

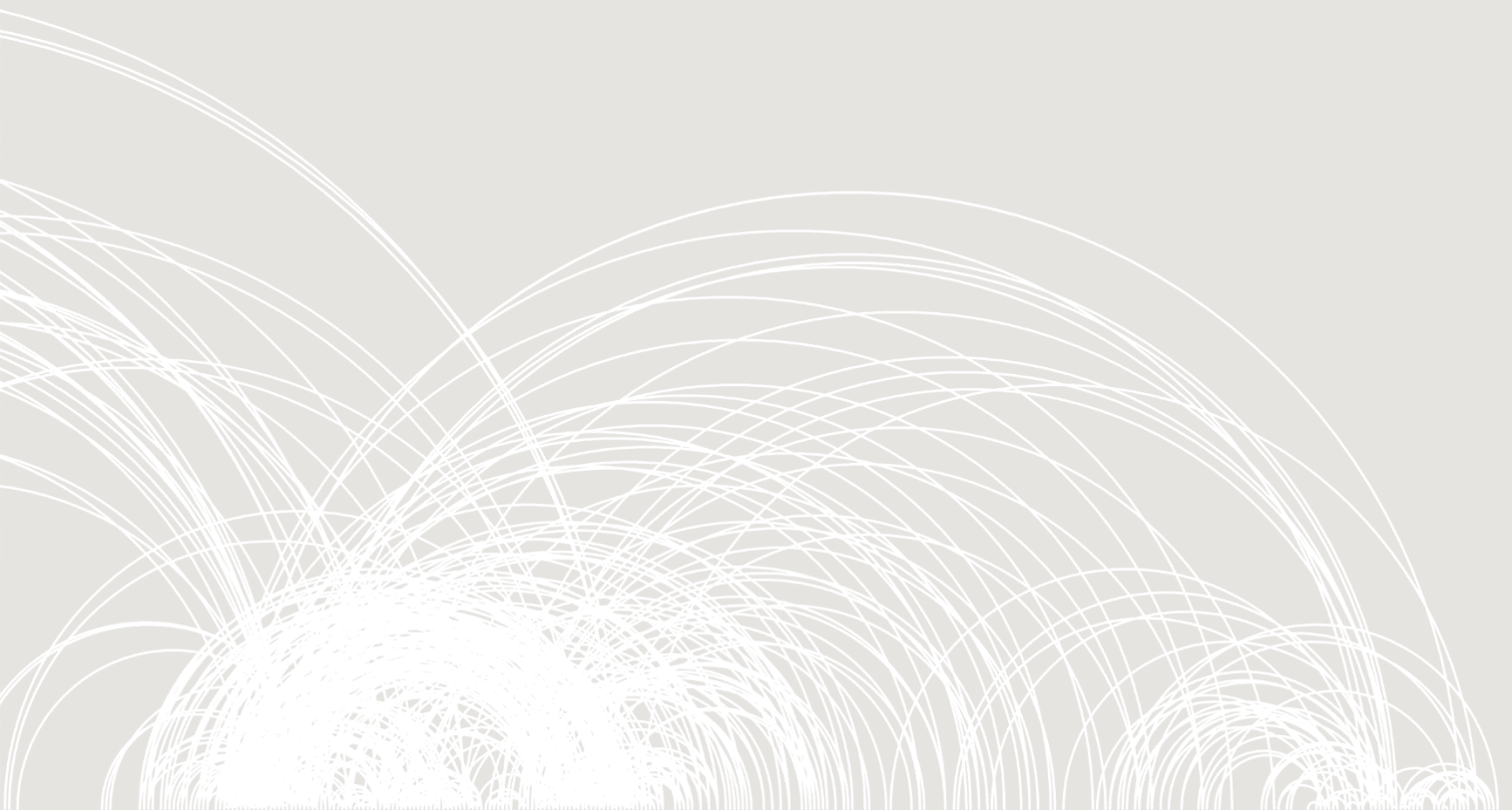
FINAL REPORT

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Analysis of Trends in Democratic Attitudes: Brazil Report

Presented by:

NORC at the University of Chicago



Analysis of Trends in Democratic Attitudes: Brazil Report

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Acronyms

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDBScan	Hierarchical Density-Based Clustering
LAPOP	Latin American Public Opinion Project
PT	Partido dos Trabalhadores
V-Dem	Varieties of Democracy

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

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

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 Brazil. It was authored Ryan E. Carlin (Professor of Political Science, Georgia State University), Mario Fuks (Professor of Political Science, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais), and Ednaldo Ribeiro (Associate Professor of Social Sciences, Universidade Estadual de Maringá). 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

Democracies require mass support to thrive. Many theories connect democratic support and democratic outcomes, but firm conclusions are difficult to draw. This report seeks to describe democratic attitudes over the last ten years in Brazil. We used five waves of the AmericasBarometer to examine potential connections between public opinion and democratic outcomes. To do so, we employed the results of NORC's cluster analysis, which inductively classified respondents into groups with distinct attitudinal profiles. The aim was to maximize similarity *within* each cluster while maximizing dissimilarity *between* clusters. In doing so, we allow the survey data to speak for itself without making assumptions in advance about how to group citizens' attitudes.

Our goal is to assess the relationship between Brazilians' support for liberal democracy and the quality of democracy in Brazil over the past two decades.⁵ Our analysis examines how well observed trends in democratic public opinion fit with expectations derived from four analytic perspectives seeking to understand democratic support: 1) 'democratic culture' perspective focusing on multigenerational socialization into democratic values and attitudes; 2) 'instrumental' perspective focusing on whether democracy delivers desirable outcomes like sustained economic progress, political stability, and public safety; 3) 'winners' consent' perspective focusing on citizens' preferences regarding who is in power; and 4) 'thermostatic' perspective, focusing on the advancement and erosion of the rights of political minorities. Our Brazilian case study can contribute new insights into the debate surrounding these analytic perspectives. Our results broadly confirm that democratic support leads to more democratic outcomes, while highlighting new theoretical wrinkles and key areas for future exploration.

The remainder of this report is organized as follows. We first describe the evolution of five variables we employ to gauge support for liberal democracy and analyze them in historical perspective. We then explain how these variables combine into attitudinal clusters and describe how the resulting cluster classification varies over time in Brazil. From there, we describe the dynamics of liberal democracy in Brazil from 2012 to 2019 and assess whether these trends are consistent with what four analytic perspectives would predict. Our conclusion summarizes our findings, synthesizes their main theoretical implications, and poses some questions that warrant further scholarly attention.

⁵ Our definition of democracy includes both institutions that ensure competitive contestation and inclusive participation (i.e., universal suffrage, free speech, and free association, Dahl 1971), and constraints on executives by the legislative and judicial branches and equality before the law.

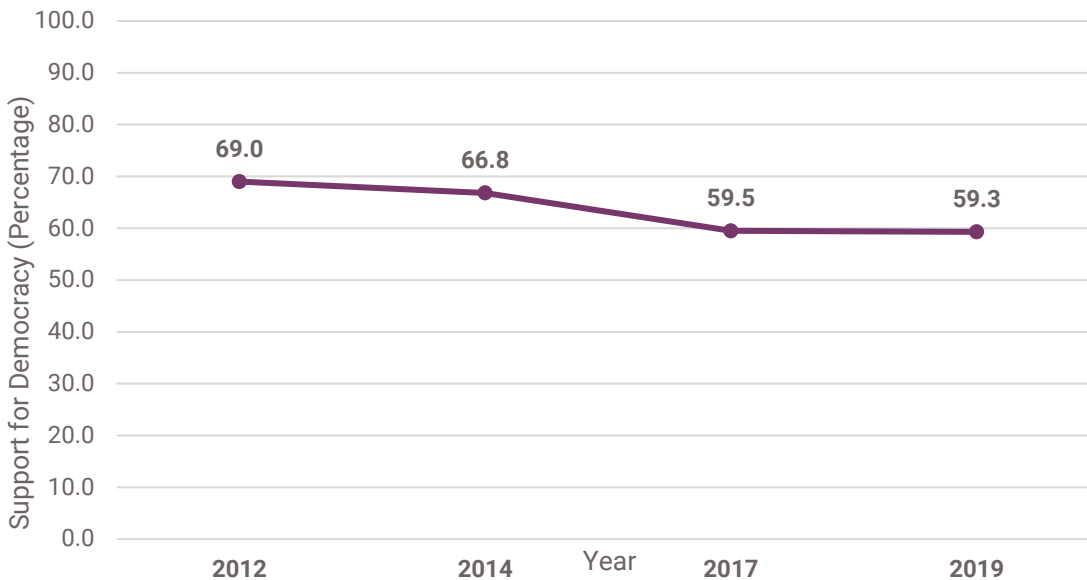
Liberal Democracy in Brazil: Attitudinal Indicators

Expert measures of the quality of democracy show that the quality of Brazilian democracy was quite high from 2012 to 2015. However, recent years have seen a substantial decline. For example, Brazil's score on the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Liberal Democracy Index remained stable at around 0.79 between 2012 and 2015 but declined to 0.51 by 2019.⁶ To assess if citizen democratic attitudes follow this trend, we first examined trends in five attitudes related to liberal democracy:

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

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

⁶ All data from V-Dem are available at: https://www.v-dem.net/data_analysis/CountryGraph/.

