

Democratic Citizenship in the United States: Measuring Democratic Support during the Trump Era¹

Hannah June Kim²

Maneesh Arora³

Summary

Democracy is often viewed as the most preferred system of government, yet the former election of Donald Trump has made scholars question the commitment of U.S. citizens to democracy. The purpose of this study is to examine support for democracy along party lines during the Trump era. Utilizing a unique measure of democratic citizenship from an original survey conducted in 2018, we find that support across the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of democratic citizenship is lower among Republicans than Democrats. Moreover, the results of an embedded survey experiment demonstrate that Republicans are more receptive to a political leader who censors the media relative to Democrats. Our results suggest that, while democratic norms may have eroded long before Trump, his 2016 election may have spurred the process and that this may have significant implications for the upcoming 2024 elections.

Keywords

Democratic Support, Trump, Partisanship, U.S. Politics, Survey Data

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2 Assistant Professor, Graduate School of International Studies, Sogang University, hannahkim@sogang.ac.kr

3 Assistant Professor, Political Science Department, Wellesley College, maneesh.arora@wellesley.edu

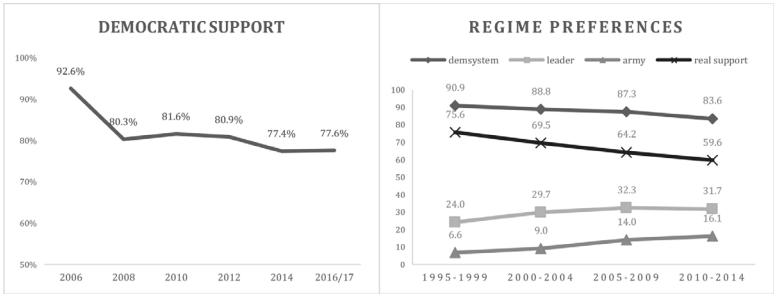
“Genuine democracy is not simply a machine that, once set up, functions by itself. It depends on the people.” -Inglehart and Welzel

The universal democratization thesis contends that democracy is emerging both as a universal value and as the universally preferred system of government, asserting that it is the only political model with global appeal (Inglehart and Welzel, 2003, 2005; Welzel, 2013; Fukuyama, 1992). As one of the oldest democracies in the world, the United States has consistently provided support for this thesis. Indeed, since The American Voter in 1960, extant scholarship has measured and monitored political capabilities of U.S. citizens. Much of the prominent literature on democracy and democratic support, moreover, has found that Americans are fully supportive of a liberal democracy, with its free elections, rule of law, human rights, and civil liberties. They are viewed to be aware and knowledgeable of politics and politically active through civic engagement in their communities (Norris, 1999; Dalton, 2008; Almond and Verba, 1963; Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry, 1996).

However, with the 2016 election of Donald Trump, many prominent scholars and pundits have questioned the commitment of U.S. citizens to democracy (Bowler, Carreras, and Merolla, 2022; Justwan and Williamson, 2022; Hall and Druckmann, 2023; Bartels 2018; Graham and Svobik,

2020). Trump’s anti-democratic rhetoric, frequent attacks on central democratic institutions, and admiration for authoritarian leadership may have weakened democratic support among the public (Hall and Druckmann, 2023). Even more worrisome, this trend may have begun long before Trump took office. In fact, our analysis of a Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) survey item that asks whether democracy can be viewed as the best form of government shows that democratic support in America has consistently declined over the past decade.⁴

[Figure 1, Support for Democracy over Time]



Of course, analyzing authentic democratic support is a complex task and analyzing measures of support by using just one question based on democracy, such as the LAPOP item shown above, is often criticized because it can lead to skewed results (see Chu, Welsh, and Weatherall, 2012; Dalton and Shin, 2014). A direct and generic question that includes the word “democracy” may lead to biased results due to the brand name that the term carries. There

4 Question wording: Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements? Scale is from 1 to 7.

are many people who remain sympathetic to democracy in theory and in the abstract while remaining antagonistic and hostile to its core principles (Schedler and Sarsfield, 2007). As such, it is important to consider support for other regime types in order to find people's true preferences. Dalton and Shin (2014), for example, deduct preferences for autocracy from preferences for democracy in order to measure true preferences for democracy. Adopting this approach, the second graph in Figure 1 above incorporates data from the World Values Survey and also takes into account an average of two questions based on support for authoritarian characteristics and deducts this from the question based on support for democracy. The "real support" trend line in the second graph of Figure 1 demonstrates that support for democracy, when calculated in this manner, has slightly decreased since 1995.

Still, manifold conceptualizations and measurements exist for democracy and the concept remains highly contested with different meanings to different people, varying in quality and quantity as well as cross-nationally and longitudinally (Ariely, 2015; Ariely and Davidov, 2011; de Regt, 2013; Moncagatta, 2015; Shin and Kim, 2017). Democracy remains both abstract and contested, which prevents its clear and coherent operationalization (Coppedge, Gerring, Bernhard, Fish, Hicken, Kroenig, Lindberg, McMann, Paxton, Semetko, Skaaning, Staton, and Teorell, 2011; Shin and Kim, 2018). To better measure democratic support and overcome these limitations, we adopt the notion of democratic citizenship as a more comprehensive measure of authentic support.

Democratic citizenship entails how well people understand democracy, how much affection they have towards it, and how willing

they are to act upon it. These three core dimensions of democratic citizenship, originally introduced by Shin, Park, and Jang (2005), are referred to as cognitive, affective, and behavioral, respectively. They help explain whether or not people fully embrace democracy as “the only game in town.” Though there has been a great deal of public opinion research on the subject of measuring support over the past two decades (see Bratton, 2010; Nathan, 2007; Easton, 1975; Shin and Cho, 2010; Welzel, 2011), discussions of this research to date have only addressed parts of democratic citizenship and have not utilized a full and comprehensive account of it in their measurements of democratic support in the United States. In order to more accurately interrogate trends in democratic support, our study utilizes democratic citizenship through an original survey conducted in 2018.

