have Paraguayans and to a lesser extent, Jamaicans.

### Dynamic Model

Having added public opinion into the normative regime preferences theory and explored individual associations of support or rejection of coups in the Americas, we take our analysis one step further. The two-step model employs a static dependent variable, preventing us from making claims as to whether our predictors contribute to the observed change in coup justification. Ideally, we would utilize panel data on the same individuals over time. However, in the absence of a panel, we follow the approach of Luna and Zechmeister (2005) and estimate bivariate correlations among the variables of interest. To do so, we utilize two specifications of a dynamic dependent variable. The first represents the *average net change in coup justification* from the last to the first survey wave for each country at the aggregate level. The alternate specification relies on the *average net change in coup justification between each survey wave*. Similarly, the individual-level variables included also represent dynamic country-level averages instead of the static variables that capture moments in time.<sup>33</sup> Though we cannot offer a conclusive estimation of the determinants of coup justification over time, we can take preliminary steps in evaluating the merit of our theory.<sup>34</sup>

We find that as support for democracy increases, coup justification over time decreases. In the model evaluating change from first to last survey wave, the correlation is  $-.41$ , the highest of any variable examined. In the model of change between surveys, the correlation is more modest,  $-.23$ , but is still notable. System support does not appear to play a determining role in model 1 but surpasses support for democracy in model 2 (see table 3). Despite being the strongest predictor in the individual model, change in trust in the military does not appear to drive declining coup support over time, nor do any of the other significant findings from previous models. Correlations between contextual variables and coup justification are not particularly strong: neither the age of democracy nor national wealth offers predictive power in a dynamic model.

The contribution of this analysis is to point to where the action is in explaining the change in coup justification in the Americas over a decade-long span, from 2004 to 2014. In our two-step analysis, we find that normative support for democracy offers the greatest potential for explaining the region's decline in coup support. We have relied on the normative regime preferences and modernization-cultural theoretical frameworks to guide the building of our models. Using two distinct analytical strategies, we have determined that normative preference for democracy is the only variable in our dynamic analysis to offer robust explanatory power: citizens of the



Table 3. Bivariate Correlations: Determinants of Coup Justification over Time

	(1) Change from First to Last Survey Wave	(2) Change Between Each Survey Wave
Direct Tests		
Support for democracy	-.41	-.23
Presidential approval	-.11	-.16
National wealth	-.14	-.37
Age of democracy	.02	.12
New Factors		
System Support	-.03	-.26
Perception that corruption is widespread	-.03	-.15
Neighborhood insecurity	-.17	-.02
Controls		
Trust in the armed forces	.08	-.07
Perception that corruption is widespread	-.03	-.15
Neighborhood insecurity	-.17	-.02
Observations	21	74

Americas support coups less over time, in large part because their support for democracy has increased over time. However, caution is warranted. As democracy declines globally, as it now clearly seems to be doing, our findings indicate that support for coups may, in turn, increase, particularly if trust in the military increases.

## CONCLUSIONS

In Latin America and Caribbean countries with armies, citizen justification for coups d'état under realistic yet hypothetical conditions of high crime and high levels of corruption declined from 2004 to 2014. This study demonstrates that coup justification can be construed more broadly as an important aspect of a wider trend toward the institutionalization of democracy. Our analysis evaluated individual characteristics from a sample of more than 120,000 respondents in 21 countries to provide evidence that the normative regime preferences theory has parallels among the mass public. The analysis reveals that mass democratic norms exert significant effects on levels of and trends in coup justification and have a stronger effect than economic modernization.

We also found that members of the mass public who feel insecure in their neighborhoods and who disapprove of the incumbent president are more likely to justify coups under conditions of high crime and high corruption. Additionally, while our findings largely confirm conventional expectations about the role of demographic and socioeconomic status in coup support—specifically that older, better-educated, system-supporting citizens support coups less—we add an important caveat. Women often do not comport with these expectations.

