

Democratic Values and Support for Executive Power

July 22, 2021

Abstract

Attempts by elected executives to consolidate power have generated alarm and raised concern about democratic backsliding. In contrast with scholarship on public approval ratings of elected executives, we study the nature of mass attitudes toward the institutional power of the office of the presidency. We investigate the potential for mass publics to constrain antidemocratic behavior and argue that individuals' democratic values shape views of executive power. Using data from twenty-six countries in the Americas and thirty-seven countries in Africa, we find support for our perspective. Individuals who express stronger commitments to democracy are less supportive of institutional arrangements that favor the executive. Our findings suggest that citizens' democratic commitments may constrain the ambitions of power-seeking executives and the erosion of democratic practices.

Democratic regimes are vulnerable to the political ambitions of would-be authoritarians. In recent years, elected executives in countries such as Turkey, Hungary, and Poland have expanded their power by enacting anti-democratic reforms. In the United States, critics frequently charged Donald Trump's presidency of nascent authoritarianism. These developments prompted concern about the potential for democratic backsliding, in which elected leaders use the democratic process to consolidate their power, thereby weakening democracy.

Stoking these concerns, elected presidents around the world have sought or endorsed popular referenda to extend their terms and increase their authority. The results of these initiatives provide a mixed portrait of popular appetites for executive power. Electorates in Russia,¹ Guinea,² Egypt,³ and Turkey⁴ voted to extend or remove term limits and expand the president's formal powers. Following these votes, incumbent presidents seemed poised to strengthen their grips on power. Yet other voters approved new limits on presidential powers in Kenya⁵ and Algeria,⁶ and rejected attempts to relax presidential term limits in Ecuador⁷ and Bolivia.⁸ In these settings, public opposition constrained the ambitions of their country's leaders. What explains variation in these outcomes across countries, and what structures voters' decisions in these contexts?

In this paper, we study the nature of mass attitudes toward executive power. In contrast with research on public approval ratings of individual presidents (Arce 2003; Buendia

¹Scott Neuman. 2020. "Referendum In Russia Passes, Allowing Putin To Remain President Until 2036." *NPR* July 1. <https://www.npr.org/2020/07/01/886440694/referendum-in-russia-passes-allowing-putin-to-remain-president-until-2036>.

²"Guinea votes in controversial referendum seen as presidential power grab." 2020. *RFI* March 22. <https://www.rfi.fr/en/international/20200322-guinea-votes-controversial-referendum-seen-as-presidential-power-grab-alpha-conde-coronavirus>.

³Reuters Staff. 2019. "Egyptian voters back constitutional changes giving more power to President Sisi." *Reuters* April 23. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-election/egyptian-voters-back-constitutional-changes-giving-more-power-to-president-sisi-idUSKCN1RZ229>.

⁴Patrick Kingsley. 2017. "Erdogan Claims Vast Powers in Turkey After Narrow Victory in Referendum." *New York Times* April 16. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/16/world/europe/turkey-referendum-polls-erdogan.html>.

⁵James Macharia and George Obulutsa. 2010. "Kenya votes 'Yes' to new constitution." *Reuters* August 5. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kenya-referendum/kenya-votes-yes-to-new-constitution-idUSTRE6743G720100805>.

⁶Ahmed Rouaba. 2020. "Algeria referendum: A vote 'to end years of deviousness'." *BBC* November 1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54748146>.

⁷Simeon Tegel. 2018. "A referendum in Ecuador is another defeat for South America's left-wing populists." *Washington Post* February 5. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/02/05/a-referendum-in-ecuador-is-another-defeat-for-south-americas-left-wing-populists/>.

⁸Nicholas Casey and Monica Machicao. 2016. "Referendum to Let Bolivian President Seek a Fourth Term Appears Headed for Defeat." *New York Times* February 21. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/22/world/americas/bolivia-to-vote-on-term-limits-amid-growing-doubts-about-its-president.html>.

1994; Carlin, Love, and Martínez-Gallardo 2015; Carlin et al. 2018; Treisman 2011), we study public views about the institutional power belonging to the presidential office. This latter quantity is an indicator of popular support for political regimes rather than political figures (Easton 1975). Despite increased attention among scholars of comparative politics to the relationship between executive power and democratic stability, existing evidence about public opinion toward executive power is limited largely to the United States (e.g., Christenson and Kriner 2020; Reeves and Rogowski 2016). We draw from several strands of research to develop and test hypotheses about public attitudes toward executive power. According to one perspective, public opinion toward political institutions reflects individuals' political alignment with those institutions (Bartels and Johnston 2013; Bartels and Kramon 2020). This perspective suggests that the public views executive power through their partisan affiliation and short-term political interests. Therefore, we test the hypothesis that individuals are more supportive of executive power when they are politically aligned with the incumbent president, and less supportive when the presidency is controlled by the political opposition. We advance an alternative perspective based on the theory of political legitimacy (Gibson, Caldeira, and Baird 1998), in which views of political institutions are rooted in core values about the nature and organization of government. We argue that beliefs about executive power are linked to individuals' commitments to democracy and the rule of law (Reeves and Rogowski 2016). This account suggests that stronger commitments to democratic principles result in diminished support for executive power.

We test these accounts using survey data from AmericasBarometer and the Afrobarometer series. Altogether, we analyze evaluations of executive power from 26 countries in the Americas between 2010 and 2019 and 37 countries in Africa between 2000 and 2019. Across a range of measures and in between- and within-country analyses, we find consistent support for both accounts. Supporters of the incumbent president express more favorable views toward executive power. Consistent with our argument, we also show that individuals who express commitments to democracy and the rule of law are less supportive of enhanced executive power. In additional cross-national analysis, we provide suggestive evidence that public attitudes toward executive power are associated with the governing characteristics of a country's regime. Our results demonstrate that attitudes toward the institutions of

government are not shaped only by partisanship and other ephemeral political factors, but also citizens' core commitments to values over governance. We further suggest that public antipathy toward executive power is a potential defense against executive aggrandizement and the democratic backsliding with which it is associated.

Presidentialism and Executive Power

Scholarship on presidentialism considers large-scale questions of institutional design, often focusing on the stability and duration of presidential systems vis-à-vis parliamentary systems (Carey and Shugart 1998; Cheibub 2007; Linz 1990; Mainwaring and Shugart 1997a; Morgenstern, Polga-Hecimovich, and Shair-Rosenfield 2013; Negretto 2013; Przeworski et al. 2000). A central tenet of presidential systems is that chief executives possess a “strong claim to democratic, even plebiscitarian, legitimacy” (Linz 1990, 53). This plebiscitarian legitimacy owes to the president's independent election, through which presidents make direct appeals to their constituents and claim popular mandates for their agendas. While popular elections may enhance accountability (e.g., Maskin and Tirole 2004), in the context of presidentialism this selection mechanism may undermine regime stability. According to Linz (1990, 48), plebiscitarian legitimacy may lead presidents to refuse to acknowledge the limits of their popular mandates, such that “compromise, negotiation, and power-sharing” occur only as “necessary antinomies—deviations from the rules of the system.” Presidents' personal sources of power may lead them to take actions that are harmful to the democratic system through which they were elected.

Fear of executive overreach is one of the primary concerns in debates over the merits of presidential systems. A focus of studies of executive power is the use of unilateral or decree powers. This scholarship considers how to measure presidential powers across contexts (e.g., Metcalf 2000; Shugart and Carey 1992) and identifies the institutional conditions under which presidents opt to exercise unilateral powers, especially as it relates to the legislative branch (Carey and Shugart 1998; Cheibub 2007; Mainwaring and Shugart 1997b; Palanza 2019; Pereira, Power, and Rennó 2005). Often, these analyses probe whether executive actions better reflect a seizure of power from or delegation of authority by the legislature

(Carey and Shugart 1998) and the conditions under which interbranch conflicts emerge over their use (Shugart and Carey 1992).

Despite a robust literature on public attitudes toward governing institutions in the comparative context (e.g., Inglehart 2003), studies on presidentialism often overlook public opinion about executive power. To the extent scholarship evaluates public opinion toward executives, it studies presidential approval ratings, which is mostly considered as a currency with which to bargain with the legislative branch (Calvo 2014; Helmke 2017; Neustadt 1960; Palanza 2019; Pereira, Power, and Rennó 2005; Reich 2002). Yet attitudes about executive power and its exercise may also structure incentives for presidents to draw upon it. Most theoretical and empirical accounts ignore the role of public opinion toward presidential governance for shaping the politics of executive power (but see, for example, Hassan 2015).

How the Public Views Executive Power

As the threat of military coups d'état overthrowing democratic government declined markedly after the Cold War, accounts of democratic erosion emphasize the potential for elected officials—especially chief executives—to undermine democratic processes (Bermeo 2016; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). These analyses often neglect or deny the role of public sentiment in explaining democratic backsliding (or its absence). Given the agency relationship between voters and officeholders (Fearon 1999), voters could deter behavior that erodes democratic practices by punishing officeholders who do so. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, 19) raise the possibility that “the fate of a government lies in the hands of its citizens. If people hold democratic values, democracy will be safe. If citizens are open to authoritarian appeals, then, sooner or later, democracy will be in trouble.” Popular accounts of executive power grabs often depict executives’ supporters as complicit in their accumulation of power but conflate political support for an individual leader with beliefs about the institutional authority that accompanies the office the leader inhabits. These critiques mostly ignore the possibility that mass publics might have meaningful attitudes toward executive power, which could be mobilized against the president by political parties and other organized groups.

