The Political and Moral Economies of Democratic Support

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Abstract

Popular support for democracy is the lifeblood of stable democratic systems. Yet existing research is poorly suited for explaining why democratic support falls and how it might rise again, because it uses static research designs, and identifies the sources of support as being fairly static factors such as institutions and political cultures. In contrast, this paper proposes and tests two explanations for changes in democratic support: a political-economic theory focusing on fluctuations in the effectiveness of governance, and a moral-economic theory focusing on variations in the impartiality of governance and political equality. Using dynamic, time-series, cross-sectional tests, we find that the most important drivers of changes in support are moral rather than political-economic. Preserving the legitimacy of democracy, and therefore its survival, rests on the extent to which democratic governments can curb corruption, treat citizens impartially, and provide more equitable access to power across class, ethnic, and gender divides.

Keywords: support for democracy, performance legitimacy, political equality, impartial governance, corruption

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Introduction

Political scientists are increasingly arguing that public faith in democracy is wavering, if not in outright decline (see, e.g., Bermeo 2016; Foa and Mounk 2016; 2017; Mounk 2018; Plattner 2017; Wilke and Fetterolf 2018). Less clear is why this might be the case. Although democratic support has been the focus of a large literature dating back to the 1990s, existing research is poorly suited to explain apparently declining public support for democracy because it overwhelmingly uses static research designs involving samples of individuals or states measured at one point in time. As a consequence of these designs, existing research has concluded that support is shaped by largely static variables such as national political cultures (e.g., Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Norris 2011; Welzel 2013) or institutional socialization (e.g., Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998; Rohrschneider 1994; Mattes and Bratton 2007).

In contrast, this paper proposes two theories which allow for rapid fluctuations in citizens' preference for democratic versus non-democratic regimes, thereby granting some leverage on the question of why democratic support may be falling in certain cases, and indeed, what might cause it to rise again. The first is a *political economic* theory of democratic support, where rational, self-interested citizens use an instrumental calculus to judge the value of democracy on the basis of the benefits provided by the regime. Citizens may expect that democracy will produce governments which provide desirable public goods such as a growing economy, control of crime, and improved health care. If so – and if democracies have become less effective at producing these beneficial public goods, especially in contrast to rapidly rising autocracies like China – support for democracy is likely to dwindle.

The second theory focuses on what we might call the *moral economy* of public support for democracy. It assumes that citizens expect democracies to be right and just, and that such expectations can be satisfied (or thwarted) by the extent to which the practices and outcomes of governance adhere to basic principles of impartiality and equality. From this perspective, changes in public support for democracy are driven by factors such as increasing corruption and cronyism,

rising levels of economic inequality, and unequal access to power across gender, ethnic, and class lines.

To test these whether these theories can account for changes in democratic support, the paper uses a dynamic research design, made possible by the recent provision of times-series, cross-sectional (TSCS) measures of democratic support (Claassen 2019), corruption (Standaert 2015), income inequality (Solt 2009), impartial governance (V-Dem Institute 2019), and access to power (Vogt et al. 2015) covering more than 100 democracies and stretching back from 2017 to as early as 1988. Such a design allows us to model the "reverse" effects of previous levels of democratic support on our independent variables of corruption, equality, and performance; and to adjust for the possible confounding effects of time-invariant, country-specific institutional and historical factors.

We find that the drivers of changes in support for democracy are moral rather than political-economic, or normative rather than instrumental. Measures of the extent to which democracies provide beneficial outcomes through effective governance, including economic performance, control of violent crime, and provision of health services, have weak and fragile effects on support. Rather, it is changes in the corruptness and partiality of the public administration, as well as shifts in political inequality which drive fluctuations in democratic support. Ultimately, preserving the legitimacy of democracy, and therefore its stability, seems to rest on the extent to which democratic governments can treat citizens impartially and provide more equitable access to the levers of power across class, ethnic, and gender divides

The question of change

Political scientists have long connected the resilience of democratic regimes with the attitudes of the citizenry. For Lipset, one of the requisites of a stable democracy was its "(l)egitimacy, or the degree to which institutions are valued for themselves and considered right and proper" (Lipset 1959, 71; see also Almond and Verba 1963; Linz and Stepan 1996). Empirically, the most recent evidence suggests that, indeed, democratic survival depends, at least partially, on the ability to preserve citizens' attitudinal support for democracy as a regime (Claassen 2020*a*).

However, what do we know in the first place about how support for democracy is sustained or, instead, undermined? The answer remains unclear, for intertwined methodological and theoretical reasons. On the one hand, the overwhelming majority of empirical comparative studies of democratic support have been based on cross-sectional designs, using vast arrays of surveys and searching for individual- or macro-level correlates of pro-democratic attitudes (e.g., Booth and Seligson 2009; Mattes and Bratton 2007; Norris 2011; Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998). While such studies have clearly illuminated differences between individuals, groups, and societies, the answers they provide with respect to the drivers of within-country change in democratic support are more suggestive than conclusive.

On the other hand, understandably, most such studies have focused on factors that tell us more about what explains stability than about what explains change. "Learning" or "habituation" (Booth and Seligson 2009; Mattes and Bratton 2007; Rohrschneider 1994; Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998) or the acquisition of values towards freedom and emancipation (Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Norris 2011; Welzel 2013), are explanations that emphasize how change in democratic support is likely to be slow, resulting either from citizens' prolonged exposure to the functioning of a stable liberal democracy or from the increasing availability of cognitive and material resources that are a function of social and economic development.

And yet we know that this cannot be the whole story. In recent years, short-term declines in support for democracy and in the rejection of autocratic alternatives have been observed in some established democratic regimes (Foa and Mounk 2016; 2017; Norris 2017), unexpected in light of "habituation," "learning," or "socialization" theories. More generally, we know now that while a few societies do exhibit stable levels of democratic support through time, change seems the norm in most countries on which we have data, including countries where support seems to ebb and flow in ways inconsistent with prevalent theoretical accounts (Claassen 2020*b*). So, what could be behind these changes in societal levels of democratic support? In this study, we examine two broad approaches to the question: an instrumental, political economy approach, which focuses on the ability of regimes to maximize the utility of citizens by delivering beneficial societal out-

comes; and a normative, moral economy approach, which focuses on the ability of regimes to meet expectations about the fairness of decision-making and the allocation of economic and political resources.

The political economy of democratic support

A political economy approach to democratic support assumes that individual preferences over political regimes are shaped by the extent to which the policies each regime generates produces outcomes which maximize those individuals' utility (Frey and Stutzer 2005). The implication is that people "evaluate various different options, including democracy versus nondemocracy, according to their assessments of their (economic and social) consequences" (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006, 19).

