Democrats with adjectives: Linking direct and indirect measures of democratic support

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Abstract. Major cross-national surveys measure popular support for democracy through direct questions about democracy in the abstract. Since people may entertain competing democratic ideas and ideals, however, the academic community ignores the extent to which standard questions capture citizen support for liberal democracy. To solve the validity problems associated with direct measures of democratic support, this article proposes linking them to more concrete, indirect measures of support for democratic principles and institutions. It employs the statistical technique of cluster analysis to establish this linkage. Cluster analysis permits grouping respondents in a way that is open to complex and inconsistent attitudinal profiles. It permits the identification of ‘democrats with adjectives’ who support democracy in the abstract, while rejecting core principles of liberal democracy. The article demonstrates the fruitfulness of this approach by drawing a map of ‘illiberal democrats’ in Mexico on the basis of the country’s 2003 National Survey on Political Culture.

The worldwide spread of democratic regimes since the mid-1970s has reinvigorated scholarly interest in mass support for democracy. According to broad strands of literature, a popular ‘commitment to democratic values, and support for a democratic system, are necessary conditions for the consolidation’ of democratic governance (Fuchs 1999: 127).¹ In this article we do not evaluate causal claims, but address a logically prior problem: measuring mass support for democracy. Standard questionnaire items that ask directly and abstractly about attitudes towards democracy suffer from fundamental problems of validity. Their failure to explicate the concrete ideas and ideals respondents associate with democracy clouds their substantive meaning. Undoubtedly, the measurement of democratic support partakes in the ‘current state of uncertainty about the equivalence of standard items across cultural contexts’ (Heath et al. 2005: 329).²

This article traces a methodological pathway that promises to lead to more valid measures of democratic support. It proposes to link direct questions on democratic support in systematic ways to more indirect and concrete questions on liberal-democratic ideas and institutions, which should allow identification of complex and inconsistent configurations of attitudes. In particular, it should
permit us to detect ‘diminished subtypes’ of democrats – ‘democrats with adjectives’ – who are sympathetic to democracy in the abstract, while hostile to core principles of liberal democracy in particular. In the first, conceptual part of the article, we review the literature on democratic support and lay out our idea of ‘democrats with adjectives’. In the second, empirical part, we illustrate the possibilities of linking direct and indirect measures of democratic support through a cluster analysis of Mexico’s major representative survey on political attitudes, the 2003 National Survey on Political Culture (ENCUP).

The elusive meaning of democratic support

Most comparative public opinion surveys on political attitudes that cover the developing world include a direct, generic question designed to measure citizen support for democracy. These questions are direct insofar as they make explicit use of the term ‘democracy’; they are generic insofar as they introduce the abstract concept without specifying any of its concrete attributes. Their precise formulations vary. Surveys may frame democracy as a ‘political regime’, ‘form of government’ or ‘political system’; they may invite respondents to evaluate it in absolute or relative terms; and they may ask for comparisons with ‘dictatorship’, ‘authoritarian government’, specified or unspecified ‘previous’ regimes or, more broadly, with ‘any other form of government’.

Interviewer effects

Today, as democracy has turned into a worldwide value, paying ‘lip service to democracy’ has become an ‘almost universal’ practice (Inglehart 2003: 51). Under the pressure of recognized social values, respondents may therefore ‘seek to give what they perceive [to be] the “right” answer to the interviewer’ (Seligson 2004: 12). Instead of identifying citizens who embrace the ideals of liberal democracy, our standard questions on ‘democratic support’ may do no
more than register ‘questionnaire democrats’ (Dalton 1994) who deliver politically correct answers to noncommittal stimuli.

Vacuous conceptions of democracy

Democracy’s almost universal acceptance as an abstract value may lead people to falsify their public preferences (Kuran 1995), but perhaps more importantly, it may lead them to profess rhetorical ‘preferences for democracy’ that are devoid of any concrete content. Respondents may understand that democracy is a good thing, something we aspire to, without being able to specify what it is supposed to represent. All over the world, across regime types, cultures and continents, generic survey questions on democratic support earn overwhelming levels of assent. In 78 out of the 80 countries included in the 1999–2000 wave of the World Values Surveys (the exceptions are Russia and Moldova), more than 80 per cent of respondents indicate that ‘having a democratic political system’ is a good thing (Inglehart et al. 2004: E117). Such almost unanimous levels of support suggest that democracy may indeed be a societal valence issue that works similarly to concepts like success and happiness in the personal realm – concepts that designate something valuable without naming its substance.