Existing scholarship offers competing perspectives about the capacity for voters to hold

and act upon democratic values. One perspective argues that factors such as partisanship, ideology, and personal loyalties dominate public evaluations of political institutions. According to this account, attitudes toward political power are mirrors of popular support for the individual who would wield it (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 191). The implicit assumption is that voters make political decisions that reflect a leader's popularity. In the context of executive power, this perspective predicts that individuals endorse the power of the presidency to the extent they approve of the individual who serves as president. For example, Christenson and Kriner (2020) argue that American voters who support the executive also support executive aggrandizement. In its strongest form, this view denies that voters have meaningful preferences about political power and procedures that could influence evaluations of political officials and the outcomes they achieve. Accordingly, this perspective suggests that citizens are ill-equipped to defend democratic institutions against erosion from within.

Evidence from institutions other than presidencies supports weaker versions of this perspective. This scholarship links evaluations of governing regimes and political institutions to the public's instrumental partisan and political motivations. Individuals tend to view the US Supreme Court as more legitimate when they issue opinions with which they agree (Bartels and Johnston 2013). Similarly, evidence from African public opinion shows that individuals support strong judicial checks on the presidency when they do not share the president's partisanship, and weaker checks when they are from the same party (Bartels and Kramon 2020). More generally, survey respondents report greater trust in government when their copartisans are in power (Morisi, Jost, and Singh 2019). Both versions of this perspective hypothesize that evaluations of executive power reflect individuals' political support for the sitting president, though they differ on whether this is the only relevant consideration that shapes these attitudes.

We advance an alternative view in which the public holds meaningful beliefs about how officials wield political power. Mass publics often express support for democracy and democratic values in the abstract (e.g., Inglehart 2003), and these beliefs shape how voters evaluate candidates and politicians. Recent scholarship shows that voters act upon their democratic values and impose electoral penalties on US political candidates who endorse anti-democratic tactics (Graham and Svobik 2020) and suggests that these beliefs are linked to the endurance

of democratic practices (Claassen 2020). With respect to attitudes about executive power, Reeves and Rogowski (2016) establishes a link between Americans' commitments to democratic values and their beliefs about presidential unilateral action. According to this research, individuals with stronger commitments to democratic practices and the rule of law are less likely to endorse concentrating power in the presidency. This perspective provides a more sanguine view about the potential for mass publics to constrain ambitious executives. If the president's political rivals can successfully generate popular backlash by appealing to the public's democratic commitments following acts of executive overreach (Christenson and Kriner 2020), presidents would have incentives to practice forbearance (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018) or otherwise risk public disapproval.

The perspectives above highlight the theoretical and normative stakes of understanding how citizens view executive power and suggest two hypotheses about the sources of these attitudes. We build upon previous research in American politics (Christenson and Kriner 2020; Posner and Vermeule 2010; Reeves and Rogowski 2018) by identifying contextual and individual-level sources of attitudes toward executive power in comparative context. So doing, we take a broader approach than is typically found in the study of executive politics. While the US and Latin America are the "traditional focus" of studies of presidentialism (Chaisty, Cheeseman, and Power 2014), our study of public views toward executive power also includes African countries. The additional breadth allows us to examine the nature of public opinion across regions with distinct contemporary and historical experiences with executive power (for an overview, see Prempeh 2008). Our cross-country approach also allows us to contextualize previous research on Americans' orientations toward executive power within the range of opinions held by citizens of other countries and to evaluate whether attitudes toward unilateral power in the United States are "a culturally specific phenomenon" (Posner and Vermeule 2010, 188). Finally, our investigation relates attitudes about executive power to more fundamental questions about support for democratic governance.⁹ We focus particularly on evaluating the potential for mass publics to serve as a backstop against the

⁹Przeworski (2019, 100-102) critiques the meaning of survey reports of democratic attitudes arguing that "one should not draw inferences about the survival of democracy from answers to survey questions" (102). Our project here is to show the relationship between support for democracy and a resistance to the expansion of executive power, which has implications for democratic survival.

erosion of democratic practices by power-seeking executives. In addressing these research questions, we contribute to other scholarship on cross-national attitudes toward political institutions including the judiciary (e.g., Bartels and Kramon 2020; Driscoll and Nelson 2018; Gibson, Caldeira, and Baird 1998), legislatures (e.g., Mishler and Rose 1994), and chief executives (e.g., Bratton 2007; Dulani and Tengatenga 2020).

Data and Measures

We measure diffuse support for executive power among the mass public using survey data from countries of the Americas and Africa. For the Americas, we rely on the AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project. This series of surveys “is the only scientifically rigorous comparative survey that covers thirty-four nations including all of North, Central, and South America, as well as a significant number of countries in the Caribbean.” Our analysis of respondents from the Americas includes data from twenty-six countries from 2010 to 2019. We study attitudes among respondents in Africa using survey data from the Afrobarometer series. Afrobarometer is a “non-partisan, pan-African research institution conducting public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, the economy and society in 30+ countries repeated on a regular cycle.” Afrobarometer includes a subset of countries based on “the availability of funding, security conditions in the country, and the ability of citizens in that country to speak freely.”¹⁰ Our analysis includes all cases from AmericasBarometer and Afrobarometer for which our question of interest were asked.¹¹ For a full summary of question wording and choice sets, see Tables A.1 and A.2.

Measuring Support for Executive Power

The AmericasBarometer and Afrobarometer surveys both contain several questions that measure attitudes toward the concentration of executive power. These questions ask about executive power in the context of other political institutions. Respondents are asked whether they approve of the expansion of executive power as it relates to either the courts or legislative

¹⁰“Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).” *Afrobarometer*. <http://afrobarometer.org/about/faqs>.

¹¹Afrobarometer excludes Ethiopia from their merged Round 5 release and advises analysts to exclude it from any comparative analyses related to democracy. We follow that advice and do not include it in our analyses. “Special note about Ethiopia data.” *Afrobarometer*. <http://afrobarometer.org/data/special-note-about-ethiopia-data>.

branch. These questions allows us to characterize beliefs about executive power within the larger context in which presidents govern and without reference to the specific presidential occupant. While these questions address similar concepts, the survey instruments vary between the AmericasBarometer and Afrobarometer surveys.

Support for Executive Power, the Americas. From the AmericasBarometer, we analyze two questions on evaluations of executive power which ask respondents whether it is justifiable during an emergency for the president to suspend and govern without either the legislative or judicial bodies. The specific question wordings (also presented in Table A.1) are:

- “Do you believe that when the country is facing very difficult times it is justifiable for the president of the country to close the Congress/Parliament and govern without Congress/Parliament?” and,
- “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/Constitutional Tribunal and govern without the Supreme Court/Constitutional Tribunal?”

We refer to these survey instruments in shorthand as, respectively, *close legislature* and *dissolve courts*. Each item allows respondents a binary choice of whether they believe the act is justified. Support for executive power is low throughout the Americas. Overall, only 17 percent of respondents agreed that the executive would be justified to “close Congress [Parliament] during difficult times,” and ranged from 14 percent in 2010 and 2012 to 25 percent in 2019. Similarly, support for closing the supreme court or constitutional tribunal was 14 percent and ranged annually from 11 percent in 2012 to 30 percent in 2019. As with all summary statistics we report, these are adjusted using survey weights.

Attitudes toward executive power varied across countries though they are still generally negative. Aggregating responses to the country level, the mean and median levels of support for governing without the legislature are 16 percent, with no country reporting support higher than 32 percent.¹² Support for governing without courts is even lower, as the mean and median country-level support was 14 percent, and no country other than Peru reported

¹²Support for this question is highest in Peru especially in 2019 when respondents expressed 59 and 50 percent support for support for executive rule vis-à-vis both the legislature and the court, respectively. These exceptional patterns may reflect political turmoil and dysfunction, which culminated with President Vizcarra dissolving Congress in 2019 amid a prolonged corruption crisis. Anatoly Kurmanaev and Andrea Zarate. 2019. “Peru’s President Dissolves Congress, and Lawmakers Suspend Him.” *New York Times* September 30.

support for governing without the judiciary from more than a quarter of respondents.¹³

Support for Executive Power, Africa. We use four measures of attitudes toward executive power included in the Afrobarometer surveys. The first survey instrument queries whether respondents approve of abolishing elections and parliament in favor of presidential rule. The question asks:

- “There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives? Elections and Parliament are abolished so that the president can decide everything.”

We refer to this question as *decides everything*. For ease of interpretation, we collapse the five-point scale of agreement to a binary indicator of support and provide additional analyses of alternative coding in the appendices. We again find substantial opposition to executive authority among respondents from countries of Africa. Overall, 88 percent of respondents disapprove of presidents governing unilaterally, and only 12 percent approve. Aggregated by country, median support for abolishing elections and parliament in favor of presidential rule stands at ten percent.

