

# CIVIL SOCIETY AND SUPPORT FOR THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN TIMES OF CRISIS

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*Abstract: How does civil society affect support for the political system during times of political crises? Some argue that civil society strengthens support for political systems by increasing trust and participation. Yet recent scholarship demonstrates that civil society can also facilitate mobilization and dissent, which may undermine support for the political system, especially in times of crisis. We test these competing claims using individual-level data from a country in the midst of a major political crisis: Bolivia in 2004. We find that membership in civil society organizations leads to higher levels of diffuse support for the political system even during a crisis—and even among those who have recently participated in protest. Civil society, however, is not associated with higher support for government during the crisis. Despite extremely high levels of mobilization, extreme dissatisfaction with government, and evidence that membership in associations actively facilitates political protest, civil society continues to be positively associated with support for the political system.*

How does civil society affect support for the political system under conditions of political crisis? Many have argued that civil society (made up of nongovernmental organizations, NGOs, and other associational organizations) provides a bedrock of moderate, stable support for democratic political systems. Civil society organizations, by providing forums for interactions that build trust and demonstrate the value of democratic decision making, are cited as the key to making democracy work (Putnam 1993) or even as a necessary precondition for democratic consolidation (Linz and Stepan 1996; Diamond 1999). Others, however, are more skeptical. Since Huntington (1968) first suggested that political mobilization may have a dark side in political instability, there has been some skepticism of civil society organizations as benevolent promoters of democratic stability. Newer work linking NGOs and political protest also suggests that civil society organizations may have unexpected consequences in struggling new democracies (Boulding 2010; Murdie and Bhasin 2011).

In this article, we explore the relationship between involvement in civil society and support for the political system at the individual level in a very particular context of political crisis: Bolivia in 2004. Bolivia represents a difficult test of the theory that civil society strengthens support for the political system. During this year, Bolivia was in the midst of a full-blown political crisis in which newly mobilized social movements of the poor, indigenous, workers, and students regularly

We thank the Latin American Public Opinion Project and its major supporters (the US Agency for International Development, the UN Development Program, the Inter-American Development Bank, and Vanderbilt University) for making the data available. We would also like to thank Andy Baker, Damarys Canache, José Cheibub, Amy Liu, Patricio Navia, Irfan Nooruddin, and Milan Svolik for comments.

*Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 49, No. 1. © 2014 by the Latin American Studies Association.

took to the streets to make demands on the government. The government, still reeling from the resignation of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada under pressure from the popular protests in 2003, was paralyzed. After the violent clashes between the military and the protesters in 2003, the new president Carlos Mesa had promised not to use force against the social movements. Marches and demonstrations shut down roads all over the country on an almost daily basis.

This new level of mobilization of disaffected people from many different sectors of society raises interesting questions about the role of civil society in very poor and unequal young democracies. Bolivia boasts one of the largest indigenous populations in Latin America; it is also the poorest country in Latin America aside from Haiti and one of the most unequal in a region of very high inequality. Despite this history of poverty and exclusion, Bolivia also has a very strong civil society. More than 80 percent of Bolivians attend meetings of a civic organization occasionally, and nearly 50 percent attend frequently, according to a 2004 Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) survey.

In this extreme political context, what is the relationship between associational activity and support for the political system? In the eyes of some observers, NGOs and civil society organizations earned a reputation as radical groups agitating citizens.<sup>1</sup> This view portrays civil society as undermining the stability of government—a vast departure from the rosier view that civil society fosters democracy. This view assumes that because civil society helps articulate dissent against particular policies and leaders, it also erodes the deeper relationship between citizens and the democratic political system. In this article, we explore the validity of these two opposing views of civil society. We ask whether membership in civil society organizations affects the deeper level of support for the democratic political system. If civil society works as a stabilizing, moderate force in democratic society, we should see a positive relationship. However, if by mobilizing people, civil society organizations also undermine support for the political system, we should see a negative relationship.

We focus on diffuse support for the political system rather than attitudes toward democracy or other indicators of regime legitimacy because we believe that diffuse support is a good indicator of generalized support for the institutions and form of government in place, something that might be under question during times of political crises. Because discussions of democracy are often politicized on many dimensions of political debate and ideology, we are more interested in generalized system support. Focusing on diffuse support also allows us to compare diffuse support with more specific forms of support that are based on performance evaluations of government (Canache 2002).

Rather than seeing civil society as constantly supportive or undermining of a democratic political system, we argue that membership in associations can build support for the political system during times of crisis while also encouraging dissatisfaction with poorly performing governments. Membership serves as a source of information and reduces barriers to collective action, thus making political

1. For an example of this argument, see the 2005 *Economist* article “Mob Rule, Not People Power,” <http://www.economist.com/node/4079503>.

participation more likely. Where civil society is playing this role of facilitating new political participation—even of contentious and critical voices—we argue that it is also likely building diffuse support for a democratic political system that allows dissent without direct repression. That is, where civil society is facilitating engagement into politics, members are more likely to be supportive of the system even if they are more critical of specific policies, politicians, or processes.

Using survey data, we found that, on average, individuals who frequently attend meetings of civil society organizations are more inclined to support the political system than those who only attend occasionally or who are not involved in civil society. We show that active membership is associated with higher rates of protest participation: people who are frequently involved with civil society organizations are more likely to protest and more likely to support the political system in times of crisis. Comparing a crisis year (2004) with a noncrisis year (2008) shows that although membership is associated with broad support for the political system in both years, it is associated with positive assessments of government only in the noncrisis year. We also find that the relationship holds even among the most dissatisfied citizens, including those who have recently protested against the government. Although this article focuses on Bolivia, we also consider how the results might hold in other contexts. We replicate the findings using survey data from a similar country in crisis, Ecuador in 2010, and find very similar relationships.

Overall, our research gives a surprising image of the role civil society played in the crisis in Bolivia in 2004 and suggests that high levels of civic engagement and social mobilization are not incompatible with support for a democratic political system—even during times of political crisis. Despite extremely high levels of mobilization, extreme dissatisfaction with government, and evidence that membership in associations actively facilitates political protest, civil society continues to be positively associated with support for the political system. And even more surprising, this relationship is not a function of wealthier, more conservative people being more likely to join organizations and more likely to support a democratic political system. The poor and indigenous are actually more active than their wealthier counterparts in Bolivia. We argue that this is good evidence that civil society can play an important stabilizing role in new democracies, even as it facilitates the articulation of serious discontents with poverty, inequality, and government policy through unconventional and contentious mechanisms.

#### HOW DOES CIVIL SOCIETY AFFECT SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL SYSTEMS IN CRISIS?

Scholars have long believed that support from the public is integral to the success and stability of democracy. Diamond (1999, 20) claims that “the essence of democratic consolidation is a behavioral and attitudinal embrace of democratic principles and methods.” Similarly, Linz and Stepan (1996) cite the requirement of attitudinal support for democracy as one of three parts of the definition of democratic consolidation. Without sufficient levels of public support, semidemocratic regimes may revert to authoritarianism and publics may begin to support anti-

system candidates (Hagopian and Mainwaring 2005, 320). High levels of political support, in contrast, may help democracy run more smoothly. Positive opinions toward the political system communicate "faith in the system," which can enhance policy makers' positions in generating and implementing better policy (Weatherford 1987, 6; Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn 2000). If there are fewer critics to assuage and more support coming from the public, policy makers have more flexibility and time to pursue better policy.

