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Varieties of Political Support in Emerging Democracies: A Cross-National Analysis

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Abstract

Political support is a multidimensional construct encompassing evaluations of political leaders and institutions (specific support) as well as adherence to basic regime principles (diffuse support). Scholars have traditionally assumed that diffuse and specific support are driven by different forces and evolve largely independently. Prior empirical work, however, has struggled to untangle the two support dimensions and focused predominantly on cross-national differences, ignoring their dynamics. This paper develops an analytical and empirical approach to examine the levels and dynamic interplay of both support dimensions and estimate their determinants, applying it to South American democracies between 1996 and 2015. Contrary to received wisdom, we show that both dimensions are quite volatile and closely linked in this region. In particular, negative economic shocks not only undermine support for government actors, but also fuel democratic disenchantment. Nonetheless, while regime support is rather fickle in South America, it can be ultimately resistant to performance fluctuations.

Keywords: Political Support, Latin American politics, Machine Learning, Latent Class Analysis, Bayesian Inference.

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