

Challenges to Democracy

Session 7: The Far-Right as a Challenge to Democracy

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Questions on podcast?

Before we start:

- any questions on the podcast?

The Far Right



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The Far Right

Is the far-right a threat to democracy? Why? Why not?

And why is the far-right a threat to democracy?



Figure: The Project 2025 in the US

“The authors have made many suggestions here that, if implemented, could bring that bureaucracy more under control and enable it to work more efficiently and responsibly” (Dans and Groves 2023, p. 83)

And why is the far-right a threat to democracy?



Figure: Storm on the Capitol in 2021

A conceptual clarification

What do we mean by far-right? What is the difference to the radical right? And why do we often speak about populists?

A conceptual clarification

*Radical right-wing populist parties are **radical** in their rejection of the established sociocultural and sociopolitical system and their advocacy of individual achievement, a free marketplace, and a drastic reduction of the role of the state. They are **right-wing** in their rejection of individual and social equality, in their opposition to the social integration of marginalized groups, and in their appeal to xenophobia, if not overt racism. They are **populist** in their instrumentalization of sentiments of anxiety and disenchantment and their appeal to the common man and his allegedly superior common sense. (Betz 1993, p. 433)*

A conceptual clarification

Since Betz' definition, a lot of work has been done, e.g. by Cas Mudde who outlines three key features...

- key feature: **nativism**: 'states should be inhabited exclusively by the members of the native group'; non-natives constitute a threat (Mudde 2007, p. 22)
- **authoritarianism**: belief in ordered society which punishes deviant behaviour
- **populism**: society as differentiated into the 'good' (common people) and the 'evil' (the elite/outsiders of the people)

A conceptual clarification

...and re-conceptualizes the terms *right* and *radical*:

- **radical**: opposition towards key features of liberal democracy (political and civil rights)
- **right**: belief in natural inequalities in society

Extreme right parties are anti-democratic, they oppose democracy. [but recently, some radical right parties have challenged the conceptual boundaries]

How the far-rights talks about principles of liberal democracy

“When populist radical right parties criticize the status quo of democracy, they may thus ask for more and better forms of participation, but are also very likely to attack liberal principles of democracy that contradict their ‘people-centred notion of democracy’.” (Engler et al. 2023)

→ tension with liberal regimes of an embedded democracy

How the far-rights talks about principles of liberal democracy

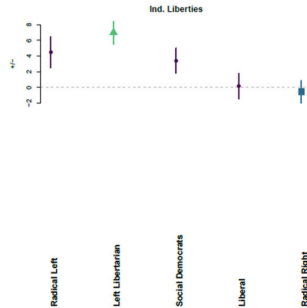


Figure: Results of quantitative text analysis on parties' references to liberal democracy (Engler et al. 2023, p. 1975)

Approaching an article from its introduction

There are four paragraphs in the introduction by Blasingame et al. (2024) introduction. Each pair reads their paragraph and tries to extract information on the summary structure.

- **Relevance, Gap and Question:**
- **Main Argument:**
- **Data and Method:**
- **Results:**
- **Implications:**

Relevance, Gap and Question

Immigration judges take a dual role in US politics, which one?

Relevance, Gap and Question

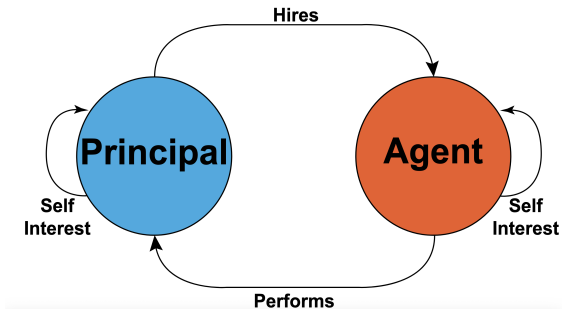
Judges serve as...

1. judges (obviously) who need to rule fairly and impartially
2. bureaucrats who are expected to be efficient

Relevance, Gap and Question

RQ: *How does the performance quota affect immigration judges' rulings?*

Argument: Immigration judges under normal times



Who's principal, who's agent?

Argument: Immigration judges under normal times

- in normal circumstances: president (principal) has little power over immigration judges
- immigration judges are rather street-level bureaucrats with little political aspirations / dependence

What did Trump change to make them more politically dependent?

Argument: The performance quota

The U.S. migration system was slow and produced a lot of backlog

- Trump issued a performance quota which required judges to be much faster in their rulings and to reduce the number of appeals
- This (might have) increased the number of two rulings: *in absentia* and *removal orders*

Why?

Argument: Who will change their voting?

Who's most likely to change their rulings?

Argument: Who will change their voting?