We further identify an important limitation in the current democratic literature: the lack of attention paid to partisan identification in democratic support in the United States. Extant scholarship indicates that partisan divides over political values and opinions are larger now than in recent decades (Pew Research Center, 2017; Graham and Svobik, 2020; Abramowitz and McCoy, 2019; Iyengar, Lelkes, Levendusky, Malhotra, and Westwood, 2018). The 2016 election of Donald Trump incited greater interest in investigating signals of diminishing democratic support from the public and the potential erosion of democratic norms and institutions (Lieberman, Pepinsky, Roberts, and Valelly, 2018). Scholars, political pundits, and social commentators alike lamented Trump’s attacks on central democratic institutions such as the media and his politicization of the rule of law, while he was in office. But, given Trump’s favorability among the

political Right and his historical unfavorability among the political Left, any discussion of the erosion of democratic support is incomplete without examining democratic support along partisan lines (Kingzette Druckman, Klar, Krupnikov, Levendusky, and Ryan, 2021). Many of the individuals and groups that Trump derided during his time in office became more popular, occasioned by increased support among Democrats (Sides, Tesler, Vavreck, 2018; Telhami, 17/01/28; Pew Research Center, 2017). Trump's former and continuing attacks on democratic institutions may have decreased democratic support among Republicans but may have had an entirely different effect on Democrats.

This study asks how much Americans supported democracy during the Trump era and analyzes whether this support differed along partisan lines. Contrary to previous scholarship, we ask two broad questions about democratic support. First, do citizens in the U.S. support democracy? Do they support democracy with a full and accurate understanding of what it entails? Second, what is the role of partisanship in democratic support in the Trump era?

We might expect partisanship to play only a small role because of how fundamental democracy is to the United States and the long history of democratic support among its citizenry. On the other hand, political polarization reached a zenith during the Trump era, and Trump's attacks on democratic institutions were unprecedented for a president in modern U.S. history. If partisanship does influence democratic support, this has important implications for the health of democracy in the U.S. as well as the role of political elites and political polarization in contributing to democratic deconsolidation. We aim to

answer this question through an original survey with accurate measures of democratic citizenship and an embedded survey experiment.

This paper is structured as follows. We first discuss the current debate on the consolidation and deconsolidation of democracy and introduce the notion of democratic citizenship along with our measurement of democratic citizenship. Then, we discuss the effects of partisanship on democratic support and describe how Donald Trump influenced the ways in which people, particularly Republicans, have changed in their support for democracy through cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Afterwards, we explain our data and methods and present results derived from an original dataset conducted in 2018. We conclude with a discussion of the findings, implications, and areas for further research.

The Democracy Debate

The theory of democratic consolidation has been prominent within political science with the idea that democracy becomes stable through strong institutions, a vibrant civil society, and wealth. Indeed, democratic support remains robust in established democracies through growing political sophistication among the youth and increasing regime legitimacy over time (Norris, 1999, Dalton, 2014, Welzel, 2013). Other studies, however, warn of democratic deconsolidation in which people

show withdrawal in democratic support (Foa and Mounk, 2016, 2017). Both sides of the argument have attracted considerable attention due to the possibility that disillusionment and the erosion of norms may lead to the deconsolidation of democracy in the U.S., despite being one of the oldest democratic nations. This was particularly visible during the Trump era (Grumbach, 2022, 2023; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018), where increasing mistrust and mutual intolerance (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018) and growing disillusionment with liberal democratic institutions, less satisfaction with democracy, and more openness to other regime alternatives (Foa and Mounk, 2016) seemed to lead the country into becoming a “democracy without guardrails” (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018).

These arguments, however, rest on the idea that democracy is highly dependent on their citizens’ continuing and widespread support, as it helps in its both the survival and effectiveness (Qi and Shin, 2011; Dalton, 1999; Easton, 1975). Yet existing studies measuring democratic support remain limited in breadth and depth. Our study contributes to this debate by examining support for democracy in a multidimensional way through the notion of democratic citizenship.⁵

Democratic Citizenship

Democratic citizenship is a multidimensional concept.⁶ It

⁵ As far as the authors know, no other data set includes a comprehensive list of questions for measuring democratic citizenship in the United States. The VOTER Survey does not have cognitive and behavioral measures of democratic citizenship, while the World Values Survey does not have cognitive questions in the way we operationalize democratic citizenship.

⁶ For varying definitions on this concept, see Bratton, 2013; Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry, 1996.

is treated meaningfully here as a phenomenon with three main characteristics: cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Shin et al., 2005). Existing studies on democratic citizenship measure each dimension in broad ways. The cognitive characteristic emphasizes how well people understand democracy, including perceptions of democratic regimes and knowledge of democratic characteristics. How interested are people in politics? How clearly do they understand democracy? The affective dimension focuses on favoring democracy over other forms of government as both political ideals and a collective political enterprise (Shin et al., 2005). It also emphasizes how important democracy is to them. Do ordinary citizens feel affection towards democratic regimes? Do they feel attached to existing forms of government (Chu, Welsh, and Weatherall, 2012)? The behavioral dimension is equated to defending democracy (Shin et al., 2005). This trait refers to the willingness to fight for democracy through political activity and by prioritizing it over other issues. Are citizens willing to defend democratic rule, even in spite of its failures? Will they continue to protect democracy even if their democratic institutions do not perform to the satisfaction of its citizenry? These three core dimensions of democratic citizenship work to examine political sophistication, through levels of informed and structured thinking, all of which help measure how well people understand democracy and how they react to it. It can further show whether or not they truthfully embrace democracy as “the only game in town” (Przeworski, 1991).

[Figure 2 Democratic Citizenship and its Dimensions]

Cognitive	Affective	Behavioral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · How well do citizens understand democracy? · How interested are they in politics? · How much political efficacy do they believe they have? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · How much affection do citizens feel towards democracy and towards their national communities? · Do they feel attached to existing forms of government? · Are they likely to embrace democracy as the 'only game in town' ? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · How willing are citizens to fight for democracy? · Are citizens willing to defend democratic rule, in spite of its failures? · Will they continue to protect democracy even if their democratic institutions do not perform to the satisfaction of its citizenry?