Competing conceptions of democracy

Within the liberal-democratic consensus that has taken hold in political science over the past decades, democracy is defined by a narrow set of political institutions. At a minimum, democracy demands multiparty competition and the rule of law. The former involves regular, inclusive, competitive and fair elections; the latter political and civil liberties as well as constitutional limits on the exercise of power. The normative convergence around liberal-democratic principles is not limited to the academic world, but extends to parts of the political world. In some established democracies, citizens and politicians largely stand on common liberal-democratic ground, rendering it ‘hardly conceivable that reasonable individuals can oppose such principles’ (Fuchs 1999: 129). By contrast, new democracies almost invariably fail to provide such contexts of consent. Rather than embracing liberal-democratic principles, their citizens may flirt with authoritarian alternatives, entertain vague ideas of democracy that lack an identifiable core or harbor notions of democracy whose core principles are incompatible with liberal-democratic ideals. In such settings, democracy continues to work as an ‘essentially contested concept’ (Gallie 1956). Rather than shared, clear and fixed, its meaning tends to be vague, shifting and controversial.
Conflicting values

Our conceptions of democracy are not value-free. They are rooted in our normative commitments. Yet, the coupling between political concepts and social values may be loose. Individuals may support fundamental principles of liberal-democratic politics at the same time as they reject some of its constitutive values. For instance, James Gibson and his collaborators have demonstrated in numerous studies that ‘a clear disjunction’ may exist ‘between levels of support for democracy and political tolerance’. Citizens who accept the institutional framework of electoral democracy ‘are not necessarily tolerant of their political enemies’ (Gibson 1996: 7).

Despite better knowledge, both producers and consumers of survey research often end up assuming that respondents attach similar meanings to the notion of democracy. They tend to read aggregate levels of (what looks like) ‘popular support for democracy’ in given countries as valid indicators of public attitudes towards democratic governance, without further clarification of underlying democratic notions and values. As Adam Przeworski (2003: 119) observed poignantly, uncounted ‘pages of academic journals are filled with percentages of Americans, Spaniards, Poles or Kazakhs saying that they like or do not like democracy’. Yet, by ignoring the polysemic nature of democracy, standard questions on democratic support involve daring assumptions about the cross-national and interpersonal comparability of democratic ideas. If the core meaning of the concept varies across countries and individuals, posing abstract questions about democracy may do little more than produce ‘an illusionary appearance of comparability’ (Heath et al. 2005: 321).5

Measuring conceptions of democracy

Both theoretical and empirical studies of democracy have long been aware of their object’s polysemic nature. As political philosophers have been discussing competing ‘models of democracy’ (Held 1987), comparative political scientists have been examining the multifaceted conceptions of democracy citizens embrace in distant places like Argentina (Powers 2001) and Senegal (Schaffer 1998). Students of comparative public opinion, too, have been ready to admit democracy’s conceptual fluidity. The literature on democratic support is dotted with statements of caution alerting against the possibility that ‘democracy can mean all things to all people’ (Bratton 2002: 6; see, e.g., Ai Camp 2001: 15–20; Bratton & Mattes 2001: 453–457; Fuchs 1999; Norris 1999: 11; Seligson 2004: 12; Rose et al. 1998). Conscious of the fact that they cannot assume the equiva-
lence of meaning in measures of democratic support, but must establish it empirically, students of public opinion have gone beyond posing direct questions about preferences for democracy. To capture broad varieties of democratic ideas and values citizens may hold, they have taken three complementary methodological routes: open definitions, constrained definitions and indirect definitions.

Employing open definitions, some surveys let citizens speak for themselves. Without prejudging their responses, they ask participants open-ended questions on what comes to mind when they hear the word ‘democracy’ (see, e.g., Ai Camp 2001: 17; Bratton 2004: 66–70; Miller et al. 1997: 164–176). As a matter of course, the fruitfulness of open questions depends on their precise wording as well as on the analytical framing and methodological transparency of the posterior coding process.

Offering constrained definitions, some surveys invite respondents to delineate the conceptual core of democracy by scaling generic attributes (from a closed list) according to the degree to which they consider them to be ‘essential’ to democracy. Such lists may be limited to elements essential to liberal democracy like political rights, civil liberties, the rule of law, universal suffrage and multiparty competition (see Westle 2003), or they may include items that tap alternative conceptions of democracy. For instance, intending to uncover substantive notions of democracy, Afrobarometer asks people whether they consider socio-economic goals like ‘equality in education’ and ‘jobs for everyone’ to be essential features of democracy (see Bratton 2004: 69).