At the contextual level, we found that greater economic development very modestly lowers levels of coup support, but that this effect did not appear in our dynamic model over time. Similarly, the age of democracy weakly associated with lower justification in the static model but not the dynamic model. In both cases, a larger country sample over a greater time span would permit a more persuasive test of these relationships, given the slow rate of change for these variables.

## NOTES

We wish to thank Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, Orlando Pérez, Jon Hiskey, and discussants Juan Pablo Luna and Michelle Taylor-Robinson at the 2016 APSA annual meeting for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper, and Vanderbilt University's Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) for making the data available to us.

1. Other factors that matter in their theory include actors' policy radicalism or moderation and a favorable regional political environment.

2. Despite the hypothesized importance of public opinion, it falls outside of the authors' scope of analysis. As they state, "Public opinion is not an actor because it cannot per se act . . . public opinion is important in regime battles, but it is not an actor" (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013, 12).

3. Social mobilization is measured as "the number of antigovernment demonstrations per administration-year (from *The New York Times*)" (Pérez-Liñán and Polga-Hecimovich 2017, 4).

4. Pérez (2016) reports that "in the period 2000–2016 there have been 62 coup attempts and 23 successful coups across the world, including events like the 2012 impeachment of President Fernando Lugo of Paraguay." Lehoucq (2017) questions the accuracy for counts such as this by finding discrepancies between international and domestic reports.

5. Voters have, of course, played a direct role in democratic breakdown by installing and maintaining authoritarian governments in power, with recent cases including Chávez-Maduro in Venezuela and Ortega in Nicaragua.

6. Janowitz (1977, 160–68) and Clapham and Philip (1985) extend this argument by claiming that military regimes must develop support from citizens in order to survive. If this is the case, it is not unreasonable that elites would consider mass opinion before launching a coup. Singh (2014), however, contends that public opinion does not matter for the success of a coup. However, our claim is not that public opinion determines the success of coups but that citizens signal to elites their willingness to support or reject a coup. Elites may well ignore this signal, but we still expect that public opinion is one of many factors that influence elite decisions.

7. Although it is considered a coup according to the database we draw from (Kuehn and Trinkunas 2017), we acknowledge that the Ecuadorian incident was a police uprising against the president at the time, involving only a few military personnel to rescue the president. We do not claim that the police uprising in Ecuador failed because support was low. Instead, we present this case because it illustrates how an event involving contestation occurred when coup support was among the lowest in many years. Kuehn and Trinkunas (2017) identify two other instances of contestation: a plotted coup in Bolivia in 2009 and two alleged coup plots in Venezuela in 2008 and 2014. These events, however, appear to have been quite minor. We would not expect, and indeed do not find, evidence that alleged or plotted coups should show citizen signaling. See online appendix A.3.

8. The regionwide AmericasBarometer began in 2004, but individual country studies, such as the 2001 survey in Ecuador, contained the identically worded item on coups.

9. This analysis is not meant to prove that mass attitudes cause or prevent democratic breakdown. However, it provides persuasive evidence of the congruence between coup support and consolidation or breakdown.

10. We thank the Latin American Public Opinion Project for making these data publicly available at [www.LAPOPSurveys.org](http://www.LAPOPSurveys.org), and United States Agency for International Development, Vanderbilt University, and several other donors for supporting data collection costs.

11. Since only crime and corruption items are found in all countries in our sample, we use those. The two items correlate at  $r = .68$  across the entire database, which justifies an additive index.

12. We opted for two-category dependent variable versus three categories (no coup support, coup support in only one instance, coup support in both instances) because individuals who supported a coup in one instance but not the other make up only 16 percent of respondents. We nonetheless ran the trichotomous version and found results are consistent across specifications.

13. In most countries, the sample size was around 1,500 respondents. Because in some countries samples were larger, we weighted all cases to an  $N$  of 1,500 per country.