While these questions broadly capture each dimension, we observe each dimension more specifically since some of the questions in each dimension are not appropriate to our study. In order to examine how well people understand democracy for the cognitive measure in our study, it is important to see whether they can identify democratic countries. As such, we incorporate a measure that looks at whether individuals can accurately identify democratic and nondemocratic countries. For the affective measure, since it is vital to get an accurate measure of support, we examine both support for authoritarianism and support for democracy as a system of government to see whether democracy is supported as “the only game in town.” For the behavioral dimension, since this focuses on defending democracy, we focus on whether individuals will participate in both conventional and non-conventional forms of political participation.

This specific measure of democratic support is used for several reasons. Most importantly, however, existing scholarship often focuses on one or few of these measures but they often fail to consider an all-

encompassing measure of support (Shin et al., 2005). By incorporating the notion of democratic citizenship and by using these specific measures, this study examines not just how citizens support democracy as a form of government but also whether individuals clearly understand democracy as a type of regime and whether they would act to protect democracy if a situation arises in which they need to defend it. Ultimately, these measures allow us to analyze democratic support in an in-depth, comprehensive, and unabridged way. That is, the level of support ordinary citizens exhibit in each of the three dimensions can separately allow us to distinguish the degree of support individuals have and altogether show how much individuals support democracy in its entirety. The sections below describe how and why this is a particularly relevant line of research when examined during the Trump era.

How Partisanship Influences Democratic Support

An analysis of political polarization over three decades found that polarization reached new heights during the Obama era, and has continued to expand during Trump's tenure (Pew Research Center, 2017). Democrats and Republicans are split on seemingly everything; from political and social values to the kinds of communities they live in to the types of friends they engage with. The report further finds that partisan

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animosity has increased, with 81% of both Democrats and Republicans holding an unfavorable view of the opposing party. Partisans are particularly split on presidential approval. Gallup weekly polls show approval among Republicans consistently above 80%, and approval among Democrats consistently in single digits (Gallup, 2018). In fact, the partisan gap in job approval is the largest for any president dating back at least to Dwight D. Eisenhower (Pew Research Center, 2017). With such large partisan gaps, we expect there to be partisan differences in democratic support, particularly given Trump's frequent attacks on central democratic institutions.

Partisan identification has long been considered the most highly crystallized attitude in American politics (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes, 1960; Converse, 1964; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 2002). Individuals tend to adopt the positions of the party that they identify with. That is, party identification leads to the adoption of partisan attitudes rather than the reverse. In fact, partisan ties have a pervasive and enduring effect on the way in which individuals interpret and react to political stimuli (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 2002; Zaller, 1992). Bartels (2002) demonstrates that partisan bias can produce real differences in the views and attitudes of Republicans and Democrats. In other cases, partisan bias halts what should be a convergence in political views. Even when Republicans and Democrats are presented with the same information, or have similar experiences, political evaluations and perceptions of objective social, political, and economic conditions can be vastly different (Bartels, 2002; Taber and Lodge, 2006). Partisan attachments can thus lead to markedly different perceptions of objective reality and strongly

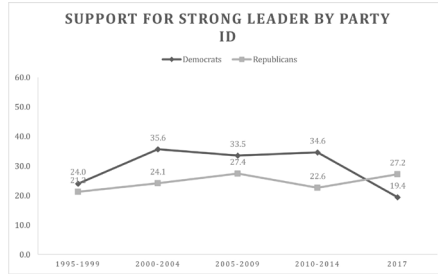
influence individuals' political preferences. This is particularly relevant in an era of hyper-partisanship.

The former election of Donald Trump and the possibility of his re-election has made the question of support for democratic institutions increasingly salient, not only in regards to his style of leadership but also based on the views of his Republican supporters. One of the major questions, then, comes from whether or not Republicans support democracy and democratic institutions. An examination of the World Values Survey (WVS) and the 2017 VOTER Survey indicate similar levels of partisan support for a “strong leader”.⁷ By combining the data from the WVS and the 2017 VOTER Survey, Figure 3 measures mean support for a “strong leader” among Democrats and Republicans over time, from 1995 to 2014. The data shows that Democrats were more likely to support a strong leader, while the trend reverses in 2017 where Republicans are about nine percentage points more supportive.⁸

7 U.S.-based surveys such as the American National Election Study and Cooperative Congressional Election Study do not contain questions on democratic citizenship as defined in this study. Therefore, we rely on the WVS and VOTER survey for our analysis. Data from 1995–2014 comes from the WVS while data for 2017 comes from the VOTER survey.

8 Appendix A shows partisan support for democratic citizenship from 1995 to 2014 using the World Values Survey. The results similarly show only a small separation between Republicans and Democrats in terms of support for democracy.

[Figure 3. Support for Strong Leader by Party ID]



For two decades Democrats were more supportive of strong leaders. However, the results above suggest that a change has taken place between 2014 and 2017. This may be due to the role of elites and the cues they provide. Extant scholarship demonstrates that elite cues have strong influence on the political attitudes and policy preferences of the general public (Carmines and Stimson, 1986; Zaller, 1992; Berinsky, 2007; Tesler, 2015). This tends to be the case even among well-informed citizens in their political decision-making. Indeed, individuals rarely employ their own reasoning when confronting political stimuli (Zaller, 1992). In fact, cue-based processing tends to influence public opinion more strongly than the actual content of the messages (Iyengar and Valentino, 2000). Donald Trump’s anti-democratic rhetoric that started prior to his administration and continues on today may be weakening democratic support among Republicans, and strengthening it among Democrats.

The Donald Trump Effect

A little over a year into Donald Trump’s presidency, there has been a fervor regarding the erosion of American democracy. Media headlines such as “Is Donald Trump Ending American Democracy?”,

“Trump and the Decline of Democracy”, and “How a Democracy Dies” have become commonplace.⁹ Recent academic studies have also raised significant concern of authoritarian practices and messages. In one study, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) argued that four factors identify an authoritarian leader – the rejection of democratic institutions, denial of the legitimacy of political opponents, tolerating or encouraging violence, and curtailing civil liberties – many of which have been correlated with Trump’s behavior.