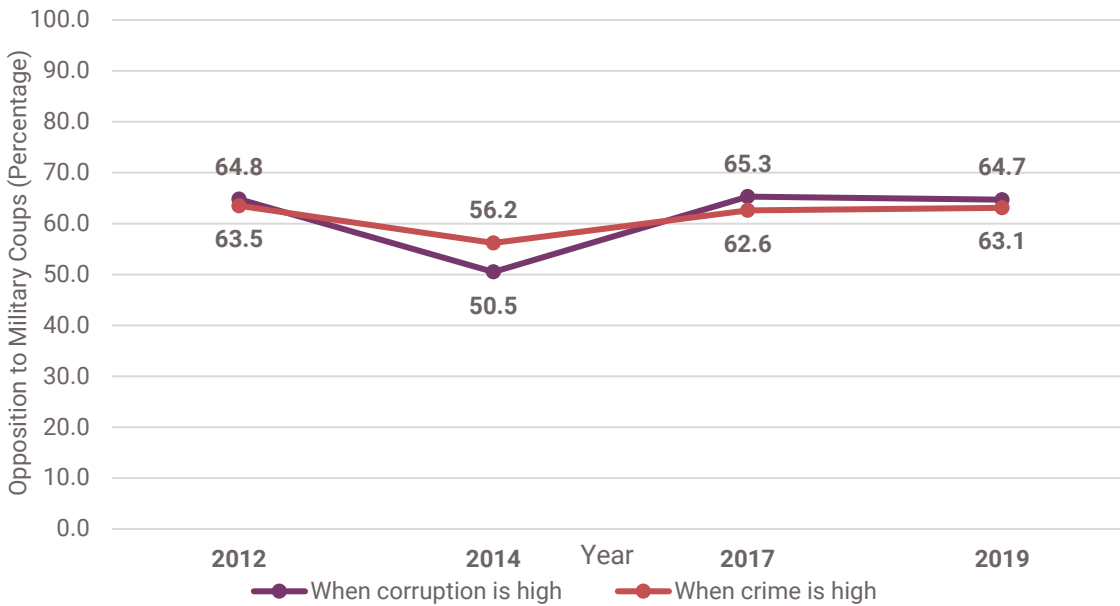
Figure 1: Support for Democracy in Brazil, 2012–2019

Source: AmericasBarometer

The percentage of Brazilians who opposed military coups varied over time (Figure 2). Under circumstances of high corruption and high crime, Brazilians' opposition to military intervention dropped by roughly 15 percentage points between 2012 and 2014 before returning to 2012 levels in 2017 and 2019. Somewhat similarly, the percentage of Brazilians who opposed executive aggrandizement fell dramatically in 2014 and improved somewhat in 2017, only to sag thereafter (Figure 3).⁷

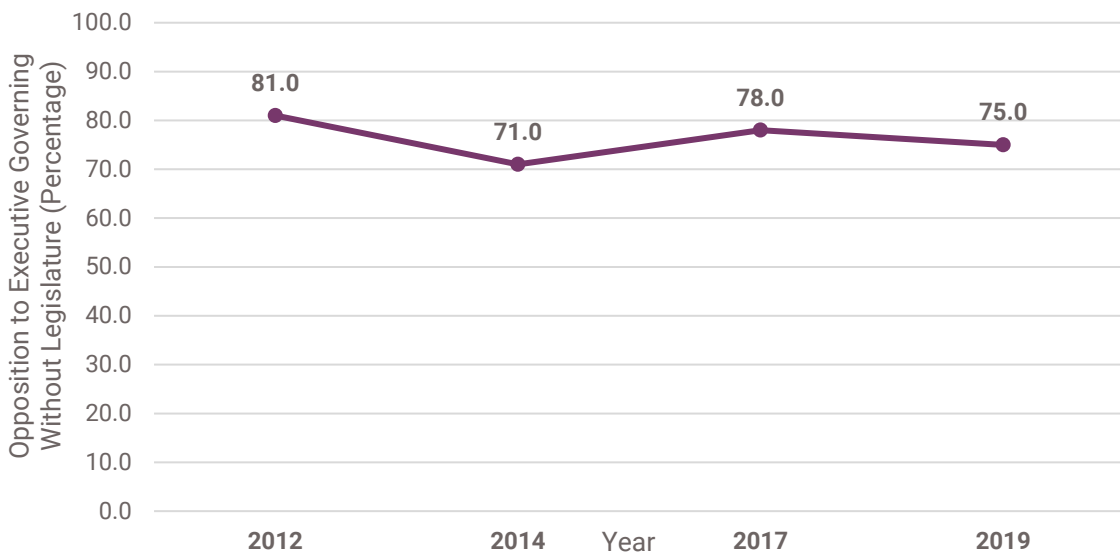
⁷ We graph only opposition to the closure of the legislature. An additional indicator of executive aggrandizement, opposition to the closure of the Supreme Court, was only available in some years.

Figure 2: Opposition to Military Coups in Brazil, 2012–2019



Source: AmericasBarometer

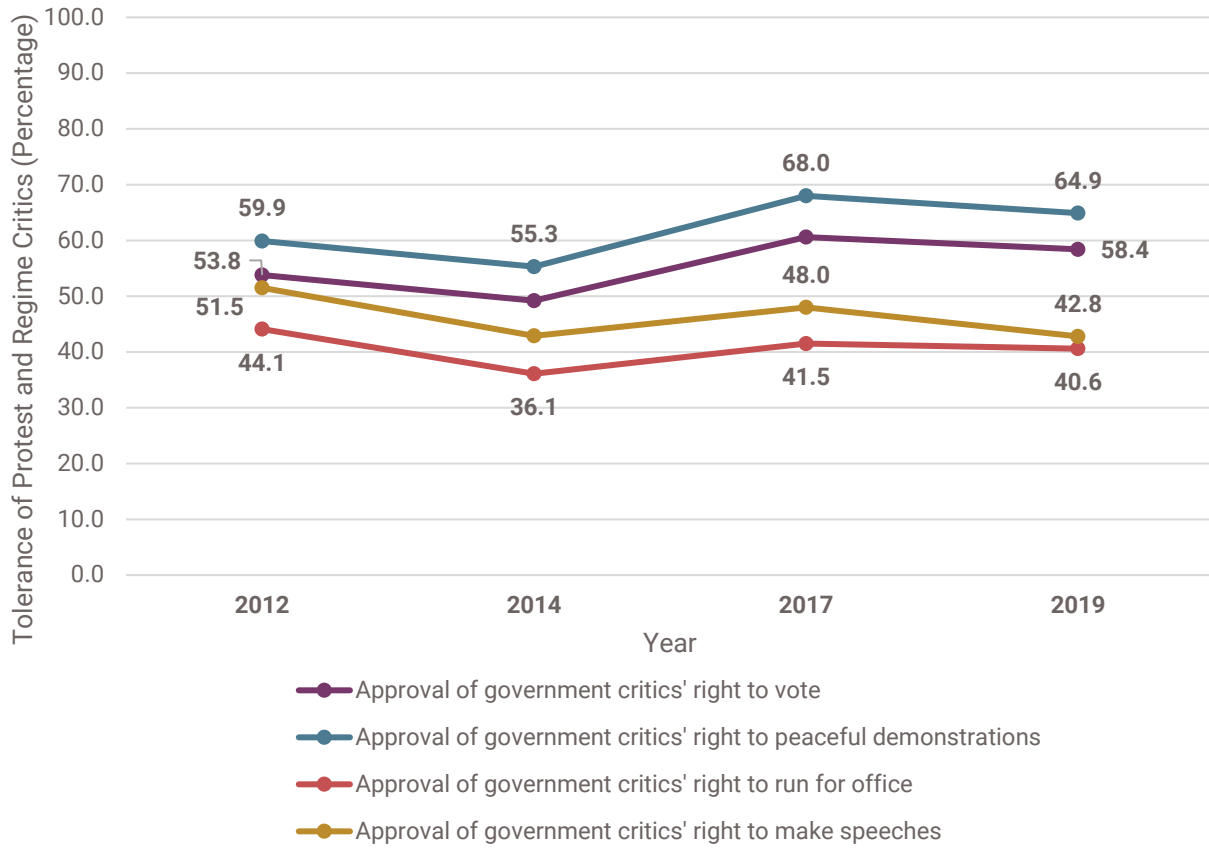
Figure 3: Opposition to Executive Governing Without Legislature in Brazil, 2012–2019



