

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Democratic values and support for executive power

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Abstract

Attempts by elected executives to consolidate power have generated alarm and raised concern about democratic backsliding. We study mass attitudes toward the institutional power of the office of the presidency and argue that individuals' democratic values shape views of executive power. Using data from 26 countries in the Americas and 37 countries in Africa, we find support for our perspective. While supporters of the incumbent president express more favorable views toward executive power, we also show that individuals who express stronger commitments to democracy are less supportive of institutional arrangements that favor the executive. Our results demonstrate that attitudes toward the institutions of government are not shaped only by partisanship and other ephemeral political factors, but also by citizens' core commitments to values over governance.

KEYWORDS

comparative politics, executive power, public opinion

INTRODUCTION

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 (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019; Svobik, 2019).

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, Guinea,¹ Egypt, and Turkey voted to extend or remove term limits and expand the president's formal powers (Kingsley, 2017; Neuman, 2020; Staff, 2019). Following these votes, incumbent presidents seemed poised to

¹"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-presidentialpower-grab-alpha-conde-coronavirus>.

strengthen their grips on power. Yet other voters approved new limits on presidential powers in Kenya,² and Algeria and rejected attempts to relax presidential term limits in Ecuador and Bolivia (Casey & Machicao, 2016; Macharia & Obulutsa, 2010; Rouaba, 2020; Tegel, 2018). 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 article, we study the nature of mass attitudes toward executive overreach. In contrast with research on public approval ratings of individual presidents (Arce, 2003; Buendia, 1994; Carlin et al., 2015, 2018; Treisman, 2011), we study public views about the institutional power of the presidential office—especially when there are moves to expand that power. 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 & Kriner, 2020; Reeves & Rogowski, 2016). We draw from several strands of research to develop and test hypotheses about public attitudes toward executive power. We focus on mass support for unilateral executive overreach, where executives take dramatic actions to expand their authority as it relates to other political actors or the legal system writ large. These are the types of actions often associated with democratic backsliding. According to one perspective, public opinion toward political institutions reflects individuals' political alignment with those institutions (Bartels & Johnston, 2013; Bartels & Kramon, 2020; Singer, 2023). 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 et al., 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 & 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 & Shugart, 1998; Cheibub, 2007; Linz, 1990; Mainwaring & Shugart, 1997a; Morgenstern et al., 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, p. 53). This plebiscitarian legitimacy owes to the president's independent election, through which presidents make direct appeals to

²<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kenya-referendum/kenya-votes-yes-to-new-constitutionidUSTRE6743G720100805>.

their constituents and claim popular mandates for their agendas. While popular elections may enhance accountability (e.g., Maskin & Tirole, 2004), in the context of presidentialism this selection mechanism may undermine regime stability. According to Linz (1990, p. 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 & Carey, 1992) and identifies the institutional conditions under which presidents opt to exercise unilateral powers, especially as it relates to the legislative branch (Carey & Shugart, 1998; Cheibub, 2007; Mainwaring & Shugart, 1997b; Palanza, 2019; Pereira et al., 2005). Often, these analyses probe whether executive actions better reflect a seizure of power from or delegation of authority by the legislature (Carey & Shugart, 1998) and the conditions under which interbranch conflicts emerge over their use (Shugart & 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 are mostly considered as a currency with which to bargain with the legislative branch (Calvo, 2014; Helmke, 2017; Neustadt, 1960; Palanza, 2019; Pereira et al., 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, e.g., 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 & 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, p. 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 (Christenson & Kriner, 2020).

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 & Ziblatt, 2018, p. 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 & 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 & Kramon, 2020). More generally, survey respondents report greater trust in government when their copartisans are in power (Morisi et al., 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 & 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) establish 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 & Kriner, 2020), presidents would have incentives to practice forbearance (Levitsky & 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 & Kriner, 2020; Posner & Vermeule, 2010; Reeves & Rogowski, 2018) by identifying contextual and individual-level sources of attitudes toward executive power in comparative context. In doing so, we take a broader approach than is typically found in the study of executive politics. While the United States and Latin America are the "traditional focus" of studies of presidentialism (Chaisty et al., 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 & Vermeule, 2010, p. 188). Finally, our investigation relates attitudes about executive power to more fundamental questions about support for democratic governance.³ We focus particularly on evaluating the potential for mass publics to serve as a backstop against the 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 & Kramon, 2020; Driscoll & Nelson, 2018; Gibson et al., 1998), legislatures (e.g., Mishler & Rose, 1994), and chief executives (e.g., Bratton, 2007; Dulani & Tengatenga, 2020).

