

Challenges to Democracy

Session 13: Performance and Resilience

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21 January 2026

Plan for today's session

1. brief reflection on input by Hansaforum last week
2. feedback form
3. discussion on the effect of performance on support for democracy
 - Magalhães, P. C. (2014). Government effectiveness and support for democracy. *European Journal of Political Research*, 53(1), 77–97. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12024>
4. outlook in how to develop a research question

Hansaforum

- What did you learn?
- Did anything surprise you?
- If you could invite practitioners again, would you do anything differently?

What did you learn?

Take five minutes to reflect individually on your learning outcomes in the seminar. What did you learn substantively about the challenges democracies face? What did you learn in terms of conducting research? Where do you still have blind spots?

Learning outcomes

What I hope I could convey (as stated in the syllabus):

- **substantively:**
 - key concepts in democratization and backsliding (how to define democracy? how can we identify backsliding?)
 - trace the empirical situation of democratization worldwide
 - understanding potential causes of democratic backsliding
 - thinking about solutions
- on a **methodological** level:
 - how to read academic literature
 - understand the diverse methodological toolkit to assess democratic quality
 - collect, analyse, summarise and present your own empirical data (podcast + term paper)
- on a **practical** level: learn real-world challenges of democratic innovations (not in syllabus)

Feedback form

Everyone should have received a link for the feedback form via mail. Please take your time and complete the form.

Performance and Democracy – why does it matter?

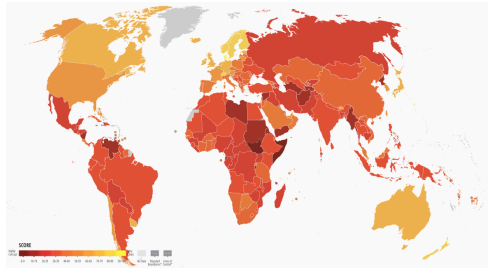


Figure: Corruption in the World, 2024, Source: [Transparency International](#)

The argument

Following Easton (1975), we can distinguish regime support into two parts:

1. specific support: object-focused support for those responsible to a regime's actions
2. diffuse support: general support for a regime

For which type of support does performance matter?

The argument

Common expectation in the literature: performance relates to specific support (e.g., for a government) but Magalhães (2014) counters

- the evaluation of a regime (diffuse support) is dependent on how it performs
- the better democracies perform, the higher the support for them

Data and methods

The analysis requires two types of data

1. individual-level support for democracy (*World Values Survey*)
 - 1.1 democratic-autocracy preference
 - 1.2 democratic performance evaluation
 - 1.3 explicit democratic support
2. regime-level government performance (*World Bank*)
 - 2.1 perceptions by experts or firms on quality of bureaucracy, policy making, financial management etc.

Results

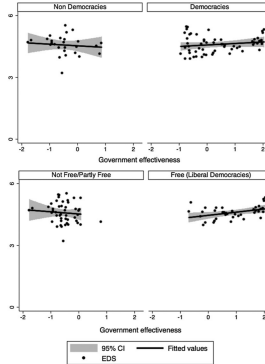


Figure: Aggregate level relationship between government effectiveness and support for democracy (Magalhães 2014)

What do we observe? What's striking?

Results

There's few variation between countries regarding the support for democracy. But on the individual-level, there might be a link between government effectiveness and diffuse support:

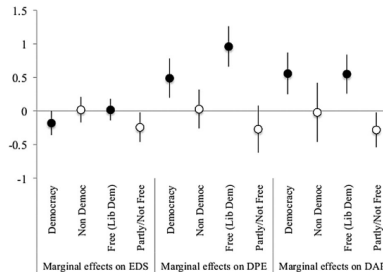


Figure: Effect of government effectiveness on democratic support by regime type (Magalhães 2014)

Everything said, what are the implications?

Question by Robin: Isn't government effectiveness and support for democracy rather mutual, than causal like Magalhães suggests?

Question by Christina: How might differences in the perception of government effectiveness between different segments of the population in a democratic society influence general support for democratic values?

Summary

- **Gap, relevance and RQ:** How does government effectiveness influence diffuse support for democracy?
- **Main Argument:** The better governments perform, the higher the support for their regime
- **Data and Analysis:** Multi-level regression of World Values Study and Worldbank data (multiple countries and individuals)
- **Results:** Diffuse support tends to be higher in countries which have a good bureaucracy
- **Implications:** Regime performance may counter democratic backsliding but also halt democratization

Designing your own follow-up research...

We have completed the substantive part of the seminar. We dealt with democratic backsliding from different perspectives: what do citizens/experts value about democracy? Is there an elite-driven dismantling of democratic institutions? How does polarization affect tolerance for anti-democratic behavior and how do crises contribute to backsliding? Finally, what can we do about it in terms of system performance and democratic innovations? Which question would you like to develop in your term paper (if you don't write one, what would you work on if you did)? Share on

<https://flinga.fi/s/F8FPVBP>

Designing your own follow-up research...



On formulating research questions

Different questions, different goals

1. Should citizens fight for democracy?
2. What would have happened to the Republican Party if they nominated Ted Cruz instead of Donald Trump in 2016?
3. How do citizens define democracy in their own words?
4. How does polarization affect tolerance of anti-democratic behavior?

Which type of questions do these examples pose?