Support for the political system is thought to be particularly important in weaker democracies, where it can act as insurance for the survival of democracies in times of crisis (Miller 1974; Easton 1975; Finkel, Muller, and Seligson 1989). In addition to the literature that directly addresses support for the political system, there are strong predictions from literature on civil society, associational activity, and nongovernmental organizations that involvement in any of these types of organizations should help create moderate civil society that is supportive of a democratic political system. Civil society is often mentioned as a key factor in building support for democratic political systems after transitions to democracy (Linz and Stepan 1996; Diamond 1999). In many parts of the developing world, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) became the visible face of civil society to foreign aid donors and development programs. A large literature has developed around the role that NGOs play in developing countries, much of which has focused on the benefits of NGOs in terms of strengthening democracy (Clark 1991; Clarke 1998; Devine 2006; Fisher 1998; Gibbs et al. 1999; Hudock 1999; Hulme and Edwards 1997; Mercer 2002; Mitlin, Hickey, and Bebbington 2007; Pearce 2000).<sup>2</sup>

Although there are good reasons to expect that civil society plays some role in building support for the political system, it is much less well understood how these dynamics function under conditions of very poorly performing government institutions and high levels of social mobilization. There are many types of political crisis, but for our purposes we define a political crisis as a political situation characterized by high levels of social conflict and a high degree of uncertainty over the actions of the key actors in the conflict. In the case of Bolivia in 2004, we see evidence of political crisis in the almost daily street protests of the year and the genuine fear that the military might crack down on the protesters as it did in October 2003, resulting in dozens of deaths. In a very real sense, then, the crisis of 2004 was a crisis of democracy characterized by uncertainty over military intervention and the stability of the democratic system. Thus, our definition of crisis is not simply that political institutions are not working well (which would be true to some degree of any time in Bolivia since the transition to democracy) but rather a moment of extreme crisis, high uncertainty over the future, and high social mobilization.

Others have suggested that the political context is crucial for understanding how civil society influences attitudes. In particular, some scholars suggest that in nondemocracies associational activity does little to build support for democracy

2. World Bank, "Involving NGOs in Bank-Supported Activities," 1989, <http://www.gdrc.org/ngo/wb-ngo-directive.html>.

and may instead strengthen authoritarian regimes (Jamal 2007; Rossteutscher 2010; Jamal and Nooruddin 2010). There is also growing evidence that NGOs in developing countries can do as much to increase political protest as they do to increase voter turnout, which is quite different from conventional expectations of civil society and NGO activity (Boulding 2010). When the government is extremely unresponsive and basic needs of ordinary people are unmet, civil society can still facilitate political engagement, but the tactics used to engage the government are likely to include political protest. Drawing on local event data from Bolivia, Boulding (2010) demonstrates that municipalities with high NGO activity are much more likely to experience political protest than those municipalities where NGOs are scarce. And the relationship is strongest where there is very little electoral competition (effectively, where elections are considered useless).

Others have pointed out that where institutions are performing poorly, civil society may actually undermine support for the political system because citizens who are members of civil society groups may have better information about government failings (Norris 1999; Carlin 2011). At one extreme, the mobilization of civil society is seen as a threat to weakly institutionalized governments, thus increasing the chances of civil war and regime failure, as ineffective governments fail to meet the demands of citizens (Huntington 1968), or promoting undemocratic political development in certain circumstances (Berman 1997). Popular rhetoric surrounding the mass protests in Bolivia has often mirrored those concerns. In a more limited way, others worry that strong civil society may allow citizens to form more critical opinions of government failures, thereby undermining long-term support for democracy. For example, a study of civic education programs in the Dominican Republic demonstrated that those programs actually reduced trust in political institutions as people became better informed (Finkel, Sabatini, and Bevis 2000).

The central purpose of this article is to explore this tension between those who see civil society as generally a force for building support in the political system and those who see it as a source of instability. We also test our argument that civil society may encourage criticism of government and build support for the political system. We focus on these two opposing viewpoints, which we describe as the instability hypothesis and the social trust hypothesis, to offer a third alternative, the democratic dissent hypothesis.

The more negative instability hypothesis predicts that under conditions of weak government and poor performance, active citizens mobilized through civil society organizations make demands that are impossible for the government to meet, thus leading to instability and even violence.

*Instability hypothesis:* Under conditions of political crisis, involvement with civil society decreases support for the political system and the government.

For proponents of civil society, involvement in associational activities builds trust, facilitates cooperation, and encourages political engagement, all of which empower citizens to demand accountability from their government. Even if the government is unable to fully meet those demands, there is an overall net benefit to democracy in terms of both participation and performance, as organized

people hold the government accountable. We summarize this set of arguments as the social trust hypothesis:

*Social trust hypothesis:* Under conditions of political crisis, involvement with civil society increases support for the political system and the government.

We argue for a third hypothesis: that where civil society is strong and is mobilizing new political participation, membership can both facilitate criticism of the government and build support for the political system. We call this the democratic dissent hypothesis.

*Democratic dissent hypothesis:* Under conditions of political crisis, involvement with civil society increases support only for the political system, not the government in power.

By facilitating dissenting political views and boosting political participation, civil society can be a challenge to democratic systems that are not broadly inclusive or are not performing well. Civil society mobilization under conditions of crisis may look quite different from the moderate, membership associations of developed democracies—even as membership in civil society organizations builds support for the political system. In particular, if civil society organizations help build trust, share information, and facilitate collective action, there is little reason to expect that they would not do so under conditions of government failures. However, the more extreme the government failures are, the more radical the interests, opinions, and preferences that civil society helps articulate may be. In fact, more engaged, networked citizens are in some ways more likely to accurately assess and criticize failings of the government.<sup>3</sup> And they are more likely to try to do something about them.

In this way, we argue that civil society membership—especially for those who are active and frequent participants in civil society—is likely to increase support for the political system at the same time that it encourages the articulation of dissatisfaction with particular policies, even through radical tactics such as political protest. This approach builds on recent work by Booth and Seligson (2009), who also find that protest and regime support are not incompatible. In fact, Booth and Seligson (2009, 195) find that “citizens with high support for democracy and national institutions tend rather strongly to approve of confrontational tactics . . . [and] do not view the techniques of confrontational protest to be inconsistent with democracy or national institutions.”

More specifically, we argue that civil society is likely to have a positive effect on diffuse support for the political system even during times of crises under the following conditions: (1) membership is high and associated with political participation, and (2) the regime in power is not openly or obviously repressing dissent and opposition. Under these conditions, associational activity may encourage negative evaluations of specific government policies or politicians at the same time that it encourages diffuse support for the system by making political participation—even critical dissent—easier.

