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Colombians' Views of the FARC as a Political Party

By Ana María Montoya
ana.m.montoya@vanderbilt.edu
Vanderbilt University

Executive Summary. The peace negotiations currently underway in Colombia between the Juan Manuel Santos government and the guerilla group known as the FARC are setting the conditions for the eventual electoral participation of FARC ex-combatants, including the opportunity for them to run for office. This *Insights* report examines the attitudes of Colombians towards the FARC's formal participation in the country's political system. In particular, I examine respondents' reactions to a hypothetical electoral victory by a FARC ex-combatant in the 2015 local elections. While a majority disapprove of such an outcome, I find that those more satisfied with Colombian democracy and those in favor of peace negotiations are more likely to accept the election of a FARC ex-combatant. These findings could offer a path for the eventual acceptance by most Colombians of the FARC as a legitimate political organization in the post-conflict Colombian system.

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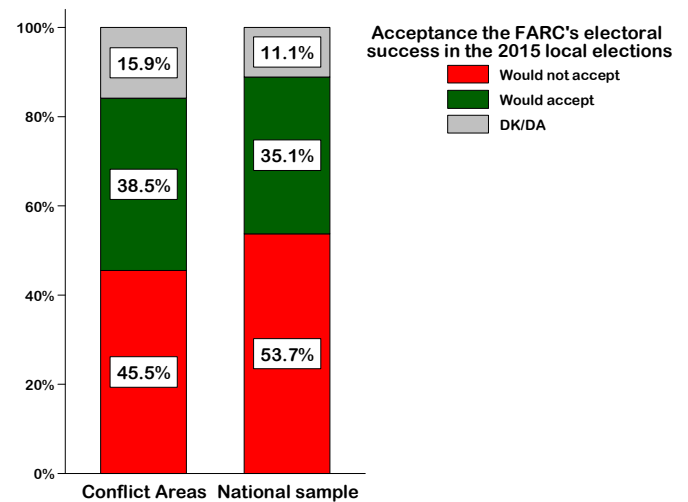
In Colombia, democracy and war have coexisted for decades (Nasi 2007). On the one hand, Colombian democracy is one of Latin America's most stable political systems, with uninterrupted, regularly held, largely free and fair elections for the past several decades (Peeler 1985). On the other hand, Colombia has one of the longest running guerrilla movements, with the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) violently opposing the government since the 1960s. On the heels of a particularly violent period in this conflict during the 1990s and early 2000s, the Colombian government began peace negotiations with the FARC in late 2012. As part of these negotiations, the government has created a pathway for FARC ex-combatants to form a political organization and run candidates for office, beginning at the municipal level.

In 2013, the AmericasBarometer¹ Colombian survey included an oversample in some of the municipalities most affected by the decades-long conflict between the FARC and the government.² In both the national and oversample surveys, respondents were asked several questions about their views of the peace negotiations, the possible political participation of FARC ex-combatants, and the appropriate path for reaching an agreement with this

¹ Funding for the 2012 round mainly came from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Important sources of support were also the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and Vanderbilt University. This *Insights* report is solely produced by LAPOP and the opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the point of view of the United States Agency for International Development, or any other supporting agency. The LAPOP study in Colombia is conducted by Observatorio de la democracia, Universidad de los Andes.

² In 2013, the national survey is divided into two samples. The first one is a nationally representative sample of 1,517 adults from 47 municipalities covering all regions. The second one is a sample of 1,505 adults from 63 municipalities, representative of conflict regions. Full results can be found at: <http://www.obsdemocracia.org/fileman/files/INFORMES%20COL/2013/Primera%20Encuesta%20Nacional%20sobre%20el%20Proceso%20de%20Paz.pdf>

Figure 1. Acceptance of the hypothetical victory of the FARC in the 2015 local elections



Source: © AmericasBarometer by LAPOP. 2013: Colombia v1.

guerrilla group. This *Insights*³ report examines the data from these items in an effort to better understand the public's receptivity to the incorporation of FARC as a legitimate political organization in the Colombian system, and who among these respondents is most likely to accept an electoral victory by an ex-combatant. To this end, I analyze responses to the following question:

COLESPA8. If in the next local elections, which are in 2015, a FARC ex-combatant is elected as mayor of your municipality, what would you do? 1) Would accept the results; 2) Would not accept the results.⁴

This question taps a critical feature of a truly democratic system in a post-conflict Colombia. Widespread acceptance of electoral outcomes as just and legitimate is a hallmark of any democratic system. Thus understanding the extent to which Colombians would accept a result with which they might not agree is an essential step in evaluating the chances for a

³ Prior issues in the *Insights* Series can be found at: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights.php>. The data on which they are based can be found at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/survey-data.php>

⁴ The non-response rate for this question is 13.5%.

relatively smooth transition to a post-conflict democracy.

