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# The Impact of Economic Versus Institutional Factors in Elite Evaluations of Presidential Progress Toward Democracy in Latin America

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Elites' support for democracy and their satisfaction with political leadership are important factors in evaluating Latin American leaders' progress toward consolidating their democracies. However, we know surprisingly little about how elites understand or define democracy and thereby evaluate leaders in terms of progress toward democracy. Much literature on opinions of elites focuses on their relative interest in democratic values and formal institutions. But is progress in these two areas really of utmost importance to elites? To better understand elite views of democracy, the authors use new survey data in which elites assess current politicians' progress toward democracy. They find that the importance of perceived progress in democratic values—civil rights and civil liberties—and formal institutions is minor compared to the impact of perceptions of economic progress; elites' evaluations of democratic progress depend primarily on their perceptions of economic success and only secondarily on perceptions of achievement of democratic values.

**Keywords:** *Latin America; elites; opinion; democracy; institutions*

You all did love him once, not without cause: What cause withholds you then,  
to mourn for him?

—*Shakespeare's Antony in Julius Caesar*

Survey research in Latin America has expanded significantly in recent years, adding much to our knowledge about citizens' views on democracy. Despite the proliferation of this line of inquiry, what remains surprisingly understudied is how Latin Americans themselves define democracy. Most surveys conducted in the region ask of respondents' support for democracy and their adherence to democratic values. Yet underlying such questions is the assumption that everyone shares the same understanding of democracy, despite the persistent debate concerning its definition among scholars. The absence of conceptual consensus in the literature is amply evident in the small wave of studies that attempt to delineate full democracies from incomplete ones (e.g., Diamond 2002; Levitsky & Way, 2002; Mainwaring, Brinks, & Pérez-Liñán, 2001). However, do Latin American citizens make such distinctions and if so, on what basis? Their support for democracy, their adherence to certain values, and their tolerance for "diminished subtypes" of democratic rule (Collier & Levitsky, 1997) may be affected by their particular understanding and expectations of democracy.

Camp (2001) offers one of the few recent empirical studies of how citizens in developing countries define democracy. Highlighting the value of such work, his findings demonstrate that "most Latin Americans do not conceptualize democracy in the same way as do North American theorists or citizens" (Camp, 2001, p. 9). Despite important variations among the countries, he notes the emphasis citizens give to social and economic factors. These findings suggest that citizens have certain expectations of democracy that extend well beyond the political realm and furthermore, that these may affect their support for democratic institutions in the long term (Camp, 2001, p. 11).

Yet what of Latin America's elite? In highly stratified societies, the elite have a disproportionate influence over national affairs. As such, their definitions and expectations of democracy may be particularly important. Converse (1964) gives us reason to expect different understandings between the elite and the masses, based on their varying belief systems. In a similar manner, Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger (1997) find different understandings of democracy between elites and masses in post-Soviet societies, with the former emphasizing law and order and the latter emphasizing freedoms. Moreno (2001) finds that the more politically sophisticated citizens in Latin America stress liberty in their conceptualization of democracy, whereas the less sophisticated highlight more commonplace matters, such as fighting crime. As these studies suggest, society's most influential members may view democracy differently than ordinary citizens. It follows that their

expectations and regime support may hinge on a different set of conditions. Given the incomplete consolidation of democracy in Latin America, understanding how elites define democracy is a particularly significant issue.

We explore this question through our survey of Latin American elite in six countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela. Using a novel dependent variable—presidential success in democratic progress (PSDP)—we attempt to overcome the shortcomings of many democratic surveys. The survey question asks our elites (on a 5-point scale), “Rate the progress [your president] has made in moving [your country] toward democracy.” This variable allows respondents to evaluate actual performance—rather than hypothetical situations—based on their own criteria rather than those of the analyst. By examining the factors that influence their assessments, we are able to draw conclusions about how they conceptualize democracy. We assess the relative influence of several factors and find that elite opinions are driven first by economic concerns and second by concerns for rights and liberties. It is notable that concerns for formal institutions are insignificant. These findings may serve as a building block in a more complete theory of how elites and masses conceptualize democracy and what their expectations of democracy are. Before presenting our findings, we first discuss the importance of elites, possible influences on their attitudes, and our data and survey. After discussing the findings, we conclude with some thoughts regarding their implications.

### **The Importance of and Influences on Elites’ Views**

Lippman’s (1922) conjecture that for the average member of the public, the world of politics is “out of reach, out of sight, out of mind,” has been a point of departure for many of those studying public opinion—redirecting attention from the masses to elites. Although the definition of *elite* varies somewhat across the social science literature, we take a relatively broad view. Rather than considering the elite to be the rulers over the ruled (Mosca, 1939), we define them as those with the capacity to influence national political outcomes or policy (Burton, Gunther, & Higley, 1992; Putnam 1976). As Eldersveld (1989) argues—borrowing heavily from V. O. Key—scholars interested in the functioning of democratic governance ought to define *elite* broadly enough to include those “who hold important positions, who have influential roles and who exercise important functions in the polity”

(p. x).<sup>1</sup> Such positions and status, along with wealth, education, and other advantages, provide the elite with political resources (Dahl, 1971) and, thus, the capacity to directly or indirectly influence the activities of the state (Putnam, 1976). In keeping with this view, our survey includes members of the elite from four categories: government, media, business, and academia.<sup>2</sup>