3. It may also be the case that a healthy dose of skepticism and distrust in government is more important than blind trust in government (Mishler and Rose 1999).



**BOLIVIA: A DEMOCRACY IN CRISIS**

We test these competing hypotheses using survey data from Bolivia in 2004, which was collected by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) at Vanderbilt University.<sup>4</sup> Bolivia is a very interesting context in which to explore these issues for several reasons. First, Bolivia has one of the highest rates of membership in civil society organizations in the region, with more than 80 percent of the population regularly attending meetings, and nearly half attending with high frequency. If civil society is likely to matter anywhere, it is likely to matter in a place where most people are members of civil society organizations. Second, Bolivia is a highly divided society, both in terms of economic class and in terms of ethnicity: Bolivia is the poorest country in South America and one of the most unequal, with an indigenous majority who have been systematically excluded from politics since colonial times. These demographic realities mean that democracy in Bolivia faces serious challenges and that the state is limited in its ability to respond to the pressing needs of many Bolivians.

Finally, in the years leading up to the year of our survey, a number of social movements launched massive protests and demonstrations to articulate discontent with the exclusion of the indigenous majority and the neoliberal economic policies of the government. Starting with the "Water War" of 2000, in which protesters blocked the privatization of water in Bolivia's third-largest city, the social movements grew to be increasingly important actors in setting the national agenda. In 2003, after an announcement of a proposed tax hike, protesters took to the streets and forced the resignation of then President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, who fled the country. The violence surrounding those events, in which dozens of people were killed, prompted the new president Carlos Mesa to promise that government forces would not be used against the protesters. Protests continued to paralyze the country throughout 2004. This is the moment of the survey. During this time, Bolivia is still considered a democracy, but one that is under duress. Tensions between the social movements and the government remained very high, and there was real discussion about the future of democracy. It is in this context that we explore the role of civil society in support for the political system.

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

The 2004 LAPOP Survey from Bolivia is an ideal survey to explore the role of civil society during times of crisis because it includes detailed questions about associational membership in different types of organizations and multiple questions about support for the political system. The sample includes 3,073 respondents from eighty-four municipalities in Bolivia's nine departments. We employ ordinary least squares regression because the distribution of the index of support for the political system is normal, and we report robust standard errors because of the presence of heteroskedasticity in the model.

4. The data are available at the Americas Barometer (2004), Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), <http://www.lapopsurveys.org>.

*Dependent Variable: Support for the Political System*

To measure support for the political system as opposed to support for particular governments, parties, or leaders, we employ a mean index of support for the political system initially developed by Muller and Jukam (1977). The index is constructed by taking the mean of responses to the following five component measures that tap attitudes toward the political system at large:

1. To what extent do you think the justice tribunals in Bolivia guarantee a fair trial?
2. To what extent do you respect the political institutions in Bolivia?
3. To what extent do you think that citizens' basic rights are well protected by the Bolivian political system?
4. To what extent do you feel proud of living under the Bolivian political system?
5. To what extent do you think that one should support the Bolivian political system?

Responses range from "not at all" (1) to "a lot" (7). On this scale, the midpoint of 4 represents a neutral answer.<sup>5</sup> Figure 1 displays the component parts of the support for the political system index.

*Main Independent Variable: Membership in Civil Society Organizations*

To measure participation in civil society organizations, we break membership into three categories: nonmembers, members (who attend meetings of at least one organization occasionally), and active members (who frequently attend meetings of at least one organization). The LAPOP survey asked respondents whether they were active in six different civil society associations, including church groups, parents' associations, neighborhood associations, community organizations, professional associations, or a territory-based organization, which are organizations that have the right to participate in municipal development projects.<sup>6</sup>

*Control Variables*

Drawing from the greater literature on attitudes toward government, including trust in government and satisfaction with democracy, we identify five main

5. The original support for the political system index developed by Muller and Jukam was later refined to an index of five measures by Muller, Jukam, and Seligson (1982; for further validation of the index, see Seligson 1983). Using principle components factor analysis, we verify that this five-measure index indeed taps a primary underlying factor as has been confirmed in other research (Seligson and Carrion 2002). Several articles also use this measure, including Muller and Jukam (1977); Muller, Jukam, and Seligson (1982); Seligson (1983); Finkel (1987); Finkel, Muller, and Seligson (1989); Seligson and Carrion (2001); Hiskey and Seligson (2003); Booth and Seligson (2005); Smith (2009).

6. To test the robustness of our findings, we use several alternative measures of membership, including (1) a mean index of participation by which individuals who indicate that they frequently attend meetings for several associations have the highest scores and those who never participate in any organizations have the lowest scores; (2) a trichotomous measure of nonmembers, members, and active members; (3) and a dichotomous measure of active members versus all others. The findings presented here are robust to these different specifications of membership.



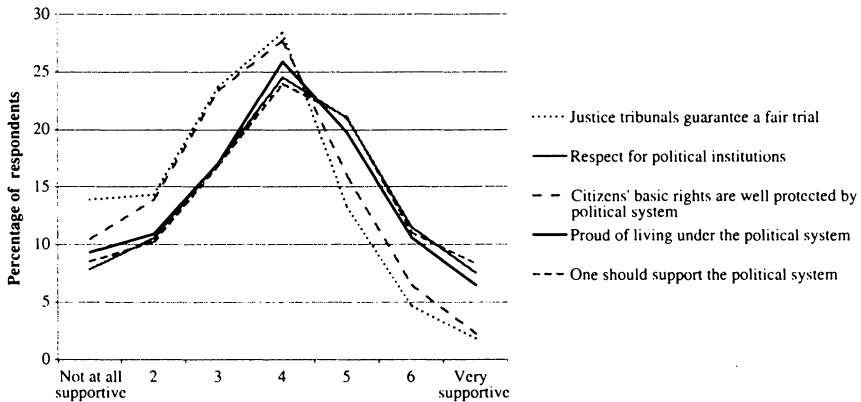


Figure 1 Components of support for the political system index

explanatory factors for which we control: government performance, ideology, interpersonal trust, political knowledge, and demographic factors.

*Government performance* / Because attitudes toward the government are likely influenced by perceptions of how well the government is performing, we consider four aspects of government performance. First, we control for perceptions of the economy, as economic performance is strongly linked to positive attitudes toward the political system (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Mishler and Rose 1999; Hetherington 1998; McAllister 1999; Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn 2000; Stimson 2004; Espinal, Hartlyn, and Kelly 2006; Keele 2007). Respondents rank the economic situation from very bad (0) to very good (4). Second, we control for respondents' opinions regarding how well the government provides services. Favorable evaluations of public services are linked to more positive attitudes toward government (Bouckeaert and van de Walle 2003; Hiskey and Seligson 2003; Espinal, Hartlyn, and Kelly 2006). We use a measure that asks respondents to rate the services of the mayor's office. Third, we control for the effect of corruption, following Mishler and Rose (2001), Anderson and Tverdova (2003), Seligson (2006), Espinal, Hartlyn, and Kelly (2006), and Kelleher and Wolak (2007). The corruption measure is coded such that a score of 3 represents perceptions of widespread corruption while 0 represents perceptions that corruption is minimal. Fourth, we control for attitudes toward the incumbent president, who at the time of the survey was Carlos Mesa. Previous research indicates that more specific forms of support, such as support for policies and particular individuals, can affect more diffuse support for a regime's institutions (Norris 1999).