Finally, when using indirect definitions, rather than asking respondents (directly) about their notions of democracy, numerous surveys ask (indirectly) whether they agree or disagree with statements that touch upon principles and institutions that others (like survey researchers themselves) consider essential to liberal democracy. Some of these instruments capture conflicting notions of democracy. Afrobarometer, in particular, taps substantive notions of democracy that associate democracy with policy outcomes like social equality, economic progress, and peace, alongside with procedural notions that equate democracy with individual rights and representative institutions (see Bratton 2004: 69). Most surveys, however, measure citizen attitudes toward liberal democracy only. For example, UNDP, in its 2004 report on the state of Latin American democracies, inquires into the importance citizens grant to Congress, political parties, independent media, and constitutional restraints on power (2004: 137).

These three strategies of measurement are designed to survey the conceptual and normative ground in which abstract preferences for democracy are anchored. In principle, they permit the systematic exploration of contrasting...
conceptualizations and ideological inconsistencies citizens may display in their attitudes towards democracy. In practice, however, prevailing habits of analysis have inhibited realizing their full analytical potential. In their analyses of opinion surveys that contain multiple items to uncover citizen attitudes towards democracy, authors tend to align respondents along a single dimension: their attitudinal proximity to liberal-democratic norms. Some employ factor analysis, others construct additive indicators, to aggregate multiple measures into one ‘summary indicator of support for democratic values’ (Gibson & Duch 1993: 321). Yet, whatever the specific technique, generating single indicators of liberal-democratic support rests upon two strong premises. It assumes that liberal democracy is a one-dimensional concept; and it assumes that individual citizens either embrace or reject liberal democracy in consistent ways. Whether liberal democracy represents a one-dimensional idea has been a longstanding matter of normative debate. By contrast, whether individual citizens are ideologically coherent is an empirical question, not a conceptual one. Since Philip Converse’s (1964) seminal treatise on ‘the nature of belief systems in mass publics’, the burden of proof lies with those who assume attitudinal consistency (see also Miller et al. 1997: 159–160).

**Democrats with adjectives**

In the comparative study of democratization, scholars have been witnessing the emergence of political regimes that fulfill the minimum conditions of electoral democracy, but lack essential attributes of liberal democracy. In order to capture such deviations from normative ideals, authors have been attaching distinctive adjectives to the multifaceted ‘diminished subtypes’ of democracy they observed (see Collier & Levitsky 1997). The specific labels scholars choose to describe such ‘democracies with adjectives’ (as Collier and Levitsky) are meant to draw attention to specific structural deficits and weaknesses. For example, ‘delegative’ democracies lack checks and balances (O’Donnell 1994), ‘illiberal’ democracies fail to uphold the rule of law (Zakaria 2003) and ‘clientelist’ democracies are weak on programmatic party politics (Kitschelt 2000).

The comparative study of democratic support seems to face similarly inconsistent and deficient objects of study. While students of regime change have been struggling to make sense of ‘hybrid regimes’ (Diamond 2002), students of public opinion have to make sense of ‘hybrid citizens’. Given analogous needs for analytic differentiation, it seems promising to extend the discussion of ‘democracies with adjectives’ to a discussion of ‘democrats with adjectives’. In the study of democracy, we seem to miss a lot of ‘differences that make a
difference’ (Bateson 1972) if we put the unifying label of ‘democracy’ (without adjectives) on the existing variety of democratic regimes. Similarly, we seem to miss a lot if we describe all individuals as ‘democrats’ (without further qualifications) if only they profess a generic ‘preference for democracy’ in response to direct survey questions.

Extending the discussion of ‘diminished subtypes’ of democratic regimes to the study of ‘diminished subtypes’ of democratic citizens runs the risk of inviting facile exercises of negative labeling. Students of public opinion may be tempted to place unrealistic demands or put cheap disqualifiers on citizens who do not to share their conceptions of democracy. Clearly, any identification of ‘democrats with adjectives’ must avoid deriving its analytical categories from either trivializing or idealizing normative standards. The ‘democratic deficits’ we diagnose must constitute clear deviations from core principles of liberal democracy.

In broad terms, the idea of ‘mixed’ citizens reaches back at least to Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba’s Civic Culture (Almond & Verba 1963). Yet, it must be noted that admitting the possibility of inconsistent attitudes is not equivalent to locating citizens in the middle range of a normative continuum. Our notion of potential normative contradictions seems more unsettling than the idea of attitudinal gradations or balances, like the benign equilibrium between passive deference and critical participation that Almond and Verba identified as the distinguishing mark of a ‘civic culture’. In more recent studies on comparative public opinion, some authors have come to embrace the intriguing possibility of individual incoherence. They have started exploring bivariate relations between generic preferences for democracy and other measures of support for democratic ideas and institutions. Michael Bratton, for instance, cross-tabulated support for democracy with the ‘rejection of authoritarian rule’ (military dictatorship, personal dictatorship, one-party rule and traditional rule). He found that almost a third of respondents said they preferred democracy, but failed to reject consistently all forms of authoritarian rule. Contrasting with ‘committed democrats’ who reject all four variants of authoritarianism, such ‘proto-democrats’ seem to caress ‘nostalgic feelings for more forceful forms of rule (Bratton 2002: 9).