Explicitly or implicitly, these assumptions have long been a part of political science thinking about the public legitimacy of, and support for, democratic regimes. Discussing the breakdown of democracies in the inter-war years, Linz stressed that governments need to "find and implement satisfactory solutions to basic policy problems." If they fail to do so, "the lack of effectiveness weakens state authority and, as a result, its legitimacy" (Linz 1978, 78). The same connection between the ability of political authorities to keep providing the "public goods that the populace needs and desires" (Levi 2006, 5) and their legitimacy reappears countless times in the theoretical literature. For example, Scharpf advanced the notion of "output-oriented legitimization" – government for the people – emphasizing the ability to legitimize governance by "effectively promoting the common welfare of the constituency in question" (Scharpf 1999, 6). And examining the determinants of citizens' compliance with state revenue policies in a series of historical case studies, Levi stressed how the legitimization of state authority hinged on the provision of positive benefits (Levi 1988, 57).

This leads us to expect that citizens' support for democracies should depend, at least partially, on democracies' ability to provide beneficial outcomes to the citizenry through effective governance. However, the empirical evidence is ambiguous. While some studies find support for

democracy to be positively related with subjective or objective economic performance (Córdova and Seligson 2010; Kotzian 2011; de Jonge 2016), others have failed to detect such relationship (Evans and Whitefield 1995; Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2005; Huang, Chang, and Chu 2008; Yap 2013).[1] Results are similarly mixed when studies looked at the ability to provide other "public goods that the populace needs and desires," such as, for example, public safety. Negative perceptions of public safety (Fernandez and Kuenzi 2010; Carreras 2013), fear of crime (Merolla, Mezini, and Zechmeister 2013), and crime victimization (Visconti 2019) have been shown to decrease support for democracy in some studies, but not in others (Ceobanu, Wood, and Ribeiro 2010). More broadly, Magalhães (2014) showed that "government effectiveness," as measured in the World Bank Governance indicators (WGI), is positively related with public support for democracy as a regime for individuals living under democracies, while it is (weakly) negatively related with such support for those living under autocracy, taking this as evidence for "output-oriented legitimization." However, as Boräng, Nistotskaya, and Xezonakis (2017) note WGI's "government effectiveness" contains not only an "output" component but also aspects related to procedures and quality of governance, rendering the results difficult to interpret strictly as tests of an instrumental approach to democratic legitimacy.

Even more importantly, the overwhelming majority of these studies employ cross-sectional designs. Therefore, they do not really answer the question of what happens to support for democracy when the delivery of beneficial outcomes improves or deteriorates across time but within countries. Yet that question was at the core of the earliest political science literature on the topic. Although Easton regarded socialization as the main source of diffuse support, he also speculated

[1]Several studies have shown a relationship between economic performance and "satisfaction with the way democracy works" (Wagner, Schneider, and Halla 2009; Armingeon and Guthmann 2014; Quaranta and Martini 2016). Yet as Linde and Ekman (2003, 400) demonstrate, satisfaction with democracy is not "an adequate indicator of support for the principles or the legitimacy of democracy" (see also Canache, Mondak, and Seligson 2001).

about the dynamic nature of the relationship between government performance and support, suggesting that the the latter "may be a product of spill-over effects from evaluations of a series of outputs and of performance over a long period of time" (Easton 1975, 446). Therefore, from this point of view, we should expect democratic support to ultimately increase when governments deliver more beneficial policy outcomes, and to suffer when the opposite happens.

The moral economy of democratic support

In his classic work on legitimacy, Tyler delineates two distinct theories for explaining why citizens obey the law. The first is "dominated by the view that citizens are concerned with winning – that is, with receiving favorable outcomes" (Tyler 1990, 5). This is the political economy view we have outlined above. The second "is concerned with the influence of what people regard as just and moral as opposed to what is in their self-interest" (Tyler 1990, 4). This, we argue, offers an alternative, moral economy approach to understanding democratic support.[2] In such a moral economy theory, we propose that democratic support should be shaped by two factors: the extent to which democracy provides impartial governance and tackles inequalities.

Impartiality

Discussing the sources of political legitimacy, Rothstein argues that it should be "deeply connected to citizens' perceptions about procedural fairness in the implementation of public policies." (Rothstein 2009, 323). This particular answer to the question of what drives legitimacy is deeply indebted to a paradigm shift in social and political psychology in the 1970s: from an outcome-

[2]The concept of "moral economy" has a varied usage. However, running like a thread through the various conceptualizations – including ours – is a concern for human motivations which go beyond the *homo oeconomicus* assumption to include "norms and sentiments regarding the responsibilities and rights of individuals and institutions with respect to others" (Sayer 2000, 79). See also Booth (1994) and the debate between Scott (1976) and Popkin (1979).

to a procedures-focused paradigm (Lind 2020). The latter paradigm regarded fairness judgments as shaped by the processes used to arrive at authoritative decisions, not only by whether these decisions produced favorable outcomes for individuals (Walker et al. 1974).[3]

Political scientists were quick to pick up these theoretical innovations and apply them to the topic of political legitimacy. Schmidt, building on Scharpf's work, discussed the importance of what she called "throughput-legitimacy:" "the quality of the governance processes" and the avoidance of "oppressive, incompetent, corrupt or biased governance practices" (Schmidt 2013, 3–5). Levi's theory of "contingent consent" stressed how compliance to authorities, more than a simple "quid pro quo for services provided by government," requires "fair and impartial treatment by government actors and by citizens of each other" (Levi 1997, 2-4). For Rothstein, "it is the absence of corruption, discrimination, and similar violations of the principle of impartiality when exercising political power that creates political legitimacy" (Rothstein 2009, 323). Ultimately, the concept of "impartiality" emerged as central in the definition of "quality of government," encompassing and implying other important concepts – such as the "rule of law" or "absence of corruption" – but being broader, by precluding "all forms of partial exercise of government power" (Rothstein and Teorell 2008, 171).

There is abundant evidence that fair and impartial procedures are positively related with public support for political authorities (for a review, see Tyler 2006). This includes not only specific support for political actors, institutions, and governance arrangements (Tyler 1981; Ramirez 2008) but also diffuse support for regimes. For example, Linde (2012) shows that support for democracy is related with perceptions of the regime's procedural fairness. Variables capturing "quality of governance" – typically including individual- or macro-level measures of the impartiality of bureaucracies and control of corruption – have emerged as strong correlates of democratic support in a variety of studies (e.g., Mishler and Rose 2001; Seligson 2002; Huang, Chang, and Chu 2008;

[3]A preference for procedural fairness, particularly expressed in a preference for impartial and unbiased procedures, seems remarkably universal and to emerge quite early in human development (Dunham, Durkin, and Tyler 2018).

Kotzian 2011; Boräng, Nistotskaya, and Xezonakis 2017; Park 2017). Once again, most of these empirical studies run static cross-sectional analyses – appropriately, in many cases, since they test cross-sectional hypotheses. However, theory and evidence also suggest a dynamic hypothesis: if democracies become more impartial, public support for a democratic system should increase.

(In)equalities

The notion of the moral economy of democratic support implies that citizens should care not only about the impartiality of decision-making procedures in regimes, but also about the fairness with which resources and power are allocated. On the one hand, people seem to be averse to outcome inequality, an aversion that also manifests itself early on in human development. Unlike what a purely self-interested approach would lead us to expect, such aversion has been found not only on the part of those who are disadvantaged but also of those who are advantaged by inequality (Loewenstein, Thompson, and Bazerman 1989; McAuliffe et al. 2017).