Although elites have an important role in advanced democracies (e.g., Aberbach, Putnam, & Rockman, 1981), their political influence may be even greater where social inequalities exist (Dahl, 1971). Appropriately, many studies of Latin American politics focus disproportionately on the role of this group and their high degree of influence. For example, macro-level views of the region's politics argue that hierarchical systems of authority are ingrained in the region's political culture (e.g., Wiarda, 2001). According to this view, elites have exercised—and will likely continue to exercise—a disproportionate share of political power. Linz (1978), for instance, theorizes that intraelite conflicts help explain the many democratic breakdowns so common in the history of Latin America. The restoration of democracy is often explained in much the same way. This argument contends that whether a transition away from authoritarianism results in a viable democracy depends, at least in part, on the attitudes and behavior of elites (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986). Indeed, the favorable conditions for democratization in the 1980s are linked closely with a developing consensus among elites in favor of democracy (Remmer, 1991, pp. 793-794).

Much of the democratic transition and consolidation literature is written with the opinions of elites as a central theme. Di Palma (1990) argues that the character and skill of the individuals who decide the new rules of the game are of fundamental importance for an emergent democracy. Burton and Higley (1987) claim that elite settlements not only are important factors in understanding political change but also have overwhelming autonomy of choice and their decisions “cannot be predicted or explained in terms of social, economic, and cultural forces” (p. 304). In a similar manner, agreement among elites concerning political rules and norms of behavior is seen to be a prerequisite for democratic consolidation (Burton et al., 1992; Diamond 1999). Those concerned with the region's contemporary

1. One benefit of this definition is that it encompasses the variety of definitions in the literature. Also, the group we identify is consistent with many past public opinion studies. For instance, Zaller (1992) defines *elites* as those who are politically sophisticated. Moreover, the Latin American politics literature widely uses a similarly broad definition in the analyses of political outcomes.

2. Details about the elites in our sample are discussed in Appendix A. Examination of attitudinal influences on the different types of elites is beyond the parameters of this study.

prospects likewise cite the influence of elites (Hagopian, 1996; Montaner, 2000). From this it is clear that elite attitudes are important elements in influencing democratic consolidation, and it follows that understanding how they conceptualize democracy merits our attention.

This fact is reinforced when we consider the effects elites have as opinion leaders. Although much of the Latin American politics literature emphasizes the direct influences of elites on regimes, the ability of elites to shape the attitudes of the general public may also be critical. Converse (1964, 1970) and McGuire (1968, 1969) find instability over time and across policies to be the norm for mass political opinion and, thus, the ill-informed masses are susceptible to manipulation by elites. With information costs so high, people are willing to accept cues from elites (Lupia, 1994; Zaller, 1992).

Diamond (1999) nicely sums up the role of elites:

Because of their disproportionate power and influence, elites matter most for the stability and consolidation of democracy, not only in their behaviors but also in their beliefs. . . . Beyond their direct power over events and decisions, however, elites also play a crucial role in shaping political culture and in signaling what kinds of behavior are proper and improper. Elites lead partly by example (good or bad); when they are contemptuous of the rules and norms of democracy, their followers or audiences are more likely to be as well. (p. 66)

Thus the role of elites in establishing and nurturing the democracies of Latin America makes it important to understand how they define democracy. We now consider the various factors that have been used to explain the formation of elite opinions regarding democratization in general and then move on to investigate if these same factors are important in explaining our dependent variable, PSDP. Among the general influences on elites' opinion, institutional and economic factors are usually cited as the most important. We examine the role of each of these factors in turn.

## **Institutions and Democratic Values**

Evaluations of formal institutions—such as the courts, armed forces, congress, and political parties—are closely linked with satisfaction with democracy (Karp, Banducci, & Bowler, 2003; Norris, 1999). Studying Venezuela, Canache (2002, p. 50) delineates the role of institutions as a component of political support and in particular, finds an important role for

confidence in the courts, armed forces, congress and political parties. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995) further demonstrate that opinions of institutions (specifically congressional processes) affect opinions of politicians (members of congress). If evaluations of institutions affect opinions of democracy and its leaders, it is an obvious extension to expect they will likewise affect our dependent variable, PSDP.

This hypothesis may be particularly relevant for the elite. Karp et al. (2003) show that citizens with higher levels of political knowledge evaluate the European Union on the basis of its institutions more so than those with lower levels of political knowledge. As the elite in Latin America may have greater levels of political knowledge, including exposure to institutional processes, they may be especially likely to base their evaluations of PSDP on confidence in institutions.

Likewise, the protection of rights or liberties—what are commonly considered democratic values—may also influence elite opinion. Empirical studies such as Kornberg and Clarke's (1992) show strong ties between regime support and feelings of efficacy, which in turn is a function of constraints on democratic values. Thus the protection given to individual rights and basic freedoms may be particularly relevant. McClosky and Brill (1983), meanwhile, argue that elites place a greater emphasis on civil liberties than do average citizens, a common theme in the literature. However, the pervasive finding that elites are cohesive in their support of civil liberties (Barnum & Sullivan, 1989; McClosky, 1964; McClosky & Brill, 1983; Stouffer, 1955) is countered by the findings of Sniderman, Fletcher, Russell, Tetlock, and Gaines (1991) that the variance in opinion among elites is even greater than the differences between elites and the general public.

