

Challenges to Democracy

Session 10: Institutions and Democracy

Mirko Wegemann

Universität Münster
Institut für Politikwissenschaft

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Plan for today's session

- readings on how countries (accidentally) democratize and what good institutions might bring to democracy
 - 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>

Democracy by Mistake

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.

Democracy by Mistake

- **Research Question:** How does democratization start - mistakes or conscious choice?
- **Main Argument:** Democratization not always intentional
- **Data and Analysis:** Democratization since 1800-2015; 201 cases; 316 initial case; more than 2,000 pages of evidence
- **Results:** 1/3: intentional; 2/3 rulers made mistakes
- **Implications:**

Democracy by Mistake

- **Research Question:** How can we explain the choices of authoritarian leaders leading to democratization?
- **Main Argument:** The choice for democratization is not always deliberate.
- **Data and Analysis:** Congruence analysis with 316 cases of democratization
- **Results:** In the majority of cases, rulers did not want to democratize but made mistakes eventually leading to democratization.
- **Implications:** Once institutions are established, they gain momentum.

The argument

Commonly, the motives for democratization are seen as deliberate...

- **demand-side** dynamics:
 - in times of crises [**examples?**], authoritarian rulers may opt for concessions
 - autocrats may prevent a revolution and establish institutions, like voting rights
- **supply-side** dynamics:
 - democratization because of internal split within elite
 - concessions to citizens, convincing them to side with your political fraction

In episodes of deliberate democratization, **the pressure on the leader is high** and they make clear concessions to the ones out of power.

The argument

Treisman (2020) suggests a different dynamic:

- democracy is not always a deliberate choice by incumbents but happens involuntarily → “a mistake is a non-optimal choice.” (795)
- revolts and claims for democratization were preceded by mistakes of incumbents

Why do mistakes arise according to Treisman (2020)?

The argument

1. lacking or wrong **information**
2. non-optimal decision-making or **calculation**

The argument

This leaves Treisman (2020) with three ways to democratization

1. deliberate democratization
2. non-deliberate but non-preventable democratization
3. democracy by mistake

The argument

Main types of mistakes by incumbents that can result in democratization

1. *Relations with domestic outsiders*
 - A) Excessive or poorly targeted concessions that could have been avoided and that strengthen opposition: "slippery slope."
 - B) Failure to make concessions that would likely have divided and demobilized opposition or coopted allies.
 - C) Excessive or poorly targeted repression that catalyzes opposition: "counterproductive violence."
 - D) Failure to use repression (and surveillance or censorship) that would likely have weakened or disrupted the opposition.
 - E) Major domestic policy failure that discredits incumbent or avoidably alienates key groups.
 - F) Mishandling election or referendum (e.g., calling when could be avoided/postponed; campaigning and/or manipulating results non-optimally; falsifying too blatantly).
2. *Relations with regime insiders*
 - G) By leader or ruling elite: Delegating to agent who turns out to be more motivated to pursue democratization (or unexpectedly weak in resisting demands for it).
 - H) Avoidably alienating army or security services (or part of them), leading to overthrow by them or erosion of state's repressive capacity.
 - I) Avoidably alienating previously supportive (civilian) elites or creating divisions among regime insiders, leading to replacement of incumbent.
3. *Relations with international actors*
 - J) Major foreign policy failure that provokes foreign intervention or discredits incumbent (e.g., entering or initiating avoidable international conflict, then performing poorly).

Figure: 10 types of mistakes (Treisman 2020, p. 796)

The argument

Concessions, policy failures or inappropriate handling of domestic or international events

Data and methods

Treisman (2020) relies on a huge qualitative study of regime transitions...

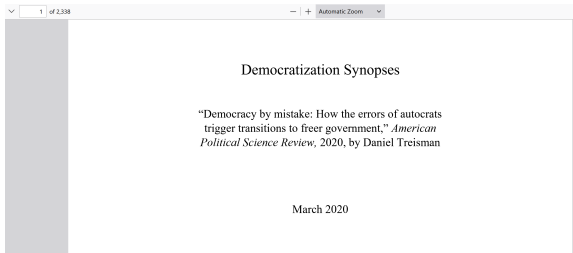


Figure: The Appendix by Treisman (2020)

Data and methods

- choice of sample comprising 316 instances of democratization by leveraging on different definitions of democratization [**which ones?**]
- application of congruence analysis: which theory do observable case characteristics match?
- evidence for each case from multiple secondary sources (history books, articles, interviews etc.) with critical evaluation of source bias + cross-validation with second coder

Data and methods

Two steps in coding

1. rating of source material and quality
2. confidence in the classification

To identify mistakes, **counterfactual analysis** was employed.