During the 2016 election, Trump made numerous unsubstantiated claims that the election was rigged against him (Martin and Burns, 16/10/16). In addition, he threatened to lock up Hillary Clinton (Applebaum, 2016), and promoted violence against his opponents at political rallies (Abramson, 17/04/02). Since his election, Trump and Attorney General Jeff Sessions have rolled back civil rights and civil liberties protections on racial profiling, gender-based policing, and school discipline (McCurdy, 2017). Trump further showed support and admiration for authoritarian leaders such as Putin, Erdogan, and Duterte, and praised Xi Jinping for consolidating his power in China, jesting that the U.S. might also do the same during his term.

Trump’s attacks on central democratic institutions were even more troubling. Trump effectively turned the rule of law, a bedrock of American democracy, into a partisan issue. Whether it was forcefully

⁹ The articles are found in Newsweek (<http://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-ending-american-democracy-742561>), the New York Times (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/04/opinion/trump-democracy-problem.html>), and Slate (<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/03/support-for-democracy-is-a-partisrepublican-issue-now.html>).

suggesting that Hillary Clinton should be locked up, or pardoning Joe Arpaio, or showering attacks on the FBI and its' Russia investigation, Trump transitioned the rule of law from being a commonly accepted democratic norm to a politicized issue (Rucker and Costa, 18/02/03). In addition, Trump called checks and balances “archaic” and made frequent references to censoring the media (Blake, 17/05/02). What is more, a study by Drutman, Diamond, and Goldman (2018) found that those who supported Trump in the Republican primary were among the least likely to support democratic institutions, though this study only took into account support for a strong leader as a measure of authoritarian support.¹⁰ Not all individuals who support or favor Trump do so because they agree with Trump’s anti-democratic stance or statements. In fact, approximately 140 million Americans continue to approve of Trump and many of Trump’s supporters became more diverse over time (Kinsman and Frimer, 2021; Tucker, Torres, Sinclair, and Smith, 2019). However, existing studies show that there is a strong correlation between political conservatism and support for Trump (Frimer and Skitka, 2018). What is more, still many of his followers show more politically authoritarian attitudes to the point where authoritarian attitudes ended up becoming one of the main predictors of support for Trump in 2016 (Donovan, 2019).

As such, we expect that these theories go beyond primary supporters and that Republicans in general were less supportive of

10 The Drutman et al. (2018) study only analyzes the affective dimension of our measure of democratic citizenship. Moreover, we expand upon this affective dimension by adding in another measure: support for army rule.

democracy during the Trump era due to hyper-partisanship and elite influences. The strong influence of partisanship and elite rhetoric on public attitudes, combined with Trump's broad influence among Republicans and frequent attacks on democratic institutions, leads us to expect that support for democracy among Republicans should be lower than Democrats during Trump's presidency.

Hypothesis 1: Democratic support among Republicans was lower in the Trump era as compared to Democrats.

To be sure, democratic norms were beginning to erode before Trump became a prominent political figure. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) cite a variety of examples from Newt Gingrich's effort to impeach Bill Clinton to Mitch McConnell and Senate Republicans blocking the nomination of Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court. However, we argue that Trump accelerated the process through his harsh criticism of democratic properties such as free media, frequent attacks on the rule of law, and questioning the legitimacy of fair elections during his term.

We further expect that support for democracy among Republicans decreased across all three measures of democratic citizenship. As the former elected leader of one of the oldest democracies, Trump's statements and actions can alter the public's perception of what democracy entails. His former and current actions and rhetoric have suggested authoritarian tendencies, attracting Republicans to those traits. It may have further convinced them to believe that a democratic leader's behavior is supposed to be as such. Indeed, prominent literature has found that the public is more likely to change their

perceptions of an issue rather than change their partisan attachments (Bartels, 2002).

Republicans may have changed their perception of what a democracy entails in order to fit Trump's behaviors into their definition of democracy. As such, we expect Republicans' support of democracy to decrease in all three dimensions of democratic citizenship. Cognitively, their support decreases due to poor democratic understanding. Affectively, they start to find more importance in authoritarian characteristics due to the former president's seeming affection for authoritarian leaders and practices. Behaviorally, they are less likely to defend democracy through conventional and unconventional forms of political participation because they have less attachment to democracy, influenced by Trump's derision of democratic institutions.

Hypothesis 2: Republicans had lower levels of democratic citizenship than Democrats in the Trump era.

Even among numerous tenets of democracy, Trump focused particular disdain on one: the media. Throughout his candidacy, and especially after assuming office, Trump attacked the media nearly every time he and his administration are portrayed in a negative light. This is problematic given the important role free media plays in a functioning democracy. The media provides the institutional basis for creating and maintaining an informed and engaged citizenry (Aalberg and Curran, 2012; McChesney, 2015). While Trump's rhetoric on most issues

has often been inconsistent, he has remained consistent in his contempt for the media. As such, we argue that this has had a strong effect on Republican attitudes towards the news media, which is often viewed as the fourth branch of government, and free speech in general, which remains a fundamental aspect of democracy.

Hypothesis 3: Republicans were more receptive than Democrats to a leader who is attempting to censor the media during the Trump era.

Data and Methods

To test our hypotheses, we ran an original survey using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) during the Trump administration in 2018. Our sample of 619 respondents was collected from March 12, 2018 to March 14, 2018. Respondents were paid to complete a survey which took on average about six minutes to complete. MTurk may be criticized for its opt-in nature. However, it presents several advantages for our study. First, studies which compare MTurk results to those found in nationally representative samples tend to find similar results (Mullinix, Leeper, Druckman, and Freese, 2015; Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling, 2011). Moreover, studies of MTurk respondents have found that samples drawn from MTurk tend to be more representative of the national population than other convenience samples (Huff and Tingley, 2015, Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling,

2011). Most importantly for our particular study, Clifford, Stewart, and Waggoner (2015) found that self-identified liberals and conservatives in MTurk samples are similar to liberals and conservatives in the mass public. Thus, MTurk presents a reliable avenue to examine partisan differences in support for democracy.

Survey Design

Respondents were asked a series of questions gauging support for democratic and authoritarian regimes, as well as a series of political attitude and demographic questions. To examine our main independent variable of partisanship, i.e., differences between Republicans and Democrats, we asked a question on political party identification.¹¹ For the first dependent variable of democratic support, we asked a question on preference for democracy as well as preference for authoritarianism. For the second dependent variable of democratic citizenship, we incorporated one question for the cognitive measure; two questions for the affective dimension; and two questions for the behavioral dimension.