³Przeworski (2019, pp. 100–2) 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" (p. 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.

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 26 countries from 2010 to 2019. We study attitudes among respondents in Africa using survey data from the Afrobarometer series. Afrobarometer is a “nonpartisan, 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.”⁴ Our analysis includes all cases from AmericasBarometer and Afrobarometer for which our questions of interest were asked.⁵ For a full summary of question wording and choice sets, see Supporting Information: Tables SA1 and SA2.

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 branch. These questions allow 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 that 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 Supporting Information: Table SA1) are as follows:

- “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?”
- “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% of respondents agreed that the executive would be justified to “close Congress [Parliament] during difficult times” and ranged from 14% in 2010 and 2012 to 25% in 2019. Similarly, support for closing the supreme court or

⁴Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).” *Afrobarometer*. <http://afrobarometer.org/about/faqs>.

⁵Afrobarometer 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-noteabout-ethiopia-data>.

constitutional tribunal was 14% and ranged annually from 11% in 2012 to 30% 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%, with no country reporting support higher than 32%.⁶ Support for governing without courts is even lower, as the mean and median country-level support was 14%, and no country other than Peru reported support for governing without the judiciary from more than a quarter of respondents.⁷

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 alternative? 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% of respondents disapprove of presidents governing unilaterally, and only 12% approve. Aggregated by country, median support for abolishing elections and parliament in favor of presidential rule stands at 10%.

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 the one that best reflected their beliefs. The pairs of statements were as follows:

- “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 with the pro-executive power statement.⁸ We

⁶Support for this question is highest in Peru, especially in 2019 when respondents expressed 59% and 50% 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.

⁷For additional descriptive analyses, see Zechmeister and Lupu (2019).

⁸In 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 0.4, indicating that they are not each reliable measuring the same underlying concept. Conducting a principal component analysis yields similar findings. The first dimension explains just 38% of the variance, with each additional dimension explaining between 18% and 24% of the variance. These concepts appear to be measuring somewhat different conceptions of executive power, so we analyze them separately.

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% (not bound by laws) to 34% (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. One compelling alternative hypothesis is that individual-level support for the person holding the office will mirror support for unilateral executive action (for an overview of this perspective, see Reeves & Rogowski, 2016). We follow the approach of Reeves and Rogowski (2016, p. 137) and focus on executive approval to examine whether “attitudes toward power are subsumed by presidential approval.” The full question wordings and choice sets for all items we used from the AmericasBarometer are presented in Supporting Information: Table SA1.

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 “In some circumstances, a nondemocratic 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 nondemocratic government is coded as one, seeing no difference is coded as two, and preferring democracy is three. Overall, 73% of respondents—nearly three-quarters—identify democracy as preferable to any other kind of government, with 14% and 13% viewing other forms of government as potentially preferable or not believing it matters, respectively.

The measures we rely upon likely better capture broad perspectives toward democracy as opposed to more specific views of the extent to which a government respects rights, ensures free and fair elections, and maintains the rule of law (Kiewiet De Jong, 2016). For our purposes, this is a more suitable measure of a core belief, but further studies could consider more specific measures of support for democracy or views of democratic practices in one's country.⁹

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 or her job over the past 12 months. *Executive approval* was asked on a four-point scale ranging from “strongly disapprove” (1) to “strongly approve” (4). Full question wording and response sets are presented in Supporting Information: Table SA2.

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

⁹We appreciate the advice of a reviewer to clarify the nature of our definition of support for democracy. We also note that this wording is consistent with one of the questions in the battery for the rule of law. We acknowledge that further research should probe additional measures of regime support and explore their relation to executive power.