Three additional questions evaluate related dimensions of respondents’ attitudes toward executive power. In each, respondents were presented with two statements about executive power and asked to choose one that best reflected their beliefs. The pairs of statements were:

- “Since the President was elected to lead the country, he should not be bound by laws or court decisions that he thinks are wrong.” OR “The President must always obey the laws and the courts, even if he thinks they are wrong.”
- “Parliament should ensure that the President explains to it on a regular basis how his government spends taxpayers’ money.” OR “The President should be able to devote his full attention to developing the country rather than wasting time justifying his actions.”
- “Members of Parliament represent the people; therefore they should make laws for this country, even if the President does not agree.” OR “Since the President represents all of us, he should pass laws without worrying about what Parliament thinks.”

After reading each pair of statements, respondents selected a response option and indicated whether they “agree strongly with” or “agree with” it. For each question, we create measures of support for executive power by creating a binary indicator for agreeing or strongly agree

¹³For additional descriptive analyses, see Zechmeister and Lupu (2019).

with the pro-executive power statement.¹⁴ We refer to these questions as *not bound by laws*, *doesn't have to justify*, and *pass laws without congress*, respectively. Across the survey instruments, we again find low levels of support for presidential power with support for the pro-executive power statement ranging from 12 percent (not bound by laws) to 34 percent (doesn't have to justify).

Measuring Support for Democracy and Executive Approval

For the AmericasBarometer surveys, we rely on a survey instrument that asks broadly about support for democracy. Respondents were asked to use a seven-point scale to evaluate whether they think democracy is the most preferable form of government. Higher scores indicate more positive evaluations of democracy relative to other systems. Since 2010, annual support for democracy ranged from 4.7 to 5.3. Mean-levels of support by country range from a low of 4.5 in Saint Lucia to a high of 6.0 in Uruguay. To measure specific support for the person holding executive office for the AmericasBarometer surveys, we rely on a survey instrument that asks respondents to rate the job performance of the president or prime minister, as appropriate from very good to very bad. The full question wordings and choice sets for all items we used from the AmericasBarometer are presented in Table A.1.

The Afrobarometer surveys measure support for democracy by providing respondents with three statements and asking which most closely reflects their opinion. Similar to the AmericasBarometer question, the first statement is that, “Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.” The second statement is that, “In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable,” and the third statement is that “For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.” We code *support for democracy* as a three-point indicator where preferring a non-democratic government is coded as one, seeing no difference is coded as two, and preferring democracy is three. Overall, 73 percent of respondents—nearly three-quarters—identify democracy as preferable to any other kind of

¹⁴In the appendix, we explore alternative approaches to this coding. It is a tempting idea to scale these measures together to create a single index of support for executive power. But this is difficult to justify. Though the measures are positively correlated with each other, their Cronbach's alpha is .4 indicating that they are not each reliably measuring the same underlying concept. Conducting a principal component analysis yields similar finding. The first dimension explains just 38 percent of the variance with each additional dimension explaining between 18 and 24 percent of the variance. These concepts appear to be measuring somewhat different conceptions of executive power and so we analyze them separately.

government with fourteen percent and thirteen percent viewing other forms of government as potentially preferable or not believing it matters, respectively.

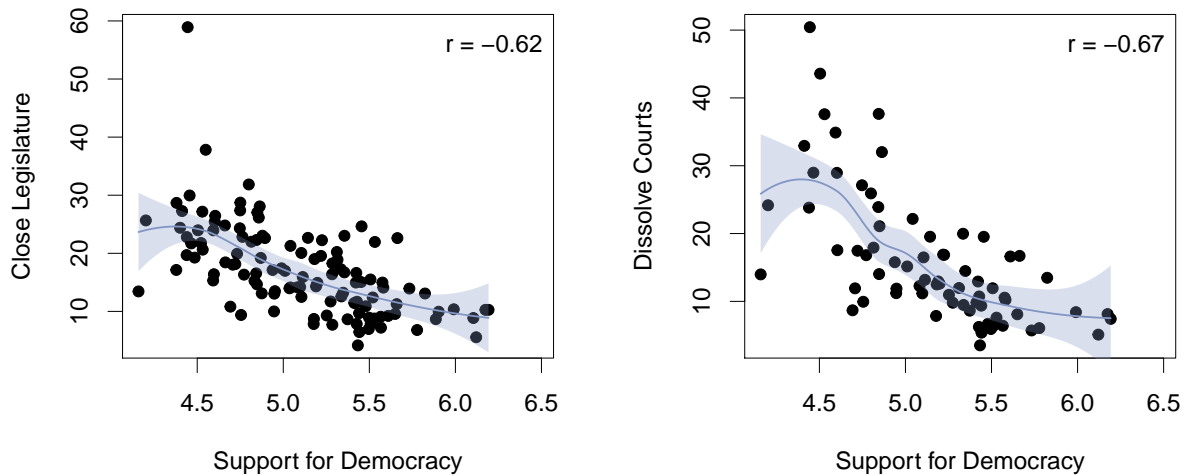
We also measure individuals' political alignment with the current president using a measure of approval from Afrobarometer. Respondents were asked whether they approved or disapproved of how the president performed his/her job over the past twelve months. *Executive approval* was asked on a four-point scale ranging from "strongly disapprove" (1) to "strongly approve" (4). Full question wordings and response sets are presented in Table A.2.

Aggregate Evaluations of Executive Power

We begin by evaluating the relationship between belief in democracy and support for executive power at the national level. Do countries that express greater support for democracy also report greater antipathy toward executive power? Figure 1 plots the relationship for the AmericasBarometer surveys. For each country and wave, we calculate mean levels of support for democracy, which we plot on the x -axis, and support for executive power, which we plot on the y -axis. The y -axes of show the percentage of respondents by country/wave that believe it is acceptable for the president or prime minister to close the legislature (left panel) or dissolve the high court (right panel) and government without them. Along the x -axes, we plot the average level of *support for democracy* along a seven-point scale for each country-wave combination. We include a local polynomial regression line and indicate the correlations in the upper right-hand corners of each panel. Consistent with our argument, the figure shows a strong negative relationship between *support for democracy* and support for executive power as measured by *close legislature* and *dissolve courts*. Even though *support for democracy* is relatively high, with all country/wave scores falling between 4.2 and 6.5, the pattern is clear. The correlations are negative and relatively strong. Based on the bivariate regression, every one-point increase in national support for democracy is associated with a decline of about ten points in support for closing the legislature and about fourteen points in support for dissolving courts and allowing presidential rule.

Figure 2 presents the relationship between *support for democracy* and our four measures of support for executive power at the country-wave level for the Afrobarometer surveys. For

Figure 1: Support for Democracy and Attitudes toward Presidential Power in Countries of the Americas

