

Public Tolerance for Anti-Democratic Behavior*

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Abstract

Voters around the world have elected leaders who erode their democracies. Recent work has pointed to partisan polarization as a key enabler of democratic erosion. But we show that partisanship is not a prerequisite for tolerating—even supporting—anti-democratic behavior. Universal norms of reciprocity provide the basis for a tit-for-tat justification: if the other side violated democratic norms first, then an in-kind response seems justified. Combining data from nationally representative surveys across Latin America and online survey experiments in the United States, Peru, and Colombia, we show that nonpartisans are responsive to tit-for-tat justifications, albeit with some variation across countries and issues. Our results shed light on the common finding that voters simultaneously claim to value democracy and support politicians who erode democratic norms. When constitutional hardball is framed as a tit-for-tat response to similar behavior from an opposition party, the public is inclined to see it as both reasonable and democratic—perhaps restoring some balance to democracy or deterring future anti-democratic behavior.

Democracies around the world have eroded (Bermeo 2016; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018), prompting recent scholarship on democratic backsliding (Druckman 2024; Grillo et al. 2023). A recurrent theme is constitutional hardball—executive or legislative actions that push up against legal restraints to asymmetrically challenge and change the system (Tushnet 2004: 523).¹ Examples include gerrymandering and packing courts with loyalists.

Political parties do not always play constitutional hardball. But, when their forbearance breaks down, scholars theorize that voters stick with their preferred party despite undemocratic behavior (Helmke, Kroeger and Paine 2022). Research backs this account: people express support for democracy in principle, but are reluctant to sacrifice their own interests to protect it (Aarslew 2023; Kidd 2024).

A prevailing view is that partisan polarization is the primary driver of public acquiescence to democratic backsliding. U.S.-focused scholars conclude that, “only a small fraction of Americans prioritize democratic principles... [and] their tendency to do so is decreasing in... the strength of partisanship” (Graham and Svobik 2020: 392; also Bartels and Carnes 2023; Braley et al. 2023; Carey et al. 2022). Partisan-centric concerns are long-standing (Federalist 10) and extend beyond the U.S. (e.g., Aarslew 2023; Ahlquist et al. 2018; Albertus and Grossman 2021; Gidengil, Stolle and Bergeron-Boutin 2022; Orhan 2022).

And yet, in many places where democracy is failing to thrive, partisan polarization is absent because partisanship is absent. For example, V-Dem documents democratic decline in Peru (Fig. A4), even as only nine percent of Peruvians say they identify with a party (LAPOP 2023). Although Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the top world regions for backsliding (Economist Intelligence Unit 2023), mean partisan identification is only 24% in the region (LAPOP 2023). Moreover, some recent work raises doubts about the extent to which partisanship is undermining democratic norms and accountability, both in the highly polarized U.S. context (Broockman, Kalla and Westwood 2022) and beyond

¹ Other terms include “procedural force” (Becher and Brouard 2022), “executive aggrandizement” (Bermeo 2016), and “autocratic legalism” (Corrales 2015).

(Mehlhaff 2024; Saikkonen and Christensen 2023; Becher and Brouard 2022).

Are there overlooked dynamics in the shadow of a spotlight so squarely focused on partisan polarization? A few studies go beyond a party-centric framework in considering public opinion on democratic backsliding. For example, Grossman et al. (2022) argue that majoritarian values can lead individuals to see constitutional hardball as an expression of the general will. Bermeo (2016) describes a similar logic, in which the public accepts executive aggrandizement by elected leaders as the fulfillment of a “democratic mandate.” And, Krishnarajan (2023) finds that individuals rationalize hardball behavior as democratic when it aligns with their policy preferences.

We draw attention to norms of reciprocity as potential contributors to democratic erosion. Norms of reciprocity feed tit-for-tat dynamics in which positive behavior is rewarded with positive behavior and vice versa for negative behavior (Ostrom 2003; Ostrom and Walker 2003; Gallucci and Presaghi 2003; Gintis 2005). To the degree that norms of reciprocity guide the public’s response to constitutional hardball, they may set off a race to the bottom—perhaps even more so when politicians are able to successfully frame their own attempt to skirt or stretch standard democratic rules by noting that the other side did it first.

While partisan politics are one arena for tit-for-tat politics, we argue that norms of reciprocity—because they are universal human inclinations—are likely to provoke support for tit-for-tat reactions even in contexts that are less crisply defined by partisanship, and among voters who lack partisan attachments. To the degree that this thesis is supported, the public’s capacity to defend against democratic erosion is weaker than recognized in some prior research.

To assess our claim, we combine multiple sources of data. First, we use comparative survey data from the 2023 AmericasBarometer to show that tit-for-tat justifications rival instrumental motivations to support politicians acting at the margins of the law. Second, we turn to pre-registered online experiments in the United States, Peru, and Colombia.

Albeit with some differences across issues and countries, we find that the public is responsive to tit-for-tat justifications for engaging in specific acts of constitutional hardball and, in fact, non-partisans are often the *most* responsive. Although partisans are more likely than non-partisans to tolerate anti-democratic behavior in the control condition, applying tit-for-tat framing narrows or even eliminates that gap.

Our results shed light on the common finding that voters claim to value democracy in principle while supporting politicians who engage in anti-democratic maneuvering. When these behaviors are framed as a tit-for-tat response to similar behavior from a rival, the public not only sees constitutional hardball as justified, but many also see it as more democratic—perhaps restoring some balance to democracy by leveling the playing field or “punishing” the opposition to deter future anti-democratic behavior.

Justifying Constitutional Hardball through Reciprocity

The pursuit of constitutional hardball is often framed as a matter of fairness. Consider one step in Venezuela’s contemporary democratic decline: in 2004, a pro-Chávez legislature expanded Venezuela’s Supreme Court from 20 to 32 seats and enhanced the executive’s power to remove sitting judges. Chávez supporters justified these packing and purging reforms as necessary to counter judicial outcomes that seemed (to them) tilted toward the opposition (Wilkinson 2004). When elected leaders play constitutional hardball, they or their supporters often claim that breaking with democratic norms is necessary to balance an unfair or corrupted playing field (Aguiar Aguilar 2023).

We argue that individuals—both partisans and non-partisans—are particularly receptive to viewing constitutional hardball through the lens of a tit-for-tat game. Tit-for-tat dynamics emerge from the fundamental human norm of reciprocity (Ostrom 2003; Gallucci and Presaghi 2003). Individuals’ inclinations towards reciprocity often generate positive outcomes, including mutual gains (Ostrom and Walker 2003). But they can also provoke tit-for-tat responses as individuals punish behavior that seems

uncooperative or unfair (Gintis 2005). The universality of reciprocity norms implies that even individuals who do not identify with a particular party might respond to tit-for-tat justification from politicians, growing more tolerant of anti-democratic moves when framed as in-kind responses to another party or politician. The bases for justifying negative tit-for-tat responses include at least three non-rival, and potentially complementary, notions: retribution; restoring balance; and deterrence.²

Retribution. People may find it reasonable for one political side to respond in kind to an unjust maneuver. That is, they feel that the other side has stolen something (an electoral district, a seat on a court, regulatory power or discretion that traditionally lies elsewhere) and they want and/or rationalize retribution (Osgood 2017).

Restore balance. Constitutional hardball may be seen as a way to nullify advantages that the other side has unscrupulously attained. In fact, people sometimes “view negative reciprocity as more fair than positive reciprocity” because the latter is seen as partiality and the former as leveling the playing field (Shaw, Barakzai and Keysar 2019: 2).

Deter. Studies in game theory have identified tit-for-tat (and variants) as among the optimal strategies for eliciting sustained cooperation (Axelrod 1984; Axelrod and Hamilton 1981). In that vein, some view a strategy in which constitutional hardball is met by constitutional hardball “as the key to getting out of this cycle.”³

Recent discussion over whether U.S. Democrats should attempt to expand the size of the Supreme Court illustrates each of these logics. When Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died during President Barack Obama’s final year in office, the Republican Senate majority broke with precedent and refused to consider Supreme Court nominations—waiting until a new Republican president was elected to appoint their preferred Justice, Neil Gorsuch. In debates over how to respond, the seat filled by Justice Gorsuch was regularly described as “stolen” (see, e.g., The Editorial Board 2016; The Times Editorial

² Under any of these three mechanisms, believing the other side distorted the rules first may make a tit-for-tat response more palatable or appealing.

³ <https://prospect.org/politics/2024-10-18-playing-hardball/>

Board 2017; Stone 2017) or as part of a “heist” (Cohen 2016). This invokes the idea that someone—ostensibly Democrats—should be punishing Republicans (*retribution*). Others framed the appointment of Gorsuch as an undemocratic effort to tilt the court in favor of Republicans; expanding the size of the court under a Democratic president, proponents argued, would eliminate an advantage that Republicans had unjustly secured (*restore balance*) (e.g., Smith 2023; Calamur and Totenberg 2021). Still others have positioned such efforts to expand the Court as a matter of deterrence, discouraging future constitutional hardball. Commenting on general political strategy, one set of political commentators put it, “If you want to end constitutional hardball, you have to get on the field” (Gerney and Knight 2024). Relatedly, Keck (2022: 142–143) argues that court packing, while decried as undemocratic, may be “necessary to break a downward spiral of democratic erosion” (*deter*).

Results

How receptive is the public to political tit-for-tat logic? And does partisanship shape receptiveness to tit-for-tat constitutional hardball? To address these questions, we turn to original survey and survey-experimental data collected across the Americas.

Public Opinion on Tit-for-Tat vs. Instrumental Frames

While individuals may express support for democracy in the abstract, studies cast doubt on their support in practice. In a candidate-choice experiment, Svolik (2020) finds that, among Venezuelans who strongly agree that democracy is the best form of government, only half choose the more democratic of two hypothetical candidates.

One source of tension between voters’ democratic values in the abstract and their preferences in practice derives from instrumental reasoning. Politicians gain public support for undemocratic behavior if they present voters with a choice: you can uphold democratic

norms—which the would-be eroder often denigrates as unimportant (see, e.g., Stokes 2025)—or you can get some desired outcome like a policy change, an electoral victory, or a key appointment in the government.

To assess the *relative* potency of tit-for-tat considerations, we compare the tit-for-tat frame to instrumental incentives for supporting behavior that violates democratic norms. To do so, we added two Likert (agree/disagree) survey items to the 2023 AmericasBarometer in 15 Latin American countries. In one, we placed playing by the rules in tension with policy outcomes (instrumental); in the other, we referenced rivals’ prior behavior (tit-for-tat):

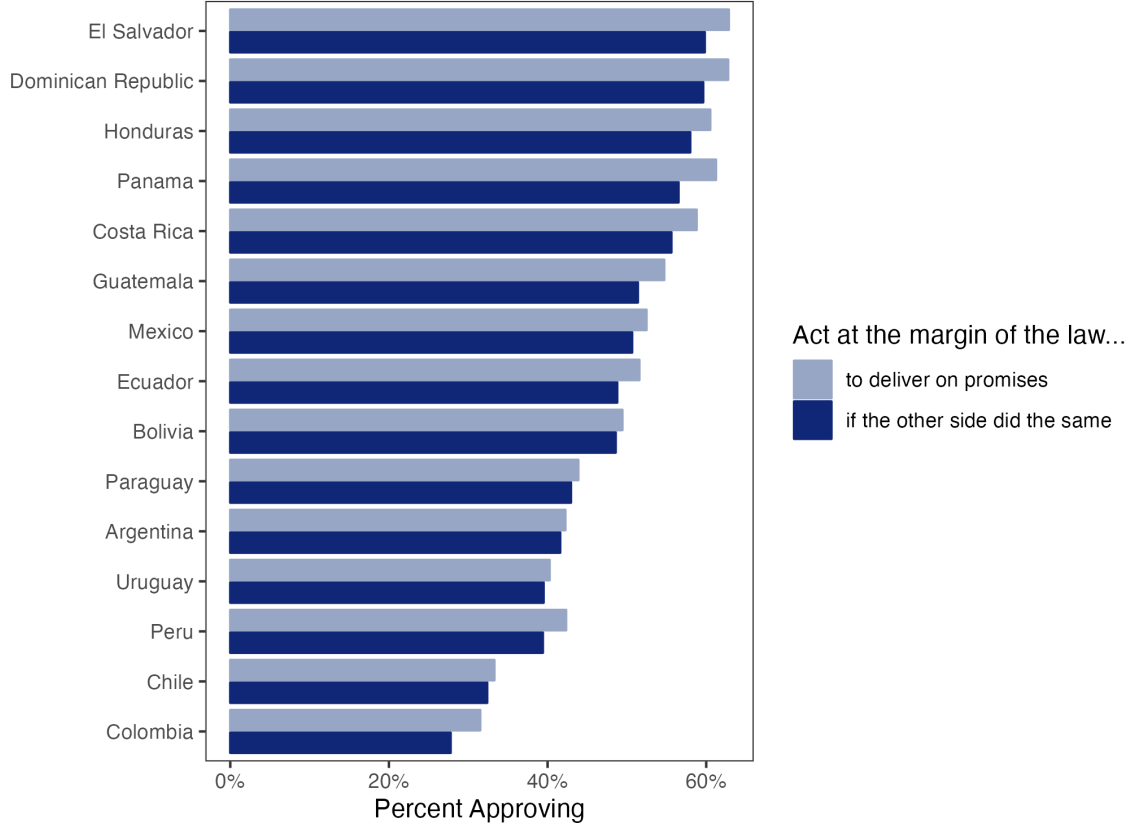
Instrumental: “In order to deliver on promises to the people, it is justifiable for politicians to act at the margin of the law.”