On the other hand, dismissing the idea that civil liberties are of chief concern to elites seems appropriate if we accept that elites may first be looking out to protect their own interests during the transition to democracy. Indeed, Miller et al. (1997) find that elites in post-Soviet societies “emphasize law and order and the rule of law, whereas citizens stress freedoms in their understanding of democracy” (p. 157). This should not be surprising, as elites may expect different benefits from democratization. Elites seek an accepted and legitimate regime that will be able to protect their wealth and societal position from the demands of the working classes. If these demands cannot be met fast enough by the democratizing regime, the positions of elites are threatened from below. The extension of civil rights and liberties—although perhaps enhancing government legitimacy—is of much more direct benefit to average citizens than to elites.

In this view, average citizens see democracy as a means to achieving political rights and freedoms as well as material benefits, whereas elites focus on their ability to maintain their own status. Thus the ability to maintain law and order—and by extension produce an environment conducive to economic stability and progress—should be of paramount importance to elites.

## **Economic Influences**

The importance of economic progress is largely overlooked in studies of elites' opinions about the establishment of democracy. Given that economic evaluations are an essential part of our understanding of how both elites and masses evaluate both leader and government performance in mature democracies (e.g., Clarke & Lebo, 2003; Lewis-Beck, 1988; MacKuen, Erikson, & Stimson, 1992), economic development should likewise play a large role in influencing satisfaction with the institutions and personalities of democratization. If economic success is consistently a major component of general support for leaders and regimes, we should expect it to play a major role in influencing the opinions of elites and others when assessing both democratic progress itself and the political leaders who work toward that end.

Furthermore, economic success may itself be an integral part of how elites define democracy. Indeed, in any type of regime, it is the elites who enjoy the greatest benefits of society and, thus, given their already elevated positions, elites do not seek democracy to “secure the Blessings of Liberty.” More likely, elites—regardless of the stage of democratization—are already enjoying these “blessings” and wish them to continue. Market liberalization followed by economic progress may be seen as essential to this end and, thus, elites may focus on economic growth as the key to what democratization is all about. In addition, we can speculate that as democracies progress, citizens and elites may further shift their focus from the establishment of democratic traditions in toward the general state of the economy. That is, the value of economic factors relative to institutions should increase throughout the consolidation process.

Given the data to follow, some clarification is required here. Despite agreement that the economy matters, an enormous amount of contradictory evidence is available from researchers investigating how the economy matters. Indeed, identifying which aspect of the economy is most important in voting and influencing evaluations of leaders has long been debated. Key's (1968) proposition that voters reward or punish governments based

on the state of their pocketbooks implies that voters are interested in personal (egocentric) rather than national (sociotropic) economic factors and in retrospective rather than prospective evaluations of the economy (see also Fiorina, 1981). Much of the dispute concerning Key's point has been in the context of leadership approval between elections (e.g., Clarke & Stewart, 1994; Mueller, 1970; Norpoth, 1985, 1996). MacKuen et al. (1992) frame the debate as whether voters are "peasants"—interested in the state of their pocketbooks—or "bankers"—rational actors able to recognize that governments exist and leaders work for the future improvement of the national economy. Studies that investigate these links among elites are lacking, however, leaving us with mostly speculation about the applicability of these competing theories.

In addition to the above factors may be added country-specific context. Historical, social, economic, and other factors of any given country may color the opinions of elites and masses alike. Among the six countries in our study, there is substantial variation in their historical trajectories and contemporary developments. For instance, Colombia is considered by many to be the longest standing democracy in South America, dating its transition to 1958, whereas Mexico's transition took place only in 2000. In a similar manner, Argentina's greatest challenge in recent years has been economic, but Venezuela's has been political. The details of each country are well beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, Table 1 presents a sampling of the variation among our cases.

## Data and Method

The literatures on opinion formation among elites and the general public suggest four possible influences on elites' evaluations of our dependent variable, PSDP: confidence in institutions, beliefs in the status of rights and liberties, economic opinions, and contextual factors.<sup>3</sup> Cross-sectional individual-level data are most useful in assessing elites' attitudes, but such data are traditionally scarce. We use data from the University of Miami/Zogby Latin American Elite Poll, which surveyed 537 elites in Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, and Chile in September of 2003.

As these data have never appeared in print, some background information about them is in order. The respondent pool was created by Zogby

3. The description and source of all the variables used in this study are described in Appendix B.

**Table 1**  
**Political and Economic Indicators for**  
**Six Latin American Countries**

Country	Years Since Transition	Freedom House Classification (2002)	Transparency International Corruption Index (2002)	GDP Growth (2001) <sup>a</sup>
Argentina	20	Partly free	2.8	-3.7
Brazil	18	Partly free	4.0	1.5
Chile	13	Free	7.5	2.9
Colombia	45	Partly free	3.6	1.6
Mexico	3	Free	3.6	-0.3
Venezuela	45	Partly free	2.4	2.7

Source: Freedom House (2003); Transparency International (2002); World Bank (2003).

a. GDP growth in percentages.

Note: Freedom House ranks political rights and civil liberties on a 1 to 7 scale, with 1 being the most free. On the basis of these scores, countries are categorized as free, partly free, or not free. See Freedom House (2003) for annual rankings. Note that economic progress does not factor into Freedom House scores. Thus although we use the scores as objective measures of democratic progress, our findings indicate that what elites are looking for when they evaluate democratic progress is not congruent with what Freedom House scores encompass.