Additionally, in relation to our third hypothesis, we embedded a survey experiment to test support for a fictional country leader. We randomly assign respondents to one of two vignettes. Both vignettes present Williams, the elected leader of an unspecified democratic nation. Williams is portrayed positively – during his first term the economy grew and unemployment declined. The first vignette then

¹¹ This survey item included the options of *Democrat, Republican, Independent, and Other*.

suggests that Williams strongly believes in a free media and would not censor the media even if false information was being spread. In the second vignette Williams believes that the government should censor the media due to the spread of fake news.¹² Respondents are then asked how likely they would be to vote for Williams if they lived in his country, with answer choices ranging from very unlikely (1) to very likely (4). Thus, we are able to isolate and test the effect of media censorship on support for the candidate.

Results

Democratic Support

In order to find a better measure for democratic support, one that takes into account both democratic and nondemocratic regime preferences, we took a question based on support for democracy and deducted out an average of two questions based on support for autocratic traits.¹³ Using this measure shows that, on average, the mean support for democracy among respondents is 76.6%. When looking at this by partisanship, however, we found clear distinctions, with Republicans showing an average democratic support of 71.2% as

¹² See Appendix B for full question wording

¹³ See Appendix C–J for full question wording of all democratic citizenship measures.

compared to 81.3% for Democrats. In other words, democrats had an average democratic support that is 10% higher than Republicans, as expected by Hypothesis 1.

[Table 1. Support for Democracy, Autocracy, and Democratic Countries]

	Democracy		Authoritarian		Democratic Country	
	Democratic Support	Democratic Understanding	Multiple Party	Leaders	Democratic Now	Democratic 5 Years Ago
Democrats	81.3%	65.2%	85.6%	40.9%	48.6%	67.4%
Republicans	71.2%	66.3%	79.4%	34.8%	63.2%	59.8%

In order to better analyze how well citizens understand and support democracy, we asked about their preferences for authoritarian characteristics, including questions about whether they prefer one party or multiple party systems and how leaders should act. On average, Republicans were 6% less likely to find value in both multi-party systems and the notion that leaders implement what voters want, both of which are prominent traits of a democracy. When asked about government responsibility, Republicans were 29% more likely to believe that people should be responsible for their own success, a trait commonly correlated to the party.

Moreover, Democrats were on average 10% more likely to feel that it is important to live in a country that is governed democratically. We also ask questions about whether or not the respondents view the United States as being governed democratically, both during the Trump administration and five years prior to the Trump administration. While Republicans were 8% less likely to believe that the country was democratic five years prior, they were

25% more likely to believe that the country was more democratic during the Trump era.

The descriptive statistics show that Republicans were less supportive of democracy, showed more support for authoritarian characteristics, and showed less democratic support than Democrats, and it also showed that they were less likely to believe that it is important to live in a democracy. Republicans believed that the country was more democratic during the Trump era than five years prior, which may be attributed to having a Republican president then and a Democratic president five years prior.

Support for Democratic Citizenship

Table 2 displays results from two sample t-tests for each aspect of democratic citizenship (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) among Democrats and Republicans. The cognitive measure included questions related to how well people understand democracy, asking respondents to rate whether certain countries were democratic.¹⁴ We listed seven countries and asked respondents to rate whether or not the countries were democratic¹⁵ and then created an additive index with all of these

¹⁴ There are other detailed measures for cognitive democratic understandings, such as looking at differences between substantive and procedural definitions of democracy (see Dalton, Shin, and Jou, 2007), but this measure provides a clear and simple account of whether or not respondents know which countries are democratic.

¹⁵ We list three non-democratic countries of China, Russia, and Iran, and four democratic countries of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and France.

questions.¹⁶ The affective measure included two survey questions. First, we subtracted questions based on support for authoritarianism from support for democracy, as shown in Hypothesis 1. Measuring democracy in this form allowed us to measure real support among Democrats and Republicans. Second, we used a question based on the importance of democracy. For the behavioral aspect of democratic citizenship, we used a measure of four different non-conventional forms of political participation, including questions on whether or not they joined political movements, joined boycotts, attended peaceful demonstrations, or have been involved in any other act of protest.¹⁷

The partisan difference in the cognitive dimension was small, with a 6% difference that was significant at the $p < .1$ level. However, the affective dimension showed a 10% partisan difference in both measures (real support and importance of democracy), both significant at $p < .001$. Finally, there was a large partisan difference in political activity in the behavioral dimension at almost 15% ($p < .001$), but a negligible difference in voting.

¹⁶ In order to determine how democratic a particular country is, we use the ratings provided by Polity IV and the Democracy Index. For example, Iran can be confusing because it has elections and more than 50% of the population votes, but the country's Polity IV score shows -6 and it is considered authoritarian with a score of 2.45 on the Democracy Index.

¹⁷ Using a factor loading plot, one factor was retained. See appendix for analysis of each measure used separately as a dependent variable.

[Table 2. Mean Democratic Citizenship by Party]

Cognitive				
	N	Understanding		
Democrat	264	63.6% (0,016)		
Republican	141	58.7% (0,024)		
Difference		5,9*		
Affective				
	N	Real Support	N	Importance
Democrat	264	81.3% (0,012)	264	82.8% (0,013)
Republican	141	71.2% (0,021)	141	72.7% (0,022)
Difference		10,1***		10,1***
Behavioral				
	N	Action	N	Voting
Democrat	264	36,7% (0,023)	264	69,9% (0,019)
Republican	141	22,0% (0,028)	141	68,8% (0,026)
Difference		14,7***		1,1

+Significant at .10 * Significant at .05 Based on Two Sample T-Test, Standard Errors in Parentheses.

We further ran multiple Ordinary Least Squares regressions in order to measure the effects of party identification on support for democracy through the three aspects of democratic citizenship. In addition, models included covariates that extant scholarship has found to influence democratic support including education, gender, race, age, income, religiosity, religion (Christianity), marriage, and area (large city).