These are steps in the right direction. Yet if we allow for ideological inconsistency, but wish to establish citizens’ attitudinal profiles in more complex and nuanced ways, we have to advance from bivariate to multivariate examinations of democratic ideas and ideals. To uncover substantive commonalities underlying a set of variables, students of public opinion commonly employ principal component or factor analysis. Here, we propose to expand this standard statistical toolbox to include cluster analysis – a classification technique routinely employed in disciplinary fields like botany, biology, market research,
psychiatry and archeology, while almost unknown in the comparative study of public opinion.7

Generally speaking, cluster analyses create groups of cases that are similar (numerically proximate) within group and dissimilar (numerically distant) between groups. They constitute inductive techniques of classification that do not judge a priori either the weight of individual variables or particular group profiles. While factor analysis allows us to discern how different variables hang together across cases, cluster analysis reveals how cases hang together across different variables. By uncovering degrees of association between variables as well as between components, factor analysis serves well to map attitudinal configurations among mass publics. As it searches for linear relationships between variables, however, it works better to the extent that cases are homogeneous not in their ideological inclinations (response levels), but in their ideological constraints (relations among responses). Where linear relationships between variables are weak, cluster analysis may serve as a valuable complement to detect and describe attitudinal inconsistencies among survey respondents. In the subsequent section, we illustrate its fruitfulness by exploring patterns of association between democratic support and political liberalism on the basis of Mexican public opinion data.

Empirical indicators

In order to explore, in an illustrative manner, configurations of democratic support and liberal attitudes among mass publics in new democracies, we use data from Mexico’s second National Survey on Political Culture, the country’s major public opinion survey on political attitudes. The nationwide survey (N = 4,850), commonly referred to as ‘ENCUP’ (after its Spanish initials), was commissioned by the Mexican government to ‘systematically diagnose the particular traits of the political culture prevalent in the country’ (SEGOB 2003: 1). Conducted in February 2003, it included 74 questions covering various dimensions of political culture such as political interest, political knowledge, political participation, policy positions, and personal and institutional trust. We select one question as our ‘anchor variable’ measuring democratic support, plus five others we hold to be meaningful indicators of liberal-democratic core principles (see Table 1).8

Democratic support

Numerous authors have emphasized the apparent ambivalence of Mexican citizens towards democratic principles and institutions. According to
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Variable name</th>
<th>Wording</th>
<th>Response categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct support for democracy</td>
<td>Democracy versus dictatorship</td>
<td>‘What do you think is better for the country: Democracy that respects the rights of all persons or dictatorship that guarantees economic progress even without respecting the rights of all persons?’</td>
<td>(1) Dictatorship; (2) Neither; (3) Democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom of organization</td>
<td>Freedom of organization</td>
<td>‘The government should intervene in decisions concerning one’s desires to associate with other persons.’</td>
<td>Government (1) should intervene; (2) should intervene in part; (3) should not intervene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom of expression</td>
<td>Freedom of expression</td>
<td>‘Would you be willing to sacrifice freedom of expression in exchange for a life without economic pressures?’</td>
<td>(1) Yes; (2) In part; (3) No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom of expression</td>
<td>Pluralism of opinion in television</td>
<td>‘Would you permit a person to say things on television that contradict your way of thinking?’</td>
<td>(1) No; (2) In part; (3) Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political equality</td>
<td>Indigenous participation</td>
<td>‘In your opinion, should indigenous people participate in politics?’</td>
<td>(1) No; (2) In part; (3) Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political equality</td>
<td>Gay participation</td>
<td>‘In your opinion, should homosexual persons participate in politics?’</td>
<td>(1) No; (2) In part; (3) Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
subsequent waves of Latinobarometer surveys since 1995, Mexican citizens have been displaying medium levels of democratic support by regional standards. These and other data have given rise to widespread complaints about ‘democratic deficits’ in Mexico’s political culture, echoing wider complaints about the ‘limited’ ‘democratic loyalty’ of Latin American citizens (Smith 2005: 292).\(^9\)