Figure 1 reveals that a slight majority of those interviewed (53.7%) in the national sample would not accept the results if a FARC ex-combatant were to win a local election. In contrast, I find that in the oversampled conflict areas, a significantly lower percentage of respondents (45.5%) were opposed to such an electoral outcome.⁵ In other words, those living in areas most affected by the conflict with the FARC seem to be somewhat more open to pursuing a path that would allow the FARC to become a legitimate player in Colombia's democracy than Colombians living outside the conflict zones.

The Determinants of Support for the Democratic Incorporation of the FARC

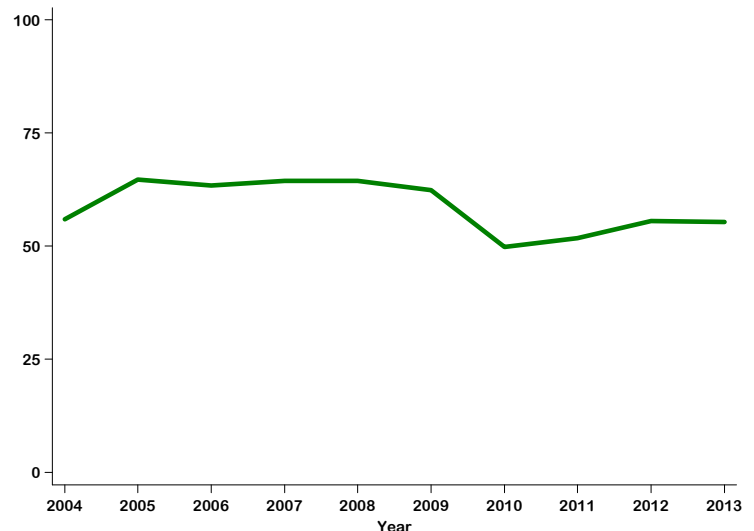
This section describes the peace negotiations and the attitudes of Colombians regarding the possible paths toward resolution of the conflict. Since 2004, the AmericasBarometer has examined the attitudes of Colombians about the conflict between the guerrillas, the government, and anti-guerrilla paramilitary groups. Figure 2 reveals a decline in support for a negotiated end to the conflict in 2010.⁶ Citizen support for a negotiated peace peaked in 2005 during the height of then president Alvaro Uribe's military campaign against the guerrillas.

Notwithstanding the 2010 decline, there remains throughout most of the survey period majority support for a negotiated peace, suggesting that more Colombians than not see the merits of a negotiated approach to ending the conflict.

⁵ I run the difference of proportions test to confirm significance. The positive and significant z value (11.74) tells us respondents in oversample are more likely to accept the results than respondents in the national sample.

⁶ COLPAZ1A. Among the following options to end the conflict with the guerrillas, which is the best? 1. Negotiating. 2. Use military power. 3. Both.

Figure 2. Preference for a Negotiated Solution with the Guerrillas Over Time



Source: © AmericasBarometer by LAPOP, 2013; Colombia v1.

The 2013 survey provides further evidence of this support for a negotiated resolution to the conflict. When Colombians were asked about the negotiation process under current President Juan Manuel Santos, close to 60% of respondents in the areas most heavily affected by the conflict supported the idea of negotiating with the guerrillas. Support for this strategy was once again somewhat lower in the national sample (53%), yet still a majority.⁷

In an effort to avoid endless negotiations on a long list of issues, Santos' plan has been to narrow the negotiation agenda to only five core issues, plus one operational item of how to implement what has been agreed to. Specifically, these substantive topics are land tenure and rural development; political participation of the FARC; end of the conflict (transitional justice, disarmament, demobilization); solution to the problem of illicit drugs; and reparations to victims. In November 2013, the topic of dealing with the possible political participation of the FARC and guarantees for the political

⁷ COLPROPАЗ1. The government of Juan Manuel Santos is leading peace talks with the FARC. To what extent do you support this process? Scale 1-7, where 1 is "not at all" and 7 is "A lot".

