

**Preserving Democracy:  
Political Support and Attitudes Toward Protest in Venezuela**

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Paper to be presented at the Annual Meeting of the Latin American Studies Association.  
Chicago, IL, September 24-26, 1998.

## Introduction

Not long ago, Venezuela seemed to have skillfully avoided many of the problems experienced by other Latin American countries. Up until the mid-1980s, Venezuela possessed a solid petroleum-based economy and a vibrant democracy built upon inter-elite cooperation within a viable two-party system. The convergence of these factors brought political stability for almost three decades, a period quite exceptional by Latin American standards (Rey 1991).

During this period, however, many issues went unresolved and many new problems were created. By the mid-1980s, the Venezuelan economy no longer enjoyed the benefits of high oil prices and the nation was deeply in debt. The government could not continue with the practice of redistributing oil rent among different sectors of the population. The economic crisis of the 1980s resulted in a dramatic turn for the worse for the people of Venezuela. Poverty increased by 32 percent between 1982 and 1989. In 1989, 22 percent of the population did not have enough resources to meet basic needs (Naim 1993). Questions were raised regarding whether traditional political institutions and social organizations were capable of meeting the social and political demands of Venezuelans. At the political level, debates surfaced throughout society about the effectiveness of political institutions and the failure of democratic governments to promote economic equality and growth. Multiple signs of citizens' discontent with the political system emerged.

In early 1992, these words, expressed by a common Venezuelan, travelled around the world in the aftermath of the first of two coup attempts that shook Venezuelan democracy:

Maybe I should not say this, but my hope was that they would kill Carlos Andrés Pérez...It would have meant one corrupt thief less here. People know who the corrupt are, and we no longer believe in politicians, and we no longer have any option.<sup>1</sup>

These words reflect a deep disenchantment with democratic politics and its leaders, and convey tacit support for a military alternative.<sup>2</sup> However, despite the public's mood and despite specific threatening incidents such as two coup attempts, violent rioting and protest, a presidential impeachment, and grave electoral fraud, democracy in Venezuela survived.

Recent analyses of Venezuelan politics, departing from the conventional view that emphasizes the decay of political institutions and actors and the limits of the elite-pacted model to manage the increasing demands of Venezuelan society, have begun to stress the flexibility of Venezuelan institutions and their potential for change and transformation.<sup>3</sup> An area of study that has received relatively little systematic attention concerns mass political attitudes and their input to democratic survival.

In this paper, we examine the ways in which people's political orientations may ameliorate threats to political democracy. We explore the implications of a well-known inconsistency in Venezuelans' political opinions: a population that is very distrustful and critical of the government and political institutions, while at the same time highly supportive of democracy (cf Baloyra and Martz 1979; Baloyra 1979 1986; Pereira 1998; Romero 1997; Torres 1985; Templeton 1995; Welsh and Carrasquero 1998).

We begin by arguing that the traditional conceptualization of political support is inappropriate to study this phenomenon in the context of democracies undergoing serious political crisis, like the Venezuelan democracy. Then, we propose an empirical conceptualization of political support that focuses on people's orientations at various levels of political generalization. After describing the context of political violence and protest that dominated Venezuelan mass politics in the years preceding this study, we turn to analyze how attitudes of political support are linked to attitudes

toward protest in Venezuela. This study's data consist of 897 survey interviews conducted in Caracas and Maracaibo, Venezuela's two main cities, in January 1995.

### **Conceptualizing Political Support**

Students of politics have long theorized that support is a factor presumed to be fundamental in accounting for democratic stability. It has been assumed that support is rooted in citizens' orientations and attachments toward political rules, institutions, and authorities. Consequently, what citizens think about their political institutions, how they perceive government performance, and how they judge political leaders and public officials have become sources of inquiry for many studies of the dynamics of democratic politics.

Much of the research on political support has been influenced by Easton's conceptualization of support (1965, 1975). Specifically by the distinction between specific and diffuse support. Easton observed that people's political attitudes vary in the extent to which they may affect the political system. There are instances in which the members of a political system dislike and oppose incumbent authorities, and yet that opposition does not erode people's confidence in the political regime. Conversely, there are situations in which people's perceptions of government performance may alter their basic attachments to the political regime. It was to explain this precise situation that Easton distinguished between specific and diffuse support.

*Specific support* is related to what the political authorities do and how they do it. It refers to people's satisfaction with the perceived outputs and performance of political authorities; in other words, how policy decisions and officials' activities are perceived to meet citizens' demands and wants. *Diffuse support* refers to what a political object means or represents for the members of a political system, not to what that object does. It is defined as "the reservoir of favorable attitudes and good will that would help members to accept and tolerate outputs that are damaging to their wants" (Easton 1965: 273). On the negative side, diffuse support represents a reserve of ill-will that may not easily be reduced by outputs or performance (Easton 1975: 444). Thus, diffuse support corresponds to generalized and durable attachments directed toward political objects.

Building on these conceptual categories, researchers have devoted attention to the consequences of people's views and feelings toward politics; particularly to the potential effects of attitudes of support for the functioning and survival of democracy. The bulk of research using the conventional conceptualization of political support has been conducted in well-established, consolidated democracies, where as we argue the notions of specific and diffuse support provide an incomplete framework for the analysis of the ways in which people relate to their governments and institutions in less stable political environments.

In well-established democracies, most citizens have been born and raised within a single political regime. For the majority, fundamental political change is a remote and perhaps unthinkable notion. Democracy is a fully established reality. On the contrary, people in democracies enduring political uncertainty (i.e., new democracies, democracies undergoing political crisis) closely confront the possibility of political change. For them, democracy is just an alternative political arrangement. It is plausible to think that in such political environments, individuals' favorable or unfavorable attitudes toward the political world are not limited to perceptions of the performance of authorities and institutions. These attitudes might also involve general beliefs about democracy as contrasted with other political regimes. In his treatise on the causes of democratic breakdown, Linz (1978)

observed that a regime's legitimacy involves comparison among alternative political arrangements. In other words, Linz suggested that individuals' relative appraisals of their political system are essential to a system's legitimacy; it is only when individuals show support for competing forms of government that the system's legitimacy is at risk.

In advancing a similar perspective, Fuchs, Guidorossi, and Svensson (1995) mention the potential role that the existence of alternative forms of governments may play in determining individuals' support for democracy (p. 329). Analyzing data on support for democracy in thirteen Western European countries, the authors found relatively high levels of support for democracy as a form of government across countries. However, Greece and Portugal, the two countries that have experienced military governments in recent history, are the two countries with the highest levels of support.

We believe that beyond the distinction between specific and diffuse support, Easton's theory offers additional valuable insights. For instance, Easton's breakdown of the system into political objects (i.e., the authorities, the political regime, and the political community) is of great potential analytical power. Easton recognized that different political objects may generate different types of support, and thus he wrote that "specific support is response to authorities; it is only indirectly relevant, if at all, to the input of support for the regime or the political community" (1975: 437). He also noted that the mode of expression of such support is partly determined by the political object to which it is directed (p. 447).<sup>4</sup>

Implicit to the political objects framework, there is another analytical aspect that needs to be highlighted: the varying levels of generalization of the political objects. As we see it, the original Eastonian classification of political objects tacitly ordered them according to their level of generalization of the political system. A set of incumbent authorities, a nation's constitution, and the nation itself, are all objects of political support, and each of them represents broader aspects of the political system.<sup>5</sup>

Those political objects that are appropriate to assess individuals' support in consolidated political systems like those in the United States and Western European countries are not necessarily the same in Venezuela where democracy has been seriously at risk during the last years or in Central and Eastern European countries where democracy is an entirely new experience. An object of support is of analytical importance if it can be *changed*. In the United States, a president may be voted out of office, and, in rare instances, the Constitution may be amended. In countries in which democracy is unstable, much more is open to change. In these nations, the existence of credible alternative systems such as military governments suggests that individuals' support for the system at the highest level of generalization is of critical significance. Thus, we submit that people's commitment to democracy as a system of government represents a type of support that must be included in an empirical conceptualization of support (see also Fuchs, Guidorossi, and Svensson 1995). In unstable political contexts, like in Venezuela, the conceptualization of support must include people's evaluations of the current government, people's evaluations of the operating rules and institutions (i.e., the country's political system), and people's evaluations of democracy.

### **Political Support and Its Consequences**

If citizens' attitudes toward the political system matter, then these attitudes must play a part in determining behaviors of clear political significance. Political support can be seen as a positive

incentive for conventional political participation. For instance, support may be the motivational force behind people's engagement in well-embedded practices of democratic politics, such as campaigning for a candidate or attending partisan meetings. These forms of political participation reinforce the status quo. In contrast, when political support is absent or low, citizens may engage in activities that openly challenge political authorities, very frequently outside of sanctioned channels—by law or custom—of political participation. When citizens' attachments toward their political system are fragile, the likely result is political withdrawal or participation in unconventional forms of political action.

Scholars using the concept of political support, and related concepts such as political alienation (i.e., Finifter 1970, Schwartz 1973), and trust (i.e., Gamson 1968; Paige 1971) have proposed, in essence, that deep rooted, generalized affect toward political authorities and institutions is an important determinant of individual political behavior. This perspective holds that a low level of political support is associated with an individual's readiness and actual participation in illegal and/or violent political dissent.