[Table 3. OLS results for Democratic Citizenship by Party ID]

	M1: Cognitive	M2: Affective	M3: Behavioral		
	Country	Support	Importance	Political Action	Vote
Party ID	-0,121** (-3.00)	-0,166*** (-5.08)	-0,223*** (-5.76)	-0,278*** (-4.91)	-0,178*** (-3.51)
Education	0,0720 (1.68)	0,0950** (2.75)	0,0417 (1.02)	0,0272 (0.45)	0,121* (2.25)
Female	-0,0301 (-1.48)	-0,0145 (-0.88)	-0,0225 (-1.15)	-0,0778** (-2.73)	0,0275 (1.07)
White	0,0109 (0.46)	0,0326 (1.71)	0,0395 (1.75)	0,0193 (0.58)	0,0700* (2.36)
Age	0,00452*** (5.42)	0,00404*** (5.98)	0,00501*** (6.25)	-0,000402 (-0.34)	0,00440*** (4.18)
Income	0,0173*** (4.94)	0,0113*** (3.99)	0,00905** (2.69)	-0,00168 (-0.34)	0,0169*** (3.82)
Religiosity	-0,0252*** (-3.84)	-0,0158** (-2.98)	-0,00622 (-0.99)	0,0342*** (3.72)	0,0213* (2.57)
Christian	0,0523* (2.16)	0,0225 (1.15)	0,0339 (1.46)	-0,0285 (-0.84)	0,0668* (2.19)
Married	-0,0528* (-2.45)	-0,0241 (-1.38)	-0,0146 (-0.71)	0,0220 (0.73)	0,0261 (0.96)
Large City	0,0176 (0.85)	-0,0147 (-0.88)	0,0112 (0.56)	0,0294 (1.01)	0,00121 (0.05)
Constant	0,393*** (8.06)	0,587*** (14.92)	0,576*** (12.34)	0,363*** (5.32)	0,221*** (3.59)
N	619	619	619	619	619
t statistics in parentheses					
=" * p<0,05 ** p<0,01 *** p<0,001"					

The results of Table 3 indicate that Republican identification

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decreased the likelihood of rating countries properly in regards to their regime type. That is, moving from a strong Democrat to a strong Republican predicted a decrease in cognitive support of 12.1%, significant at the $p < 0.01$ level. Among the control variables, age, income, and identification as a Christian predicted an increase in support for democracy while religiosity and marriage predicted a decrease in support. Using this cognitive measure, we found that Republicans were significantly less likely to have an accurate understanding of democracy.

The results for the affective measure of the multiple regression analysis showed that, for the first question, moving from a strong Democrat to a strong Republican decreased the likelihood of real support. Republicans were 16.6% less likely to believe that democratic governance is important or needed ($p < 0.001$). Among control variables, age and income increased support for democracy while religiosity decreased support. For the second question, moving from a strong Democrat to a strong Republican decreased the likelihood of a respondent feeling that it is important to live in a democratically governed country. In other words, Republicans were 22.3% less likely to believe that democratic governance is important or needed ($p < 0.001$). Of the control variables, age and income increased support for democracy.

The regression results for the behavioral aspect showed that, moving from a strong Democrat to a strong Republican decreased the likelihood for people to join in on unconventional forms of political participation by 27.8%. That is, Republicans were much less likely

to participate in non-conventional forms of political action ($p < 0.001$). Control variables indicated that gender and religiosity also affected support for democracy.

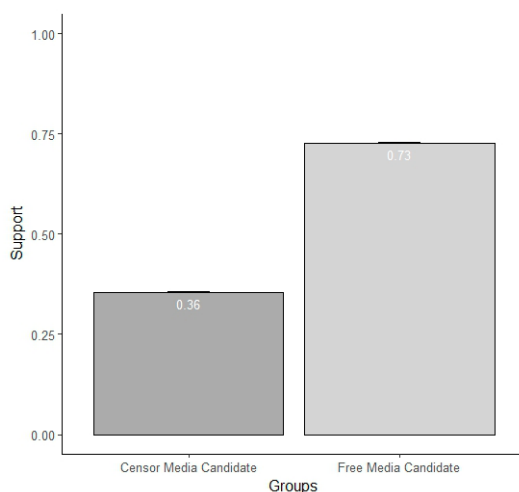
Similar results were shown for voting, the standard conventional form of participation. Republicans were 17.8% less likely to vote in comparison to those that identified more with Democrats. Education, race (white), age, income, religiosity, and Christianity increased democratic support.

Free Media vs. Censored Media

The experimental results in Figure 4 present respondents' mean levels of support for "free media" Williams, the leader who supports free and uncensored media, and "censored media" Williams, the leader who supports government censorship of the media. Mean support for the free media leader was significantly higher than for the censored media leader. Respondents were nearly 37% more likely to support the free media leader than the censor media leader. The difference in support was significant at the $p < .001$ level based on a two sample t-test. The results indicated that, overall, respondents were significantly more supportive of a leader who supports a free media environment than a leader who is in favor of censoring the media.¹⁸

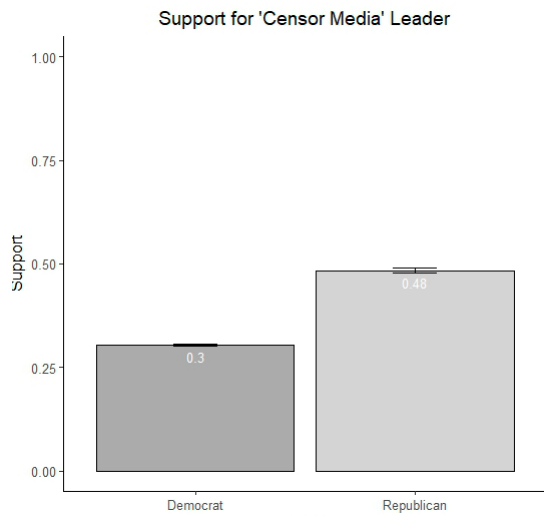
¹⁸ See Appendix K for raw results of two sample t-tests.