This suggests that economic inequality is perceived as a "social evil" that collides with people's sense of fairness (Alesina, Di Tella, and MacCulloch 2004, 2010). As a consequence, regimes under which economic inequality is increasing face the threat of losing support among the citizenry. This is precisely what the available cross-sectional evidence suggests. Andersen (2012) finds not only that income inequality is negatively related with support for democracy, but also that this negative relationship is even stronger for those with higher income levels. Similarly, Krieckhaus and colleagues find empirical support for a "sociotropic retrospective" view of inequality, through which "rich and poor alike condemn democracy when inequality is high" (Krieckhaus et al. 2014, 150; see also Houle 2018).

However, such "vertical" inequality in income and wealth between individuals or households is just one part of the whole story about why "inequality" might be consequential for the legitimacy of democracies. Increasing attention has been given more recently to "horizontal" inequalities between groups of people with shared characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or age (Stewart 2002; Deere, Kanbur, and Stewart 2018). In the study of the determinants

of violent political conflict, such inequalities seem particularly consequential when economic disadvantage coincides with the political exclusion of particular social groups (Wimmer, Cederman, and Min 2009; Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch 2011). Political inclusion and exclusion has also been argued to matter for the legitimization of democracy. Mansbridge suggested that increasing the access to power of disadvantaged social groups, such as women and ethnic minorities, should enhance the de facto legitimacy of the polity, by allowing those groups "a voice in the making of a particular policy, even if that voice is through one's representative and one's views did not prevail" (Mansbridge 1999, 651)

Indeed, we know that greater "voice" has a positive effect on both organizational legitimacy (Folger 1977; Thibaut and Walker 1975) and political support (Esaiasson, Gilljam, and Persson 2012; Strebel, Kübler, and Marcinkowski 2019), quite aside from any advantageous or disadvantageous outcomes which result. A particularly relevant illustration of the importance of increasing access to power is provided by the research on the attitudinal consequences of fostering the political representation of underrepresented social groups. For example, increasing the presence of women in legislatures, legislative committees, administrative bodies, or executive roles seems to increase trust, efficacy, and legitimacy, above and beyond any policy consequences (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005; Clayton, O'Brien, and Piscopo 2019; Riccucci, Ryzin, and Lavena 2014; Atkeson and Carillo 2007). The larger the share of working-class legislators, the more voters are likely to approve, trust, and feel legislatures accomplish their goals (Barnes and Saxton 2019). Increasing the presence of African Americans in decision-making bodies has been found to increase perceptions of fairness (Hayes and Hibbing 2017). Relatedly, formal constitutional rules recognizing indigenous people's rights in Latin America are positively related with support for democracy (Fierro 2019). And one of the most striking aspects of all the works cited above is that, unlike a self-interested approach would lead us to expect, these positive effects are detected both for members of the public who belong to historically under-represented groups as well as those who belong to over-represented groups. There are therefore good reasons to expect that democracies which move in the direction of diminishing inequalities in access to power should enjoy increased public

support.

Research design

To understand why democratic support changes, as well as the role played by changes in regime performance, impartiality, and equality, we require longitudinal measures which vary over time. Adopting a dynamic research design offers three major advantages for understanding the determinants of change in democratic support. First, it allows us to control for the possible "reverse" effects of previous levels of the dependent variable on current realizations of the independent variable. For example, low levels of democratic support may allow corrupt leaders to emerge and flourish, even while such leaders may subsequently dampen enthusiasm for democracy (Morris and Klesner 2010). Second, dynamic designs allow us to examine within-country variation in support and its determinants, removing the between-country variance which has been the focus of extant research, but which is likely intractably confounded by long-established and static historical, cultural, and institutional factors specific to each country. For example, analysts have argued that resilient between-country differences in political culture are a legacy of historically remote political institutions, which in turn condition contemporary institutions and their performance (Tabbellini 2008). In a cross-sectional setup, these between-country differences are likely to produce correlations between social and political attitudes and levels of, for example, economic performance or quality of governance. Finally, dynamic designs allow us to estimate both the long and short run effects of various factors on democratic support, moving beyond the short-run focus of extant research.

Dependent variable

We use the TSCS estimates of democratic support developed by Claassen (2019; 2020*a*; 2020*b*). He collects all available cross-national opinions tapping support for democracy and rejection of authoritarian alternatives and applies a dynamic Bayesian latent variable model to produce annual estimates of "democratic mood," which captures "principled or diffuse support for democracy

itself, rather than instrumental support for the outputs of government or the incumbent office-holders" (Claassen 2020*b*, 39–40). These estimates cover 136 countries, ranging from as far back as 1988, in some cases, until 2017.

We further restrict the sample of countries to those that were at least somewhat democratic in the period for which we have data. Firstly, our expectations that democratic support is shaped by changes in government effectiveness, inequality and impartiality hold only within democratic states. Moreover, in overtly autocratic regimes, survey questions on democratic support ask citizens to evaluate an alternative, idealist, form of government, with which they may have had no experience. In contrast, in democratic states, support for democracy is not only idealist but also realist in that it asks citizens to evaluate the regime with which they are familiar (Mishler and Rose 2001). As such, we believe that it is misleading to compare the results across democracies and autocracies.

We adopt two approaches to testing our theories within democracies. First, in results reported in the main paper, we select a sample of 101 at least somewhat democratic countries as follows: (1) include a country starting in the first year in which that country was rated as a electoral or liberal democracy using V-Dem's "Regimes of the World" indicator, and for which we have democratic support estimates; (2) then collect yearly observations for that country until 2017 or until that country spent two or more years as a closed autocracy, in which case, stop collecting observations; (3) finally, remove any countries with less than five consecutive years of coverage.[4]

This is a permissive definition of democracy, which includes such cases as Russia and Belarus, which spent short periods as electoral democracies in the 1990s before settling into electoral autocracy status. In the online appendix, we use an alternative method: we use the entire sample and include interactions between our key independent variables and a dummy variable indicating whether a country was a democracy (electoral or liberal) in a given year or an autocracy (electoral

[4]We further remove two countries (Luxembourg and Malta) which have no longitudinal variation in some of the key independent variables (e.g., political equality), and are therefore unsuitable cases for testing the effects of changes in these variables.

or closed). This provides a more stringent method of testing the effects of our hypotheses within democracies while retaining the whole sample, but at the cost of increased model complexity.