Indeed, much of the research on the consequences of support has focussed on various forms of unconventional political behavior, that is, behavior that can be defined broadly as disruptive of the normal functioning of the government, that is, illegal and may be violent (e.g., Farah, Barnes and Heunks 1979; Kornberg and Clark 1992; Marsh 1977; Muller 1977, 1979; Muller and Jukam 1977; Muller, Jukam and Seligson 1982; Wright 1976). Political support, and especially diffuse support, has been considered important but not pivotal to explain unconventional participation. Several studies have yielded evidence of a positive, but moderate, relationship between low political support and unconventional behavior (e.g., Marsh 1977; Muller 1977; Wright 1976). While most scholars agree on assigning some explanatory quota to political support, they differ on their understanding of how support influences unconventional political behavior.<sup>6</sup>

Further complications in the understanding of political support and its consequences obviously arise when, as we have argued, there are serious limitations in the conceptualization of support, at least for the study of this phenomenon in unstable political contexts. In such contexts, we believe that attitudes toward democracy itself are an important ingredient of people's overall support, and therefore, these attitudes must be taken into account when studying unconventional political behavior. Citizens in stable democracies tend to voice strong support for democracy, but these judgments lack both context and tangible significance. Support for democracy expressed by a Venezuelan, a Nicaraguan, a Czech, or a Pole represents a choice from among real alternatives. Moreover, where democracy is unstable, calls for political change may be highly consequential. In the United States, no participant in a political protest reasonably expects even violent protest to escalate to the point where the government may collapse, institutions may be dismantled, and democracy itself may be replaced. In unstable democracies, in contrast, protest today can provide the foundation for fundamental political change tomorrow.

### **The Setting**

The events of the last decade have shaken Venezuelan democracy. Sudden and violent rioting, two failed coups d'état, the impeachment of a president, flagrant electoral fraud, and the decay of traditional parties signal that Venezuelan democracy confronts a crisis of serious proportions. While

casual observation may just focus on these dramatic episodes, a systematic study of Venezuelan politics reveals that underneath these incidents there is a substratum of sociopolitical unrest.

Here we work with a very broad definition of political unrest that encompasses events of various forms; it includes bloody riots, serious attempts to overthrow the government, and a myriad of non-violent and violent protests. Differences in the type, intensity, and the subjects undertaking the actions are, just to mention few, some of the dimensions across which these events differ. For now, our objective is to describe the sociopolitical context of this study. To do this, we focus on the period 1989 to 1993.

In addition to the riots of February 1989 and the massive demonstrations directly linked to the 1992 coups, Venezuela's streets were simply overflowing with protest by the early 1990s. Journalistic reports on the frequency and intensity of protest depicted an impressive situation of violence. In January 1992, for example, the *New York Times* reported that during the first three years of the presidency of Carlos Andrés Pérez there were 5,000 street protests, with 2,068 ending in violence. On May 27, 1992 the Caracas' daily *EL Globo* reported that since September 1991 there were 1376 street demonstrations in Venezuela, 679 of which had turned violent (Canache 1996).

These accounts sharply contrast with previous indicators of the level of protest in Venezuela. Indicators from the World Handbook of political conflict (Taylor and Jodice 1983) for the period 1958- 1977, show that during the first decade of democracy in Venezuela there was considerable political turmoil, but once the bases of the political system were well-grounded there was a successive decline in violent political events. The peak of violent events corresponds to 1958-67 (679 out of 708 incidents recorded), the years in which Venezuela's young democracy experienced several military reactions, demands from new mobilized actors, and a strong guerrilla movement.

The Handbook's indicators provide a very broad picture of the political unrest in Venezuela; fortunately a Venezuela-specific data set (VIOPOL) has been compiled by researchers in that country.<sup>7</sup> This data bank supplies information for three years—1976, 1980, and 1986—preceding our 1995 survey. The data evidence a consistent pattern of growing non-violent protest. Hence, it can be said that during the 1970s and 1980s non-violent actions (i.e., demonstrations, political strikes, labor strikes) set the tone of Venezuelans' unconventional participation.

Overall, the indicators provided by the World Handbook and the Venezuelan data bank (VIOPOL) depict a sociopolitical climate very dissimilar from the climate in the 1990s. Venezuela confronted substantial political violence during the foundation of democracy, but social and political stability was achieved over the years. In the 1970s and 1980s, Venezuelans remained active, protesting and presenting their claims using mainly peaceful means.

Venezuela began a period characterized by sustained agitation, and involving protests of various types after the violent events of 1989. Protest event data collected for a five-year period (1989-1993) aid to depict the sociopolitical climate in the years preceding this analysis.<sup>8</sup>

Venezuela's sociopolitical reality in the 1990s sharply contrasts with the political stability of the 1970s and early 1980s. Between 1989 and 1993, there was a substantial escalation of protest participation in Venezuela, including violent protests. Figure 5.1 portrays the incidence of protest during 1989-1993. Although the images of an explosion of violence in Venezuela are frequently associated with the riots of February 1989, we see that violent protests were a frequent means of political action since 1990. For the whole period of escalating protest, protests that became violent during their development account for 46 percent of the registered actions (N=794), while 13 percent

of protests were originally violent. Familiar means of protest such as demonstrations and labor strikes, however, remained a substantial component (38.20 percent) of protest behavior in Venezuela. A less well-know type of non-violent protesting, the political strike, was used by Venezuelans in various (2.80 percent) and somewhat unique ways.<sup>9</sup>

We seek to reconsider the possibility that political support is related to attitudes toward protest. In doing so, we expand upon the conventional Eastonian view of specific and diffuse support. Where democracy is not well-established, we posit that support for democracy itself may influence attitudes regarding protest. Venezuela in the 1990s is an ideal context in which to test this view. Venezuela has experienced more than a generation of democratic rule, but specific leaders and institutions have been challenged, and political violence has emerged in the last decade as a serious threat to social and political stability.

### **Dependent Variables**

Measurement of participation in violent political actions is not an easy task. When the focus of interest is not organized political activism—e.g., militancy, social movements, guerrilla groups, and so on—but the extent to which ordinary people engage in unorthodox acts of political participation, survey research confronts several challenges. For instance, Marsh and Kaase (1979) point out that few survey respondents report involvement in conventional forms of participation; thus, it may follow that even fewer people would report participation in protest. Actual involvement in protest behavior, Marsh and Kaase believe, is contingent upon strong and infrequent stimuli. In other words, protesting occurs when events external to the individuals call them forth (p. 58).<sup>10</sup> Therefore, for Marsh and Kaase, what is important to measure is the *potential to participate*, an attribute of a wide sector of the political community, whether currently active or not. The potential to participate in protests, or an individual's *protest potential*, is an attitude linked to individual behavioral intentions.

Contrasting with this view, Muller (1979, 1980) calls for the use of overt behavioral measures rather than indirect indicators such as measures of behavioral potential, or purely attitudinal measures of approval/disapproval of protest and political violence. He included measures of actual participation in protest and political violence in surveys conducted in New York City and West Germany. In measuring this kind of behavior, researchers are obviously dealing with a highly sensitive topic and many precautions are normally taken during the administration of personal interviews. In the West German study, for example, interviewees were promised strict anonymity and assured of the exclusive scientific purposes of the investigation. Further, the questions were presented in a non-threatening manner to reassure respondents that the survey did not have any ulterior motive.<sup>11</sup> In spite of all safeguards, Muller recognized that the rate of response for items measuring aggressive behavior was quite small (1979: 40). While it is not surprising that a small number of people participate in this kind of behavior, such low rates of positive response is possibly due to the fact that some people underreport their participation in aggressive acts because they are unwilling to admit participation to a stranger. Thus, to address this issue, Muller proposed to combine the measures of behavioral intention and actual participation into an overall measure of aggressive participation,<sup>12</sup> the aggressive participation index.

Two lessons can be drawn from reviewing past experiences through the measurement of the public's actual participation in unconventional political acts, and more concretely, in those actions that are illegal and/or disruptive of the normal functioning of the political life. First, a crude indicator

of participation (have done/have not done) very likely will perform poorly because some respondents who have engaged in an action will refuse to admit that they have done so. Second, measures of behavioral intention are sound proxy for actual behavior.

This study's survey includes a battery of items regarding political violence and protest. We measure respondents' dispositions toward political violence and protest using four different scales: a) a scale measuring approval of using violent actions as means to achieve political objectives; b) a scale measuring respondents' justification of various types of protest; c) a scale measuring opinion about the instrumental value of protest; and d) an item measuring the likelihood that respondents would participate in future protests.<sup>13</sup>

#### **a) Approval of Political Violence**

The first dependent variable is a measure of respondent's generic approval of political violence as a means to achieve desired political goals. Following Muller (1979), the items concerning violent political actions were part of an extensive set of questions covering both conventional and unconventional political actions. In this way, political violent actions were not singled out within the questionnaire.

