

Deeming the Undemocratic Democratic: How Support for ‘Illiberal Majoritarianism’ Shapes Understandings of Democracy in Latin America

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Abstract

Across the world, many citizens express strong support for democracy while also backing leaders who weaken checks and balances, sideline opposition parties, and challenge the rule of law. We argue that citizens’ understanding of democracy as *illiberal majoritarianism* helps resolve this puzzle. Under this conception, elected executives embody the people’s will, making constraints on executive authority appear as obstacles to democratic rule. We introduce the Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism (SIM) index, based on a five-item battery included in the 2026 AmericasBarometer surveys in 16 Latin American countries. We find that illiberal majoritarianism is widespread and positively associated with abstract support for democracy. Those high in SIM also perceive their countries as more democratic, even in electoral autocracies. Further, SIM is particularly high among democracy supporters who strongly approve of the incumbent. Finally, Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) and individual-level comparisons show that existing measures tend to portray citizens as less illiberal than SIM does. Together, these findings show how illiberal understandings of democracy can reconcile professed democratic support with support for leaders and practices that undermine liberal-democratic institutions.

1 Introduction

Unlike past trends, contemporary authoritarian populist leaders have often risen to power through elections rather than through abrupt regime changes such as coups d’état (e.g., Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Stokes, 2025), thereby placing citizens’ political attitudes and behavior at

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the center of scholarship seeking to explain how democracy erodes and endures (e.g., Svobik, 2019; Claassen, 2020), in line with a longstanding tradition in comparative political behavior (Almond and Verba, 1963; Diamond, 1999; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). A critical assumption of this literature is that even when elected leaders dismantle democracy, citizens’ commitment to democratic rule can shield democracy from collapse or help restore it. At first glance, extensive evidence across time and countries provides strong reason for optimism: over the past two decades, citizens have remained broadly supportive of democracy over authoritarian rule (Anderson, Bol, and Ananda, 2021). This optimistic view, however, is challenged by findings showing that broad support for democracy often coexists with support for leaders who undermine democracy from within (Anderson, Bol, and Ananda, 2021). In this article, we examine this puzzle: *Why do citizens who express strong support for democracy often also endorse leaders and practices that undermine democratic institutions?*

As a first step toward explaining citizens’ commitment to democracy, prior research has emphasized the importance of examining how citizens themselves understand democracy (König, Siewert, and Ackermann, 2022). This approach moves beyond traditional measures that rely on survey questions explicitly referencing the term “democracy,” leaving respondents to interpret and define the concept for themselves. In response, recent scholarship has sought to assess the extent to which citizens support the fundamental requisites of democracy (Dahl, 1971), including both its electoral and liberal dimensions, such as multiparty competition, universal suffrage, and freedom of the press (Claassen et al., 2025). While this represents an important step toward more precise conceptualizations and measurements of democratic support, we argue that these efforts remain incomplete because they overlook a critical understanding of democracy that we term *illiberal majoritarianism*.

Under this conception, democracy is understood primarily as the duty of *elected* leaders to implement the will of “the people” (that is, the majority that elected them), even when doing so entails weakening institutional constraints, marginalizing political opponents, or violating minority rights. Therefore, supporters of illiberal majoritarianism grant elected executives expansive, if not virtually unconstrained, authority to carry out the majority’s electoral mandate while simultaneously expressing strong support for democracy.

Conceiving democracy in illiberal majoritarian terms carries important implications. First, the coexistence of support for “democracy” and approval of authoritarian leaders may not represent a contradiction but rather a coherent and internally consistent set of beliefs. Citizens may support both because they understand democracy primarily as the implementation of majority preferences

by elected leaders. Second, individuals who embrace illiberal majoritarianism may strongly endorse the electoral dimensions of democracy while rejecting its liberal components, particularly when institutional constraints are perceived as hindering elected leaders’ ability to govern on behalf of “the people.” In this view, elections constitute the primary source of democratic legitimacy. Democratic governance is therefore strengthened not through adherence to liberal principles such as checks and balances, minority rights, or judicial independence, but through elected leaders’ ability to fulfill the perceived mandate of the majority, even when doing so requires illiberal actions.

Focusing on Latin America and the Caribbean, this article demonstrates that illiberal majoritarianism constitutes a widespread yet largely underexamined understanding of democracy, and that failing to account for it has constrained our understanding of how public opinion can sustain competitive authoritarian regimes—political systems in which authoritarian leaders attain and maintain power through formally democratic elections (Levitsky and Way, 2020).

To examine our theoretical propositions empirically, we developed an original measure of support for illiberal majoritarianism (SIM) based on five survey items first piloted through online surveys in Mexico and Brazil during the summer of 2025. These items were subsequently incorporated into nationally representative surveys conducted across 16 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Given the region’s substantial variation in democratic performance and its diverse experiences with democratic erosion, these data provide an opportunity to examine how support for illiberal majoritarianism manifests across distinct political contexts.

The battery of questions underlying the SIM index and its validation was included in the 2026 wave of the Latin American Public Opinion Project’s (LAPOP) AmericasBarometer surveys. The questionnaires also included the democracy support items proposed by Claassen et al. (2025), which we use to assess their performance relative to our SIM index. This comparison allows us to evaluate whether existing measures overlook citizens who express support for many electoral and liberal components of democracy while simultaneously endorsing illiberal majoritarian principles.

First, we show that an additive index based on five original survey items provides a valid and highly reliable measure of Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism (SIM) across countries. Second, we find that support for illiberal majoritarianism is high across most Latin American countries, though levels vary. Third, the findings suggest that many citizens in the region understand “democracy” in illiberal majoritarian terms, as we theorize. Importantly, this relationship persists even after accounting for presidential approval, indicating that SIM captures a distinct conception of democratic

rule rather than mere support for the incumbent government.

Finally, the results show that the measure of support for liberal democracy proposed by Claassen et al., 2025 overestimates individuals' democratic inclinations, which we argue is largely because it does not account for their predispositions toward illiberal majoritarianism. Their measure assumes that support for liberal democracy entails a strong commitment to both its electoral and liberal dimensions. Our findings, however, demonstrate that these dimensions do not necessarily move together. When citizens conceive democracy in illiberal majoritarian terms, citizens may oppose democracy's liberal requisites not despite their commitment to electoral rule, but precisely because they view elections as conferring legitimacy on unconstrained executive power.

By introducing the concept of Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism and developing a novel measure to capture it, this article contributes to ongoing debates about the role of public opinion in contemporary processes of democratic erosion and resilience. More broadly, it highlights the importance of distinguishing between support for democracy as a system of competitive authoritarianism and support for democracy as a liberal constitutional order.

2 Support for Democracy: Previous Literature

A central premise in the study of democracy is that its quality and very survival depend not only on institutional arrangements but also on citizen support for democratic rule. Classic work on political culture emphasizes that democratic stability requires a citizenry that values democratic norms and accepts the legitimacy of democratic procedures (Almond and Verba, 1963). Building on this foundation, subsequent scholarship has consistently highlighted the importance of public commitment to democracy as a key pillar of democratic resilience and as a source of cross-national variation in democratic quality (Linz and Stepan, 1996; Diamond, 1999; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). This perspective is closely tied to the concept of diffuse support (Easton, 1975), understood as a reservoir of legitimacy that sustains democratic systems even in the face of dissatisfaction with regime performance (Lipset, 1960).

Within this framework, high levels of public support for democracy are typically interpreted as evidence of regime legitimacy and as a protective buffer against democratic breakdown. As a result, survey-based measures of democratic support have become a central tool for assessing the health of democratic regimes. Much of this empirical literature relies on the so-called “Churchill

question,” which asks respondents whether democracy, despite its flaws, is preferable to any other form of government. Judged by this indicator, scholars have often been largely optimistic that citizens around the world are broadly supportive of democracy and would take action to defend it. For example, Levitsky and Way (2020, p. 57) indicates that “public opinion across much of the world remains essentially in line with Churchill’s aphorism about democracy: Citizens do not necessarily love democracy, but outside of a handful of countries (including China and Singapore), they do not find the alternatives any better.”

However, a growing body of research has begun to question traditional measures, cautioning about overly optimistic interpretations. A key limitation of the Churchill question is that it assumes a shared understanding of what democracy entails (Diamond, 2010; Canache, 2012; Rehus and Van Hauwaert, 2025). In practice, citizens may hold divergent, and sometimes conflicting, conceptions of democracy, or may lack a clear understanding of the concept altogether. As a result, agreement with this statement does not necessarily reflect support for liberal democratic norms, nor does it offer protection against the emergence and persistence of authoritarian rule.

Recent studies provide evidence consistent with this concern. Experimental and survey-based research shows that individuals who express support for “democracy” may nonetheless tolerate or even endorse violations of democratic norms, particularly when these align with partisan preferences or political loyalties (Svolik, 2019; Graham and Svolik, 2020). Cross-national analyses further suggest that high levels of democratic support do not necessarily prevent democratic erosion (Claassen, 2020). Moreover, variation in how citizens conceptualize democracy shapes their ability to recognize democratic transgressions: individuals whose understandings deviate from liberal democratic principles are more likely to tolerate actions that undermine democracy (Wunsch, Jacob, and Derksen, 2025).

Further, a related line of research highlights that support for “democracy” is largely shaped by evaluations of government performance—a measure of specific support (Easton, 1975). In Latin America and the Caribbean, support for democracy, as measured by the Churchill questions, is positively associated with presidential approval, suggesting that individuals are more likely to favor “democracy” when they are satisfied with incumbent leaders (Córdova and Seligson, 2010; Azpuru, 2023). Broader cross-national evidence points in a similar direction: support for democracy tends to be higher in contexts characterized by favorable economic conditions. In contrast, adverse conditions such as crime and corruption undermine support for democracy (Córdova and Seligson, 2010;

Fernandez and Kuenzi, 2010). Taken together, these findings suggest that citizens' evaluations of democracy are closely tied to perceived outcomes and government performance.

These insights challenge the classical view of democratic support as a stable and diffuse orientation. Rather than functioning as a durable reservoir of legitimacy, support for democracy appears contingent and responsive to political and economic conditions. Yet, while most research shows that democratic support is conditional and conceptually heterogeneous, it does not fully explain why individuals may simultaneously express strong support for democracy while tolerating, or even endorsing, political leaders and actions that undermine democratic institutions. This gap points to a deeper issue: conventional measures that assume or follow scholarly definitions of democracy may not adequately capture how citizens themselves understand democracy.

Claassen et al., 2025's recent study constitutes an important effort to move beyond the Churchill question to a measure of support for liberal democracy that does not rely on items containing the word "democracy," and therefore that does not leave it to citizens to define the concept themselves. Based on online surveys from 19 countries worldwide, they identify items that capture "support for liberal democracy," accounting for both its electoral and liberal requisites, as conventionally defined (Dahl, 1971) and measured by the Varieties of Democracy project (Coppedge, Gerring, Knutsen, Lindberg, et al., 2025). After evaluating the performance of a larger set of items, they conclude that seven questions make up a unidimensional measure of support for liberal democracy.

Support for democracy's electoral components is measured by four items: (1) support for freedom of expression, captured by an item on support for free media; (2) support for freedom of association, measured by rejection of single-party rule; (3) support for universal suffrage, measured by opposition to excluding uninformed voters from voting; and (4) support for free and fair elections, captured by an item on accepting electoral results. The authors include three additional items to gauge support for liberal institutions: (5) judicial compliance and (6) legislative compliance, which measure opposition to executive actions aimed at sidelining court rulings and the legislature, respectively; and (7) support for equality before the law, measured by opposition to executive actions that circumvent the law.

The underlying assumption of Claassen et al., 2025's index is that support for electoral procedures goes hand in hand with support for the liberal components of democracy. However, as we argue in the next section, citizens who appear to support electoral democracy may view electoral procedures as legitimizing illiberal practices, potentially leading them to score relatively high on

Claassen et al., 2025’s measure despite holding illiberal convictions. Further, although the authors acknowledge that commitment to liberal democracy entails “endorsing both majoritarian and minoritarian institutions,” (Claassen et al., 2025, p. 1185), their proposed index does not include items that capture this dimension. Our theoretical argument emphasizes the importance of capturing both citizens’ views on minoritarian institutions and support for minority rights to assess their true commitment to liberal democracy.