The item ENCUP 2003 uses to measure overt support for democracy is similar, while not identical, to standard questions on democratic support. It asks what respondents think is ‘better for the country: a democracy that respects the rights of all persons, or a dictatorship that guarantees economic progress’. In contrast to standard questions, the survey thus concretizes the notion of democracy (its liberal dimension of individual rights). In addition, it specifies the circumstances under which respondents may deem authoritarian rule to be justifiable (the achievement of economic progress). Given these differences in wording, we should not expect ENCUP 2003 to reveal identical levels of ‘democratic support’ as Latinobarometer 2003 (according to which 53 per cent of Mexicans thought that ‘democracy is preferable to any other kind of government’). Considering the explicit emphasis the Mexican survey puts on individual rights as well as the explicit trade-off it poses against economic performance, respondents should show themselves to be less supportive of democracy as the item reflects a stronger commitment to liberal-democratic governance than vague ‘preferences for democracy’ registered by Latinobarometer.\(^10\)

As it turns out, however, over two-thirds of all respondents (67.9 per cent) said they would prefer democratic rights to dictatorial welfare. Since more than one-fifth failed to provide valid answers (21.4 per cent), this amounts to an astonishing level of agreement of 84.2 per cent of valid responses (see Table 2).\(^11\) The level of non-responses merits attention, however. It suggests that many respondents may have felt uncomfortable with the artificial alternative presented by ENCUP that associates authoritarianism with economic efficiency and (albeit in an implicit manner) democracy with economic failure. They may have refused to choose among ‘two evils’: dictatorship without individual rights and democracy without economic growth. It appears that when forced to give ‘simplistic answers to what are perceived as simplistic questions’ (Gibson 1996: 11), they took refuge in essentially uninterpretable ‘don’t know’/‘no response’ answers.

**Freedom of association**

To establish citizen attitudes towards freedom of organization, we select an item that asks whether ‘the government should intervene in decisions that
concern one’s wishes to associate with other persons’. This question about the desirability of governmental interference into associational decisions touches upon a core value of political liberalism: freedom of organization. As Table 2 shows, more than a third of respondents declared themselves in favor of governmental interference into citizens’ associational desires (37.7 per cent). A solid majority objected (57.7 per cent).

Table 2. Support for democracy and liberal values, Mexico 2003: Percentage distribution of valid answers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1 Illiberal</th>
<th>2 Ambiguous</th>
<th>3 Liberal</th>
<th>Missing values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘What do you think is better for the country: A democracy that respects the rights of all persons or a dictatorship that guarantees economic progress even without respecting the rights of all persons?’*</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>86.4</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Should gays participate in politics or not?’**</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Should indigenous people participate in politics or not?’***</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>84.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The government should intervene in decisions concerning one’s wishes to associate with other persons.’***</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Would you be willing to sacrifice freedom of expression in exchange for a life without economic pressures?’***</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Would you permit a person to get on television who will be saying things that contradict your way of thinking?’***</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Response categories: * Democracy (3), dictatorship (1); ** No (1), in part (2), yes (3); *** Yes (1), in part (2), no (3). N = 4,580.
Source: Own calculations on the basis of ENCUP (2003).
Freedom of expression

To capture the value citizens grant to freedom of expression, we selected two survey items. The first asks whether interviewees would be willing to see persons appear on television who would be saying things that run counter their personal way of thinking, which seems to measure tolerance of dissent in quite a neat way. As shown in Table 2, an astonishing (as well as worrisome) majority of citizens object to the public expression of diverging opinions (51.9 per cent). Our second item asks whether respondents would be ‘willing to sacrifice freedom of expression in exchange for a life without economic pressures’. Remarkably, almost two-thirds reject the invitation of renouncing basic rights in the name of economic welfare (63.2 per cent) (see Table 2).

Political equality

The democratic principle of equality demands guaranteeing equal rights of participation to all citizens. Within narrow and well-defined exceptions (children and psychiatric patients), all exclusions from the democratic process are illegitimate. We select attitudes towards the political inclusion of gays and indigenous people as indicators of citizen respect for equal rights of participation. Tolerating, or even demanding, the political exclusion of ascriptive groups reveals normative dispositions fundamentally at odds with the liberal-democratic principle of equality.

Summary

Our five indicators of liberalism, while less than ideal, do seem to tap citizen attitudes towards fundamental liberal-democratic rights in ways that are neither trivial nor redundant. In order to obtain a rough first idea of attitude consistency, we computed bivariate correlations and did some principal component analysis. Although mostly significant (at the 0.01 level), Pearson correlation coefficients (not reported here) are almost uniformly low and some even show counterintuitive negative signs. None of our measures of liberalism correlates higher than 0.06 with our indicator of democratic support. Factor analysis, too, confirms low levels of inter-item consistency. Rotated principal component analysis (Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization) yields two factors with Eigenvalues above 1. One contains attitudes towards gay and indigenous participation in politics (with factor loadings close to 0.8); the other one combines freedom of association (factor loading 0.6) with freedom of expression (factor loading 0.7). Neither factor loads highly on our ‘anchor variable’ of democratic support. The imperfect fit between our
measures of democratic support and liberal values suggests that simple binary classifications of respondents – as either supportive of or hostile to liberal-democratic values – will fail to capture the existing complexity of attitudinal configurations.

