PERSONALITY AND AN INTERNAL ENEMY: UNDERSTANDING THE POPULARITY OF ÁLVARO URIBE, 2002-2010[1]

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Abstract

During two terms in office, Álvaro Uribe enjoyed very high approval ratings. This deviates from the typical approval patterns exhibited by most executives in the region and from prior Colombian presidents. In this paper we give elements to understand what explains Uribe's eight-year honeymoon. Here we argue that Uribe's popularity was the interplay of three factors: A ruling style that allowed him to build an affective link with citizens. Uribe's ability to create a rally-around-the-flag atmosphere regarding the internal armed conflict. And a booming economy. Using regression models based on cross-national and survey data results indicate that: Uribe exhibited high approval ratings because he was part of a group of Latin American executives who developed a government style based on an emotional link with people, and that those citizens who saw the internal conflict as the main problem in Colombia and were more exposed to Uribe's messages about the insurgent threat were more likely to support him.

Resumen

Durante sus dos períodos como presidente de Colombia, Álvaro Uribe disfrutó de altísimos niveles de aprobación. Esto claramente

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se desvía del patrón de aprobación de la mayor parte de los presidentes de la región y de sus predecesores nacionales. En este artículo ofrecemos elementos para entender por qué Uribe disfrutó de una luna de miel de ocho años. En este artículo argumentamos que la popularidad de Uribe puede entenderse a partir de una combinación de tres factores: Un estilo de gobierno que le permitió establecer un vínculo emocional con los ciudadanos. La habilidad para crear una atmosfera de "rally alrededor de la bandera" (patriotismo) en relación al conflicto armado interno. Y una economía en expansión. A partir de modelos de regresión basados en datos de nivel nacional y de encuestas, nuestros resultados indican que Uribe disfrutó altos niveles de aprobación debido a que formó parte de un grupo de presidentes latinoamericanos que desarrollaron un lazo emocional con los ciudadanos, y que fue más probable que aquellas personas que veían el conflicto interno como el principal problema del país y estaban más expuestas a los mensajes del presidente sobre la insurgencia expresaran altos niveles de apoyo hacia este.

Introduction

The election, in 2002, of Álvaro Uribe as president of Colombia represented a major change in Colombian politics. His victory and later his administration contributed to the debilitation of traditional parties and to the reshuffling of the existing party system. His counterinsurgency policy weakened guerrillas like no other administration before. However, mounting pressures from the president to eradicate left-wing guerilla groups at all cost produced outrageous human rights violations. For instance, army units executed thousands of civilians falsely labeled as guerrilla combatants. Uribe's administration was also marked by corruption scandals and attempts to change the balance of power. In fact, he managed to amend the Constitution to ensure a second term (2006–2010) and would have achieved a second reelection had the Constitutional Court not struck down his attempt to further amend the constitution. Despite such heterogeneous balance in terms of

government performance, unlike his predecessors and his successor, Uribe enjoyed an exceptionally strong popular support.

After a failed peace process between the Pastrana administration (1998–2002) and the FARC, a peak in violence and insecurity, and a public mood characterized by feelings of uncertainty, Álvaro Uribe's discourse of recovering order, security, and prosperity, and his critique to the political establishment gained momentum among the public (Hoskin, Macías, & García–Sánchez, 2003). Uribe's closest competitor, Horacio Serpa, the candidate formally from the Liberal party, represented in the eyes of voters all the sins of the traditional party leaders.On top of that, Serpa's campaign did not manage to articulate a clear message and insisted on a negotiated peace with armed groups at a moment when voters wanted a shift in the approach to the guerrilla problem, from negotiation to military confrontation. In May 2002, Uribe was elected president of Colombia in the first round of the presidential election. He obtained 52.9% of the vote, while Serpa received only 31.7% of the votes (Hoskin, Macías, & García–Sánchez, 2003). Uribe was the first dissident of the Liberal party to win the presidency.[4] Unlike previous dissidents, Uribe was able to win the election by attracting many Liberal and almost all Conservative voters, as well as the support from several politicians who approached Uribe as his candidacy gained momentum and Serpa lost ground among the electorate (Murillo & Fernández, 2003).

Uribe's first term was a clear success in terms of security and economic performance. He managed to dismantle the paramilitary bands through a negotiated deal, and his counterinsurgent strategy (Seguridad Democrática) started to weaken the guerrilla forces. The economy grew faster

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[4] In 1946 and 1982 the Liberal party lost the presidential bid because candidates Jorge Eliecer Gaitán and Luis Carlos Galán, respectively, ran dissident Liberal campaigns that split the Liberal electorate in two, opening the door for a Conservative party victory.

than 5 percent and oil prices soared. But beyond the numbers, his leadership style helped him build a close relationship with the public. An amendment enacted by Congress in 2005 lifted the constitutional ban on reelection, thus allowing Uribe to run for a second term. By the 2006 election the entire political establishment sided with Uribe. His only opposition came from the left and a handful of Liberal politicians. In May 2006 Uribe won reelection with 62.3% of the first-round vote. His main opponent, Carlos Gaviria, the candidate of a leftist coalition, was supported by just 22% of the electorate.

During his eight years in office, Álvaro Uribe's approval ratings deviated from the typical pattern exhibited by most executives in the region and from the rates obtained by other prior Colombian presidents (Carlin & Martínez-Gallardo, 2018). Research has shown that the executive experiences a short period in which approval increases (honeymoon) and then these ratings tend to decline (Carlin & Martínez-Gallardo, 2018); that was clearly not the case of Uribe. He started his first term in 2002 with very high approval numbers that remained high throughout his two terms. As shown in Figure 1, presidential approval scores in Colombia moved from around 20% at the end of the Pastrana administration to close to 70% at the beginning of Uribe's first term. Such scores remained above 60% over his two administrations, reaching in 2008 a top level of 80%. What explains this eight-year honeymoon?

Studies on wealthy Western democracies have demonstrated that three main forces drive presidential approval: First, the honeymoon effect, that is, an initial phase of high approval rates that tend to decline as the presidential term elapses. Second, economic factors affect presidential approval; in particular economic crises and poor evaluations of the national economy result in lower approval rates. Third, international crises tend to have the opposite effect, as they activate a sense of patriotism that contributes to enhance approval rates (Carlin et al., 2012; Gronke

& Newman, 2003). Some of these key factors may contribute to understand Uribe's approval, in particular economic evaluations. However, the other two face limitations, as time didn't affect negatively Uribe's approval scores and Colombia faced an internal crisis rather than an external one. Thus, explaining Uribes' approval needs to go beyond the traditional divers of presidential approval.