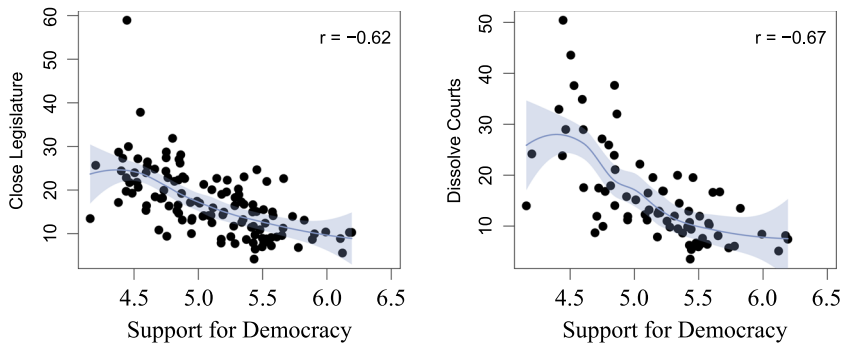


FIGURE 1 Support for democracy and attitudes toward presidential power in countries of the Americas. Each point represents the mean score of respondents for each country survey wave. *Support for democracy* is measured along a seven-point scale of agreement that democracy is better than any other form 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.

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 show the percentage of respondents by country/wave who believe it is acceptable for the president or prime minister to close the legislature (left panel) or dissolve the high court (right panel) and govern 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 10 points in support for closing the legislature and about 14 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 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 differences in 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.

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

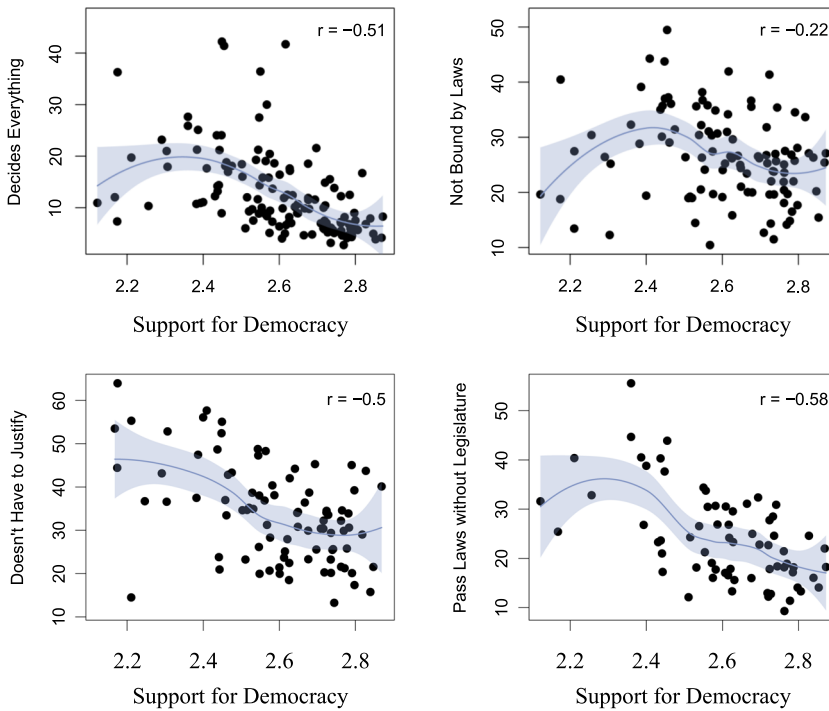


FIGURE 2 Support for democracy and attitudes toward presidential power in African countries. Each point is the mean score for a country survey wave. *Support for democracy* is measured along a three-point scale. The four measures of support for executive power are measured as binary indicators of support. Values are weighted for cross-country comparisons.

democracy structures 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, which could confound the relationship between individual characteristics and views toward executive power, we include country-wave fixed effects in all models.¹⁰ 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

¹⁰Cross-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.

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 dissolving the courts (i.e., *dissolve courts*). We include demographic variables including age, gender, education, income, and marital status to account for other individual-level factors that may 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 United States (Reeves & 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 0.04 in the probability of support for executive power to close the legislature and of 0.06 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 0.05 decline in the probability of supporting a president's power to close the legislature and a 0.06 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.

These patterns are robust to several alternative specifications reported in Supporting Information: 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 et al. (2018) and include an indicator for whether the country is a parliamentary system.¹¹ 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

Tables 2 and 3 present 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

¹¹Based on the coding in Cruz et al. (2018), 15% of respondents in the AmericasBarometer sample are from parliamentary systems (i.e., Belize, Canada, Jamaica, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago) and 2% are from Guyana, the lone semi-presidential system in the data.