*Ideology* / Ideological predispositions could be linked to support for the political system in various ways. More conservative ideology generally advocates for the maintenance of the status quo and the existing power structures but could also

be linked in some contexts to less trust of large federal government. Accordingly, some scholars find conservative ideology to be positively associated with support for the political system (Hiskey and Seligson 2003; Anderson and Singer 2008), whereas others find a negative relationship in the US context (Cook and Gronke 2005). Left-leaning ideologues may also be more supportive of the ideals of polyarchy (Carlin and Singer 2011). The president in power in Bolivia in 2004, President Carlos Mesa, was part of the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement, which had supported more neoliberal economic policies congruent with a more conservative political stance. Mesa had also made a public promise not to use force against the protesters, in sharp contrast to his predecessor, which gained him some support from the Left. To account for the political leanings of individuals, we use a measure that asks respondents to place themselves on a 10-point scale, for which the highest values are the most conservative.

*Interpersonal trust* / Previous research finds that in some cases, trust in other people extends to trust in government (Brehm and Rahn 1997; Finkel, Sabatini, and Bevis 2000; Keele 2007; Newton 2009). We use a 4-point measure that asks respondents whether people from their communities are very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, not very trustworthy, or not at all trustworthy.

*Political knowledge* / On the one hand, political knowledge may engender greater support as individuals become more aware of the challenges of government. On the other hand, greater political knowledge could also predispose individuals to recognize conflict in and shortcomings of government, thus leading them to be more pessimistic about how the system functions. The measure is a summative index by which individuals receive additional points for correct answers on the presidents of the United States, Brazil, and Argentina, as well as how many deputies are in Congress, the name of the uninominal deputy from the respondent's district, and whether candidates must belong to a political party.

*Demographic factors* / Finally, we control for a number of demographic factors: income, education, age, gender, and indigenous identity. Income is a measure derived from principle components factor analysis of various assets individuals have.<sup>7</sup> The education measure is a scale of the years of education that respondents were asked to view and circle. Last, because indigenous identity was highly politicized in the social conflicts of the time, we include a measure of indigenous identity from a question asking if the respondent is indigenous, white, black, or mixed.

## FINDINGS

Overall, most people are dissatisfied with the political system in our sample. The average level of support for the political system is 3.782, slightly below the

7. Assets questions include a color television, refrigerator, telephone, washing machine, microwave, electricity, drinking water, sewerage connection, and bicycle.

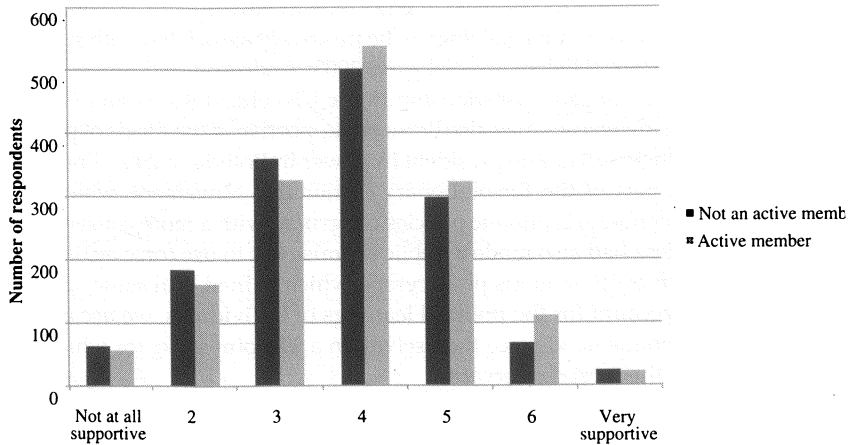


Figure 2 Membership and support for the political system

neutral value of 4. Figure 2 shows the level of support for the political system among active members of civil society organizations is generally higher relative to nonmembers.

Table 1 tests this relationship more rigorously. Results indicate that contrary to the hypothesis that associations foment political dissent, active membership in an association is linked with greater support for the political system. This effect is limited to those who are frequent participants in associational life; members who attend infrequently are not significantly more supportive than nonmembers.

The government performance factors lead to more sizable effects on support for the political system. All government performance factors perform as expected in terms of sign and significance; those who have more favorable views of the economy, who believe that the system is less corrupt, and who indicate a high level of satisfaction with municipal services are more supportive of the political system. Next to opinions of the economic situation, political ideology has the second-largest impact on support for the political system, as individuals with the strongest leftist orientation have lower levels of support for the political system. The demographic variables yield some interesting findings. First, in 2004, non-indigenous Bolivians were no more likely than indigenous Bolivians to support the political system. Wealthier and younger individuals were less likely to support the political system. Higher levels of education also led to lower levels of support for the political system. However, political knowledge appears to have had no effect on support for the political system.<sup>8</sup>

Given the initial finding that associational participation helps build support

8. Our results hold using multiple imputation to account for missing data. For the full results, please see the online appendix, <https://sites.google.com/a/colorado.edu/carew-boulding/research/boulding-nunez-2013-online-appendix>.

Table 1 Determinants of support for the political system

|                                 | Model 1              |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| Active member of an association | 0.178*<br>(0.077)    |
| Member of an association        | -0.019<br>(0.078)    |
| Perception of the economy       | 0.176**<br>(0.031)   |
| Municipal services              | 0.084**<br>(0.029)   |
| Corruption                      | -0.103**<br>(0.028)  |
| Satisfaction with the president | 0.149**<br>(0.036)   |
| Ideology                        | 0.075**<br>(0.012)   |
| Interpersonal trust             | 0.083**<br>(0.027)   |
| Political knowledge             | 0.010<br>(0.016)     |
| Income                          | -0.118**<br>(0.028)  |
| Education                       | -0.012***<br>(0.007) |
| Age                             | -0.004*<br>(0.002)   |
| Gender (female = 1)             | 0.067<br>(0.048)     |
| Indigenous                      | -0.026<br>(0.065)    |
| Constant                        | 2.985**<br>(0.174)   |
| N                               | 2,324                |
| R <sup>2</sup>                  | 0.093                |

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .10$

for the political system even in a time of crisis, we now explore whether all associations are the same in their ability to foster stronger bonds between citizens and the political regime. Since "civil society" is hardly one entity, we further explore the ways in which membership in different types of organizations affect support for the political system. Table 2 presents the effect of membership in each of the six association types available in the survey.