Source: AmericasBarometer

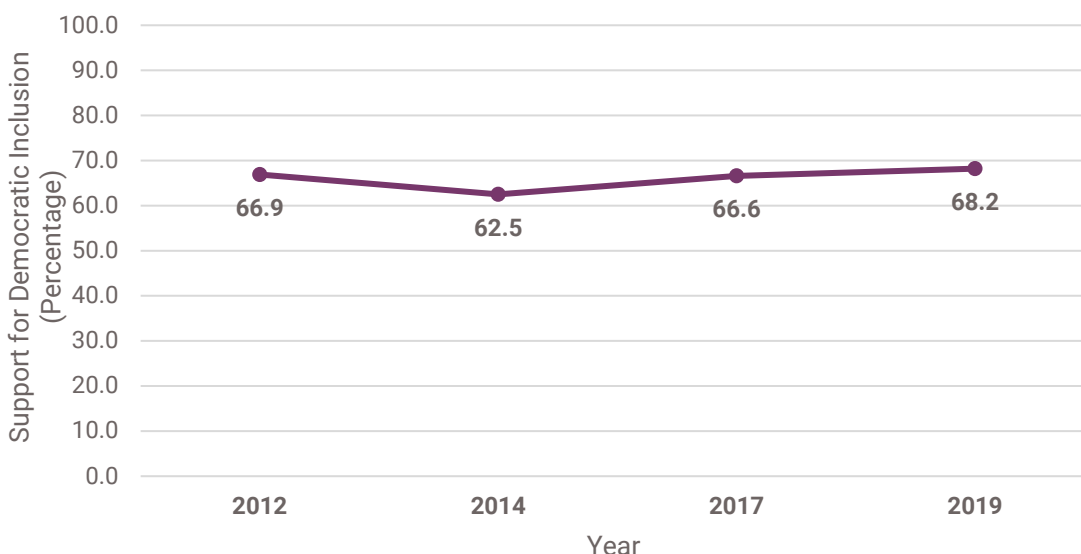
The percentage of Brazilians who approved of the political rights and civil liberties of regime critics was generally high. However, approval of regime critics’ right to run for office was low relative to the other rights depicted, whereas support for their right to peacefully demonstration was relatively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

Figure 4: Tolerance of Protest and Regime Critics in Brazil, 2012–2019



Source: AmericasBarometer

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

Figure 5: Support for Democratic Inclusion in Brazil, 2012–2019

Source: AmericasBarometer

Democratic Attitude Profiles in Brazil, 2012–2019

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

NORC employed a cluster analysis to identify the most dominant democratic attitudinal profiles among Brazilians. They used this approach for the five waves of AmericasBarometer surveys conducted in Brazil (2012, 2014, 2017, 2019, 2021). They used the five democratic attitudes discussed in the preceding section: support for democracy, opposition to military coups, opposition to executive aggrandizement, tolerance for protest and regime critics, and support for democratic inclusions. Annex 1 provides detailed information regarding the study's methodology.

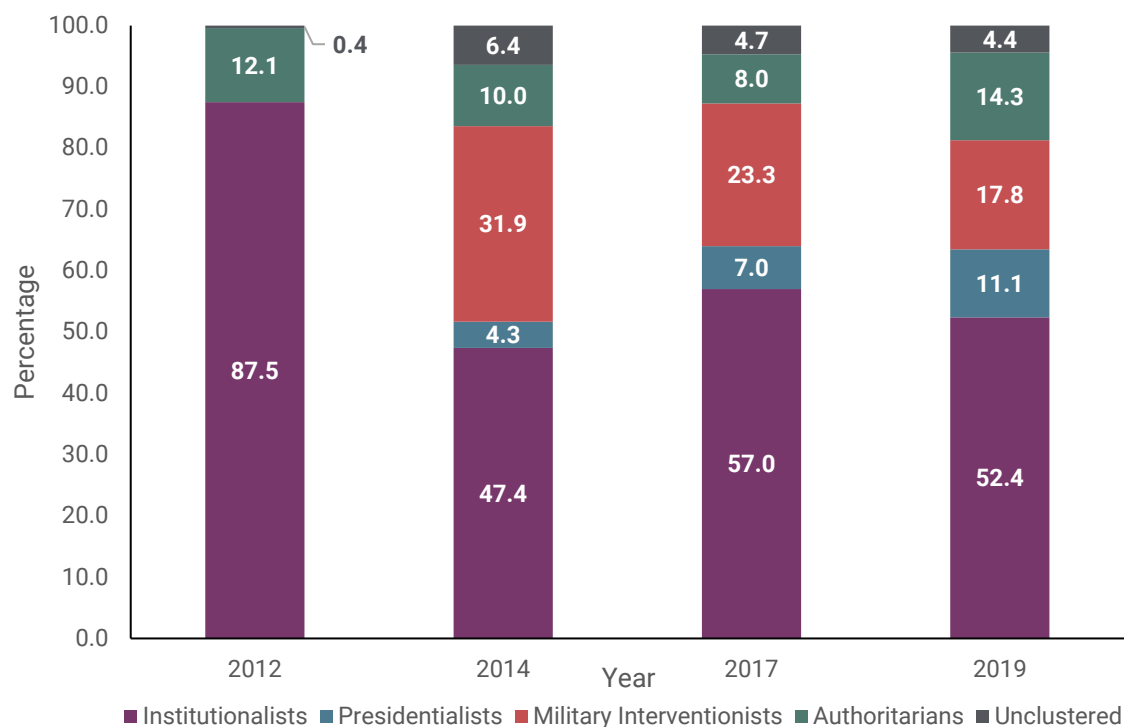
Questions measuring all five attitudes were available in the first four survey waves (2012, 2014, 2017, and 2019). Only three attitudes were available in 2021: support for democracy, opposition to military coups, and opposition to executive aggrandizement. The 2021 cluster analysis results are therefore not directly comparable to those of prior waves and not discussed in this report. Annex 2 presents the main cluster analysis results for all waves.

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

- *Institutionalists*: Individuals in this cluster family are characterized by full opposition to military coups and executive aggrandizement. They represent “ideal” democratic citizens compared to the other cluster families. This cluster family includes institutionalists, democratic institutionalists, and ambivalent institutionalists.⁸
- *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*: Individuals in this cluster family are characterized by less-than-full opposition to both coups and executive aggrandizement.