Independent variables

Several measures of beneficial governance outcomes are included. First, we use the log of GDP per capita to measure the level of economic development, with annual percent change therein used to measure economic performance. Data are drawn from the Penn World Tables, and missing values replaced with values from the Maddison and IMF datasets and adjusted using a multilevel linear regression model. A second measure of economic performance is the inflation rate, with data drawn from the IMF and a sign-log transformation applied.[5] Third, we measure violent crime using (logged) data on violent deaths per capita, extracted from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation's "Global Burden of Disease" Study (IHME 2017). Fourth, we measure health outputs using the (logged) rate of infant mortality per 1,000 live births, from the World Bank's World Development Indicators.[6]

We use two main measures of impartiality. The most familiar form of partial governance is corruption, indicators of which are abundant. We use the Bayesian Corruption Index (Standaert 2015), which applies a Bayesian model to combine these various corruption indicators into a single consolidated TSCS measure.[7] Second, to measure impartial governance, we use the "Rigorous

[5]i.e., $sign(x)(log(|x| + 1))$, where x is the raw inflation rate.

[6]In models included in the online appendix, we examine the effects of two additional measures of effective governance: (1) the rate of adult employment using estimates from the International Labor Organization; (2) calorie supply per capita from the International Food Policy Research Institute.

[7]In models included in the online appendix, we test two alternative indicators of corruption: first, the "Political Corruption Index" from V-Dem, which focuses on corruption in government and the public service; second, the "Corruption Perceptions Index" from Transparency International.

and impartial public administration" indicator from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Dataset (Version 9), which measures "the extent to which public officials generally abide by the law and treat like cases alike, or conversely, the extent to which public administration is characterized by arbitrariness and biases (i.e., nepotism, cronyism, or discrimination)" (V-Dem Institute 2019, 162). While corruption focuses on the use of public office for private gain, partial governance is a more general phenomenon which also includes biases or imbalances in government decision-making which may not necessarily benefit the officeholder but do benefit some individuals or interests at the expense of others (Rothstein and Teorell 2008).

Finally, we include measures of economic and political inequality. To measure the former, we include annual estimates of national Gini coefficients of income inequality, obtained from the Standardized World Income Inequality Dataset (version 8.1, see Solt 2009), which uses a Bayesian model to combine Gini estimates from a variety of different sources. To measure political (in)equality, we use the "Equal Access Index" from the Varieties of Democracy project (version 8.1), which measures socioeconomic, ethnic, and gender groups' de facto capabilities for influencing power. This is becoming a standard measure of the distribution of power in different societies (Cole 2018; Houle 2018). We include two further measures of power inequalities. The first is the "Women's Political Empowerment Index" from the Varieties of Democracy project (version 8.1), which takes account of the civil liberties accorded to women and the degree to which women participate in civic and political life. The second is the share of the population that belong to an ethnic group which was "excluded" from executive power at the national level, from the 2019 Ethnic Power Relations dataset (see Vogt et al. 2015).

We also include, as control variables, measures of the electoral and liberal aspects of democracy. First, since opportunities to participate and exercise one's "voice" have long been thought to be important for legitimacy, we control for the effects of (changes in) democratic electoral procedures and rights, using V-Dem's "Electoral Democracy Index," which measures the extent to which a country's leaders are appointed via clean elections, where all adult citizens enjoy the freedom to vote, associate with other citizens, and express their political views (V-Dem In-

stitute 2019). Second, Claassen (2020*b*) argues that democratic support reacts thermostatically to changes in the liberal aspects of democracy, such as equality before the law and judicial oversight of the executive. We therefore include V-Dem's measure of this aspect of democracy, the "Liberal Component Index."

Empirical strategy

Our workhorse model is the error correction model (ECM). This allows us to dynamically model the persistence of the dependent variable over time, as well as the potentially enduring (or long-run) effects of the independent variables (Plümper and Troeger 2019). Following Claassen (2020*b*), we use two lags of the dependent variable of democratic support y_{it}, with our baseline EC model being specified as follows (for i countries, t years, and j covariates)

$$\Delta y_{it} = \alpha + \phi_1 y_{it-1} + \phi_2 y_{it-2} + \sum_{j=1}^{J} \beta_{1j} X_{ijt-1} + \sum_{j=1}^{J} \beta_{2j} \Delta X_{ijt} + \epsilon_{it} \tag{1}$$

Although mathematically equivalent to the model of levels of democratic support (i.e., the autoregressive distributed lag [ADL] model; see De Boef and Keele 2008), the ECM specification allows the fleeting effects of immediate changes in independent variables as well as the more enduring effects of lagged levels, to be more readily communicated. The evolution of the effects of independent variables, over both the short and long run, can be calculated using simulation methods and visually displayed, as we do later in the paper.[8]

With the inclusion of lagged dependent and independent variables, the ECM allows us to control for the possibility that democratic support, our dependent variable, might affect our independent variables of effective governance, impartiality, and inequality. Yet even with lagged dependent variables, we might still be concerned that observed relationships between democratic

[8]The ECM (and its ADL equivalent) require that time-series are stationary. The evidence is that ours are: Im, Pesaran and Shin and Levin, Lin and Chu tests show that the null hypothesis of unit roots can be rejected for all variables (see online appendix for results).

support and its purported determinants are shaped by additional confounding variables. To control for time-varying confounds, we include a number of control variables in each model, as outlined above. Yet time-invariant confounds, such as country-specific historical events, remain a possibility. Fortunately, panel data allow us to evade these confounding effects by examining only within-country variance in the key variables, e.g., as the following dynamic fixed effects model, which includes country fixed effects α_i

$$\Delta y_{it} = \alpha_i + \phi_1 y_{it-1} + \phi_2 y_{it-2} + \sum_{j=1}^{J} \beta_{1j} X_{ijt-1} + \sum_{j=1}^{J} \beta_{2j} \Delta X_{ijt} + \epsilon_{it} \tag{2}$$

Unfortunately, with short time series such as ours (which range from 5 to 30 years), including fixed effects and lagged dependent variables induces Nickell bias. A solution is the System GMM model, which includes further lags and lagged differences of the dependent variable as instruments and use generalized method of moments to estimate the model (Blundell and Bond 1998). In addition to the basic ECM (equation 1), we also run system GMM models estimating equation 2.

Analysis

Political economy of democratic support

We begin our empirical analysis with the tests of the effects of political-economic drivers of democratic support (i.e., effective government performance), before considering the effects of moral economic factors (i.e., inequality and impartiality). The EC and System GMM model results are displayed in Table 1.