The limitations of previous research are particularly consequential in contexts of democratic backsliding, where citizens are increasingly confronted with elected leaders who claim democratic legitimacy while simultaneously weakening democratic institutions and repressing dissenting voices. If individuals interpret democracy primarily in terms of electoral procedures, then support for democracy may coexist with tolerance for actions that erode institutional constraints and minority rights. Under these conditions, conventional measures risk conflating distinct understandings of democracy and obscuring the attitudinal foundations that may enable democratic erosion rather than prevent it. To address this gap, the next section introduces the concept of illiberal majoritarianism. It develops a framework for understanding how this conception of democracy shapes citizens’ support for illiberal political practices, paradoxically in the name of democracy.

3 Theoretical Framework: Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism

Long-standing debates in comparative politics have emphasized the tension between majority rule and minority protections within democratic systems. Lijphart (2012) shows that stable democracies often rely on consensus-oriented institutions that constrain majority power and protect minority interests. By contrast, majoritarian models place greater emphasis on the preferences of the electoral majority, while still adhering to democratic rules. We argue that contemporary democratic backsliding has increasingly radicalized this majoritarian logic, whereby electoral victory is invoked to justify the concentration of power and the erosion of institutional constraints. Accordingly, we argue that a key missing link in the public opinion literature is the extent to which citizens internalize understandings of democracy that align with radicalized notions of majoritarian rule.

We conceptualize this orientation as **illiberal majoritarianism**, *a conception of democracy in which elected leaders are understood to possess broad and largely unconstrained authority to govern in*

the name of “the people,” even when doing so violates minority rights, weakens institutional checks and balances, or contravenes basic liberal principles. Unlike conventional majoritarian democracy, which presumes the coexistence of majority rule and minority protections (Lijphart, 2012), illiberal majoritarianism rejects pluralism when perceived as an obstacle to fulfilling the people’s electoral mandate. Therefore, illiberal majoritarians often view opposition actors as obstacles to national progress and treat institutional constraints, including courts and minority rights, as barriers to the popular mandate.

The central implication is that many citizens come to embrace illiberal majoritarianism not as a deviation from democracy, but as a democratic ideal. When democracy is largely understood as resting on electoral legitimacy, executive actions that bypass institutional constraints or violate minority rights may be interpreted as consistent with, rather than contrary to, democratic governance. This helps explain an apparent paradox in public opinion: individuals who strongly affirm that “democracy is the best form of government” may simultaneously support leaders and practices that undermine liberal democracy.

When citizens understand democracy as a system in which elected leaders should freely implement the will of the majority, support for “democracy” and support for illiberal practices can reinforce one another. Under these conditions, electoral legitimacy itself may become a resource that enables, rather than constrains, democratic erosion. This dynamic helps explain why processes of democratic backsliding often unfold with substantial public approval among self-proclaimed democracy supporters, as observed, for example, in El Salvador (lupu2023) and Hungary (Wunsch and Gessler, 2023).

Importantly, we conceive illiberal majoritarianism as related to, but fundamentally distinct from, other constructs, such as delegative democracy (O’Donnell, 1994) and populist preferences. O’Donnell (1994) argued that delegative democracies are rooted in the premise that a political leader who wins a presidential election can govern the country as they see fit, given that they become the embodiment of “the national interest.” Accordingly, delegative democracies are largely majoritarian, and accountability institutions often become an “impediment to the full authority that the President has been delegated to exercise.” (O’Donnell, 1994, p. 60). Yet, O’Donnell theorized that these regimes do not necessarily threaten democratic rule, but rather constitute characteristics of democracies that are neither consolidated nor institutionalized. This constitutes a key distinction with our concept of illiberal majoritarianism, which we see as posing a real threat to democratic rule

and helping to understand recent instances of democratic backsliding. Further, O'Donnell (1994)'s theoretical framework did not explicitly consider the implications of delegative democracy for citizens' understandings of democracy. We theorize that support for illiberal majoritarianism (SIM) reflects a broader orientation in which citizens come to understand democracy in illiberal majoritarian terms, thereby risking the perception of democratic backsliding as legitimate and compatible with democracy itself.

Populism is yet another concept studied in relation to democratic backsliding, with recent scholarship focusing on how citizens' populist orientations can facilitate democratic erosion. While populism favors majoritarian rule (Urbinati, 2017; Rehus and Van Hauwaert, 2025), it does not necessarily reflect strong support for countervailing democratic institutions. Using cross-national survey data from ten Western European countries, Rehus and Van Hauwaert (2025) examine populist citizens' understandings of democracy and find that they tend to support direct democracy and express lower support for minority protections than non-populist citizens. However, populist citizens remain supportive of democratic institutions. By contrast, support for illiberal majoritarianism is guided by majoritarian preferences grounded in electoral legitimacy, which justify weakening democratic institutions to implement policies favored by the winning coalition.

3.1 Explaining Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism

We theorize that support for illiberal majoritarianism is grounded in a conception of democracy that emerges from the interaction between elite discourse, institutional context, and citizens' evaluative orientations toward political authority. Illiberal majoritarian views are shaped, in part, by political elites who frame democratic legitimacy in exclusively majoritarian terms. Contemporary executives, particularly those with populist orientations, frequently portray themselves as the sole authentic representatives of "the people," while depicting opposition actors and institutional constraints as illegitimate obstacles to the popular will. This framing is especially effective in contexts where institutions such as courts and legislatures are perceived as ineffective, corrupt, or politically biased. Further, as regime type can produce a socialization effect, a country's history of democratic rule is also likely to shape citizens' illiberal majoritarian inclinations, with individuals exposed to hybrid and authoritarian regimes potentially being more inclined to support illiberal majoritarianism. Taken together, these conditions are likely to reinforce citizens' understanding of institutional accountability not as essential for democracy, but as a barrier to effective governance.

At the same time, citizens’ evaluations of executive performance play a critical role in reinforcing support for illiberal majoritarianism. When incumbents are perceived as effective, whether in delivering economic improvements, reducing crime, or addressing salient public concerns, support for the leader may extend to support for their governing style. In such contexts, the association between electoral legitimacy and unconstrained executive authority becomes more salient. Citizens may come to interpret strong, centralized leadership not as a deviation from democratic norms, but as a necessary feature of a well-functioning democracy. Rather than reflecting an ideological stand, SIM cross-cuts left-right political leanings. Perceived performance reinforces SIM, independent of the executive’s political orientation. Indeed, authoritarian populist leaders across the ideological spectrum have employed rhetoric that echoes illiberal majoritarian narratives.

These dynamics are likely to reinforce each other and together contribute to the formation of illiberal majoritarianism as a coherent attitudinal orientation. Rather than representing a lack of democratic commitment, illiberal majoritarianism reflects a specific understanding of democracy in which electoral victory justifies broad executive authority, particularly when the executive enjoys public approval. The general implication from this discussion is that SIM is likely to vary between and within countries. Both country-level contextual characteristics and individual traits are likely to shape SIM levels.

3.2 Testable Implications

Our theoretical framework yields several testable implications. First, if individuals interpret democracy primarily through an illiberal majoritarian lens, then support for “democracy” should not necessarily imply rejection of illiberal practices. Instead, support for democracy, as measured by the Churchill question, and support for illiberal majoritarianism may coexist at the individual level. Second, following the same logic, citizens holding illiberal majoritarian orientations will be more likely to perceive that democracy in their country is strong, even if its actual level is relatively low or current trends show declines. After all, when executives violate the law and sideline minorities or democratic institutions in the name of the nation’s progress, and therefore the popular will, individuals with majoritarian tendencies will perceive these actions as highly democratic. Therefore, we draw the following hypotheses:

H1: Individuals who express strong support for “democracy,” as measured by the Churchill question, will also exhibit strong support for illiberal majoritarianism, all else equal.

H2: Individuals who express higher levels of support for illiberal majoritarianism are more likely to perceive a robust democracy in their country, even if its actual level is relatively low or current trends show declines.

Third, when citizens strongly support illiberal majoritarianism, they may also hold an illiberal conception of elections, whereby electoral procedures legitimize authoritarian practices. They are likely to reduce democracy to elections, which in turn justifies authoritarian leaders' undemocratic practices so long as these are intended to fulfill the people's will.

H3: Individuals who express higher levels of support for illiberal majoritarianism are more likely to reduce democracy to the existence of elections, all else equal.

Fourth, if support for illiberal majoritarianism is reinforced by perceived incumbent performance, then individuals who approve of the incumbent's performance should be more likely to endorse illiberal majoritarian views. These individuals are more likely to extend a "blank check" to elected executives, allowing them to govern without institutional constraints as long as they fulfill their perceived mandate. This scenario becomes particularly dangerous for democracy when a popular incumbent exhibits clear authoritarian tendencies, thereby further legitimizing undemocratic governance. Moreover, executive approval is likely to reinforce illiberal majoritarian views most strongly among individuals who profess a strong commitment to "democracy." They are more likely to justify unconstrained executive rule when they strongly approve of the incumbent's performance and conceive this form of governance as the essence of democracy. Thus, consistent with their expressed support for "democracy," they are expected not only to endorse illiberal majoritarianism but to do so more strongly when they hold favorable evaluations of elected executives.

H4: Individuals who express higher executive approval are more likely to support illiberal majoritarianism, particularly when they express strong support for "democracy," as measured by the Churchill question.

Finally, our theoretical framework has important implications for how support for liberal democracy has previously been conceptualized and measured. Claassen et al. (2025), for example, propose an index of seven items to examine citizen support for liberal democracy, assuming two components, commitment to electoral and liberal institutions, as scholars typically conceptualize democracy and measure country levels. On their measure, higher scores represent higher support for illiberal democracy (IDEM). However, without accounting for individuals' illiberal majoritarian orientations, this approach is likely to underestimate undemocratic tendencies and thus make it difficult to identify

true democracy supporters.

As we argue, commitment to electoral democracy does not necessarily make an individual more democratic. For example, citizens may favor universal suffrage and a multi-party system, dimensions included in (Claassen et al., 2025)’s index, as long as these institutional features do not interfere with the incumbent’s ability to govern without constraints in the majority’s interest. Therefore, a purportedly unidimensional measure of support for liberal democracy that incorporates commitment to electoral institutions as one of its components will not necessarily distinguish genuine democratic commitment from illiberal attitudes. In addition, as Claassen et al., 2025’ illiberal component of their measure do not purposely capture illiberal majoritarian preferences, many apparent liberal democracy supporters might in fact be more likely to support sidelining democratic institutions when they do not appear to serve the interests of the majority.

In short, we expect that SIM will be distinct from (Claassen et al., 2025)’s support for the illiberal democracy (IDEM) measure. In particular, as SIM assumes that citizens do not reject electoral institutions, we expect the electoral component of (Claassen et al., 2025)’s index to overestimate the most democratic because SIM assumes that citizens do not reject electoral institutions, we expect the electoral component of (Claassen et al., 2025)’s index to overestimate the level of most-democratic commitment. Further, given that both SIM and IDEM measure citizens’ willingness to support sidelining liberal democratic institutions, such as the courts, the institutional component of IDEM will be more closely related to SIM; yet, it will still tend to underestimate support for unconstrained power, given that Claassen et al., 2025’s measure does not fully integrate majoritarian orientations:

H5: The IDEM index will portray individuals as less illiberal than the SIM index, particularly IDEM’s electoral component.

Together, these expectations provide a framework for empirically assessing how support for illiberal majoritarianism shapes understandings of democracy, under what conditions SIM is more likely to be endorsed, and its implications for the conceptualization and measurement of democratic support. Our cross-country comparison will also empirically examine variations in SIM levels and, therefore, descriptively explore whether contextual country characteristics are likely to shape a nation’s illiberal majoritarian political culture.

4 Data and Empirical Analyses

To evaluate the theoretical expectations outlined above, we draw on original survey data from the 2026 AmericasBarometer. We introduce a measure of SIM and contrast it with previous measures of support for liberal democracy (Claassen et al., 2025). The survey items used to measure SIM were incorporated into the 2026 AmericasBarometer after we piloted them in online surveys in Brazil and Mexico, which demonstrated unidimensionality and high reliability. The SIM battery was included in the 2026 AmericasBarometer across 16 countries for a total sample size of 18,022 respondents. Surveys are nationally representative of the voting age population.¹

The countries in the sample exhibit substantial variation in both their levels of democracy and their recent democratic trajectories. According to V-Dem’s 2026 Democracy Report, the sample includes some of the region’s strongest and most enduring democracies, such as Uruguay, Chile, and Costa Rica, as well as countries with substantially weaker democratic institutions and recent experiences of democratic erosion (Nord et al., 2026). At the time of the surveys, Argentina, Peru, Mexico, and El Salvador were experiencing ongoing autocratization, while other countries, including Brazil, Bolivia, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic, were experiencing episodes of democratization or recovery from previous declines.

