

Democracy, Political Stability, and Homicide

'Democracy is in Retreat'. This phrase can be found in articles and reports from several organizations. In 2019, the Economic Intelligence Unit (EUI) stated that democracy is backsliding based on its result on the democracy index of countries. Only 5.7 percent of the global population lives in a "full democracy"(EUI 2019). Still, regardless of democracy levels, democracies outnumbered autocracies. According to Pew Research center, as of the end of 2017, 96 out of 167 countries with populations of at least 500,000 (57%) were democracies of some kind, and only 21 (13%) were autocracies.

However, there is a growing number of people discontent with how democracy is working. Another 2019 survey conducted by Pew Research showed that 52% of people who live across 34 countries surveyed are dissatisfied with the way their democracy is functioning. It partially has to do with the stall or temporary increase in violent crimes. In 2019, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports that although the global homicide rate has been declining over time, given the global population growth, the global number of homicide victims increased from 362,000 in 1990 to 464,000 in 2017. Also, this trend neglects a great variation in homicide rates by state. It contradicts what Karstedt (2006, 50) said: "democracies represent an institutional framework and a way of life that is, by definition, nonviolent". However, paradoxically, violent crimes in democracies have been gradually on the rise.

Political stability has never been in the positive territory since the data became available in 2002 according to the Global Economy. It is safe to say that democracy is not immune to political instability just like other types of institutions. Political stability comes with various definitions but in this paper, political stability is understood as a political system free from attempts of being overthrown or destabilize by politically motivated violence and terrorism which is in line with the World Bank definition.

This paper asks: *Does political stability explain a correlation between democracy and homicide?* I argue that once political stability is undermined, homicide is more likely to increase as it creates chaos or anomie in society. However, countries with a higher level of political stability may allow them to properly control society, which in turn, enables countries to maintain lower rates of homicide. Political stability may serve as an explanation for the modernization theory and conflicting theory on crime. In short, strong democratic and authoritarian countries with strong political stability may experience less homicide, while flawed democracies and hybrid regimes with political instability may experience more homicide.

In the following pages, I first describe the scholarly debates related to democracy and crime. Next, I present my theory that political stability explains the relationship between the level of democracy and homicide rates. Third, I analyze the data by using the Ordinary Least Square regression. Finally, I conclude and present the implications of the finding of this paper.

Literature Review

There have been several empirical studies to explain the relationship between democracy and homicide rates. Previous literature reaches the same conclusion: countries in the democratization or modernization process experience a rapid rise in homicide rates. (LaFree and Tseloni 2006; Liu 2006; Neumayer 2003). The modernization theory assumes that swift

social changes during modernization which often accompany democratization create anomie in society disrupting traditional values and roles. As a result, social integration is weakened and thus, violent crime inevitably increases during modernization (Durkheim 1964).

However, mixed results have been shown on the relationship between full democracy and homicide rates. LaFree and Tseloni (2006) argue that a full democracy with a longer period suffers from the increasing homicide rates. Their results support Karl Max's conflict theory rather than modernization theory. The conflict theory presumes that market-based democracies are likely to experience an increase in homicide rates because of inequality between different social classes. Neumayer (2003), by contrast, insists that democracy lowers homicide rates. This sentiment is echoed by Chon (2018) who argues that homicide rates remain low in democratic countries.

Further research shows that both stable democracies and stable autocracies may enjoy low homicide rates (LaFree and Tseloni 2006; Neumayer 2003). But others argue that democracies are more likely to have lower homicide rates than autocratic countries (Chon 2018; Karstedt 2006; Lin 2006). However, there has not been enough research on the causal relationship between democracy and violent crime. The research places their focus on either due process (Huebert and Brown 2018) or sound policies (Neumayer 2003) or democratic values (Karstedt 2006).

To begin with, even though the due process does not have an explicit definition, it can be defined as legal rights for the accused. To be specific, in general, due process includes the presumption of innocence, the right of individuals to be heard before public proceedings, protection from arbitrary and unfair treatment. Due process enables people to place trust in the criminal justice system. As a result, people tend to resolve interpersonal conflicts in courts rather than by themselves. As Huebert and Brown (2018) said, both stable democracy and autocracy have due process in place, but they apply it differently. Democracies prioritize ensuring individual rights, while authoritarian regimes focus on controlling crimes. This may partially explain an inverted U shape relationship between the level of democracy and homicide rates.

Neumayer (2003) argues that good policies on the economy and political governance can lower homicide rates. Sound economic policies refer to measure that can boost economic growth and wealth in a country. Political governance includes democracy, respect for human rights, and the abolition of capital punishment. The author finds out that good economic and political governance policies can lower homicide rates. Given the fact that democracy is more likely to achieve economic success and pursue favorable policies for political governance, those policies may explain the correlation between democracy and homicide rates.