In its annual Corruption Perception Index, Transparency International ranks countries on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the least corrupt. As a point of contrast, the United States currently ranks 16th with a score of 7.7. See Transparency International (2002) for a country-by-country listing.

International, who randomly selected respondents from lists of elites drawn from business, government, the media, and academia. Interviews were conducted at the respondents' offices in Spanish, except in Brazil where interviews were conducted in Portuguese. The survey focuses on elites' views of political and business conditions across Latin America and thereby is perfectly suited to address our research questions. Additional details about the characteristics of our elite sample are detailed in Appendix A.

Data for PSDP come from the survey question that asks respondents to rate the progress their president has made in moving their country toward democracy. We employ this new measure to avoid the shortcomings of the more common means of evaluation. Many surveys ask respondents to rate their satisfaction with democracy, yet this one variable has been subject to significant criticism because it can be interpreted in numerous ways (Canache, Mondak, & Seligson, 2001; Norris, 1999). As Canache et al. (2001, pp. 511-512) point out, respondents may even interpret the question as asking them to compare democracy with another form of government.

Other surveys ask respondents to evaluate a set of democratic principles, such as competitive elections, freedom to criticize the government, and so forth, but this clearly assumes a standard interpretation of democracy (Miller et al., 1997, p. 159). The Hewlett poll analyzed by Camp (2001), furthermore, asks respondents to indicate what democracy means to them. The highly abstract nature of this line of questioning raises concerns for not only the ambiguous nature of democracy but also each of the possible responses.

The PSDP measure avoids some, although certainly not all, of these problems. By asking respondents to assess actual performance, it gives a much more specific and “real-world” frame of reference than the more common questions. Yet by allowing them to compare performance against their own standard of democracy, it does not presume any common understanding of the term. Through our analysis, we can determine what influences their understanding. To be clear, we do not directly ask about regime-level opinions or support for democracy; rather, we ask opinions of the president’s progress in advancing democracy and from the results, infer how elites conceive of democracy.

Some might question whether PSDP is merely an assessment of presidential approval, but a separate question measures approval and we use it as a control variable. It may be worth noting, in addition, that our variable, like satisfaction with democracy, asks respondents to make an evaluation without providing an explicit standard of comparison. Although satisfaction with democracy is criticized on this point, it is from the perspective of examining citizens’ support for democracy. Our task, by contrast, is to ultimately determine how elites conceptualize democracy. As such, allowing a flexible, respondent-determined standard is appropriate, and we view PSDP as a valuable new tool for investigating elite opinions—by directly measuring its causes, we can infer how elites define democracy.

The variation in our dependent variable, PSDP, is seen in Table 2, which depicts the mean score for each country’s elites. Answers on this 5-point scale range from *poor* to *excellent*, with higher scores reflecting increasingly positive assessments. In general, these results show that elites in each of the countries see their leaders as making moderate (Mexico’s Fox, Argentina’s Kirchner) to strong (Brazil’s Lula da Silva, Colombia’s Uribe, Chile’s Lagos) progress toward democracy. The one exception is Venezuela’s Chávez, who has overseen a retreat from democracy and is rated about 1.30 points less than his nearest colleague—on a 5-point scale. We now turn to our independent variables.

We expect that confidence in formal institutions and progress toward the implementation of democratic values should positively affect evaluations.

**Table 2**  
**Mean Evaluation of Each President's Progress Toward**  
**Democracy by Elites in Each Country**

Country	President	Mean Progress Score
Argentina	Kirchner	3.12
Brazil	Lula da Silva	3.83
Chile	Lagos	3.72
Colombia	Uribe	3.48
Mexico	Fox	2.84
Venezuela	Chávez	1.53

Note: Variable ranges from 1 to 5.

Research shows that elites are especially concerned with values such as civil rights and liberties (Barnum & Sullivan, 1989; McClosky, 1964; McClosky & Brill, 1983; Stouffer, 1955). To the degree that presidents have enhanced democratic values, elites should view PSDP positively. We use three indicators to assess the degree to which respondents view action concerning democratic values.

Liberties measures the degree to which the president has done a good job ensuring that civil rights and liberties are respected. As free expression is central to the expression of civil liberties, the degree to which the president works to ensure a free press taps a second aspect of civil rights and liberties. Judicial independence measures elites' views of the success the president has had in improving the independence of the judiciary. These are scored such that higher values correspond to increased confidence or success.

Confidence in the functioning of formal institutions also seems likely to affect presidential evaluations. It is important to note here that we assess the impact of each of our variables individually. Thus our classification of variables as belonging among either formal or informal institutions does not affect our empirical results. Generally, we expect elites who lack confidence in such institutions to evaluate presidents' progress toward democracy more critically. We assess the impact of five aspects of formal institutions: Justice measures the confidence elites have in the legal process and provides an indicator of institutional legitimacy; congress measures the confidence elites have in their national congress; crime assesses the degree to which elites view the president's efforts to fight crime as successful; parties accounts for the confidence elites have in the political parties; and finally,

corrupt assesses elites' views of presidential progress toward reducing governmental corruption. Each of these variables allows elites to reflect on tangible outcomes that are either directly under or related to the president's influence. Again, higher scores for these variables reflect higher confidence or success.