Mexico and El Salvador show some of the most striking trends. In less than a decade, Mexico deteriorated from electoral democracy to electoral autocracy and was classified by V-Dem as being in the “autocratic grey zone.” El Salvador has experienced an even more dramatic transformation: following a rapid decline in its Liberal Democracy Index since Nayib Bukele took power in 2019, V-Dem now classifies the country as an electoral autocracy and describes the speed of its democratic deterioration as comparable almost only to that observed during military coups.

In short, our sample encompasses countries ranging from liberal democracies to electoral autocracies, as well as cases moving in opposite directions along the democratic–autocratic continuum.

4.1 Measuring Illiberal Majoritarianism

To operationalize the concept of illiberal majoritarianism, we developed the **Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism (SIM) Index**, a five-item battery designed to capture core elements of

¹AmericasBarometer country surveys are based on national probability samples of voting-age adults, with interviews conducted face-to-face in respondents’ households. Appendix Table 1 reports the sample size by country and descriptive statistics for the main variables used in the analyses.

this orientation: (1) the entitlement of elected leaders to exercise unconstrained executive authority; (2) the legitimization of unconstrained action in the name of the country’s progress, and thus the fulfillment of the popular mandate; (3) the radicalization of majority will over minority rights; and (4) the justification for sidelining institutional and political opponents. Survey items ask respondents for the extent of their agreement with five statements, measured on Likert-type scales (1-7) and coded such that higher values indicate stronger support for illiberal majoritarian views. The five items are as follows:

- *Item 1 (Unconstrained executive authority)*: “Presidents elected by the people should have the authority to govern without obstacles.”
- *Item 2 (Sidelined opposition parties)*: “It is necessary for the progress of this country that our presidents limit the voice and vote of opposition parties.”
- *Item 3 (Sidelined judiciary)*: “It is necessary for the progress of this country that our presidents limit the voice of judges who obstruct their work.”
- *Item 4 (Law circumvented)*: “For the country’s progress, it is sometimes justified for our presidents to ignore laws that obstruct their work.”
- *Item 5 (Minority rights violated)*: “Elected presidents should do what the people want, even when this violates the rights of a minority.”

To capture the theorized characteristics of SIM, we purposely designed items that refer to **elected** executive leaders and use wording that makes it costly to disagree with each statement, as doing so would imply making it more difficult for elected leaders to implement actions intended to fulfill the people’s mandate—namely, actions aimed at improving the country’s conditions. In addition, the items capture respondents’ degree of agreement with sidelining accountability institutions, which could hinder the implementation of such actions. Because SIM entails disregarding the voices of political “losers” and/or those who do not represent the majority, the wording explicitly refers to opposition parties and minority’s rights. Further, our question battery excludes items measuring support for (or opposition to) democratic electoral institutions, such as universal suffrage, as we theorize that individuals holding illiberal majoritarian views support elections and likely use them to justify illiberal actions. Including such items would therefore risk conflating citizens who are genuinely committed to liberal democracy with those who support illiberal majoritarianism.

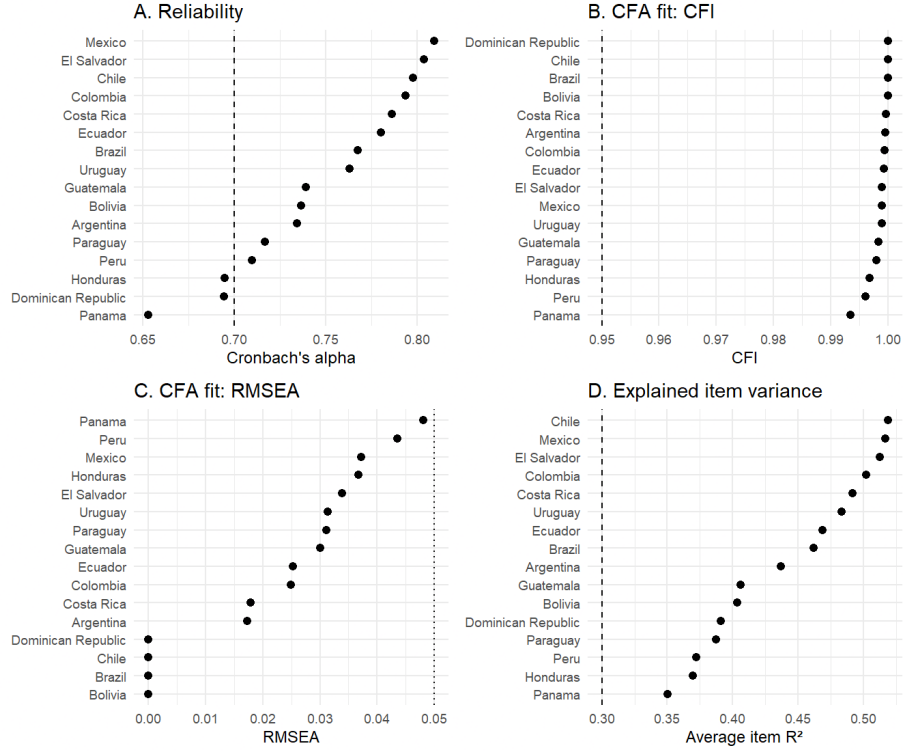
4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Validation of the SIM Index

First, we evaluated the battery's reliability (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). As shown in 1, the Cronbach's alpha exceeds the conventional threshold of .70 in nearly all countries, with values ranging from approximately .66 in Panama to over .81 in Mexico. The overall pattern indicates acceptable to good reliability across the diverse national contexts included in the study. Next, we conducted exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis (EFA and CFA) to examine the SIM's battery dimensionality (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2023). We theorized that our battery provided a reliable and unidimensional measure of SIM.

The results of EFA lend strong evidence of a dominant common factor. The inspection of the scree plots showed that the first eigenvalue was substantially larger than the remaining eigenvalues. In contrast, subsequent factors exhibited considerably lower eigenvalues and did not suggest substantively meaningful additional dimensions. In every country, the first eigenvalue was above the conventional Kaiser criterion, equal to one (see B.1).

CFA provides additional evidence for the proposed one-factor structure. CFA loadings for all items are at or above the minimum acceptable 0.4 threshold in each country (see Appendix Figure??). Further, as shown in Figure1, the values of the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) are high across all countries, exceeding .99 throughout the sample, and thus substantially surpassing the conventional benchmark of .95. Likewise, RMSEA values remain below .05 in all countries, indicating excellent model fit. The standardized CFA results further show that the latent factor explains a substantial proportion of the variance in each item, surpassing the conventional .30 threshold. Average item R^2 values range from approximately .35 to .51 across countries, indicating that between one-third and one-half of the variance in the IM items is accounted for by the common latent construct.

Figure 1: Country Level Diagnostics for the SIM Index



Note: Dashed lines indicate conventional reference thresholds.

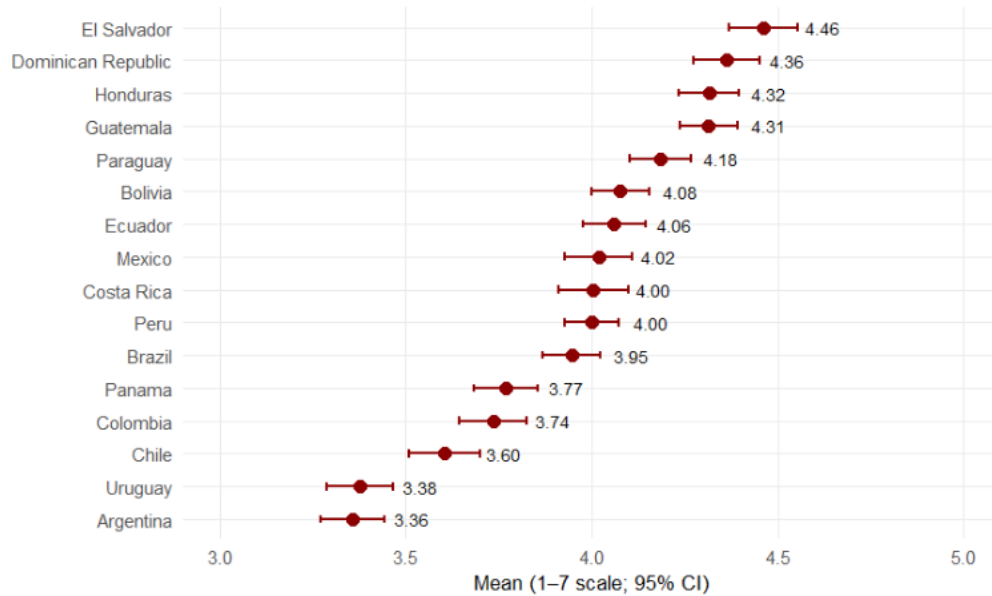
Once we have confirmed that the five SIM items are unidimensional, we proceed to identify an index aggregation strategy. More specifically, we examine the index's performance using alternative approaches: Item Response Theory (IRT), confirmatory factor analysis/structural equation modeling (CFA/SEM), and a simple average of the five items (Bollen, 1989; Coppedge, Gerring, Knutsen, Krusell, et al., 2019; Marquardt and Pemstein, 2022; Kline, 2023). The resulting measures are highly correlated across alternative specifications, with correlations ranging from 0.973 to 0.997. Given this substantial convergence, we use the simple average index as our main measure because of its straightforward interpretation, while using the IRT and CFA/SEM-based measures as robustness checks.²

Figure 2 shows the average SIM on a 1-7 scale. As can be observed, there is significant variation in SIM across the 16 countries included in the sample, ranging from 3.36 in Argentina to 4.46 in El Salvador. The lowest average scores correspond to the three countries that have historically

²The Appendix provides a detailed description of each measurement strategy and presents additional evidence comparing the resulting indices, including a graphical assessment of their correspondence.

been among the strongest liberal democracies in the region since the third wave of democratization: Uruguay, Chile, and Argentina. While Uruguay and Chile have maintained relatively high levels of democratic performance, Argentina has experienced a recent decline in liberal democracy during the Milei administration. At the other end of the spectrum, El Salvador has followed a much weaker democratic trajectory, with a rapid deterioration in recent years that culminated in a democratic breakdown.

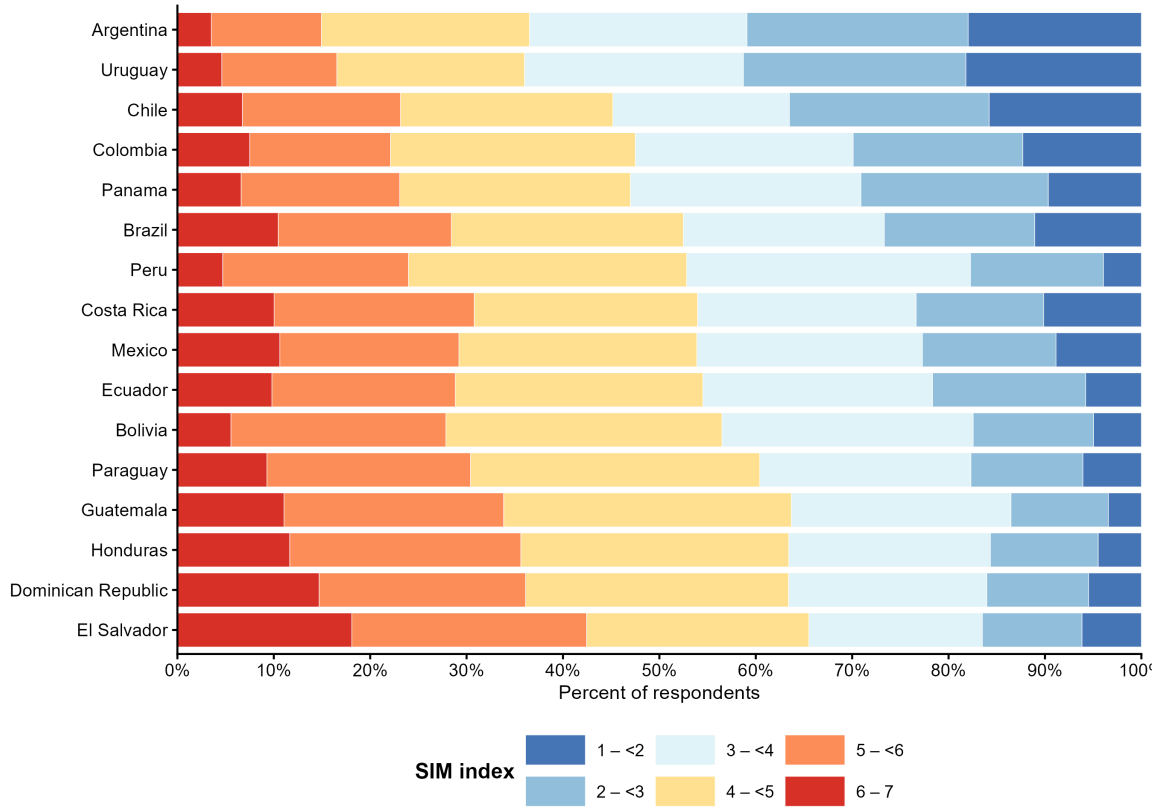
Figure 2: Average Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism by country



Note: Average Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism measured based on a simple average of five items across respondents.