Figure 1. Executive approval.Colombia 1994-2016
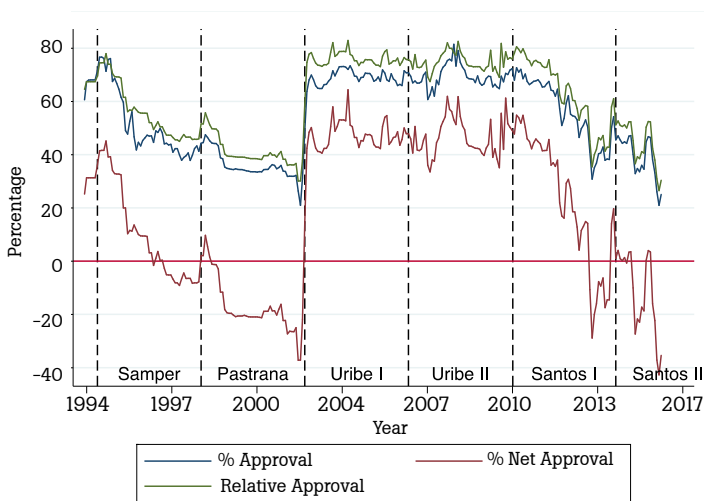
Source. The Executive Approval Database 1.0 (Carlin et al., 2016).The series were constructed as follows:

% Approval = % Positive approval, % Net Approval = % Positive approval – % Negative approval

$$\text{and } \% \text{ Relative approval} \ = \ \frac{\% \text{ Positive approval}}{\% \text{ Positive approval} - \% \text{ Negative approval}}$$

Following the comparative literature on presidential approval and some particularities of the Colombian case, we argue that the exceptionally high approval rates that he enjoyed during his presidential tenure were the result of the interplay of three factors. First, Uribe developed a ruling style that allowed him to build an affective link with

citizens (Ortiz-Ayala & García-Sánchez, 2014). Second, he managed to create a rally-around-the-flag atmosphere, more typical of international crises, regarding the internal armed conflict. By priming his counterinsurgent strategy and its positive results, he convinced Colombians of the threat posed by guerrillas, of their imminent military defeat, and of the patriotism needed for such endeavor. Finally, during the Uribe years the Colombian economy boomed.

To test our argument, we use both aggregate and individual level data. Using a cross-national dataset we compare 26 Latin American presidents to study how government style and macroeconomic fluctuations are related to approval averages. Using individual-level survey data we compare the rally effects and the impact of economic perceptions on job approval for presidents Uribe and Santos, while controlling for other factors. Results from our analyses indicate that, compared to other presidents in the region, Uribe exhibited high approval ratings because he was part of a group of Latin American executives who developed a government style based on an emotional link with people and enjoyed positive macroeconomic indicators. Our results also show that those citizens who saw the internal conflict as the main problem in Colombia and were more exposed to media news were more likely to support Álvaro Uribe. Positive economic perceptions are also correlated with Uribe's approval. Finally, our results indicate that beyond the government style, a permanent rally effect, and the economy, Uribe's outstanding popular support may be associated with his ability to build a loyal base of supporters.

This paper proceeds as follows. The first section presents a brief balance of the literature on presidential approval. The second section scrutinizes Álvaro Uribe's popularity. The third section describes our data and analytical framework. The fourth section presents a detailed description of our results. The final section concludes.

Situating Uribe within the presidential approval literature

Presidential approval has been explained taking into consideration a myriad of factors, time being the first of them. Several studies starting with the work of Mueller (1973) have demonstrated that after an initial phase of high approval ratings, popularity tends to decline as the presidential term elapses. This phenomenon known as the honeymoon effect suggests that presidents, once in office, suffer a wear out process that contributes to a decline in their approval. High approval ratings tend to last about six months (Erikson, Mackuen, & Stimson, 2002).Other studies propose that presidential approval ratings follow a cyclical trajectory over time: After the honeymoon period, approval numbers start to decline, reaching their lowest point by midway through the presidential term, then by the time elections approach approval rates rise again (Anderson 1996). There is also evidence that under particular circumstances there is an "anti-honeymoon" effect or a permanent honeymoon. When George W. Bush came into power in the midst of a controversy around his election, throughout the first months of his presidency, his approval numbers were lower than during the second semester of the first year (Eichenberg, Stoll, and Lebo, 2006). In rare cases, however, presidents have sustained high approval ratings over their entire administrations; Álvaro Uribe is a good example of this situation (García-Sánchez & Wills, 2011).

A second line of research belongs to the economic voting literature (Kinder and Kiewiet, 1981; MacKuen, Erikson, & Stimson, 1992). Here, the basic intuition states that when the economy faces a crisis or when citizens have a negative perception of the national economy, presidential approval faces a reduction. Although there is evidence that this relationship holds in several countries (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2009), recent research showed that such link is conditioned by various factors. Specifically, citizens tend to

hold their presidents accountable for the economy in countries in which the executive is the actor "responsible" of such matters (Powell Jr and Whitten, 1993). Variations in responsibility are linked to the institutional structure of a country (Nadeau, Niemi, &Yoshinaka, 2002), the balance of power between the president and the legislature (unified government versus divided government) (Anderson, 2000, 2007), and the effective control governments exercise over economic matters in a globalized market (Hellwig & Samuels, 2007; Alcañiz & Hellwig, 2011). Recent research has demonstrated that presidential approval in Latin America is affected by the economy in ways that are similar to those in other regions (Gélineau & Singer, 2015).

Close to the voting behavior literature, various studies showed that citizens politically identified with the ruling party would be prone to have a positive evaluation of the executive's performance (Campbell et al., 1960; Fiorina, 2002). As in the case of economic factors, the impact of party identification on job approval is conditioned by other variables such as ideological polarization and level of education (Holmberg, 1994; Bartels, 2000). In contexts of high polarization, the impact of partisanship on approval will be stronger than in situations lacking deep ideological divisions.