Mapping democratic support and illiberal values

To obtain a more precise picture of citizens’ ideological profiles, we employ agglomerative, hierarchical cluster analysis according to Ward – a technique well-fitted to maximizing intra-group similarity as well as inter-group dissimilarity.12 As we exclude all respondents who failed to give valid answers to all six questions (all those with at least one missing value), our analysis includes 3,099 cases, which amounts to a bit over two-thirds of all respondents (67.6 per cent). In order to prevent clusters from becoming too small, we settled on a six-cluster solution in which each group still contains no less than 10 per cent of all cases. Even more importantly, balancing parsimony and complexity, the six clusters display configurations of attitudes that are nicely distinctive and make sense in substantive terms.

Table 3 shows the mean values each of the six groups obtained on our six indicators. Variables are coded so that 1 always corresponds to authoritarian or illiberal responses, 2 to ambiguous answers and 3 to democratic or liberal responses (see also Tables 1 and 2 above). Bold characters highlight extreme values of each variable (column). In a further step, we group the data into three simple categories. We distinguish between democratic, ambiguous and authoritarian attitudes that vary in their levels of overt democratic support (column 6), and between liberal, ambiguous and illiberal attitudes that vary in their levels of political liberalism (columns 1–5). The cut-off points for these groups are given at the bottom of Table 4. Let us briefly highlight the distinctive traits of each cluster.

Liberal democrats

On average, all groups, except the very last one, are ‘democratic’ insofar as they express overt preferences for democracy (see column 6). Yet, only the first cluster corresponds to the idea of ‘liberal democrats’ in a consistent fashion. This group is unanimous (!) in its direct support for democracy as well as in its support of four out of our five questions on liberal values. Tellingly, consistent democrats represent little more than an eighth of the entire sample (13.6 per cent).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Clusters</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Gay participation</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Indigenous participation</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Freedom of organization</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Freedom of expression</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Pluralism of opinion</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Democracy versus dictatorship</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Liberal democrats</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>Mean</td>
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<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Intolerant democrats</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>Mean</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>SD</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Paternalistic democrats</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.99</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Homophobic democrats</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.97</td>
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<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Exclusionary democrats</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>Mean</td>
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<td>Mean</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.95</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>0.90</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ambivalent nondemocrats</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>Mean</td>
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<td>Mean</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1.21</td>
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<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.96</td>
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<td>0.89</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>SD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>3,099</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>Mean</td>
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<td>Mean</td>
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<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.76</td>
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<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Ward’s method for agglomerative hierarchical cluster analysis. Squared Euclidian distances, unweighted variables. SD = standard deviation. Figures in bold highlight maximum and minimum values within clusters.
### Table 4. Illiberalism and democratic support: Citizen profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Clusters</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
<th>1 Gay participation</th>
<th>2 Indigenous participation</th>
<th>3 Freedom of organization</th>
<th>4 Freedom of expression</th>
<th>5 Pluralism of opinion</th>
<th>6 Democracy versus dictatorship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Liberal democrats</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>liberal</td>
<td>liberal</td>
<td>liberal</td>
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<td>liberal</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Intolerant democrats</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>liberal</td>
<td>liberal</td>
<td>liberal</td>
<td>ambivalent</td>
<td>illiberal</td>
<td>democratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Paternalistic democrats</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>liberal</td>
<td>liberal</td>
<td>illiberal</td>
<td>ambivalent</td>
<td>ambivalent</td>
<td>democratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Homophobic democrats</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>illiberal</td>
<td>liberal</td>
<td>ambivalent</td>
<td>ambivalent</td>
<td>ambivalent</td>
<td>democratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Exclusionary democrats</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>illiberal</td>
<td>illiberal</td>
<td>ambivalent</td>
<td>ambivalent</td>
<td>ambivalent</td>
<td>democratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ambivalent nondemocrats</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>ambivalent</td>
<td>liberal</td>
<td>ambivalent</td>
<td>ambivalent</td>
<td>ambivalent</td>
<td>authoritarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Ambivalent democrats</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>ambivalent</td>
<td>liberal</td>
<td>ambivalent</td>
<td>ambivalent</td>
<td>ambivalent</td>
<td>democratic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Range of arithmetic means for ‘illiberal’ and ‘authoritarian’ attitudes: $1 \leq \phi < 1.5$; range of means for ‘ambivalent’ attitudes: $1.5 \leq \phi \leq 2.5$; range of means for ‘liberal’ and ‘democratic’ attitudes: $2.5 < \phi \leq 3$. © 2007 The Author(s) Journal compilation © 2007 (European Consortium for Political Research)
Intolerant democrats