The distribution shown in Figure 3 confirms that support for illiberal majoritarianism is widespread across countries rather than confined to a small subpopulation. Figure 3 shows the cumulative percentage of respondents across SMI index values, from high to low, in each country. The sum of the red, orange, and yellow bars indicates the percentage of citizens who score on the upper end of the index—between 4 and 7 points on the 1-7 scale. As can be observed, in most countries, the majority of respondents fall within this upper range.

Figure 3: % Respondents across the Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism Index by country



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer, 2026.

In El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Guatemala, over 60 percent of respondents score at least 4 points on the SIM scale. Except in Argentina and Uruguay, this number is at least 50 percent in all other countries. Even in Argentina and Uruguay, which have comparatively lower average SIM levels, over 35 percent of the public scores in the 4-7 range. Overall, Figure 3 shows that SIM is not a marginal belief limited to countries in the region experiencing deep democratic backsliding, such as El Salvador; support for illiberal majoritarianism is broadly present across countries with very different democratic trajectories, albeit to varying degrees. By capturing a dimension of democratic attitudes that is not directly observed in previous survey instruments, the index allows us to reassess citizens' understandings of democracy, its relationship to support for illiberal political practices, as well as to examine the performance of the SIM index vis-à-vis Claassen et al. (2025)'s measure.

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

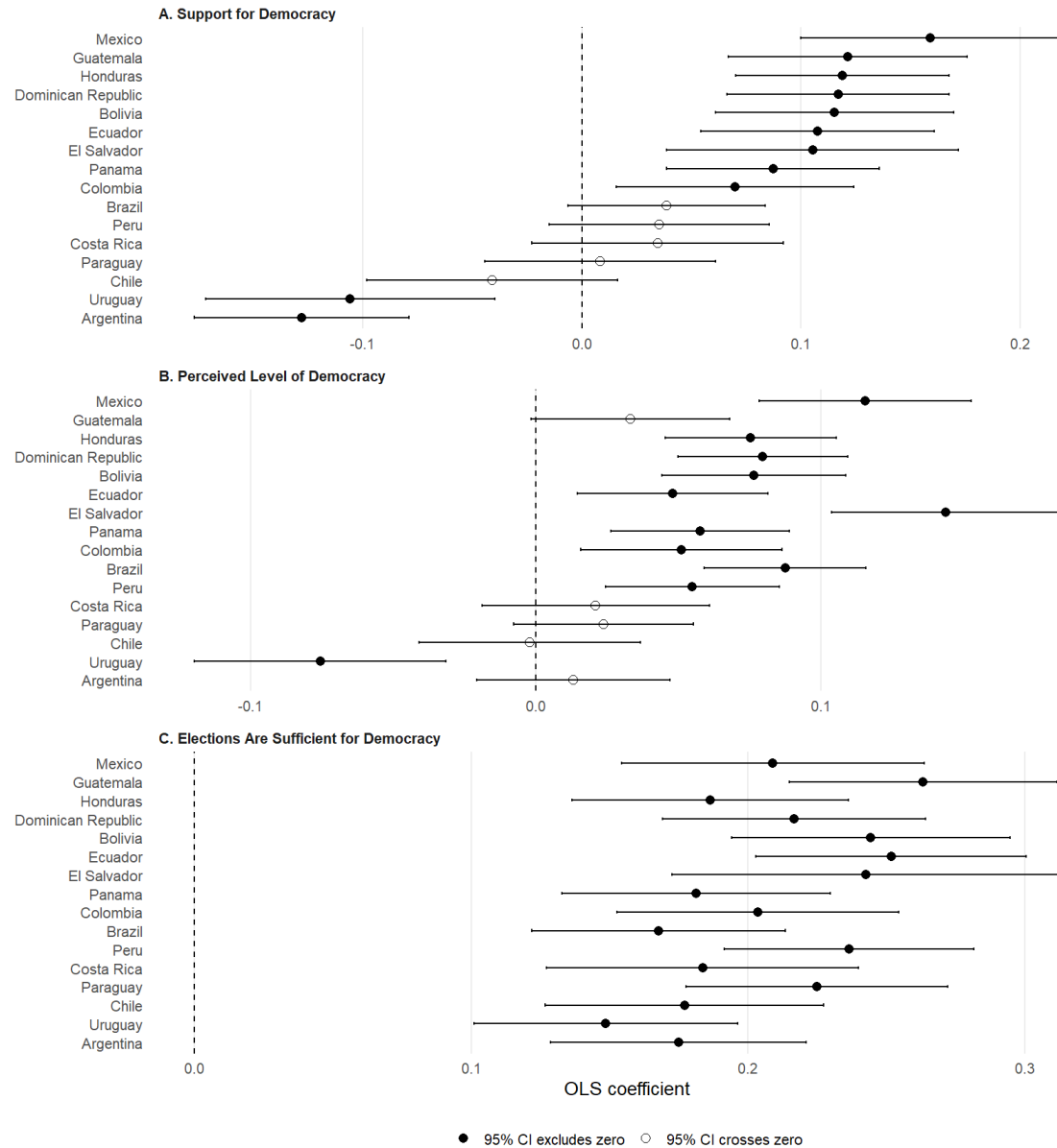
To test hypotheses **H1-H3**, we estimate OLS models to examine the correlation between the SIM index and key variables while holding a set of covariates constant. Models control for executive approval, crime victimization, trust in the judicial system, corruption victimization, perceived corruption, sociotropic economic evaluations, political ideology, and socio-demographic characteristics, including age, gender, education, and a wealth index based on household assets (Córdova, 2009). Therefore, the results presented below do not simply capture potential confounders correlated with SIM but also gauge its individual effect as a distinct attitude. Next, we test H4 by relying on an OLS model that interacts presidential approval with support for democracy, measured by the Churchill item, while controlling for the same variables indicated above. Finally, to test H5, we employ Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) alongside complementary strategies.

4.4 Understanding Democracy as Illiberal Majoritarianism

To test **H1**, we measure support for democracy using the Churchill question. Figure 4 summarizes the results. Panel A graphs the estimated coefficients depicting the relationship between the Churchill question and the SIM index by country, after accounting for control variables. We find support for **H1** in 9 out of the 16 countries included in the sample. In these countries, there is a positive and statistically significant association between the Churchill question and SIM, indicating that strong supporters of "democracy" also tend to rank high on the SIM index. This evidence suggests that a high proportion of individuals in these countries tend to understand democracy in illiberal majoritarian terms, as we argue. In five other countries, the Churchill question appears unrelated to SIM, since coefficients are not statistically significant, suggesting a more heterogeneous understanding of democracy. However, this null result suggests that while understanding of democracy varies, a liberal conception is not the main understanding either: support for "democracy" does not lead to lower SIM. Only in Uruguay and Argentina, the countries with the lowest average level of SIM, are the coefficients negative and statistically significant, implying that individuals scoring low (high) in SIM do so because they (do not) genuinely support democracy.

To examine **H2**, we use a variable in the survey that asks, "On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means there is no democracy at all, and 10 means there is a lot of democracy, in your opinion, how much democracy is there in [country name]?" Lending support to **H2**, in 11 countries, higher SIM

Figure 4: Country-Level Associations Between the SIM Index and Democratic Attitudes



Note: Unstandardized OLS coefficients. Horizontal lines indicate 95% confidence intervals. Models include control variables

is associated with higher perceived democracy (see Panel B in Figure 4). Remarkably, in some of these same countries, individuals tend to associate democracy most with illiberal majoritarianism. Notably, this positive association is strongest in El Salvador and Mexico, the two cases that have experienced the most rapid democratic erosion in recent years. The pattern, therefore, runs directly counter to what an objective assessment of democratic performance would predict: precisely where liberal-democratic institutions have weakened substantially, citizens with stronger illiberal majoritarian orientations are especially likely to perceive their countries as highly democratic.

This pattern is particularly striking in El Salvador, the country with the highest average level of SIM, which rapidly transitioned from electoral democracy to electoral autocracy. Rather than perceiving this erosion as a decline in democracy, citizens who more strongly endorse illiberal majoritarianism are especially likely to perceive El Salvador as highly democratic. A similar pattern emerges in Mexico, where SIM is also strongly associated with perceived democracy despite the country’s sharp democratic decline (Nord et al., 2026). These findings are consistent with our argument that citizens who understand democracy in illiberal majoritarian terms may interpret the concentration of power by elected executives not as evidence of democratic erosion, but as an expression of democratic rule.

To test **H3**, we use an item asking to what extent respondents agree or disagree (1-7 scale) with the statement that, “to have a full democracy, the only thing that matters is that our presidents are elected by the people.” Figure 4 panel C presents the association between the SIM Index and this item. The relationship is positive and statistically significant across *all* countries included in the analysis, providing strong support for **H3**. This pattern is consistent with our argument that illiberal majoritarianism rests on a narrow understanding of democracy, one that privileges elections over minority rights and institutional constraints; citizens may sincerely identify as democratic while defining democracy primarily in terms of elections, which in turn legitimizes the concentration of power in the executive and weakening of the rule of law. Therefore, the weakening of liberal protections need not be interpreted as undemocratic, so long as it is undertaken by leaders who derive their authority from electoral majorities.

4.5 Presidential Approval as a Reinforcing Force

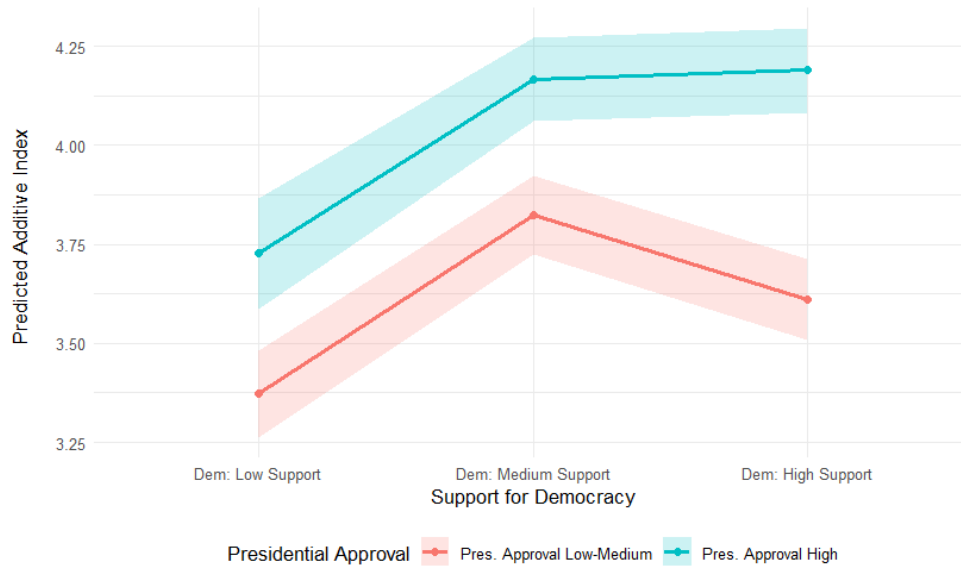
Building on the previous results, we turn to **H4**, which states that executive approval reinforces support for illiberal majoritarianism among individuals who already hold a narrow conception of

democracy. Specifically, we expect individuals who approve of the incumbent executive to be more likely to endorse that leader’s authoritarian actions and to justify them in the name of democracy. Using the pooled sample, we estimate an OLS model that interacts recoded variables of democracy support (measured by the Churchill measure) and presidential approval as predictors of SIM, controlling for the same covariates as in the previous analyses, plus country fixed effects ³ We find a positive and statistically significant interaction effect between high democracy support and executive approval, suggesting that the association between democratic support and the SIM Index becomes stronger as executive approval increases (Appendix Figure A5).

