

Challenges to Democracy

Session 9: Global Crises

Mirko Wegemann

Universität Münster
Institut für Politikwissenschaft

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Plan for today's session

- brief discussion of feedback
- effect of global crises on democracy
 - Mittiga, R. (2022). Political Legitimacy, Authoritarianism, and Climate Change. *American Political Science Review*, 116(3), 998–1011. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421001301>
 - Cerkez, N. (2024). *Extreme Weather Events and the Support for Democracy*. <https://nicolascerkez.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/droughtsdemocracy-2.pdf>

Your Feedback

Generally, you seem to be satisfied with the seminar so far.

What could be improved:

- depth of the sessions
- some forms of teaching preferred over others (individual taste)
- group for podcast project too large
- workload

Of those who participated in the survey, it seems none have an idea for the final exam (no issue; but let's discuss!)

The context of the paper...



Figure: Controversy after the article has been published

To be agreed? Disagreed? ¹

¹For a summary and commentary of the debate ([Drezner 2022](#))

The empirical starting point

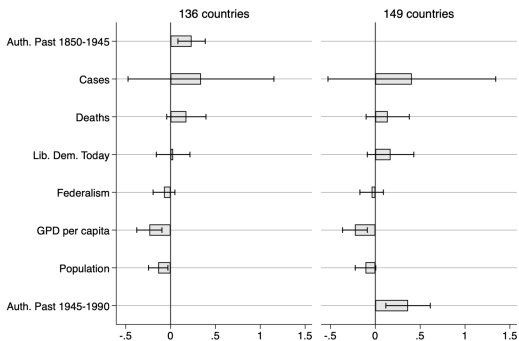


Figure: Association between authoritarian past and Covid-19 policy stringency (Trein 2020, p. 6)

Similar finding by Chiplunkar and Das (2021): institutions matter, but democracies can catch-up with authoritarian regimes

The empirical starting point

Yet, the relationship is not crystal clear:

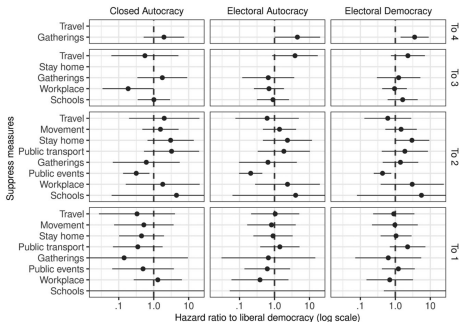


Figure: Association between regime type and Covid-19 policy implementation (Schmotz and Tansey 2023, p. 949)

Crisis governance – A moral dilemma?

We can distinguish political legitimacy in categories like...

- **input** legitimacy: how power is constituted (e.g. elections)
- **output** legitimacy: does governance lead to outcomes that improve conditions of a society

How does Mittiga (2022) relate to this?

Crisis governance – A moral dilemma?

- **foundational** legitimacy: basic needs of a society are fulfilled (protecting the security of its citizens) [and be guaranteed in the future]
- **contingent** legitimacy: based on governance by acceptable means (in the context of democracies, are democratic principles uphold when governing?)

According to Mittiga (2022), foundational legitimacy precedes contingent legitimacy. The content of contingent legitimacy is influenced by foundational legitimacy.

Question by Luisa: Doesn't it perhaps make sense to expand the definition of FL to include elementary economic needs?

Crisis governance – A moral dilemma?

What changes in times of crises?

Crisis governance – A moral dilemma?

1. authoritarian ways of governing are employed
2. i.e., foundational legitimacy is prioritized over contingent legitimacy
3. long-term prospects of crisis may not only lead to repeated authoritarian instances of governance but shift the prospects of what is regarded as legitimate

As Mittiga (2022) puts it “if contemporary conditions were to change, would rights and democracy remain central to legitimacy?” (1001)

A gradual change in contingent legitimacy?

- normative principles in judging what's fair use of power is up for contestation
- contingent legitimacy is not overhauled rapidly, but gradually changes
- crisis create demands for swift responses, potentially at the expense of democratic norms

A gradual change in contingent legitimacy?

In contexts of a crisis, authoritarian governance can be justified if it is...

- *necessary*: no other way of handling the crisis
- *successful*: reasonable chances of success
- *proportional*: only in the realms of governance that require authoritarian exercise of power

Mittiga (2022) often refers to the Covid-19 pandemic as an example in which crisis management by authoritarian means was prioritized over contingent legitimacy. Is his argument valid?

A gradual change in contingent legitimacy?