<i>Deliberate democratization</i>	(a) Leader was <i>not</i> replaced before reforms leading to democracy were announced. (b) Historical evidence does not suggest that any of the 10 mistakes listed in Figure 1 "probably" or "very probably" occurred and contributed to democratization.
<i>Unintended but unavoidable democratization</i>	(a) Leader was replaced before reforms leading to democracy were announced. (b) Historical evidence does not suggest that any of the 10 mistakes listed in Figure 1 "probably" or "very probably" occurred and contributed to democratization.
<i>Democratization by mistake</i>	Historical evidence suggests that at least one of the 10 mistakes listed in Figure 1 "probably" or "very probably" occurred and contributed to democratization.

Figure: Classification scheme (Treisman 2020, p. 797)

Results

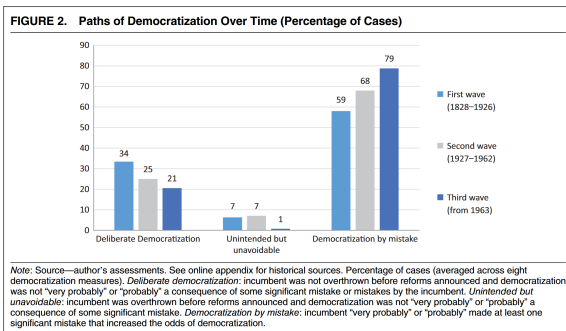


Figure: Paths to democratization over time (Treisman 2020, p. 801)

What do we observe?

Results

Deliberate democratization only constitutes about a third of the total cases – even though democratization often comes with mass unrest.

- mass unrest does not lead to concessions but overthrowing of leader



Everything said?

Question by Marie: Can we really consider political leaders as political institutions?

Everything said?

Institutional change can either be caused by endogenous change, exogenous shocks or a combination of both (Greif and Laitin 2004).

- the paper most clearly outlines instances of institutional change coming from all of these sources
- exogenous shocks (economic crises, wars)
- endogenous decision-making (concessions, involvement in conflicts)
- sometimes, shocks initiated by leaders' decisions

Everything said?

“Even when institutional rules have been created to accommodate relatively complex situations, actors face information-processing limitations and certainly cannot anticipate all of the possible future situations in which rules written now will be implemented later.”
(Mahoney and Thelen 2009, p. 12) → that relates closely to the argument by Treisman (2020)

Everything said?

An important cause for institutional change are shifts in power (Mahoney and Thelen 2009).

- many of the changes are not the only reasons why authoritarian regimes democratized
- but: once there's a loss of stability, new institutions may develop self-reinforcing mechanisms
- i.e., once erected, it's difficult to reverse a mistake.

Everything said?

Question by Ann-Sophie: Can a democracy that has been created by mistakes of an authoritarian government even survive in the long term? What are the risks to the sustainability of democratic regimes that are based on unintended mistakes rather than a systematic, planned transition?

Following the arguments of the paper, what would help to bolster democratization?

Everything said?

Pressure on authoritarian regimes matters.

- international integration (e.g., human rights' treaties) may lead to unintended consequences
- putting the economy under pressure could urge leaders to make (possibly) wrong choices [certainly with a cost!]

Institutions and Democracy

In session 7, we have already seen that institutions are a safeguard for democracy (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). **Yet,**

- they become increasingly contested
- they are even subverted by enemies of democracy

Institutions as a Solution?

- naturally, we could think that democratic backsliding could be mitigated by **strengthening institutions**
- institutions provide social rules of behaviour → if democratic rules are strengthened, this may increase willingness for cooperation

Institutional Quality Causes Generalized Trust

Public goods game...

Institutional Quality Causes Generalized Trust

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

Institutional Quality Causes Generalized Trust

- **Research Question:** Does institutional quality increase generalized trust?
- **Main Argument:** Impartial state institutions create trust in inter-personal relations
- **Data and Analysis:** Experimental evidence + observational analysis
- **Results:** The better the institutional quality, the more people trust strangers.
- **Implications:** Create better institutions?

The Argument

Institutions are associated with higher degrees of generalized trust.