Accepting the FARC into Colombia's Democracy

opposition was approved by negotiators. The special Colombian AmericasBarometer survey of 2013 included several questions regarding the attitudes of Colombians towards opening opportunities for the political participation of FARC combatants. The first of these questions asked respondents the extent to which they agree with the idea that the government should guarantee the opportunity for formal political participation to FARC ex-combatants.⁸ The next question asked about the possibility of reserving seats in the Congress for members of the FARC as part of the agreements.⁹ Finally, the survey included two items that asked on a scale from 1 to 10 if Colombians would approve of the FARC being allowed to form their own political party¹⁰ and putting forward candidates in the 2015 elections.¹¹

Figure 3 shows the basic results from these items in 2013 AmericasBarometer survey. We find that the views of many Colombians toward the formal political incorporation of the FARC are decidedly negative. In 2013, over 70% of Colombians disagree with the basic idea of allowing the FARC to participate in Colombian politics. Similarly high numbers of respondents disapproved of the three other scenarios offered in the survey items. But we still do not know who among Colombians are most likely to support such a path. It is to this question that I turn in the next section.

According to Przeworski (1991: 12), a democracy is a system of institutionalized uncertainty in which “actors . . . know what is possible and likely but not what will happen.” This uncertainty allows all political actors the hope of winning in the future, and thus incentivizes them to accept losing in the present. Identifying, then, the characteristics of those Colombians who would accept the electoral results if a FARC ex-combatant were the winner of local elections is an important step in assessing the prospects for more widespread acceptance of this possibility in the future.

Even though previous works have explored the role of winners and losers in democracies (Anderson, et al. 2005), we know very little about how this research might apply in a context of a post-conflict transition. I put forth three factors I posit are theoretically important in explaining who might support the electoral incorporation of the FARC. First, those respondents most supportive of democracy in general and democratic values should be more likely to support the political participation of the FARC, even if it were to mean a FARC electoral victory.

Second, and perhaps more intuitively, those individuals who self-identify on the left on a left-right ideology scale would seem more likely to be willing to accept a FARC victory. Third, an individual with direct, personal experience with the conflict will also likely support the political inclusion of the FARC as a more peaceful and productive strategy of ending the conflict once and for all.

⁸ **COLCONCE4.** The Colombian government ought to guarantee FARC excombatants the possibility to participate in politics. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