Figure 6 presents the results of the cluster analysis. Three findings stand out. First, results from 2012 indicate that Brazilians were rather homogeneous in their democratic attitudes: 87.5 percent of respondents were classified as ambivalent institutionalists, displaying high support for democracy, medium-to-high opposition to military coups, and full opposition to executive aggrandizement (see Figure A2.1 in Annex 2). In later years, the cluster analysis was able to identify more distinct attitudinal profiles and Institutionalists ceased to display ambivalent attitudes. Second, between 2014 and 2019, the share of institutionalists increased slightly, from 47.4 percent of respondents to 52.4 percent. Third, between 2014 and 2019, the share of military interventionists and presidentialists shifted over time. Military interventionists decreased from 31.9 percent to 17.8 percent, while presidentialists increased from 4.3 percent to 11.1 percent. The share of authoritarians remained relatively stable throughout the period under analysis.

⁸ Ambivalent institutionalists exhibit full opposition to executive aggrandizement but medium-to-high opposition to military coups. They are therefore a diminished subtype of institutionalists. We included them in the institutionalists cluster family rather than in the military interventionist family because of their high level of support for democracy.

Figure 6: Evolution of Cluster Families in Brazil, 2012–2019

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

Institutionalists

Members of the institutionalist family best approximate ideal-type liberal democrats. Brazilians in this group oppose both military coups and executive aggrandizement. They are the family most tolerant of protesters and regime critics, though still only at modest levels. Citizens in this group are also highly supportive of democratic inclusion.

Women were proportionally more likely to be classified as institutionalists in 2017 and 2019, potentially in reaction to President Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment and President Michel Temer’s subsequent rollback of gender equality in government. Bucking trends elsewhere, Brazilian youth (aged 18–29) became more prevalent in the institutionalist family in 2017, while

older Brazilians became less prevalent.⁹ Institutionalists had more average years of schooling than other Brazilians in 2017 and 2019. In 2019, they expressed significantly less approval of the president than others (43.2 percent vs. 60.3 percent) and were less likely to believe that those in government are interested in what people think (33.5 percent vs. 41.2 percent).

Military Interventionists

The military interventionist family holds many common attitudes with institutionalists, including robust support for democracy and democratic inclusion, moderate levels of tolerance of dissent, and unanimous rejection of executive aggrandizement. However, military interventionists are far more permissive of the military stepping in during times of high corruption and high crime. Military interventionists are typically the second-most-populous attitudinal cluster in Brazil, ranging from 17.8 percent of the sample to 31.9 percent.

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

Presidentialists

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

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

⁹ Foa, Roberto, and Mounk, Yascha. 2016. “The Danger of Deconsolidation: The Democratic Disconnect.” *Journal of Democracy* 27 (3): 5–17.

Authoritarians

Authoritarians believe the military would be justified to interrupt democratic politics in certain circumstances. They would also justify the president dissolving the legislature or Supreme Court and governing without them if the country faces “very difficult times.” Authoritarians nonetheless hold moderate support for democracy and democratic inclusion. The percentage of Brazilians in this family ranged from a low of 8.0 percent in 2017 to a high of 14.3 percent in 2019.

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

Explaining Liberal Democratic Attitudinal Dynamics in Brazil

In this section we identify likely explanations for changes in democratic attitudes in Brazil over time and rule out explanations for several of the temporal dynamics observed.

Four Analytic Perspectives

Highly variable democratic attitudes and mixed attitudinal profiles are not uncommon in relatively new democracies.¹⁰ Democratic culture is cultivated as multiple generations become socialized into democratic values, norms, and symbols.¹¹ A democratic tradition or democratic culture perspective is likely useful to understand *long-term* shifts in democratic attitudes and attitudinal profiles. However, it is not likely to shed light on *short-term* changes like those we observe in Brazil between 2012 and 2019.

According to an instrumental or performance-based perspective, volatile democratic attitudes are expected where democracy delivers sustained economic progress, political stability, and public safety.¹² Until it can deliver on its promises, citizens may view democracy instrumentally; they will be likely to assess it based on its ability to provide desirable economic, political, and

¹⁰ Borba, Julian, and Gabriela Ribeiro Cardoso. 2021. “Legitimidade democrática e apoio político: inovações recentes no debate internacional.” *Opinião Pública* (27): 333–59.

¹¹ Easton, David, and Dennis, Jack. 1967. “The Child’s Acquisition of Regime Norms: Political Efficacy.” *American Political Science Review* 61 (1): 25–38.

¹² Lipset, Seymour. 1959. “Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy.” *American Political Science Review* 53 (1): 69–105; Easton, David. 1965. *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*. New York: John Wiley & Sons; Magalhães, Pedro. 2014. “Government Effectiveness and Support for Democracy.” *European Journal of Political Research* (53): 77–97.

social outcomes.¹³ Given Brazil's inconsistent track record on such issues, many Brazilians may continue to ask "what has democracy done for me lately?"

The winners' consent perspective argues that citizens show greater support for democratic institutions when their preferred leader or party is in power.¹⁴ However, this support can be shallow and can accompany support for backsliding that advantages the incumbent. The winners' consent phenomenon makes democracy vulnerable to autocratizing leaders and, in turn, could produce variation in the nature, number, and social composition of profiles of democratic support over time.

Finally, democracy and democratic attitudes may be locked into a thermostatic relationship, which occurs when increases in rights of political minorities lead to the rejection of democracy by the majority, and to increases in public support for democracy when these rights become accepted and are subsequently removed or threatened.¹⁵ Our Brazilian case study can contribute new insights into the debate surrounding these analytic perspectives.¹⁶

Three Analytic Periods

We structure our examination of changes in democratic support profiles in Brazil around three analytic periods. The pre-2013 period represents the apex of Brazil's economic and political performance. Fueled by the commodity boom, President Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva presided over a massive expansion of the economy, stable prices and exchange rates, and major gains in poverty reduction. He passed the presidential sash to his protégé, Rousseff, in 2011. We refer to this as the *boomtimes* period.

However, boom led to bust. Rousseff suffered the misfortune of declining global commodity prices and the resulting deteriorating domestic economic outcomes.¹⁷ In 2013, demonstrations erupted in various cities. Initially focused on public transportation fare hikes, they expanded to protest government corruption, police brutality, and lack of funding for education and healthcare. The following year, the Federal Police started the Operation Lava Jato anticorruption criminal investigation, which targeted key public officials and businesspeople. In 2015, at the beginning of Rousseff's second term, anti-corruption protests erupted across the country, many of them calling for her impeachment. Protests continued throughout 2016 and ended with Rousseff's removal and Temer becoming President. The Brazilian right, which has been reinventing itself

¹³ Bratton, Michael, and Mattes, Robert. 2001. "Support for Democracy in Africa: Intrinsic or Instrumental?" *British Journal of Political Science* 31 (3): 447–74; Claassen, Christopher, and Magalhães, Pedro. 2022. "Effective Government and Evaluations of Democracy." *Comparative Political Studies* 55 (5): 869–94; Fuks, Mario, Gabriel Casalecchi, and Ednaldo Ribeiro. 2019. "Determinantes contextuais da coesão do sistema de crenças democrático: evidências a partir da América Latina." *Revista Brasileira de Ciência Política* 28: 7–32; Katz, Gabriel, and Ines Levin. 2016. "The Dynamics of Political Support in Emerging Democracies: Evidence from a Natural Disaster in Peru." *International Journal of Operational Research* 28: 173–95.

¹⁴ Cohen, Mollie, et al. 2022. "Winners' Consent? Citizen Commitment to Democracy When Illiberal Candidates Win Elections." *American Journal of Political Science*; Singer, Matthew M. 2021. "Fiddling while Democracy Burns: Partisan Reactions to Weak Democracy in Latin America." *Perspectives on Politics*: 1–18.

¹⁵ Claassen, Christopher. 2020. "In the Mood for Democracy? Democratic Support as Thermostatic Opinion." *American Political Science Review* 144 (1): 36–53. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055419000558>.

¹⁶ Tai, Yuehong C., Yue Hu, and Frederick Solt. 2022. "Democracy, Public Support, and Measurement Uncertainty." *American Political Science Review*: 1–7.

¹⁷ Campello, Daniela, and Zucco, Cesar. 2021. *The Volatility Curse: Exogenous Shocks and Representation in Resource-rich Democracies*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

and occupying the public sphere since the beginning of the 2000s, was very active in these protests.¹⁸ With Brazil's political class in full-blown crisis, Judge Sérgio Moro convicted Lula of corruption for allegedly receiving a condominium from a construction firm implicated in the Lava Jato scandal. This conviction plucked Lula out of the 2018 presidential race.