Beyond evaluations of the economy and partisanship, presidential approval is also sensitive to foreign policy crises and international conflicts. These events may trigger a so-called "rally-round-the-flag" effect: a boost in presidential approval ratings due to a peak in patriotism produced by a perception of an external threat (Mueller, 1973). The occurrence of recent terrorist attacks in Europe and the United States also triggered a rally effect like that observed in cases of military or diplomatic crisis (Eichenberg, Stoll, & Lebo, 2006). Similarly, security threats posed by local insurgents have also an effect on presidential approval (Arce, 2003). Like other variables affecting approval ratings, the effect of security threats (foreign and domestic) on presi-

dential approval is not homogeneous. Thus, violent events tend to have a positive effect on approval ratings for right leaning executives and a negative impact for leftist governments (Arce, 2003). Additionally, institutional contexts condition the effect of domestic security crisis on approval ratings. In fact, when there are few veto players and there is a unified government (high clarity of responsibility), terrorist attacks produce a rally effect (Carlin, Love, & Martínez-Gallardo, 2015).

Along with traditional factors explaining presidential approval, some scholars have studied the role of a president's personality and government style. The basic assumption of these studies is that citizens' opinions about political leaders cannot be isolated from the stereotype of a good leader. If citizens perceive that the executive has the qualities of an ideal leader, it is more likely for them to approve his job. Some of those qualities are leadership, charisma, knowledge, religiosity or high moral standards (Aldrich, Gronke, & Grynaviski, 1999; Merolla & Zechmeister, 2009). Indeed, perceptions of a president's personality may be so important that in certain cases citizens will forgive the leader's mistakes if he or she is a charismatic political figure (Sullivan et al., 1990; Merolla and Zechmeister, 2009). Ronald Reagan's charisma, for instance, appears to have helped him overcome political difficulties without affecting his approval ratings (Sullivan et al., 1990; Funk, 1996; Lyons, 1997). Government style, closely linked to leaders' personalities, also explains variations in presidential approval. Presidents who develop a government style relying on their personalities and a close link with the people tend to have high approval ratings (Ortiz-Ayala & García-Sánchez, 2014). Hence Latin American presidents like Hugo Chávez and Luis Inácio *Lula* da Silva may have enjoyed high levels of job approval thanks to their ability to develop a government style close to citizens.

Explaining an outlier

In this paper, we argue that the exceptionally high approval rates that Uribe enjoyed during his presidency are a consequence of the interplay of three factors. First, Uribe developed a ruling style that allowed him to build an affective link with citizens (Ortiz-Ayala & García-Sánchez, 2014). Second, he managed to create a rally-around-the-flag atmosphere regarding the situation of armed conflict. By priming his counterinsurgent strategy and its positive results, he convinced Colombians of the threat posed by guerrillas and that he was the most capable individual (if not the only one) to defeat them. Finally, Colombia's economic performance under Uribe's administration was very positive.

The first element behind Uribe's high approval numbers is his governing style. Here we follow the argument presented by Ortiz-Ayala & García-Sánchez (2014) according to which presidents who manage to develop a personalistic government style enjoy higher job approval rates than those executives lacking this form of ruling. A personalistic style is a political strategy that attempts to build a direct relationship between the president and its citizens that relies on an emotional link. In order to do that personalistic leaders use their charisma, elements of the popular culture and a political discourse that present themselves as saviors of the nation. By building an emotional link with people, these presidents manage to increase trust in the executive, which translates into high approval ratings (Ortiz & García-Sánchez, 2014: 377).

Álvaro Uribe is a clear example of a personalistic leader. He was a charismatic president in the Weberian sense of the word, as people saw him as an individual with exceptional abilities (Weber, 1977). Uribe worked long hours, appeared before the public as a disciplined and strict person, forced his subordinates to deliver results, and exhibited a very combative personality picking up fights with all his contradictors. Uribe complemented his charismatic leader-

ship with an ability to connect with popular culture. Despite the fact that he came from a very rich family and that his government championed the interests of economic elites, the president dressed, talked, acted, and prayed as a humble peasant. This performance helped him to connect with thousands of men and women who shared his traditional world view (Bonilla, 2015). On top of that, Uribe stressed his regional origin so he distinguished himself from the Bogotá elites. These characteristics distanced Uribe from other Colombian presidents who were not able or were unwilling to establish an emotional connection with the public. For instance, Juan Manuel Santos, Uribe' successor, lacked charisma and his efforts to connect with the public were unsuccessful, because they did not appear to be authentic. He, as most recent Colombian presidents, was seen as another representative of the traditional elites from the capital.[5]

Finally, Uribe presented himself as a crusader against the enemies of the *patria* (fatherland). These enemies not only included the leftist guerrillas −severely debilitated during his administration−, but also the opposition, the media, the Courts and Hugo Chávez (Sierra, 2015).In sum, *we expect presidents, like Álvaro Uribe, characterized by a personalistic governing style, to enjoy higher levels of approval than those executives who do not establish such a governing style.*

The second pillar of Uribe's high approval ratings regards his ability to create a rally-around-the-flag atmosphere about the internal conflict that lasted throughout his tenure. By 2002, the year in which Uribe took office,security was a serious national concern. After years of increasing political violence −produced both by leftist guerrillas and right-wing paramilitaries−, a surge in the number of kidnappings and a failed peace process between the FARC and the Pastrana administration (1998-2002), Colombians felt hopeless.

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[5] The affective government style index, presented in Figure 2, illustrates the contrast between Uribe and Santos. The former ranks at the top of this index, while the latter ranks at the bottom.

Just months after his inauguration Álvaro Uribe launched a security strategy that started to produce results such as the demobilization of the paramilitary bands and the weakening of the leftist guerrillas. Despite the improvements in security and a positive public mood, the president constantly reminded the public that the threats to the nation (*la patria*) were alive ("the snake is alive", he said). The menaces to Colombia included the communist insurgents, which he described as "narco-terrorists" and "bloodthirsty bandits", but also the opposition, human rights advocates, and even the Supreme Court. Those who dared to criticize the president were stigmatized as "terrorist in civilian clothes", "prophets of disaster" or simply "enemies of the fatherland". In contrast, he presented himself as the "first soldier of the nation", the leader of a crusade to save the country.