Current and future economic conditions should also influence elites' views (e.g., Canache, 2002; Lewis-Beck, 1988; MacKuen et al., 1992). Although economic conditions have not specifically been used to explain PSDP, there is good reason to expect these evaluations to prove useful in evaluating leadership success beyond that tapped by simple approval measures. Perhaps nowhere is this more clear than in our respondents' answers to the question of whether democracy or economic development is more important: Only 55% held democracy to be a more important goal. Consequently, elites should be less likely to support a political system that engenders a lack of economic opportunity or vibrancy.

We expect that the impact of economic evaluations ought to be transmitted through elites' evaluations of their personal and their nations' economic prospects. Perceptions of current national economic conditions are operationalized in the variable *economy*, whereas future measures expectations about the future of the national economy. Both variables are coded so that scores increase with economic satisfaction or optimism. Lastly, an individual's opinion of PSDP should depend on the state of his or her personal finances—individuals are unlikely to be satisfied with their president's progress toward democracy if they view their own financial status as declining. Thus we include the variable *household*, which measures opinions about the respondent's personal finances during the past year.

Contextual factors and cross-national differences also influence attitudes concerning progress toward democracy. To account for unique country-specific influences, we employ a fixed effects framework by including country-level dummy variables.<sup>4</sup> Mexico serves as the required baseline category and is therefore omitted.

Finally, control variables are included in the model to account for other influences on democratic evaluations. As mentioned above, controlling for presidential popularity is especially important to ensure that our dependent variable assesses attitudes toward democracy rather than general presidential success or popularity. The dummy variable *approval* measures whether

4. We also estimated models including dummies for all combinations of countries as well as a model that omitted all dummies. The results are extremely robust. In virtually every case, the substantive results of all variables other than the country dummies remain about the same.

respondents approve of the job their president is doing. Education and ideology are also well-recognized influences on opinion (Converse, 1964). The variable education measures the highest degree completed, and ideology is measured by having respondents rate themselves on the “left-right” scale from 0 to 7.<sup>5</sup>

The theoretical expectations developed in the previous sections and operationalized above are tested statistically on our individual-level data. As the dependent variable has five categories, we employ a fixed effects ordered probit model. The statistical model we use to test our expectations is as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 PSDP = & \alpha + \beta_1 * \text{Economy} + \beta_2 * \text{Future} + \beta_3 * \text{Household} + \beta_4 * \text{Education} \\
 & + \beta_5 * \text{Ideology} + \beta_6 * \text{Liberties} + \beta_7 * \text{Press} \\
 & + \beta_8 * \text{Judicial Independence} + \beta_9 * \text{Corrupt} + \beta_{10} * \text{Crime} \\
 & + \beta_{11} * \text{Justice} + \beta_{12} * \text{Congress} + \beta_{13} * \text{Parties} + \beta_{14} * \text{Argentina} \\
 & + \beta_{15} * \text{Brazil} + \beta_{16} * \text{Chile} + \beta_{17} * \text{Colombia} + \beta_{18} * \text{Venezuela} \\
 & + \beta_{18} * \text{Approval} + \epsilon.
 \end{aligned}$$

## Results

Our model estimates the extent to which economic opinions, confidence in institutions, and beliefs about the status of democratic values drive perceptions about PSDP while controlling for other factors, including the unique background of these countries.<sup>6</sup> The results of the statistical model are seen in Table 3. Several interesting results are evident.

The results illustrate the important roles of economic evaluations, democratic values, and contextual influences. The pseudo  $R^2$  of .34 indicates that the model performs reasonably well given the noisiness of survey data, the diversity of the respondents, and the varied contexts in which the surveys were administered. Looking at the effects of our independent variables, we begin with our most surprising result.

5. It is possible that some respondents may view democracy negatively and that this could affect our results. To test this possibility, we also ran this model with a variable accounting for a respondent's willingness to accept an authoritarian government. The authoritarian variable proved insignificant and the other model results are statistically and substantively identical to those reported.

6. The purpose of this article is to draw descriptive inference about influences on elites in Latin America. The question of the influences on elites in the individual countries lies beyond the scope of this article.

**Table 3**  
**Ordered Probit of Progress Toward Democracy on Economic,  
 Institutional, and Contextual Factors**

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Economy	.192***	.069
Future	.16**	.078
Household	.27***	.078
Education	-.182**	.076
Ideology	-.002	.04
Liberties	.265***	.08
Press	.157**	.073
Independent judiciary	.134*	.074
Corruption	-.014	.085
Crime	-.037	.08
Courts	.016	.10
Congress	-.022	.119
Parties	.044	.115
Argentina	-.607***	.215
Brazil	.358*	.19
Chile	.15	.205
Colombia	.269	.202
Venezuela	-.781***	.227
Approval	1.12***	.157
Cut Point 1	1.51	.47
Cut Point 2	2.47	.48
Cut Point 3	3.83	.49
Cut Point 4	5.10	.51
Log likelihood	-454.48	
Pseudo $R^2$	.34	
$N$	438	

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

We find no evidence that elites' confidence in what we identify as formal institutions influences their evaluations of PSDP. None of the variables—congress, courts, or parties—comes close to reaching conventional levels of statistical significance; each of their  $Z$  scores is well below 1. Even the evaluation of presidential performance on issues indirectly related to government institutions, such as crime and governmental corruption, fail to reach significance.<sup>7</sup> In sum, high levels of confidence in these areas have no measurable effect on PSDP—presidents may be seen as making fine progress without them. Again, this finding is somewhat surprising, given what appears to scholars to be the obvious nexus between the caliber of

governmental institutions and true democratic progress. Indeed, a wide range of literature stresses the fundamental role institutions play in the democratization process and in shaping political life. That is, although many (including Freedom House) may in large part define democratic progress by the health of formal institutions, the elites in our sample do not. Instead, democratic values, economic considerations, and contextual effects matter most.