- democratic states can foster generalized trust in different ways
 1. impartial legal system
 2. identification with the community
 3. state officials as representative of peers
- common problem: causal direction of the argument

Data and Methods

1. trust game with a survey experiment (N=264) in Germany
2. observational, cross-country evidence based on Quality of Government + survey data [**why?**]

Data and Methods

- trust game in two phases
 1. **public good phase:**
 - split into groups of three; two citizens, one public administrator
 - administrator can freely choose to embezzle money but success determined by institutional environment (citizens are informed about likelihood that embezzlement is detected but not about actual distribution)
 2. **trust phase:**
 - only citizens remain but are rematched with other citizens
 - participants receive new money to send to each other
 - in switching roles, they need to choose how much money the send to their fellow citizen (receivers got double the amount sent by the senders)

Results

TABLE 1 The Effect of Embezzlement on Generalized Trust

	Trust Game: Amount Sent by the Group Members				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Condition One	-0.590 (0.434)	-0.594 (0.416)	-0.618 (0.418)	-0.606 (0.419)	-0.794 (0.405)
Condition Fifty	-1.271* (0.434)	-1.181* (0.432)	-1.195* (0.430)	-1.163* (0.433)	-1.029* (0.442)

Figure: Effect of first on second phase of experiment (Martinangeli et al. 2024, p. 980)

What's the main result?

Results

Further results

- Embezzlement influenced generalized trust but not cooperative behaviour in step 1 (for group members)
- administrator tried to cheat more often when knowing that their risk of being detected is low
- **from observational study:** negative relationship of embezzlement score from QoG and generalized trust

Everything said?

Question by Marie: Do we need trust to insure democracy?

Everything said?

In the context of our seminar, how do the results relate to our findings on threats to democracies? What could institutional quality mitigate?

Everything said?

- depending on the measure, reinforcement of democratic norms
- potentially reducing polarization

Further Considerations

Not always can we strengthen institutions without trade-offs:

“**Militant democracy** [...] refers to the idea of a democratic regime which is willing to adopt pre-emptive, prima facie illiberal measures to prevent those aiming at subverting democracy with democratic means from destroying the democratic regime.”
(Müller 2012)

Further Considerations

- critical questions are whether provisions of militant democracy are part of the Constitution and who is defined as an enemy of democracy
- tools are party bans or restrictions of free speech
- “Art. 20: (1) The Federal Republic of Germany is a democratic and social federal state. [...] (4) All Germans shall have the right to resist any person seeking to abolish this constitutional order if no other remedy is available.”

Further Considerations

As Müller (2012) puts it,

- almost every democracy will try to self-defend: not only a matter of pre-existing provisions
- militant democracy is essentially useless if not accompanied with public support for democracy
- abuse of these measures is always possible

Further Considerations

Empirical evidence is scarce but even democratic measures like a cordon sanitaire against illiberal parties may be publicly condemned

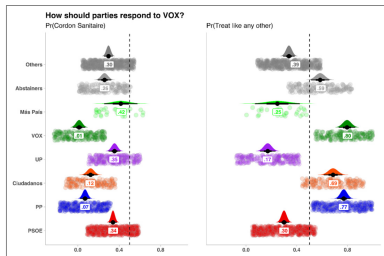


Figure 3. Modelling support for responses to VOX among Spanish partisans.

Figure: Public opinion on cooperation with VOX (Turnbull-Dugarte 2024, p. 5)

Conclusion

What we have learned from today...

- institutions can change; even by mistake
- new institutions could lead to democratization
- ...and higher quality of institutions generate trust

To prepare for after the Christmas breaks...

- after the Christmas break:
- **readings:**
 - Kalla, J. L., & Broockman, D. E. (2020). Reducing Exclusionary Attitudes through Interpersonal Conversation: Evidence from Three Field Experiments. *American Political Science Review*, 114(2), 410–425.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055419000923>
 - E. Finkel, S., Neundorf, A., & Rascón Ramírez, E. (2024). Can Online Civic Education Induce Democratic Citizenship? Experimental Evidence from a New Democracy. *American Journal of Political Science*, 68(2), 613–630.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12765>

Any further questions?

Literature

- E. Finkel, S., Neundorf, A., & Rascón Ramírez, E. (2024). Can Online Civic Education Induce Democratic Citizenship? Experimental Evidence from a New Democracy. *American Journal of Political Science*, 68(2), 613–630.
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Literature

- Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How Democracies Die* (1st ed.). Crown.
- Mahoney, J., & Thelen, K. (2009). *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power*. Cambridge University Press.
- 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>

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- Müller, J.-W. (2012). Militant Democracy. In M. Rosenfeld & A. Sajó (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Constitutional Law* (p. 0). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578610.013.0062>
- 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>
- Turnbull-Dugarte, S. J. (2024). Public support for the cordon sanitaire: Descriptive evidence from Spain. *Party Politics*, 13540688241246141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688241246141>