Three items referring to aggressive political behavior were included in the Venezuelan survey. The behaviors were: a) taking over private property; b) taking over factories, offices, and other buildings; and c) participation in a group that wants to overthrow the government by violent means.<sup>14</sup> Descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1. When the three items are considered together, it can be said that Venezuelan respondents disapproved of the use of violent actions for political purposes. A careful examination, however, reveals that there is somewhat more support for actions directed to depose the government (mean= 1.605) than for the others violent behaviors (means= 1.373 and 1.372). A summated scale, "Approval of Political Violence," was constructed from responses to these three items. Scores on the political violence measure range from a low of 3 to a high of 15. The mean is 4.349 and the standard deviation is 2.542. A substantial number of cases are clustered at the very low end of the continuum (66.20 percent), an extreme deviation from a normal distribution. In addition, the variable's distribution is markedly skewed to the right of the mean, with 2.80 percent of cases having scores three standard deviations above the mean.<sup>15</sup> Statistical analyses using this scale as a dependent variable can be carried out only after appropriate procedures have been implemented to improve the distribution's symmetry. The usual procedure is to convert the variable's original scores into logarithms.<sup>16</sup> Descriptive statistics for the resulting logged variable are given in Table 1; they indicate that the variable has a mean of 1.360 and a standard deviation of 0.425. The range is 1.099 to 2.708. This reduces the skewness at the high end of the scale, and produces a substantial shift of the cases away from the extremes to the middle of the distribution. Substantive interpretation of a logged variable implies that any unit of increase in an explanatory variable is approximately equal to the percent increase in the logged dependent variable (Tuft 1974: 127). Thus, for statistical purposes, the logged Approval of Political Violence scale is a better variable than the original measure. It better fulfills statistical assumptions of linear regression estimation, and it can be easily interpreted.

#### **b) Justification of Protest**

The second attitudinal variable is a measure of respondents' justification of a wide range of protests. In an introductory statement, respondents were prompted to think about the political situation, and particularly about the wave of violence and protest in Venezuela, during the previous

five years. Then, they were asked whether they felt that various types of protest were justified. Wording of the items and corresponding descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. Not all protests are seen as one piece. Labor strikes and student protests are seen as reasonably justified by the respondents (means= 2.075 and 1.774, respectively), while actions that explicitly involve some illegal or violent action such as looting are seen as unjustified (mean= 0.454). The resulting measure is a summated scale called “Justification of Protest.” The scale’s mean is 7.688 and the standard deviation is 4.184. The scale ranges from 0 to 18.

### **c) Evaluation of Protest**

The third attitudinal variable gauges people’s instrumental evaluation of protest. The Venezuelan survey included three questions about respondents’ perceptions of the consequences of protest for both the country and for themselves. Respondents are evenly divided in their perceptions of the utility that protests may bring for the nation. At the personal level, however, about 41 percent of the respondents think that by protesting they can improve their personal circumstances. Approximately 38 percent of the respondent believe that by engaging in protest they can personally bring about change. The variable to be included in future analysis is called “Instrumental Value of Protest.” This is a summated scale that ranges from zero to three, with high scores indicating that protest is perceived as having instrumental value. The scale’s mean is 1.278 and the standard deviation is 1.188.

### **d) Propensity to Protest**

The Venezuelan survey included a question regarding respondents’ behavioral intentions.<sup>17</sup> That is, respondents were asked how likely they thought it would be that they would participate in future protests. Asking this question, we expected that those individuals disinclined to acknowledge past participation in protests—perhaps fearing legal repercussions—would reveal their genuine position about protesting. The variable “Propensity to Engage in Protest” ranges from 0 (the respondent unlikely would engage in protest) to 3 (the respondent very likely would engage in protest). As indicated in Table 1, the mean is 0.933 and the standard deviation is 0.980.

## **Political Support and Other Sources of Protest**

Evidence of a negative relationship between political support and the various measures of protest will corroborate the traditional view that holds that low political support is related to unconventional political behavior. Previously, we proposed to view support as a construct that combines various attitudes of support that vary on their level of political generalization. More concretely, we suggested that to analyze political support in Venezuela we need to consider support for the incumbent government, support for the political system, and support for democracy. Indicators for all three types of political orientations were included in our survey. Wording and descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2.

Our survey included a measure about the evaluation of the overall performance of the Venezuelan president, Rafael Caldera. Similar items have seen frequent use in research on specific support (e.g., Muller and Jukam 1977; Seligson and Muller 1987). Table 2 reports data regarding Caldera. In a scale ranging from very bad (0) to excellent (4), respondents rated the performance of President Caldera as slightly greater than average (2.202).

The second measure of support is the Political Support-Alienation scale (Muller and Jukam 1977), a measure of the legitimacy of the Venezuelan political system. The first four items correspond

to a revised version of the scale (e.g., Seligson 1983); these items were asked for the first time in Venezuela during this study's survey. The other four items measure support for specific institutions. These items are frequently used in multinational public opinion projects (e.g., European Values Survey, LatinBarometer), and they form a measure of institutional support, a level of analysis that corresponds to the political system. Correlational and factor analyses indicated that these items can be merged to form a single measure of support for the Venezuelan political system. The scale ranges from 0 (low) to 48 (high); the average inter-item correlation is 0.396, and the alpha coefficient of reliability is 0.838.

The final measure taps support for democracy. We have claimed that a full conceptualization of political support requires that we account for a level of support that involves individuals' appraisals of the broad form of government present in a nation. The Venezuelan survey included two questions about respondents' judgments concerning democracy. In Table 2 we see that these items are highly correlated ( $r = 0.464$ ). Therefore, we combined them into a two-item measure that ranges from 0 (other than democracy) to 2 (democracy). The scale's mean is 1.615, indicating Venezuelans' relatively strong support for democracy, and the standard deviation is 0.628.

The utility of this three-part conceptualization of support can now be evaluated by exploring the relative effects of these various attitudes of support on the measures of protest. Therefore, the main independent variables are the three measures of political support: support for the incumbent government, support for the Venezuelan political system, and support for democracy.

### **Controlling for Other Determinants**

A survey of the empirical literature offers a vast array of antecedents or explanatory factors for both attitudes and behaviors that denote unconventional political involvement.<sup>18</sup> In considering the effect that political support may have on protest, we need to take into account other plausible explanations. In doing so, we do not intend to assess how well alternative theories of unconventional political behavior perform against one another. Neither is it our objective to examine the effect of each of the numerous potential sources of unconventional behavior. Instead, we will include them in multivariate models in order to determine the relative impact of the political support variables on a person's dispositions toward protest when controlling for these other influences.

Table 3 shows the wording and descriptive statistics for all control variables. The first set of control variables measures background characteristics of individuals; two variables, sex and age will be considered here. Men and women are predicted to have differential levels of unconventional political involvement. Marsh and Kaase (1979) observe that Western child-rearing styles consistently reward aggression in male children in contrast to passive traits in women. Consequently, they theorized that men are more prone to unconventional participation than women. Additionally, the authors continue, men are more available for political mobilization than women, since women's domestic lifestyles and traditional values discourage their involvement in politics. Young people are expected to be more involved in unconventional politics than old people. There are various conditions that facilitate the greater involvement of young people in protest, among them, physical vigor, freedom from day-to-day responsibilities associated with a career and family, and time (Marsh and Kaase 1979; Muller 1979; Inglehart 1979).<sup>19</sup>

Cognitive conditions of the individuals are measured by education and political knowledge. Although education is believed to have various consequences for a person's tendency to participate

in politics, one of the obvious effects is the role that it plays in shaping a person's cognitive skills. Higher educated people are better equipped to deal with the complex and abstract world of politics. Therefore, one would expect that as a person's education increases, his likelihood of becoming involved in politics will rise as well. This well-established relationship concerning conventional politics is also anticipated for unconventional politics (Inglehart 1979; Marsh and Kaase: 1979; Muller 1979). Hence, one would expect that the most favorable attitudes toward protesting will be held by those individuals with the highest level of education. In addition to education, it has been postulated that knowledge, and more specifically, political knowledge, equips citizens to translate their opinions and judgments into political action (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Inglehart and Klingemann 1979). While the effect of political knowledge has been primarily studied in relation to voting behavior, it is possible that the same pattern holds for unconventional participation. In other words, the more politically informed and cognizant individuals will be more positively oriented toward protest.

This perspective on the effect of cognitive skills (i.e., education and political knowledge) is based on the premise that unconventional participation is essential to democratic mass politics. This is the position adopted by numerous scholars studying the rise of protest in Western industrial democracies in the last decades (Barnes and Kaase 1979; Jennings and Van Deth 1989; Dalton 1996). When studying social and political protest outside these contexts, an alternate effect of education and political knowledge can be theorized. It is possible to think that the propensity of highly educated people to engage in political activism at a high, even in unorthodox activities such as protesting, can be altered when such participation is highly disruptive and violent and openly challenges the status quo. In such instances, highly educated individuals potentially benefit the most from the system and thus, they may be less likely to support or participate in violent actions.

Two measures of individual economic conditions will be considered. The first variable is a person's objective socio-economic condition. Following the classic Marxist thesis (1848) about how the proletariat's economic degradation would lead to revolution, one would expect that those individuals enduring the greatest social and economic hardship would be most prone to protest. In contrast to this thesis, a voluminous body of research has focused on the impact of subjective economic dissatisfaction on political action. Most of this research has been greatly influenced by the concept of relative deprivation (e.g., Barnes, Farah and Heunks 1979; Canache 1996; Muller 1979; Muller, Jukam, and Seligson 1982). The Venezuelan survey did not include questions that allow direct measure of subjective deprivation (cf Cantril 1965; Muller 1979), but a measure did tap perceived satisfaction with life as a whole. Such a measure captures feelings of individual frustration that may be linked to aggressive political behavior. Therefore, although we cannot assess directly whether and how perceptions of material deprivation influence individuals' attitudes toward protest, we are able to isolate the effect that perceptions based on social comparison may have on attitudes toward protest. We expect that those dissatisfied with life as a whole, that is, those experiencing intense frustration, will be most predisposed toward protest.