Based on these regional results, Figure 5 shows predicted values of the SIM Index across levels of democratic support by level of executive approval. As observed, higher levels of support for democracy are associated with higher SIM, and executive approval reinforces this effect. Individuals express the highest SIM when both their levels of executive approval and support for democracy are high. This suggests that executive approval reinforces SIM among strong democracy supporters, as expected. In contexts where authoritarian elected leaders have broad popular support, the implication of this finding is particularly consequential. Under such circumstances, citizens’ favorable evaluations of political leaders facilitate acceptance of actions that weaken institutional constraints or liberal-democratic protections. Rather than perceiving these actions as fundamentally incompatible with democracy, supporters may view them as legitimate exercises of authority. Thus, associating democracy with illiberal majoritarianism helps explain why an individual can strongly support an authoritarian leader while also self-identifying as a strong advocate of democratic rule.

³For ease of interpretation, we recode the original 1–7 democracy-support scale into three categories: low support (1–3), medium support (4–5), and high support (6–7). Presidential approval is recoded into two categories: low-to-medium approval (1–3) and high approval (4–5).

Figure 5: Predicted Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism by Democratic Support and Executive Approval



Note: The figure presents adjusted predicted values of the SIM Index across levels of support for democracy and executive approval, based on a pooled linear model with individual-level covariates and country fixed effects. Shaded areas represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 5 also depicts another important pattern. Paradoxically, the regional trend shows that expressing low support for democracy tends to actually make an individual more democratic, given their lower SIM. Among low supporters of democracy, SIM is the lowest when executive approval is also low. Although this result merits further exploration, it suggests that many individuals in the region reject democracy precisely because they also understand it narrowly, mainly as a regime in which elections legitimize unconstrained majoritarian rule.

When we reproduce the analysis by country, we find that the patterns shown in Figure 5 are broadly consistent across countries (see Appendix Figure A6). Yet, Argentina more clearly deviates from the regional trend, consistent with the pattern shown above: high support for democracy is associated with lower SIM, independent of executive approval, which aligns with what we would expect from true democrats who have an understanding of democracy more closely aligned to how scholars and policymakers define it.

4.6 Gauging Democratic Commitment: SIM vs. Previously Proposed Measures

H5 suggests that proposed measures of democratic support that do not account for illiberal majoritarian tendencies will tend to overestimate individuals' democratic inclinations. Many individuals will support electoral and liberal institutions while exhibiting highly majoritarian, illiberal attitudes; this is likely especially true of the electoral component, as illiberal majoritarians do not reject elections.

Along with the SIM index questions, the 2026 AmericasBarometer surveys included items proposed by Claassen et al. (2025) to measure support for liberal democracy, which allows us to contrast the two indexes and test **H5**. Claassen et al. (2025) conclude that their index is a unidimensional measure that integrates support for electoral and liberal democracy as its two core theoretical components, and that, depending on their focus, researchers can use either the aggregated index or each component separately. (Claassen et al., 2025)'s items asked individuals' extent of agreement with the following statements on a 1-7 scale:

Support for Electoral Institutions: Item 1: Governments should be allowed to censor news media that criticize them too much. *Item 2:* The country would be better off if there were only one political party. *Item 3:* If citizens are poorly informed and easily misled, they should not have the right to vote. *Item 4:* Election results should be respected regardless of which candidate or political party wins.

Support for Liberal Institutions: Item 5: Presidents should be allowed to ignore judges' decisions if they consider them unfair. *Item 6:* If the Legislative Assembly obstructs a president's work, the president should be allowed to ignore the Legislative Assembly. *Item 7:* Presidents should be allowed to manipulate the interpretation of the law to address urgent problems.

For simplicity, we use these items in their original scale, and thus refer to them as the *Support for Illiberal Democracy (IDEM)* measures proposed by Claassen et al. (2025). First, we note that the wording of the support-for-electoral-institutions items does not rule out the possibility that citizens believe democracy largely reduces to elections, as we showed illiberal majoritarians tend to believe. This means that theoretically, a person can rank relatively low on IDEM but high on the SIM. Relatedly, the wording of IDEM items does not refer to elected executives, which does not clearly signal to illiberal majoritarians that these leaders or entire governments are "entitled" to govern

without constraints, potentially making it more likely for an illiberal majoritarian to score low on IDEM items. Further, the wording of IDEM items does not make it explicit whether those who pose an obstacle to political leaders are part of a minority. For example, while item 6 relates to item 2 of the SIM battery, the former broadly refers to Congress or the legislative assembly, which can comprise both majoritarian and minoritarian political parties. Without specifying opposition parties specifically, illiberal majoritarians might score lower on the IDEM measure than SIM.

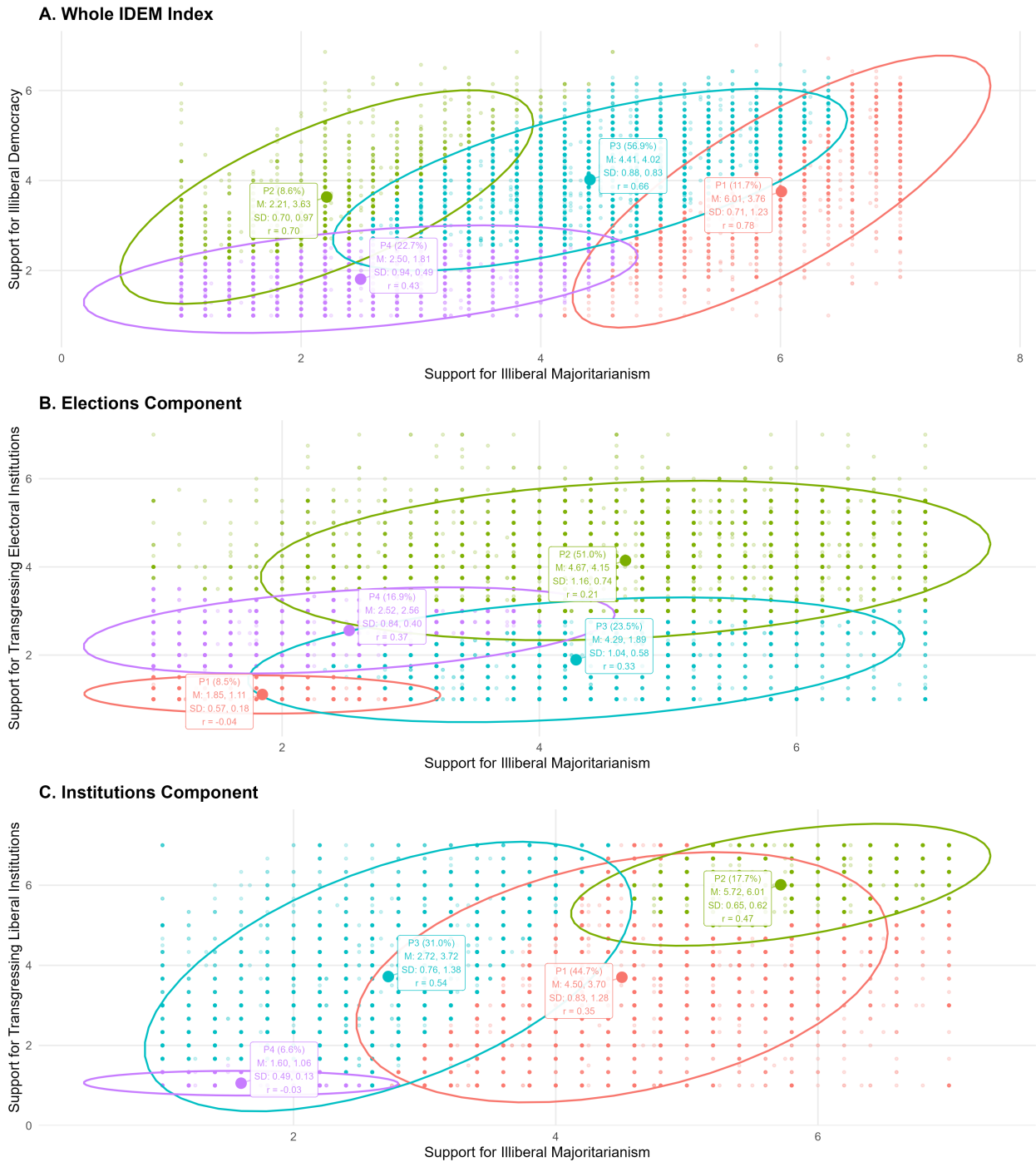
Our assessment of the reliability and dimensionality of the IDEM items indicates much greater heterogeneity across countries than that of the SIM measures (See Figure 1). In many countries, IDEM’s reliability and CFA fit statistics fall below the conventional thresholds (see appendix Figure A7). When we examine the CFA loadings for each IDEM item, we observe significant variation across countries (see Figure A8 in the appendix); yet, most values remain at or slightly above the minimum threshold of 0.4. Notably, however, the loadings associated with item 4 are below that mark in each country. Nonetheless, to examine **H5**, we create a simple average index of IDEM.

First, we explore whether the IDEM and SIM indices are distinct, thereby helping to classify individuals into different profiles of democratic commitment, as **H5** suggests. To do so, we employ Latent Profile Analysis (LPA), a model-based clustering technique that identifies unobserved subpopulations of individuals who exhibit similar response patterns across multiple continuous indicators (Scrucca et al., 2023). LPA is a respondent-centered approach that helps classify individuals according to the configuration of their attitudes. We use LPA to determine whether respondents organize into distinct democratic orientations based on their scores on the IDEM and SIM indexes.

To test **H5**, we contrast the IDEM and SIM scores, assuming a maximum of four latent profiles to allow for potential combinations of low and high scores across indexes. Figure 6 shows the results in three panels, corresponding to comparisons between SIM and the IDEM index as a whole (panel A) and the electoral and institutional components of the IDEM index (panel B and C), respectively. Small dots represent respondents assigned to their most likely latent profile, while the large point marks each profile’s centroid, or mean combination of SIM and IDEM; the percentage indicates the share of respondents assigned to that profile. The SDs indicate dispersion around the centroid on each dimension, while r reports the within-profile correlation between SIM and IDEM. The ellipses summarize the joint dispersion of respondents assigned to each profile: larger ellipses indicate greater heterogeneity; upward-sloping ellipses indicate a positive association between SIM and IDEM; downward-sloping ellipses indicate a negative association; and relatively horizontal

ellipses indicate weaker correspondence. If SIM and IDEM measured the same underlying attitude, respondents would cluster along a narrow 45-degree diagonal, producing thin, elongated ellipses with correlations approaching one. Deviations from this pattern, broader ellipses, weaker correlations, or centroids that differ substantially along one dimension but not the other, indicate that the two constructs are related but empirically distinct. Importantly, ellipse size does not indicate profile size, and profile numbers are arbitrary and should not be compared directly across panels.