This disaggregated perspective of membership in civil society organizations presents complementary findings: most civil society organizations tend to build support for the political system. Specifically, membership in church groups,

Table 2 Membership in civil society organizations

|                             | Model 2             | Model 3              | Model 4              | Model 5             | Model 6              | Model 7              |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Member of                   |                     |                      |                      |                     |                      |                      |
| Church group                | 0.110*<br>(0.048)   |                      |                      |                     |                      |                      |
| Parent assoc.               |                     | 0.060<br>(0.047)     |                      |                     |                      |                      |
| Neighborhood assoc.         |                     |                      | 0.094*<br>(0.047)    |                     |                      |                      |
| Community committee         |                     |                      |                      | 0.121*<br>(0.048)   |                      |                      |
| Professional assoc.         |                     |                      |                      |                     | 0.010<br>(0.051)     |                      |
| Territory-based org.        |                     |                      |                      |                     |                      | 0.069<br>(0.053)     |
| Perception of the economy   | 0.169**<br>(0.031)  | 0.169**<br>(0.031)   | 0.175**<br>(0.031)   | 0.168**<br>(0.031)  | 0.176**<br>(0.031)   | 0.173**<br>(0.031)   |
| Municipal services          | 0.084**<br>(0.030)  | 0.086**<br>(0.030)   | 0.088**<br>(0.030)   | 0.087**<br>(0.030)  | 0.086**<br>(0.030)   | 0.089**<br>(0.030)   |
| Corruption                  | -0.100**<br>(0.028) | -0.099**<br>(0.029)  | -0.104**<br>(0.029)  | -0.109**<br>(0.029) | -0.101**<br>(0.029)  | -0.104**<br>(0.029)  |
| Satisfaction with president | 0.146**<br>(0.036)  | 0.155**<br>(0.036)   | 0.149**<br>(0.036)   | 0.151**<br>(0.037)  | 0.146**<br>(0.036)   | 0.150**<br>(0.036)   |
| Ideology                    | 0.075**<br>(0.012)  | 0.075**<br>(0.012)   | 0.075**<br>(0.012)   | 0.074**<br>(0.012)  | 0.075**<br>(0.012)   | 0.076**<br>(0.012)   |
| Interpersonal trust         | 0.086**<br>(0.027)  | 0.087**<br>(0.027)   | 0.088**<br>(0.027)   | 0.086**<br>(0.027)  | 0.088**<br>(0.027)   | 0.085**<br>(0.027)   |
| Political knowledge         | 0.012<br>(0.016)    | 0.013<br>(0.016)     | 0.016<br>(0.016)     | 0.012<br>(0.016)    | 0.013<br>(0.016)     | 0.014<br>(0.016)     |
| Income                      | -0.119**<br>(0.028) | -0.115**<br>(0.028)  | -0.117**<br>(0.028)  | -0.114**<br>(0.028) | -0.120**<br>(0.028)  | -0.117**<br>(0.028)  |
| Education                   | -0.011<br>(0.007)   | -0.012***<br>(0.007) | -0.011***<br>(0.007) | -0.010<br>(0.007)   | -0.012***<br>(0.007) | -0.012***<br>(0.007) |
| Age                         | -0.003*<br>(0.002)  | -0.003*<br>(0.002)   | -0.004*<br>(0.002)   | -0.004*<br>(0.002)  | -0.003***<br>(0.002) | -0.003*<br>(0.002)   |
| Gender (female = 1)         | 0.076<br>(0.048)    | 0.076<br>(0.048)     | 0.089***<br>(0.048)  | 0.083***<br>(0.049) | 0.083***<br>(0.048)  | 0.084***<br>(0.048)  |
| Indigenous                  | -0.008<br>(0.065)   | -0.017<br>(0.065)    | -0.017<br>(0.065)    | -0.029<br>(0.065)   | -0.018<br>(0.065)    | -0.018<br>(0.065)    |
| Constant                    | 2.945**<br>(0.169)  | 2.971**<br>(0.168)   | 2.964**<br>(0.167)   | 2.990**<br>(0.168)  | 3.001**<br>(0.168)   | 2.996**<br>(0.167)   |
| N                           | 2322                | 2313                 | 2312                 | 2303                | 2306                 | 2308                 |
| R <sup>2</sup>              | 0.088               | 0.087                | 0.089                | 0.088               | 0.087                | 0.088                |

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .10$

neighborhood associations, and community committees all appear to support the view that civil society builds stronger linkages between citizens and government. However, the effect approaches significance only for parent associations and does not apply for professional associations or territory-based organizations. Professional associations are likely very heterogeneous, incorporating professional organizations for the highly skilled as well as agrarian associations and labor unions. These types of organizations are often not considered part of the core of civil society in that they tend to span into economic society (Diamond 1999). Taken together, these findings provide evidence that the core civil society organizations function in the way that Putnam (2001) predicts, generating more positive linkages between members and government.

The question remains whether the effect of membership in civil society associations can be attributed to the people who join them rather than an individual's participation in them. Is the effect on support for the political system merely a factor of more conservative, wealthier individuals joining associations? Or is membership dominated by a particular group that might be more supportive of the political system for another reason? Table 3 shows the percentages of different groups who are active members of associations.

In terms of membership in general, the differences between these segments of society are not substantial. For example, the poor are nearly as participatory as the middle class. Indigenous respondents are only slightly more likely to be members of an association than other respondents. The differences between left- and right-leaning individuals also seem immaterial. Although greater differences begin to emerge when we look at membership by association type, the degree of difference is still fairly limited. The greatest differences appear for class and education, but here the finding is not that those with more resources who tend to benefit most from the political system are more participatory. Instead, the reality in Bolivia is that, generally, membership in civil society organizations is high, and it is highest among those with lower education levels and lower socioeconomic status.<sup>9</sup>

It is also possible that active membership in civil society organizations simply builds support for those who are already supportive. To test this possibility, we explore whether the effect of active membership holds even for those who have protested against the government. We use a dichotomous measure that asks whether respondents have "ever participated in a demonstration or public protest."

Table 4 shows the results of an interactive model in which membership in associations is interacted with the protest variable. The coefficient for membership

9. As a more rigorous test of this endogeneity problem, we also test the relationship between civil society membership and support for the political system using matching. We find very similar results, which strengthens our confidence that there is a causal relationship at work. To generate the propensity scores for membership, we use education, age, gender, ethnicity, income, and whether a respondent lives in a rural or urban context, as well as measures of political sophistication and democratic attitudes. Comparing members with most-similar nonmember respondents demonstrates that membership likely has an independent effect on support for the political system. These results are available in the online appendix.