A person's ideology plays a central role in determining his disposition toward protest. Ideological conceptualization helps people to understand the wide range of political information and to form their political judgments (Inglehart and Klingemann 1979). It has been theorized that certain ideologies condition a person's predispositions toward protest; thus, among those holding belief systems that prescribe social change, one would expect the greatest inclination toward protest (Miller 1974; Muller and Jukam 1977).

A person's sense of political efficacy may affect attitudes regarding involvement in direct political action. A person's perception of his own personal political influence is assumed to be associated with the individual's propensity to protest. Thus, the higher the perception of his own ability to influence political outcomes, the higher the likelihood that he would try to do something to bring desired changes. Theories of political discontent and alienation (Gamson 1968; Finifter 1970; Schwartz 1973) have gone further in postulating that it is the combination of high political efficacy and low political support—that is, the interaction between them—which creates ideal conditions for unconventional behavior (cf Craig and Maggioto 1981; Paige 1971; Seligson 1980).

The last control variable is a measure of possible social influence: the support for protest in a respondent's social network. The political relevance of an individual's social network rests on the premise that political attitudes and behaviors can be understood partly in terms of the flow of political information that takes place within the various social spaces in which individuals are immersed (Eulau 1986; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). At the core of this theoretical position is the assumption that individuals' opinions and behaviors are not the exclusive outcome of individual factors but that they are partly determined by the social and political environment in which they take place. Here, we will consider a specialized version of a person's social network, the political network. Attention will be given to the content of the information transmitted through social communication—conversation—between respondents and their political discussants.<sup>20</sup>

### **Political Support and Attitudes Toward Protest**

An important body of research has directed attention toward the influence of political support on unconventional political attitudes and behaviors. Collectively, these studies of aggressive behavior, protest, and political violence have produced results indicating that political support does not hold a cardinal position among possible explanatory variables. This does not mean, however, that people's support for their political systems is trivial.

We have argued that the traditional Eastonian conceptualization of specific and diffuse support is incomplete, and therefore, inappropriate for the study of political support in fragile or unstable democratic systems. In countries experiencing crisis or undergoing transition, people's attitudes of political support are richer and more complex than Easton's categorization suggests. In such political contexts, in addition to support for the government and support for a country's political system, we need to account for people's support for the form of government, that is for democracy itself.

Following the same logic Easton used when he distinguished between specific and diffuse support, we hypothesize that a person's most abstract and general attitudes—that is, this person's support for democracy itself—acts as a safety mechanism, reducing his favorable orientation toward political violence and protest. Thus, it is support for democracy and not support for the country's political system that ultimately constitutes the “reservoir of good will” that prevents individuals from favoring, and possibly becoming involved in, actions that challenge the system's survival. Put in more concrete terms, we anticipate that in Venezuela, individuals' lack of support for democracy will have the strongest effect, relative to the impact of the lack of support for the government and for the Venezuelan system, on people's predispositions toward political violence and protest.

To test this initial hypothesis, we need only regress the four protest dependent variables on the three indicators of support, along with appropriate control variables. It may be, however, that the

impact of support on protest is more complex. Following Easton, our argument is that support for democracy constitutes a reservoir of good will, or a safety mechanism, that prevents otherwise dissatisfied citizens from turning to protest and violence. If this is the case, then support for protest should be greatest when two conditions are met: 1) the respondent is displeased with some aspect of contemporary politics, and 2) the respondent has expressed antipathy toward democracy, meaning that the reservoir of good will is dry. In other words, the respondent has a reason *to* support protest, and the respondent has no reason *not to* support protest. The most direct way to test this hypothesis is to interact support for democracy with support for the incumbent government, because these variables reflect the highest and lowest levels of political generalization. If support for democracy functions as a safety mechanism, then support for protest should peak when attitudes toward both democracy and the incumbent government are negative.<sup>21</sup>

In this section, we estimate statistical models using the four measures of attitudes toward protest that were previously described (i.e., approval for political violence, justification of protest, perception that protest has instrumental value, and propensity to protest). For each model, the main independent variables are the measures of support—support for the government of President Caldera, support for the Venezuelan political system, and support for democracy—that correspond to the three conceptual levels of support. The analysis for each dependent variable will proceed in similar fashion: first, we will estimate a baseline model that includes only the set of control variables described above. Second, we will reestimate each model adding the two measures of support that conventionally have been used in the literature: specific support (i.e., support for the incumbent government) and diffuse support (i.e., support for the political system). Next, we will calculate a third model that incorporates the measure that represents the highest level of generalization, support for democracy. A fourth model will assess the possibility that support for democracy acts as a safety mechanism. This model adds the interaction between support for democracy and support for the incumbent government.

The first dependent variable is approval of political violence. Results for the control model, which provides a baseline for evaluation of subsequent models including the political support measures, are depicted in column 1 of Table 4. Only four out of the ten control variables display coefficients that achieve levels of statistical significance: age, education, wealth, and discussant support for protest. The coefficients for these variables indicate effects that are consistent with theoretical expectations. As predicted, as people get older their levels of support for political violence decreases. Results for wealth demonstrate that as socioeconomic condition improve, approval of political violence diminishes. We also see, as expected, that the better educated oppose rather than support political violence. Finally, results for discussant support demonstrate that attitudes toward political violence are strongly influenced by the content of social communication.

Measures of support for the incumbent government and support for the Venezuelan political system are added in Table 4's second model. Inclusion of these variables does not produce any significant change in the behavior of the control variables (i.e., coefficients for the variables age, education, wealth, and discussant's support for protest are similar to those reported in the baseline model). Moreover, the model's performance does not improve, suggesting that inclusion of the political support variables does not add to our understanding of attitudes regarding political violence. Although the effects of support for the incumbent government and support for the Venezuelan system are in the expected direction, the size of the coefficients is quite small, indicating that the impact of these variables is substantively weak. Further, coefficients for both variables of support are

statistically insignificant. These results suggest that opposition to the incumbent government and opposition to the current institutional arrangement do not spark approval of political violence.

The next step is to examine the impact that the highest level of support in the hierarchy, support for democracy, has on approval of political violence. The results shown in column 3 of Table 4 yield strong initial evidence that attitudes toward democracy aid in explaining people's dispositions toward violent protest. Support for democracy has a strong and statistically significant influence on respondents' approval of political violence. Consistent with expectations, approval of political violence is lowest among those respondents who most cherish democracy. Also note that addition of the support for democracy variable substantially improves model performance.

Were the analysis to end here, we would conclude that of the three levels of political support, only support for democracy influences a person's inclination toward protest. Hence, we might be tempted to conclude that citizens' dissatisfaction with political authorities, governmental policies, and political institutions are not important at all, and that support for democracy equally affects dispositions toward protest regardless of a person's level of dissatisfaction with the government or the political system. However, recall that we hypothesized not only that favorable attitudes toward democracy will act to reduce a person's support for protest, but also that this effect would be strongest among those individuals who are highly dissatisfied with the government. In other words, support for violence should be highest among respondents who are critical of both the current government and democracy in general.

In column 4 of Table 4, we see that the regression coefficient for the interaction term between support for the government and support for democracy achieves statistical significance, while the main effects of both attitudinal measures of support are significant as well. This pattern, which is depicted in Figure 2, is precisely what was hypothesized.<sup>22</sup> First, support for democracy has no effect for respondents who strongly approve of the president. These respondents are satisfied with the status quo and thus they disapprove of political violence. Attitudes toward democracy are irrelevant for these respondents. But a second quite different pattern exists for respondents who disapprove of the incumbent government. Among these respondents, attitudes toward democracy are pivotal. Most importantly, support for democracy acts as a safety mechanism, diffusing the effects of ill-will against the incumbent government. As a result, strong support for violence is found only when there is dissatisfaction with the status quo coupled with disdain for democracy.

Findings with respect to political violence provide initial evidence regarding the importance of attitudes toward democracy. Of the three support variables, only the democracy measure produced a strong main effect. Moreover, the interaction depicted in Figure 2 is consistent with the claim that support for democracy acts as a safety mechanism. Confidence in the importance of these findings will increase if these same patterns replicate with subsequent dependent variables.

The second dependent variable is a measure of respondents' perceptions that protest is justified. Results for the control model and other models including political support measures are presented in Table 5. As with approval for political violence, coefficients for age, education, wealth, and discussant support for protest are statistically significant. With the exception of education, the variables perform as expected. The regression coefficient for education is positive, suggesting that respondents with high levels of education are more likely to justify protest than those with low levels of education. Thus, the performance of education suggests that protest activities, and particularly those that do not explicitly involve a violent component, draw the approval of individuals from the

middle and upper socioeconomic strata. Whether the escalation of protest activities in Venezuela should be interpreted as a normal component of democratic life, meaning that it resembles the situation in advanced industrial democracies, is an empirical question that demands further investigation. Thus far, the evidence suggests that the higher a person's cognitive skills, the more likely this person will be to justify acts of protest in Venezuela.<sup>23</sup> Results in the second and third columns of Table 5 show that support for the incumbent government has a strong and significant effect in determining a respondent's perception of protest as justified. Negative views of the government led respondents to evaluate protests as justified. Global views of the Venezuelan political system, however, do not have any significant impact on a person's justification of protest. Support for democracy again yields strong and significant influence on attitudes toward protest.