Tit-for-tat: “If politicians on the other side act at the margin of the law, it is justifiable for politicians I support to act at the margin of the law.”

Figure 1 shows the proportion who agree that politicians are justified in acting at the margin of the law in each condition, across the 15 countries. Importantly, the two logics—instrumental and tit-for-tat—yield similar rates of agreement in every country. In only one case—Panama—do we observe a statistically significant difference in support for instrumental motivations versus tit-for-tat justifications ($p < 0.05$). For the tit-for-tat condition, agreement ranges from 28% in Colombia to 60% in El Salvador (the latter being a notable recent case of democratic decline, see Fig. A5).

AmericasBarometer data thus show that a large portion of the public across Latin America—a majority in seven countries—is open to allowing politicians to act at the margins of the law if rival elites did the same thing first. Moreover, this tit-for-tat justification is about as widely accepted as instrumental justifications to deliver on promises.

FIGURE 1. Approval of Constitutional Hardball in Latin America



Note: Countries are listed in descending order of the approval rate for the tit-for-tat condition. Item non-response rates are low (less than 3%) and missing data are not imputed.

Source: 2023 AmericasBarometer.

An Experiment to Test Reciprocity Motivations

Survey items give a sense of public preferences, but they abstract from actual decision-making by individuals. Thus, we fielded a pre-registered survey experiment in the US to measure reactions to specific instances of tit-for-tat justifications across several issue domains.

The experiment presents hypothetical scenarios involving some form of constitutional hardball or undemocratic behavior by a politician. It then asks them to assess each action on two dimensions: whether it is justified and whether it is consistent with democratic principles.

Respondents in the control condition are only informed about one actor’s behavior. In the treatment group, respondents also see information about preceding behavior from a rival party or politician. The quantities of interest are the difference in means on the outcome questions: when presented with a tit-for-tat justification, do respondents view undemocratic actions as more justified and more consistent with democratic principles?

Box 1: Example of Experimental Module

Control group: black text

Treatment group: black text + [blue text]

Countries around the world differ in how democratic they are. We sampled the following practices from around the world. We would like to know how democratic do you think each one is, and whether or not it is an appropriate action.

First, we will ask you how consistent the action is with democratic principles. Then, we will ask you how justified the action is.

Q1: Courts have ruled against a number of the governor’s policies, but the governor has ignored these rulings and continued to implement the policies anyway. [The governor says the court rulings are illegitimate because the other party recently packed the courts with loyalists.]

Q1a: Would you say the **governor’s** actions are consistent with democratic principles?

Q1b: Would you say the **governor’s** actions were justified?

[Q1c: Would you say the **opposition’s** actions are consistent with democratic principles?]

[Q1d: Would you say the **opposition’s** actions were justified?]

Box 1 presents the introductory text shown to respondents along with an example of one of the scenarios we presented. In the control condition, we described a governor ignoring a court ruling against their policies and implementing the policies anyway. In the treatment condition, we add that the governor claims the court ruling is illegitimate because the rival party recently packed the courts with loyalists.

Each respondent saw four scenarios (see Box 2): court rulings, court packing, and gerrymandering, along with one of two rallies scenarios. After each scenario, respondents

assessed whether the elected official or governing party’s actions are consistent with democratic principles and whether the actions were justified. In the treatment condition, respondents also assessed the opposition’s actions on these two dimensions (consistency with democratic principles and justification).

Box 2: All Experimental Scenarios (United States)	
Treatment group 1: black text Treatment group 2: black text + [blue text]	
Court Rulings: Courts have ruled against a number of the governor’s policies, but the governor has ignored these rulings and continued to implement the policies anyway. [The governor says the court rulings are illegitimate because the other party recently packed the courts with loyalists.]	
Gerrymandering: The governing party redrew electoral districts to win more seats in the legislature [after the other party did so in a previous term.]	
Rallies (right-wing): [Last year, a right-wing governor banned far-left groups from holding public rallies.] This year, the new left-wing governor banned far-right groups from holding public rallies.	
Rallies (left-wing): [Last year, a left-wing governor banned far-right groups from holding public rallies.] This year, the new right-wing governor banned far-left groups from holding public rallies.	
Court Packing: [Last year, the current minority party held a majority in the legislature and expanded the size of federal courts to appoint more judges aligned with their ideology.] This year, the new majority party in the legislature [further] expanded the size of federal courts to appoint more judges aligned with their ideology.	

We omit referencing any particular party or politician to minimize the extent to which tit-for-tat partisan dynamics are implicitly primed in the control condition. If, for example, we had described Democrats expanding the size of the Supreme Court, many in the control condition would think about Republicans’ prior refusal to confirm Merrick Garland to the Court given the salient public discussions to that effect.⁴

⁴ As such, our approach intentionally contrasts with explicit partisan framings used in recent influential experiments (e.g., Graham and Svobik 2020).

Figure 2 presents average treatment effects across all scenarios. The “rallies” condition in Figure 2 pools responses to both the left-wing and right-wing rallies conditions. We observe statistically significant treatment effects in almost every scenario, and with regard to both outcomes (democratic and justified). The largest effects come in the gerrymandering scenario, where learning that the other side gerrymandered increases the “democratic” score by 0.23 points and the “justified” score by 0.37 points.

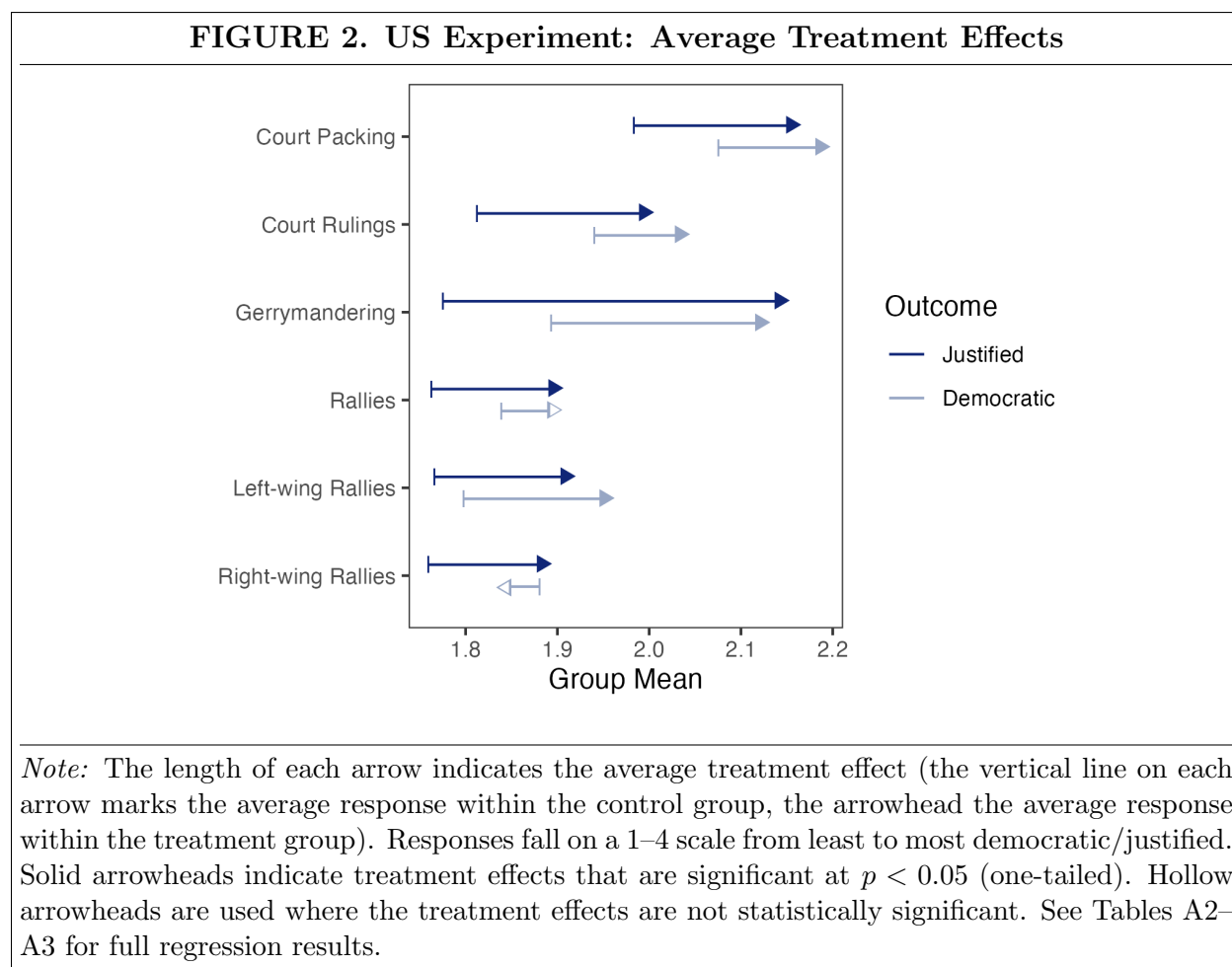


Figure 2 reports the effects in terms of the difference in means, as specified in our pre-analysis plan. But for substantive interpretation, we can also consider changes in terms of percent agreeing that the actions are “somewhat” or “very” justified or democratic. For the gerrymandering scenario, 24% in the control condition said it is “somewhat” or “very” justified; in the tit-for-tat treatment, this increased to 37%. Similarly, belief that

gerrymandering is “somewhat” or “very” democratic was shared by 36% in the treatment condition, up from 29% in the control.

With regards to court packing, learning that the other side had previously packed the courts increased the proportion saying it is somewhat or very justified from 31% to 38%; and the proportion saying it is somewhat or very democratic increased from 36% to 40%. Learning that the other side had previously packed the courts also increased approval of a governor ignoring that court’s rulings: belief that this is democratic rose from 31% to 34%, and belief that it is justified rose from 24% to 32%.

For rallies, we consistently observe effects on the “justified” outcome, but not on the “democratic” outcome. When respondents learn that a left-wing official previously banned right-wing rallies, they become four percentage points more likely to say that banning left-wing rallies is both democratic and justified. When the ideologies are reversed — first, a right-wing official bans left-wing rallies, and then a left-wing official responds by banning right-wing rallies — the belief that the left-wing official is justified again increases, by 4.5 percentage points. Yet the belief that the left-wing governor was behaving democratically does not change at a statistically detectable level. When pooling across the left- and right-wing rally scenarios, there is a significant effect on the “justified” outcome, but not on the “democratic” outcome.

We cannot say why average reactions differed depending on the ideology of the rally. But the question of banning right-wing rallies might have held a different significance in the aftermath of the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol. That event has remained highly salient: a Google news search for **january 6** over the six days of data collection yields over 4.7 million results, including headlines such as “DeSantis downplays Jan. 6, says it wasn’t an insurrection but a ‘protest’ that ‘ended up devolving’” (Price 2023). We conjecture that inquiring about banning right-wing rallies might have primed respondents to think of the January 6 incident as a direct threat to democracy. Looking at responses within the control group provides some support for this proposition: e.g., in that condition,

only 15% of Independents said that banning left-wing rallies is democratic but 23% said banning right-wing rallies is democratic.

How Central is Partisanship?

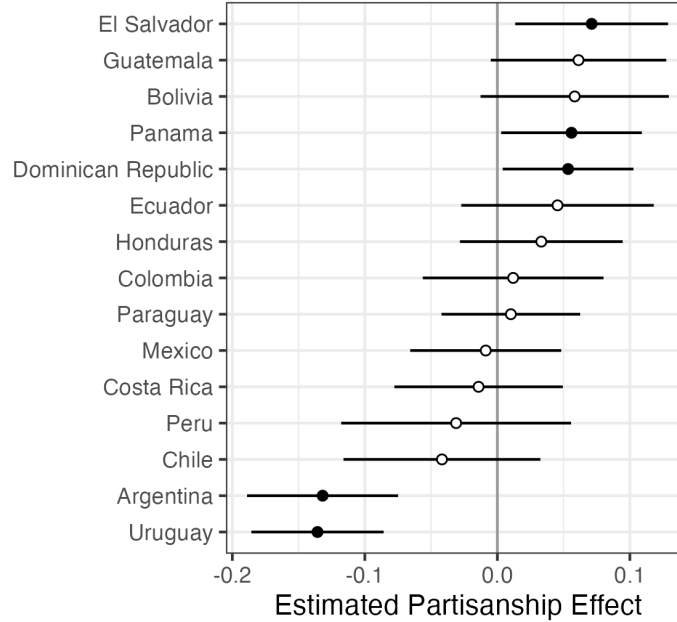
Having demonstrated the potency of tit-for-tat frames (as rival to instrumental motivations and as effective in moving opinion across issue domains) we now consider how they vary in their effectiveness across party-dominant contexts and contexts that are less defined by partisanship, and across partisans and non-partisans.

The AmericasBarometer yields little evidence that partisans and non-partisans vary in levels of approval for bending the rules as part of a tit-for-tat response. Figure 3 plots the estimated relationship between partisanship and approval for the tit-for-tat justification. In the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Panama, partisans are five to seven percentage points more likely than non-partisans to approve of bending the rules in a tit-for-tat response. In Argentina and Uruguay, we see the opposite: partisans are 13 to 14 percentage points *less* likely to approve of this. And in the remaining 10 countries, there is no discernible difference between partisans and non-partisans on this question.

Our survey experiment in the US finds that non-partisans are just as susceptible to tit-for-tat justification—perhaps even more so—than partisans. Figure 4 presents the treatment effects for each scenario, broken down by partisanship. We compare respondents who identified as Independents with those who identified as Democrats or Republicans (those who said they identify with another party are excluded from the comparison).