Two mechanisms helped Uribe prime his message and frame reality to his favor. The first was a well-crafted communications strategy that consisted of producing daily press releases that were distributed through a network of small and medium radio and TV stations, avoiding interviews with newspapers to elude editing, and being the first to talk to the country in moments of crisis (Sierra, 2015). Second, the president had weekly meetings with local communities (*consejos comunales de gobierno*) in different places of the country. In those gatherings, he reinforced people's feeling of having a close and capable president and continued distributing his simple and persuasive message about the threats faced by Colombia. In short, Uribe set the public agenda for eight years.

We argue that Uribe's sustained message stressing the insurgent threat and the effectiveness of the government's security strategy resulted in citizens forming their opinions about the president relying on the issues emphasized by his message (Druckman, 2004). Therefore, *we expect that support for Uribe will be significantly higher among those individuals who saw insurgency as the main problem of the country and among those who were more exposed to mass*

media (García–Sánchez & Wills, 2011). In addition, we believe that for those who saw guerrillas as the country's most important problem, support for Uribe should be higher as media consumption increases.

The third element that helped Uribe sustain high levels of approval was a growing economy. After facing a crisis in 1999, the Colombian economy started to experience a slow recovery that accelerated during Álvaro Uribe's first term. From 2002 to 2007, Colombia's GDP grew over 5 percent, reaching its peak in 2007 when the economy grew 7.5 percent. Such positive numbers were attributed to measures taken by the administration (reduction in government spending and a reform of the retirement system, among others) and to an increase in foreign investment that poured into the country thanks to the improving security conditions (Botero & Méndez, 2008; Rettberg, 2010). Although the 2008 global crisis affected Colombian economy, the blow was not as strong as that experienced by other countries (there was a small but positive GDP growth in 2008 and 2009). The economy also benefitted from a surge in the prices of oil and coal –key Colombian exports– that granted Uribe's administration additional resources. In fact, in the midst of the 2008 crisis, the Colombian economy was driven by extractive activities (Rettberg, 2009). Thus, following the logic of the economic voting literature *we expect fluctuations of presidential approval to relate to fluctuations in the economy*. Due to the distance between objective economic indicators and perceptions of the economy, *at the individual level we expect a positive relationship between evaluations of the national economy and Uribe's approval.*

Data and methods

To test the hypotheses relating executive approval to presidents' style of government, we make use of aggregate data. The data set includes 26 Latin American presidents from 16 countries who held office between 1999 and 2016, amount-

ing to 629 data points (president-quarters).The dependent variable is a quarterly approval report for each president, obtained from the Executive Approval Project (EAP) (Carlin et al., 2016).[6]

The main independent variable is the measure of affective government style, an additive index introduced by Ortiz-Ayala and García-Sánchez (2014) which captures four dimensions: charisma, closeness to popular culture, a polarizing discourse, and direct contact with the people. Figure 2 graphs the results obtained by these authors for the affective government style index for each president in their study.[7] We employ the original metrics from 0 to 6, where 6 indicates the most affective governing style.[8] Other independent variables considered for the aggregate level analysis are: inflation, GDP growth,[9] dummy variables capturing the first three quarters of a president's term and dummy variables indicating whether the election takes place one or two quarters ahead (Carlin et al., 2018).

Considering the nature of our data, to test the hypotheses on the effect of government style and fluctuations of the economy, the most adequate strategy would be to run a fixed effects model. However, since the affective government style index is a time invariant variable this is not possible. As an alternative, the first aggregate level estimation (Model 1) controls for the presidents' "fixed effects" using dummy variables for each leader, instead of estimating the fixed effects by demeaning; this allow us to keep the govern-

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[6] The EAP collects and combines approval data from different sources for all Latin American countries. These scores are "smoothed" into a quarterly time series that is comparable across time despite of being estimated from different sources. For a more detailed description of the EAP data see: http://www.executive-approval.org/.

[7] For a more detailed description of this index see: Ortiz-Ayala and García-Sánchez, 2014.

[8] Table 4 in the Appendix shows both the approval rate and the affective government style index for each president and each year for which the data are available.

[9] Table 5 in the Appendix lists the sources for the macroeconomic data included in this model, by country.

ment style index in the model. This estimation controls for inflation and economic growth (including one-quarter lags of these variables) and includes dummy variables to control for the honeymoon effect and the end of term popularity re-bound. Others have also included a lagged dependent vari-able to capture the dynamic nature of presidential approval (Carlin et al., 2018), and therefore we estimated a second model including such control. However, since the inclusion of a lagged dependent variable requires our model to meet stricter assumptions we rely on results from Model 1.[10]

Figure 2. Affective government style index
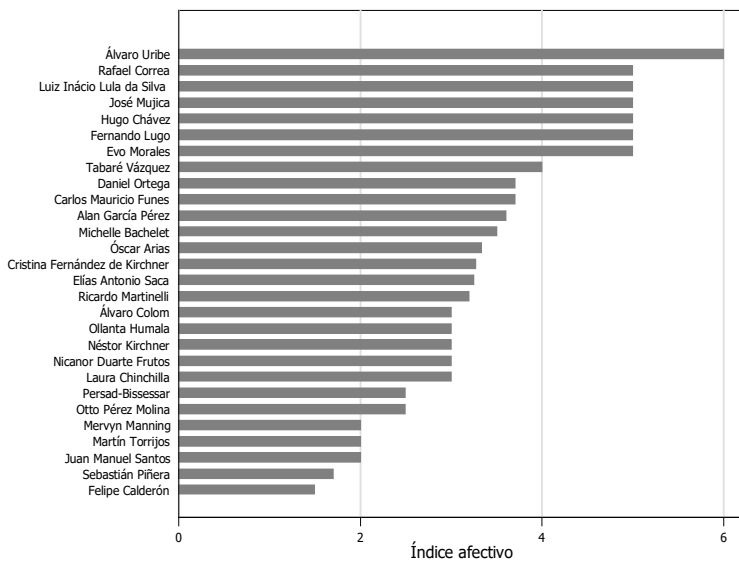
Source: Ortiz-Ayala & García-Sánchez, 2014.

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[10] The inclusion of a lagged dependent variable means that we are dealing with a dynamic panel. The proper way to analyze this type of panels is by using an instrument for the lagged dependent variable and to estimate the model by first differences. Since our variable of interest is time invariant, we discard-ed such strategy. Therefore, estimators from model 2 are likely to be biased and inconsistent as this model violates the assumption of strict exogeneity between the lagged dependent variable and the error term (Kennedy, 2003; Greene, 2012).