TABLE 1 Model of support for executive power and support for democracy, the Americas.

	Close legislature	Dissolve courts
Executive approval	0.040*	0.061*
	(0.012)	(0.010)
Support for democracy	-0.054*	-0.060*
	(0.007)	(0.009)
Intercept	0.204*	0.176*
	(0.010)	(0.015)
Country × Year fixed effects	X	X
Demographic controls	X	X
Num. obs.	72,602	47,355

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

* $p > 0.05$.

TABLE 2 Model of support for executive power and support for democracy, African countries.

	Decide	Not bound	Justify	Pass laws
Executive approval	0.027*	0.026*	0.030*	0.052*
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.009)
Support for democracy	-0.094*	-0.044*	-0.113*	-0.097*
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.009)
Intercept	0.322*	0.414*	0.538*	0.467*
	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.015)
Country × Wave fixed effect	X	X	X	X
Demographic controls	X	X	X	X
Num. obs.	144,365	118,223	103,468	75,419

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

* $p > 0.05$.

for democracy. Across the four models, support for democracy is associated with a 0.11 to 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 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 Supporting Information: Appendix B. Using logistic regression models and survey weights in lieu of controlling for individual-level covariates again yields substantively similar results. We also estimate models using alternative four-point or five-point codings for 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 et al. (2018), 84% of the

TABLE 3 Model of support for executive power and support for democracy, the Americas: Interaction between support for democracy and executive approval.

	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 × Exec. approval	0.039* (0.014)	-0.006 (0.015)
Intercept	0.148* (0.017)	0.175* (0.024)
Country × Year fixed effect	X	X
Demographic controls	X	X
Num. obs.	72,602	47,355

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

* $p > 0.05$.

Afrobarometer respondents are from presidential systems, with 10% 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 whether they "agree" or "agree very strongly" with the statement. This creates a four-point measure of support for rule of law, which closely matches one of the survey instruments used by Reeves and Rogowski (2016).¹² The results, presented in Supporting Information: Appendix SB, 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.

¹²Support for democracy and support for rule of law correlated at 0.09, further suggesting that they are not mirrors of each other.

TABLE 4 Model of support for executive power and support for democracy, African countries: Interaction between support for democracy and executive approval.

	Decide	Not bound	Justify	Pass laws
Executive approval	0.048*	0.025*	0.032*	0.064*
	(0.004)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Support for democracy	-0.076*	-0.045*	-0.111*	-0.086*
	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Support for democracy × Exec. approval	-0.027*	0.001	-0.003	-0.016
	(0.005)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Intercept	0.308*	0.414*	0.536*	0.459*
	(0.012)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Country × Wave fixed effect	X	X	X	X
Demographic controls	X	X	X	X
Num. obs.	144,365	118,223	103,478	75,419

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

* $p > 0.05$.

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 democracy to constrain executive power, it would need to operate among both supporters and opponents of the person in office.¹³

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 Tables 3 and 4.

Across the six models in Tables 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 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

¹³See Reeves and Rogowski (2018, pp. 433–5) for a similar argument and analysis in the US case.

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 fully conditional on support for 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 & Rogowski, 2018), Posner and Vermeule (2010, p. 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 & 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 analysis, we conduct 26 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 results 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% 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), 22 of the 26 estimated relationships are