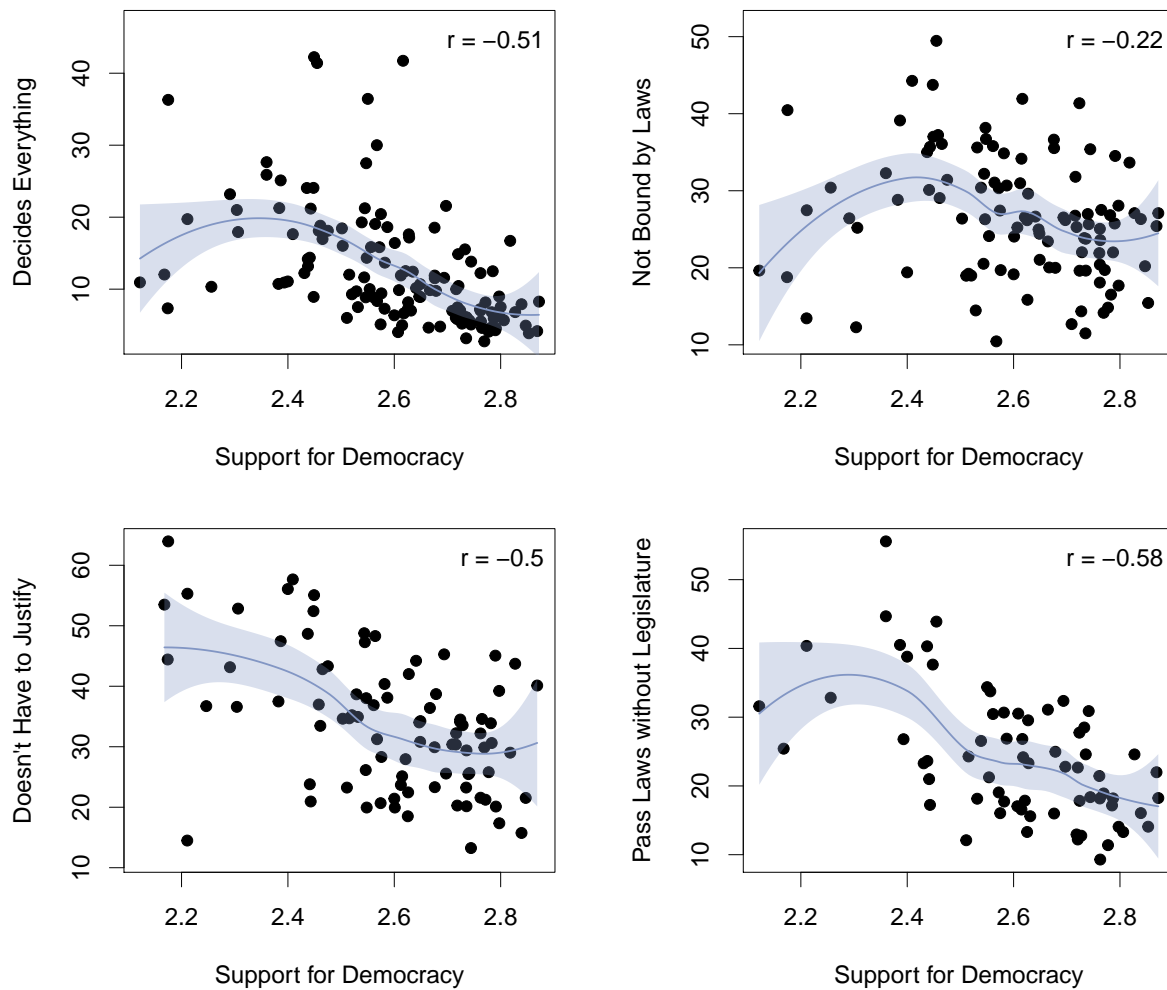


Note: Each point represents the mean score of respondents for each country survey wave. Support for Democracy is measured along a seven-point scale of agreement that democracy is better than any other form of government. A score of seven indicates strong agreement with that statement. Support for closing the legislature and dissolving courts reflects aggregate percentages of individuals who support each action. Values are weighted for cross-country comparisons.

the Afrobarometer surveys, *support for democracy* is measured along a three point scale and all measures of support for executive power are binary indicators and indicate the percent of support when aggregated to the country-wave level. We again find negative correlations between commitments to democracy and attitudes toward executive power. The correlations range from -0.58 to -0.22 . Across country-years and measures, we find consistent evidence that stronger commitments to democracy and the rule of law are associated with more negative evaluations of executive power.

The patterns shown in Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate that across the Americas and Africa, countries with stronger beliefs in core values associated with democracy also report lower levels of support for executive authority. Even incremental increases in core beliefs about the conduct of government are associated with changing aggregate support for executive power. At the aggregate level across dozens of countries, stronger democratic commitments are associated with more skeptical orientations toward executive power.

Figure 2: Support for Democracy and Attitudes toward Presidential Power in African Countries



Note: Each point is the mean score for a country survey wave. Support for democracy is measured on a three point scale. The four measures of support for executive power are measured as binary indicators of support. Values are weighted for cross-country comparisons.

Individual Attitudes toward Executive Power

We now examine the relationship between support for democracy and support for executive power at the individual level across our samples. As with the aggregate analyses, we explore whether support for democracy structure attitudes about the bounds of power of executives. We also evaluate the alternative perspective that views of executive power reflect individuals' political support for the person who holds executive office.

We conduct our individual-level analyses by regressing each measure of attitude toward executive power on respondents' support for democracy. For each of the AmericasBarometer and Afrobarometer surveys, we use their respective measures of support for democracy to model the variety of attitudes toward executive powers we previously described. All models also include the measure of *executive approval* as previously described. To better grasp the strength of relationships across analyses, we standardize some of our measures. We measure approval of the executive officeholder with a binary indicator. All of our measures of executive power are also included as binary indicators of support. For the two measures of support for democracy (i.e., the seven-point scale for the AmericasBarometer and the three-point scale for the Afrobarometer), we rescale each measure so that it ranges from zero to one. The estimated coefficients can therefore be interpreted across models as a shift from the lowest level of support for democracy to the highest.

To account for variation in political context and institutions across country and time, and which could confound the relationship between individual characteristics and views toward executive power, we include country-wave fixed effects in all models.¹⁵ With this specification, we estimate linear probability models and cluster standard errors on country-wave. Therefore, our coefficients of interest are identified with variation in executive approval and core values among respondents from the same country and survey wave. Given the perspectives outlined above, we test the hypotheses that executive approval is positively associated with and democratic values are negatively associated with support for executive power.

Individual Results, the Americas. Table 1 presents our individual-level analysis of the AmericasBarometer surveys. The first column shows results for whether respondents believe it is justifiable for the president to close the legislature during difficult times (i.e., *close legislature*), and the second column shows analogous results for closing the courts (i.e., *dissolve courts*). We include demographic variables including age, gender, education, income, and marital status to account for to account for other individual-level factors that may

¹⁵Cross-national differences in evaluations of executive power could reflect differences in formal powers enshrined in countries' constitutions. The country-wave fixed effects account for baseline differences in attitudes toward executive power that could reflect these country-level sources of variation. Future research could evaluate how constitutional differences affect public opinion toward political institutions.

influence political attitudes and whose distributions are likely to vary across countries.

We find similar results for both models in Table 1. Consistent with results from the US (Reeves and Rogowski 2016), *executive approval* is positively related to support for executive power, as the coefficients are statistically significant in both models. Approving of the presidential officeholder is associated with an increase of .04 in the probability of support for executive power to close the legislature and of .06 to dissolve the courts. We also find that *support for democracy* is negatively associated with views toward executive power, and these coefficients are also statistically distinguishable from zero. Moving from the lowest to the highest level of support for democracy is associated with a .05 decline in the probability of supporting a president’s power to close the legislature and a .06 decline in the probability of supporting a president’s prerogative to dissolve the courts. Across the Americas, support for democracy is related to more restrained views of executive power vis-à-vis legislatures and the courts.

Table 1: Model of Support for Executive Powers, the Americas

	Close Legislature	Dissolve Courts
Executive Approval	0.040* (0.012)	0.061* (0.010)
Support for Democracy	-0.054* (0.007)	-0.060* (0.009)
Intercept	0.204* (0.010)	0.176* (0.015)
Country × Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓
Demographic Controls	✓	✓
R ²	0.041	0.068
Adj. R ²	0.039	0.066
Num. obs.	72602	47355

* $p < 0.05$.

Note: Linear regression with robust standard errors clustered on country/wave.

These patterns are robust to several alternative specifications reported in Supplemental Appendix B. Here, we employ logistic regression models and use survey weights in lieu of controlling for individual-level covariates. Our substantive conclusions remain. We also distinguish parliamentary versus presidential systems using data from Cruz, Keefer, and

Scartascini (2018) and include an indicator for whether the country is a parliamentary system.¹⁶ Because these characteristics tend to be fixed within countries over long periods of time, we estimate a variety of models that alternately include and omit country fixed effects. The inclusion of this term does not materially affect our conclusions from Table 1. Even when accounting for a country’s political system, *executive approval* and *support for democracy* continue to be significantly associated with attitudes toward executive power.

Individual Results, Africa. Table 2 and 3 presents individual-level models for respondents from the Afrobarometer surveys. The dependent variables are binary indicators of support for executive power—*president decides everything*, *president not bound by laws*, *president doesn’t have to justify*, and *pass laws without congress*. In all cases, a one indicates support for executive power. As in the previous section, we rescale the Afrobarometer measure of support for democracy from zero to one and use linear probability models. We follow Bartels and Kramon (2020) and include measures of gender, education, poverty, age, and whether their locale is urban or rural to account for individual-level factors that could be associated with views toward executive power.

Given the coding of *support for democracy*, the coefficients indicate the change in probability of support for executive power associated with an increase from the lowest level to highest level of support for democracy. Across the four models, support for democracy is associated with between a 0.11 and 0.04 decline in support for executive power. The magnitude of these relationships is comparable to those observed in our analysis of the AmericasBarometer surveys. Additionally, we see that support for the person holding the office is associated with an increase in support for executive power from between 0.03 and 0.05. Notably, our findings for *support for democracy* persist even when accounting for evaluations of the current president.

As with our analysis of AmericasBarometer data, we conducted a number of robustness checks, which we present in the Supplemental Appendix B. Using logistic regression models, and survey weights in lieu of controlling for individual-level covariates again yields substantively similar results. We also run models using alternative 4-point or 5-point codings for

¹⁶Based on the coding in Cruz, Keefer, and Scartascini (2018), 15 percent of respondents in the AmericasBarometer sample are from parliamentary systems (i.e., Belize, Canada, Jamaica, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago) and 2 percent are from Guyana, the lone semi-presidential system in the data.

Table 2: Model of Support for Executive Powers and Support for Democracy, African Countries

	Decide	Not Bound	Justify	Pass Laws
Executive Approval	0.027* (0.004)	0.026* (0.005)	0.030* (0.007)	0.052* (0.009)
Support for Democracy	-0.094* (0.007)	-0.044* (0.007)	-0.113* (0.008)	-0.097* (0.009)
Intercept	0.322* (0.009)	0.414* (0.011)	0.538* (0.012)	0.467* (0.015)
Country \times Wave Fixed Effect	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Num. obs.	144365	118223	103468	75419

* $p < 0.05$.

Note: Linear regressions with robust standard errors clustered on country/wave. Binary.

the dependent variables. Again, our substantive results remain.