Also consistent with the pattern of results for the variable approval for political violence, the interactive effect between support for the incumbent government and support for democracy influences a person's justification of protest. This effect is displayed in Figure 3. The pattern replicates what we saw previously with respect to approval of political violence. That is, support for democracy has no effect among respondents who strongly approve of the president, but attitudes toward democracy do affect the propensity of the president's opponents to view protest as justified. In short, support for democracy again functions as a safety mechanism.

The next two dependent variables, perception that protest has instrumental value and propensity to protest, are ordinal measures. To investigate the impact of political support on these variables, ordered logistic regression models will be estimated.<sup>24</sup> Beginning with the variable perception of the instrumental value of protest, results in Table 6 confirm the nature of the effects of education and discussant support on respondents' attitudes toward protest. Coefficients for the variable political efficacy also are statistically significant across all four models in the Table. Political efficacy had no effect on respondents' approval of political violence or on the perception that protest is justified. The effect in Table 6 indicates, in accord with theoretical expectations, that a highly efficacious person, one who is confident in his own political abilities and resources, tends to attribute a greater instrumental value to protest. Given that the perception that protest has instrumental value is the most tangible, end-oriented dependent variable of the four used here, the impact of efficacy seems reasonable.

Results again produce forceful evidence of the influence of support for democracy on attitudes toward protest. Note in columns 2 and 3 that neither support for the incumbent government nor support for the Venezuelan system yield significant effects. In contrast, support for democracy has a strong and statistically significant effect on respondent's perceptions about protest. Also, addition of the democracy variable produces a significant improvement in model performance.<sup>25</sup>

One difference between current results and those for the prior two dependent variables is that support for democracy does not act as a safety mechanism in the current case. The interactive effect between support for the incumbent government and support for democracy does not affect respondents' perceptions of the value of protest; the coefficient for the interaction term (column 4) is insignificant and its inclusion in the model does not help to explain assessments of the value of protest. Given this absence of an interactive effect, Figure 4 displays the main effect for support for democracy, with results derived from coefficients in Table 6's third model. We see that support for democracy lowers respondents' perceptions of the instrumental value of protest, an effect that is constant across support for the incumbent government.

The final test examines the influence of political support on respondents' intentions to participate in protest. Ordered logit coefficients are reported in Table 7 and estimated probabilities are depicted in Figure 5. Looking first at the baseline model in column 1, we see that four factors, age, sex, satisfaction with life, and discussant support for protest influence respondents' propensity to protest are statistically significant. Age and discussant support for protest operate much as in previous analysis concerning the other protest dependent variables. However, two new individual attributes, sex and level of satisfaction with life, affect respondents' propensity toward protest. Consistent with expectations, the results indicate that men are more likely to engage in protest than women, and also that a person's level of satisfaction with life in general is inversely related with this person's intention to protest.

When the measures of political support are added to the analysis, strong evidence emerges that confirms past patterns of influence. In column 3 of Table 7, we can see that the coefficient for support for democracy is statistically significant, while support for the government and for the political system exert no impact on respondents' intentions to protest. Turning attention to the next column, we find evidence of the interactive effect between support for the government and support for democracy. Once again, graphic representation of this effect provides testimony of the crucial role of attitudes toward democracy. In Figure 5 we can see that support for democracy has a dramatic effect among those respondents who are critical of the government, but virtually no effect among respondents who are highly sympathetic toward the government. The only respondents who are predicted to be at least somewhat likely to participate in future protests are those who express antipathy toward both democracy and Venezuela's incumbent government.

The four dependent variables considered here all concern protest, but they also are both conceptually and empirically distinct from one another. With this in mind, the consistency of the multivariate results warrants emphasis. First, the conventional Eastonian conceptualization of support fails to explain attitudes regarding protest in Venezuela. Support for the Venezuelan political system was unrelated to all four dependent variables, and support for the incumbent government produced only one statistically significant main effect. Second, support for democracy is strongly and consistently linked to attitudes toward protest. Of all of the independent variables considered, support for democracy was one of only two to produce a statistically significant direct effect for all four dependent variables. Third, support for democracy appears to function as a safety mechanism. The hypothesized interaction between support for democracy and support for the incumbent government emerged in three of four models. Fourth, individual-level political attitudes are influenced by patterns of social interaction. Discussant support for protest is the only control variable to yield strong and statistically significant coefficients for all four of the protest dependent variables, suggesting that individual-level political behavior is best understood as being at least partly socially determined.

### **Conclusion**

Although analyses based upon elite decision making and institutional engineering are critical to understand how democracies manage to overcome serious political crises, there should be little doubt that what citizens think is also an essential component of democratic politics. We have sought to call attention to the importance of people's attitudes regarding democracy in unstable political systems. In those contexts, we have argued that people's evaluations of alternate political regimes matter because they see political change as a real possibility.

Building upon the Eastonian conceptualization of political support, we have argued that in addition to people's attitudes toward the incumbent government and the political system, orientations toward democracy itself also should be taken into account when studying political behavior in fragile democracies. The Venezuelan democracy in the 1990s serves as an ideal context to test our view of political support. After many years of political stability, numerous violent events have endangered democracy. Our analysis has examined how Venezuelans' dispositions toward the government, the political rules and institutions, and toward the idea of democracy itself influence their attitudes toward protest. Using four different indicators of attitudes toward protest, we found consistent evidence about first the differential impact of the various levels of support, and second, about the strong effect of attitudes toward democracy itself. As hypothesized, the results indicated that a person would oppose political violence and protest when support for democracy is high.

Support for democracy produced a main effect on each of the four protest dependent variables, and an interaction between support for democracy and support for the incumbent government also was detected in three of four cases. Collectively, these results provide clear corroboration for the revised view of political support outlined here. Past research has yielded mixed evidence regarding the proposition that political support influences attitudes regarding protest. Our findings suggest that this mixed record likely reflects not any irrelevance of support for protest, but rather an inappropriately narrow conceptualization of political support.

#### **Endnotes**

1. Quoted in *The Washington Post*, 9 February 1992, sec. A.
2. Public opinion data have consistently shown that a sizable portion of the public voiced support for a military alternative in the aftermath of the coup attempts. Polls taken by early 1992, around the time of the first military uprising, give some perspective on the public mood toward military alternative during this time. For example, Phillip (1992) reports results from a poll taken after the coup in which about half of the population thought that a coup might make things better. Coppedage (1992) also comments on public opinion data that indicated that about a third of Venezuelans favored a military solution. Templeton (1995) reports that 26 percent of the population preferred a military government to the present system of Venezuela according to a poll conducted in March 1992, shortly after the February coup attempt.  
In January 1995, this study's survey found that support for a military solution had decreased; about 12 percent of the respondents said that a military dictatorship was the best form of government, and also about 12 percent preferred a military government to democracy. Thus, by 1995 it seems that the public's views have returned to high support for democracy. Data from the World Values Survey conducted in 1996 indicated that about a quarter of the respondents rated a military government as good or very good in contrast with 85% that thought the same about democracy (Welsch and Carrasquero 1998).
3. For a collection of works on this perspective see Canache and Kulisheck (1998).
4. Various scholars have recognized the value of the political objects framework, for example see the works by Kornberg and Clarke 1992; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995; Weatherford 1984, 1987.

5. Fuchs, Guidorossi, and Svensson (1995) argue that attitudinal objects of people's support vary in their levels of generalization.

6. The literature offers mixed findings and interpretations on the effect of support on unconventional political behavior. Some researchers have claimed the existence of a direct and independent effect (i.e., Muller and Jukam 1977; Muller 1979). Others scholars contend that low support produces unconventional behavior only when it is combined with other attitudes such as political efficacy (e.g., Craig 1980; Craig and Maggioto 1981). Similar arguments have been made for the concept of trust, a notion that parallels the concept of support (see for example Gamson 1968; Paige 1971; Seligson 1980). Other scholars have found that specific rather than diffuse support is strongly related to unconventional participation (Kornberg and Clarke 1992).

7. Researchers at the Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales of the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello in Caracas gathered information on socio-political conflict in Venezuela for the years 1976, 1980, 1990, and for the three first months of 1992 and 1993. The data are assembled in a data bank called VIOPOL.

8. The data set consists of 794 protest incidents for the period 1989-1993 (Canache 1996). A "protest event" was defined as a physical action initiated by individuals or groups that takes place in a specific time and within a specific nation; that pursues, implicitly or explicitly, a social or political objective, or both; and that it is directed against the political authorities.

The sources used were: *El Nacional*, one of the main newspapers in Venezuela, and the *Foreign Broadcast International Service, Daily Report for Latin America* (FBIS). *El Nacional* is the primary source of information. This newspaper has a well-recognized history of more than fifty years in Venezuela. Its scope is national and covers most, if not all, economic, cultural, social, and political happenings in Venezuela. The secondary source is the FBIS *Daily Report*. Relying on foreign radio transcripts, television broadcasts, and numerous regional newspapers, the *Daily Report* contains much more information about specific regions and countries than major American or foreign newspapers such as the *New York Times*. Thus, it offers a rich compilation of information on social, economic and political events in non-American contexts. For example, for the period 1989-1993, the FBIS *Daily Report* included an average of 740 reports per year about Venezuela. These figures are in sharp contrast with coverage in the *Times*, which, for example, published 103 stories concerning Venezuela for the entire five-year period.