Indeed, the results depict a strong role for democratic values. Each of the three variables reflecting democratic values is significant. However, the magnitude of the liberties variable is about twice as large as the others, which, given the identical coding schemes, suggests that it plays a larger role. This result is consistent with research on elites in advanced democracies.

We also find significant impacts for contextual influences. The dummy variables for both Venezuela and Argentina are highly significant and negatively signed, suggesting that elites in these countries have lower evaluations of PSDP. This effect appears to be especially large in Venezuela, where the average elite rates President Chávez's progress as only slightly above "poor"—far and away the lowest of any of the leaders of the countries surveyed. Finally, the effect of education is also interesting in that it is large and significant, although negatively signed. Thus the more highly educated are more critical of their president's progress.

Perhaps the most salient result is the exceptionally strong role of economic evaluations. Each of the three economic variables is significant. It is clear that both egocentric and sociotropic forces are at play here, although because their magnitudes are similar it is hard to assess the relative impact of these variables. Nonetheless, economic evaluations clearly influence PSDP. Moreover, the magnitude of these variables is especially impressive when one considers that these results are not the product of presidential approval. Because the linkage of economic variables to PSDP is of particular interest, we perform a likelihood ratio test, which compares the efficacy of a model without the economic variables with a model that includes the three economic variables (i.e., a baseline model). The results of this test,  $\chi^2(3) = 79.42$ , show that the inclusion of the economic variables significantly (.01 level) adds to our explanation of elites' evaluations of PSDP. A model containing only democratic values variables, institutional variables, and contextual factors is incomplete.

7. These results are not because of multicollinearity. The model does not exhibit any of the classic symptoms (e.g., high  $R^2$ , insignificant coefficients) and no two variables correlate at higher than .65. Most important, the highest correlation among the institutional variables is .47 (i.e., congress and parties).

**Table 4**  
**Change in Probability of an Excellent Evaluation Resulting**  
**From a Shift From the Median to the Maximum on**  
**Selected Economic and Institutional Variables**

Variable	Change
Economy	.04 (.02)
Future	.03 (.02)
Household	.06 (.02)
Press	.04 (.02)
Liberty	.07 (.03)
Independent judiciary	.03 (.02)

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

It is clear that the economic factors add to our understanding, but owing to the estimation technique, interpretation of the magnitude of these effects is not straightforward. Estimation of the changes in predicted probabilities associated with changes in economic conditions, confidence in government institutions, and democratic values allows for an assessment of the relative impact of these influences.

The impact of these variables is presented in Table 4 and illustrated in Figure 1. Table 4 compares the impact of a change in democratic values variables with the impact of a similar change in economic variables on the probability that a respondent rates PSDP as "excellent".<sup>8</sup> More specific, in each case we compare the predicted effect of shifting a respondent's answer on the institutional variable from "somewhat confident" to "great confidence" with the impact of shifting the economic variables from "stay the same" to "get a lot better" while holding all other variables at their mean values.<sup>9</sup>

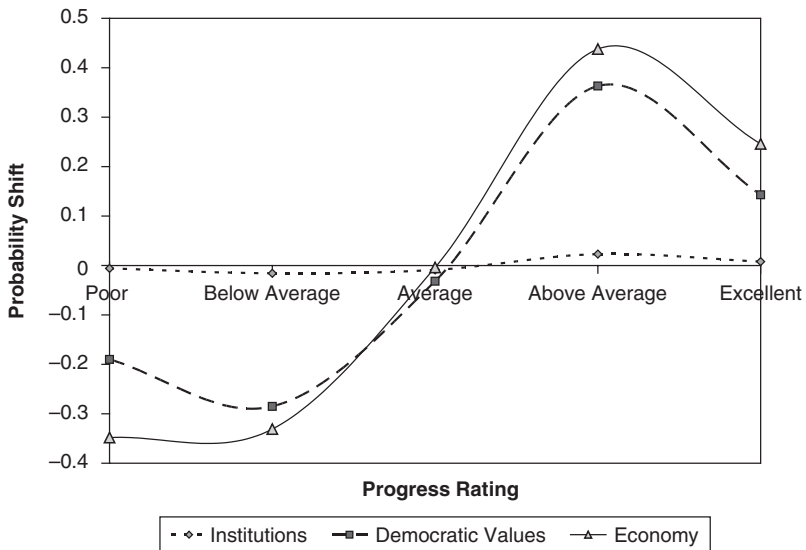
The results in Table 4 clearly show the impact of each of the economic and democratic values variables.<sup>10</sup> Each of the three economic variables produces an increase in the probability of giving their president the highest possible evaluation of between 3% and 6%. These effects are comparable to

8. We omit substantive analysis of the institutional confidence variables as they are statistically insignificant.

9. These shifts reflect a change from the median to the maximum category on each of the independent variables. These estimates were obtained using the CLARIFY program (King, Tomz, & Wittenberg, 2000).