We also estimated models with the Afrobarometer that accounted for differences in views of executive power by political systems. Based on the coding from Cruz, Keefer, and Scartascini (2018), 84 percent of the Afrobarometer respondents are from presidential systems with 10 percent from parliamentary systems (i.e., Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius) and the remainder from hybrid systems (i.e., South Africa and Togo). Our findings are robust to accounting for a country’s political system and across model specifications. The results suggest that individuals in parliamentary systems report more negative evaluations of executive power than individuals in presidential or hybrid systems. While these results are perhaps a function of affinity for one’s own political system, we do not wish to overinterpret this finding and note that it raises interesting possibilities for future research.

We also explore whether other core democratic values are negatively correlated with support for executive power. Building on Reeves and Rogowski 2016, we consider whether support for the rule of law is related to executive power among respondents in African nations as they find it is among Americans. The Afrobarometer survey asks respondents whether they agree that either, “It is important to obey the government in power, no matter who you voted for,” or, “It is not necessary to obey the laws of a government that you did not vote for.” After the respondent picks the statement with which they agree, they are asked

to whether they ‘agree’ or ‘agree very strongly’ with the statement. This creates a 4-point measure of support for rule of law, which closely matches one of the survey instruments used by Reeves and Rogowski (2016).¹⁷ The results, presented in Supplemental Appendix B show that support for rule of law is significantly and substantively associated with decreased support for all measures of executive power.

These results provide strong evidence that mass publics across much of the world view executive power through remarkably similar lenses. At the national level, we have documented strong negative associations between core democratic values and support for executive power. These aggregate cross-country relationships also persist at the individual level within countries. Overall, these patterns offer strong and consistent evidence about the nature of attitudes toward executive power across many nations.

Presidential Approval and Support for Executive Power

One possibility is that support for democracy operates unevenly across approvers and disapprovers of the person holding the office when it comes to views of executive power. Rather than act as an independent influence, support for democracy might only depress support for executive power among those who already disapprove of the presidential officeholder. For support for support for democracy to constrain executive power, it would need to operate among both supporters and opponents of the person in office.¹⁸

To explore this possibility, we examine the interaction between executive support and support for democracy. Our analyses are the same as in the previous section with the addition of an interaction term between executive support and support for democracy. These results are presented in Table 3 and 4.

Across the six models in Table 3 and 4, four of the interaction terms are statistically indistinguishable from zero meaning that presidential approvers do not weight support for democracy any differently than disapprovers when it comes to translating core values into beliefs into views of executive power.

In the AmericasBarometer analyses in Table 3, the interaction is statistically significant

¹⁷Support for democracy and support for rule of law correlated at 0.09 further suggesting that they are not mirrors of each other.

¹⁸See Reeves and Rogowski (2018, 433–435) for a similar argument and analysis in the US case.

Table 3: Model of Support for Executive Powers and Support for Democracy, the Americas

	Close Legislature	Dissolve Courts
Executive Approval	0.013 (0.014)	0.065* (0.015)
Support for Democracy	-0.077* (0.011)	-0.056* (0.012)
Support for Democracy \times Exec. Approval	0.039* (0.014)	-0.006 (0.015)
Intercept	0.219* (0.012)	0.174* (0.015)
Country \times Year Fixed Effect	✓	✓
Demographic Controls	✓	✓
Num. obs.	72602	47355

* $p < 0.05$.*Note:* Linear regressions with robust standard errors clustered on country/wave.

Table 4: Model of Support for Executive Powers and Support for Democracy, African Countries

	Decide	Not Bound	Justify	Pass Laws
Executive Approval	0.048* (0.004)	0.025* (0.007)	0.032* (0.008)	0.064* (0.008)
Support for Democracy	-0.076* (0.004)	-0.045* (0.006)	-0.111* (0.007)	-0.086* (0.007)
Support for Democracy \times Exec. Approval	-0.027* (0.005)	0.001 (0.008)	-0.003 (0.009)	-0.016 (0.009)
Intercept	0.308* (0.012)	0.414* (0.017)	0.536* (0.018)	0.459* (0.018)
Country \times Wave Fixed Effect	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Num. obs.	144365	118223	103468	75419

* $p < 0.05$.*Note:* Linear regressions with robust standard errors clustered on country/wave. Binary.

and positive for the *close legislature* model. Among disapprovers of the executive in office, *support for democracy* is associated with a 0.08 decline in the probability of supporting closing the legislature and allowing presidential rule. That relationship is weaker among presidential approvers, with support for democracy being associated with a 0.04 decline in support for presidential rule ($-0.077 + 0.039 = -0.038$). While the size of the relationship is reduced, we note that support for democracy is still negatively associated with views toward executive power even among individuals who approve of the current president.

In the Afrobarometer analyses in Table 4, the interaction is statistically significant and negative for the *decide* model. Among those who oppose the individual in office, support for democracy is associated with a decline of 0.08 in support for abolishing elections and parliament and allowing the president to decide everything. Among approvers of the president, democratic values are even more strongly brought to bear. Support for democracy is associated with a decline of 0.10 ($-0.076 + -0.027 = -0.10$) in the probability of supporting an executive being allowed to decide everything. While we observe a statistically significant interaction, the substantive conclusions remain.

Taken together, we do not find systematic evidence that support for democracy operates differently between presidential approvers and disapprovers. The relationship between support for democracy and endorsing executive power is not conditioned on support of the person holding the office.

Country-Level Variation in Attitudes toward Executive Power

We now examine how the individual-level dynamics we observe in the previous section vary across countries. This analysis allows us to study whether core values translate into views about executive power in a uniform way across countries. Establishing and investigating the nature of this relationship advances our understanding of attitudes toward executive power around the world and is a step toward identifying whether contextual and institutional variation may condition the relation between core values and evaluations of government.

As a starting point, we highlight the relative place of the United States. While survey research shows that Americans dislike unilateral presidential power and penalize policies

that are undertaken without legislative consent (Reeves and Rogowski 2018), Posner and Vermeule (2010, 188) suggest that resistance to unilateral power “might be a culturally specific phenomenon, unique to the United States.” Yet Americans’ opposition to unilateral power might also reflect a commitment to democracy such that if the aggregate distribution of Americans’ support for the rule of law were different, we would observe different patterns in aggregate attitudes toward presidential power.

While we cannot manipulate beliefs in support for democracy, we instead evaluate whether the association between core values and attitudes toward executive power varies across countries. Citizens of different countries may show systematic differences in how they bring core values to bear on their views of executive power based on deep-seated geographic or cultural differences (Almond and Verba 1963; Fischer 1989). Variation in views toward executive powers may also reflect political circumstances and contexts due to more recent changes in political systems and volatility in political institutions.

Country-Level Variation, the Americas. As with our analyses above, we begin with the Americas. We again model the two items that measure whether respondents support executives suspending the legislative body (*close legislature*) or the courts (*dissolve courts*) as a function of attitudes toward democracy and approval of the president or prime minister in power. We again employ linear probability models. In this analyses, we conduct twenty-six separate regressions, one for each country contained in the data. In each model, we also include an indicator variable for each survey wave for each respective country along with the same demographic controls we used for the pooled analyses in the previous section. Our focus is on how support for democracy (again standardized along a zero to one scale) is related to the probability of support for executive power while controlling for the aforementioned factors especially *executive approval*. Negative values indicate that support for democracy is associated with opposition to executive power.

Figure 3 presents the from the AmericasBarometer surveys sorted by magnitude of the coefficient on *support for democracy*. Consider the results for Argentina in the left panel, which examines support for a president’s ability to close the legislature and govern alone. Moving from the lowest to highest level of support for democracy is associated with a decrease of 0.12 in supporting this measure of executive power. The error bars present the 95 percent

confidence interval around the estimate and, in the case of Argentina, ranges from -0.17 to -0.08.

Our goal here is not to interpret the findings for each individual country but rather to understand the overall patterns across them. In our analysis of support for the president closing the legislature and governing without them (i.e., *close legislature*, left panel), twenty-two of the twenty-six estimated relationships are negative. For fourteen, the 95 percent confidence interval does not include zero. These results suggest that the relationship between core values and support for executive power is not fleeting or particular to only certain countries. Instead, it applies across most countries of the Americas.