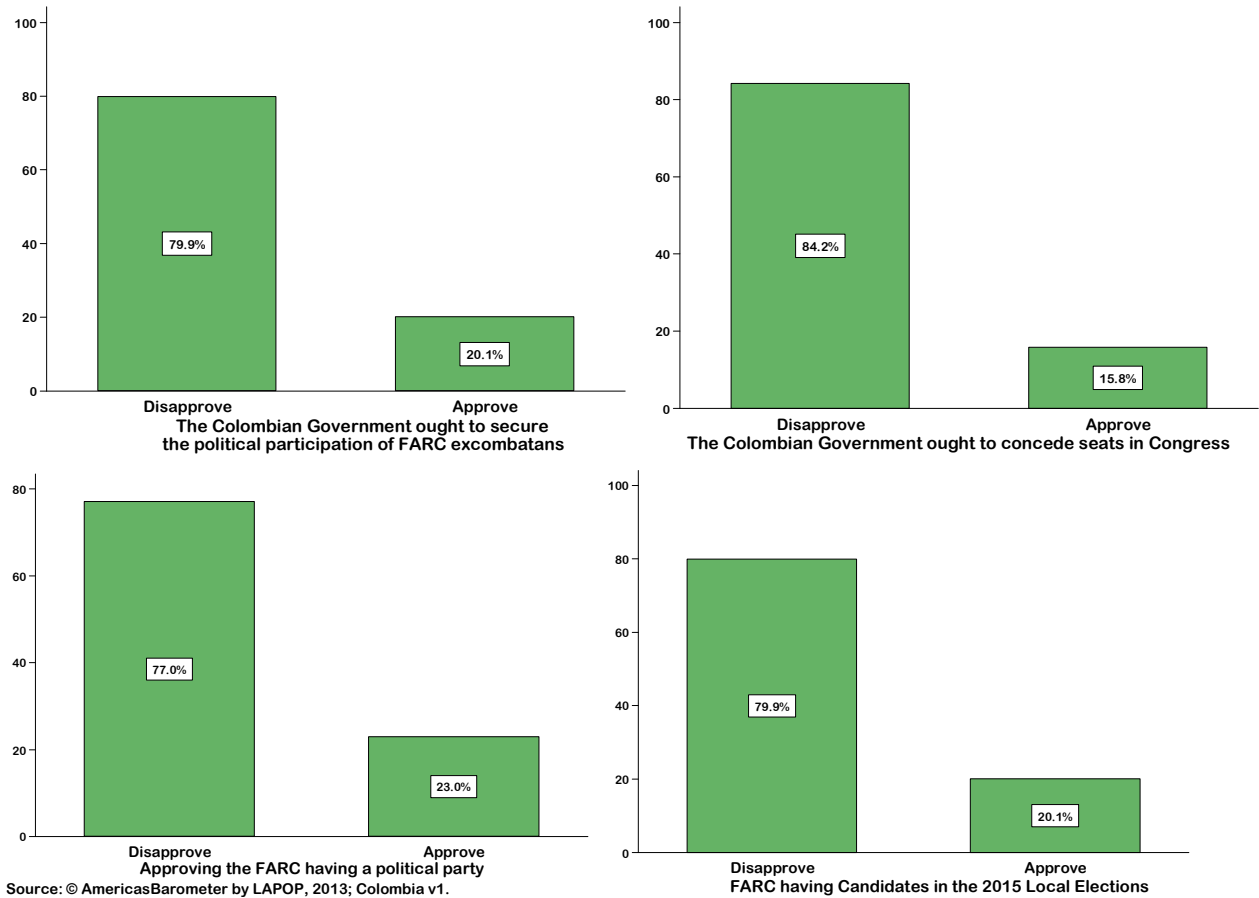
⁹ **COLCONCE5.** The Colombian government should open spaces for political representation (for example having seats in Congress) to some FARC excombatants. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

¹⁰ Thinking about the possibility that the demobilization of the FARC , I am going to read to you some actions that FARC excombatants could do for achieving their political goals. Please tell me to what extent you would approve or disapprove that FARC excombatants would take the following actions:

COLESPA1. Creating a political party. Do you approve or disapprove?

¹¹ **COLESPA2.** Running candidates in the local elections in 2015 (for mayor and municipal councils).

Figure 3. Attitudes toward FARC's Political Participation, 2013



For a test of the first proposition regarding pro-democratic attitudes and acceptance of a FARC electoral victory, I use the standard AmericasBarometer measures¹² of support for democracy,¹³ satisfaction with democracy,¹⁴ and political tolerance. I expect those individuals who believe that democracy is the best system of government, and those satisfied with its operation in Colombia are more likely to accept the results of the democratic game. In a similar sense, those who are more politically tolerant should be more likely to accept because they are

willing to accept the basic rights and civil liberties of groups whose viewpoints differ from their own (Seligson 2002, 45-46).

Previous research has found that citizens who are strongly supportive of their political system tend to be more likely to engage in and support conventional forms of political participation such as voting and forming a political party (Norris, 2002:30; Booth and Seligson, 2009). Therefore, individuals with high levels of system support in Colombia should be more inclined to accept electoral results favoring a FARC ex-combatant candidate than those Colombians with low levels of system support.

¹² The following variables are recoded from 0 to 100.