10. The estimates of the substantive impact of each of the formal institutional variables are omitted because the effects are not statistically significant.

**Figure 1**  
**Shift in the Probability of Assigning a Progress Rating**  
**as Economic, Formal Institutional, and Democratic**  
**Values Variables Are Shifted in Combination From**  
**Their Minimum to Their Maximum Values**



those observed for the press and independent judiciary variables. However, of particular interest is the role of liberty, which exhibits a magnitude of increase (7%) comparable to the strongest economic effect (household).

The effect of these variables may be understated when moved in isolation. It seems likely, for instance, that individuals' evaluations of their economic situation may color their evaluations of the national economy. There may also be similar spillover effects with the democratic values variables. Freedom of the press, speech, and assembly may move together. To account for these combined effects, we estimate the magnitude of the effect of simultaneous shifts in the related variables.

The substantive significance of economic influences is perhaps most clearly seen in Figure 1, which demonstrates the impact of the simultaneous change described above for each of the five ratings of a president's progress. More specific, Figure 1 depicts the change in the probability of assigning a particular PSDP rating when three key economic, democratic values or

formal institutions variables are simultaneously changed from their low (i.e., “not at all confident” or “got a lot worse”) to high values (i.e., “great confidence” or “got a lot better”).<sup>11</sup> This diagram allows us to compare the relative impact of each of these groups of variables on the probability that a respondent will assign a particular rating to their president.

The results are striking. The magnitude of the impact of the economic variables is larger than the impact of either confidence in formal institutions variables or the democratic values variables. For instance, the probability that an elite rates PSDP as poor (Category 1) decreases by about 35% when his or her evaluation of the economy shifts from the most negative to the most positive category. In a similar manner, the probability of rating the PSDP as above average increases by about 44%. In comparison, the impact of changes in the evaluation of democratic values is less pronounced. The probability of an excellent rating increases just less than 14%, whereas the likelihood of a poor rating decreases by just about 22%. It is important that similar shifts in the confidence in institutions have little discernable effect.

These results strongly suggest that in combination, economic factors drive opinions of PSDP. Although their impact is substantively smaller, these results also reinforce the importance of democratic values in elites' evaluations. This result is important because it suggests that the factors influencing elites' evaluations in fragile democracies are similar to those that influence evaluations in more advanced and stable ones. However, in comparison, the confidence in governmental institutions is both tiny and statistically insignificant.

## Discussion and Conclusion

These results provide insight into the degree to which elites' views of institutions, democratic values, and economic progress affect their evaluations of PSDP. The results are especially instructive given that we control for the impact of presidential popularity. Our results reveal that context, democratic values, and most especially economic considerations are all influential factors shaping elites' evaluation of their leaders' progress toward democracy. Perhaps our most noteworthy finding is the insignificance of formal institutions in this assessment. Thus even with poor confidence in such

11. Democratic values variables are liberty, press, and judicial independence; formal institutions variables are congress, courts, and parties; and economic variables are economy, future, and household.

**Table 5**  
**Proportion of Respondents in Each PSDP Category**  
**That Gave the Lowest and Highest Economic**  
**Evaluations (in percentages)**

Economic Evaluation	Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent
A lot worse	71.26	23.29	7.75	5.07	2.33
A lot better	2.30	1.37	1.41	9.42	19.77

Note: PSDP = presidential success in democratic progress.

important bodies as congress, the courts, and political parties, elites will view their presidents as making democratic progress so long as economic concerns are met and democratic values are spread. This can be seen especially clearly in Table 5, which shows the proportion of respondents in each PSDP category who said that the national economy has gotten a lot better or a lot worse. It is clear that PSDP evaluations rise with economic evaluations—someone who thinks the president’s success in democratic progress is poor is 31 times more likely to believe the economy is doing a lot worse than a lot better.

Looking more deeply, because respondents implicitly compare the performance of their presidents against their own standards of democracy, determining the factors that influence PSDP reveals how elites conceptualize democracy. Our results suggest that elites hold a highly instrumental view of democracy, with economics viewed as the key by-product. In light of the unimportance of confidence in formal institutions as well as the lack of a link between concerns for crime and corruption and PSDP, these results suggest that elites place greater emphasis on the economic products of democracy than on democracy itself. Indeed, one conjecture we can make is that Latin American elites are not committed to democracy and are supportive of a system only for as long as they can extract from it some personal economic benefit.<sup>12</sup> This possibility is one deserving of more research, much of which should focus on the impact of economic opinions.

A good example of these relationships is the high PSDP rating of Brazil’s da Silva. Concerns held by many of the elite for the economic ramifications of his leftist platform proved unfounded. Since taking office, his economic program has been decidedly centrist and economic performance has improved.

12. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this point.

As a result, he has the highest approval ratings of the presidents in this survey. Yet more than just affecting general approval ratings, economic considerations in Brazil strongly influence PSDP. In fact, of the elites in our six countries, it is Brazil's who give their president the highest scores on making progress toward democracy.