In the court-packing and left-wing rally scenarios, the average treatment effects observed in Figure 2 are actually driven by non-partisans. Independents became 13 percentage points more likely to deem court-packing democratic and justified when exposed to the tit-for-tat treatment. On banning left-wing rallies, the tit-for-tat treatment made them 11 percentage points more likely to describe it as democratic, 14 percentage points more likely to describe it as justified. Meanwhile, we see no significant effects among

FIGURE 3. Partisanship and Approval of Tit-for-Tat Justifications



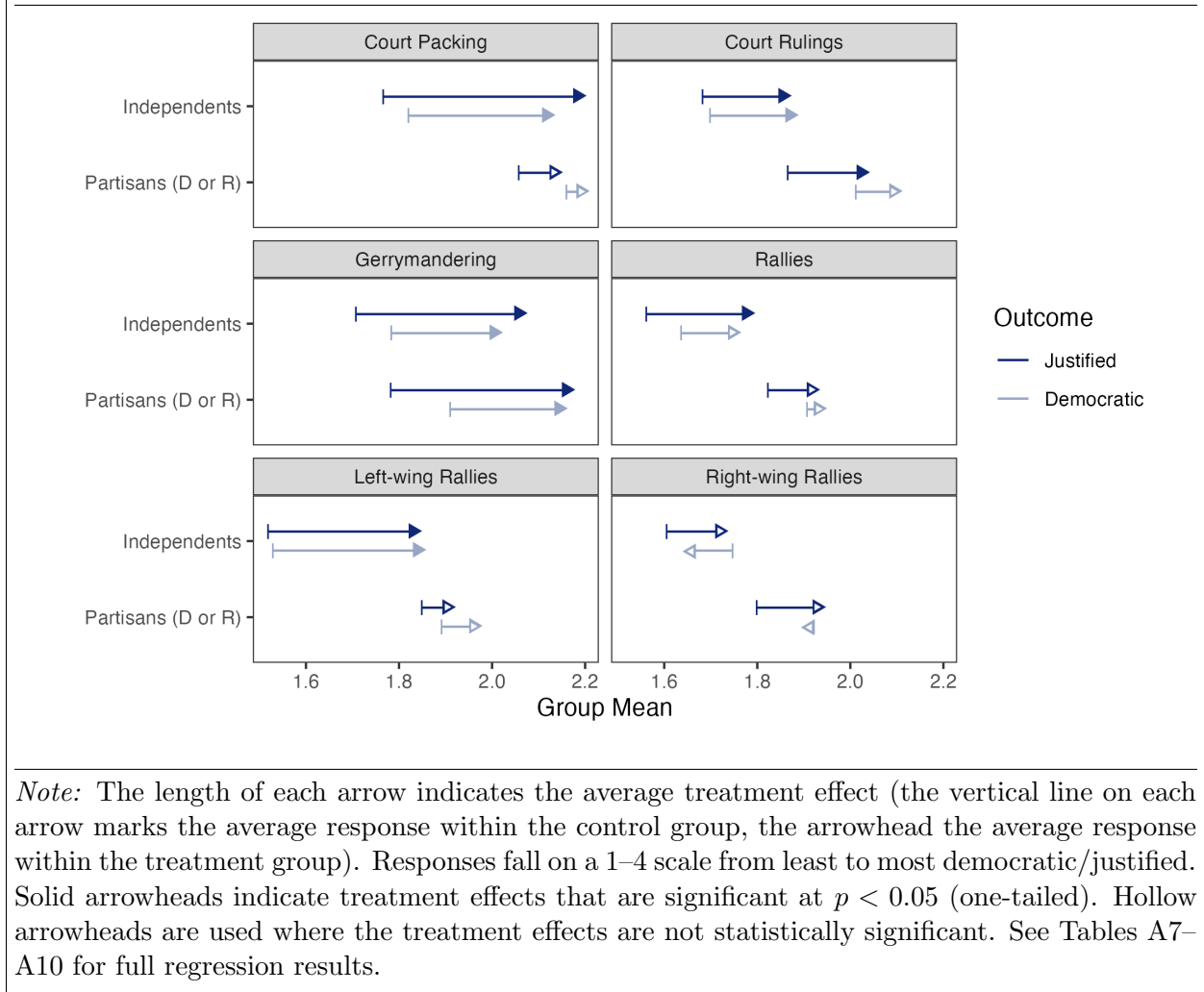
Note: Coefficient estimates come from OLS regressions of approval for tit-for-tat behavior on a dummy variable for partisanship. Lines indicate 95% confidence intervals. Solid points indicate statistically significant estimates; hollow points are not statistically significant (at $p < 0.05$). Complete regression results are provided in the appendix (Tables A4–A6).

Source: 2023 AmericasBarometer

partisans for either scenario.

Although Independents are far more responsive to treatment, they do not become more accepting than partisans of court-packing or banning rallies. Instead, we find that independents start out with a much stronger belief that these two behaviors are undemocratic and unjustified. But when these same behaviors are presented in the context of a tit-for-tat logic, the gap between partisans and non-partisans narrows or disappears.

On the matter of ignoring court rulings, we see that partisans and non-partisans both say that this is more justified if the other party packed the courts. When assessing how democratic it is to ignore unfavorable court rulings, Independents are responsive to the tit-for-tat treatment while partisans are not. But again, Independents started out saying that this behavior was much less democratic than partisans indicated. The tit-for-tat treatment merely narrows the gap between Independents and partisans.

FIGURE 4. Treatment Effects by Partisanship

Turning to the gerrymandering scenario, partisans and non-partisans behave similarly. Both groups are responsive to the tit-for-tat justification, increasing their assessment of how democratic and how justified gerrymandering is in response to prior gerrymandering. And both groups start and end at similar points. In contrast, for the right-wing rallies scenario, neither partisans nor non-partisans exhibit significant treatment effects.

Although partisans often start out more accepting of anti-democratic behavior, the tit-for-tat logic increases tolerance among non-partisans in the U.S., making them look more like their partisan counterparts. Of course, in the U.S. case, these are non-partisans

who are operating within a context of intense partisan polarization and where tit-for-tat scripts are commonplace in the political information environment.

To investigate whether we find similar effects in contexts that are less crisply defined by partisanship (that is, in contexts with lower levels of partisanship and less partisan-centric rhetoric), we fielded a similar set of survey experiments in Colombia and Peru. In the 2023 AmericasBarometer, partisan identification rates are 13% and 9% for these countries, respectively. As additional context, abstract support for democracy is middling: mean values on the abstract “Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government” question are about 4.5 on a 1–7 Likert scale, just below the mean of 4.9 for the other 13 countries, jointly, that are analyzed above (Lupu et al. 2023). Both countries have faced significant but distinct challenges to democratic stability in recent years. That said, the countries’ democratic trajectories recently have taken different paths, with Colombia’s electoral and liberal V-Dem democracy scores on the rise since 2020 and Peru’s on the decline (Figs. A4 and A6).

In adapting the experimental design from the U.S. for Peru and Colombia, we eliminated the gerrymandering scenario. We also made some minor wording changes to the remaining scenarios. Box 3 provides the English translations for the introductory statement and each scenario presented in the experiments. Note that we removed references to ideological positions in the rallies scenario since left-right labels are less meaningful in these contexts (Zechmeister and Corral 2013). The outcome questions and response scales are the same as the U.S. version of the experiment.

Figure 5 presents the results for non-partisans in Colombia and Peru with results from U.S. non-partisans included for comparison. The results are substantively consistent if we include the small number of partisan respondents in the analysis (see Tables A22 and A23). Overall we observe a pattern of results that is aligned with our expectations. The tit-for-tat treatment causes respondents in Colombia to view court packing as more justified and more democratic. In Peru, the treatment effects in this scenario are not

Box 3: All Experimental Scenarios (Peru and Colombia)

Control group: black text

Treatment group: black text + [blue text]

For the next few questions, we will describe some actions that government officials might take. These examples are hypothetical — they are not intended to refer to any specific, real-life government official.

We would like to know how democratic do you think each one is, and whether or not it is an appropriate action.

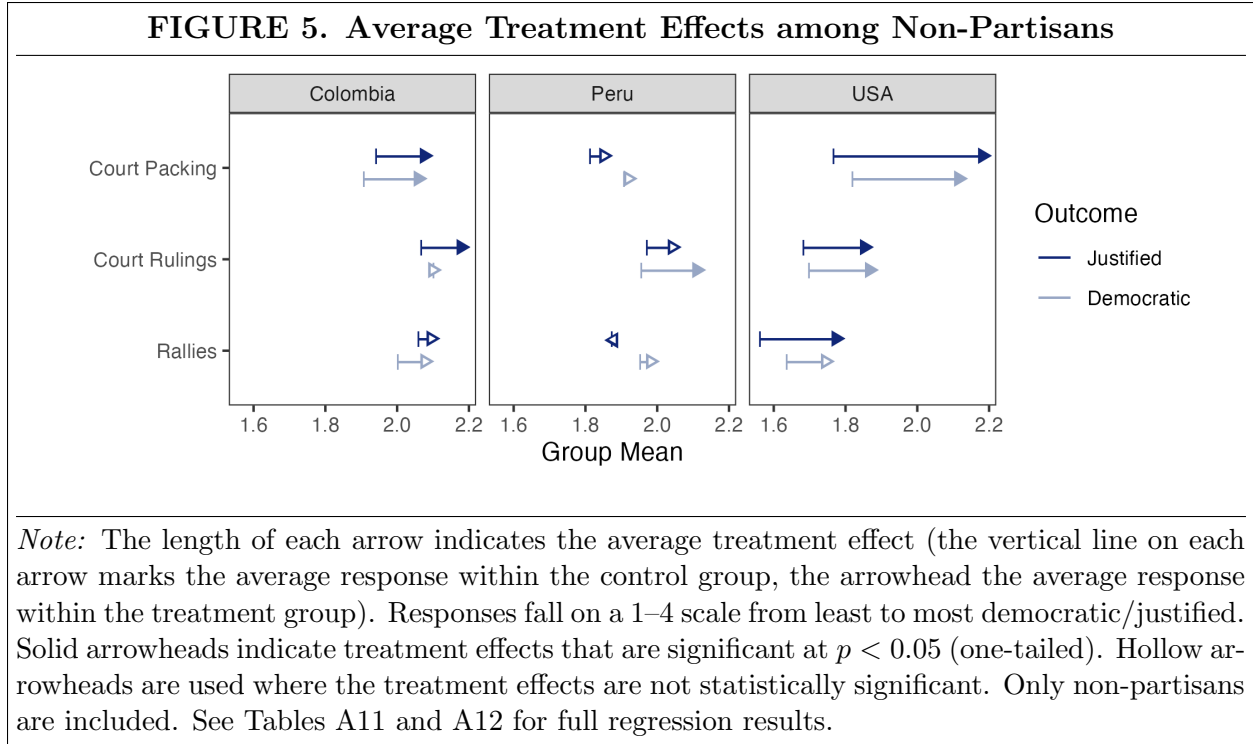
Court Rulings: Courts have ruled against a number of the president’s policies, but the president has ignored these rulings and continued to implement the policies anyway. [The president says the court rulings are illegitimate because a previous opposition government recently packed the courts with loyalists.]

Rallies: Last year, the government banned opposition groups from holding public rallies. [This year, the new government banned opposition groups from holding public rallies.]

Court Packing: The president has selected loyalists to courts to rule in favor of a number of their policies [after an opposition government did so in a previous term.]

statistically significant, but the effects are in the expected direction. For the court rulings scenario, the effects are again in the expected direction, reaching statistical significance in Colombia for the “justified” outcome and in Peru for the “democratic” outcome. As in the U.S., the rallies condition yields the weakest evidence for tit-for-tat justifications, with neither outcome exhibiting a statistically significant treatment effect in either country.

We posit a couple of factors may combine to produce weaker results for Colombia and Peru. First, these particular scenarios may be less salient in Colombia and Peru. For comparability, we used the same scenarios (minus gerrymandering) as in our U.S. experiment. That said, we did assess whether respondents deemed the experimental scenarios plausible, and find that they did (see Fig. A3). Second, tit-for-tat justifications may be a more widespread and familiar political tactic in the U.S. (perhaps a natural outgrowth of the two-party system, which generates a clearly defined “other side” that is consistent over time), whereas they are less pervasive in Colombia and Peruvian political



discourse. To the extent these suppositions are correct, we have evidence that universal tendencies toward tit-for-tat political logics are tempered by the political information environment, an assertion that establishes a hypothesis for testing in future research.

Discussion

In sum, we find that the public is receptive to tit-for-tat logic as a justification for constitutional hardball, with related implications for public support or acquiescence to democratic backsliding. For those hoping that non-partisans might provide an effective brake, the results are discouraging: in the U.S., non-partisans are initially less tolerant of constitutional hardball; but when introduced to the tit-for-tat justification, they start to look much more like partisans. In Colombia and Peru, partisanship rates are too low to directly compare the effects on partisans and non-partisans; but the effects we identify in these low-partisanship environments are suggestive of a general tendency to be receptive to tit-for-tat frames.