Table 3 Percentages of various groups who are active members of civil society organizations

|                  | Active membership | Church group | Parent assoc. | Neighborhood assoc. | Community committee | Professional assoc. | Territory-based org. |
|------------------|-------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Ethnicity</b> |                   |              |               |                     |                     |                     |                      |
| Indigenous       | 55.05             | 24.59        | 30.23         | 17.05               | 20.33               | 14.29               | 18.92                |
| All others       | 50.02             | 25.37        | 23.50         | 13.80               | 14.77               | 10.78               | 16.89                |
| <b>Education</b> |                   |              |               |                     |                     |                     |                      |
| No education     | 52.54             | 37.29        | 18.97         | 20.69               | 24.14               | 6.78                | 24.14                |
| Primary          | 53.87             | 27.99        | 28.27         | 16.31               | 19.43               | 10.83               | 19.01                |
| High school      | 48.99             | 24.01        | 24.64         | 13.99               | 15.41               | 10.33               | 16.92                |
| College          | 50.55             | 24.24        | 24.58         | 12.60               | 12.60               | 11.31               | 15.32                |
| Post-grad        | 53.19             | 25.64        | 19.83         | 13.62               | 14.72               | 20.17               | 15.74                |
| <b>Class</b>     |                   |              |               |                     |                     |                     |                      |
| Upper            | 46.68             | 24.58        | 18.84         | 8.70                | 9.70                | 9.50                | 11.13                |
| Middle           | 54.38             | 26.48        | 24.81         | 15.37               | 13.87               | 11.91               | 19.17                |
| Lower            | 50.41             | 23.42        | 25.04         | 16.22               | 17.06               | 12.42               | 18.83                |
| Poor             | 49.29             | 24.33        | 27.58         | 13.88               | 15.03               | 10.14               | 16.28                |
| Very poor        | 51.11             | 27.19        | 26.76         | 15.70               | 20.48               | 12.46               | 18.36                |
| <b>Ideology</b>  |                   |              |               |                     |                     |                     |                      |
| Left leaning     | 49.14             | 22.78        | 24.17         | 15.85               | 15.78               | 13.16               | 18.67                |
| Centrist         | 50.40             | 25.76        | 24.50         | 13.61               | 14.08               | 11.45               | 16.69                |
| Right leaning    | 52.04             | 26.21        | 25.69         | 13.68               | 17.30               | 9.89                | 16.09                |

Note: The class categories are based on quintiles of the asset-based income measure.

Table 4 *The effect of membership on support by participation in protest*

|                                 | Model 8              |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| Active member of an association | 0.183**<br>(0.060)   |
| Active member × protested       | 0.021<br>(0.092)     |
| Protested                       | -0.003<br>(0.066)    |
| Perception of the economy       | 0.175**<br>(0.031)   |
| Municipal services              | 0.084**<br>(0.029)   |
| Corruption                      | -0.101**<br>(0.028)  |
| Satisfaction with president     | 0.150**<br>(0.036)   |
| Ideology                        | 0.075**<br>(0.012)   |
| Interpersonal trust             | 0.084**<br>(0.027)   |
| Political knowledge             | 0.009<br>(0.016)     |
| Income                          | -0.118**<br>(0.028)  |
| Education                       | -0.012***<br>(0.007) |
| Age                             | -0.004*<br>(0.002)   |
| Gender (female = 1)             | 0.067<br>(0.048)     |
| Indigenous                      | -0.025<br>(0.065)    |
| Constant                        | 2.969**<br>(0.169)   |
| <i>N</i>                        | 2321                 |
| <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>           | 0.093                |

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .10$

remains positive and significant, which indicates that membership is associated with more support for the political system even for those who have recently protested. In other words, even among individuals who have taken their grievances to the street, membership in associations still exerts a positive effect on support for the political system. Figure 3 shows the predicted level of support for the political system for individuals who have protested and individuals who have not. In both cases, the predicted values are greater for individuals who are active members of civil society organizations. This is very direct evidence that membership

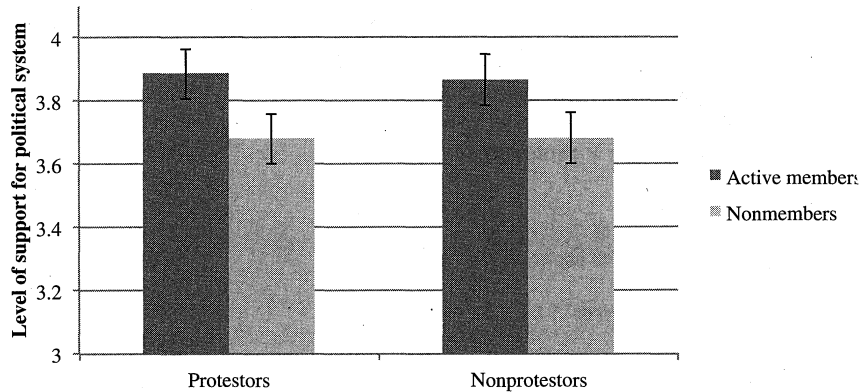


Figure 3 Predicted values of support for the political system

in civil society does not undermine support for the political system, even among those who most actively voice their discontent with the leaders and policies of the time.

Figure 3 also shows that overall support for the political system is not vastly different between protesters and nonprotesters. This is an interesting finding in itself, and further evidence that even very contentious political participation need not be at odds with support for the political system.

In fact, part of the reason we expect active membership in associations to build support for the political system even during times of crisis is that membership in this context facilitates political participation. People who are frequently involved with civil society organizations are more likely to express their discontent with government through political participation, including protest. This outlet for grievances, we argue, strengthens overall support for the system even as it gives voice to serious discontent with the government. Because this assumption is pivotal to the causal story we present here, we directly test the relationship between active membership and protest participation. Table 5 shows that active membership is indeed an important predictor of participation in political protest.

#### COMPARING CRISIS AND NONCRISIS YEARS

Thus far, we have explored how civil society affects support for the political system in a crisis year. We argue that members of civil society organizations are generally more supportive of the system than nonmembers, even controlling for active dissent against the government in the form of protest. Here we look more closely at how membership influences the different components of the system support index and compare those results with results from a year in Bolivia when things were much more stable (2008). We argue that the different questions in the index (though often used to measure general system support) actually vary in the

Table 5 Effect of membership on protest in 2004

|                                 | Model 9              |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| Active member of an association | 0.661**<br>(0.150)   |
| Member of an association        | 0.300***<br>(0.155)  |
| Perception of the economy       | -0.101***<br>(0.059) |
| Municipal services              | -0.083<br>(0.053)    |
| Corruption                      | -0.059<br>(0.055)    |
| Satisfaction with president     | -0.057<br>(0.068)    |
| Ideology                        | -0.103**<br>(0.022)  |
| Interpersonal trust             | -0.145**<br>(0.049)  |
| Political knowledge             | 0.111**<br>(0.031)   |
| Income                          | -0.008<br>(0.053)    |
| Education                       | 0.035**<br>(0.013)   |
| Age                             | 0.003<br>(0.003)     |
| Gender (female = 1)             | -0.275**<br>(0.093)  |
| Indigenous                      | 0.203<br>(0.127)     |
| Constant                        | -0.380<br>(0.332)    |
| <i>N</i>                        | 2,330                |
| <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>           | 0.043                |

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .10$

extent to which they measure diffuse versus specific support. Questions 2, 4, and 5 that ask directly about the general political system, we argue, are the best indicators of diffuse support. Questions 1 and 3 regarding guarantees of fair trial and the protection of basic rights, however, are more likely to measure evaluations of how well the government is performing.