This period of deep political crises affected political elites, institutions, and parties, especially Lula and Rousseff's party, the PT. Since the massive demonstrations of 2013, the PT had been under heavy attack from the streets (Rousseff's sinking presidential approval), from the legislature (Rousseff's impeachment), and from the judiciary (Lula's imprisonment). At the same time, the economic crisis from Rousseff's first term continued, with excessive public spending and unchecked inflation.¹⁹ Following Hunter and Power, we refer to the time from the 2013 protests until Bolsonaro's 2018 election as the *perfect storm* period.²⁰

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

How well do the composition and distribution of democratic attitudes over time in Brazil comport with the analytic perspectives outlined above? A lack of observations and an abundance of variables present enormous challenges for drawing confident conclusions about causal relationships. We employ deductive reasoning to examine the theories against the data and proceed chronologically through the three analytic periods.

Boomtimes

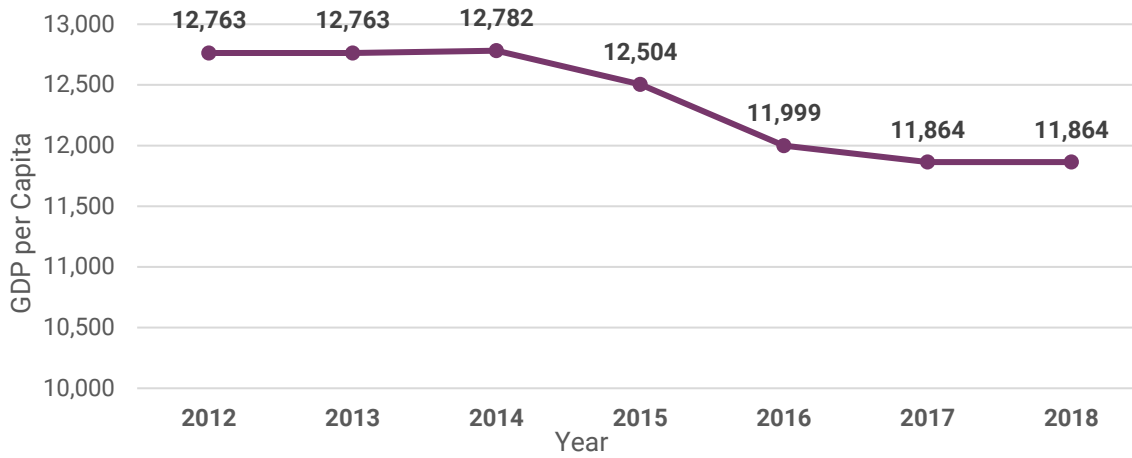
Unfortunately, we only have individual survey data from one year of Brazil's boomtimes, 2012. Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was over 12,500 United States dollars in 2012 and rising (Figure 7). Unemployment (Figure 8) and inflation rates (Figure 9) were in the single digits.

¹⁸ Rocha, C., E. Solano, and J. Medeiros. 2021. *The Bolsonaro Paradox: The Public Sphere and Right-Wing Counterpublicity in Contemporary Brazil*. Springer International Publishing.

¹⁹ Lapper, Richard. 2021. *Beef, Bible and Bullets: Brazil in the Age of Bolsonaro*. Manchester University Press.

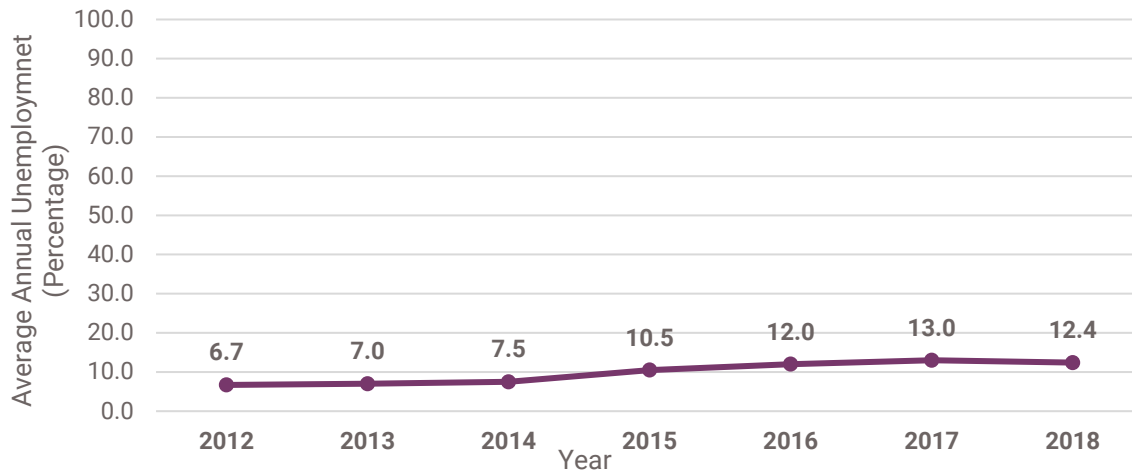
²⁰ Hunter, Wendy, and Timothy Power. 2019. "Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash." *Journal of Democracy* 30 (1): 68–82.

Figure 7: GDP per Capita in Brazil, 2012–2018

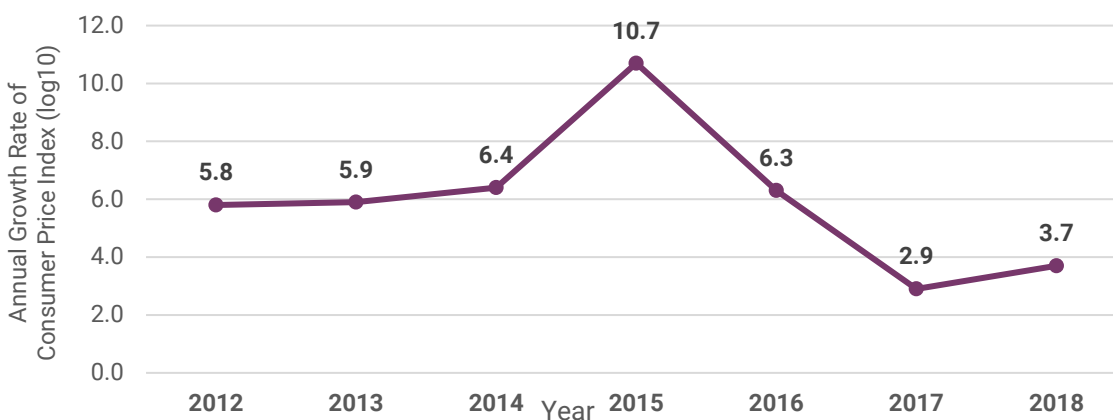


Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

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



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Figure 9: Annual Growth Rate of the Consumer Price Index in Brazil, 2012–2018