9. Examples of political protests are the civic strikes that were observed in most cities and towns across the country. In some cases, these protests had a *motif* like "El Pitazo" or the protest of "Las Cacerolas," in remembrance of the famous Chilean protests.

10. The likelihood of protest also depends on the resistance offered by political authorities and the support for such resistance from other members of the community (Marsh and Kaase 1979: 60, cf Huckfeldt 1989).

11. First, five aggressive action questions (seizure of factories, offices and other buildings; refusal to pay rent or taxes; participation in fights—battles with police, battles with other demonstrators;

participation in a group that wants to dislodge the government by violent means; participation in wildcat strikes) were mixed with a similar number of non-aggressive actions questions (participation in a petition-signing campaign; working for a political party or candidate; refusal of military service; participation in a legally permitted demonstration; attempting to win converts to one's own political views).

Second, not all the questions were verbally answered by the respondents. Respondents were given a deck of ten cards. Each card listed a specific political action. Respondents were asked to consider each of these actions as a possible mean to influence the government and then they were asked to consider: a) whether or not they approved of each behavior; b) in their view, what percentage of citizens in the Federal Republic would approve each behavior; c) whether or not they personally would engage in each behavior; and d) whether or not they had done each behavior. For the last question, the question of actual participation, respondents used a mechanical sorting procedure—sorting out the cards in four boxes—instead of directly answering to the interviewer (Muller 1979: 37-40).

In the survey conducted in New York City, the questions about actual participation were part of an extensive battery of questions that included conventional participatory acts. Also, responses to the questions about actual participation were placed in a sealed envelope in the presence of the respondent.

12. Muller offers an additional reason for this procedure: not all respondents who reported to have participated in aggressive acts expressed the intention to repeat that act. Consequently, it would be misleading to treat those who have engaged in aggressive acts as the same.

13. Using factor analysis technique we were able to identify three distinct factors among the whole set of individual items. For the first factor, "Approval of Political Violence," the rotated factor loadings were: invasion private property (0.81), taking over factories, offices, and buildings (0.81) and overthrow the government (0.68). The rotated factor loadings for the second factor, "Justification of Protest," were: student protests (0.73), labor strikes (0.72), civic strikes (0.63), blockage of streets (0.69), taking over government offices (0.64), and looting (0.54). For the factor "Instrumental Value of Protest," the factor loadings were: anything good for the country (0.73), by protesting I can not change anything (0.82), and anything good for me (0.83). The single item measuring intention to engage in protest did not load in any of the factors above, suggesting that this indicators is measuring a different construct.

14. These items have been adapted from the questionnaire of the Central American Public Opinion Project, coordinated by Mitchell Seligson. Some of these items originally appeared in Muller's West Germany survey (1979), and Marsh and Kaase's cross-national study (1979).

15. Muller (1979: 51-54) confronted an even more severe situation with the core variable of his West Germany study, "Aggressive Political Participation" (APP). In that study, 70.40 percent of the cases were clustered at the very low end of the scale. The scale was also extremely skewed to the right, with 2.30 percent of the cases with scores above the mean.

16. Logarithmic transformation helps to reduce the skeweness of the distribution by spreading out the clustered scores at the low end of the scale and pulling in more toward the middle the very large outlying scores at the high end of the variable (Tufté 1974: 108).

17. Two measures of protest behavior, actual engagement in protest and behavioral intention, were included in the survey. The first variable, actual engagement in protest, is a very rough indicator of protest behavior. Respondents were simply asked to indicate whether they have or have not participated in any sort of protest in the last five years. Not surprisingly, the majority of respondents (87 percent) said that they had not participated in any sort of protest. Unfortunately, it is not clear that this measure accurately reflects people's actual participation in protest because we cannot be certain that some of the respondents were not reluctant to admit that they had protested. There have been only a few attempts at measuring protest behavior in Venezuela, and these existing studies have analyzed the issue from different perspectives. For example, a survey conducted in 1993 asked several questions about approval of and justification of protests, but none about actual engagement in protest. Febres and collaborators (1992) conducted a survey in three states—Distrito Federal, Miranda, and Aragua—during one of the major civic protests of the last several years (“El Pitazo”). Torres and Coddetta (1990) conducted an in-depth study of the riots in February 1989. In light of this evidence, it is impossible to assess the reliability of the measure of actual participation in protest. Given both these problems and the item's highly skewed distribution, we will focus instead on self-reported propensity to protest.

18. Studies that focus on individual level explanations have operationalized unconventional political participation in various ways. For example, numerous researchers in the 1960s and 1970s concentrated on the study of participation in riots (e.g., Caplan 1970, 1971; Eisinger 1973, 1974; Finifter 1972; Gamson 1971; Lieske 1978; Miller, Bolce and Halligan 1977; Paige 1971; Sears, and McConahay 1973; Seeman 1972, 1975; Wright 1976). Muller has used several indicators to operationalize unconventional political participation: potential for political violence—a combination of approval of political violence and intention to engage in political violence—(1972); aggressive political behavior—a sumated index of positive responses to questions asking whether or not a respondent had engaged in actions involving political violence (1977). Later, he perfected this measure by combining the measures of actual aggressive behavior and intention to participate in protest (1979). Marsh and Kaase (1979) used the variable protest potential—a measure of behavioral intention toward protest.

19. Muller conceives age as a background trait that acts as a summary of availability for collective action. As he sees it, “the young, because they are likely to be unmarried, to be students, and to be unemployed or only part-time employed, have more free time than the old (excepting retired persons). In addition, the young, on the average, are more likely to be available for collective action than the old by virtue of better health, greater energy, and perhaps higher general enthusiasm for social activism” (1979: 100).

20. Respondents were asked to identify three discussant partners. For each discussant, respondents were asked whether the person supports protest (coded -1 = discussant opposes protest; 0=discussant is neutral or respondent does not know discussant's positions on protest; 1= discussant supports

protest) and how often the respondent and the discussant talk (coded 1 = less than once a month, to 4 = daily). A social network measure is created by weighing each discussant's perceived position on protest by the frequency of interaction, and then adding the resulting scores across the respondent's three discussants. The resulting measure ranges from -12 (respondent speaks daily with three discussants who oppose protest) to 12 (respondent speaks daily with three discussants who support protest).

21. The expectation that attitudes toward protest will be most positive when support for democracy and support for the incumbent government both are low resembles an interaction hypothesized by other authors, one between specific support and diffuse support (e.g., Muller and Jukam 1977; Seligson and Carrión 1998). Given our argument that the hypothesized effects of support for democracy hinge on the fact that this variable represents the highest level of generalization, effects associated with conventional indicators of diffuse support likely will be subsumed by the democracy variable and its corresponding interaction with specific support. Empirical results support this expectation. Additional versions of the models reported below were run to test for a possible support for incumbent government x support for Venezuelan political system interaction, but no such interaction was identified.

22. In all Figures, independent variables other than support for the incumbent government and support for democracy are held at their means or modes as appropriate.

23. The effects of education reported in Table 5 are particularly intriguing when juxtaposed with those in Table 4. Education produced a statistically significant effect in both cases, but the direction of these effects differ: increasing education is associated with the perception that protest is justified (table 5), but with disapproval of *violent* protest (table 4). It appears that the well-educated approve of protest as an expressive, and thus democratic, act; conversely, they disapprove of protest that is outwardly violent.

24. When the dependent variable is both polytomous and ordinal, the appropriate modeling strategy is ordered logistic regression, a technique which allows the analyst to take advantage of the ordered nature of the response categories (Agresti 1989; Demaris 1992; Liao 1994). With OLS regression, the space between units on the dependent variable is assumed to be equal, and the effects of independent variables are assumed to be linear. With ordered logit, in contrast, the space between categories is estimated using a series of constants, or cut-points, and the estimation procedure is inherently nonlinear. Once the cut-points have been taken into account, interpretation of ordered logit results is quite similar to interpretation of binomial logistic regression results.