We expect the coefficient for the affective government style index to be positive. That is, we hypothesize that a more personalistic ruling style results in higher approval rates. A better economic performance (that is, higher growth and lower inflation) is expected to be correlated with higher approval rates. Finally, coefficients for the dummy variables capturing the honeymoon effect and the end of term approval bump are expected to be positive.

At the individual level, we use a dataset constructed by pooling survey data from the Colombian Americas Barometer-Lapop from 2004 to 2016. This database covers the second half of Uribe's first term and his entire second term, as well as five years of Santos' administration. Here executive's job approval is a measure using a five-point scale that run from "very good" (*muy bueno*) to "very bad" (*muy malo*).[11] The main independent variables are: a measure that identifies whether the respondent considers conflict to be the main problem of the country, political sophistication (as a proxy of media consumption, (Zaller, 1992), and retrospective sociotropic and egotropic evaluations of the economy (Singer & Carlin, 2013). We also include controls such as income, gender, age, education, perceptions of corruption and security, and a variable called "Uribe camp".[12]

Using these data, we test the rally-around-the-flag hypothesis and the impact of sociotropic and egotropic evaluations of the economy on presidential approval. We estimate two sets of OLS models of job approval: one for Uribe (using survey data from 2004 to 2010) and the other for

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[11] For the purpose of the analysis we reversed the variable's code so higher scores capture high approval.

[12] Uribe camp is a dichotomous variable that takes the value of 1 if the informant supported Uribe or one of the presidential candidates endorsed by him. For individuals interviewed between 2006 and 2010 were coded as in Uribe's camp if they voted for him in the previous presidential election (2002 and 2006). For the 2011 and 2013 surveys, the Uribe camp includes those who voted for Santos in 2010. For the 2014 and 2016 studies, the Uribe camp consists of those who intended to vote for Zuluaga, Uribe's *Centro Democrático* party. The 2013 survey was excluded from the analysis because the question on previous vote choice was not included in that year (Matanock & García-Sánchez, 2017)

Santos (using data from 2011 to 2016). By doing this we can observe the effects of the main independent variables and compare whether they work differently for Uribe compared to Santos. For each president we estimate four models: Model 1 includes all independent variables but the interactive term (conflict main problem x sophistication); Model 2 ads the interactive term; Model 3 excludes the variable "Uribe camp" and the interactive term; Model 4 ads the interactive term to Model 3. There may be a possible endogeneity between Uribe Camp and the dependent variable; however, we think that is very unlikely as Uribe Camp captures a relatively stable divide in Colombian politics, as political identities broke into two clear factions during Uribe's presidency and specially when Uribe distanced himself from Santos once the latter started peace negotiations with the FARC in 2012. Uribe camp proved to be a strong predictor of different political attitudes (Matanock & García-Sánchez, 2017). As this political divide is still driving public opinion in Colombia we decided to estimate various models including this variable, despite the possible endogeneity; similarly, we estimate a set of models excluding "Uribe camp" to test how robustly our models behave without such a strong predictor.

Since we argue that the rally effect was channeled through Uribe's capacity to constantly prime a message about his security policies, we expect those individuals who think the internal conflict is the main problem of Colombia to have a higher level of support for Uribe. This is because they formed their opinion about the president's performance relying on the issue most emphasized by the executive himself (Druckman, 2004). Since we use sophistication as a measure of media consumption, there should be a positive relationship between it and presidential approval, as media consumers were more likely to be exposed to Uribe's message.We also include an interaction term between conflict as the main problem of the country and sophistication. The effect of thinking that the conflict is the most serious

problem is expected to be stronger among those individuals who are more exposed to media news. The impact of the two variables capturing the rally effect must be significant only in the models for the Uribe administration. President Santos did not produce a rally effect.

The sociotropic and egotropic evaluations of the economy must have positive effects on approval, as previous research has shown for the Colombian case (García-Sánchez and Wills, 2011). Our individual level models also include a set of dummy variables capturing the year and a variable measuring how many months in office the president has served at the time of the survey. These variables, specially the second one, allow us to deal with the confounding honeymoon effects. Finally, our individual level models include the set of controls mentioned above.

Results

In this section we present the main findings of two sets of statistical analyses we performed to test the effect of the different components of our theory about Uribe's extraordinary high popularity. We start with the aggregate-level analysis and then discuss the outcomes from the individual level models. The first set of analyses tests the personalistic hypothesis and the effects of macroeconomic factors on annual approval averages. The second set of analyses tests the impact of Uribe's communication strategy (rally effect) and the role of perceptions of the national economy on individual-level evaluations of Uribe's job performance.

Government style and economic context

The results obtained from the aggregate-level comparative model (see Table 1) suggest a positive and significant effect of a president's ruling style on how citizens form their opinions about the executive. Presidents who develop personalistic, emotional links with the population are rewarded by higher approval ratings. All else equal, the predicted differ-

ence in approval between the least personalistic president and the most personalistic one is about 12 points based on Model 1 returns.

Table 1. Regression results for executive approval - Aggregate, comparative Level

Variables	M1	M2 (Dynamic panel)
Approval $_{t-1}$		0.846**
		(0.0390)
Affective Index	2.697**	0.539**
	(0.147)	(0.108)
Honeymoon 1st Quarter	4.081+	1.460*
	(1.994)	(0.697)
Honeymoon 2nd Quarter	6.541**	0.752
	(1.583)	(1.192)
Honeymoon 3rd Quarter	4.949**	-0.0170
	(1.412)	(0.949)
1 Quarter pre–election	1.047	1.016
	(2.223)	(0.791)
2 Quarter pre–election	0.618	1.271
	(1.864)	(1.125)
Inflation	-0.573*	-0.507**
	(0.224)	(0.175)
Growth	8.099	7.380
	(9.979)	(4.871)
Inflation $_{t-1}$	-0.171	0.385*
	(0.244)	(0.150)
Growth $_{t-1}$	12.15	-0.120
	(13.28)	(5.444)
Presidents' dummies	YES	YES
Constant	56.84**	8.211**
	(1.140)	(2.173)
Observations	581	581
R-squared	0.678	0.897
Number of presidents	16	16

Robust standard errors in parentheses.
** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$, + $p<0.1$

The comparative perspective adopted in this model helps explain why Uribe is such an outlier in the distribution of approval rates among Latin American presidents. As we develop in more detail below, he was able to relate to the people using his charisma, to adopt a mimetic approach to the common citizen, and to rally support around him to face his foes, which he made the nation's. Even now, eight years after he left office, many people feel strongly emotional ties with his persona. The model shows how his personalistic style of ruling, the highest among the presidents included in the study developed by Ortiz-Ayala and García-Sánchez (2014),[13] is correlated to his exceptionally high approval rates.