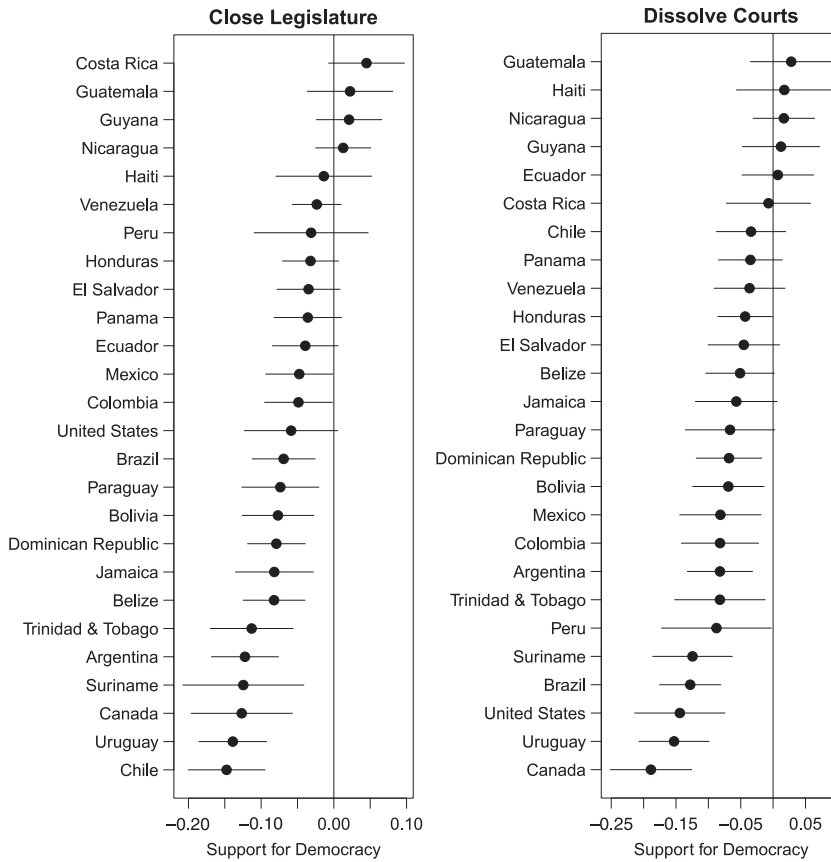


FIGURE 3 Support for democracy is negatively related to support for executive powers across countries of the Americas. Estimates are from linear models estimated separately for respondents from each country. We control for executive approval along with a host of demographic variables and include indicators for the survey wave when applicable. Each point is the change in support for executive power associated with a difference in support for democracy from the lowest to the highest value. For full question wordings, see Supporting Information: Table SA1.

negative. For 14, the 95% 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 4 percentage points (i.e., a reduction in the probability of 0.04). In contrast, the same change is associated with a 19-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.

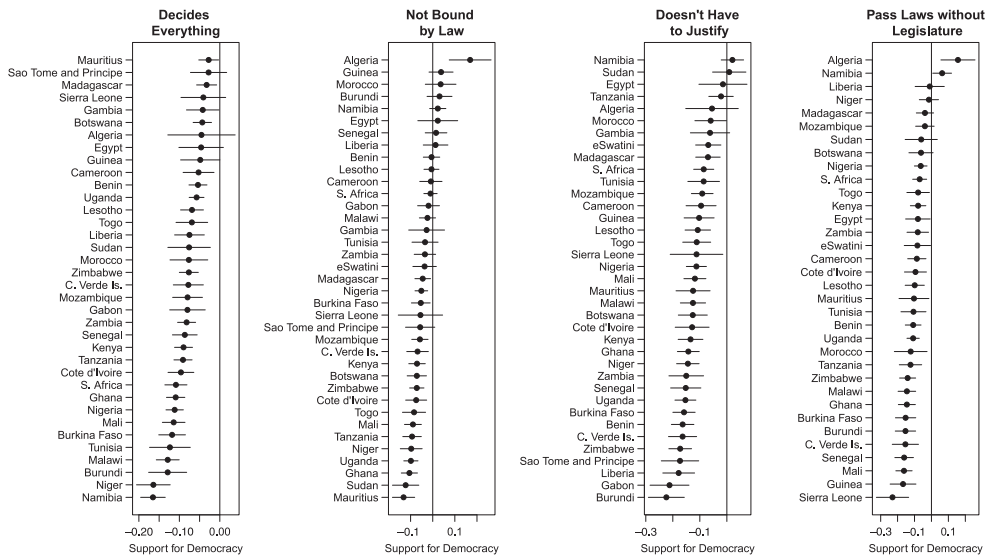


FIGURE 4 Support for democracy is negatively related to support for executive power across countries of Africa. Estimates are from linear models estimated separately for respondents from each country. We control for executive approval along with a host of demographic variables and include indicators 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 Supporting Information: Table SA2.

Support for democracy is again included in the 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% 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 0.26 in the probability of support for abolishing elections and the legislature and allowing a president to decide everything. The 95% confidence interval around this estimate spans from -0.16 to -0.36 .