On formulating research questions

1. Should citizens fight for democracy? → Normative questions
2. What would have happened to the Republican Party if they nominated Ted Cruz instead of Donald Trump in 2016? → Hypothetical questions
3. How do citizens define democracy in their own words? → Descriptive questions
4. How does polarization affect tolerance of anti-democratic behavior? → Causal-explanatory questions

For your term paper, you should focus on the latter, **causal explanatory questions**.

A good question

How does a good research question look like?

A good question

Powner (2014, November 4) lists some **dos** and **don'ts** in drafting research questions.

Dos

- start with a puzzle for which there's no good answer available (on a subject you know already)
- a question should have a question mark (e.g., *how...?* or *why...?*)
- highlights the outcome, not the causes (these will be nevertheless important later!)
- relate to theory

A good question

Don'ts

- ...have a clear, even tautological answer
- ...focus on a single case (do not use proper nouns, like states or persons in the research question, they should be more general)
- ...translate the relationship into empirical indicators in the question (e.g., talk about which positions parties take on migration policy not their score on the Manifesto Project migration indicators)

Present the question to your neighbor, does it correspond to the do's and don'ts? If not, what should be changed?

How to do a literature review on your questions...

Strategies for a review

- look into the reference list of an article which is close to yours
- scrutinize literature reviews (e.g., Annual Review of Political Science)
- use tools to search for other sources

How to do a literature review on your questions...

There are different **tools to use** for a literature review:

- Google Scholar
- Web of Science
- University Library
- Elicit
- Connected Papers

On your research question, identify relevant literature through one of these techniques/tools.

Conclusion

What we have learned from today...

- how government performance (might) lead to democratic support
- how to develop a (good) research question

To prepare for next week...

- next week, you'll get the chance of briefly presenting your research ideas for your term paper
- in addition, we will discuss how to develop a theory
- ...and clarify some expectations on the term paper

Any further questions?

Literature

- Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. A. (2001). A Theory of Political Transitions.
- Boix, C., & Stokes, S. C. (2003). Endogenous Democratization. *World Politics*, 55(4), 517–549.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2003.0019>
- Easton, D. (1975). A Re-assessment of the Concept of Political Support. *British Journal of Political Science*, 5(4), 435–457. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400008309>
- Kurer, T. (2020). The Declining Middle: Occupational Change, Social Status, and the Populist Right. *Comparative Political Studies*, 53(10–11), 1798–1835.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414020912283>

Literature

- Magalhães, P. C. (2014). Government effectiveness and support for democracy. *European Journal of Political Research*, 53(1), 77–97. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12024>
- Powner, L. C. (2014, November 4). *Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student's Practical Guide*. CQ Press.

Modernization theory – a popular explanation of democratization

Any idea what modernization theory is about?

Modernization theory – a popular explanation of democratization

Modernization theory posits that democratization is a consequence of economic development. There are two types of the theory:

1. **endogenous** democratization: transition to democracy caused by economic development
2. **exogenous** democratization: different reasons for democratization, but economic growth stabilizes democracy

Mechanisms? Urbanization, literacy, education, evolution of civil society, reduction in inequality (less conflict potential between rich/poor, see Acemoglu and Robinson (2001))

Modernization theory – a popular explanation of democratization

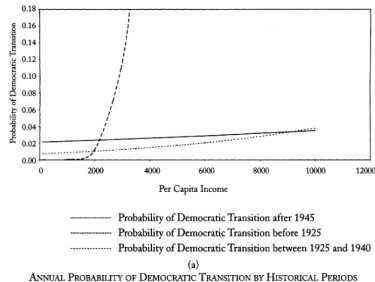


Figure: Relationship between economic development and transitions to democracy by Boix and Stokes (2003, p. 532)

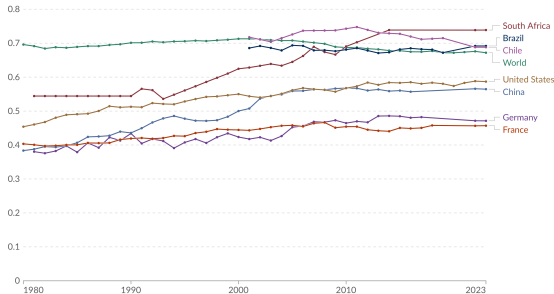
→ period-specific effect of economic development

Economic inequality and support for democracy

Gini coefficient, 1980 to 2023

The Gini coefficient measures inequality on a scale from 0 to 1. Higher values indicate higher inequality. Inequality is measured here in terms of income before taxes and benefits.

Our World
in Data



Data source: World Inequality Database (WID.world) (2025)

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Note: Income is measured before payment of taxes and non-pension benefits, but after the payment of public and private pensions.

Figure: Development of income inequality, measured by Gini, over time; Source: [Our World in Data](#), based on [World Inequality Database](#)

Economic inequality and support for democracy

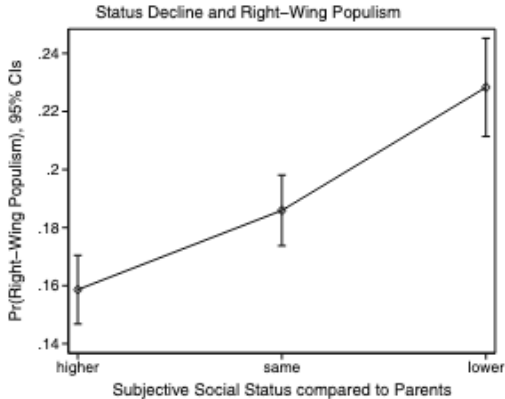


Figure: How perceived status decline might result in support for anti-liberal actors (Kurer 2020)