14. Missing data on the two items total 5.2 percent on crime, 5.6 percent on corruption. The consistency in attitudes between these two scenarios gives us confidence that we are tapping into a generalized phenomenon of coup justification rather than an attitude linked only to crime or corruption. For a discussion of the validity of these items, see Zechmeister 2018.

15. We explain in the following section how we combined the two measures into one, but graphs of each item alone show the same pattern.

16. We further verify our measure by comparing it to a question asked in our entire sample about individuals' approval or disapproval of others' achieving their political goals through violently removing the elected government. We find a strong positive correlation, and that normative preferences remain a strong predictor. We think our measure better captures the theories we purport to test and therefore proceed with coup justification. We also tested the model against whether individuals had attended a protest in the last year (from 2010 to 2014 only). Overall, the model fit is poor, and the coefficient for normative preferences is actually positive: individuals who normatively value democracy are more likely to participate in protests. To us, this indicates that protest and support for coups are viewed differently with respect to their role in supporting or bringing down democracy.

17. Replacing our measure with individuals' evaluation of how democracy is working (an output-based measure) in our model yields generally consistent results, except that output-based support has a magnitude about half that of normative preferences. This suggests that people value democracy for its intrinsic value, consistent with the interpretations of Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2013), Rose and Mishler (1996), and Magaloni (2007), among others.

18. We find that coup justification and normative preferences for democracy are correlated at  $-.12$ , and that the average of the former is 21.6 percentage points higher (69.7 for normative preferences versus 59.1 for coup justification). We go one step further by examining waves 5–6 (2005–14) of the World Values Survey. We use the Survey question, "Would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad way of governing this country? Having the army rule?" as the dependent variable (a proxy for coup support), and "How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically? On this scale, where 1 means

it is not at all important and 10 means absolutely important, what position would you choose?" as a proxy for our independent variable (normative support for democracy). Full details are available in online appendix A.6. While a full comparative model goes beyond the scope of this article, we test our key relationship of interest and find that even with different questions and a much wider sample, the predicted relationship holds. Ultimately, we have strong reason to suspect that normative preferences would still affect coup justification if we were able to systematically partial out the impact of reverse causality.

19. Inglehart (1988) and Inglehart and Welzel (2005) have argued that the relationship goes mainly the other way around: values produce democracy, but others have refuted that causal sequence (Hadenius and Teorell 2005; Muller and Seligson 1994; A. Seligson 2002).

20. These data are from the World Bank Indicators database. However, data for this indicator for Argentina (all years), Venezuela (2014), and Belize (2014) are missing, so we rely on supplemental data obtained from Economy Watch (<http://www.economywatch.com/economic-statistics/economic-indicators/>). GDP per capita PPP was chosen to represent national wealth because we suggest that respondents are likely to perceive changes in GDP per capita PPP when compared to raw GDP per capita. It captures the level of national wealth or development, not the trend. We test several other economic indicators to examine the robustness of our results, including GDP per capita, GNI per capita PPP, GNI PPP, inflation consumer prices (annual percent), and inflation GDP deflator (annual percent). Overall, our findings are consistent across these measures. Lehoucq and Pérez-Liñán (2013) lag economic variables by one year, due to endogeneity concerns. Using this alternative specification, the second-step results are virtually identical statistically and substantively. Results are presented in online appendix B.

21. We also looked at ethnic minority status, political interest, and self-declared political position. While these factors are generally significant, we find no systematic pattern that would outweigh the empirical limitations of including them. Readers are directed to online appendix B.

22. We have explored the potential endogeneity of trust in the military and support for coups. First, we substituted trust in the police for trust in the military. The former has face validity as a nonendogenous variable because our dependent variable focuses explicitly on military coups. Trust in the police is significant in both the pooled OLS and two-step models, but the magnitude of the coefficient is considerably lower than trust in the military. The correlation between these measures is just .08. Thus, we find that respondents can and do trust the military as an institution without thinking that a coup is justified.