¹³ **ING4.** Changing the subject again, democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

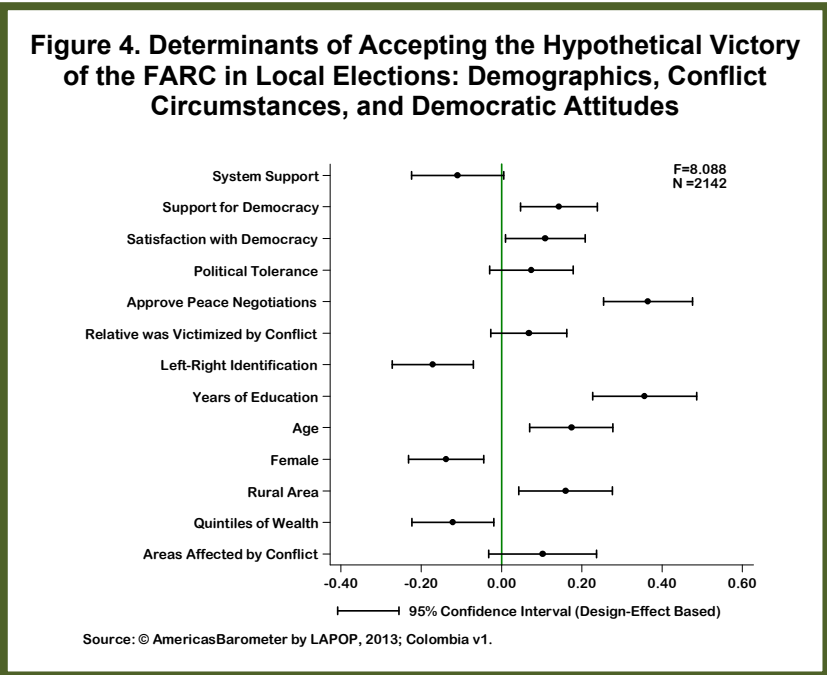
¹⁴ **PN4.** And now, changing the subject, in general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the way democracy works in country?

Moving to the second proposition, the FARC was originally inspired by leftist ideas and agrarian reform (Pizarro Leongómez 2011). Accordingly, individuals who more closely identify with the left on a left-right scale should also be more likely to accept the election of a FARC member in 2015.

Finally, someone who has had direct experience with the armed conflict should also be more likely to accept the election of a FARC candidate. Even though most municipalities in Colombia have suffered in one form or another from the armed conflict, there is great variation in the intensity and influence of the FARC across the country (García y Hoskin 2003).¹⁵ The FARC have operated mostly in the countryside and jungles of the southeastern region of the country. In these areas, the FARC has been able to generate some measure of support among civilians (García 2007; Nasi 2007). Therefore, individuals living in rural areas and those surveyed in the oversampled conflict areas may be more inclined to accept an electoral victory by a FARC ex-combatant. In contrast, those with limited exposure to the actual conflict may be more demanding in the conditions under which they would accept the political participation of ex-combatants.

Additionally, age and education level should affect the probability of accepting such electoral results in 2015. Older, more educated individuals tend, on average, to be committed to the democratic rules of the game (Seligson 2007) and therefore more supportive of a democratic solution to the conflict, even if it means the election of a FARC candidate. I include wealth and gender but have no clear expectations regarding how these variables may affect one's views toward a hypothetical FARC electoral victory.

¹⁵ For an idea of this distribution see the classification developed by CERAC <http://www.cerac.org.co/es/infograf%C3%ADa/tipologia-del-conflicto-armado-por-municipios.html>



I also include an item that asked respondents if they have a relative that has been a victim of the conflict. As with wealth and gender, I do not have a priori expectations for this item. Direct experience with the violence in the form of the loss of a loved one may lead an individual to seek revenge and thus favor a military solution or it may increase her desire to simply end the conflict, even if that means a negotiated resolution.

Figure 4 presents the results of a logistic regression of the model outlined above. To interpret the results of this analysis, when the dot is to the right of the green axis, in Figure 4, the corresponding variable is positively associated with acceptance of a FARC electoral victory in local elections, while when a variable's corresponding dot is to the left of the axis, this indicates a negative relationship with acceptance of a FARC victory. The line crossing each dot represents the 95% confidence interval for each estimate. When the confidence interval does not cross the axis at 0.0, we can be reasonably confident in the particular result. Results in Figure 4 support several of the propositions outlined above. Individuals living in rural areas and older, more educated respondents are more likely to accept a

hypothetical FARC victory in local elections. Similarly, individuals supporting the peace negotiations also are willing to accept the possibility of being ruled by a FARC ex-combatant.¹⁶ The probability of accepting the electoral results nearly quadruples when we compare a respondent who does not support the peace negotiations at all to one who is highly supportive of the process, holding all other factors constant.¹⁷ Clearly then, there is a strong connection in the minds of respondents between the overall peace process and such details as the eventual inclusion of the FARC in Colombia's formal political arena.