Figure 6: Latent Profiles of Illiberal Democratic Orientations: Pooled Sample

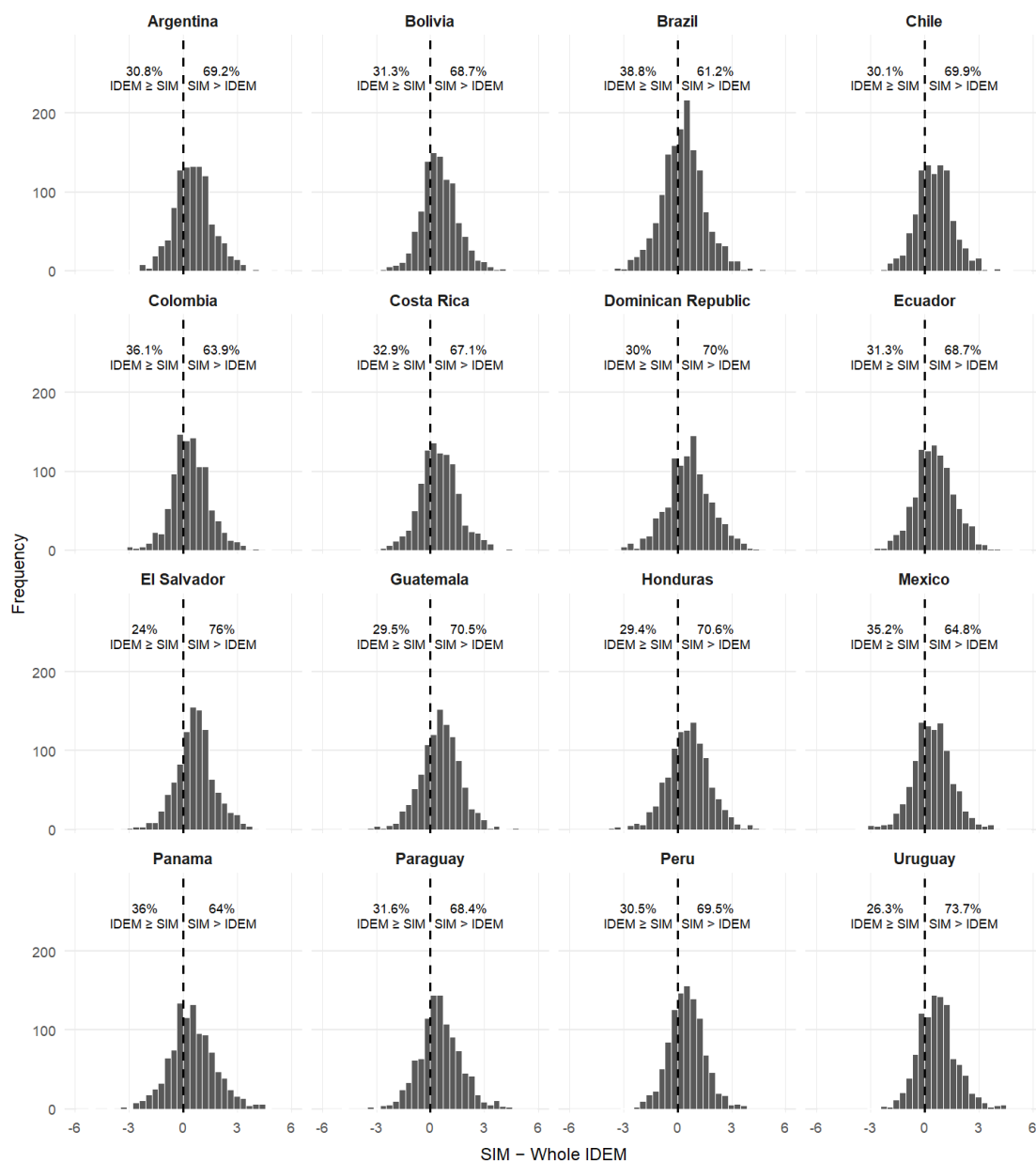


Note: Ellipses depict 95 percent multivariate normal data regions. Four-profile VEV Gaussian mixture models were estimated separately for the whole IDEM index and its two components. Profile numbers are model-specific and are not directly equivalent across panels.

Figure 6 shows that SIM and IDEM are related but do not map onto one another uniformly. For the whole IDEM index (Panel A), Profiles 1, 3, and 4 have higher mean SIM than IDEM, with the highest percentage of respondents across all four profiles falling in Profile 3 (56.9%). Differences in mean values between the two indices are especially apparent for the electoral component (Panel B), where Profile 3 (23.5%) combines a relatively high SIM (mean=4.29) with a substantially lower electoral IDEM (mean=1.89). At the same time, the generally weak within-profile correlations indicate limited correspondence between the two measures.

By contrast, for the institutional component (Panel C), profile means show substantially closer correspondence between SIM and IDEM. However, considerable heterogeneity remains, and respondents do not cluster along a narrow 45-degree diagonal. Figures 7 and 8 complement the LPA by showing clearer directional evidence. For the whole IDEM index (Figure ??), SIM exceeds IDEM for a majority of respondents in every country (roughly 61–76 %).

Figure 7: Difference Between Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism and the Whole LDEM Index

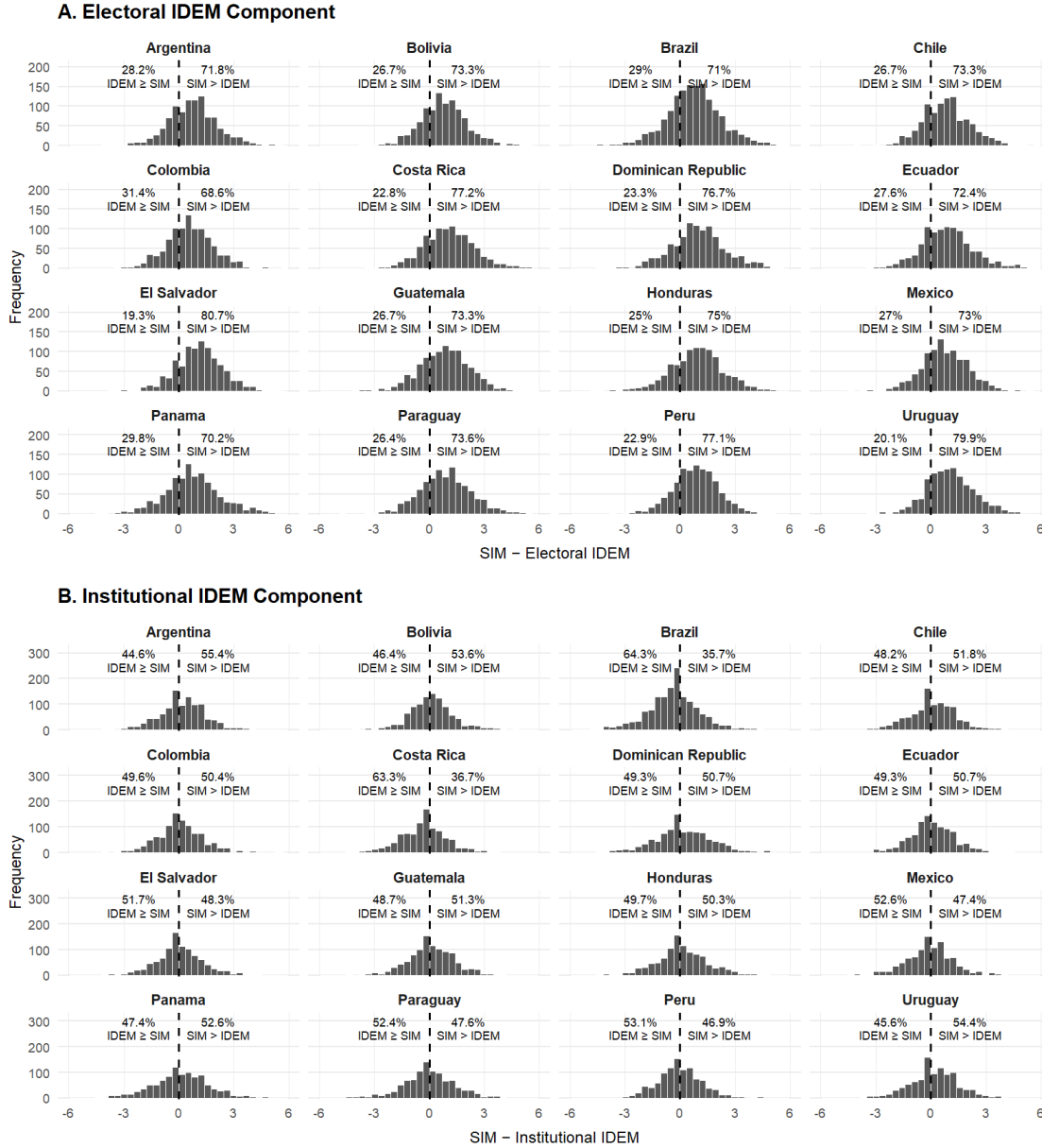


Note: The dashed vertical line indicates equal scores on SIM and IDEM. Values to the right indicate SIM > IDEM; values to the left indicate IDEM > SIM. Percentages report the share of respondents on each side of the equality line.

Further, as shown in Figure 8, the difference is substantially larger for the electoral component (Panel A): about 68–81% of respondents across countries score higher on SIM than on electoral IDEM. Unlike the electoral component, between 36 and 55% of respondents across countries show

a SIM larger than IDEM's institutional dimension (Panel C); however, as with the LPA for the institutional component, we observe significant dispersion in score differences.

Figure 8: Difference Between Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism and LDEM Components



Note: The dashed vertical line indicates equal scores on SIM and IDEM. Values to the right indicate SIM $\geq$ IDEM; values to the left indicate IDEM $\geq$ SIM. Percentages report the share of respondents on each side of the equality line.

Taken together, the results support the hypothesis that IDEM tends to portray individuals as

less illiberal than SIM, with the clearest and most systematic evidence coming from IDEM’s electoral component.

5 Conclusion

[In progress]

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Appendix

A Sample Composition and Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 reports the composition of the analytic sample across the 16 countries included in the study, together with descriptive statistics for the main variables used in the analyses. The pooled sample includes 18,022 respondents.

Table 1: Sample Composition and Descriptive Statistics by Country

Sample Descriptives by Country							
Pooled Latin American Public Opinion Survey Sample							
Country	N	Sample (%)	Democracy Support	Perceived Democracy	High Pres. Approval (%)	Education	Women (%)
Mexico	1,020	5.66	4.91	5.82	50.83	3.75	52.06
Guatemala	1,058	5.87	4.68	5.43	26.05	3.02	49.31
El Salvador	1,030	5.72	5.28	6.32	83.01	3.08	48.57
Honduras	1,053	5.84	4.73	5.05	47.46	2.75	50.14
Nicaragua	1,042	5.78	4.94	NaN	61.81	3.53	46.20
Costa Rica	1,008	5.59	5.41	6.59	57.26	3.43	49.95
Panama	1,051	5.83	4.98	5.23	13.81	3.84	50.34
Colombia	1,007	5.59	4.91	5.42	29.95	3.94	50.05
Ecuador	1,028	5.70	4.44	5.07	26.13	3.82	49.75
Bolivia	1,015	5.63	4.60	4.99	32.17	4.23	49.90
Peru	1,048	5.82	4.45	4.44	23.42	4.16	49.76
Paraguay	1,036	5.75	4.79	5.02	33.27	3.44	49.60
Chile	1,012	5.62	5.49	6.36	23.12	4.35	49.85
Uruguay	1,028	5.70	6.06	7.68	34.26	3.80	49.80
Brazil	1,512	8.39	5.15	6.07	35.13	3.27	49.69
Argentina	1,031	5.72	5.39	6.04	24.90	3.94	49.61
Dominican Republic	1,043	5.79	5.12	6.19	36.60	3.40	50.67
Total	18,022	100.00	5.02	5.74	37.50	3.62	49.72
<i>Note: SIM = Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism. Entries report country-level means unless otherwise indicated. Percentages are calculated using available observations for each variable.</i>							

B Alternative Measurement Strategies and Index Validation

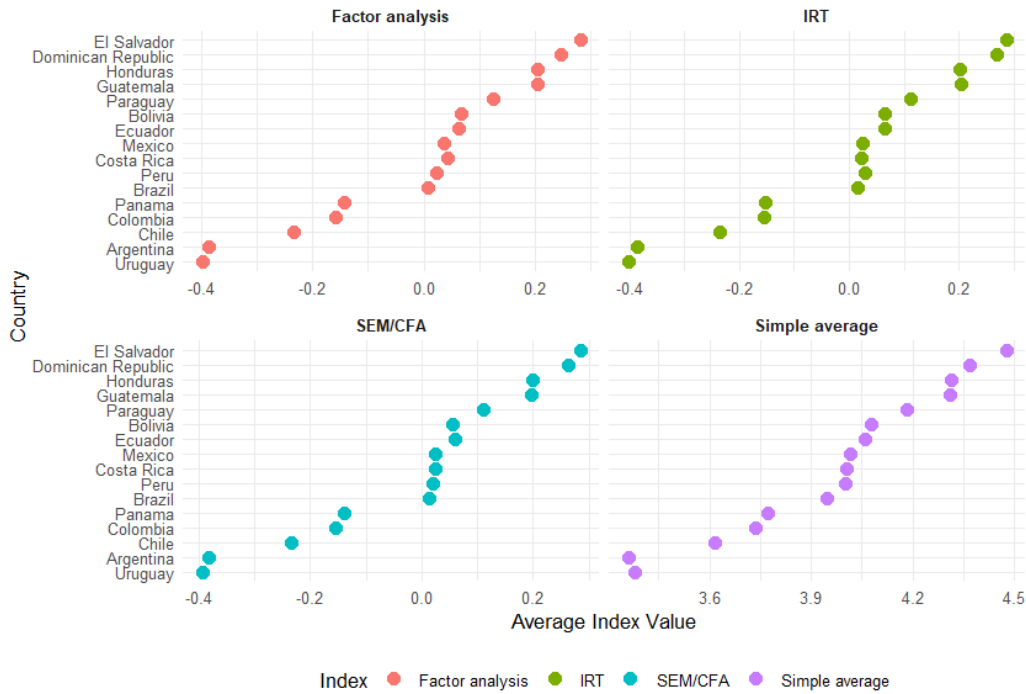
Our measure of support for illiberal majoritarianism is constructed from five survey items intended to capture a common underlying orientation toward democracy: the view that electoral majorities and popularly elected leaders should be able to exercise political authority with limited institutional constraints. To assess whether these items can be meaningfully combined into a single index, and to ensure that our substantive conclusions are not driven by a particular aggregation method, we construct the index using four alternative measurement strategies: (1) exploratory factor analysis (EFA), (2) Item Response Theory (IRT), (3) confirmatory factor analysis/structural equation modeling (CFA/SEM), and (4) a simple average of the five items.