Camp's (2001) study of Latin America echoes this point. Camp finds that the Latin American version of democracy emphasizes "social and economic equality and progress" (p. 9). In post-Soviet states, by contrast, Miller et al. (1997) find that elites "take democracy to mean order, restraint and legal institutions" (p. 175). They also find relatively little connection between economic and democratic beliefs. These contrasting findings again suggest that more research is necessary. We need to assess elite and mass conceptualizations of democracy in Latin America and to compare them with their counterparts in other developing areas. Citizens' understanding of democracy affects the conditions under which they offer regime support, and this in turn may affect the chances for democratic consolidation.

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## Appendix A

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### Sample Methodology

Applying Eldersveld's (1989) definition of elites, our sample consists of leaders in government, the media, business, and academia. The survey was administered by Zogby International using the following methodology. In each country, lists were created of eligible populations of members of these four groups. Participants were selected from each group such that each sector was approximately equally represented in each country. Interviewing continued until quotas for each group (about 20 respondents per group) in each country were met such that each country had about 80 respondents. The response rate was about 25% and interviews were conducted primarily in Spanish (except in Brazil where Portuguese was used) both in person and by phone, depending on the respondent's preferences. Membership in the groups was defined as follows:

*Public Sector:* national and local top-level public officials, consisting primarily of legislators and political party leaders

*Private Sector:* executive directors and top-level management of private companies (mainly large corporations)

*Mass Media:* journalists and editors from national and local media

*Academia:* deans, heads of schools and departments, and influential faculty in public and private universities as well as research centers

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## Appendix B

### Construction and Sources of Variables

Variable	Description	Source/Coding
Approval	Dummy variable for presidential approval	Question 1: Do you approve or disapprove of the job your president is doing? Positive responses are 1 (yes) and negative responses are 0 (no).
Argentina	Dummy variable for Argentina	Coded 1 for elites from Argentina, 0 for non-Argentinean elites
Brazil	Dummy variable for Brazil	Coded 1 for elites from Brazil, 0 for non-Brazilian elites
Chile	Dummy variable for Chile	Coded 1 for elites from Chile, 0 for non-Chilean elites
Colombia	Dummy variable for Colombia	Coded 1 for elites from Columbia, 0 for non-Colombian elites
Congress	Confidence in congress	Question 14: How much confidence do you have in each of the following institutions: National Congress? Coded as a 3-point scale from 1 ( <i>not at all confident</i> ) to 3 ( <i>great confidence</i> )
Corruption	President's performance reducing corruption	Question 48: How good a job do you think your president has done: Reducing government corruption? Coded as a 4-point scale from 1 ( <i>very bad job</i> ) to 4 ( <i>very good job</i> )
Crime	President's performance fighting crime	Question 49: How good a job do you think your president has done: Fighting crime? Coded as a 4-point scale from 1 ( <i>very bad job</i> ) to 4 ( <i>very good job</i> )
Economy	Retrospective opinion of country's economic performance	Question 2: How do you think the general economic situation in your country has changed over the last 12 months? Coded as a 5-point scale from 1 ( <i>got a lot worse</i> ) to 5 ( <i>got a lot better</i> ).
Education	Respondent's level of education	Question 50: Education, coded as 1 (primary or less), 2 (secondary), 3 (4-year college), 4 (master's or professional degree), 5 (Ph.D.)

*(continued)*

## Appendix B (continued)

Variable	Description	Source/Coding
Future	Prospective opinion of country's economic performance	Question 3: How do you think the general economic situation in your country will develop over the next 12 months? Coded as a 5-point scale from 1 ( <i>get a lot worse</i> ) to 5 ( <i>get a lot better</i> ).
Ideology	Respondent's ideological position	Question 12: Thinking of politics in terms of left and right, on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 is left of center, and 7 is right, where would you place yourself?
Judicial independence	President's performance improving judicial independence	Question 41: How good a job do you think your president has done: Improving the independence of the judiciary? Coded as a 4-point scale from 1 ( <i>very bad job</i> ) to 4 ( <i>very good job</i> ).
Justice	Confidence in judiciary	Question 16: How much confidence do you have in each of the following institutions: Judiciary? Coded as a 3-point scale from 1 ( <i>not at all confident</i> ) to 3 ( <i>great confidence</i> )
Liberty	President's performance ensuring civil liberties	Question 40: How good a job do you think your president has done: Ensuring civil rights and liberties are respected? Coded as a 4-point scale from 1 ( <i>very bad job</i> ) to 4 ( <i>very good job</i> )
Media	Confidence in the media	Question 19: How much confidence do you have in each of the following institutions: Media? Coded as a 3-point scale from 1 ( <i>not at all confident</i> ) to 3 ( <i>great confidence</i> )
Police	Confidence in police	Question 17: How much confidence do you have in each of the following institutions: Police? Coded as a 3-point scale from 1 ( <i>not at all confident</i> ) to 3 ( <i>great confidence</i> )
Press	President's performance ensuring free press	Question 47: How good a job do you think your president has done: Ensuring a free press? Coded as a 4-point scale from 1 ( <i>very bad job</i> ) to 4 ( <i>very good job</i> )

*(continued)*

## Appendix B (continued)

Variable	Description	Source/Coding
Presidential success in democratic progress	President's progress toward democracy	Questions 23 to 30: Rate the progress each of the following leaders has made in moving their country toward democracy. Coded as a 5-point scale from 1 ( <i>poor</i> ) to 5 ( <i>excellent</i> ).
Venezuela	Dummy variable for Venezuela	Pertains to country's recent political instability; coded 1 for elites from Venezuela, 0 for non-Venezuelan elites

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