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

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

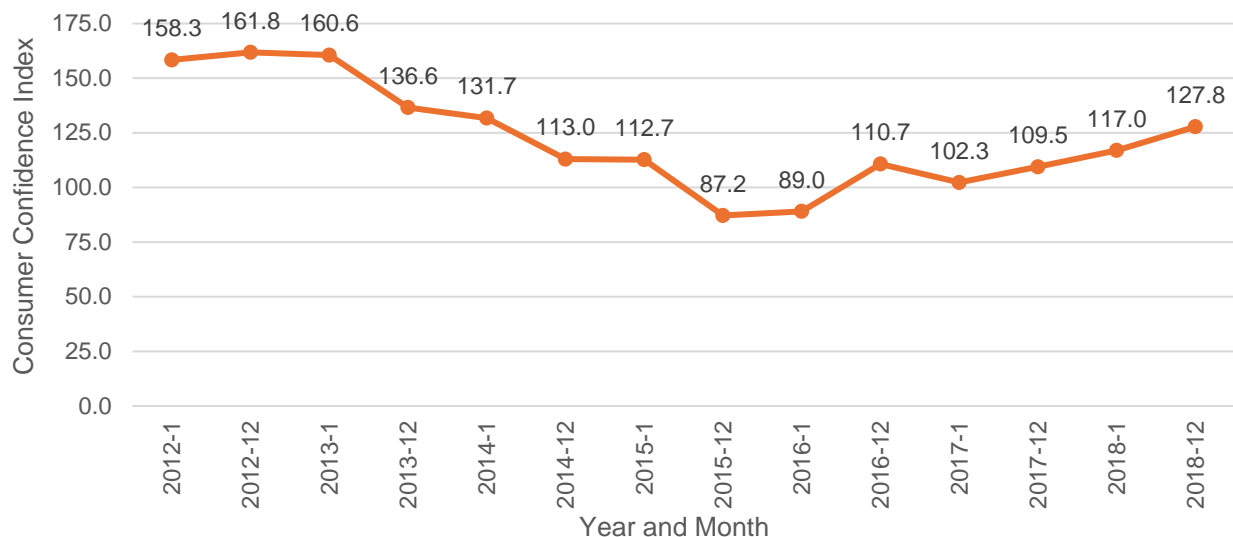
Perfect Storm

Nevertheless, good economic performance was not strong enough or long enough to buoy democratic attitudes through short-term performance failures.²¹ Political, economic, and social headwinds began buffeting Brazil between 2011 and 2012, as good economic times, characterized by low international interest rates and high commodity prices, came to an end.²² Unemployment and inflation were somewhat slow to react, but citizens could read the writing on the wall. Figure 10 shows that consumer confidence nosedived by 43.9 points, or 40.5 percent of the previous total value, between December 2012 and April 2016.²³ Impeachment proceedings began against Rousseff shortly thereafter.

²¹ We do not make an argument about the length of time that an economic decline must exist for the effect of short-term performance to be reflected in democratic attitudes. However, we expect short-term economic declines or improvements can lead to short-term changes in democratic support, even if they are followed by a few years of strong economic performance. The good economic performance was insufficient to fill the public reservoir of support for democracy. As a result, support for democracy remained to some extent instrumental and likely to change with short-term fluctuations in performance.

²² Campello and Zucco 2021.

²³ To place the magnitude of this drop in perspective, consumer confidence dropped 35 points, or 37 percent, during the beginning of COVID-19 in 2020, though the drop was much faster.

Figure 10: Brazil Consumer Confidence Index, 2012–2018

Source: Fundação Getúlio Vargas

Crises during the perfect storm clearly damaged democratic support. From 2012 to 2014, the institutionalist family shrunk by nearly half, to 47.4 percent of respondents, its lowest-recorded point. Military interventionists emerged in 2014 and accounted for 31.9 percent of respondents, its highest-recorded point. 2014–2017 saw a spike in the share of institutionalists, a substantial decrease in the share of military interventionists, and an increase in presidentialists, from 4.3 percent to 7.0 percent.

Democratic Backsliding

A period of democratic backsliding followed the perfect storm. Brazil's V-Dem Index score fell from 0.79 in 2015 to 0.70 in 2016, reaching the same level as Brazil's more troubled neighbors of Argentina and Peru. By 2018, the index declined even further, to 0.62, reaching a statistical tie with Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama.

Examining democratic support profiles from the perfect storm period to the democratic backsliding period revealed a series of nuanced developments. From 2017 to 2019, the percentage of institutionalists declined by 5 percentage points, to 52.4 percent. The percentage of military interventionists also declined, by 6 percentage points, to 17.8 percent. Yet the percentage of presidentialists increased by 4.1 percentage points, to 11.1 percent, an almost 50 percent increase.

In the wake of the perfect storm, it appeared that Bolsonaro's populist-nationalist rhetoric and illiberal ideas resonated enough with Brazilians to win him the presidency.²⁴ Bolsonaro's support

²⁴ Tamaki, Eduardo, Cezar Braga, and Mario Fuks. 2021. "A Drop in the Ocean or a Change in the Weather? Populism in Bolsonaro's Campaign Revisited." Team Populism, Leader Profile Series. https://populism.byu.edu/App_Data/LeaderProfiles/A%20Drop%20in%20the%20Ocean%20or%20a%20Change%20in%20the%20

could be attributable to changes in the public's democratic attitudes,²⁵ the awakening of illiberal attitudes,²⁶ the activation of latent populist attitudes,²⁷ or some blend of these explanations. Overall, the growth of undemocratic attitudes is consistent with what Claassen calls a "backlash," a reaction to a set of liberalizing policies, norms, and behaviors that increasingly menaced the privilege of a substantive, more conservative, segment of Brazilian society.²⁸ This wave of illiberal attitudes coinciding with the rise of Bolsonaro, who openly attacked civil liberties, the separation of powers, and political and social tolerance on the campaign trail and while in office, is probably not a coincidence.²⁹

Unfortunately, data limitations in the 2021 AmericasBarometer prevent us from adequately judging the counterfactual of the thermostatic proposition: that an expansion of illiberalism during the democratic backsliding period triggers a reverse backlash in which support for democracy grows. However, two other pieces of evidence point in this direction. First, the continued rise in support for democratic inclusion (Figure 5) could be a leading indicator of a broader democratic reaction. Second, cluster analysis suggests institutionalists rebounded in 2021 to comprising as much as 62.7 percent of the population; this would represent an almost 15 percentage point increase over the early part of the perfect storm in 2014 (see Figure A2.5 in Annex 2). While this result is suggestive, only time and additional data will tell whether we are witnessing a reverse backlash in defense of democracy.

Conclusion

Combining public opinion data, economic indicators, measures of the quality of democracy, and contextual information about the national politics of the last two decades, this work presents an overview of Brazil's recent democratic history. It attempts to bring evidence to bear on some of the most plausible explanations of variation in democratic support in Brazil.

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

Weather%20(2021).pdf; Castanho Silva, Bruno, Mario Fuks, and Eduardo Ryô Tamaki. 2022. "So Thin It's Almost Invisible: Populist Attitudes and Voting Behavior in Brazil." *Electoral Studies* 75: 102434.

²⁵ Cohen, Mollie et al. 2022. "Winners' Consent? Citizen Commitment to Democracy When Illiberal Candidates Win Elections." *American Journal of Political Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12690>.

²⁶ Castanho et al. 2022.

²⁷ Hawkins, Kirk A., Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, and Ioannis Andreadis. 2018. "The Activation of Populist Attitudes." *Government and Opposition* 55 (2): 283-307. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2018.23>.

²⁸ Claassen 2020.

²⁹ We suspect that performance failures, followed by a sharp decrease in support for the incumbent (Rousseff), led to the initial decrease in democratic attitudes during the perfect storm, independent of democratic backsliding. We also suspect that the democratic backsliding period produced a pro-democracy backlash. Data from the 2021 AmericasBarometer are consistent with this argument, though we acknowledge the limitations to inference that remain.

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

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

Theories that emphasize economic and political performance help to explain the dynamics of support for democracy in the first two periods, but they are not sufficient to explain changes observed in the current period, especially the positive variations of indicators of democratic support. The data from this period suggest a society divided between a group that reacts to the current President's assaults on democracy and another group more loyal to illiberal forms of government.

We agree in principle that short-run democratic backsliding is largely due to elite decision-making.³⁰ Bolsonaro's unilateral actions in office have clearly been aimed at, and succeeded in, damaging democratic institutions and norms. Bolsonaro continues to shape the thoughts and actions of millions of faithful followers. Therefore, we believe that illiberal shifts in the political context most directly altered the distribution and the dynamics of democratic attitudes in Brazil in more illiberal directions. However, we cannot rule out the possibility of the causal arrow running in both directions.

Based on these findings and additional preliminary analyses that showed that a reverse backlash in support for democracy is currently underway, we make the following tentative conclusions. Brazilians' belief systems became more coherent in the wake of the perfect storm. Since then, Brazil appears to be a divided society, with pushbacks against democracy and an embrace of alternative government structures on the one hand and growing niches of democratic reaction on the other. One worry is that the typical left-right cleavage is beginning to overlap with the pro-democracy/anti-democracy cleavage, which reinforces societal division. A fragile democratic tradition contributed to an instrumental withdrawal of loyalty to the regime in the perfect storm period, while recent institutional erosion during the democratic backsliding period could have sparked backlash to defending democracy. More research is needed to test whether and to what extent this conclusion accurately captures reality.