In terms of the breadth of their liberal-democratic convictions, the group contiguous to liberal democrats of cluster 1 are the ‘intolerant democrats’ of cluster 2. In fact, these two clusters are hardly distinguishable from each other except on one variable: their tolerance towards dissenting views in the public space. In contrast to its almost perfectly liberal profile on all other variables, this group looks almost perfectly illiberal in its rejection of ideological pluralism in the mass media (column 5). The manifest aversion to dissenting opinion this group exhibits reveals the ‘paradox of political tolerance’ James Gibson formulated about a decade ago. It confirms that ‘only a tenuous connection’ may exist between support for democracy and political tolerance (Gibson 1996: 7, 10).

Paternalistic democrats

The next democratic group is the ‘paternalistic democrats’ of cluster 3 (18.8 per cent). They are liberal in their consistent respect for political equality, expressing unanimous support for gay and indigenous participation. Yet they are ambiguous in the relative importance they attribute to freedom of expression (column 4) as well as in their attitudes towards dissenting views appearing on their television screens (column 5). They earn the label of ‘paternalistic’ because of their illiberal stance towards freedom of organization (column 3). Almost without fissures, they agreed that governments should interfere when citizens wish to organize (mean = 1.09). As it seems, this group, while open to the political involvement of everyone, wishes to put cautionary limits on political participation through governmental tutelage of civil society and the media.

Homophobic democrats

The ‘homophobic democrats’ of cluster 4 are supportive of democracy and acceptant of indigenous people, but openly discriminatory towards gays, advocating the cancellation of their citizenship rights. Their willingness to act upon their social prejudices and send a whole category of citizens into political exile reveals a patchy commitment to liberal-democratic rights. If Ronald Inglehart (2003: 54) is right and ‘tolerance of homosexuality is a [strong] predictor of stable democracy’, we may find it worrisome that homophobic democrats represents the most populous group, comprising well over a quarter of the survey sample (28.2 per cent).
Exclusionary democrats

Interviewees sorted into cluster 5 show an ideological profile very similar to the preceding cluster 4. Even if they choose democracy over dictatorship, their commitment to political liberties appears to be superficial at best. Yet deepening the discriminatory thrust of homophobic democrats, this group wishes to extend the denial of citizenship rights to indigenous groups as well. No other cluster adopts a position that would come even remotely close to this group of ‘exclusionary democrats’.

Ambivalent non-democrats

Cluster 6, our one and only group of ‘authoritarian’ citizens, includes those 12.4 per cent of respondents who give priority to economic progress, even at the expense of democratic rights (column 6). While instrumental in their attitude towards democratic governance, they are ‘tolerant’ towards the political participation of indigenous people, and ambivalent on all other variables. In some sense, this is good news. Those citizens who prefer the economic efficacy of dictatorship to the political efficacy of democracy do not display a consistently illiberal profile. Rather than posturing as hard core autocrats, they show a pattern of relative indifference, speckled with dots of liberalism.

Summary

From our inductive classification we may infer that ideological inconsistency carries the day among Mexican citizens. The bad news is that most democratic supporters, except the small group of liberal democrats, manifest illiberal convictions on at least one dimension. The good news is that the few who flirt with authoritarian governance are not consistent either: they display a mix of normative indifference and instrumental calculation. The data speak of citizens who claim democratic rights and liberties for themselves, but seem to be ready to deny them to others. Embracing democracy as an abstract ideal, they still seem to be willing to banish dissenting voices or disliked groups from the public sphere. Since the specific targets of intolerance vary among the different clusters of ‘illiberal democrats’, they may find it difficult to translate their non-democratic impulses into political action. Yet citizens who conceive democratic rights as private privileges rather than universal guarantees may be willing to tolerate the erosion of political rights and civil liberties as long as they themselves feel protected.
Conclusion

Standard survey questions that ask in a direct and generic manner whether respondents prefer democracy to non-democratic regimes tend to generate more puzzles than they resolve. Since they do not inform us about underlying democratic concepts and values, they do not tell us to what extent people who express a generic ‘preference for democracy’ are actually committed to liberal-democratic ideas and institutions. The semantic indeterminacy of standard questions on democratic preferences has led some authors to conclude that ‘it is not useful to ask if people support [democracy] in abstract’ (Bratton & Mattes 2001: 457). This article, by contrast, vindicated the usefulness of such direct and abstract questionnaire items. While we should keep asking such questions, we should introduce and interpret them in conjunction with more indirect and concrete questions on democratic ideas and ideals. Rather than resigning ourselves to the meaninglessness of overt democratic support, we should strive to uncover its structure of meaning by reading it in the context of individual attitudes towards more specific components of liberal democracy – be they conceptual, institutional or normative.