The results provide strong evidence that the five items capture a coherent underlying dimension.

In particular, the CFA/SEM specification exhibits excellent model fit ($CFI = 0.999$; $RMSEA = 0.025$), supporting the interpretation of illiberal majoritarianism as a common latent construct underlying responses to the five items.

More importantly, the choice of measurement strategy has virtually no effect on the substantive patterns we observe. Figure A1 compares country-level averages obtained using each of the four approaches. Although the scales of the resulting measures differ—with the latent-variable measures centered around zero and the simple average retaining the original response scale—the relative position of countries is remarkably consistent across specifications. Countries displaying comparatively high levels of support for illiberal majoritarianism under one measurement strategy also tend to rank highly under the others, while countries with lower levels of support consistently appear toward the bottom of the distribution.

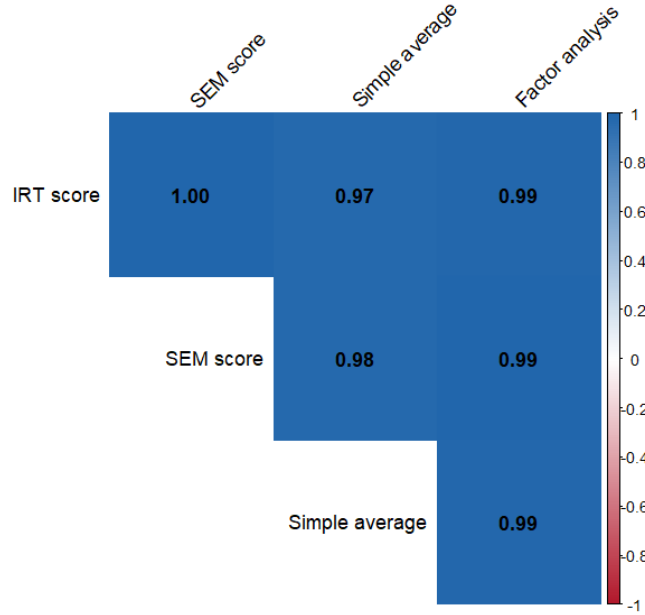
Figure A1: Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism Across Alternative Measurement Strategies



Note: The figure presents country-level mean levels of support for illiberal majoritarianism estimated using exploratory factor analysis (FA), Item Response Theory (IRT), confirmatory factor analysis/structural equation modeling (CFA/SEM), and a simple average of the five component items. Because the measures are expressed on different scales, the comparison focuses on the relative position of countries across measurement strategies.

The high degree of convergence is also evident when examining individual-level correlations across the alternative measures. As shown in Figure A2, correlations among the indices range from 0.973 to 0.997. Thus, despite relying on different assumptions and estimation procedures, the alternative measurement strategies classify respondents in nearly identical ways.

Figure A2: Correlations Across Alternative Measures of Illiberal Majoritarianism



Note: The figure reports pairwise correlations among alternative measures of support for illiberal majoritarianism constructed using exploratory factor analysis (FA), Item Response Theory (IRT), confirmatory factor analysis/structural equation modeling (CFA/SEM), and a simple average of the five component items.

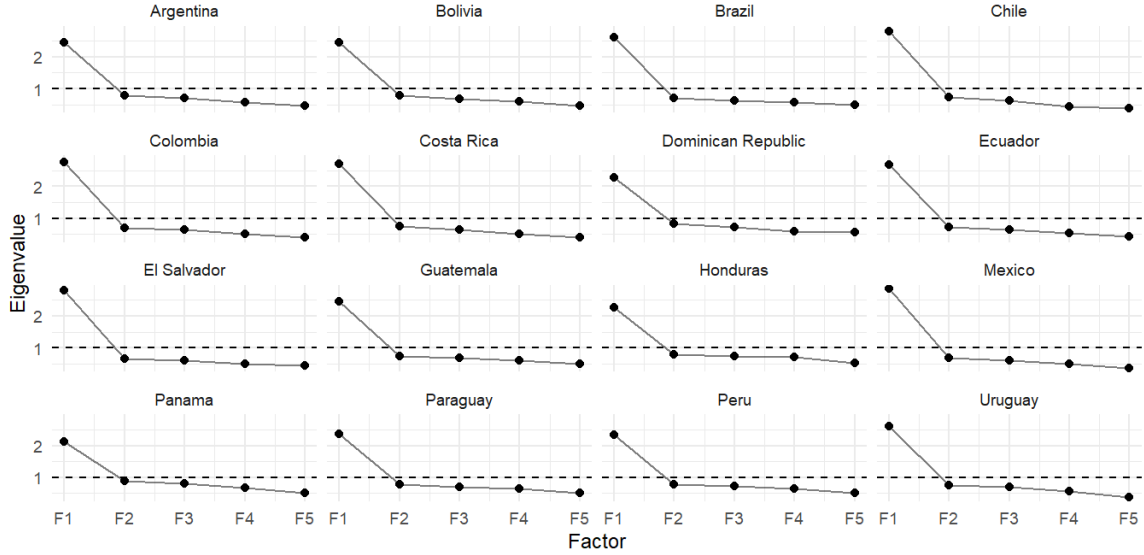
Taken together, these results indicate that our measurement of illiberal majoritarianism is highly robust to alternative index-construction strategies. Given the near-equivalence of the resulting measures, we use the simple average index in the main analyses. This approach has the advantage of retaining the original and substantively interpretable response scale while avoiding the additional modeling assumptions required by latent-variable approaches. The factor-, IRT-, and SEM-based measures serve as robustness checks, demonstrating that the substantive patterns we identify are not an artifact of our choice of measurement strategy.

B.1 Scree Plots: SIM

As an additional assessment of the SIM battery's dimensionality, we conduct exploratory factor analysis (EFA) separately for each country. Figure A3 presents the resulting scree plots. Across

countries, the first eigenvalue is substantially larger than the remaining eigenvalues and exceeds the conventional Kaiser criterion of one. The sharp decline after the first factor provides consistent evidence that the five SIM items capture a single dominant underlying dimension.

Figure A3: Scree Plots for the SIM Items by Country

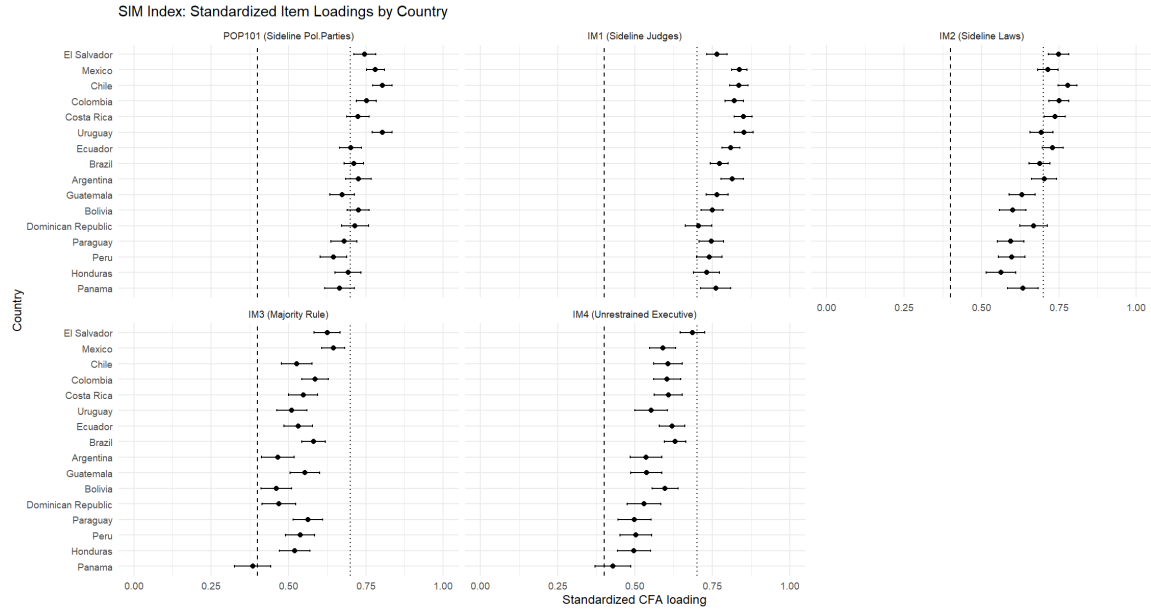


Note: Scree plots report eigenvalues from exploratory factor analyses of the five SIM items conducted separately by country. Across countries, the sharp decline in eigenvalues after the first factor indicates a dominant one-factor structure. The horizontal reference line indicates an eigenvalue of one.

B.2 CFA Item Loadings: SIM

We further assess the proposed one-factor structure using country-specific confirmatory factor analyses (CFA). Figure A4 reports the standardized factor loadings for each of the five SIM items across countries. All five items load positively on the latent SIM factor, and the loadings are consistently at or above the conventional .40 threshold across countries. Although the magnitudes of individual item loadings vary across national contexts, no single item consistently performs weakly. Together with the overall CFA fit statistics reported in the main text, these results provide additional evidence that the five items capture a common underlying construct across the countries in the sample.

Figure A4: Standardized CFA Item Loadings for the SIM Index by Country

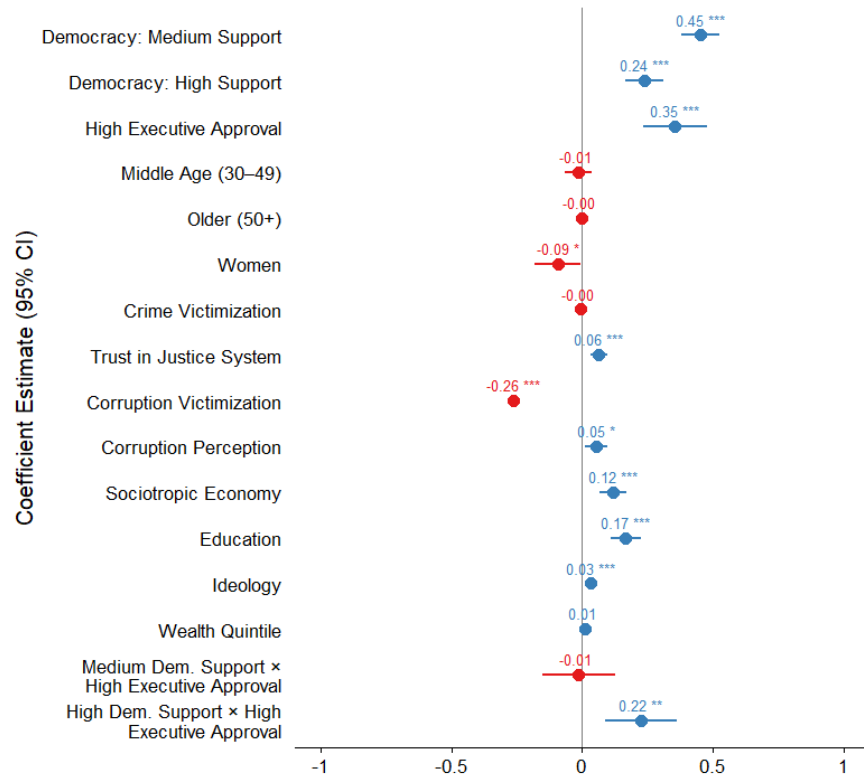


Note: Points represent standardized factor loadings from country-specific one-factor confirmatory factor analyses of the five SIM items. The dashed vertical line at .40 indicates a conventional minimum threshold for interpreting factor loadings.

C Democratic Support and Executive Approval

Figure A5 presents the coefficient estimates from the pooled model used to test the conditional relationship between support for democracy and executive approval. The model includes the interaction between democratic support and executive approval, the full set of individual-level covariates, and country fixed effects. The estimates provide the pooled-sample benchmark for the country-specific analyses presented below.