- judges often have an ideological leaning in their verdicts
- those judges who lean more conservative on migration matters were already in line with administration
- the more liberal judges are expected to shift towards more anti-migrant verdicts

Data

Blasingame et al. (2024) need data on migration judges' rulings before and after the performance quota was introduced

- exploit a database on court decisions from 2012-2020
- limit the sample to judges who were active before and after the ruling
- dependent variable(s)
 - in-absentia verdicts
 - removal verdicts
- main independent variable
 - time of policy (before/after)
 - political leaning of judge (based on voter registration)
 - other judge-related characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnic background)
 - other case-related information (e.g., nationality of noncitizen)

Method

- They analyse a time-series but need to match the data before and after (so that they only compare similar cases).
- Then logit regression with dependent variable (ruling) and independent variables (mainly time and political leaning)

Findings

FIGURE 1. Monthly Rates of *In Absentia* Removal Orders Before and After the Policy Change for Noncitizens

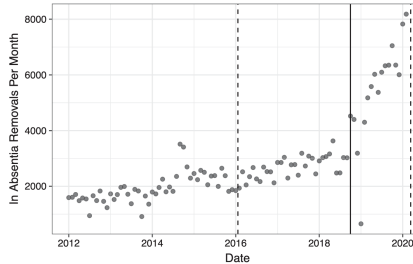


Figure: Time trend of *in-absentia* ruling (Blasingame et al. 2024, p. 1695)

Question by Miká: How can the increase in merit removal orders by judges right after the beginning of the Trump administration be explained?

Findings

FIGURE 3. Estimated Conditional Average Treatment Effects and 95% Confidence Intervals, *In Absentia* Rulings

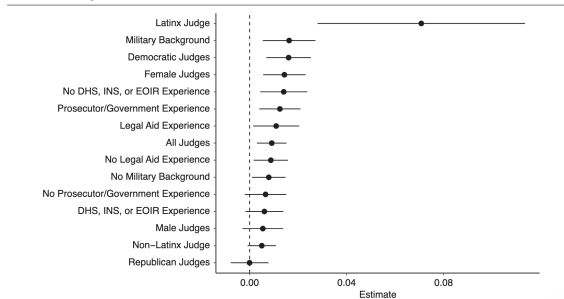


Figure: Effect of performance quota on *in-absentia ruling* for different judges (Blasingame et al. 2024, p. 1696)

Findings

FIGURE 6. Estimated Conditional Average Treatment Effects and 95% Confidence Intervals, Merits Rulings

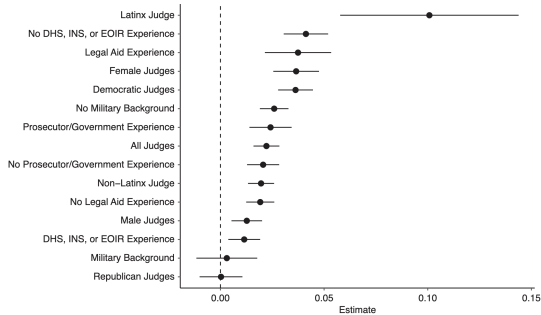


Figure: Effect of performance quota on *removal ruling* for different judges (Blasingame et al. 2024, 1698))

What are the main implications?

Implications

- Performance quotas can have (un)intended consequences for the judiciary
- Potentially: Executive aggrandizement can be successful
- in this case, manipulating the referees leads to different court rulings
- beyond the US?

Question by Celine: How does the research design account for potential long term institutional effects?

Summary

- **Relevance, Gap and Question:** Have performance quotas altered the ruling of immigration judges in the US?
- **Main Argument:** Performance quotas made anti-immigrant rulings more likely.
- **Data and Method:** Logit regression of time-series data on judges' rulings
- **Results:** Particularly more liberal-leaning judges tend to be more restrictive in their migration rulings
- **Implications:** Judges' behavior can be shaped by executive decisions.

Conclusion

What we have learned from today...

- A definition of the far-right
- A practical example of how they constitute a threat for democratic regimes

Next week

- in the next week, we'll turn towards a demand-side perspective (citizens)
- how do polarization lead to an erosion of democratic norms?
- main reading
 - Graham, M. H., & Svolik, M. W. (2020). Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States. *American Political Science Review*, 114(2), 392–409.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000052>
- complementary readings
 - Broockman, D. E., Kalla, J. L., & Westwood, S. J. (2023). Does Affective Polarization Undermine Democratic Norms or Accountability? Maybe Not. *American Journal of Political Science*, 67(3), 808–828.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12719>

Next week

- Cohen, M. J., Smith, A. E., Moseley, M. W., & Layton, M. L. (2023). Winners' Consent? Citizen Commitment to Democracy When Illiberal Candidates Win Elections. *American Journal of Political Science*, 67(2), 261–276.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12690>
- Frederiksen, K., Le Corre Juratic, M., Allinger, T., & Bischof, D. (2025). *Democratic Transgressions Embedded in Reality*. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/42vhy_v1

Any further questions?

Literature

Betz, H.-G. (1993). The New Politics of Resentment: Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe.

Comparative politics, 25(4), 413.

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Blasingame, E. N., Boyd, C. L., Carlos, R. F., & Ornstein, J. T. (2024). How the Trump Administration's Quota Policy

Transformed Immigration Judging. *American Political Science Review*, 118(4), 1688–1703.

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- Dans, P., & Groves, S. (**typeredactors**). (2023). *Project 2025 — Presidential Transition Project*. Retrieved January 22, 2025, from <https://www.project2025.org/>
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- Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press.