“My argument, however, is that relaxing or suspending CL standards is justifiable only when—and to the extent that—doing so is necessary to address serious and credible threats to citizens’ safety.”

Question by Luisa: What would happen to democratic culture if we were to switch between prioritising and suspending CL?

Climate change as a state of emergency?

- guaranteeing basic needs is already inhibited by climate change
- climate change serves as a multiplier reinforcing existing threats to basic needs

An authoritarian way of handling climate change?

- restricting life styles contributing to climate change (e.g. flying, nutrition etc.)
- banning misinformation on climate change → weakening of free speech
- establish bureaucracy that agrees with climate change action
- overturn referenda and ignore democratic opinion

These points affect all aspects of a democratic regimes.

An authoritarian way of handling climate change?

How might contingent legitimacy change due to climate change?

- **stewardship** principle: responsibility to act on behalf of future generations
- **epistocracy** standards: demands for scientific-based governance (further technocratization)
- **sustainability** standard

Extreme Weather Events and the Support for Democracy

All over the room, you find sheets with the article classification scheme we used before. For each of the sheets, you've got one minute to fill it out on your own. At your final stop, you have to choose what's the best answer to the question.

Extreme Weather Events and the Support for Democracy

- **Research Question:**
- **Main Argument:**
- **Data and Analysis:**
- **Results:**
- **Implications:**

Extreme Weather Events and the Support for Democracy

- **Research Question:** Does the experience of natural disasters affect the support for democracy?
- **Main Argument:** People base their support for a regime on individual experiences with it
- **Data and Analysis:** mainly geo-localized survey data from sub-Saharan Africa (Afrobarometer); matched data on development aid by China
- **Results:** Droughts negatively affect trust in government and institutions; effect mediated by presence of international actor
- **Implications:** Crises mitigate support for democratic idea

Main argument

Related to what we learned last week, political norms shape regime stability. But here, there's a reinforcing relationship.

- your day-to-day experiences update your priors on regime support
- if democratic regimes perform well, you are more likely to support them

Main argument

The author identifies a potential mechanism (apart from an economic one) which may explain this relationship:

- presence of a foreign power (China and the World Bank)
- according to Cerkez (2024), it's not about the economic benefits coming from development aid but about cultural transmission

The argument stops here, what could be the underlying idea?

Data

Three main types of data, **survey**, **administrative** and **weather** data

- five rounds of **Afrobarometer** (N=129,002)
- we know the location of the respondent (geocoded data)
- main question of interest: opinion on regime type
- follow-up question on what democracy means for individuals
- for **mechanism check**: matched with World Bank and geocoded data on Chinese projects

Data

Weather data:

- focus on droughts as a significant example of anthropogenic climate change
- use of **SPEI**-index that classifies whether an area experiences wet or drought-like conditions
- available from 1960 onwards, on a small scale area ($27 \times 27 km$)
- 12-months average compared to historical data for analysis

Data

Wording of the question:

“Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?
A: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government. B: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable. C: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.”

What's your take on this measure?

Data

In terms of modelling, Cerkez (2024) simply regresses the support for democracy on the drought index for each individual i in each enumeration area e in a grid cell g for time t (including some control variables at individual-level)

$$\text{Support for democracy}_{iegt} = \delta_g + \tau_t + \beta \text{Drought Index}_{gt} + x_{iegt}\gamma + \epsilon_{iegt} \quad (1)$$

Data

On which assumptions does the modelling strategy rest?

Data

1. **randomness of weather** → weather is independent from institutions
2. **homogeneity in treatment** effect across countries (fulfilled; although, there is quite high effect heterogeneity)
3. treatment (droughts) do **not affect survey roll-out** (probably not violated; sample remains balanced; even if countries with high emigration patterns are dropped)

Results

	Respondent supports democracy			
	Coding 1		Coding 2	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Drought index	-0.011** (0.005)	-0.011** (0.005)	-0.018*** (0.005)	-0.017*** (0.005)
Lagged drought index (1 year)		-0.001 (0.004)		-0.010** (0.005)
Lagged drought index (2 years)		-0.000 (0.004)		-0.008 (0.005)
p-value of joint significance		[0.108]		[0.000]
Mean of outcome		0.859		0.682
Effect of one drought (2 SDs)	-2.56%	-2.56%	-5.28%	-4.99%
Lagged effect of one drought (2 SDs)		-0.23%		-2.93%
Lagged effect of one drought (2 SDs)		-0.00%		-2.35%

Figure: Main results (Cerkez 2024, p. 42)

In addition to these results, also increases in support for anti-democratic governance and loss in trust in institutions.