We expect that in the midst of crisis, active membership in civil society has a stronger effect on the more diffuse aspects of support, as members may be dissatisfied with government but be more able to voice their discontent than nonmembers. Table 6 presents the disaggregated results. Consistent with the democratic dissent hypothesis, active membership (which is strongly associated with higher

Table 6 2004 diffuse and specific support

Component questions of the system support index (more diffuse questions in bold):

1. To what extent do you think the justice tribunals in Bolivia guarantee a fair trial?
- 2. To what extent do you respect the political institutions in Bolivia?**
3. To what extent do you think that citizens' basic rights are well protected by the Bolivian political system?
- 4. To what extent do you feel proud of living under the Bolivian political system?**
- 5. To what extent do you think that one should support the Bolivian political system?**

|                                 | Question<br>1             | Question<br>2             | Question<br>3             | Question<br>4             | Question<br>5             |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Active member of an association | 0.017<br>(0.097)          | 0.270*<br>(0.116)         | 0.068<br>(0.096)          | 0.250*<br>(0.108)         | 0.282**<br>(0.109)        |
| Member of an association        | -0.118<br>(0.098)         | -0.039<br>(0.117)         | -0.063<br>(0.098)         | 0.066<br>(0.109)          | 0.110<br>(0.110)          |
| Perception of the economy       | <b>0.214**</b><br>(0.043) | <b>0.144**</b><br>(0.047) | <b>0.191**</b><br>(0.041) | <b>0.186**</b><br>(0.046) | <b>0.152**</b><br>(0.046) |
| Municipal services              | 0.035<br>(0.040)          | 0.020<br>(0.042)          | 0.108**<br>(0.038)        | 0.137**<br>(0.044)        | 0.117**<br>(0.044)        |
| Corruption                      | -0.101**<br>(0.039)       | -0.095*<br>(0.043)        | -0.119**<br>(0.039)       | -0.096*<br>(0.043)        | -0.128**<br>(0.044)       |
| Satisfaction with president     | 0.082***<br>(0.048)       | 0.225**<br>(0.054)        | 0.122*<br>(0.048)         | 0.120*<br>(0.053)         | 0.171**<br>(0.056)        |
| Ideology                        | 0.071**<br>(0.016)        | 0.105**<br>(0.017)        | 0.064**<br>(0.016)        | 0.059**<br>(0.017)        | 0.074**<br>(0.018)        |
| Interpersonal trust             | 0.072*<br>(0.035)         | 0.093*<br>(0.040)         | 0.072*<br>(0.035)         | 0.108**<br>(0.039)        | 0.074***<br>(0.040)       |
| Political knowledge             | -0.008<br>(0.021)         | -0.006<br>(0.023)         | 0.005<br>(0.021)          | 0.024<br>(0.023)          | 0.038<br>(0.023)          |
| Income                          | -0.030<br>(0.037)         | -0.109**<br>(0.041)       | -0.094**<br>(0.037)       | -0.187**<br>(0.041)       | -0.161**<br>(0.042)       |
| Education                       | -0.014***<br>(0.009)      | -0.007<br>(0.010)         | -0.025**<br>(0.009)       | -0.017***<br>(0.010)      | 0.004<br>(0.010)          |
| Age                             | -0.006**<br>(0.002)       | -0.004<br>(0.003)         | -0.007**<br>(0.002)       | -0.001<br>(0.003)         | -0.002<br>(0.003)         |
| Gender (female = 1)             | 0.091<br>(0.063)          | 0.130***<br>(0.070)       | 0.028<br>(0.062)          | 0.066<br>(0.070)          | 0.016<br>(0.072)          |
| Indigenous                      | -0.026<br>(0.089)         | 0.041<br>(0.093)          | -0.043<br>(0.087)         | -0.109<br>(0.097)         | -0.018<br>(0.098)         |
| Constant                        | 3.006**<br>(0.234)        | 2.975**<br>(0.265)        | 3.173**<br>(0.233)        | 2.955**<br>(0.258)        | 2.876**<br>(0.262)        |
| N                               | 2,285                     | 2,301                     | 2,295                     | 2,306                     | 2,287                     |
| R <sup>2</sup>                  | 0.049                     | 0.059                     | 0.061                     | 0.055                     | 0.046                     |

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .10$

rates of participation) is a significant predictor of more diffuse support. Occasional membership, which has only a weak relationship with political participation, has no effect.

By 2008 in Bolivia, the crisis had largely abated. Social mobilization remained high, but the new administration of Evo Morales was in its third year, a new constitution had been written and put into effect, and the worst of regional tensions had been settled. In 2009, Morales won reelection with an even wider margin than in 2005. At least for the moment, the prospect of the government falling apart had been put to rest. In this more stable context, we expect that active membership is associated with all the indicators of system support, including those related to government performance. As table 7 shows, we find that both members and active members are more supportive than nonmembers in 2008 in all of the more general system support measures,<sup>10</sup> as well as on the more specific measure of whether the system guarantees fair trials.<sup>11</sup>

#### IMPLICATIONS BEYOND BOLIVIA

In this section we briefly revisit our argument about why civil society tends to strengthen support for the political system during times of crisis, and we consider how our findings might hold up outside of the particular context of Bolivia. Although Bolivia is unusual, we do not believe that it is unique. We argue that the civil society in Bolivia strengthens support for the political system because membership rates in Bolivia are high and civil society has played a role in mobilizing political participation in the political system. Finally, although the crisis of 2004 in Bolivia involved some violent interactions (and casualties) between the state and mobilized citizens, the government did not respond with outright or widespread repression of opposition voices.

In general, we expect these findings to hold in countries where civil society is strong and is mobilizing people to participate in politics, and where the political crisis in question has not led to widespread or systematic persecution of the opposition. As a test of the validity of this argument, we replicate our main analysis using a very similar survey conducted by LAPOP in Ecuador in 2010. We believe that Ecuador in this year meets the criteria we established from our investigation of Bolivia. First, membership rates are consistently high (63 percent of people in the survey reported membership in 2010, compared with 69 percent for Bolivia in 2010). Second, Ecuador, like Bolivia, has experienced significant waves of popular mobilization and protest, in which civil society has played an important

10. Note that we dropped political knowledge from the 2008 model because there were fewer available measures, a high number of missing observations, and a low level of variation (more than 90 percent of the sample answered three of the four base measures correctly).

11. Extending these tests, we consider the differences between the effect of membership in 2004 and 2008 across more measures of specific support, including trust in political parties, Congress, the president, the justice system, and the Bolivian Supreme Court. Our results are consistent with those in tables 5 and 7. In 2004, neither membership nor active membership predicted any form of support, whereas in 2008 both membership and active membership predicted all forms of specific support, with the exception of trust in the president. The full logistic regression results for these models are available in the online appendix.