In the 144 country-level models, 106 times (74%) *support for democracy* is a negative 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.¹⁴ Somewhat speculatively, it is possible that the patterns for Algeria reflect the unique political context in which the survey was conducted, but we leave a more thorough investigation of this possibility for future research.

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 toward executive authority.

¹⁴These 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%: 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>.

At the same time, democratic values may not be a universal prophylactic against antidemocratic executives. Citizens of some countries more strongly translate their support for democracy into opposition to executive authority. Consider the United States 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. Yet 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 & Ziblatt, 2018, p. 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 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 democratic values. This connection is consistent with contemporary debates in comparative politics. Consistent with our results, for example, Meijers and 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 & Tavits, 2018) and confidence votes (Becher & Brouard, 2022). And Singh and Carlin (2015) find that citizens in Latin American countries prefer a “happy medium” where views of democracy are most negative when presidents are either hamstrung by gridlock or face few constraints in implementing their policies. 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.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available at the author's Dataverse page at <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/areeves>.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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A Supplemental Appendix

A.1 Question Wording

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

Question	Choice Set
<p>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?</p>	<p>yes, it is justified; no, it is not justified</p>
<p>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</p>	
<p><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?</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p><i>Executive Approval.</i> Speaking in general of the current administration, how would you rate the job performance of [Prime Minister or President] [Name]?</p>	<p>very good; good; neither good nor bad (fair); bad; very bad</p>
<p>Demographics: <i>Age.</i></p>	<p>Numeric age.</p>
<p>Demographics: <i>Education.</i></p>	<p>Recoded from various choice sets such that none = 0, primary = 1, secondary = 2, post-secondary = 3.</p>
<p>Demographics: <i>Gender.</i></p>	<p>Male, Female, or Other.</p>
<p>Demographics: <i>Marital Status.</i></p>	<p>Recoded from various choice sets such that married = 1, otherwise 0.</p>
<p>Demographics: <i>Income.</i></p>	<p>Ten categories based on income deciles in respective country. Extra categories added in later surveys. We standardize the ordinal values within country.</p>

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

Question	Choice Set
<i>Support for Executive Power: 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
<i>Support for Executive Power: 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
<i>Support for Executive Power: 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.	
<i>Support for Executive Power: 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.	
<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.	Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?
<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, ap-prove, strongly approve
<i>Demographics: Age.</i>	Numeric age.
<i>Demographics: Education.</i>	Recoded from various choice sets such that none = 0, primary = 1, secondary = 2, post-secondary = 3.
<i>Demographics: Gender.</i>	Male or Female.
<i>Demographics: 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.
<i>Demographics: 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 and Support for Democracy, 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	-2.095* (0.106)	-1.905* (0.162)
Country \times Year Fixed Effects	X	X
Demographic Controls	X	X
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 × Wave Fixed Effect	X	X	X	X
Demographic Controls	X	X	X	X
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 and Support for Democracy, the Americas:
Using Survey Weight

	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	0.108* (0.010)	0.092* (0.009)
Country × Wave Fixed Effects	X	X
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 Democracy, 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 × Wave Fixed Effects	X	X	X	X
Num. obs.	148207	119363	104388	76382

* $p < 0.05$.

Note: Linear regressions with survey weights. Robust standard errors clustered on country/wave. Demographic variables are not included in the model.

B.3 Controlling for System

Table B.5: Model of Support for Executive Powers and Support for Democracy, 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	0.047* (0.020)	0.076* (0.022)
Intercept	0.132* (0.019)	0.178* (0.019)
Country × Year Fixed Effects	X	X
Demographic Controls	X	X
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	X	X	X	X
Demographic Controls	X	X	X	X
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 Rule of Law, African Countries.

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

* $p < 0.05$.

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

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* (0.006)	0.073* (0.007)	0.075* (0.008)	0.112* (0.008)
Support for Democracy	-0.360* (0.008)	-0.105* (0.009)	-0.280* (0.010)	-0.214* (0.010)
Intercept	2.755* (0.035)	2.500* (0.038)	2.697* (0.041)	2.584* (0.038)
Country × Wave Fixed Effect	X	X	X	X
Demographic Controls	X	X	X	X
Num. obs.	152466	118223	103468	75419

* $p < 0.05$.

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