Notably, we find that tit-for-tat framing can increase individuals’ sense that constitutional hardball is justified *and* democratic. This points to a partial explanation for why citizens often say that they support democracy when asked in the abstract, yet support anti-democratic actions from their preferred politicians. In a tit-for-tat context, they are adjusting their assessments of which actions are consistent with democratic principles. This might stem from a strategic position of viewing tit-for-tat as deterrence (as Keck 2022 argues, trying to “break a downward spiral of democratic erosion”). It might also stem from a sense of needing to restore some prior status quo or balance to democracy (trying to “undo” or nullify the other side’s earlier undemocratic action by responding in kind—e.g., responding in kind to court packing). Alternatively, people might just have weak priors about what is democratic and undemocratic, so when they see something happening frequently in their democracy (multiple parties are engaging in norm-breaking behavior, rather than just one), they conclude that it is consistent with democratic principles. Generally speaking, the results raise interesting implications for the potential for militant democracy (pre-emptively limiting the power of extremist groups (Müller 2016)) to backfire in protecting democracy by, instead, fueling negative reciprocity if aggrieved supporters secure a legislative foothold.

Our findings point to important questions to be addressed in future work. As noted above, one question this project raises is whether the comparative salience of tit-for-tat rhetoric conditions the nature of public reactions to constitutional hardball scenarios. Additional avenues for further research include probing the different mechanisms by which people adjust their perceptions of what is and is not democratic (e.g., strategic deterrence versus weak priors). Other research might consider what makes independents more responsive to frames (is it that partisans are already saturated by such rhetoric, at least in some contexts?) and how does the effectiveness of other frames compare to the power of tit-for-tat logic (while the survey data suggest instrumental rationales are equally potent, one could probe this and/or frames in future studies). Finally, an important question is

whether similar tit-for-tat dynamics could be used to *strengthen* democracy rather than weakening it. That is, could pro-democratic maneuvers by one side (e.g., explicitly accepting an instrumental loss for the sake of bolstering democracy) increase the other side’s willingness to do the same? Scholars have shown that norms of reciprocity can yield virtuous dynamics in a variety of situations (Ostrom and Walker 2003), yet it remains to be seen if they can do the same in the political realm.

Methods

Observational Survey Data

We added two survey items to the 2023 AmericasBarometer in 15 Latin American democracies. These countries are Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, and Uruguay. We also collected similar data in several Caribbean countries and Brazil, but we omit them from this analysis for reasons of comparability across languages. The AmericasBarometer is a biennial series of nationally representative, probability-based in-person surveys fielded across the Americas. For further information about sampling and data collection see the 2023 AmericasBarometer technical report at <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/ab2023/AB2023-General-Technical-Report-v4.0-FINAL-eng-231121.pdf>. These observational data allow us to estimate how much voters approve, in the abstract, of politicians violating democratic norms as part of a tit-for-tat interaction. The results also enable a comparison between tit-for-tat justifications and instrumental justifications (violating norms to achieve desired policy outcomes).

Instrumental: “In order to deliver on promises to the people, it is justifiable for politicians to act at the margin of the law.”

1. Yes, it is justifiable
2. No, it is not justifiable

Translated from: *Para cumplir las promesas a la gente, se justifica que los políticos actúen al margen de la ley.*

1. *Sí, se justifica*
2. *No, no se justifica*

Tit-for-tat: “If politicians on the other side act at the margin of the law, it is justifiable for politicians I support to act at the margin of the law.”

1. Yes, it is justifiable
2. No, it is not justifiable
3. I do not support any party/politician

Translated from: *Si los políticos del [lado/bando] opuesto actúan al margen de la ley, se justifica que los políticos a los que uno apoya también actúen al margen de la ley.*

1. *Sí, se justifica*
2. *No, no se justifica*
3. *No apoya a ningún partido o político*

To account for potential priming effects from one question to the next, we randomized the order in which these two questions were asked across respondents.

We use the language of “acting at the margin of the law” to reflect our interest in constitutional hardball—behavior that arguably does not cross the line into illegality but breaks with important norms and tests the bounds of what is technically permissible under the law. In subsequent online studies, we randomly assigned respondents to see either the above statements or a version in which we describe politicians as acting “outside” rather than “at the margin of” the law. Unsurprisingly, support for acting outside the law was lower than support for acting at the margin of the law. In terms of the relative support for tit-for-tat vs instrumental justifications, we find that respondents are either indifferent between the two justifications for acting “outside the law” or are more accepting of the

tit-for-tat justification (the results on this comparison vary across countries, see Figure A2).

We also used data on partisan identification, to analyze the relationship between partisanship and approval of tit-for-tat justifications. Partisanship was measured as a binary variable, using the following standard AmericasBarometer question:

VB10. Do you currently identify with a political party? (Translated from: *¿En este momento, simpatiza con algún partido político?*)

Survey Experiments

We fielded three pre-registered experiments in online surveys in the US, Peru, and Colombia. Online samples in Latin America have important limitations with regard to representativeness (see Castorena et al. 2023), but our experiments at least allow us to make causal inferences about public opinion within the population that is well-represented in these non-probability samples. We have little a priori reason to believe that probability-based samples would yield different results. In these experiments, we posed concrete hypothetical situations in which an unnamed politician violated a democratic norm and we asked respondents to indicate whether the action was justified and whether it was consistent with democratic norms. Whereas the control condition did not specify any provocation for the action, the treatment condition indicated that an opposing party had previously broken a similar norm.

Experimental Design: US

We placed our experiment on the US survey of the 2023 AmericasBarometer, which was conducted online by YouGov using their quasi-probabilistic matching approaching to sampling 1,500 respondents from their panel between July 21 and July 26. Our anonymized pre-registration for the experimental module is included in the appendix.

Respondents were assigned to either the left-wing or right-wing rallies condition, using simple random assignment with equal probabilities. For each of the four scenarios a

respondent saw, treatment was also assigned with simple random assignment, equal probabilities. We used independent draws for each scenario, so treatment status in one scenario did not affect treatment status for any of the other scenarios. Table 1 lists the number of respondents assigned to each treatment group.

TABLE 1. Treatment Group Sizes		
	Control	Treatment
Court Rulings	755	745
Gerrymandering	753	747
Court Packing	752	748
Rallies	745	755
	Left-wing rallies	Right-wing rallies
	749	751

In our sample, 34% of respondents identified as Democrats, 28% as Republicans, and 27% as Independents. The remainder either identified with another party (4%) or said they were unsure (6%).

We pre-registered regressions testing for average treatment effects (reported in Tables A2 and A3, pre-registered in section 3.1 of the PAP), interaction effects between ideology and the left-/right-wing rallies treatments (Table A15, pre-registered in section 3.1.1), and average treatment effects when controlling for demographics (Tables A13 and A14, pre-registered in section 3.2). We also pre-registered tests of second-mover effects (Tables A18 and A19, pre-registered in section 3.3). Note that the second-mover analyses are observational tests; they are not causally identified like the other experimental analyses.

Experimental Design: Peru and Colombia

In these two experiments, we again used simple random assignment with equal probabilities, and we assigned treatment status independently across scenarios (e.g., treatment status for the court packing scenario is not dependent on treatment status for the court rulings scenario). The surveys were fielded online in December 2023 using

non-probability sampling from the firm’s panels. The provider (Netquest) used quotas for age, gender, socioeconomic status, and region. The samples consist of 1,016 respondents in Colombia and 1,002 in Peru. Table 2 lists the number of respondents in each treatment group. Our anonymized pre-registration for the experimental modules is included in the appendix.

TABLE 2. Treatment Group Sizes			
Colombia			
	Control	Treatment	
Court Rulings	512	504	
Court Packing	507	509	
Rallies	512	504	
Peru			
	Control	Treatment	
Court Rulings	502	500	
Court Packing	505	497	
Rallies	504	498	

We pre-registered regressions testing for average treatment effects (reported in Tables A22 and A23, pre-registered in section 3.1 of the PAP) and interactions between treatment and partisanship (Tables A16 and A17, pre-registered in section 3.2). We also pre-registered tests of second-mover effects (Tables A20 and A21, pre-registered in section 3.3). Note that the second-mover analyses are observational tests; they are not causally identified like the other experimental analyses.

IRB

Our study was approved by the [redacted for blind peer review] Institutional Review Board, Protocol # 200472. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Data collection complied with all relevant ethical regulations.

Data Availability Statement

The data for our study are available via Code Ocean DOI 10.24433/CO.0996034.v1

Code Availability Statement

The analysis scripts for our study are available via Code Ocean DOI
10.24433/CO.0996034.v1

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1 Tables for Main Text Figures

1.1 Figure 1

TABLE A1. Support for Instrumental vs Tit-for-Tat Justifications				
	Country	Tit-for-Tat	Instrumental	p-value
	Argentina	42%	42%	0.63
	Bolivia	49%	49%	0.65
	Chile	32%	33%	0.47
	Colombia	28%	32%	0.05
	Costa Rica	56%	59%	0.06
	Dominican Republic	60%	63%	0.09
	Ecuador	49%	52%	0.10
	El Salvador	60%	63%	0.10
	Guatemala	51%	55%	0.07
	Honduras	58%	61%	0.17
	Mexico	51%	52%	0.34
	Panama	57%	61%	0.01
	Paraguay	43%	44%	0.76
	Peru	39%	42%	0.11
	Uruguay	39%	40%	0.85

Note: Percent agreeing that a politician would be justified in acting at the margins of the law. Two-tailed p-values come from OLS regressions of approval on condition (tit-for-tat vs instrumental).

1.2 Figure 2

TABLE A2. US: Main Results 1						
	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Court Rulings (Democratic)	Court Rulings (Justified)	Court Packing (Democratic)	Court Packing (Justified)	Gerry- mandering (Democratic)	Gerry- mandering (Justified)
Treatment	0.096* (0.050)	0.185*** (0.048)	0.114* (0.051)	0.173*** (0.049)	0.231*** (0.049)	0.369*** (0.048)
Constant	1.940*** (0.035)	1.813*** (0.034)	2.076*** (0.036)	1.984*** (0.035)	1.893*** (0.035)	1.776*** (0.034)
Observations	1,497	1,494	1,493	1,493	1,493	1,494
<i>Note:</i>				* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (one-tailed)		

TABLE A3. US: Main Results 2

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Rallies (Democratic)	Rallies (Justified)	Left-wing Rallies (Democratic)	Left-wing Rallies (Justified)	Right-wing Rallies (Democratic)	Right-wing Rallies (Justified)
Treatment	0.058 (0.051)	0.136** (0.049)	0.156* (0.072)	0.145* (0.070)	−0.039 (0.072)	0.127* (0.070)
Constant	1.840*** (0.036)	1.763*** (0.035)	1.798*** (0.051)	1.766*** (0.049)	1.881*** (0.051)	1.759*** (0.050)
Observations	1,494	1,493	745	745	749	748
<i>Note:</i>			* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (one-tailed)			

1.3 Figure 3

TABLE A4. Partisanship and Support for Tit-for-Tat 1

	<i>Dependent variable: CRG1 (tit-for-tat justified)</i>				
	Argentina	Bolivia	Chile	Colombia	Costa Rica
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Partisan	−0.132*** (0.029)	0.058 (0.036)	−0.042 (0.038)	0.012 (0.035)	−0.014 (0.032)
Constant	0.451*** (0.015)	0.476*** (0.013)	0.328*** (0.012)	0.276*** (0.013)	0.559*** (0.014)
Observations	1,490	1,650	1,578	1,448	1,493
<i>Note:</i> * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed)					

TABLE A5. Partisanship and Support for Tit-for-Tat 2

	<i>Dependent variable: CRG1 (tit-for-tat justified)</i>				
	Dominican Rep.	Ecuador	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Partisan	0.053* (0.025)	0.045 (0.037)	0.071* (0.029)	0.061 (0.034)	0.033 (0.031)
Constant	0.575*** (0.016)	0.481*** (0.014)	0.580*** (0.015)	0.505*** (0.014)	0.573*** (0.014)
Observations	1,559	1,530	1,491	1,515	1,531
<i>Note:</i> * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed)					

TABLE A6. Partisanship and Support for Tit-for-Tat 3

	<i>Dependent variable: CRG1 (tit-for-tat justified)</i>				
	Mexico	Panama	Paraguay	Peru	Uruguay
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Partisan	−0.009 (0.029)	0.056* (0.027)	0.010 (0.027)	−0.031 (0.044)	−0.136*** (0.025)
Constant	0.507*** (0.014)	0.546*** (0.016)	0.426*** (0.017)	0.397*** (0.013)	0.455*** (0.017)
Observations	1,593	1,493	1,453	1,505	1,457

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed)

1.4 Figure 4

TABLE A7. US: Independents 1

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Court Rulings (Democratic)	Court Rulings (Justified)	Court Packing (Democratic)	Court Packing (Justified)	Gerry- mandering (Democratic)	Gerry- mandering (Justified)
Treatment	0.175* (0.089)	0.176* (0.087)	0.302*** (0.092)	0.422*** (0.090)	0.225** (0.091)	0.355*** (0.090)
Constant	1.700*** (0.063)	1.683*** (0.061)	1.820*** (0.064)	1.767*** (0.063)	1.785*** (0.066)	1.708*** (0.065)
Observations	402	401	402	402	403	403
<i>Note:</i> * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (one-tailed)						

TABLE A8. US: Independents 2

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Rallies (Democratic)	Rallies (Justified)	Left-wing Rallies (Democratic)	Left-wing Rallies (Justified)	Right-wing Rallies (Democratic)	Right-wing Rallies (Justified)
Treatment	0.114 (0.092)	0.219** (0.088)	0.315** (0.120)	0.315** (0.116)	-0.094 (0.140)	0.118 (0.133)
Constant	1.637*** (0.065)	1.562*** (0.062)	1.529*** (0.085)	1.520*** (0.082)	1.747*** (0.099)	1.606*** (0.094)
Observations	402	402	205	205	197	197
<i>Note:</i> * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (one-tailed)						