[Figure 4. Support for Leader who supports Censored & Free Media]



In Figure 5, we present partisan differences in leader support. For the free media leader, there was no difference in support among Democrats and Republicans. However, there was a substantial difference in support for the leader who is in favor of censoring the media. Mean support for the “censor media” leader was 16% higher among Republicans than Democrats, significant to the $p < .001$ level. The results indicate that Democrats and Republicans were equally likely to support a democratic leader, but Republicans were much more supportive of a leader with authoritarian tendencies regarding government censorship of the media.

[Figure 5. Support for Leader who Supports Free Media and Censors Media]



Republicans were significantly more likely to support a leader with authoritarian tendencies toward the media than were Democrats. However, we also conducted a regression analysis to ensure that imbalances in our sample were not influencing our results.

The results in Table 4 provide further support for our hypothesis that Republicans were more likely to support a leader with authoritarian tendencies toward the media than Democrats during the Trump era. Model 1 indicates that party identification has no effect on support for the free media leader. The coefficient is small ($\beta=-0.0315$) and not statistically significant. However, Model 2 indicates that party identification has a strong and statistically significant effect on support for the censor media leader. Moving from strong Democrat (0) to strong Republican (1) produced a 22% increase in support for the censor media leader, significant at the $p<.01$ level. Holding several variables

constant, the results indicated a large partisan split in support for a leader with authoritarian tendencies.

The regression results affirm that there were no partisan differences in support for a leader who is in favor of a free media environment, but Republicans were significantly more likely to support a leader in favor of censoring the media during the Trump administration.

[Table 4. OLS Results for Support of Leader based on Media]

	Model 1: Free Media	Model 2: Censor Media
Party ID	-0.0315 (-0.52)	0.226** (2.98)
Education	0.0763 (1.20)	-0.164* (-2.06)
Female	-0.00939 (-0.31)	0.0609 (1.59)
White	-0.0232 (-0.63)	-0.0176 (-0.42)
Age	0.00244* (2.05)	-0.00104 (-0.64)
Income	0.0129* (2.54)	0.00354 (0.52)
Religiosity	-0.00586 (-0.62)	0.0287* (2.22)
Christian	0.0437 (1.23)	0.0176 (0.38)
Married	-0.0560 (-1.77)	0.119** (2.92)
Large City	-0.0590 (-1.93)	0.00197 (0.05)
Constant	0.590*** (7.87)	0.235** (2.65)
N	310	309
t statistics in parentheses		
=	* p < 0.05	** p < 0.01
		*** p < 0.001

Conclusion

Shock spread throughout the world after Trump's victory in 2016, with many fearing the eroding effect his presidency might have on central democratic institutions. At the end of his term, there was still hope that democratic institutions will survive (Beauchamp, 18/01/30; Friedman, 18/01/30). And even with the current Biden administration working to make amends, Trump continues to come back into the spotlight. Just last November, Trump announced his campaign for a second presidential term in the 2024 U.S. presidential election (Watson, 22/11/15). Despite being indicted four times, on 91 charges, and being impeached twice, he could potentially become the front-runner for the Republican nomination during the 2024 presidential race (Kurtzelben, 23/10/04). Indeed, recent polls show that 46 percent of registered voters would choose Trump (Loffman, 23/10/04) and that 64 percent of Republicans want Trump to run again (Colvin and Sanders, 23/08/15). With the possible return of Trump in 2024, our findings indicate a troubling effect on a large portion of the American populace that may help Trump's rise back into political power in the near future.

While democratic norms had begun to erode long before Trump, our results indicate that his prior election spurred on the process. Indeed, our results show the effect of presidential approval on democratic citizenship, finding that higher approval of Trump predicts a decrease in all three dimensions of democratic citizenship.

[Table 5. OLS results for Democratic Citizenship by Presidential Approval]

	M1: ognitive	M2: Affective	M3: Behavioral		
	Country	Support	Important	Action	Vote
Presidential Approval	-0.288*** (-4.73)	-0.193*** (-7.39)	-0.105** (-3.28)	-0.0203 (-0.43)	0.0314 (0.74)
Party ID	-0.0215 (-0.26)	-0.0385 (-1.08)	-0.154*** (-3.50)	-0.264*** (-4.09)	-0.199*** (-3.43)
Education	0.113 (1.47)	0.0805* (2.42)	0.0338 (0.83)	0.0257 (0.43)	0.124* (2.29)
Female	-0.00812 (-0.22)	-0.0171 (-1.09)	-0.0239 (-1.23)	-0.0781** (-2.73)	0.0279 (1.08)
White	0.0266 (0.63)	0.0348 (1.90)	0.0406 (1.81)	0.0195 (0.59)	0.0697* (2.35)
Age	0.00797*** (5.30)	0.00423*** (6.54)	0.00511*** (6.43)	-0.000382 (-0.33)	0.00436*** (4.14)
Income	0.0279*** (4.42)	0.0108*** (3.96)	0.00876** (2.62)	-0.00174 (-0.35)	0.0170*** (3.83)
Religiosity	-0.0241* (-2.02)	-0.0119* (-2.32)	-0.00407 (-0.65)	0.0346*** (3.74)	0.0206* (2.47)
Christian	0.0799 (1.82)	0.0405* (2.15)	0.0438 (1.89)	-0.0266 (-0.78)	0.0639* (2.08)
Married	-0.0358 (-0.91)	-0.00915 (-0.54)	-0.00648 (-0.31)	0.0236 (0.77)	0.0236 (0.86)
Large City	-0.0223 (-0.60)	-0.0213 (-1.33)	0.00761 (0.39)	0.0287 (0.99)	0.00227 (0.09)
Constant	0.250** (2.85)	0.582*** (15.43)	0.574*** (12.38)	0.362*** (5.31)	0.221*** (3.61)
N	619	619	619	619	619
t statistics in parentheses					
= " * p < 0,05 ** p < 0,01 *** p < 0,001"					

Prior to 2016, survey data indicates that there was very little difference in democratic support among Republicans and Democrats. In

fact, during the past twenty years, Republican support for democracy has consistently been slightly higher than that of Democrats (see Figure 3). The results of our MTurk study suggest large partisan differences in democratic citizenship have further manifested during the Trump era, with Republicans showing lower levels of support than Democrats across all measures of democratic citizenship. More specifically, a large proportion of Republicans were receptive to a leader who prefers to censor the media during Trump's time in office. Not coincidentally, the 2017 VOTER Survey showed that Democrats were about 38% more likely to agree that the news media should scrutinize the president than Republicans, while Republicans were much more likely to believe that the news media should allow the president to make decisions without being constantly monitored.¹⁹