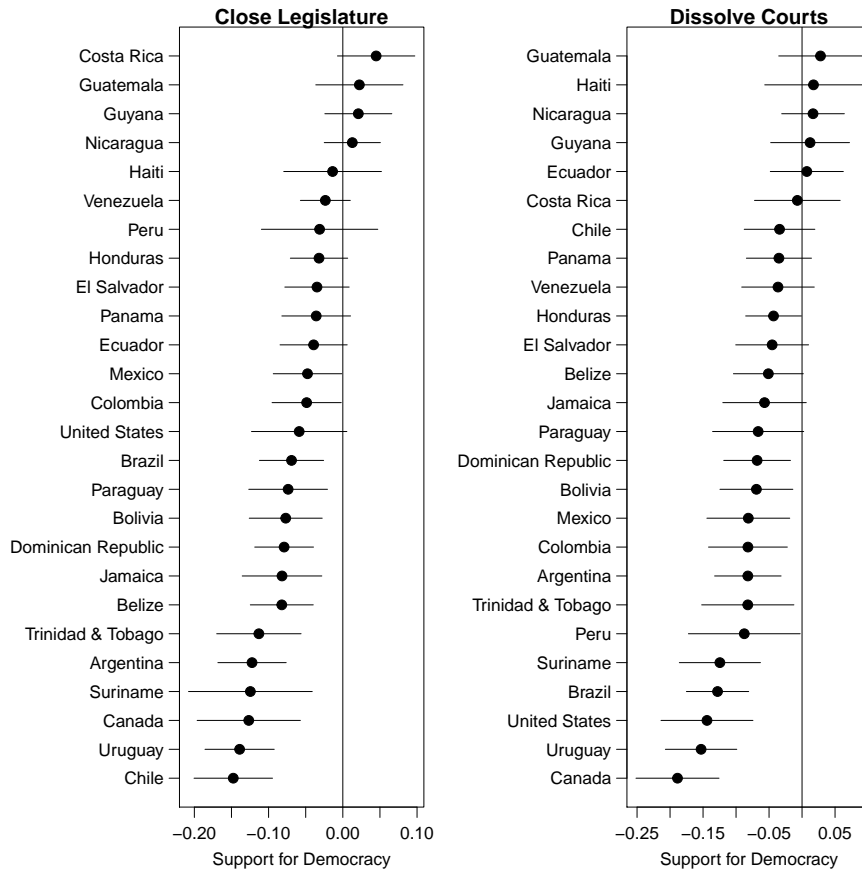
The magnitude of the association varies to some degree, however. For example, in the right panel of Table 3, we see the relationship between *support for democracy* and support for allowing an executive to dissolve the courts and govern without them. Among Hondurans, *support for democracy* is associated with a decline in support of executive power of four percentage points (i.e., a reduction in the probability of 0.04). In contrast, the same change is associated with an nineteen point decline in Canada.

Country-Level Variation, Africa. For our Afrobarometer analyses, we model our five dependent variables measuring binary indicators of support for executive power as a function of democratic values and approval of the executive in office. We again conduct separate analyses for respondents of each country running linear probability models, one for each country contained in the data. If the survey for the country has been conducted in multiple years, we include indicator variables for each wave.

Support for democracy is again included in the model model as a scaled variable ranging from zero to one. The results in Figure 4 display the estimated linear regression coefficient along with the 95 percent confidence interval around the estimated coefficient. Consider the results for Mali in the first panel of Figure 4. The point estimate presented in the figure is -0.26, meaning that support for democracy is associated with a decrease of .26 in the probability of supporting for abolishing elections and the legislature and allowing a president to decide everything. The 95 percent confidence interval around this estimate spans from -0.16 to -0.36.

In the 144 country-level models, 106 times (74 percent) *support for democracy* is a negative

Figure 3: Support for Democracy is Negatively Related to Support for Executive Powers across Countries of the Americas



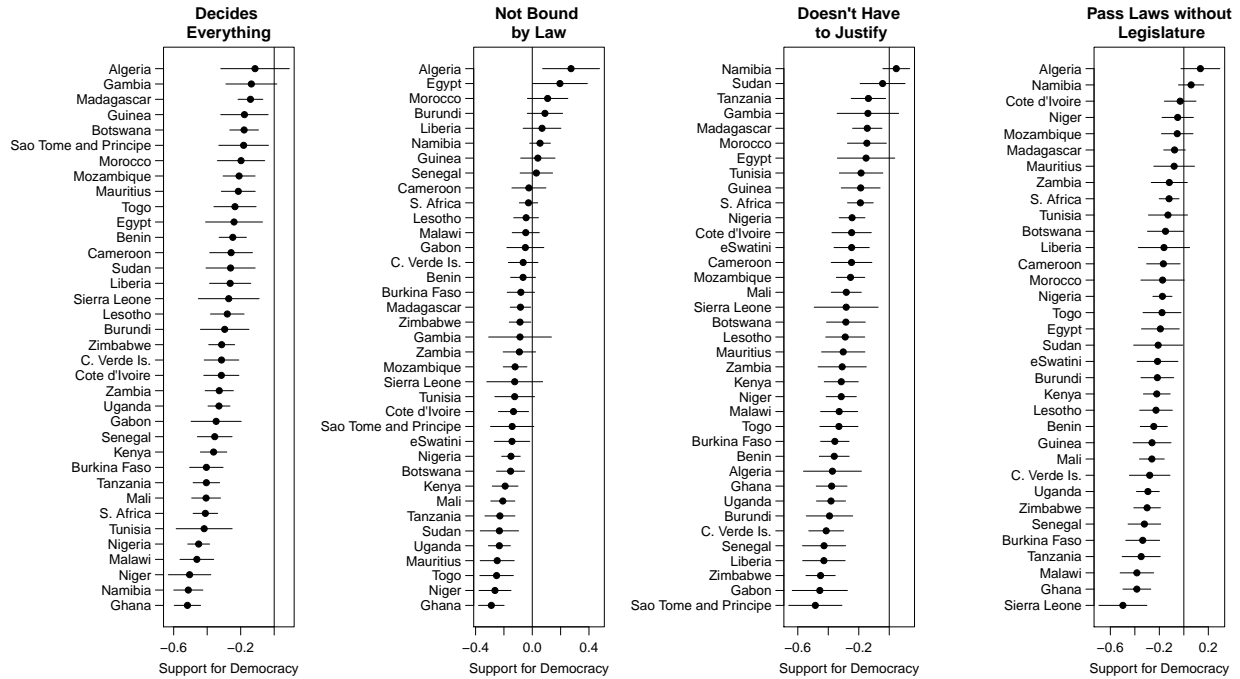
Notes: Estimates are from linear models estimated separately for respondents from each country. We control for executive approval along with a host of demographic variables, and include indicators for the survey wave when applicable. Each point is the change in support for executive power associated with a change in support for democracy from the lowest to highest value. For full question wordings see Table A.1.

and statistically significant predictor of support for executive power ($p \leq 0.05$). We also observe variation across countries. The models for Algerians, for example, show a positive coefficient for three of the models. In the *not bound by law* model, the coefficient is both positive and statistically significant meaning that Algerians translate support for democracy into support for presidential power.¹⁹ Somewhat speculatively, it is possible that the patterns for Algeria reflect the unique political context in which the survey was conducted, but we

¹⁹These results are based on the 2015 wave, which took place a year after a presidential election in which “opponents dismissed as a stage-managed fraud to keep the ailing leader in power.” Patrick Markey and Lamine Chikhi. 2014. “Algeria’s Bouteflika wins re-election with 81.5 percent: official results.” *Reuters* April 18. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-algeria-election/algerias-bouteflika-wins-re-election-with-81-5-percent-official-results-idUSBREA3H0D620140418>.

leave a more thorough investigation of this possibility for future research.

Figure 4: Support for Democracy is Negatively Related to Support for Executive Powers across Countries of Africa



Notes: Estimates are from linear models estimated separately for respondents from each country. We control for executive approval along with a host of demographic variables, and include indicators for the survey wave when applicable. Each point is the change in support for executive power associated with a change in support for democracy from the lowest to highest value. For full question wordings See Table A.2.

Our findings provide strikingly similar patterns about public opinion toward executive power. Core governing values structure beliefs about executive power. This relationship is consistent across the countries of the Americas, though the association varies somewhat in magnitude. These results suggest the power of institutional systems, perhaps more so than country-specific cultures, in shaping beliefs about government. Instead, across much of the west and the global south, we find that when citizens value the process of democratic politics, they cast a skeptical eye towards executive authority.

At the same time, democratic values may not be a universal prophylactic against anti-democratic executives. Citizens of some countries more strongly translate their support for democracy into opposition towards executive authority. Consider the US in Figure 3. Americans are not superlative in their translation of values into executive constraint, but nor

are they middling. In a few other rare cases, we find core democratic values associated with positive views of executive power. Though beyond the scope of our analyses here, further research should consider the economic, institutional, contextual, and cultural factors that drive this variation.

Conclusion

While processes of democratic consolidation help to secure the long-run success of democratic systems, the consolidation of power in a chief executive may undermine democratic systems from within. Recent scholarship has emphasized the dangers that authoritarian-minded executives pose to democratic institutions. Most of this scholarship ignores or rules out the possibility that public audiences could constrain the temptation of overreach among ambitious executives. Understanding mass attitudes toward executive power, however, can shed light on the “guardrails of democracy” (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 101).

We present new evidence about mass opinion on executive power and its relevance for governing regimes. Theoretically, we argue for the relevance of democratic values—citizens’ procedural commitments—in understanding how individuals view the exercise of power by political authorities. Empirically, we demonstrate a systematic relationship between support for democracy and the rule of the law and evaluations of executive power. Individuals and countries with stronger democratic commitments express more skepticism toward executive authority. As Christenson and Kriner (2020) indicate, these attitudes suggest the potential for an executive’s political rivals to generate public backlash following executive overreach.