TABLE A9. US: Partisans (D or R) 1

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Court Rulings (Democratic)	Court Rulings (Justified)	Court Packing (Democratic)	Court Packing (Justified)	Gerry- mandering (Democratic)	Gerry- mandering (Justified)
Treatment	0.085 (0.065)	0.161** (0.062)	0.035 (0.065)	0.080 (0.062)	0.237*** (0.062)	0.381*** (0.061)
Constant	2.013*** (0.046)	1.866*** (0.044)	2.161*** (0.046)	2.058*** (0.044)	1.911*** (0.044)	1.783*** (0.043)
Observations	934	933	932	932	931	932
<i>Note:</i> * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (one-tailed)						

TABLE A10. US: Partisans (D or R) 2

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Rallies (Democratic)	Rallies (Justified)	Left-wing Rallies (Democratic)	Left-wing Rallies (Justified)	Right-wing Rallies (Democratic)	Right-wing Rallies (Justified)
Treatment	0.028 (0.065)	0.097 (0.064)	0.073 (0.095)	0.059 (0.093)	-0.015 (0.090)	0.134 (0.087)
Constant	1.908*** (0.046)	1.824*** (0.045)	1.892*** (0.067)	1.849*** (0.065)	1.923*** (0.064)	1.799*** (0.062)
Observations	933	933	460	460	473	473
<i>Note:</i>			* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (one-tailed)			

1.5 Figure 5

TABLE A11. Peru Non-Partisans

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Court Rulings		Court Packing		Rallies	
	Democratic	Justified	Democratic	Justified	Democratic	Justified
Treatment	0.162** (0.059)	0.077 (0.059)	0.018 (0.060)	0.045 (0.057)	0.035 (0.061)	-0.002 (0.058)
Constant	1.956*** (0.041)	1.971*** (0.041)	1.908*** (0.042)	1.814*** (0.040)	1.954*** (0.043)	1.874*** (0.040)
Observations	890	889	891	891	890	890
<i>Note:</i>			* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (one-tailed)			

TABLE A12. Colombia Non-Partisans

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Court Rulings		Court Packing		Rallies	
	Democratic	Justified	Democratic	Justified	Democratic	Justified
Treatment	0.004 (0.069)	0.117* (0.068)	0.158** (0.065)	0.141* (0.065)	0.081 (0.065)	0.042 (0.066)
Constant	2.102*** (0.049)	2.068*** (0.048)	1.908*** (0.046)	1.943*** (0.045)	2.002*** (0.046)	2.060*** (0.047)
Observations	796	795	796	796	795	795
<i>Note:</i>			* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (one-tailed)			

(See also Tables A7 and A8 for US non-partisans analysis)

2 Additional Pre-registered Analyses

2.1 United States

TABLE A13. US: Analysis with Controls					
	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Consistent with Democratic Principles				
	Court Rulings	Court Packing	Gerrymandering	Rallies (Left)	Rallies (Right)
Treatment	0.078 (0.048)	0.127* (0.050)	0.217*** (0.048)	0.185** (0.068)	−0.010 (0.067)
Age	−0.013*** (0.001)	−0.011*** (0.001)	−0.010*** (0.001)	−0.014*** (0.002)	−0.016*** (0.002)
Education	−0.085*** (0.016)	−0.055** (0.017)	−0.046** (0.016)	−0.087*** (0.023)	−0.097*** (0.023)
Political Interest	−0.103*** (0.028)	−0.016 (0.029)	−0.062* (0.028)	−0.143*** (0.039)	−0.088* (0.039)
Democrat	0.227*** (0.057)	0.215*** (0.060)	0.022 (0.058)	0.109 (0.080)	0.267** (0.083)
Republican	0.292*** (0.060)	0.094 (0.063)	0.203*** (0.061)	0.342*** (0.087)	0.245** (0.084)
Constant	3.031*** (0.107)	2.759*** (0.110)	2.659*** (0.108)	3.076*** (0.154)	3.089*** (0.147)
Observations	1,496	1,492	1,492	744	749
<i>Note:</i> † $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed)					

TABLE A14. US: Analysis with Controls

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Justified				
	Court Rulings	Court Packing	Gerrymandering	Rallies (Left)	Rallies (Right)
Treatment	0.179*** (0.047)	0.191*** (0.047)	0.217*** (0.048)	0.171* (0.067)	0.159* (0.064)
Age	-0.010*** (0.001)	-0.011*** (0.001)	-0.010*** (0.001)	-0.014*** (0.002)	-0.018*** (0.002)
Education	-0.056*** (0.016)	-0.058*** (0.016)	-0.046** (0.016)	-0.044 [†] (0.023)	-0.057** (0.022)
Political Interest	-0.088** (0.027)	-0.014 (0.028)	-0.062* (0.028)	-0.083* (0.039)	-0.081* (0.037)
Democrat	0.225*** (0.056)	0.235*** (0.057)	0.022 (0.058)	0.091 (0.079)	0.377*** (0.079)
Republican	0.117* (0.059)	-0.030 (0.060)	0.203*** (0.061)	0.241** (0.086)	0.048 (0.080)
Constant	2.684*** (0.105)	2.693*** (0.105)	2.659*** (0.108)	2.756*** (0.152)	2.949*** (0.140)
Observations	1,493	1,492	1,492	744	748
<i>Note:</i> [†] $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed)					

TABLE A15. US: Ideology Interaction (Rallies Conditions)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Left-wing Rallies		Right-wing Rallies	
	Democratic	Justified	Democratic	Justified
Treatment	−0.021 (0.163)	0.057 (0.158)	0.049 (0.155)	0.338* (0.148)
Ideology	0.025 (0.018)	0.040* (0.017)		
Treatment X Ideology	0.029 (0.026)	0.013 (0.025)		
Ideology (Rev.)			0.014 (0.018)	0.088*** (0.017)
Treatment X Ideology (Rev.)			−0.016 (0.026)	−0.040 (0.025)
Constant	1.664*** (0.110)	1.549*** (0.107)	1.802*** (0.110)	1.288*** (0.105)
Observations	744	744	748	747

Note: † $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed)

Table A15 shows the interaction between the rallies treatment and ideology. The ideology variable is coded 1–10 where 10 is the most conservative. In the right-wing rallies condition, we reverse the coding of the ideology variable so that 10 is the most liberal (to facilitate easier comparison between the left- and right-wing rallies conditions).

2.2 Colombia and Peru

TABLE A16. Colombia: PID Interaction

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Court Rulings		Court Packing		Rallies	
	Democratic	Justified	Democratic	Justified	Democratic	Justified
Treatment	0.004 (0.073)	0.117 (0.072)	0.158* (0.068)	0.141* (0.068)	0.081 (0.069)	0.042 (0.069)
PID	0.222* (0.110)	0.311** (0.110)	0.198† (0.106)	0.154 (0.106)	0.179† (0.105)	0.158 (0.105)
Treatment X PID	0.058 (0.158)	−0.081 (0.157)	0.081 (0.148)	0.161 (0.148)	0.133 (0.150)	0.184 (0.150)
Constant	2.102*** (0.051)	2.068*** (0.051)	1.908*** (0.048)	1.943*** (0.048)	2.002*** (0.049)	2.060*** (0.049)
Observations	1,013	1,012	1,013	1,013	1,011	1,011

Note: † $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed)

TABLE A17. Peru: PID Interaction

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Court Rulings		Court Packing		Rallies	
	Democratic	Justified	Democratic	Justified	Democratic	Justified
Treatment	0.162** (0.060)	0.077 (0.060)	0.018 (0.061)	0.045 (0.058)	0.035 (0.063)	−0.002 (0.059)
PID	0.203 (0.142)	0.145 (0.143)	0.126 (0.126)	0.046 (0.121)	0.210 (0.140)	0.146 (0.132)
Treatment X PID	−0.028 (0.185)	0.084 (0.186)	−0.052 (0.184)	0.155 (0.176)	0.068 (0.190)	−0.068 (0.179)
Constant	1.956*** (0.042)	1.971*** (0.042)	1.908*** (0.043)	1.814*** (0.041)	1.954*** (0.044)	1.874*** (0.041)
Observations	999	997	1,000	999	999	999

Note: † $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed)

2.3 First- and Second-Mover Analysis

We also test, within the treatment groups, whether respondents rate the second mover's actions as more justified and as more consistent than the first mover (e.g., when two parties gerrymander, do respondents rate the second party to gerrymander as more democratic than the first?). Note that these analyses are observational.

TABLE A18. US: Second Mover Analysis 1

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Court Rulings		Gerrymandering	
	Democratic	Justified	Democratic	Justified
Second Mover	-0.147** (0.051)	-0.173*** (0.050)	0.003 (0.050)	0.089† (0.049)
Constant	2.038*** (0.036)	1.997*** (0.035)	2.124*** (0.035)	2.147*** (0.034)
Observations	1,474	1,478	1,478	1,488
<i>Note:</i>	† $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed)			

TABLE A19. US: Second Mover Analysis 2

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Court Packing		Rallies	
	Democratic	Justified	Democratic	Justified
Second Mover	0.052 (0.051)	0.053 (0.049)	0.041 (0.050)	0.144** (0.048)
Constant	2.190*** (0.036)	2.156*** (0.035)	1.898*** (0.036)	1.896*** (0.034)
Observations	1,486	1,484	1,504	1,500
<i>Note:</i>	† $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed)			

TABLE A20. Colombia: Second Mover Analysis

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Court Rulings		Court Packing		Rallies	
	Democratic	Justified	Democratic	Justified	Democratic	Justified
Second Mover	-0.002 (0.062)	0.132* (0.062)	0.089 (0.060)	0.095 (0.060)	0.036 (0.060)	0.093 (0.060)
Constant	2.164*** (0.044)	2.232*** (0.044)	2.128*** (0.043)	2.156*** (0.043)	2.150*** (0.043)	2.171*** (0.043)
Observations	1,000	1,000	1,016	1,014	998	992
<i>Note:</i> $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$; $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$; $***p < 0.001$ (two-tailed)						

TABLE A21. Peru: Second Mover Analysis

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Court Rulings		Court Packing		Rallies	
	Democratic	Justified	Democratic	Justified	Democratic	Justified
Second Mover	0.008 (0.056)	0.018 (0.056)	-0.079 (0.056)	-0.099 [†] (0.056)	0.018 (0.057)	-0.093 [†] (0.055)
Constant	2.141*** (0.040)	2.078*** (0.040)	1.933*** (0.040)	1.878*** (0.039)	2.022*** (0.040)	1.883*** (0.039)
Observations	994	996	992	986	988	990
<i>Note:</i> $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$; $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$; $***p < 0.001$ (two-tailed)						

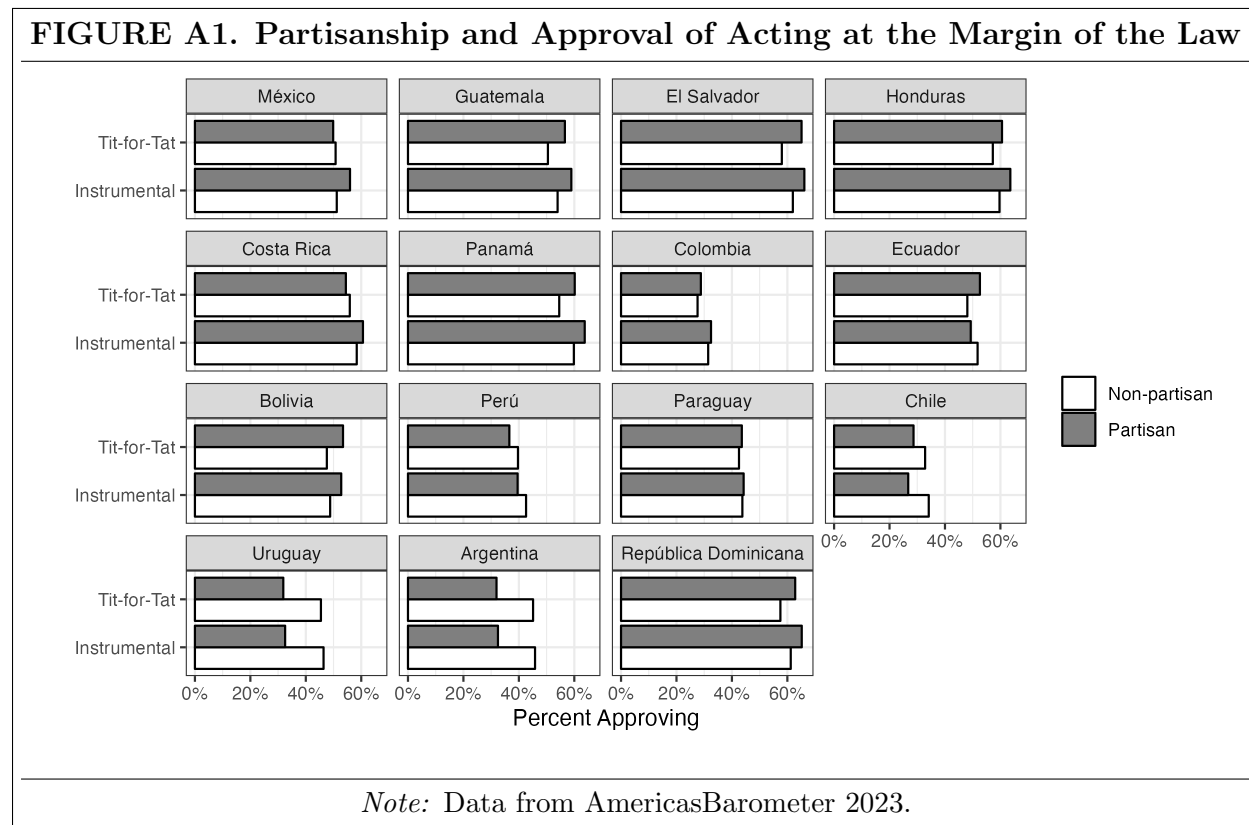
2.4 Colombia and Peru: Full Sample Analysis

Tables A22 and A23 replicate Tables A11 and A12 (Figure 5), including partisans in addition to non-partisans.