Among the economic factors included in the model, only the inflation rate reaches statistical significance in the expected direction. *Ceteris paribus*, an additional percentage point in a country's inflation rate entails a decline of almost 0.6 percentage points in its president's approval rate. Model 1 also indicates that presidents tend to be more popular during the first three quarters of their terms, than in the rest of their tenure. Finally, our analysis didn't offer evidence of an approval boost during the two quarters prior to the general election.

Rally-around-the-flag and economic voting

Results presented in Table 2 make it clear that some of the factors behind Álvaro Uribe's job approval are exclusive to this president. Although citizens' support for Uribe and Santos are positively correlated with sociotropic and egotropic evaluations of the economy and with perceptions of security, as expected; support for Uribe is also correlated with considering insurgency as the main problem of Colombia and with respondents' sophistication (our proxy for media consumption). These two factors are not associated with Santos' job approval.

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[13] See Figure 2.

Thus, among those who think conflict with insurgents was the main problem of the country there was a significantly higher level of approval for Uribe, compared to those citizens seeing other issues as the most relevant problem. This result offers evidence that Uribe's capacity to create a rally-around-the-flag atmosphere about the internal conflict had an impact on his popularity, as those citizens convinced that the insurgency posed a threat to the country, a message constantly primed by the president, formed their opinions about him relying on such issue. We also found that sophistication, a proxy for media consumption, was positively correlated with approval for Uribe (in 2 out of 4 specifications). This, to some extent, indicates that media consumers may have been exposed to Uribe's achievements and to a persuasive message stressing the dangers posed by insurgents and that the only leader capable of defeating those evils was Uribe.

Results from the interaction term between conflict with guerrillas as the main problem of the country and sophistication give us a more detailed account of how the rally effect worked. Table 3 shows the linear combination of the relevant coefficients obtained in regression models 3 and 4, specifically it presents the coefficient for the variable *conflict as the main problem* for the minimum and the maximum levels of sophistication.[14] The effect of considering conflict as the main problem of the country was only significant for those persons with the highest level of sophistication (media consumption). This indicates that being concerned about the internal conflict was not enough for approving Uribe's job, this concern turned into a significant determinant of supporting the president when citizens were more exposed to Uribe's communication strategy.

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[14] Since the interpretation of interactive terms is not straightforward, we present the additive combination of the coefficient for the variable of interest and the interaction coefficient for the different values of the second variable included in the interaction (sophistication). For a more detailed discussion on the interpretation of interactions see (Franzese & Kam, 2009).

Thus, as the president constantly primed citizens, through different media channels (radio, TV news, and televised *Consejos Comunales de Gobierno*), about his security strategy and the risk posed by guerrillas, Uribe turned thousands of frequent media consumers, concerned about internal conflict, into his supporters.

The variable *Uribe Camp* predicted a tremendous and significant increase in Uribe's presidential approval and a significant reduction (not as large) in approval for Santos. For those within this political faction, support for Uribe was about 23 points higher than for citizens located in other political camps. This indicates that Uribe's exceptional high levels of support during his presidency may have also been the product of his capacity to build a base of loyal supporters and to polarize the electorate vis-à-vis approaches to internal conflict. In Colombia, *Uribismo* and anti-*Uribismo* grew up as strong political attachments capable of modeling opinions and defining electoral results. In 2014 Oscar Iván Zuluaga, the obscure candidate supported by Uribe, defeated the incumbent in the first round of the presidential election. Four years later in 2018, Uribe's blessing to Iván Duque's candidacy turned an unknown senator into the winner of the presidential bid.

Other results from our models deserve mention. There is no significant relationship between wealth and approval for Uribe's job. This suggests that Uribe's support base was widespread across social classes. In the case of Santos an increase in wealth predicts a reduction of support, indicating a narrower support base. Perceptions of corruption affect more clearly Santos's approval than Uribe's. Support for Santos decreased as the perceptions of corruption increased. Although both governments were affected by corruption scandals, most events affecting Uribe's administration were public after he left office. And while and in recent years Colombia witnessed a political context of increasing corruption scandals, however not all of them implicated the government.

Table 2. Regression models for support for Uribe and for Santos. Individual level data

VARIABLES	Uribe				Santos			
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M1	M2	M3	M4
Sociotropic evaluation – retrospective	0.117**	0.117**	0.162**	0.162**	0.114**	0.114**	0.131**	0.132**
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Egotropic evaluation – retrospective	0.029**	0.029**	0.055**	0.055**	0.028+	0.028+	0.035**	0.035**
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Uribe camp	23.620**	23.630**			-3.579**	-3.575**		
	(0.904)	(0.905)			(1.156)	(1.156)		
Education	-0.118	-0.118	-0.387**	-0.382**	-0.007	-0.006	0.042	0.041
	(0.106)	(0.106)	(0.091)	(0.091)	(0.150)	(0.150)	(0.090)	(0.090)
Age	0.003	0.004	0.053*	0.053*	0.060	0.060	0.125**	0.125**
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Gender (female)	-0.562	-0.561	1.067+	1.040+	0.323	0.330	-0.235	-0.242
	(0.752)	(0.752)	(0.629)	(0.629)	(1.072)	(1.073)	(0.623)	(0.623)
Wealth	0.007	0.007	0.002	0.002	-0.073**	-0.073**	-0.059**	-0.058**
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Perception of corruption	-0.006	-0.006	-0.023+	-0.022+	-0.093**	-0.094**	-0.081**	-0.081**
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Perception of security	1.475+	1.478+	2.077**	2.067**	3.730**	3.733**	1.721**	1.723**
	(0.768)	(0.769)	(0.635)	(0.635)	(1.081)	(1.081)	(0.625)	(0.625)
Conflict as main problem	2.374**	2.670+	3.960**	1.750	0.303	0.891	1.929**	0.700
	(0.787)	(1.591)	(0.655)	(1.269)	(1.153)	(2.694)	(0.713)	(1.501)
Sophistication	2.250*	2.423+	1.065	-0.231	0.611	0.815	-0.536	-0.966
	(0.961)	(1.256)	(0.778)	(1.005)	(1.471)	(1.696)	(0.825)	(0.946)
Conflict x sophistication		-0.385		2.944*		-0.718		1.580
		(1.799)		(1.448)		(2.971)		(1.698)
Months in office	-1.204**	-1.200**	-2.023**	-2.048**	-0.308**	-0.308**	–	-0.339**
	(0.395)	(0.395)	(0.325)	(0.325)	(0.038)	(0.038)		(0.025)
2007	-44.947**	-44.821**	-72.776**	-73.650**				
	(13.706)	(13.721)	(11.243)	(11.248)				
2008	-34.370**	-34.262**	-57.844**	-58.580**				
	(11.361)	(11.374)	(9.315)	(9.320)				
2009	-10.843*	-10.802*	-17.964**	-18.221**				
	(4.281)	(4.286)	(3.500)	(3.501)				
2010	–	–	–	–				
2012					0.635	0.629	-2.014*	1.386
					(1.221)	(1.222)	(1.013)	(0.923)
2013							-13.267**	-4.093**
							(0.845)	(0.713)
2014					–	–	-11.536**	–
							(0.841)	
Constant	96.528**	96.230**	147.622**	149.684**	71.150**	71.007**	60.174**	63.564**
	(18.355)	(18.411)	(14.952)	(14.982)	(3.560)	(3.609)	(1.887)	(2.004)
N	2,834	2,834	5,114	5,114	1,443	1,443	4,460	4,460
R-squared	0.297	0.297	0.115	0.116	0.131	0.131	0.164	0.165