Table 7 Bolivia 2008 diffuse and specific support

Component questions of the system support index (more diffuse questions in bold):

1. To what extent do you think the justice tribunals in Bolivia guarantee a fair trial?
2. **To what extent do you respect the political institutions in Bolivia?**
3. To what extent do you think that citizens' basic rights are well protected by the Bolivian political system?
4. **To what extent do you feel proud of living under the Bolivian political system?**
5. **To what extent do you think that one should support the Bolivian political system?**

|                                 | Question<br>1       | Question<br>2       | Question<br>3        | Question<br>4        | Question<br>5      |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Active member of an association | 0.293**<br>(0.079)  | 0.237**<br>(0.089)  | 0.157*<br>(0.076)    | 0.236**<br>(0.087)   | 0.173*<br>(0.088)  |
| Member of an association        | 0.252**<br>(0.075)  | 0.149***<br>(0.084) | 0.034<br>(0.072)     | 0.133<br>(0.081)     | 0.249**<br>(0.083) |
| Perception of the economy       | -0.056<br>(0.043)   | -0.129**<br>(0.048) | -0.100*<br>(0.042)   | -0.062<br>(0.046)    | -0.007<br>(0.048)  |
| Municipal services              | 0.115**<br>(0.041)  | 0.194**<br>(0.045)  | 0.111**<br>(0.039)   | 0.042<br>(0.046)     | 0.141**<br>(0.043) |
| Corruption                      | -0.093*<br>(0.041)  | -0.169**<br>(0.045) | -0.092*<br>(0.041)   | -0.076***<br>(0.045) | -0.049<br>(0.044)  |
| Satisfaction with president     | 0.069**<br>(0.019)  | 0.161**<br>(0.021)  | 0.185**<br>(0.018)   | 0.271**<br>(0.020)   | 0.279**<br>(0.021) |
| Ideology                        | 0.080**<br>(0.017)  | 0.041*<br>(0.018)   | 0.049**<br>(0.016)   | 0.049**<br>(0.018)   | 0.062**<br>(0.018) |
| Interpersonal trust             | 0.157**<br>(0.040)  | 0.054<br>(0.044)    | 0.086*<br>(0.039)    | 0.144**<br>(0.043)   | 0.110*<br>(0.044)  |
| Income                          | -0.074*<br>(0.037)  | 0.026<br>(0.043)    | -0.030<br>(0.035)    | -0.095*<br>(0.040)   | -0.014<br>(0.041)  |
| Education                       | -0.001<br>(0.009)   | 0.006<br>(0.010)    | -0.015***<br>(0.009) | -0.004<br>(0.009)    | -0.007<br>(0.010)  |
| Age                             | -0.008**<br>(0.002) | -0.005*<br>(0.003)  | -0.007**<br>(0.002)  | -0.002<br>(0.002)    | -0.006*<br>(0.003) |
| Gender (female = 1)             | 0.021<br>(0.061)    | 0.042<br>(0.071)    | 0.042<br>(0.061)     | -0.005<br>(0.069)    | -0.111<br>(0.070)  |
| Indigenous                      | 0.030<br>(0.036)    | 0.020<br>(0.042)    | -0.008<br>(0.049)    | 0.038<br>(0.056)     | 0.047<br>(0.055)   |
| Constant                        | 3.063**<br>(0.231)  | 3.781**<br>(0.271)  | 3.517**<br>(0.234)   | 3.156**<br>(0.256)   | 3.126**<br>(0.261) |
| N                               | 1,971               | 2,009               | 1,980                | 2,007                | 1,995              |
| R <sup>2</sup>                  | 0.058               | 0.057               | 0.088                | 0.128                | 0.132              |

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .10$

role (Feinberg, Waisman, and Zamosc 2006; Zamosc 2007). Finally, the political crisis of 2010 represented a real threat to stability but fell short of resulting in widespread repression of opposition voices. During the crisis, which began as a conflict between the police objecting to austerity measures, a state of emergency was declared giving the military temporary powers, and there was a standoff as the president of the country, Rafael Correa, was held hostage in a brief incident that some labeled an attempted coup.

Because of these similar conditions, we expect that our main findings—that membership strengthens support for diffuse system support—should hold in Ecuador. We present the results in table 8. We find that membership is indeed associated with more positive support for the political system.

*Table 8 Effect of membership on system support in Ecuador, 2010*

|                                 | Model 10            |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| Active member of an association | 0.234**<br>(0.067)  |
| Member of an association        | 0.103***<br>(0.060) |
| Perception of the economy       | 0.168**<br>(0.035)  |
| Municipal services              | 0.081**<br>(0.031)  |
| Corruption                      | -0.157**<br>(0.031) |
| Satisfaction with president     | 0.366**<br>(0.031)  |
| Ideology                        | 0.034**<br>(0.012)  |
| Interpersonal trust             | 0.061*<br>(0.029)   |
| Political knowledge             | -0.130<br>(0.085)   |
| Income                          | -0.012<br>(0.029)   |
| Education                       | -0.022**<br>(0.008) |
| Age                             | -0.006**<br>(0.002) |
| Gender (female = 1)             | 0.122*<br>(0.052)   |
| Indigenous                      | 0.146<br>(0.164)    |
| Constant                        | 3.230**<br>(0.217)  |
| <i>N</i>                        | 1,809               |
| <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>           | 0.173               |

*Note:* Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01; \*\*\**p* < .10

Although we find this confirmation heartening, we also see a future research agenda in testing the conditions under which civil society strengthens support for the political system more systematically, including exploring variation in the types of crisis and the types of civil society.

#### CONCLUSION

This article presents the results of a difficult test of the long-standing argument that membership in civil society organizations strengthens generalized support for the political system. We find that this relationship holds even in a context where we might least expect it—a country in the middle of a protracted political crisis of high social mobilization and poor government performance. More important, we find that membership is associated with more supportive attitudes even among those who have recently protested against the government. And active membership does not appear to have an effect on more specific forms of support. In other words, membership in civil society organizations does not seem to prevent people from criticizing their government, protesting against government policies, or reporting high levels of dissatisfaction and distrust of government. But membership is associated with higher levels of general system support.

This relationship between civil society and support for the political system also does not appear to be a function of who joins civil society organizations—at least insofar as it is not those with greater resources or more politically conservative views that join such organizations. In fact, in Bolivia, those with fewer resources and lower levels of education and those who are indigenous are slightly more likely to join. Moreover, the relationship between civil society membership and support for the political system cannot be attributed to more supportive people joining civil society organizations. We provide evidence that civil society organizations in fact boost support for the political system even among people who are actively protesting government actions. In other words, membership builds support for those who are satisfied with the political system as well as those who are not.

Overall, this study presents an optimistic view of the role that civil society can play in new democracies during times of crisis. Although civil society facilitates the articulation of interests that can be very challenging to the status quo (as in the case of Bolivia, where huge popular movements made up of the poor and indigenous mobilized against the state), they can also be a stabilizing force in terms of building support for democracy. At first this may seem like a profound contradiction, but in the context of highly unequal societies, it is possible that both roles are necessary for democracy to succeed. Engaging new voices into elite-dominated political systems is unlikely to be easy, but it is more likely to be successful if there is strong consensus over the rules of the game. At least in the case of Bolivia, it appears that civil society assists with both the articulation of new interests and the building of support for a democratic political system.

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