TABLE A22. Peru Full Sample						
	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Court Rulings		Court Packing		Rallies	
	Democratic	Justified	Democratic	Justified	Democratic	Justified
Treatment	0.167** (0.057)	0.094* (0.057)	0.011 (0.057)	0.060 (0.055)	0.048 (0.059)	−0.007 (0.056)
Constant	1.974*** (0.040)	1.984*** (0.040)	1.923*** (0.040)	1.819*** (0.038)	1.974*** (0.042)	1.888*** (0.039)
Observations	999	997	1,000	999	999	999
<i>Note:</i>			* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (one-tailed)			

TABLE A23. Colombia Full Sample						
	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Court Rulings		Court Packing		Rallies	
	Democratic	Justified	Democratic	Justified	Democratic	Justified
Treatment	0.015 (0.065)	0.099 (0.065)	0.179** (0.061)	0.179** (0.061)	0.109* (0.062)	0.080 (0.062)
Constant	2.150*** (0.046)	2.135*** (0.045)	1.949*** (0.043)	1.974*** (0.043)	2.041*** (0.043)	2.094*** (0.043)
Observations	1,013	1,012	1,013	1,013	1,011	1,011
<i>Note:</i>			* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (one-tailed)			

3 Observational Data: Additional Analyses



We tested an alternative wording in 2024 surveys in El Salvador, Honduras, and Peru. Instead of referring to a politician acting “at the margin of the law,” we referenced acting “outside the law”:

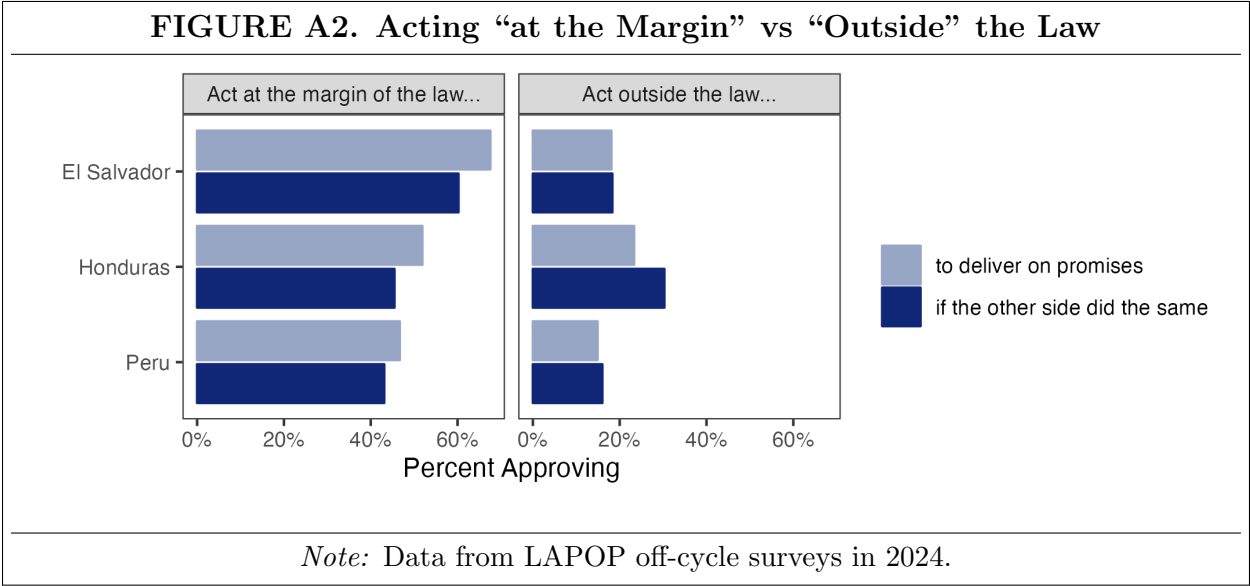
CRG1N: *Si los políticos del bando opuesto actúan fuera de la ley, se justifica que los políticos a los que uno apoya también actúen fuera de la ley.*

CRG2N: *Para cumplir las promesas a la gente, se justifica que los políticos actúen fuera de la ley.*

In all three countries, respondents were randomly assigned to see either the “at the margin” wording or the “outside” wording for both the instrumental and tit-for-tat scenarios (as in the AmericasBarometer 2023, reported in the main text, the order of the two questions was randomized).

Figure A2 presents the rates of agreement with the original question wording (at the margin) and the alternative (outside). Using the “at the margins” wording, we observe

higher support for the instrumental condition in El Salvador and Honduras (in the AmericasBarometer 2023, we did not find significant differences in these countries). Using the “act outside the law” wording, we observe higher support for the tit-for-tat condition in Honduras. Across the board, support for acting outside the law is, unsurprisingly, lower than support for acting at the margin of the law (with variation by country in the magnitude of this drop). In the instrumental scenario, support drops by 29 to 49 percentage points when shifting to behavior “outside the law.” In the tit-for-tat scenario, it drops by 15 to 42 percentage points.



4 Experiments: Additional Details

TABLE A24. Non-Response Rates by Treatment Group

Country	Outcome	Control	Treatment	p-value
United States	Gerrymandering (Democratic)	0.003	0.007	0.252
United States	Gerrymandering (Justified)	0.005	0.003	0.419
United States	Court Rulings (Democratic)	0.000	0.004	0.081
United States	Court Rulings (Justified)	0.003	0.005	0.404
United States	Court Packing (Democratic)	0.003	0.007	0.253
United States	Court Packing (Justified)	0.003	0.007	0.253
United States	Rallies (Democratic)	0.004	0.004	0.987
United States	Rallies (Justified)	0.004	0.005	0.718
Colombia	Court Rulings (Democratic)	0.000	0.006	0.081
Colombia	Court Rulings (Justified)	0.002	0.006	0.309
Colombia	Court Packing (Democratic)	0.004	0.002	0.561
Colombia	Court Packing (Justified)	0.004	0.002	0.561
Colombia	Rallies (Democratic)	0.002	0.008	0.173
Colombia	Rallies (Justified)	0.002	0.008	0.173
Peru	Court Rulings (Democratic)	0.002	0.004	0.561
Peru	Court Rulings (Justified)	0.006	0.004	0.658
Peru	Court Packing (Democratic)	0.002	0.002	0.991
Peru	Court Packing (Justified)	0.004	0.002	0.573
Peru	Rallies (Democratic)	0.004	0.002	0.571
Peru	Rallies (Justified)	0.004	0.002	0.571

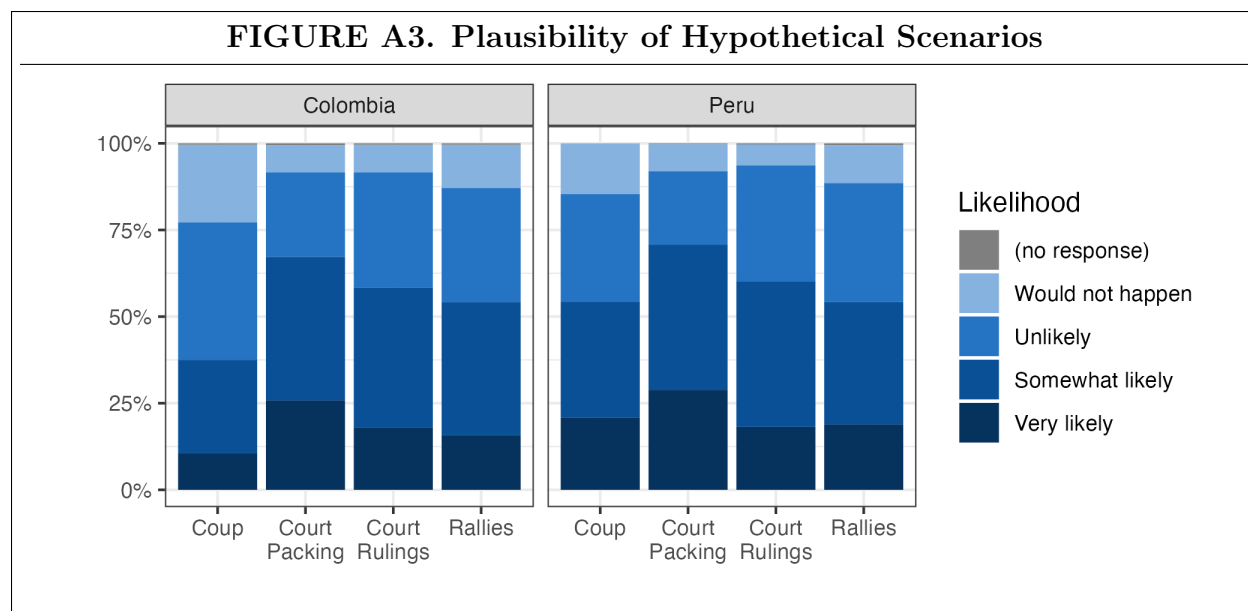
Note: p-values are two-tailed, from regressing a dummy variable for missingness on treatment assignment.

4.1 Plausibility

Each respondent was asked how likely it was that a given scenario would occur in their country within the next six years. We used a six-year time frame to encourage respondents to think generally about the state of their democracy rather than the current leaders (presidential terms are five years in Peru and four years in Colombia). The scenarios included the three examples in the experiment (court packing, ignoring court rulings, and rallies), as well as a military coup condition (included as a baseline for comparison). Note that the three conditions from the experiment were presented without the provocation condition (e.g., in the case of ignoring court rulings, there is no mention of this being a response to packing the courts).

Figure A3 shows the distribution of responses to the plausibility questions. A majority of respondents in both countries thought that each of the experimental scenarios was at least

FIGURE A3. Plausibility of Hypothetical Scenarios



“somewhat likely” to happen in the next six years. Fewer than 13% were confident that any of the experimental scenarios “would not happen” (with skepticism highest in the rallies condition). As a point of comparison, 15% of Peruvian and 22% of Colombian respondents were confident that a coup would not occur in the next six years.

4.2 Original Spanish Text

Para las próximas preguntas, describiremos algunas acciones que los funcionarios gubernamentales podrían tomar. Estos ejemplos son hipotéticos: no pretenden referirse a ningún funcionario gubernamental específico de la vida real.

Nos gustaría saber qué tan democrático cree que es cada uno, y si es o no una acción adecuada.

Court rulings

Control: Los tribunales han fallado en contra de varias políticas del presidente, pero el presidente ha ignorado estos fallos y continúa implementando las políticas de todos modos.

Treatment: Los tribunales han fallado en contra de varias políticas del presidente, pero el presidente ha ignorado estos fallos y continúa implementando las políticas de todos modos. El presidente dice que los fallos judiciales son ilegítimos porque un gobierno anterior de la oposición recientemente llenó los tribunales con leales.

COURTA ¿Diría que las acciones del presidente son consistentes con los principios democráticos?

- Muy consistentes
- Algo consistentes
- Algo inconsistentes
- Muy inconsistentes

COURTB ¿Diría usted que las acciones del presidente estaban justificadas?

- Muy justificadas
- Algo justificadas
- Algo injustificadas
- Muy injustificadas

COURTC ¿Diría que las acciones del gobierno anterior de la oposición son consistentes con los principios democráticos?

- Muy consistentes
- Algo consistentes
- Algo inconsistentes
- Muy inconsistentes

COURTD ¿Diría que las acciones del gobierno anterior de la oposición estaban justificadas?

- Muy justificadas
- Algo justificadas
- Algo injustificadas
- Muy injustificadas

Rallies

Control: Este año, el nuevo gobierno prohibió a los grupos de la oposición realizar mítines públicos.

Treatment: El año pasado, el gobierno prohibió a los grupos de la oposición realizar mítines públicos. Este año, el nuevo gobierno (del otro lado) prohibió a los grupos de la oposición realizar mítines públicos.

RALLYA ¿Diría que las acciones del nuevo gobierno son consistentes con los principios democráticos?

- Muy consistentes
- Algo consistentes
- Algo inconsistentes
- Muy inconsistentes

RALLYB ¿Diría que las acciones del nuevo gobierno estaban justificadas?

- Muy justificadas
- Algo justificadas
- Algo injustificadas
- Muy injustificadas

RALLYC ¿Diría que las acciones del gobierno anterior son consistentes con los principios democráticos?

- Muy consistentes
- Algo consistentes
- Algo inconsistentes
- Muy inconsistentes

RALLYD ¿Diría que las acciones del gobierno anterior estaban justificadas?

- Muy justificadas
- Algo justificadas
- Algo injustificadas

- Muy injustificadas

Court packing

Control: El presidente nombró a personas leales a los tribunales federales para que fallaran a favor de varias de sus políticas.

Treatment: El presidente nombró a personas leales a los tribunales federales para que fallaran a favor de varias de sus políticas, después de que un gobierno de la oposición hiciera lo mismo durante un mandato anterior.

PACKA ¿Diría que las acciones del presidente son consistentes con los principios democráticos?

- Muy consistentes
- Algo consistentes
- Algo inconsistentes
- Muy inconsistentes

PACKB ¿Diría usted que las acciones del presidente estaban justificadas?

- Muy justificadas
- Algo justificadas
- Algo injustificadas
- Muy injustificadas

PACKC ¿Diría que las acciones del gobierno anterior son consistentes con los principios democráticos?

