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Damarys Canache

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# Citizens' Conceptualizations of Democracy: Structural Complexity, Substantive Content, and Political Significance

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## Abstract

Empirical evidence of how citizens around the world understand democracy highlights the predominance of the liberal model of democracy. Yet the existence of a dominant view does not mean that *all* citizens in every nation *exclusively* endorse a liberal conceptualization. Hence, this article asks whether public beliefs about the meaning of democracy affect people's political attitudes and behaviors. Using data from the 2006–2007 Latin American Public Opinion Project AmericasBarometer surveys, the author develops a taxonomy to categorize democratic conceptualizations in terms of structural complexity and substantive content. The author then examines the effects of the structure and substance of democratic conceptualizations on attitudes toward democracy and on patterns of political participation. Findings indicate that variance in the structure of citizens' democratic conceptualizations brings several effects on political attitudes and behaviors. As to the substantive content of democratic conceptualizations, conceiving of democracy in terms other than liberty influences numerous aspects of citizens' attitudes and behaviors.

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