25. The gain in model chi-square as we move from the second model to third is 6.646 ( $p < .01$ , 1 d.f.).

**Table 1. Measures of Unconventional Political Action**

| Question  | Statistics |       |
|---|------------|-------|
| <b>A. Approval of Political Violence</b>  |            |       |
| To what extent you approve or disapprove of people performing the following actions (for all items, 1=strongly disapprove, to 5=strongly approve) |            |       |
| 1) that people invade private property  | Mean       | 1.373 |
|   | SD         | 1.008 |
|   | N          | 896   |
| 2) that people take over factories, offices and other buildings   | Mean       | 1.372 |
|   | SD         | 0.989 |
|   | N          | 896   |
| 3) that people participate in a group that wants to overthrow the government by violent means   | Mean       | 1.605 |
|   | SD         | 1.232 |
|   | N          | 896   |
| Sum of items in section A (3=strongly disapprove, to 15=strongly approve)   | Mean       | 4.349 |
|   | SD         | 2.542 |
|   | N          | 896   |
| Mean correlation = 0.432, alpha = 0.695   |            |       |
| Logged Approval of Political Violence   | Mean       | 1.360 |
|   | SD         | 0.425 |
|   | N          | 896   |
| <b>B. Justification of Protest</b>  |            |       |
| Tell me if you consider the following actions very justified (3), somewhat justified (2), slightly justified (1), not justified (0)               |            |       |
| 1) Student Protests   | Mean       | 1.774 |
|   | SD         | 1.033 |
|   | N          | 894   |
| 2) Labor Strikes  | Mean       | 2.075 |
|   | SD         | 0.928 |
|   | N          | 890   |
| 3) Civic Strikes  | Mean       | 1.472 |
|   | SD         | 1.154 |
|   | N          | 879   |

|  |      |       |
|--|------|-------|
| 4) Blockage of streets   | Mean | 1.003 |
|  | SD   | 1.090 |
|  | N    | 889   |
| 5) Taking over government offices                                    | Mean | 0.931 |
|  | SD   | 1.096 |
|  | N    | 884   |
| 6) Looting   | Mean | 0.454 |
|  | SD   | 0.920 |
|  | N    | 893   |
| Sum of items in section B<br>(0=not justified, to 18=very justified) | Mean | 7.688 |
|  | SD   | 4.184 |
|  | N    | 864   |
| Mean correlation= 0.340 , alpha= 0.755                               |      |       |

### C. Instrumental Value of Protest

Please tell me whether the following  
is true (0) or false (1)

|   |         |        |
|---|---------|--------|
| 1) Protests do not bring anything<br>good for the country                   | % false | 48.543 |
|   | N       | 892    |
| 2) Protests do not bring anything<br>good for me                            | % false | 41.367 |
|   | N       | 892    |
| 3) By protesting I can not change anything                                  | % false | 38.004 |
|   | N       | 889    |
| Sum of items in section C<br>(0=negative evaluation; 1=positive evaluation) | Mean    | 1.278  |
|   | SD      | 1.188  |
|   | N       | 881    |
| Mean correlation= 0.470 , alpha= 0.726                                      |         |        |

### D. Propensity to Engage in Protest

|  |      |       |
|--|------|-------|
| How likely is it that you will engage in protest<br>in the near future? (0=unlikely, to 3=very likely) | Mean | 0.933 |
|  | SD   | 0.980 |
|  | N    | 885   |

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**Table 2. Measures of Political Support**

| Question  | Mean   | Standard<br>Deviation | N   |
|---|--------|-----------------------|-----|
| <b>A. Support for the Incumbent Government</b>  |        |                       |     |
| In your opinion, the performance of President Caldera in governing the country is excellent (4), good (3), average (2), bad (1), or very bad (0)      | 2.202  | 0.836                 | 883 |
| <b>B. Support for the Political System (for all items, 0 = not at all, to 6 = a great deal).</b>  |        |                       |     |
| 1) To what extent do you have respect for the political institutions of Venezuela?  | 2.865  | 2.002                 | 895 |
| 2) To what extent do you think that the courts in Venezuela guarantee a fair trial?   | 2.184  | 1.754                 | 890 |
| 3) To what extent do you feel that the basic rights of citizens are well protected by the Venezuelan political system?                                | 1.799  | 1.642                 | 895 |
| 4) To what extent are you proud to live under the Venezuelan political system?  | 3.137  | 1.981                 | 897 |
| 5) To what extent do you have confidence in the the Supreme Electoral Council?  | 2.115  | 1.878                 | 894 |
| 6) In the armed forces?   | 3.859  | 1.871                 | 896 |
| 7) In the Congress?   | 2.172  | 1.893                 | 896 |
| 8) In the political parties?  | 1.205  | 1.631                 | 897 |
| Mean correlation = 0.396      alpha = 0.838   |        |                       |     |
| Sum of items in section C   | 19.318 | 10.064                | 897 |
| <b>C. Support for Democracy</b>   |        |                       |     |
| 1) In general, what type of government do you prefer, an elected government (1), a government imposed by force (0), or are they about the same (0.5)? | 0.796  | 0.345                 | 873 |
| 2) In your judgment, which is the best form of government: democracy (1), dictatorship/or a left-wing government (0).                                 | 0.816  | 0.388                 | 868 |
| Correlation between items = 0.464   |        |                       |     |
| Two-item scale  | 1.615  | 0.628                 | 852 |

**Table 3. Control Variables**

| Question   | Statistics    |        |
|--|---------------|--------|
| Sex (0= women, 1=male)   | % male        | 49.387 |
|  | N             | 896    |
| Age  | Mean          | 35.864 |
|  | SD            | 15.138 |
|  | N             | 895    |
| What is the last grade you completed in school?  | Mean          | 9.464  |
|  | SD            | 3.831  |
|  | N             | 894    |
| Political Knowledge Index<br>(0= all incorrect, to 4= all correct)   | Mean          | 2.587  |
|  | SD            | 1.149  |
| -Who is the chief of the Army?   | N             | 860    |
| -Which chamber of Congress has more members?   |               |        |
| -How long is the presidential period?  |               |        |
| -Who is the president of the United States?  |               |        |
| Wealth index (0 to 21)   | Mean          | 7.401  |
| In closing will you tell me if you own<br>(none, one, two, or more than two) :<br>radio, television, VCR, refrigerator,<br>washing machine, telephone, car                                       | SD            | 3.761  |
|  | N             | 897    |
| All things considered, how satisfied<br>are you overall with your life these days?<br>(1) very, (2) somewhat, (1) a little,<br>(0) not satisfied at all  | Mean          | 2.606  |
|  | SD            | 0.641  |
|  | N             | 888    |
| Left (1= left; 0= other)   | % respondents | 15.161 |
|  | N             | 897    |
| Right (1 =right; 0= other)   | % respondents | 27.090 |
|  | N             | 897    |
| Political Efficacy Index (0= low,<br>to 6= high)   | Mean          | 2.344  |
|  | SD            | 1.868  |
| -It is worthless to participate in<br>politics, because people like me<br>does not have any influence on the<br>government's decisions   | N             | 884    |
| -I should not participate in politics,<br>because politics is too complicated  |               |        |
| Discussant support for protest<br>(-12= respondent speaks daily with<br>three discussants that oppose protest, to<br>12= respondent speaks daily with three<br>discussants that support protest) | Mean          | -0.889 |
|  | SD            | 7.892  |
|  | N             | 882    |

**Table 4. Determinants of Approval of Political Violence: OLS Regression Estimates (logged dependent variable)**

|   |                                  |                                  |                                  |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Constant  | 1.641 <sup>***</sup><br>(20.018) | 1.686 <sup>***</sup><br>(17.952) | 1.798 <sup>***</sup><br>(18.663) | 2.006 <sup>***</sup><br>(15.873) |
| Sex   | 0.034<br>(1.168)                 | 0.035<br>(1.196)                 | 0.033<br>(1.125)                 | 0.035<br>(1.210)                 |
| Age   | -0.004 <sup>***</sup><br>(3.955) | -0.004 <sup>***</sup><br>(4.047) | -0.004 <sup>***</sup><br>(4.257) | -0.004 <sup>***</sup><br>(4.205) |
| Education   | -0.011 <sup>*</sup><br>(2.232)   | -0.012 <sup>*</sup><br>(2.366)   | -0.010 <sup>#</sup><br>(1.937)   | -0.010 <sup>*</sup><br>(2.027)   |
| Political Knowledge   | -0.015<br>(1.050)                | -0.016<br>(1.104)                | -0.011<br>(0.720)                | -0.011<br>(0.739)                |
| Wealth  | -0.011 <sup>*</sup><br>(2.313)   | -0.011 <sup>*</sup><br>(2.315)   | -0.009 <sup>*</sup><br>(2.027)   | -0.009 <sup>*</sup><br>(2.090)   |
| Life Satisfaction   | 0.023<br>(1.003)                 | 0.025<br>(1.073)                 | 0.021<br>(0.935)                 | 0.022<br>(0.964)                 |
| Left  | 0.058<br>(1.407)                 | 0.053<br>(1.252)                 | 0.026<br>(0.628)                 | 0.020<br>(0.481)                 |
| Right   | -0.002<br>(0.069)                | 0.003<br>(0.100)                 | 0.003<br>(0.082)                 | 0.000<br>(0.009)                 |
| Efficacy  | -0.006<br>(0.717)                | -0.005<br>(0.648)                | -0.005<br>(0.678)                | -0.005<br>(0.624)                |
| Discussant Support<br>for Protest                                       | 0.009 <sup>***</sup><br>(5.225)  | 0.009 <sup>***</sup><br>(5.210)  | 0.008 <sup>***</sup><br>(4.668)  | 0.008 <sup>***</sup><br>(4.667)  |
| Support for Incumbent<br>Government                                     |                                  | -0.003<br>(0.175)                | 0.004<br>(0.247)                 | -0.100 <sup>*</sup><br>(2.242)   |
| Support for Venezuelan<br>Political System                              | -0.002                           | 0.000<br>(1.020)                 | -0.000<br>(0.033)                | -0.000<br>(0.209)                |
| Support for Democracy<br>(logged)                                       |                                  |                                  | -0.203 <sup>***</sup><br>(4.344) | -0.437 <sup>***</sup><br>(4.230) |
| Support for Incumbent<br>Government x Support<br>for Democracy (logged) |                                  |                                  |                                  | 0.118 <sup>*</sup><br>(2.537)    |
| Adj. R <sup>2</sup>   | 0.084                            | 0.083                            | 0.105                            | 0.111                            |
| Number of Cases   | 766                              | 766                              | 766                              | 766                              |

Note: t-values are in parentheses.