As the preceding analysis suggests, the statistical technique of cluster analysis may serve as a fruitful heuristic tool for linking direct and indirect measures of democratic support as it permits ordering large numbers of cases across several dimensions without prejudging their substantive profiles. At this point, few comparative opinion surveys are well designed to capture citizen attitudes towards democratic ideas and institutions. Still, existing datasets do contain large amounts of useful yet understudied data. If we wish to deepen our understanding of popular attitudes towards democracy, re-analyzing available data in fresh ways, despite their limitations, seems to be no less important than collecting new data.

Future applications of cluster analysis to the comparative study of democratic support face the triple challenge of improving our ‘descriptive inferences’ (King et al. 1994) by incorporating additional variables, exploring the origins and tracing the consequences of different attitudinal configurations. They may draw fuller portraits of citizens’ democratic ideas and ideals by analyzing a broader range of plausible democratic conceptions and commitments, going beyond a particular set of liberal values. They may explore the origins of different attitudinal profiles by examining their political, cultural and socio-economic correlates. And they may study the consequences citizens’ ideological profiles carry by examining levels of support different groups show for political regimes, political institutions and public policies. In the face of this ample research agenda, we wish to conclude by stating the obvious: much work

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remains to be done to decipher the means and meanings of democratic support across and within nations.

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Notes

2. See also Sarsfield (2003). For an innovative discussion of validity problems in cross-national survey research, with a focus on political efficacy, see King et al. (2004). Heath et al. (2005: 318–330) offer a concise revision of problems and solutions of semantic equivalence in comparative public opinion studies.
3. For precise wordings, see the websites of the World Values Surveys (www.worldvaluessurvey.org) and Globalbarometer (www.globalbarometer.org), with links to the regional Barometers.
4. Such portraits of normative consensus are likely to be overdrawn, however. It may be worth rediscovering older discussions as exemplified by Prothro and Grigg (1960) that questioned easy assumptions about the breadth and depth of democratic support in industrial democracies.
5. See, e.g., Lagos (2003a, 2003b); Waldron-Moore (1999); Zovatto (2002). Granted, non-academic consumers of survey research are much more vulnerable to interpretative simplifications – see, e.g., the article ‘Democracy’s Low-level Equilibrium’ (*The Economist*, 12 August 2004).
7. A notable recent exception is UNDP (2004).
8. ENCUP 2003 does not tap attitudes towards democratic institutions, nor does it permit one to look beyond liberal values and reconstruct citizens’ commitment to alternative strands of normative democratic theory (like participatory, substantive, republican or deliberative democracy). Thus our exclusive focus on liberal values. The survey was commissioned by the Secretary of the Interior (SEGOB, Secretaría de Gobernación). Individual-level data, as well as technical documentation, are accessible online at: www.segob.gob.mx. Questions were designed (with little regard for cross-national comparability) by SEGOB, while sampling and interviewing was conducted by the National Institute for Statistics and Geographical Information (INEGI). The sample was stratified...
by socio-economic levels and rural-urban residence. Respondents were randomly chosen among ‘habitual residents’ above age 18 of the households selected. The 4,580 completed interviews represent a response rate of 87.1 per cent of the original sample of 5,256 households. Reported margins of error lie at 5.2 per cent (SEGOB 2003: 3). For more detailed information on sampling and interviewing, see www.segob.gob.mx (Encuesta Nacional de Cultura Política y Prácticas Ciudadanas → Encup 2003 → Documentación).


10. In contrast to ENCUP, the Latinobarometer item on regime preferences offers an intermediate category that allows respondents to express their indifference between regime types.

11. All questions included in our analysis ask respondents either to agree or disagree, admitting the possibility of ‘spontaneous’ indications of ‘partial’ agreement or disagreement. We recoded all items by assigning a score of 1 to illiberal (authoritarian) answers, and a score of 3 to liberal (democratic) responses. We understood spontaneous offers of ‘partial’ agreement or disagreement as intermediate categories receiving a score 2 (see also Table 1). All translations of survey items are ours.

12. As a proximity measure, we used squared Euclidian distances. Variables are unweighted. All results were produced by SPSS for Windows 11.5. For a brief comparative discussion of Ward’s method, see Everitt et al. (2001: 59–64). Useful introductions into cluster analyses are Aldenderfer and Blashfield (1984) and Bailey (1994).

References


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