Trump's candidacy and presidency saw the leader of the free world make provocative statements on many issues including racial issues, foreign policy, and gun violence. After each provocative statement, many on both sides of the political spectrum were quick to say that his statements should not be taken seriously. While this may be true for other issue arenas, our results provide suggestive evidence that the former election of Donald Trump, his anti-democratic ways, and the subsequent criticisms Trump has levied on central democratic institutions such as the media, rule of law, and judicial system eroded democratic support among Republicans during his term. This result is consistent across all three measures of democratic citizenship:

¹⁹ See Appendix L for full results.

cognitive, affective, and behavioral. A survey experiment provides additional support for our hypotheses, demonstrating that media censorship may be an attractive quality in a leader among Republicans.

Future studies can draw a clearer linkage between diminishing support for democracy among Republicans and Trump. One way this can be done is through a priming experiment. By priming respondents with anti-democratic rhetoric from Trump, and then asking a series of questions about democratic citizenship, one can better understand the direct influence Trump has had on support for democracy. Furthermore, this experimental design can allow for an examination of the Trump effect on Democrats as well to better gauge whether Trump has increased democratic citizenship among Democrats.

Concern over the erosion of democratic institutions is not unique to the United States. Strong leaders with authoritarian tendencies and dubious support for democracy have risen to power in nations across the world in recent years. Future studies analyzing the effects of the rhetoric and practices of other leaders, such as Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orban, and the former president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, on democratic citizenship will be of particular importance due to the instability of the regimes that exist in their respective countries.

Public support for democratic institutions is essential to the functioning, maintenance, and consolidation of democracy (Welzel, 2013; Bratton, 2013). Indeed, democratic institutions come alive through its citizenry, since “[w]e need to know what people actually think and do when they inhabit political roles and embrace political rules – in short,

when they make institutions their own” (Bratton, 2013: 3-4). As such, it is imperative that we gain a clear understanding of trends in democratic citizenship and the potential that elites have to influence democratic support.

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Hannah June Kim · Maneesh Arora, Democratic Citizenship in the United States:

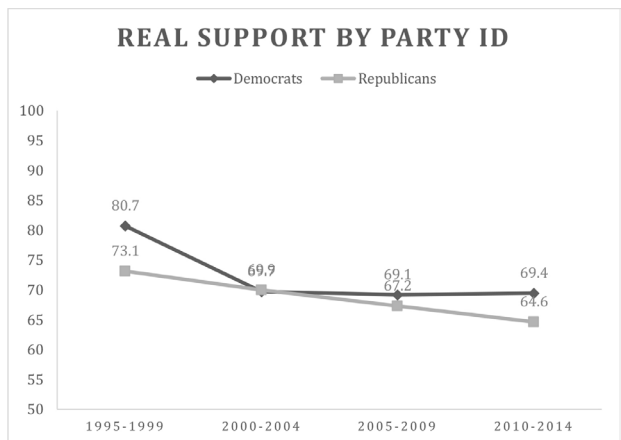
Measuring Democratic Support during the Trump Era

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[Appendix]

Appendix A



Appendix B

Williams is the elected leader of a democratic nation. During his first term, the economy has grown steadily and unemployment rates have decreased. Williams believes that the media should remain free and uncensored even if it is spreading false information. If you lived in Williams' country, how likely would you be to vote for him?

Williams is the elected leader of a democratic nation. During his first term, the economy has grown steadily and unemployment rates have decreased. Williams believes that the government should censor the media because the media is spreading fake news. If you lived in Williams' country, how likely would you be to vote for him?

Responses were coded on a 0-1 scale (0=very unlikely, 0.333=somewhat unlikely, 0.667=somewhat likely, 1=very likely)

Appendix C

How do you feel about having a democratic political system as a way of governing this country?

How do you feel about having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections in regards to governing this country?

How do you feel about having the army rule as a way of governing this country?

Responses were coded on a 0-1 scale (0=very bad, 0.333=fairly bad, 0.667=fairly good, 1=very good)

Appendix D

Which of the following statements do you agree with most? Choose the first or the second statement:
“One party represents the interests of all the people” or “Multiple parties compete to represent political interests”

Which of the following statements do you agree with most? Choose the first or the second statement:
“Government leaders do what they think is best for the people” or “Government leaders implement what voters want”

Appendix E

Which of the following statements do you agree with most? Choose the first or the second statement:
“The government should bear the main responsibility for taking care of the wellbeing of the people” or “People should look after themselves and be primarily responsible for their own success in life”

Appendix F

How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically? On this scale where 1 means it is “not at all important” and 10 means “absolutely important” what position would you choose?

Appendix G

How democratically is this country being governed today? Using a scale from 1-10, where 1 means “not at all democratic” and 10 means “completely democratic”, what position would you choose?

How democratically was this country being governed five years ago? Using a scale from 1-10, where 1 means “not at all democratic” and 10 means “completely democratic”, what position would you choose?

Appendix H

How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically? On this scale where 1 means it is “not at all important” and 10 means “absolutely important” what position would you choose?

Appendix I

For each of the political actions listed below, check whether you have never, once, or more than once done any of these things during the past two years,

- Join a movement
- Sign a petition
- Join a boycott
- Attend a peaceful demonstration
- Join a strike

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· Any other act of protest

Appendix J

When elections take place, do you vote always, usually or never?

Appendix K

Experimental Results		
Leader Support		
	N	Support
Free Media	310	0,728 (0,015)
Censored Media	309	0,355 (0,014)
Difference		0,373***
Free Media		
	N	Support
Democrat	133	0,736 (0,021)
Republican	79	0,729 (0,033)
Difference		0,007
Censored Media		
	N	Support
Democrat	133	0,305 (0,028)
Republican	62	0,484 (0,042)
Difference		-0,178***

+Significant at ,10 * Significant at ,05 Based on Two Sample T-Test, Standard Errors in Parentheses.

Appendix L