We also showed that attitudes about executive authority are reflected in a country’s governing practices. Consistent with theories of political agency (e.g., Fearon 1999), our results suggest that governments are responsive to citizens’ attitudes about the distribution of political power, and that these attitudes provide incentives for how elected officials wield those powers. Though scholarship on democratic backsliding understates the potential for citizens to prevent democratic decay, our findings suggest more sanguine implications about the potential for mass publics to constrain their leaders’ power-seeking ambitions.

Taking the wide view, our results suggest the political relevance of a citizenry’s demo-

cratic values. This connection is consistent with contemporary debates in European politics. Consistent with our results, for example, Meijers and van der Veer (2019) show that members of the European Parliament who represented national parties with authoritarian ties were more likely to raise questions about breaches of the rule of law by governments in Hungary and Poland. There, as in our study, public attitudes about executive power appear to be associated with elite behavior and governing practices. At a more granular level, our findings also relate to several other studies of European politics that demonstrate the political and electoral relevance of public opinion about political procedures. In those studies, voters disapprove of and punish incumbents for employing opportunistic election timing (Schleiter and Tavits 2018) and confidence votes (Becher and Brouard, Forthcoming). Our results complement these findings and suggest that voters around the world hold meaningful attitudes about the exercise of political power. Theories of political accountability apply not only to policy positions and competence, but also to procedures and power.

Our results have several important limitations and provide opportunities for further research. First, our findings are purely in the camp of observational research. Future research could explore experimental opportunities to induce variation in the strength or salience of core values and study its effect on evaluations of executive power. Second, our findings provide only a general assessment of how these attitudes may bear on the exercise of power. Future research could study how, for example, attitudes about executive power affect evaluations of decrees, vetoes, or other specific presidential actions. Third, as we noted above, additional research is needed to understand contextual variation in views of executive power. Not only might country-level variation in experiences with political regimes affect how citizens today view executive power, but other factors—such as national security threats, economic emergencies, or parliamentary performance—may also affect how individuals view executive power. These are important questions for additional study.

References

- Almond, Gabriel Abraham, and Sidney Verba. 1963. *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Ed. by 1963. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Arce, Moises. 2003. “Political Violence and Presidential Approval in Peru.” *Journal of Politics* 65 (2): 572–583.

- Bartels, Brandon L., and Christopher D. Johnston. 2013. "On the Ideological Foundations of Supreme Court Legitimacy in the American Public." *American Journal of Political Science* 57 (1): 184–199.
- Bartels, Brandon L., and Eric Kramon. 2020. "Does Public Support for Judicial Power Depend on Who is in Political Power? Testing a Theory of Partisan Alignment in Africa." *American Political Science Review* 114 (1): 144–163.
- Becher, Michael, and Sylvain Brouard. Forthcoming. "Executive Accountability Beyond Outcomes: Experimental Evidence on Public Evaluations of Powerful Prime Ministers." *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Bermeo, Nancy. 2016. "On Democratic Backsliding." *Journal of Democracy* 27 (1): 5–19.
- Bratton, Michael. 2007. "The Democracy Barometers (Part I): Formal Versus Informal Institutions in Africa." *Journal of Democracy* 18 (3): 96–110.
- Buendia, Jorge. 1994. "Security, Clarity of Responsibility, and Presidential Approval." *Comparative Political Studies* 29 (5): 566–591.
- Calvo, Ernesto. 2014. *Legislator Success in Fragmented Congresses in Argentina*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Carey, John M., and Matthew Soberg Shugart, eds. 1998. *Executive Degree Authority*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Carlin, Ryan E., Gregory J. Love, and Cecilia Martínez-Gallardo. 2015. "Security, Clarity of Responsibility, and Presidential Approval." *Comparative Political Studies* 48 (4): 438–463.
- Carlin, Ryan E., et al. 2018. "Public support for Latin American presidents: The cyclical model in comparative perspective." *Research & Politics* 5 (3): 1–8.
- Chaisty, Paul, Nic Cheeseman, and Timothy Power. 2014. "Rethinking the 'presidentialism debate': conceptualizing coalitional politics in cross-regional perspective." *Democratization* 21 (1): 72–94.
- Cheibub, José Antonio. 2007. *Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Democracy*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Christenson, Dino P., and Douglas L. Kriner. 2020. *The Myth of the Imperial Presidency: How Public Opinion Checks the Unilateral Executive*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Claassen, Christopher. 2020. "Does Public Support Help Democracy Survive?" *American Journal of Political Science* 64 (1): 118–134.
- Cruz, Cesi, Philip Keefer, and Carlos Scartascini. 2018. *The Database of Political Institutions 2017*. Inter-American Development Bank.
- Driscoll, Amanda, and Michael J. Nelson. 2018. "There is No Legitimacy Crisis: Support for Judicial Institutions in Modern Latin America." *Revista de la Sociedad Argentina de Análisis Político* 12 (2): 361–377.
- Dulani, Boniface, and John Tengtanga. 2020. "Big Man Rule in Africa: Are Africans Getting the Leadership They Want?" *The African Review* 46 (2): 275–291.
- Easton, David. 1975. "A Re-assessment of the Concept of Political Support." *British Journal of Political Science* 5:435–457.
- Fearon, James D. 1999. "Electoral Accountability and the Control of Politicians: Selecting Good Types versus Sanctioning Poor Performance." Chap. 99 in *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation*, ed. by Adam Przeworski and Susan C. Stokes, 999. Cambridge.

- Fischer, David Hackett. 1989. *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gibson, James L., Gregory A. Caldeira, and Vanessa A. Baird. 1998. "On the Legitimacy of National High Courts." *The American Political Science Review* 92 (2): 343–358.
- Graham, Matthew A., and Milan W. Svobik. 2020. "Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States." *American Political Science Review* 114 (2): 392–409.
- Hassan, Mai. 2015. "Continuity despite change: Kenya's new constitution and executive power." *Democratization* 22 (4): 587–609.
- Helmke, Gretchen. 2017. *Institutions on the Edge: Inter-Branch Crises in Latin America*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Inglehart, Ronald. 2003. "How Solid is Mass Support for Democracy—And How Can We Measure It?" *PS: Political Science & Politics* 36 (1): 51–57.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. New York: Penguin.
- Linz, Juan J. 1990. "The Perils of Presidentialism." *Journal of Democracy* 1:51–69.
- Mainwaring, Scott, and Matthew S. Soberg Shugart. 1997a. "Juan Linz, Presidentialism, and Democracy: A Critical Appraisal." *Comparative Politics* 29 (4): 449–471.
- Mainwaring, Scott, and Matthew Soberg Shugart, eds. 1997b. *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Maskin, Eric, and Jean Tirole. 2004. "The Politician and the Judge: Accountability in Government." *American Economic Review* 94 (4): 1034–1054.
- Meijers, Maurits J., and Harmen van der Veer. 2019. "MEP Responses to Democratic Backsliding in Hungary and Poland: An Analysis of Agenda-Setting and Voting Behaviour." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 57 (4): 838–856.
- Metcalf, Lee Kendall. 2000. "Measuring Presidential Power." *Comparative Political Studies* 33 (5): 660–685.
- Mishler, William, and Richard Rose. 1994. "Support for Parliaments and Regimes in the Transition toward Democracy in Eastern Europe." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 19 (1): 5–32.
- Morgenstern, Scott, John Polga-Hecimovich, and Sarah Shair-Rosenfield. 2013. "Tall, Grande, or Venti: Presidential Powers in the United States and Latin America." *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 5 (2): 37–70.
- Morisi, Davide, John T. Jost, and Vishal Singh. 2019. "An Asymmetrical 'President-in-Power' Effect." *American Political Science Review* 113 (2): 614–620.
- Negretto, Gabriel L. 2013. *Making Constitutions: Presidents, Parties, and Institutional Choice in Latin America*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Neustadt, Richard E. 1960. *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Palanza, Valeria. 2019. *Checking Presidential Power: Executive Decrees and the Legislative Process in New Democracies*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

- Pereira, Carlos, Timothy J. Power, and Lucio Rennó. 2005. "Under what Conditions do Presidents resort to Decree Power? Theory and Evidence from the Brazilian Case." *Journal of Politics* 67 (1): 178–200.
- Posner, Eric A., and Adrian Vermeule. 2010. *The Executive Unbound : After the Madisonian Republic*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Prempeh, H. Kwasi. 2008. "Progress and Retreat in Africa: Presidents Untamed." *Democracy* 19 (2): 109–123.
- Przeworski, Adam. 2019. *Crises of Democracy*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Przeworski, Adam, et al. 2000. *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Material Well-being in the World, 1950–1990*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Reeves, Andrew, and Jon C. Rogowski. 2018. "The Public Cost of Unilateral Action." *American Journal of Political Science* 62 (2): 424–440.
- . 2016. "Unilateral Powers, Public Opinion, and the Presidency." *Journal of Politics* 78 (1): 137–151.
- Reich, Gary. 2002. "Executive Decree Authority in Brazil: How Reactive Legislators Influence Policy." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 27 (1): 5–31.
- Schleiter, Petra, and Margit Tavits. 2018. "Voter Reactions to Incumbent Opportunism." *Journal of Politics* 80 (4): 1183–1197.
- Shugart, Matthew Soberg, and John M. Carey. 1992. *Presidents and Assemblies*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Treisman, Daniel. 2011. "Presidential Popularity in a Hybrid Regime: Russia under Yeltsin and Putin." *American Journal of Political Science* 55 (3): 590–609.
- Zechmeister, Elizabeth J., and Noam Lupu, eds. 2019. *Pulse of Democracy*. Nashville, TN: LAPOP.