Individuals with a family member affected by the conflict are not significantly distinct from their counterparts with respect to their views of a possible FARC victory. This null finding is perhaps a product of the fact that violence during the conflict was perpetrated by all sides, so while some respondents with family members victimized by the conflict may have been willing to accept a FARC victory, others may have blamed, and never forgiven, the FARC for what happened to their family.

Finally, individuals supportive of democracy, both in the abstract and with respect to the Colombian system, are significantly more likely to accept a FARC electoral victory at the local level. The predicted probability of accepting the electoral results favoring a FARC ex-combatant changes from 33% to 42% when we compare an individual with low and high levels of support for democracy. The effect of the satisfaction with the Colombian democracy is even greater. The predicted probability of accepting the electoral victory in local elections of a FARC ex-combatant goes from 30% to 49% when we compare an individual with very low levels of satisfaction with democracy to one who is highly satisfied... Counter to my expectations though, neither system support nor political

tolerance has an effect on the probability of accepting the electoral victory of a FARC ex-combatant.

Finally, and as expected, those who self-identify on the left were significantly more likely to accept a FARC electoral victory than those who placed themselves on the right side of the scale.

Conclusions

The agreement to conclude the internal conflict is far from complete, as of this writing. With the June 15 re-election of President Santos, it appears that his efforts to push for a negotiated resolution to the conflict have received support from a majority of Colombians. What remains uncertain, however, is the degree to which voters will continue to support this process once confronted with the possibility of the formal inclusion of the FARC in the Colombian political system. The results of my analysis offer a cautionary tale for the president as he begins his second term in office and continues pursuit of a negotiated end to the conflict.

At the general level, as evidenced in Figure 2, a consistent majority of Colombians do indeed support a negotiated resolution. But when we move beyond that general measure of public opinion for Santos' strategy we find a more complicated picture. All four of the charts in Figure 3 highlight the strong level of disapproval among Colombians for several specific proposals that would allow for a FARC political presence in the Colombian system. At the local level, though, when presented with the scenario of a FARC electoral victory, about half of respondents to the 2013 AmericasBarometer survey would accept such an outcome. These somewhat contradictory results suggest that while there still remains quite a bit of resentment and opposition to the FARC, there does exist an underlying willingness among many Colombians, particularly those in conflict zones, to accept a political solution to the conflict, even if it means accepting an electoral victory by the FARC. Not surprisingly, those

¹⁶ As a robustness check, I dropped this variable (*colpropaz1*) and run the model again. Results were substantively the same.

¹⁷ These percentages are predicted probabilities, keeping all the other variables in the model at their means.

most likely to support such a route are those most supportive of democracy as a political system.

Given that the FARC has insisted throughout the negotiation process of having conditions in place for their ultimate participation in the electoral process, the results presented in this *Insights* report represent in many ways the next challenge for the Santos administration in sustaining public support for the peace process. These results, based on public opinion data, suggest that a significant number of Colombians would accept an electoral victory by FARC ex-combatants at the local level, even if they would not fully embrace it.

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Appendix

Table 1. Determinants of Accepting the Hypothetical Victory of the FARC: Demographics, Conflict Circumstances, and Democratic Attitudes (Logistic Regression)

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Areas affected by conflict	0.10	0.06
Quintiles of Wealth	-0.12*	0.05
Rural Area	0.16*	0.05
Female	-0.14*	0.04
Age	0.17*	0.05
Years of Education	0.36*	0.06
Relative was victimized by conflict	0.07	0.05
Approve peace negotiations	0.36*	0.05
Ideology	-0.17*	0.05
Satisfaction with Democracy	0.11*	0.05
Support for Democracy	0.14*	0.05
System Support	-0.11	0.06
Political Tolerance	0.07	0.05
Constant	-0.46	0.07
<i>Number of Observations</i>	2142	

* $p < 0.05$

Note: Coefficients are statistically significant at * $p < 0.05$ two-tail