\*\*\* p < .001 \*\* p < .01 \* p < .05 # p < .10

**Table 5. Determinants of the Perception that Protest is Justified: OLS Regression Estimates**

|   |                      |                       |                       |                       |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Constant  | 9.359***<br>(11.414) | 10.390***<br>(11.184) | 11.198***<br>(11.699) | 12.670***<br>(10.089) |
| Sex   | 0.288<br>(0.988)     | 0.331<br>(1.139)      | 0.313<br>(1.087)      | 0.330<br>(1.145)      |
| Age   | -0.044***<br>(4.461) | -0.045***<br>(4.527)  | -0.046***<br>(4.681)  | -0.046***<br>(4.646)  |
| Education   | 0.112*<br>(2.245)    | 0.103*<br>(2.063)     | 0.120*<br>(2.400)     | 0.117*<br>(2.331)     |
| Political Knowledge   | 0.087<br>(0.599)     | 0.103<br>(0.706)      | 0.147<br>(1.011)      | 0.145<br>(1.003)      |
| Wealth  | -0.078#<br>(1.695)   | -0.077#<br>(1.675)    | -0.067<br>(1.466)     | -0.068<br>(1.497)     |
| Life Satisfaction   | -0.286<br>(1.243)    | -0.238<br>(1.036)     | -0.267<br>(1.166)     | -0.263<br>(1.152)     |
| Left  | -0.035<br>(0.085)    | -0.216<br>(0.520)     | -0.409<br>(0.978)     | -0.453<br>(1.083)     |
| Right   | -0.379<br>(1.153)    | -0.331<br>(0.998)     | -0.338<br>(1.028)     | -0.357<br>(1.087)     |
| Efficacy  | -0.007<br>(0.089)    | -0.000<br>(0.000)     | -0.000<br>(0.001)     | 0.003<br>(0.039)      |
| Discussant Support<br>for Protest                                       | 0.129***<br>(7.151)  | 0.129***<br>(7.188)   | 0.122***<br>(6.779)   | 0.122***<br>(6.784)   |
| Support for Incumbent<br>Government                                     |                      | -0.480**<br>(2.771)   | -0.426*<br>(2.459)    | -1.153**<br>(2.621)   |
| Support for Venezuelan<br>Political System                              | -0.003               | 0.009<br>(0.185)      | 0.006<br>(0.596)      |                       |
| Support for Democracy<br>(logged)                                       |                      |                       | -1.482**<br>(3.200)   | -3.125**<br>(3.051)   |
| Support for Incumbent<br>Government x Support<br>for Democracy (logged) |                      |                       |                       | 0.830#<br>(1.798)     |
| Adj. R <sup>2</sup>   | 0.114                | 0.121                 | 0.132                 | 0.135                 |
| Number of Cases   | 747                  | 747                   | 747                   | 747                   |

Note: t-values are in parentheses.

\*\*\* p < .001    \*\* p < .01    \* p < .05    # p < .10

**Table 6. Determinants of Perception that Protest Has Instrumental Value:  
Ordered Logistic Regression Estimates**

|   |                      |                      |                      |                      |
|---|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Constant  | -0.677<br>(1.693)    | -0.381<br>(0.843)    | -0.061<br>(0.131)    | -0.467<br>(1.269)    |
| Sex   | 0.162<br>(1.160)     | 0.174<br>(1.238)     | 0.163<br>(1.157)     | 0.160<br>(1.140)     |
| Age   | 0.001<br>(0.140)     | -0.000<br>(0.033)    | -0.001<br>(0.209)    | -0.001<br>(0.222)    |
| Education   | 0.070**<br>(3.035)   | 0.066**<br>(2.792)   | 0.071**<br>(2.982)   | 0.072**<br>(3.000)   |
| Political Knowledge   | -0.000<br>(0.002)    | -0.006<br>(0.087)    | 0.014<br>(0.185)     | 0.014<br>(0.192)     |
| Wealth  | 0.030<br>(1.375)     | 0.030<br>(1.347)     | 0.035<br>(1.582)     | 0.035<br>(1.608)     |
| Life Satisfaction   | -0.086<br>(0.780)    | -0.074<br>(0.667)    | -0.085<br>(0.775)    | -0.086<br>(0.781)    |
| Left  | -0.142<br>(0.701)    | -0.180<br>(0.868)    | -0.269<br>(1.275)    | -0.258<br>(1.222)    |
| Right   | 0.097<br>(0.618)     | 0.132<br>(0.830)     | 0.123<br>(0.774)     | 0.132<br>(0.827)     |
| Efficacy  | 0.216***<br>(5.772)  | 0.219***<br>(5.837)  | 0.219***<br>(5.831)  | 0.218***<br>(5.796)  |
| Discussant Support<br>for Protest                                       | 0.036***<br>(4.175)  | 0.036***<br>(4.157)  | 0.034***<br>(3.853)  | 0.034***<br>(3.873)  |
| Support for Incumbent<br>Government                                     |                      | -0.035<br>(0.431)    | -0.013<br>(0.155)    | 0.183<br>(0.778)     |
| Support for Venezuelan<br>Political System                              | -0.009               | -0.004<br>(1.221)    | -0.003<br>(0.513)    |                      |
| Support for Democracy<br>(logged)                                       |                      |                      | -0.576*<br>(2.514)   | -0.106<br>(0.208)    |
| Support for Incumbent<br>Government x Support<br>for Democracy (logged) |                      |                      |                      | -0.231<br>(0.954)    |
| Cut-point #1  | 0.951***<br>(13.672) | 0.954***<br>(13.669) | 0.963***<br>(13.686) | 0.965***<br>(13.668) |
| Cut-pont #2   | 1.913***<br>(19.537) | 1.918***<br>(19.566) | 1.932***<br>(19.653) | 1.934***<br>(19.607) |
| Model Chi-Square  | 95.956               | 97.890               | 104.536              | 105.677              |
| Number of Cases   | 755                  | 755                  | 755                  | 755                  |

Note: t-values are in parentheses.

\*\*\* p < .001 \*\* p < .01 \* p < .05 # p < .10

**Table 7. Determinants of Propensity to Protest: Ordered Logistic Regression Estimates**

|   |                      |                      |                      |                      |
|---|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Constant  | 1.740***<br>(4.406)  | 1.980***<br>(4.401)  | 2.268***<br>(4.849)  | 3.045***<br>(5.004)  |
| Sex   | 0.290*<br>(2.034)    | 0.298*<br>(2.078)    | 0.286*<br>(1.995)    | 0.300*<br>(2.093)    |
| Age   | -0.017***<br>(3.508) | -0.018***<br>(3.571) | -0.018***<br>(3.623) | -0.018***<br>(3.581) |
| Education   | 0.001<br>(0.050)     | -0.002<br>(0.067)    | 0.004<br>(0.171)     | 0.003<br>(0.133)     |
| Political Knowledge   | 0.014<br>(0.195)     | 0.016<br>(0.226)     | 0.033<br>(0.459)     | 0.032<br>(0.446)     |
| Wealth  | -0.012<br>(0.530)    | -0.012<br>(0.536)    | -0.008<br>(0.379)    | -0.010<br>(0.432)    |
| Life Satisfaction   | -0.324**<br>(3.104)  | -0.315**<br>(2.992)  | -0.323**<br>(3.068)  | -0.321**<br>(3.050)  |
| Left  | -0.268<br>(1.362)    | -0.300<br>(1.497)    | -0.366#<br>(1.805)   | -0.389#<br>(1.909)   |
| Right   | -0.198<br>(1.247)    | -0.181<br>(1.128)    | -0.187<br>(1.162)    | -0.199<br>(1.232)    |
| Efficacy  | 0.034<br>(0.936)     | 0.037<br>(0.998)     | 0.036<br>(0.991)     | 0.038<br>(1.026)     |
| Discussant Support<br>for Protest                                       | 0.041***<br>(4.685)  | 0.041***<br>(4.673)  | 0.040***<br>(4.426)  | 0.040***<br>(4.424)  |
| Support for Incumbent<br>Government                                     |                      | -0.086<br>(0.992)    | -0.066<br>(0.760)    | -0.457*<br>(2.191)   |
| Support for Venezuelan<br>Political System                              | -0.002               | 0.002<br>(0.328)     | 0.001<br>(0.218)     |                      |
| Support for Democracy<br>(logged)                                       |                      |                      | -0.524*<br>(2.391)   | -1.408**<br>(2.940)  |
| Support for Incumbent<br>Government x Support<br>for Democracy (logged) |                      |                      |                      | 0.444*<br>(2.017)    |
| Cut-point #1  | 1.315***<br>(16.519) | 1.317***<br>(16.495) | 1.323***<br>(16.474) | 1.327***<br>(16.469) |
| Cut-pont #2   | 2.916***<br>(19.553) | 2.921***<br>(19.552) | 2.934***<br>(19.499) | 2.944***<br>(19.445) |
| Model Chi-Square  | 58.146               | 59.457               | 64.571               | 68.147               |
| Number of Cases   | 756                  | 756                  | 756                  | 756                  |

Note: t-values are in parentheses.

\*\*\* p < .001 \*\* p < .01 \* p < .05 # p < .10

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