- Muy consistentes
- Algo consistentes
- Algo inconsistentes
- Muy inconsistentes

PACKD ¿Diría que las acciones del gobierno anterior estaban justificadas?

- Muy justificadas
- Algo justificadas
- Algo injustificadas
- Muy injustificadas

5 V-Dem data

FIGURE A4. V-Dem Democracy Scores in Peru, 2005–2023

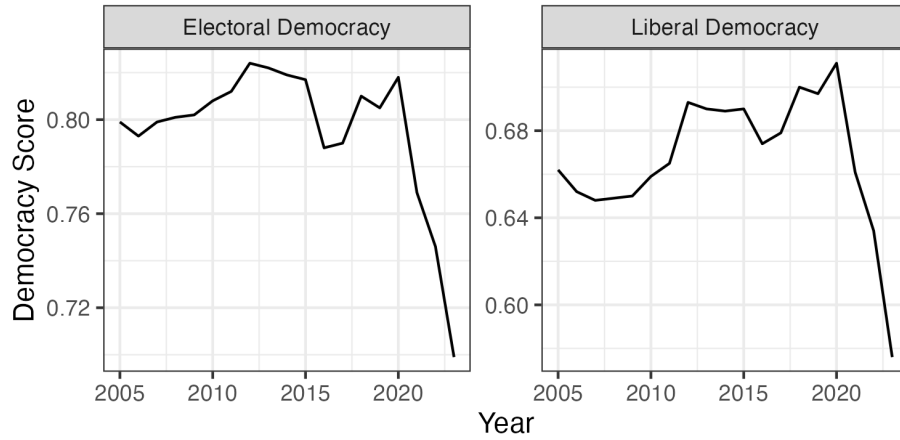


FIGURE A5. V-Dem Democracy Scores in El Salvador, 2005–2023

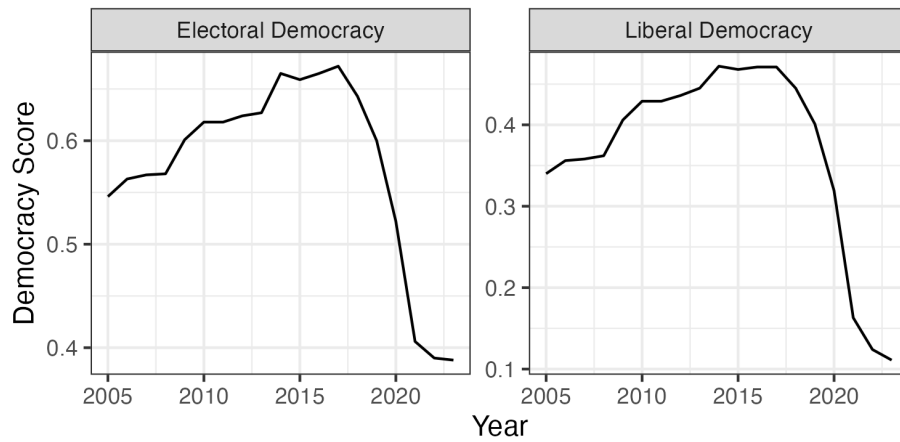
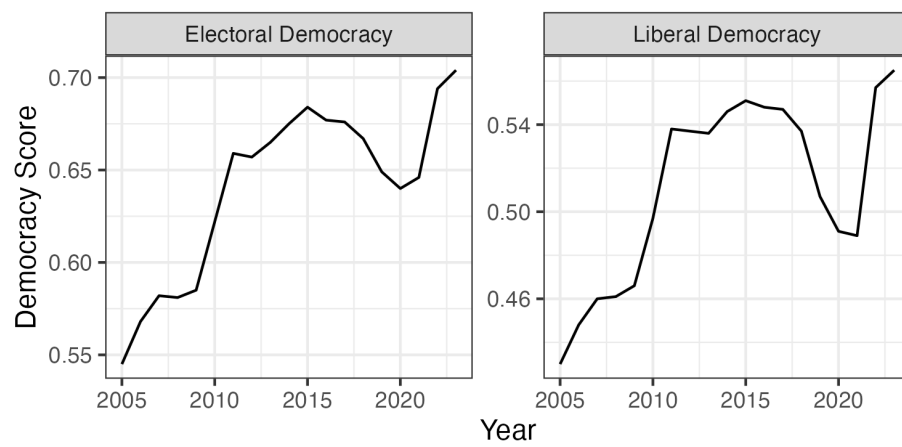


FIGURE A6. V-Dem Democracy Scores in Colombia, 2005–2023



6 Pre-Analysis Plans

Two pre-analysis plans (one for the US experiment and second for the Peru and Colombia experiments) are appended below.

Pre-Analysis Plan: Tit-for-Tat and Public Perceptions of Anti-Democratic Behavior

July 24, 2023

1 Introduction

In this experiment, we study whether voters become more accepting of undemocratic behavior when it is seen as a response to undemocratic behavior from the other side.

2 Survey Design and Randomization

2.1 Sample

We will conduct the experiment on a nationally-representative sample of adults from the United States. The survey will be conducted online in July 2023 with a targeted sample size of 1500 respondents. We will follow the sampling strategy outlined in the AmericasBarometer 2021 US technical report (see <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/usa/ABUSA2021-Technical-Report-v1.0-FINAL-eng-110921.pdf>)

2.2 Randomization

Randomization will occur across five dimensions. Each dimension has two groups, and respondents will be randomly assigned using simple randomization with equal probabilities. All dimensions will be assigned independently.

Dimensions:

- $d.court \in \{0, 1\}$
- $d.gerry \in \{0, 1\}$
- $d.rallies \in \{0, 1\}$
- $d.right \in \{0, 1\}$
- $d.pack \in \{0, 1\}$

2.3 Experimental Module

For the next few questions, we will describe some actions that government officials might take. These examples are hypothetical – they are not intended to refer to any specific, real-life government official.

We would like to know how democratic do you think each one is, and whether or not it is an appropriate action.

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: Randomly assign respondents to d.court=1 or d.court=0]-

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: SHOW USCOURT-CON INTRO IF d.court=0]-

-[COURT-CON INTRO]:- Courts have ruled against a number of the governor’s policies, but the governor has ignored these rulings and continued to implement the policies anyway.

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: SHOW COURT-TR INTRO IF d.court=1]-

-[COURT-TR INTRO]:- Courts have ruled against a number of the governor’s policies, but the governor has ignored these rulings and continued to implement the policies anyway. The governor says the court rulings are illegitimate because the other party recently packed the courts with loyalists .

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK USCOURTA AND USCOURTB TO ALL RESPONDENTS]-

USCOURTA Would you say the governor’s actions are consistent with democratic principles?

1. Very consistent
2. Somewhat consistent
3. Somewhat inconsistent
4. Very inconsistent

USCOURTB Would you say the governor’s actions were justified?

1. Very justified
2. Somewhat justified
3. Somewhat unjustified
4. Very unjustified

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK USCOURTC IF d.court=1]-

USCOURTC Would you say the other party’s actions are consistent with democratic principles?

1. Very consistent
2. Somewhat consistent

3. Somewhat inconsistent
4. Very inconsistent

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK USCOURTD IF d.court=1]-

USCOURTD Would you say the other party's actions were justified?

1. Very justified
2. Somewhat justified
3. Somewhat unjustified
4. Very unjustified

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: Randomly assign respondents to d.gerry=1 or d.gerry=0]-

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: SHOW GERRY-CON INTRO IF d.gerry=0]-

-[GERRY-CON INTRO]:- The governing party redrew electoral districts to win more seats in the legislature.

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: SHOW GERRY-TR INTRO IF d.gerry=1]-

-[GERRY-TR INTRO]:- The governing party redrew electoral districts to win more seats in the legislature, after the other party did so in a previous term.

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK USGERRYA AND USGERRYB TO ALL RESPONDENTS]-

USGERRYA Would you say the governing party's actions are consistent with democratic principles?

1. Very consistent
2. Somewhat consistent
3. Somewhat inconsistent
4. Very inconsistent

USGERRYB Would you say the governing party's actions were justified?

1. Very justified
2. Somewhat justified
3. Somewhat unjustified
4. Very unjustified

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: SHOW USGERRYC IF d.gerry=1]-

USGERRYC Would you say the other party's actions are consistent with democratic principles?

1. Very consistent

2. Somewhat consistent
3. Somewhat inconsistent
4. Very inconsistent

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: SHOW USGERRYD IF d.gerry=1]-

USGERRYD Would you say the other party's actions were justified?

1. Very justified
2. Somewhat justified
3. Somewhat unjustified
4. Very unjustified

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: Randomly assign respondents to d.right=1 or d.right=0]-

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: Randomly assign respondents to d.rallies=1 or d.rallies=0]-

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: SHOW RIGHT-CON INTRO IF d.right=1 and d.rallies=0]-

-[RIGHT-CON INTRO]:- This year, the new left-wing governor banned far-right groups from holding public rallies.

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: Show RIGHT-TR INTRO if d.right=1 and d.rallies=1]-

-[RIGHT-TR INTRO]:- Last year, a right-wing governor banned far-left groups from holding public rallies. This year, the new left-wing governor banned far-right groups from holding public rallies.

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK USRIGHTA IF d.right=1]-

USRIGHTA Would you say the new left-wing governor's actions are consistent with democratic principles?

1. Very consistent
2. Somewhat consistent
3. Somewhat inconsistent
4. Very inconsistent

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK USRIGHTB IF d.right=1]-

USRIGHTB Would you say the new left-wing governor's actions were justified?

1. Very justified
2. Somewhat justified
3. Somewhat unjustified

4. Very unjustified

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK USRIGHTC IF d.right=1 AND d.rallies=1]-

USRIGHTC Would you say the previous right-wing governor's actions are consistent with democratic principles?

1. Very consistent
2. Somewhat consistent
3. Somewhat inconsistent
4. Very inconsistent

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK USRIGHTD IF d.right=1 AND d.rallies=1]-

USRIGHTD Would you say the previous right-wing governor's actions were justified?

1. Very justified
2. Somewhat justified
3. Somewhat unjustified
4. Very unjustified

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: SHOW LEFT-CON INTRO IF d.right=0 AND d.rallies=0]-

-[LEFT-CON INTRO]:- This year, the new right-wing governor banned far-left groups from holding public rallies.

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: SHOW LEFT-TR INTRO IF d.right=0 AND d.rallies=1]-

-[LEFT-TR INTRO]:- Last year, a left-wing governor banned far-right groups from holding public rallies. This year, the new right-wing governor banned far-left groups from holding public rallies.

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK USLEFTA IF d.right=0]-

USLEFTA Would you say the new right-wing governor's actions are consistent with democratic principles?

1. Very consistent
2. Somewhat consistent
3. Somewhat inconsistent
4. Very inconsistent

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK USLEFTB IF d.right=0]-

USLEFTB Would you say the new right-wing governor's actions were justified?

1. Very justified

2. Somewhat justified
3. Somewhat unjustified
4. Very unjustified

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK USLEFTC IF d.right=0 AND d.rallies=1]-

USLEFTC Would you say the previous left-wing governor's actions are consistent with democratic principles?

1. Very consistent
2. Somewhat consistent
3. Somewhat inconsistent
4. Very inconsistent

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK USLEFTD IF d.right=0 AND d.rallies=1]-

USLEFTD Would you say the previous left-wing governor's actions were justified?

1. Very justified
2. Somewhat justified
3. Somewhat unjustified
4. Very unjustified

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: Randomly assign respondents to d.pack=1 or d.pack=0]-

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: SHOW PACK-CON INTRO IF d.pack=0]-

-[PACK-CON INTRO]:- This year, the new majority party in the legislature expanded the size of federal courts to appoint more judges aligned with their ideology.

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: SHOW PACK-TR INTRO if d.pack=1]-

-[PACK-TR INTRO]:- Last year, the current minority party held a majority in the legislature and expanded the size of federal courts to appoint more judges aligned with their ideology.

This year, the new majority party in the legislature further expanded the size of federal courts to appoint more judges aligned with their ideology.

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK USPACKA AND USPACKB TO ALL RESPONDENTS]-

USPACKA Would you say the new majority party's actions are consistent with democratic principles?

1. Very consistent
2. Somewhat consistent

3. Somewhat inconsistent
4. Very inconsistent

USPACKB Would you say the new majority party's actions were justified?

1. Very justified
2. Somewhat justified
3. Somewhat unjustified
4. Very unjustified

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK USPACKC IF d.pack=1]-

USPACKC Would you say the current minority party's actions are consistent with democratic principles?

1. Very consistent
2. Somewhat consistent
3. Somewhat inconsistent
4. Very inconsistent

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK USPACKD IF d.pack=1]-

USPACKD Would you say the current minority party's actions were justified?

1. Very justified
2. Somewhat justified
3. Somewhat unjustified
4. Very unjustified

2.4 Additional (Pre-Treatment) Variables for Analysis

POL1 How much interest do you have in politics: a lot, some, little or none?

1. A lot
2. Some
3. Little
4. None

USVB1011 Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

- Republican
- Democrat

- Independent
- Other

ED.USA What is the highest level of education you have completed?

1. Did not graduate from high school
2. High school graduate
3. Some college, but no degree (yet)
4. 2-year college degree
5. 4-year college degree
6. Postgraduate degree (MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, etc.)

Q2Y. In what year were you born?

IDEOLOGY: a 10-point variable ranging from Liberal (1) to Conservative (10).

We will combine responses to the questions L1B and L1BN to indicate every respondent's self-declared ideological position:

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: APPLY L1B TO 1/3 OF THE SAMPLE AND APPLY L1BN TO 2/3 OF THE SAMPLE.]-

L1BN Now, to change the subject... This is a 1-10 scale that goes from liberal to conservative. One means liberal and 10 means conservative. According to the meaning that the terms "liberals" and "conservatives" have for you, and thinking of your own political leanings, where would you place yourself on this scale?