We include lags of our dependent variable, democratic support, in both the EC and System GMM specification, to model the potentially enduring effects of our independent variables. AIC tests indicate that two lags are required. With these lags included, serial correlation is largely removed, as indicated by the insignificant Breusch–Godfrey tests for each model. Residuals may however be serially-correlated across space, so we include Beck-Katz panel-corrected standard

Table 1. The Effects of Effective Governance on Change in Democratic Support

	Error-Correction Models					System GMM models				
	(1.1)	(1.2)	(1.3)	(1.4)	(1.5)	(1.6)	(1.7)	(1.8)	(1.9)	(1.10)
GDP growth $_{t-1}$	.058				.074	−.023				.020
	(.062)				(.069)	(.064)				(.073)
Δ GDP growth	.124*				.128*	.067				.090
	(.059)				(.062)	(.050)				(.047)
Inflation rate $_{t-1}$		−.002			.001		−.007*			.002
		(.003)			(.003)		(.003)			(.004)
Δ inflation rate		−.006			−.005		−.008*			−.003
		(.004)			(.004)		(.004)			(.004)
Murder rate $_{t-1}$			−.007		−.007			−.021*		−.021*
			(.004)		(.004)			(.006)		(.006)
Δ murder rate			−.025		−.028			−.001		−.013
			(.044)		(.044)			(.042)		(.041)
Infant mortality rate $_{t-1}$				−.007	−.001				−.013*	−.001
				(.006)	(.005)				(.004)	(.005)
Δ infant mortality rate				.073	.115				.193	.267*
				(.078)	(.085)				(.107)	(.115)
N observations	1824	1824	1813	1796	1785	2026	2026	2026	2026	2026
N countries	101	101	101	101	101	101	101	101	101	101
N instruments						95	95	95	95	107
Residual standard error	.096	.096	.097	.097	.097					
Breusch-Godfrey AR(1) test (p-value)	.481	.425	.516	.502	.484					
Hansen test (p-value)						.440	.525	.509	.536	.651
Arellano-Bond AR(2) test (p-value)						.930	.981	.963	.957	.961

*$p < .05$. All models include two lags of democratic support, electoral democracy and regime liberalism. in both lagged levels and first-differences, and lagged log of GDP per person. EC models include Beck-Katz panel corrected standard errors; System GMM models include Windmeijer-corrected standard errors.

errors in our ECM specifications. System GMM results include Windmeijer-corrected standard errors.[9]

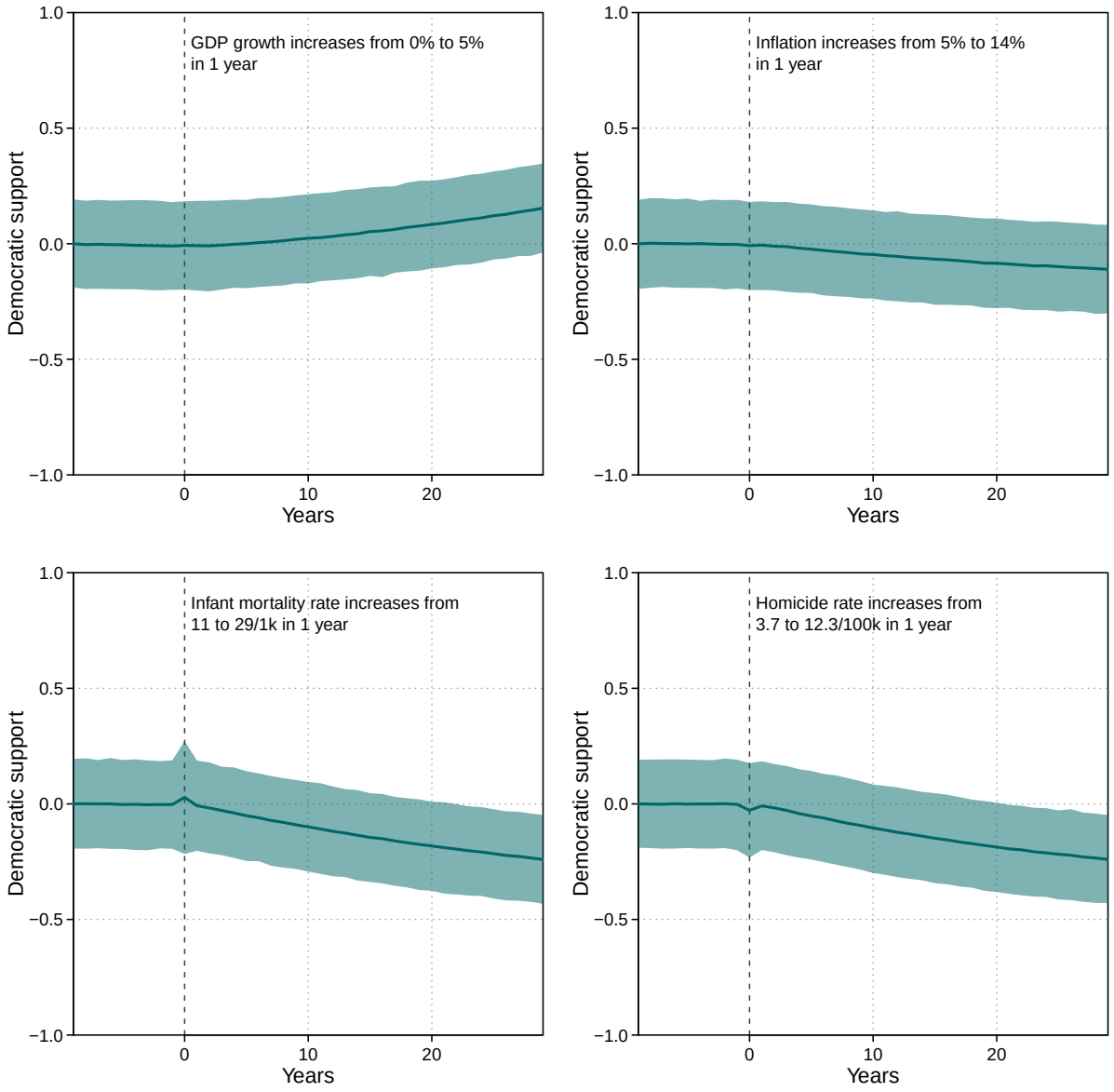
Few of the indicators of effective governance show significant effects in our dynamic models, and none show robust effects that hold across the two modelling specifications, in both the simpler models with fewer covariates as well as the full models with all covariates. For example, the effect of economic growth is small and insignificant within democracies, even when the other indicators of effective government are excluded from the model. Immediate changes in the rate of economic growth tends to have a larger (positive) effect on change in democratic support, although not always a significant effect.

Yet we should also bear in mind that Table 1 reports only the short run effects. Small effects may accumulate over decades into more substantial effects. Modeling these enduring, dynamic effects is one of the major advantages of using a TSCS research design. In Figure 1, we show how a substantial but not unreasonably large increase (one standard deviation) in each measure of effective governance impacts democratic support in the long run, over 30 years. For example, the upper left panel of Figure 1 shows how an increase in the economic growth rate from 0 percent (a below average performance) to 5 percent (an above average performance) affects support.[10] The small effects shown in table 2 accumulate over time. In addition, the two positive effects of economic growth and change in economic growth are joined by a third effect – the increase in

[9]Roodman (2009) suggests limiting the number of instruments in GMM models to approximatelyy the number of cross-sectional units. We follow this advice by using only the third and fourth lags of democratic support as instruments in our GMM models. Hansen tests indicates that the instruments are jointly valid. Arellano-Bond test show that there is no second-order serial correlation, meaning that we do not have to resort to using more distant lags.

[10]These simulated effects use the coefficients extracted from the ECM specifications (Models 1.1 to 1.4), with Beck-Katz robust variance-covariance estimates. See the online appendix for further details on the method which is used.