³⁰ Haggard, Stephan, and Robert Kaufman. 2021. *Backsliding: Democratic Regress in the Contemporary World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Tai et al 2022; Mainwaring, Scott, and Anibal Pérez-Liñán. 2014. *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America: Emergence, Survival, and Fall*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University.

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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.³¹ 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>

³¹ Campello, Ricardo, Davoud Moulavi, and Jörg Sander. 2013. "Density-based clustering based on hierarchical density estimates." Pacific-Asia conference on knowledge discovery and data mining. Springer. p. 160-172.

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

DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES ¹	QUESTIONS
	<p>D4. How strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people appearing on television to make speeches? <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. Item JC13 was administered to one-quarter of the sample and JC15A to one-half of the sample. About 24 percent of the sample was asked the two questions. We used this portion of the sample to conduct cluster analysis.

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

Annex 2. 2012–2021 Cluster Results

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

Figure A2.1: 2012 Cluster Results

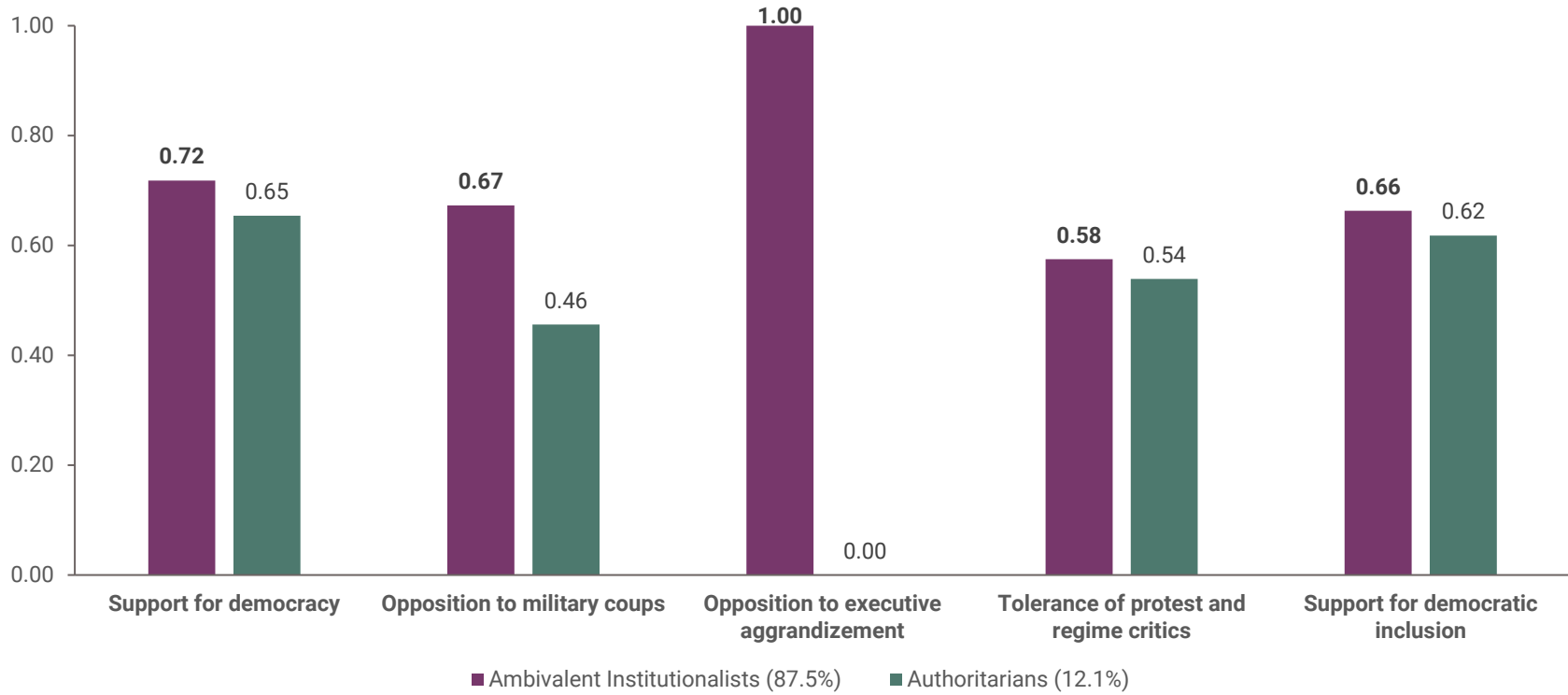


Figure A2.2: 2014 Cluster Results

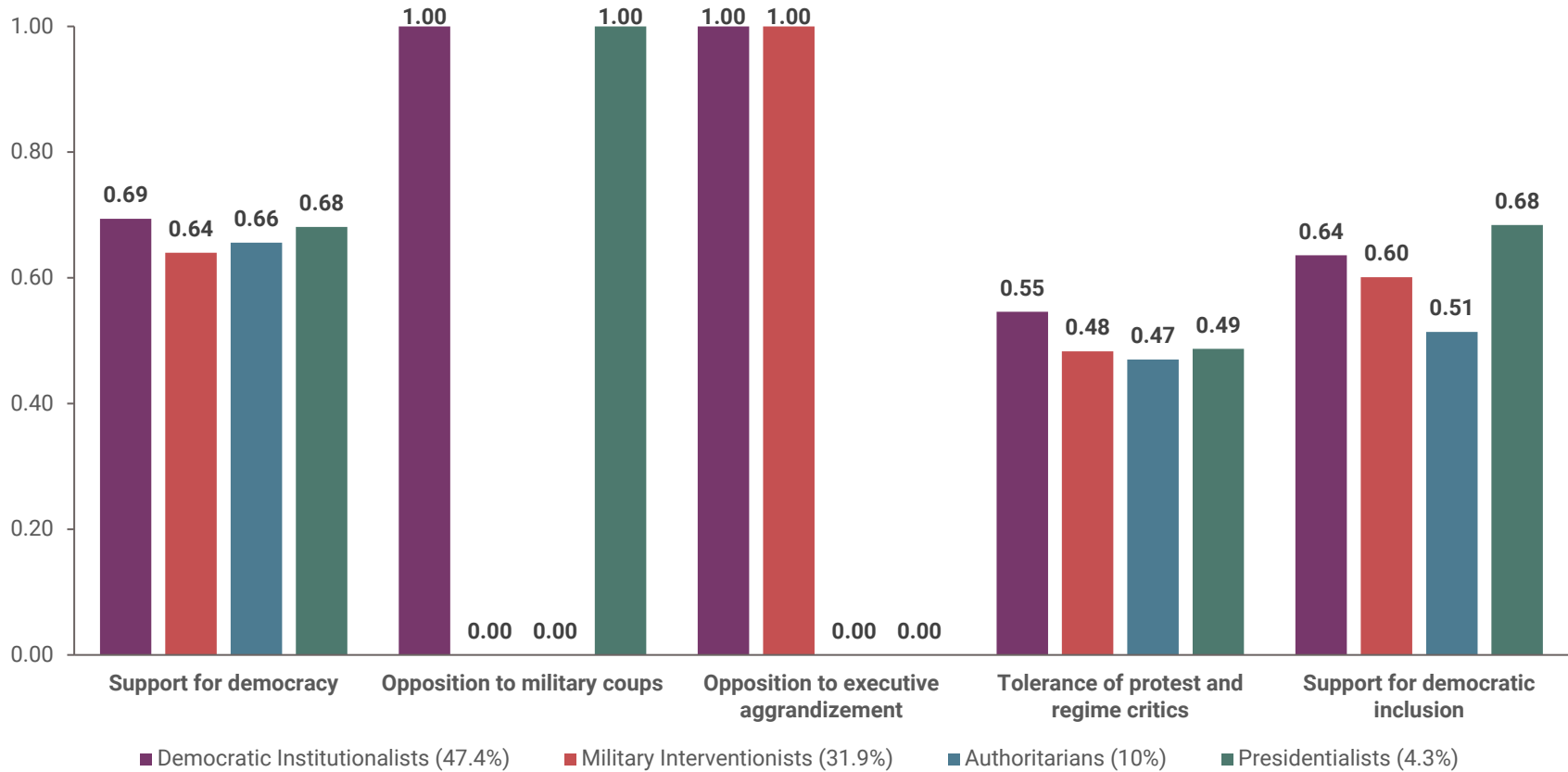


Figure A2.3: 2017 Cluster Results

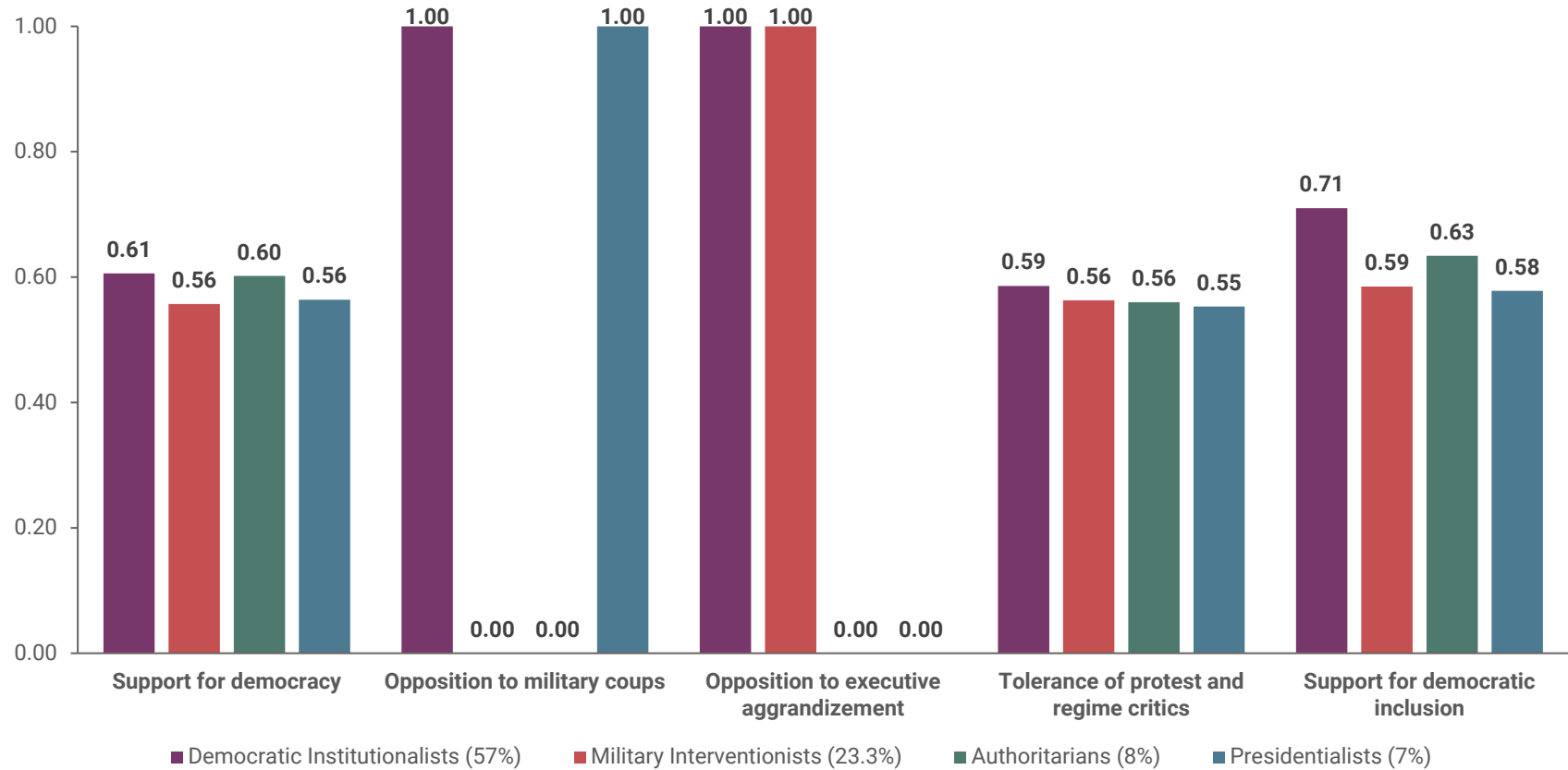


Figure A2.4: 2019 Cluster Results

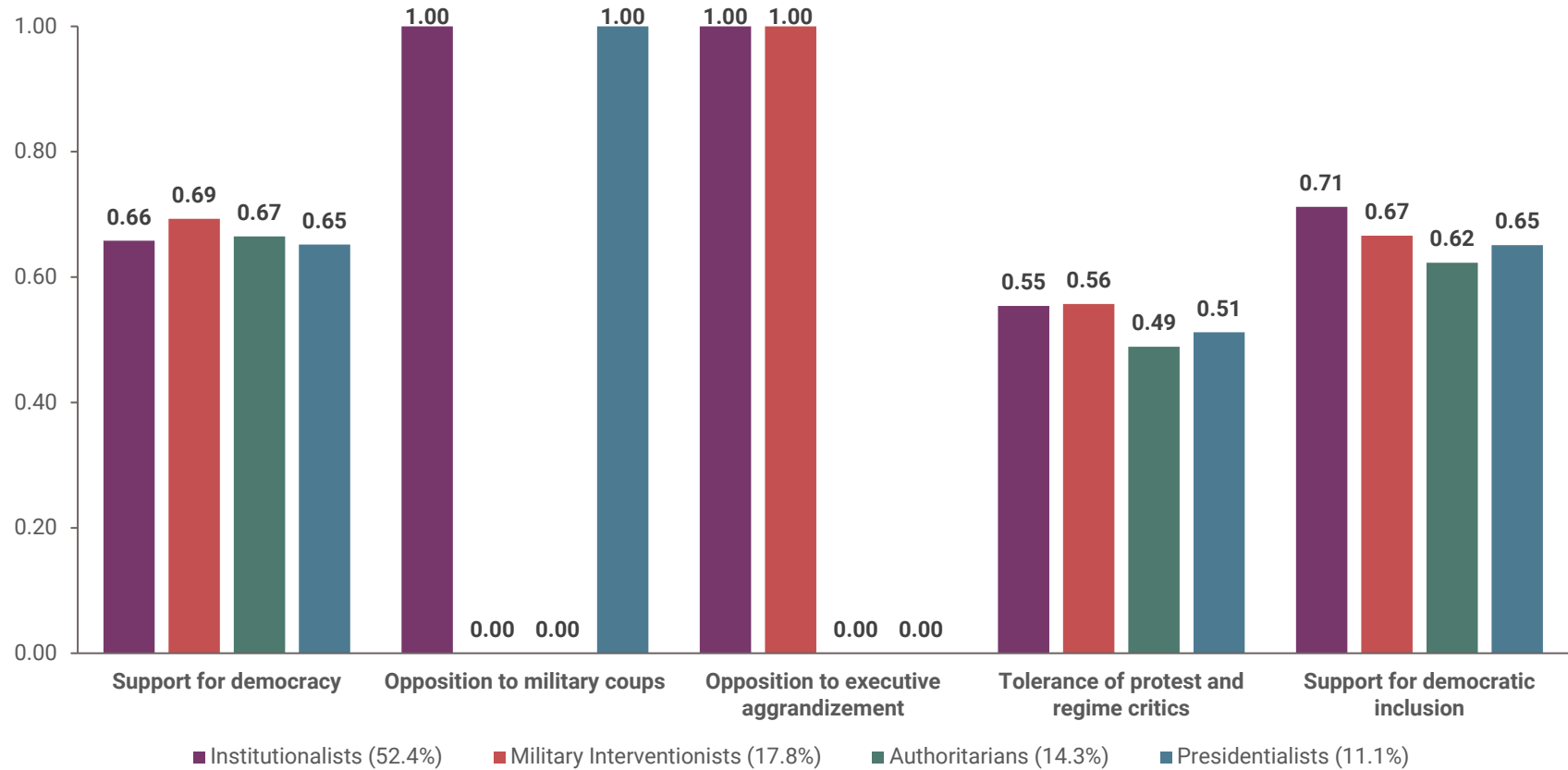


Figure A2.5: 2021 Cluster Results