Table 3. Interaction results. Conflict as the main problem
of Colombia for different values of sophistication

	Sophistication level (media consumption)	Coefficient	Standard Error	P
Conflict as main problem (W / Uribe camp)	Low	2.670	1.591	0.093
	High	2.284	0.891	0.010
Conflict as main problem (W out / Uribe camp)	Low	1.750	1.269	0.168
	High	4.694	0.748	0.000

Conclusions

In this paper we offered evidence that Álvaro Uribe's high popularity is correlated with factors traditionally used to explain presidential approval, but also with factors specific to the Colombian case and to Uribe's political strategy.

Our comparative analysis also showed that personalistic presidents –those that use their charisma, elements of the popular culture and a political discourse presenting themselves as saviors of the nation–, build an emotional link with people that ends up having a positive effect on their approval scores. Uribe tops the list of Latin American presidents, including figures like Chávez, Lula, Correa and José Mujica, that thanks to this personalistic government style enjoyed high approval scores.

Our analysis also offers evidence that Uribe's high popularity was also linked to certain particularities of his government. Specifically, to his diagnosis of Colombia's problems, strategy to face such challenges, and communication strategy. In a country facing multiple forms of violence, Uribe convinced the public that the left-wing guerrillas were the main threat to the country, that his counterinsurgency strategy was the proper way to defeat them, and that he was the right leader to conduct such endeavor. This created a permanent rally–around–the–flag atmosphere about the internal conflict that lasted his entire tenure. A well-crafted communications strategy helped to sustain the rally effect. Our data showed that citizens who believed con-

flict with insurgents was the main problem of the country and those more exposed to media exhibited the highest approval scores for Uribe. They received and accepted the message primed by the president and formed their opinions about Uribe based on the issue that articulated such a message. However, being concerned about internal conflict was apparently not enough to engender approval of Uribe's job performance. Rather, this concern turned into a significant determinant of supporting the president when citizens were exposed to his communication strategy. These factors did not explain Santos's job approval.

On top of these factors, like other studies on presidential approval, we found a link between the economy and our dependent variable. Álvaro Uribe enjoyed positive economic conditions and took certain actions to promote growth, control inflation and increase foreign investments; this positively affected his approval scores. Our comparative analysis showed that in Latin America approval averages are sensitive to inflation but not to economic growth; this reveals the importance of the economy in a region that has experienced economic crisis and important variations in inflation. In the case of Uribe, his capacity to maintain inflation slightly under the regional mean may have contributed to sustain his popularity.[15] At the individual level, we found a positive relationship between perceptions of the national and personal economies and presidential approval. Although these relationships are almost constant in all approval models in Latin America, its contribution to sustain presidential popularity may change from country to country due to variations in the volume of individuals with positive evaluations of the economy. Thus, the fact that during the Uribe years the public mood around the economy was positive and about a quarter of the country said that the national economy was improving indicate that economic vari-

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[15] Colombia's average inflation from 2002 to 2010 was 5.4%. The regional mean for the same period was 6.2%.

ables may have played an important role sustaining Uribe's popularity. In other words, even though in both Uribe and Santos' popularity models the economy was positively correlated with the dependent variable, the volume of citizens that considered the economy to be in better shape than the previous year was higher during Uribe's second term (23%) than during the two Santos' administrations (13%).

Beyond these three factors, our analysis indicates that Uribe may have enjoyed a permanent honeymoon with the public by turning sympathizers into militants. Over the last 20 years Colombian political parties weakened and citizens' distrust in these institutions increased; paradoxically, at the same time *Uribismo* evolved into a political force capable of mobilizing thousands of loyal followers. Although this may be an effect of Uribe's high popularity, we think that once he transformed his sympathizers into militants, he was able to sustain high approval scores; his continued popularity to the present augurs in favor of this interpretation.

Finally, our study suggests that understanding presidential approval is an endeavor that needs to go beyond traditional factors and methods. Deep knowledge of national contexts and the political strategies of executives beyond the U.S. context will, we believe, lead to significant theoretical breakthroughs. Although most presidents' approval scores behave in a similar fashion and the variation of such numbers can be explained relying on variables such as the economy, partisanship and time, in many cases presidential approval moves in a puzzling manner. Identifying the factors that can explain such outliers requires detailed case knowledge of both the political system and the incumbent.