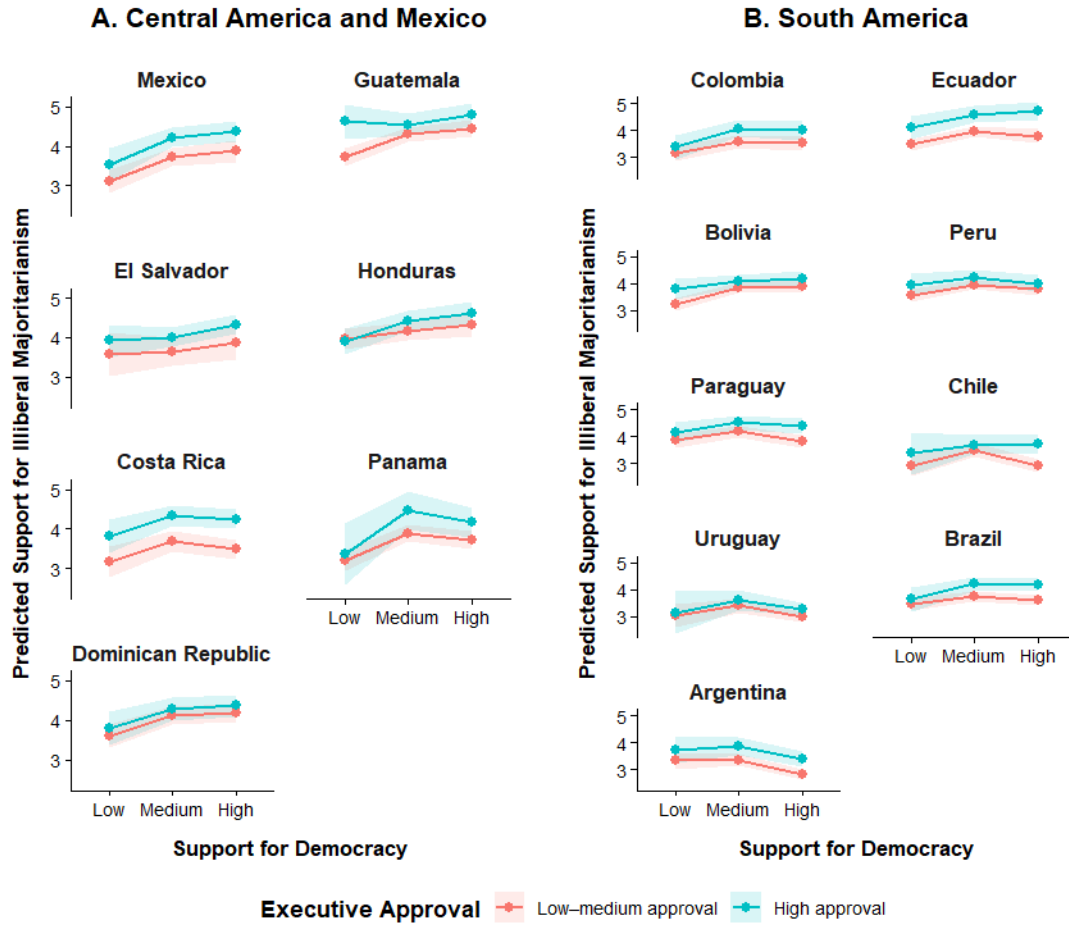
Figure A5: Pooled Model: Executive Approval and Support for Democracy as Predictors of Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism



Note: Points represent coefficient estimates from a pooled linear model predicting the SIM Index. Horizontal lines indicate 95% confidence intervals. The model includes country fixed effects and the individual-level covariates described in the main text. Reference categories are low support for democracy, low-to-medium executive approval, young respondents, and men.

Figure A6 presents adjusted predictions of support for illiberal majoritarianism across levels of democratic support and executive approval for each country. The country-specific models include the same individual-level covariates as the pooled specification reported in the main text. Although the magnitude of the interaction varies across countries, the overall pattern closely resembles the pooled results: respondents with high executive approval consistently exhibit higher predicted levels of support for illiberal majoritarianism, and the gap between approval groups tends to widen as support for democracy increases. The only country in which we observe that higher levels of support for democracy are associated with lower SIM is Argentina; however, individuals who approve of the executive show higher SIM levels.

Figure A6: Predicted Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism by Democratic Support and Executive Approval



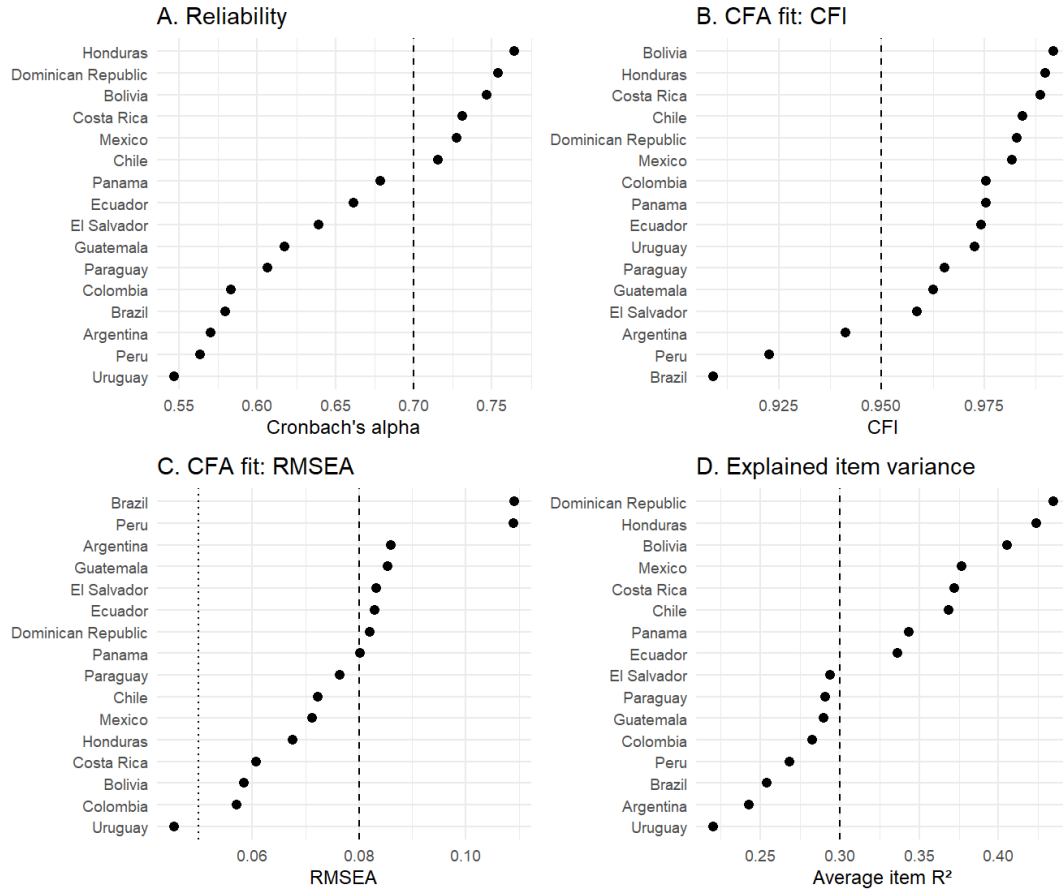
Note: Adjusted predicted values based on individual country-level analyses, controlling for the same variables included in the pooled model

Taken together, the country-level analyses suggest that the main pooled findings are not attributable to a single country or a small subset of cases. The positive associations between democratic support, executive approval, and illiberal majoritarianism appear across a range of national settings. At the same time, the variation in coefficient magnitudes and interaction effects underscores the importance of political context and suggests that the individual-level foundations of illiberal majoritarianism may differ across countries.

C.1 Reliability and Dimensionality of the IDEM Index

Before comparing the IDEM and SIM indexes, we assess whether the seven IDEM items constitute a reliable, unidimensional measure across the countries in our sample. Figure [A7](#) reports country-level reliability and CFA diagnostics. In contrast to the SIM battery’s consistently strong performance, the IDEM items exhibit substantial cross-national heterogeneity. Cronbach’s alpha falls below the conventional .70 threshold in a majority of countries. The CFA results are similarly mixed. Although CFI values indicate a good fit in most countries, some fall below the conventional .95 threshold, while RMSEA exceeds the conventional .08 threshold in several cases. The average proportion of item variance explained by the common factor also varies considerably across countries, falling below .30 in several cases. Taken together, these diagnostics provide limited support for treating the seven IDEM items as a consistently reliable and unidimensional construct across the countries in our sample.

Figure A7: Country-Level Reliability and CFA Diagnostics for the IDEM Index

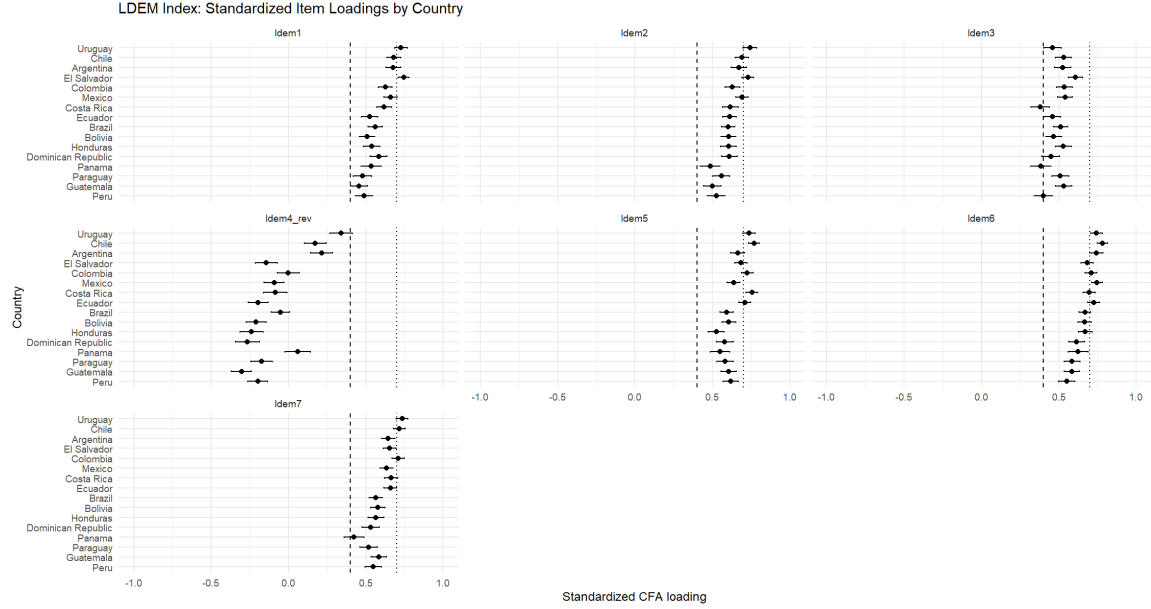


Note: Panel A reports Cronbach's alpha for the seven IDEM items. Panels B and C report the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) from country-specific one-factor confirmatory factor analyses. Panel D reports the average proportion of item variance explained by the common factor (R^2). Dashed lines indicate conventional reference thresholds.

To examine the source of this heterogeneity, Figure A8 reports standardized CFA loadings for each of the seven IDEM items by country. Most items load positively on the common factor, although the magnitudes of the loadings vary across countries. Item 4, which asks respondents whether election results should be respected regardless of which candidate or political party wins, stands out as a particularly weak indicator. Its standardized loading falls below the conventional .40 threshold across countries and, in several cases, is close to zero or negative. The remaining items generally perform better, although their loadings also exhibit meaningful cross-national variation. These results suggest that the limited fit of the overall IDEM index is not simply a matter of reliability, but also reflects differences in how its component items relate to the proposed underlying

construct across national contexts.

Figure A8: Standardized CFA Item Loadings for the IDEM Index by Country



Note: Points represent standardized loadings from country-specific one-factor confirmatory factor analyses of the seven IDEM items. Horizontal lines represent 95% confidence intervals. The dashed vertical line at .40 indicates a conventional minimum threshold for interpreting factor loadings.

Overall, these analyses indicate that the IDEM items do not reproduce a uniformly strong unidimensional structure across the Latin American and Caribbean countries examined here. This contrasts with the more consistent reliability and dimensionality of the SIM battery documented above. Nevertheless, we retain the original seven-item IDEM specification in the analyses presented in the main text to evaluate the measure as originally proposed and to facilitate a direct comparison with SIM. “