23. See the *Political Analysis* special issue for the merits of a two-step approach over a hierarchical linear model (Achen 2005; Duch and Stevenson 2005; Franzese 2005; Huber et al. 2005; Jusko and Shively 2005; Kedar 2005).

24. The first step of the model, at the individual level, utilizes clustered standard errors at the country level. The second step utilizes HC3 Standard Errors, which account for unknown heteroscedasticity. We have *a priori* reasons to expect heteroscedasticity, and we know we have a small sample size, so failure to take the error structure into account would lead to a loss in efficiency. HC3 errors adjust the standard errors for the two-step approach (Long and Ervin 2000).

25. Individual-level variables are scaled from 0 to 1 to represent a minimum to maximum change. We opted to present an LPM rather than a logit or probit model for ease of interpretation and similarity in the estimates across models. See appendix I for a comparison of the LPM model presented and the same model run with logistic standard errors.

26. Rural women, women with no education or only primary education, or women with no political interest are no more likely than men to support coups, while women in the highest economic quintile are twice as likely to support coups than in the full sample.

27. This picture of female coup supporters reminds us anecdotally of the overthrow of Salvador Allende and the rise of the military dictatorship in Chile. In the months preceding Allende's downfall, there were constant marches in the streets by women banging pots—typically middle-class women—signaling that they would support getting rid of Allende and a military coup. While further research is needed to confirm or deny this hypothesis, our results raise interesting questions about the role of gender in the transmission of democratic norms from elites to the masses.

28. We explored other long-term competing explanations by looking at changes in the levels of crime and corruption for our sample. We looked at the UNODC crime data and the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index. Neither performed well. Moreover, we encountered missing data in both measures which would have attenuated our sample of 21 country cases.

29. Figure 5 does show a slight increase in support for coup justification in Brazil in 2012, but unfortunately the dependent variable was not asked in Brazil in 2014. We suspect that the uptick is attributable to the country's challenging economic situation.

30. As a robustness check, we examined two additional contextual variables: inequality (GINI coefficient) and the UNDP's Human Development Index. Unfortunately, more than half of the GINI observations needed were missing. For the HDI, we wanted to see if a change in the quality of life, rather than GNP alone, produced a change in support for coups. During our period of interest, HDI is measured in 2005, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014. For our dynamic model, we approximate the change from a country's last to first survey wave. Using this approximation, we found that the change in HDI was less significant than the measure we used in our main model; namely, the change in national wealth ( $t$  statistics of 0.07 and 0.41, respectively), but neither reached statistical significance at conventional levels. However, support for democracy attained significance at the same level ( $p < .10$ ) when HDI was substituted for national wealth. The  $t$  statistic is slightly lower for the HDI model (1.98) than for the model with national wealth (2.14).

31. We carried out another robustness check for national wealth and found that our results held for other economic measures as well. That is, we found significant results for this approach when we replaced GDP per capita PPP with GDP per capita, inflation (consumer prices), inflation (GDP deflator), and GNI per capita PPP. GNI PPP did not attain significance but suffered from missing data that might have influenced the results.

32. We set a five-unit minimum increase of our one-hundred-unit coup justification scale as the smallest indicating a substantively important rise. This is an arbitrary limit, but one that sets apart cases that could easily have averaged a net decline.

33. We aggregate individual variables using the average values per country and survey wave, and take the change from the last to the first survey wave. The variables are the same as in the first step above, omitting demographic variables. See appendix A.1.

34. We rely on bivariate correlations for two reasons. By analyzing change over time, our cases are limited to one observation per country, for an  $N$  of 21 cases for the first specification and 74 for the second. Our degrees of freedom are more constrained than in the two-step model, and we risk overspecification. Furthermore, many of the variables examined do not change significantly over time.

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting materials may be found with the online version of this article at the publisher's website: Online appendixes

For replication data, see the authors' file on the Harvard Dataverse website: <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/P1UXI5&version=DRAFT>