Appendix

Table 4. Executive approval rates and affective government style index

Country	President	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Argentina	Fernández										40.8	33.2	41.0	58.8	51.6	44.2	38.5	52.5	
											3.27	3.27	3.27	3.27	3.27	3.27	3.27	3.27	
Bolivia	Morales								63.0	59.1	53.6	52.0	49.1	44.2	46.5	55.9	63.0	64.8	58.3
									5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Brazil	Lula					60.3	47.8	46.4	51.9	57.8	67.9	74.4	80.4						
						5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5						
	Bachelet								51.4	42.0	42.3	63.2							
									3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5							
Chile	Piñera												55.7	33.9	30.5	37.0			
													1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7			
	Bachelet																46.2	29.7	26.7
																	3.5	3.5	3.5
	Uribe					67.9	70.9	69.3	68.2	67.0	74.2	67.1	69.6						
						6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6						
Colombia	Santos													67.3	59.6	45.2	44.1	40.7	28.7
														2	2	2	2	2	2
	Arias									51.4	47.1	51.4	53.8						
Costa Rica										3.33	3.33	3.33	3.33						
	Chinchilla													39.6	32.1	23.7	44.4		
														3	3	3	3		
Ecuador	Correa									75.9	71.7	66.2	65.9	69.5	68.6	80.9	81.3	64.7	51.6
										5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
	Saca							71.2	55.3	49.7	47.8	71.2							
								3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25							
El Salvador	Funes											83.0		73.7	68.7	76.8	66.3		
													3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7		

Note: the following table appears rotated 90° on the page. Each leader has a constant Affective government style index *(italic value) and a series of* Approval rate (%) *values.*

Country	Leader	Approval rate (%) — successive waves	Index
Guatemala	Colom	50.4, 55.7, 50.9, 46.4	*3*
Guatemala	Pérez	74.3, 59.5, 60.0, 42.0	*2.5*
Mexico	Calderón	65.6, 63.0, 63.6, 54.2, 56.1, 59.0	*1.5*
Nicaragua	Ortega	43.3, 27.1, 37.1, 42.6, 53.9, 62.2, 65.4, 64.9, 69.9, 65.0	*3.7*
Panama	Torrijos	40.2, 50.2, 50.6, 39.7, 57.5	*2*
Panama	Martinelli	34.9, 51.1, 59.8, 50.3, 62.1	*3.2*
Paraguay	Duarte	40.7, 33.9, 32.2, 22.5, 39.5	*3*
Paraguay	Lugo	51.2, 47.3, 44.7, 31.1, 26.1	*5*
Peru	García	36.9, 23.9, 25.3, 26.3, 38.6	*3.6*
Peru	Humala	43.3, 36.1, 23.0	*3*
Uruguay	Vásquez	66.6, 59.0, 56.8, 57.2, 64.4	*4*
Uruguay	Mujica	70.7, 55.7, 51.4, 51.3, 60.5, 44.5	*5*
Venezuela	Chávez	53.1, 45.9, 42.9, 33.0, 34.2, 38.7, 46.6, 48.6, 44.6, 41.4, 40.2, 36.5, 39.2, 44.5, 51.3, 60.5	*5*

Approval rate (%) (Source: EAP).

Affective government style index. (Source: Ortiz Ayala & García Sánchez, 2014).

Table 5 Sources of macroeconomic data

Country	GDP growth	Inflation
Argentina	World Bank	World Bank
Bolivia	World Bank	*Banco Central de Bolivia*
Brazil	World Bank	World Bank
Chile	World Bank	World Bank
Colombia	World Bank	*Banco de la República*
Costa Rica	World Bank	World Bank
Ecuador	World Bank	World Bank
El Salvador	World Bank	World Bank
Guatemala	World Bank	World Bank
Mexico	World Bank	World Bank
Nicaragua	World Bank	*Banco Central de Nicaragua*
Panama	World Bank	World Bank
Paraguay	World Bank	World Bank
Peru	World Bank	World Bank
Uruguay	World Bank	World Bank
Venezuela	Fred	Fred

Description of variables / Individual level model

Retrospective sociotropic evaluation of the economy. This variable captures respondents' opinion on the past situation of the national economy. It is based on the following question: Do you think that the country's current economic situation is better than, the same as or worse than it was 12 months ago? Individuals had 3 response options in which 1 was "better", 2 was "the same" and 3 was "worst".

Retrospective evaluation of the personal economy. This variable captures respondents' opinion on the past situation of his personal economy. It is based on the following question: Do you think that your economic situation is better than, the same as, or worse than it was 12 months ago? Individuals had 3 response options in which 1 was "better", 2 was "the same" and 3 was "worst".

Uribe Camp. This variable is a dichotomous indicator that takes the value of one for Uribe supporters and zero otherwise. This variable was created using vote choice reports for

the previous presidential election. Individuals interviewed between 2006 and 2010 were coded as in his camp if they voted for Uribe in the previous presidential election (2002 and 2006). For the 2011 and 2013 surveys, the Uribe camp consists of those who voted for Santos in 2010. For the 2014 and 2016 studies, the Uribe camp consists of those who intended to vote for Óscar Iván Zuluaga. The 2013 survey was excluded from the analysis because the question on previous vote choice was not included in that year.

Education. This variable measures each respondent's years of formal education.

Age. This variable was measured as the respondent's number of years.

Gender. This is a dummy variable coded 1 if male, and 0 if female.

Wealth. This is an index of individuals' ownership of nine consumption goods. These goods are: television, refrigerator, conventional telephone, cellular telephone, automobile, washing machine, microwave, indoor running water, indoor bathroom, and personal computer. This index is measured on a 0 to 100 scale.

*Perception of corruption.*This variable captures respondents' perception of corruption among public servants. It is based on the following question: Based on your experience the corruption of public servants is: 1. Very widespread, 2. Somewhat widespread, 3. Not very widespread, 4. Not widespread.

Perception of security. This variable measures respondents' perception of neighborhood security. It is captured using the following question: Speaking of the neighborhood where you live and thinking of the possibility of being assaulted or robbed, do you feel 1. Very safe, 2. Somewhat safe, 3. Somewhat unsafe or 4. Very unsafe?

Conflict as main problem. This variable is a dichotomous indicator that takes the value of one for those respondents that consider armed conflict to be the main problem faced by the country. All other responses have the value of zero.

This variable was created using the following open-ended question: In your opinion, what is the most serious problem faced by the country?

Media consumption. This variable measures frequency of media consumption using this question: About how often do you pay attention to the news, whether on TV, the radio, newspapers or the internet? The alternatives are: 1. Daily, 2. A few times a week, 3. A few times a month, 4. Rarely. 5 Never.

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