Figure 1. Simulated Long-Run Effects of Changes in Government Effectiveness on Democratic Support



Simulated effects based on coefficients and variance-covariance matrices from models 2.1-2.4. The solid lines indicate the mean simulated effect; the shaded regions indicate the 95% confidence intervals of these simulated effects.

GDP per person implied by decades of economic growth. With all three effects acting in concert, a sustained period of high economic growth amounts to a noticeable increase in democratic support of 0.16 standard deviations.

However, this long run effect is largely a modernization effect, driven by increases in the

level of economic development,[11] rather than a performance effect driven by a period of high economic growth, as demonstrated by the virtually static levels of democratic support seen even after a decade of economic growth. We should also acknowledge the hypothetical nature of these simulations. Although it is a reasonable assumption to consider the effects of a single year increase in economic growth, it is less reasonable to assume that a country will achieve and maintain a five percent rate of economic growth for three decades. Furthermore, as we show below, a 0.16 standard deviation increase after 30 years is anyway a fairly modest yield. Finally, we note that economic growth itself does not have a significant effect (or even a positive one in the system GMM models).

The story is similar for our other measures of government effectiveness, inflation, infant mortality, and crime. These have small effects, which, although being of the hypothesized sign, are not robust across modelling specifications nor to the inclusion of other covariates. Indeed, crime is the only measure of effective governance which has a significant lagged effect in some of the models presented in Table 1. The long run effects of inflation (-0.11), infant mortality (-0.24), and crime (-0.24), are also modest, as shown by the simulated plots in Figure 1.[12]

In sum, effective government plays only a weak and generally insignificant role in sustaining (or eroding) democratic support. Only over time – and assuming fairly large and resilient improvements – do the effects of better health outcomes and violent crime prevention amount to much change in support for democracy. The effects of economic performance are even weaker, with neither inflation nor economic growth producing any appreciable improvement in support. To understand why democratic support ebbs and flows, we therefore need to turn to the moral side of governance.

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[11] Over the 30 years of simulated growth, GDP rises from USD 6,311 to USD 25,976 per person.

[12] In the online appendix, we consider the effects of two additional measures of government effectiveness: the employment rate and the food supply per person. Neither has robust and significant effects.

The moral economy of democratic support

To test the moral economy theory, we examine whether measures of impartiality and inequality impact democratic support. Once again, we use EC and System GMM models, coupled with simulated long run effects. Results are reported in Table 2 and Figure 2 respectively.

We begin with our measures of impartial governance: the level of corruption in a society and the impartiality of the public administration. The lagged levels of both variables have significant effects when included alongside only the basic controls (i.e., in Models 2.1, 2.2, 2.6, and 2.7), with corruption reducing democratic support and impartiality increasing it. The long run effects are shown in the two plots in the first row of Figure 2. As can be seen, both variables have marked effects on democratic support over the long run, with a standard deviation increase in corruption reducing support by 0.38 standard deviations after 30 years, and a standard deviation increase in impartial governance increasing support by a considerable 0.54 standard deviations.

However, the full models (Models 2.5 and 2.10) reveal that the effect of impartiality is much reduced, and no longer significant, when this variable is included alongside corruption. Corruption, on the other hand, retains a significant lagged effect when included alongside impartiality. We conclude that increasing corruption presents a clear risk to national democratic legitimacy, over and above the overall impartiality of the the national public administration, as well as the extent of electoral democracy and liberal checks and balances.

We now consider the effects of our measures of economic and political (in)equality. Economic inequality, in the form of the Gini coefficient of income inequality, does not show any robust effects across our specifications. When included with only basic controls in a system GMM model (Model 2.8), income inequality has the negative (and significant) effect one might expect. Yet this effect varies considerably across our models and is not significant in either of the full models (2.5 and 2.10). As the simulated effects plot (bottom left in Figure 2) indicates, a standard deviation increase in the Gini coefficient produces a sharp, but temporary, decrease in support. Over the long run, it leads to a small (but insignificant) ebbing away of support (-0.20 standard deviations).

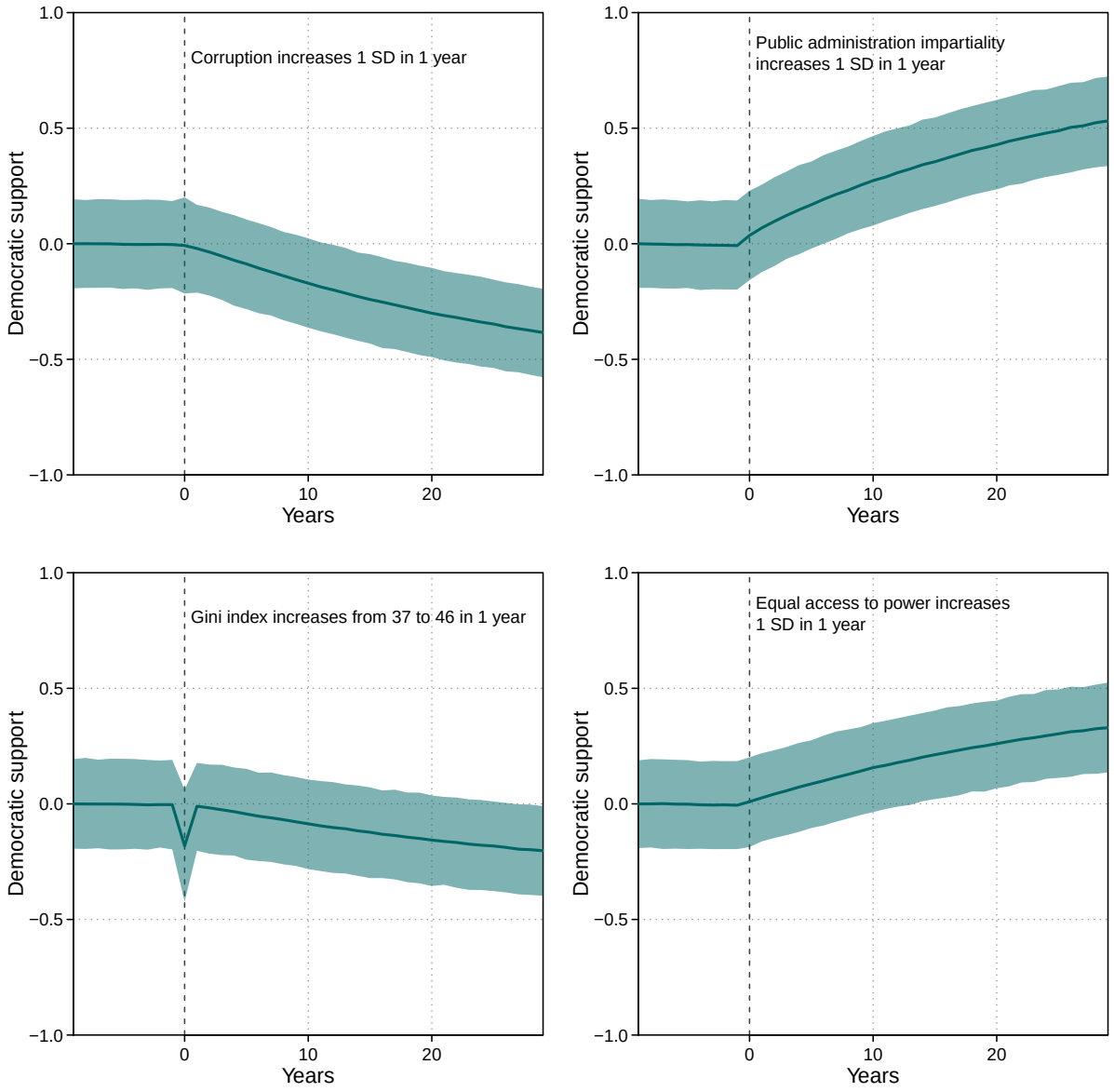
Political inequality, in contrast, has a robust and marked effect on democratic support.