Results

	Respondent supports democracy	Democracy index	Trust in government	Trust in institutions
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Drought index	-0.012** (0.005)	-0.040** (0.016)	-0.067** (0.013)	-0.071** (0.012)
Drought index x country is autocratic	0.009 (0.013)	0.061* (0.037)	0.113** (0.045)	0.042 (0.036)
Coefficient of index + interaction	-0.003	0.021	0.046	-0.029
p-value: Coefficient of index + interaction	[0.787]	[0.532]	[0.274]	[0.383]
Mean of outcome		0.859		
Effect of one drought (2 SDs) (no interaction)	-2.70%	-9.31%	-15.60%	-16.54%
Effect of one drought (2 SDs) (interaction)	-0.70%	4.89%	10.7%	-6.73%

Figure: Effect of droughts in democracies vs. autocracies Cerkez (2024, p. 45)

→ These effects are only present for democracies!

Question by Greta: How is it that there are no effects of droughts on citizens political beliefs within autocratic systems? What else does it effect?

Results

	Respondent supports democracy			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Drought index	-0.002 (0.005)	-0.001 (0.005)	0.003 (0.006)	0.010 (0.007)
Drought index x Chinese project (50km)	-0.022*** (0.007)			
Drought index x Chinese project (100km)	-0.021*** (0.007)			
Drought index x World Bank project (50km)	-0.016** (0.007)			
Drought index x World Bank project (100km)	-0.025*** (0.007)			
Coefficient of exposure to project	-0.024	-0.022	-0.013	-0.015
p-value: Coefficient of exposure to project	[0.002]	[0.001]	[0.010]	[0.004]
Mean of outcome	0.859			
Effect of one drought (2 SDs) (no project exposure)	-0.47%	-0.23%	0.070%	2.33%
Effect of one drought (2 SDs) (project exposure)	-5.59%	-5.12%	-3.03%	-3.49%

Results

...and only for individuals who were exposed to development projects by China or the World Bank [even if they do not benefit economically from it]. + development aid even reduces potential for riots and willingness to demonstrate

Everything said?

Question by Luisa: Do we have direct proof that there are people who would neglect CL in favour of FL?

Everything said?

The effect of droughts on support for democracy is only present if individuals were exposed to international power.

- What's the underlying mechanism? The World Bank and China are very different international players.
- How can we explain the assumed long-term effect of exposure to development aid on individuals support for democracy? [once exposed to development aid, individuals remain treated]
- Would this argument also work in reverse – e.g. by looking at development aid by the US or EU?

Everything said?

Some methodological choices could benefit from more clarification:

- Are there any intrinsic reasons to focus on sub-Saharan Africa only?
- Why only focusing on droughts if one has data on floods as well?
- Why are respondents who conceive political regimes as irrelevant for themselves not treated as a separate category?
...despite this being quite a popular choice.
- 12-months rolling average of SPEI-index may be too close to disaster if mechanism is about government's handling of crisis

Conclusion

What we have learned from today...

- continuing episodes of crises might undermine democratic legitimacy (Mittiga 2022)
- individuals tend to support anti-democratic principles if they are affected by climate crises
- international authoritarian actors might (successfully) promote their ideas in times of crises

To prepare for next week...

- in the last week before the Christmas break, we will start with the third block of our seminar: **solutions** for the challenges of democracy
- **readings:**
 - Treisman, D. (2020). Democracy by Mistake: How the Errors of Autocrats Trigger Transitions to Freer Government. *American Political Science Review*, 114(3), 792–810.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000180>
 - Martinangeli, A. F., Povitkina, M., Jagers, S., & Rothstein, B. (2024). Institutional Quality Causes Generalized Trust: Experimental Evidence on Trusting under the Shadow of Doubt. *American Journal of Political Science*, 68(3), 972–987.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12780>

Any further questions?

Literature

- Cerkez, N. (2024). *Extreme Weather Events and the Support for Democracy*. <https://nicolascerkez.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/droughtsdemocracy-2.pdf>
- Chiplunkar, G., & Das, S. (2021). Political institutions and policy responses during a crisis. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 185, 647–670.
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Literature

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2023.2205129>

Trein, P. (2020). The Paradox of Prevention: Authoritarian Past and Liberal Democracy in Times of Crisis.

<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3625523>

Literature

Treisman, D. (2020). Democracy by Mistake: How the Errors of Autocrats Trigger Transitions to Freer Government. *American Political Science Review*, 114(3), 792–810.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000180>