A Supplemental Appendix

A.1 Question Wording

Table A.1: Question Wording for Survey Instruments from AmericasBarometer

Question	Choice Set
Support for Executive Power: <i>Close Legislature.</i> Do you believe that when the country is facing very difficult times it is justifiable for the president of the country to close the Congress/Parliament and govern without Congress/Parliament?	yes, it is justified; no, it is not justified
Support for Executive Power: <i>Dissolve Courts.</i> 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/Constitutional Tribunal and govern without the Supreme Court/Constitutional Tribunal	
<i>Support for Democracy.</i> 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?	Now we will use a ladder where 1 means “strongly disagree” and 7 means “strongly agree.” A number in between 1 and 7 represents an intermediate score.
<i>Executive Approval.</i> Speaking in general of the current administration, how would you rate the job performance of [Prime Minister or President] [Name]?	very good; good; neither good nor bad (fair); bad; very bad
Demographics: <i>Age.</i>	Numeric age.
Demographics: <i>Education.</i>	Recoded from various choice sets such that none = 0, primary = 1, secondary = 2, post-secondary = 3.
Demographics: <i>Gender.</i>	Male, Female, or Other.
Demographics: <i>Marital Status.</i>	Recoded from various choice sets such that married = 1, otherwise 0.
Demographics: <i>Income.</i>	Ten categories based on income deciles in respective country. Extra categories added in later surveys. We standardize the ordinal values within country.

Table A.2: Question Wording for Survey Instruments from Afrobarometer

Question	Choice Set
Support for Executive Power: <i>Decides Everything.</i> There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives?: Elections and Parliament are abolished so that the president can decide everything.	strongly disapprove, disapprove, neither approve nor disapprove, approve, strongly approve
Support for Executive Power: <i>Not Bound by Laws.</i> Statement 1: Since the President was elected to lead the country, he should not be bound by laws or court decisions that he thinks are wrong. Statement 2: The President must always obey the law and the courts, even if he thinks they are wrong.	Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2? agree very strongly with statement 1; agree with statement 1; agree with statement 2; agree very strongly with statement 2
Support for Executive Power: <i>Doesn't Have to Justify.</i> Statement 1: Parliament should ensure that the President explains to it on a regular basis how his government spends taxpayers' money. Statement 2: The President should be able to devote his full attention to developing the country rather than wasting time justifying his actions.	
Support for Executive Power: <i>Pass Laws without Legislature.</i> Statement 1: Members of Parliament represent the people; therefore they should make laws for this country, even if the President does not agree. Statement 2: Since the President represents all of us, he should pass laws without worrying about what Parliament thinks.	Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?
<i>Support for Democracy.</i> Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government. Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable. Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.	
<i>Executive Approval.</i> Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past twelve months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?: [Name of President]	strongly disapprove, disapprove, approve, strongly approve
Demographics: <i>Age.</i>	Numeric age.
Demographics: <i>Education.</i>	Recoded from various choice sets such that none = 0, primary = 1, secondary = 2, post-secondary = 3.
Demographics: <i>Gender.</i>	Male or Female.
Demographics: <i>Poverty.</i> Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Gone without enough food to eat?	Recoded from various choice sets such that never = 0, sometimes =1, frequently = 3, and always = 4.
Demographics: <i>Rural:</i> Defined by surveyor based on primary sampling unit.	Rural = 1 and all urban or quasi-urban designations are 0.

B Alternative Specifications

B.1 Logistic Regression Models

Table B.1: Model of Support for Executive Powers, the Americas. Logistic Regression models.

	Close Legislature	Dissolve Courts
Executive Approval	0.298* (0.094)	0.524* (0.088)
Support for Democracy	-0.393* (0.052)	-0.480* (0.072)
Intercept	-1.365* (0.077)	-1.623* (0.120)
Country \times Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓
Demographic Controls	✓	✓
Num. obs.	72602	47355

* $p < 0.05$.

Note: Logistic regressions with robust standard errors clustered on country/wave.

Table B.2: Model of Support for Executive Powers and Support for Democracy, African Countries. Logistic Regression Models

	Decide	Not Bound	Justify	Pass Laws
Executive Approval	0.288* (0.049)	0.144* (0.030)	0.145* (0.032)	0.324* (0.056)
Support for Democracy	-0.788* (0.049)	-0.227* (0.037)	-0.512* (0.038)	-0.522* (0.049)
Intercept	-0.390* (0.084)	-0.296* (0.056)	0.215* (0.057)	0.038 (0.097)
Country \times Wave Fixed Effect	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Num. obs.	144365	118223	103468	75419

* $p < 0.05$.

Note: Logistic regressions with robust standard errors clustered on country/wave.

B.2 Survey Weights

Table B.3: Model of Support for Executive Powers, the Americas. Using Survey Weights

	Close Legislature	Dissolve Courts
Executive Approval	0.042* (0.003)	0.059* (0.004)
Support for Democracy	-0.065* (0.005)	-0.073* (0.006)
Intercept	0.225* (0.019)	0.136* (0.015)
Country \times Wave Fixed Effects	✓	✓
Num. obs.	96745	55033

* $p < 0.05$.

Note: Survey design is explicitly declared including weights as advised by AmericasBarometer documentation.

Table B.4: Model of Support for Executive Powers and Support for Rule of Law, African Countries. Using Survey Weights

	Decide	Not Bound	Justify	Pass Laws
Executive Approval	0.027* (0.004)	0.030* (0.006)	0.032* (0.006)	0.055* (0.009)
Support for Democracy	-0.099* (0.007)	-0.043* (0.007)	-0.116* (0.009)	-0.107* (0.010)
Intercept	0.282* (0.007)	0.378* (0.007)	0.514* (0.008)	0.419* (0.010)
Country \times Wave Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Num. obs.	148207	119363	104388	76382

* $p < 0.05$.

Note: Linear regressions with survey weights. Robust standard errors clustered on country/wave.

B.3 Controlling for System

Table B.5: Model of Support for Executive Powers, the Americas. Controlling for political system.

	Close Legislature	Dissolve Courts
Executive Approval	0.040* (0.003)	0.061* (0.004)
Support for Democracy	-0.054* (0.005)	-0.060* (0.006)
Parliamentary System	-0.034* (0.017)	0.043* (0.020)
Intercept	0.204* (0.013)	0.176* (0.013)
Country \times Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓
Demographic Controls	✓	✓
R ²	0.041	0.068
Adj. R ²	0.039	0.066
Num. obs.	72602	47355

* $p < 0.05$.

Note: Linear regression with robust standard errors clustered on country/wave.

Table B.6: Model of Support for Executive Powers and Support for Democracy, African Countries. Controlling for political system.

	Decide	Not Bound	Justify	Pass Laws
Executive Approval	0.027* (0.004)	0.026* (0.005)	0.030* (0.007)	0.049* (0.009)
Support for Democracy	-0.094* (0.007)	-0.044* (0.007)	-0.114* (0.008)	-0.096* (0.009)
Parliamentary System	-0.154* (0.002)	-0.204* (0.003)	-0.169* (0.004)	-0.138* (0.003)
Intercept	0.322* (0.009)	0.414* (0.011)	0.537* (0.012)	0.472* (0.015)
Country \times Wave Fixed Effect	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Num. obs.	144365	117245	101500	74601

* $p < 0.05$.

Note: Linear regressions with robust standard errors clustered on country/wave.

B.4 Rule of Law

Table B.7: Model of Support for Executive Powers and Support for Democracy, African Countries. Support for the rule of law.

	Decide	Not Bound	Justify	Pass Laws
Executive Approval	0.035*	0.033*	0.034*	0.061*
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Support for Rule of Law	-0.026*	-0.019*	-0.038*	-0.044*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Intercept	0.357*	0.437*	0.586*	0.532*
	(0.012)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Country \times Wave Fixed Effect	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Num. obs.	140670	145648	128494	104932

* $p < 0.05$.

Note: Linear regressions with robust standard errors clustered on country/wave. Binary.

B.5 Alternative DV Coding, Afrobarometer

Table B.8: Model of Support for Executive Powers and Support for Democracy, African Countries. Using Four / Five point scales with dependent variables.

	Decide (4pt)	Not Bound (5pt)	Justify (5pt)	Pass Laws (5pt)
Executive Approval	0.105*	0.073*	0.075*	0.112*
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Support for Democracy	-0.360*	-0.105*	-0.280*	-0.214*
	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Intercept	2.755*	2.500*	2.697*	2.584*
	(0.035)	(0.038)	(0.041)	(0.038)
Country \times Wave Fixed Effect	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Num. obs.	152466	118223	103468	75419

* $p < 0.05$.

Note: Linear regressions with robust standard errors clustered on country/wave. Binary.