Table 2. The Effects of Impartiality and Inequality on Change in Democratic Support

	Error-Correction Models					System GMM models				
	(2.1)	(2.2)	(2.3)	(2.4)	(2.5)	(2.6)	(2.7)	(2.8)	(2.9)	(2.10)
BCI corruption $_{t-1}$	−.013*				−.010*	−.030*				−.021*
	(.004)				(.004)	(.009)				(.008)
Δ BCI corruption	.009				.025	.048				.069
	(.045)				(.054)	(.049)				(.053)
Impartial admin $_{t-1}$		.018*			.007		.043*			.011
		(.006)			(.006)		(.015)			(.011)
Δ impartial admin		.027			.020		.036*			.016
		(.019)			(.021)		(.017)			(.020)
Income inequality $_{t-1}$			−.046		.022			−.163*		.008
			(.048)		(.050)			(.056)		(.041)
Δ income inequality			−1.483		−1.623			−1.224		−1.476
			(.845)		(.829)			(.777)		(.824)
Equal access to power $_{t-1}$				.018*	.021*				.044*	.037*
				(.008)	(.009)				(.012)	(.011)
Δ equal access to power				.011	.015				.023	.024
				(.020)	(.022)				(.020)	(.022)
N observations	1815	1824	1654	1824	1645	2026	2026	2026	2026	2026
N countries	101	101	101	101	101	101	101	101	101	101
N instruments						99	99	99	99	111
Residual standard error	.096	.096	.098	.096	.097					
Breusch-Godfrey AR(1) test (p-value)	.658	.598	.453	.647	.676					
Hansen test (p-value)						.390	.453	.514	.530	.643
Arellano-Bond AR(2) test (p-value)						.953	.919	.848	.947	.918

*$p < .05$. All models include two lags of democratic support, electoral democracy, regime liberalism, and growth in GDP per person in both lagged levels and first-differences, as well as lagged log of GDP per person. EC models include Beck-Katz panel corrected standard errors; System GMM models include Windmeijer-corrected standard errors.

Figure 2. Simulated Long-Run Effects of Changes in Impartiality and Inequality on Democratic Support



Simulated effects based on coefficients and variance-covariance matrices from models 2.6-2.9. The solid lines indicate the mean simulated effect; the shaded regions indicate the 95% confidence intervals of these simulated effects.

The lagged level of V-Dem's equal access index has a significant positive effect in all four of the models in which it is included in Table 2. As the lower right plot in Figure 2 show, a standard deviation increase in political equality bolsters democratic support dramatically over 30 years, with a simulated increase of 0.52 standard deviations. As the coefficients in Models 2.5 and 2.10

(Table 2) show, this revitalizing effect of increased political equality is not diminished when other measures of democracy and quality of governance are included (Models 2.5 and 2.10).

In sum, we have demonstrated three main findings in this section. Measures of effective governance play little role in increasing (or decreasing) democratic support, with indicators of economic performance being particularly weak. In contrast, corruption robustly and significantly undermines democratic support and political equality robustly and significantly bolsters it. The deleterious effects of corruption, on both democratic support as well as democracy itself, are well known (although extant evidence is largely cross-sectional). More novel is our finding that growing political equality energizes democratic support, while growing political inequality saps it. In the next section, we therefore explore this finding in more granular fashion, using alternative indices to examine how the effect of changing inequality varies across the social divisions of class, ethnicity, and gender.

The role of inequalities

As we have seen, economic inequality exerts a negative short-run effect on changes in democratic support. However the long-run effects of economic inequality are neither consistently negative across models nor generally significant. Political (in)equality, in contrast, does show significant, pronounced, and long-term effects on changes in support for democracy. Yet, since political and economic inequalities are generally regarded to be linked (e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Boix 2003); could the observed effects of political inequality be no more than an indirect manifestation of the effect of economic inequality? Houle (2018), for example, shows a relationship between alternative measures of economic inequality and expert measurements of the extent to which degree to which political power is distributed equally across socioeconomic positions.

To address this issue, we conduct two sets of analyses. First, in the online appendix, we consider the question of whether political inequality mediates the effects of income inequality on democratic change. Specifically, we examine the effects of income inequality on changes in political inequality using EC and Blundell-Bond models. There is not a great deal of evidence for

Table 3. The Effects of Alternative Measures of Political Inequality

	Error-Correction Models					System GMM models				
	(3.1)	(3.2)	(3.3)	(3.4)	(3.5)	(3.6)	(3.7)	(3.8)	(3.9)	(3.10)
Equal access by class$_{t-1}$	.009*	.011*				.021*	.018*			
	(.004)	(.005)				(.007)	(.007)			
Δ equal access by class	.015	.026				.028	.034*			
	(.016)	(.017)				(.017)	(.017)			
Equal access by ethnicity$_{t-1}$	.008	.008				.022*	.018*			
	(.006)	(.006)				(.008)	(.008)			
Δ equal access by ethnicity	−.007	−.006				−.009	−.007			
	(.020)	(.023)				(.019)	(.020)			
Equal access by gender$_{t-1}$	.007	.008*				.020*	.016*			
	(.004)	(.004)				(.009)	(.007)			
Δ equal access by gender	.008	.002				.013	.007			
	(.018)	(.021)				(.016)	(.016)			
Women's political empowerment$_{t-1}$			.013		.010			.028*		.011
			(.008)		(.011)			(.013)		(.010)
Δ women's political empowerment			−.029		−.030			−.033		−.033
			(.027)		(.034)			(.026)		(.028)
Exclusion by ethnicity$_{t-1}$				−.051*	−.041				−.113*	−.074*
				(.021)	(.021)				(.034)	(.028)
Δ exclusion by ethnicity				−.154*	−.151				−.150	−.154
				(.077)	(.088)				(.093)	(.097)
Controls	Basic	Full	Basic	Basic	Full	Basic	Full	Basic	Basic	Full
N observations	1824	1645	1824	1814	1645	2026	2026	2026	2026	2026
N countries	101	101	101	101	101	101	101	101	101	101
N instruments						107	119	99	99	115
Residual standard error	.096	.097	.096	.096	.097					
Breusch-Godfrey AR(1) test (p-value)	.680	.707	.479	.314	.464					
Hansen test (p-value)						.402	.627	.494	.426	.642
Arellano-Bond AR(2) test (p-value)						.924	.950	.999	.955	.798

*$p < .05$. Basic controls: two lags of democratic support, electoral democracy, regime liberalism, and growth in GDP per person, in both lagged levels and first-differences, and lagged log of GDP per person. Full controls also include BCI corruption, impartial administration and the Gini index, in both lagged levels and first-differences. EC models include Beck-Katz panel corrected standard errors; System GMM models include Windmeijer-corrected standard errors.

such effects: while changes in income inequality are linked with immediate changes in political inequality, there are no significant effects of lagged income inequality on political inequality, and therefore no significant long-run effects. The effects of political inequality on democratic support, in other words, appear to be largely independent of the effects of economic inequality.