1. Liberal
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
10. Conservative

L1B Now, to change the subject... This is a 1-10 scale that goes from liberal to conservative. One means liberal and 10 means conservative. Nowadays, when we speak of political leanings, we talk of liberals and conservatives. In other words, some people sympathize more with the liberals and others with the conservatives. According to the meaning that the terms

"liberals" and "conservatives" have for you, and thinking of your own political leanings, where would you place yourself on this scale?

1. Liberal
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
10. Conservative

3 Analysis Plans

For all of our analyses, we will use one-tailed p-values unless otherwise specified, with a threshold of $p < 0.05$ for significance.

For all outcome variables, we will reverse the coding direction (so 4=very justified and 1=very unjustified, and 4=very consistent and 1=very inconsistent)

3.1 Main outcomes

We will test whether treatment increases responses on each "A" and "B" outcome (makes respondents view the behavior as more consistent and as more justified).

```
lm(USCOURTA ~ d.court , data=df)
```

```
lm(USCOURTB ~ d.court , data=df)
```

```
lm(USGERRYA ~ d.gerry , data=df)
```

```
lm(USGERRYB ~ d.gerry , data=df)
```

```
lm(USPACKA ~ d.pack , data=df)
```

```
lm(USPACKB ~ d.pack , data=df)
```

3.1.1 Rallies

For the rallies treatment, we will create new outcome variables USRALLIESA, USRALLIESB, USRALLIESC, and USRALLIESD that combine responses across the LEFT and RIGHT conditions (USRALLIESA=USLEFTA if d.right=0 and USRALLIESA=USRIGHTA if d.right=1, etc.). We will analyze all the rallies responses together with the USRALLIES outcomes, and we will also analyze the LEFT and RIGHT responses separately.

```
lm(USRALLIESA ~ d.rallies ,data=df)
```

```
lm(USRALLIESB ~ d.rallies ,data=df)
```

```
lm(USLEFTA ~ d.rallies ,data=df)
```

```
lm(USLEFTB ~ d.rallies ,data=df)
```

```
lm(USRIGHTA ~ d.rallies ,data=df)
```

```
lm(USRIGHTB ~ d.rallies ,data=df)
```

We will also interact the rallies treatment with ideological positioning. For these regressions, we will use two-tailed p-values:

```
lm(USLEFTA ~ d.rallies*(IDEOLOGY) ,data=df)
```

```
lm(USLEFTB ~ d.rallies*(IDEOLOGY) ,data=df)
```

```
lm(USRIGHTA ~ d.rallies*(11-IDEOLOGY) ,data=df)
```

```
lm(USRIGHTB ~ d.rallies*(11-IDEOLOGY) ,data=df)
```

(Note that we use 11-IDEOLOGY to reverse the direction in the USRIGHT regressions and make the results more easily comparable across the USRIGHT and USLEFT conditions - each in terms of consistency of actor with respondent's ideology).

3.2 Controls

We will also run the main analysis with controls for age, education, political interest, and partisanship.

```
AGE=2023 - Q2Y
```

```
EDU=ED.USA
```

```
POLINT=4 - POL1
```

```
DEM=as.numeric(USVB1011=="Democrat")
```

```
REP=as.numeric(USVB1011=="Republican")
```

```
lm(USCOURTA ~ d.court + AGE + EDU + POLINT + DEM + REP ,data=df)
```

```

lm(USCOURTB ~ d.court + AGE + EDU + POLINT + DEM + REP, data=df)
lm(USGERRYA ~ d.gerry + AGE + EDU + POLINT + DEM + REP, data=df)
lm(USGERRYB ~ d.gerry + AGE + EDU + POLINT + DEM + REP, data=df)
lm(USPACKA ~ d.pack + AGE + EDU + POLINT + DEM + REP, data=df)
lm(USPACKB ~ d.pack + AGE + EDU + POLINT + DEM + REP, data=df)
lm(USLEFTA ~ d.rallies + AGE + EDU + POLINT + DEM + REP, data=df)
lm(USLEFTB ~ d.rallies + AGE + EDU + POLINT + DEM + REP, data=df)
lm(USRIGHTA ~ d.rallies + AGE + EDU + POLINT + DEM + REP, data=df)
lm(USRIGHTB ~ d.rallies + AGE + EDU + POLINT + DEM + REP, data=df)

```

3.3 First vs Second Mover

We will also test, within the treatment groups, whether respondents rate the second mover's actions as more justified and as more consistent than the first mover. (e.g., do respondents give a higher score in USCOURTA versus USCOURTC?). Note that these analyses are observational.

For each module, we create two new dataframes. E.g., for the courts treatment, the first dataframe consists of USCOURTAC (where USCOURTAC is a vector listing every response to USCOURTA and every response to USCOURTC) and SECOND (where SECOND=1 for responses to USCOURTA and SECOND=0 for responses to USCOURTC). The second dataframe consists of USCOURTBD (where USCOURTBD is a vector listing every response to USCOURTB and every response to USCOURTD) and SECOND (where SECOND=1 for responses to USCOURTB and SECOND=0 for responses to USCOURTD).

```

lm(USCOURTAC ~ SECOND, data=dfcourt1)
lm(USCOURTBD ~ SECOND, data=dfcourt2)
lm(USGERRYAC ~ SECOND, data=dfgerry1)
lm(USGERRYBD ~ SECOND, data=dfgerry2)
lm(USPACKAC ~ SECOND, data=dfpack1)
lm(USPACKBD ~ SECOND, data=dfpack2)
lm(USRALLIESAC ~ SECOND, data=dfrallies1)
lm(USRALLIESBD ~ SECOND, data=dfrallies2)

```

Pre-Analysis Plan: Tit-for-Tat and Public Perceptions of Anti-Democratic Behavior in Peru and Colombia

December 8, 2023

1 Introduction

In this experiment, we study whether voters become more accepting of undemocratic behavior when it is seen as a response to undemocratic behavior from the other side.

2 Survey Design and Randomization

2.1 Sample

We will conduct the experiment on two national samples: one in Colombia and one in Peru. The surveys will be conducted online in December 2023 with a targeted sample size of 1000 respondents per country. We will conduct the same analyses on each sample (separately), as described below.

2.2 Randomization

Randomization will occur across three dimensions. Each dimension has two groups, and respondents will be randomly assigned using simple randomization with equal probabilities. All dimensions will be assigned independently.

Dimensions:

- $d.court \in \{0, 1\}$
- $d.rallies \in \{0, 1\}$
- $d.pack \in \{0, 1\}$

2.3 Experimental Module

For the next few questions, we will describe some actions that government officials might take. These examples are hypothetical – they are not intended to refer to any specific, real-life government official.

We would like to know how democratic do you think each one is, and whether or not it is an appropriate action.

2.3.1 Scenario 1: Courts

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: Randomly assign respondents to d.court=1 or d.court=0]- -

[PROGRAMMING NOTE: SHOW COURT-CON INTRO IF d.court=0]-

-[COURT-CON INTRO]:- Courts have ruled against a number of the president's policies, but the president has ignored these rulings and continued to implement the policies anyway.

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: SHOW COURT-TR INTRO IF d.court=1]-

-[COURT-TR INTRO]:- Courts have ruled against a number of the president's policies, but the president has ignored these rulings and continued to implement the policies anyway. The president says the court rulings are illegitimate because a previous opposition government recently packed the courts with loyalists.

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK COURTA AND COURTB TO ALL RESPONDENTS]-

COURTA Would you say the president's actions are consistent with democratic principles?

- 1. Very consistent
- 2. Somewhat consistent
- 3. Somewhat inconsistent
- 4. Very inconsistent

COURTB Would you say the president's actions were justified?

- 1. Very justified
- 2. Somewhat justified
- 3. Somewhat unjustified
- 4. Very unjustified

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK COURTC AND COURTD IF d.court=1]-

COURTC Would you say the previous opposition government's actions are consistent with democratic principles?

- 1. Very consistent
- 2. Somewhat consistent
- 3. Somewhat inconsistent

- 4. Very inconsistent

COURTD Would you say the previous opposition government's actions were justified?

- 1. Very justified
- 2. Somewhat justified
- 3. Somewhat unjustified
- 4. Very unjustified

2.3.2 Scenario 2: Rallies

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: Randomly assign respondents to d.rallies=1 or d.rallies=0]-

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: SHOW RIGHT-CON INTRO IF d.rallies=0]-

-[RALLY-CON INTRO]:- This year, the new government banned opposition groups from holding public rallies.

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: Show RIGHT-TR INTRO if d.rallies=1]-

-[RALLY-TR INTRO]:- Last year, the government banned opposition groups from holding public rallies. This year, the new government banned opposition groups from holding public rallies.

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK RALLYA AND RALLYB TO ALL RESPONDENTS]-

RALLYA Would you say the new government's actions are consistent with democratic principles?

- 1. Very consistent
- 2. Somewhat consistent
- 3. Somewhat inconsistent
- 4. Very inconsistent

RALLYB Would you say the new government's actions were justified?

- 1. Very justified
- 2. Somewhat justified
- 3. Somewhat unjustified
- 4. Very unjustified

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK RALLYC AND RALLYD IF d.rallies=1]-

RALLYC Would you say the previous government's actions are consistent with democratic principles?

- 1. Very consistent
- 2. Somewhat consistent
- 3. Somewhat inconsistent
- 4. Very inconsistent

RALLYD Would you say the previous government's actions were justified?

- 1. Very justified
- 2. Somewhat justified
- 3. Somewhat unjustified
- 4. Very unjustified

2.3.3 Scenario 3: Court-packing

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: Randomly assign respondents to d.pack=1 or d.pack=0]-

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: SHOW PACK-CON INTRO IF d.pack=0]-

-[PACK-CON INTRO]:- The president selected loyalists to courts to rule in favor of a number of their policies.

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: SHOW PACK-TR INTRO if d.pack=1]-

-[PACK-TR INTRO]:- The president has selected loyalists to courts to rule in favor of a number of their policies, after an opposition government did so in a previous term.

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK PACKA AND PACKB TO ALL RESPONDENTS]-

PACKA Would you say the president's actions are consistent with democratic principles?

- 1. Very consistent
- 2. Somewhat consistent
- 3. Somewhat inconsistent
- 4. Very inconsistent

PACKB Would you say the president's actions were justified?

- 1. Very justified
- 2. Somewhat justified
- 3. Somewhat unjustified
- 4. Very unjustified

-[PROGRAMMING NOTE: ASK PACKC AND PACKD IF d.pack=1]-

PACKC Would you say the previous opposition government's actions are consistent with democratic principles?

- 1. Very consistent
- 2. Somewhat consistent
- 3. Somewhat inconsistent
- 4. Very inconsistent

PACKD Would you say the previous opposition government's actions were justified?

- 1. Very justified
- 2. Somewhat justified
- 3. Somewhat unjustified
- 4. Very unjustified

2.4 Additional (Pre-Treatment) Variables for Analysis

VB10. At this time, do you identify with any political party?

VB11. With which party do you identify?

3 Analysis Plans

For all of our analyses, we will use one-tailed p-values unless otherwise specified, with a threshold of $p < 0.05$ for significance.

For all outcome variables, we will reverse the coding direction (so 4=very justified and 1=very unjustified, and 4=very consistent and 1=very inconsistent)

3.1 Main outcomes

We will test whether treatment increases responses on each “A” and “B” outcome (makes respondents view the behavior as more consistent and as more justified).

```
lm(COURTA ~ d.court , data=df)
```

```
lm(COURTB ~ d.court , data=df)
```

```
lm(PACKA ~ d.pack , data=df)
```

```
lm(PACKB ~ d.pack , data=df)
```

```
lm(RALLIESA ~ d.rallies , data=df)
```

```
lm(RALLIESB ~ d.rallies , data=df)
```

3.2 Partisanship

We will also test for differences in the effects among partisans versus non-partisans.

```
lm(COURTA ~ d.court*VB10, data=df)
```

```
lm(COURTB ~ d.court*VB10, data=df)
```

```
lm(PACKA ~ d.pack*VB10, data=df)
```

```
lm(PACKB ~ d.pack*VB10, data=df)
```

```
lm(RALLIESA ~ d.rallies*VB10, data=df)
```

```
lm(RALLIESB ~ d.rallies*VB10, data=df)
```

3.3 First vs Second Mover

We will also test, within the treatment groups, whether respondents rate the second mover's actions as more justified and as more consistent than the first mover. (e.g., do respondents give a higher score in COURTA versus COURTC?). Note that these analyses are observational.

For each module, we create two new dataframes. E.g., for the courts treatment, the first dataframe consists of COURTAC (where COURTAC is a vector listing every response to COURTA and every response to COURTC) and SECOND (where SECOND=1 for responses to COURTA and SECOND=0 for responses to COURTC). The second dataframe consists of COURTBBD (where COURTBBD is a vector listing every response to COURTB and every response to COURTD) and SECOND (where SECOND=1 for responses to COURTB and SECOND=0 for responses to COURTD).

```
lm(COURTAC ~ SECOND, data=dfcourt1)
```

```
lm(COURTBBD ~ SECOND, data=dfcourt2)
```

```
lm(PACKAC ~ SECOND, data=dfpack1)
```

```
lm(PACKBD ~ SECOND, data=dfpack2)
```

```
lm(RALLIESAC ~ SECOND, data=dfrallies1)
```

```
lm(RALLIESBD ~ SECOND, data=dfrallies2)
```