Our second approach is to consider the effects of changing political equality across different social divides. To accomplish this analysis, we break V-Dem's equal access index into its three constituent indicators, which measure equality of political power across (1) class, (2) ethnic,[13] and (3) gender divides. Are the effects of political equality, which we observed in the previous section, driven largely by changes in class power, and therefore changes in economic inequality? Or do changes in access to power across gender and ethnic lines also contribute to the ebbing and flowing of democratic support?

To provide for further tests of these hypotheses, we locate and include two additional and alternative measures of changing access to power that address "horizontal inequalities." The first is the Women's Empowerment Index: although also collected by V-Dem, it uses different indicators (and is managed by a different research team) than those used for the equal access to power index we have been using. The second is the share of the population that belong to an ethnic group which was "excluded" from power, as gathered and made available by the Ethnic Power Relations project. The results are displayed in Table 3.

We see (in Models 3.1, 3.2, 3.6 & 3.7) evidence that all three forms of political equality matter for democratic legitimacy. Increasing access to power across ethnic, gender, and socio-economic lines is generally associated with subsequent increases in public support for democracy. Each form of political equality moreover exerts an independent positive effect on democratic support, since all the models in Table 3 include all three indicators of political equality. The effect sizes are similar for the lagged effects of all three forms of equal access, even if not all coefficients

[13]V-Dem uses the term "social group." However, the list of groups ("caste, ethnicity, language, race, region, religion") are variations of ethnicity as typically conceptualized in comparative politics (see, e.g., Chandra 2006).

are significant in all models.

Models 3.3 to 3.5 and 3.8 to 3.10 then show the effects of our alternative measures of gender and ethnic empowerment (vs. exclusion). The effects of women's empowerment, as measured by V-Dem's index, is fairly weak, with a significant effect in model 3.9 but a smaller and insignificant effect in the full GMM model (3.10). The Ethnic Power Relations measure of ethnic exclusion, in contrast exhibits a much stronger and more robust effect, particularly in the GMM models. Increases in the proportion of the population who are excluded from power at the national level – whether via active discrimination or not – undermines democratic support.

In sum, we have shown that changes in political equality – one of our main drivers of changing democratic support – is largely independent of the effects of economic inequality. On the one hand, income inequality has only modest and insignificant effects on changes in political equality. On the other hand, increasing women's and ethnic minorities' access to power plays at least as important a role in democratic support as increasing access to power among subordinate socio-economic classes. Political equality thus exerts effects on democratic support which are fairly autonomous from the influence of economic inequality.

Conclusion

What ails democracy today, and how can its popular support be bolstered and even increased? In this paper, we have shown that the answer lies in the moral economy rather than the political economy – in impartial governance and equitable access to power rather than instrumental outcomes. While increases in the delivery of beneficial public goods produce little change in democratic support, decreases in corruption and political inequality produce marked increases in support. To put it differently, our results echo Rothstein's argument that "impartiality" is the "basic norm for generating legitimacy on the output side of the political system," with "political equality" being "the basic norm on the input side," and "[r]espect for both norms must be considered central in creating political legitimacy" (Rothstein 2011, 95-96).

The finding that decreasing corruption bolsters support (and therefore that increasing cor-

ruption erodes support) is consistent with the results of earlier, cross-sectional studies (Mishler and Rose 2001; Seligson 2002; Huang, Chang, and Chu 2008; Kotzian 2011). Indeed, perhaps more than any other feature of political systems, the perception that political office is abused for private gain has a corrosive effect on the legitimacy of democracy. We confirm this finding, now with longitudinal variation in our data and using methods of panel data analysis which adjust for reverse effects and country-specific, time-invariant confounds.

Conversely, the finding that fostering political equality also increases public commitment to a democratic system is more novel, and perhaps more controversial. On its face, it may seem to contradict the new "backlash" literature, which suggests that rising popular endorsement of a progressive agenda and the increasing access to power of parties that espouse it – addressing issues such as gender and ethnic equality, LGTBQ rights, affirmative action, and quotas – has engendered an authoritarian populist reaction (Bustikova 2014; Norris and Inglehart 2019) . However, as Norris and Inglehart note, despite populist attacks on the "legitimacy of the core channels linking citizens and the state," public opinion data shows no evidence of a generalized backlash against democracy (Norris and Inglehart 2019, 436). Moreover, as Alexander and Welzel (2017) argue, the increasing electoral success of authoritarian populism is more likely to result from the effective mobilization of an increasingly homogeneous but dwindling support base than from an increase in that base (see also Claassen and McLaren 2019).

Instead, we find that (at least at the aggregate level) efforts to distribute power more fairly, not also across class but also across ethnic and gender cleavages, are likely to bolster the legitimacy of the system. This finding resonates with another new literature, which demonstrates the salutary effects that increased political representation of women and ethnic minorities has on political trust and legitimacy (e.g., Atkeson and Carillo 2007; Clayton, O'Brien, and Piscopo 2019; Hayes and Hibbing 2017; Riccucci, Ryzin, and Lavena 2014; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005).

To the extent that the survival of democratic regimes hinges at least partially on public support (Claassen 2020*a*), our findings can be read as providing some needed solace to democrats. If it was true that "citizens have built up loyalty to their political system because it kept the peace and

swelled their pocketbooks" (Mounk 2018, 131), democrats would have more than a few reasons to worry about the future. In the industrialized democracies, some have argued, the potential for rising prosperity is now limited by demography, low demand, or the limited productivity-enhancing potential of new technologies (Summers 2014; Gordon 2015), not to mention the long-term negative economic impacts of climate change (Tol 2018).

Neither would there be much room for optimism if rising economic inequality was the main cause of declining public support for democracy among the public. Income inequality and concentration of wealth have increased in almost all advanced economies since the 1980s (Piketty and Saez 2014). Although different policies in different polities have made some difference in mitigating or exacerbating these trends (Chancel 2019), increases in economic inequality are arguably driven by forces – technological change and trade openness until now, automation and climate change in the near future – that seem exceptionally difficult to tame.

However, we have not found much evidence that government performance and income inequality are important and significant sources of changes in democratic support. Instead, it is corruption and political inequality that matter. Although the challenges posed in addressing these pathologies are still formidable, these driving forces are located squarely on the side of politics, and, therefore, on factors perhaps more amenable to political fiat.

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