The last one is democratic values. According to Karstedt (2006), democratic values can be best represented by individualism and egalitarianism. The author's argument makes sense in that democracy emphasizes the importance of individuals' rights and equal opportunity for all. Those values are key to have lower homicide rates in democracies. However, if those values are not balanced, this can give ways to social unrest, which can result in a rise in homicide (Karstedt 2006). While autocracies uniform values, they may overlook different values and views of individuals. Consequently, this can create conflicts in society, leading to increased homicide rates. However, they tend to have greater social control, which allows them to have

a competitive advantage in curbing violent crime. In this context, Karstedt's argument can explain a causal relationship between different regime types and homicide rates.

The modernization and conflicting perspective are well-suited theories to explain an association between democracy and homicide. In the following section, I lay out the causal mechanism of the relationship between democracy and homicide rate which can be explained through due process, good policies on the economy and political governance, and democratic values. However, missing from this discussion is the role that political stability places on this relationship. Political stability relates to stable institutions without or less politically motivated violence, which may contribute to maintaining the social organization. In modernization theory (Durkheim, 1964), when traditional values and norms disrupt, anomie or a condition with social disorganization takes place. And that is the moment when the crime rates dramatically increase. This indicates that political stability, a source of societal order, is related to the crime rates as well.

Theory

Due process, good policies, and democratic values make people put trust in the institution. This may lead to lower homicide rates. However, to the best of my knowledge, no research has been done on the relationship between democracy and homicide from the political stability perspective. As mentioned above, political stability relates to politically motivated violence or terrorism to overthrow the government by the definition of the World Bank. In strong democratic countries, rule of law and diversity are well respected, and the criminal justice system tends to be fair and transparent (Chon 2018). Consequently, people tend to trust their institution and bring their case to court rather than solving the issue by themselves. In other words, overall society enjoys stability and peace. This demonstrates that strong democratic countries may enjoy a greater degree of political stability.

Similarly, strong authoritarian states can exert a high level of social control with greater power and authority of states and the criminal justice system (Sung 2006). They provide legitimacy to their institutional system through due process of controlling corruption (Huebert and Brown, 2018). As a result, people are likely to follow rules in society and are less likely to question how the system works. In this regard, a high level of political stability can be maintained in stable authoritarian states.

However, for flawed democracy and hybrid regimes, values and norms are disrupted, ultimately creating chaos in society. People become skeptical about the institution and criminal justice system, which force them to realize justice by themselves and believe that violence is a better means to get what they want. As society destabilizes, more crimes can be committed since criminals can easily find a safe haven. This indicates that they may have lower political stability compared to strong democratic and autocratic states. I expect, therefore, a curvilinear relationship between political stability and homicide rates, with the lowest homicide rates at either the highest degree of political stability of democracies or autocracies while those in the middle will be the countries with the highest levels of homicide rates. Specifically, hybrid regimes and flawed democracies will show lower political stability thus, the highest levels of homicide rates. I hypothesize that *strong democracies, and autocracies with a higher level of political stability, may experience lower homicide rates, while hybrid regimes and flawed democracies with lower political stability may have higher homicide rates.*

Data and Method

This study aims to identify a curvilinear relationship between democracy and homicide rates. I argue that political stability can account for the relationship. I test the idea that stable democracies and autocracies are likely to have lower homicide rates because of strong political stability, while flawed democracies and hybrid regimes tend to have higher homicide rates as they lack political stability.

I employ ordinary least squares (OLS) regression modeling using the software package R to measure the correlation between democracy and homicide rates, and between homicide rates and crime. Homicide rates, political stability, and democracy index are based on 2018 data. The data of homicide rates, my dependent variable of this paper, come from three major sources: the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and World Health Organization (WHO). They have slightly different definitions for homicide, but I will use homicide data per 100,000 from UNODC since more and more countries are adopting the definition of UNODC (Sung 2006). UNODC defines homicide as unlawful death inflicted on a person by another person.

I use the EIU Democracy index to measure the level of democracy, one of my key independent variables, based on five criteria: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation, and political culture. In accordance with criteria used by Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU), countries are divided into four groups: full democracy, flawed democracy, hybrid regime, or authoritarian regime. On a scale of 0 to 10, countries that score between 0 and 4 are categorized as “authoritarian regimes”, countries that score between 4 and 6 are regarded as “hybrid regimes”, countries that score between 6 and 8 are considered “flawed democracies”, and countries that score between 8 and 10 are viewed as “full democracies”. From each category, eight countries were randomly sampled, and thus the total number of countries for the following analysis is 32.

Data of political stability, my key independent variable, from the World Bank is used since it is the only organization that systemically collects data about political stability. Political stability is defined as the perceptions of the likelihood that the government will be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means, including politically motivated violence and terrorism. It ranges from -2.5, the weakest, to 2.5, the strongest.

Results

Table 1 demonstrates a statistical summary for variables discussed above, which are homicide rates, regime types, and political stability. All statistics reflect 2018 figures of thirty-two countries.

The mean of homicide rate is 6.120 with a minimum of 0.156, and a maximum of 52.019. For the regime type, the mean is 6.073 with a minimum of 1.430, and a maximum of 9.870. Political stability's mean is 0.023 with a minimum of -2.751, and a maximum of 1.494.

Table 1. Summary Statistics.

Variable	N	M	Minimum	Maximum
Homicide Rate	32	6.120	0.156	52.019
Regime type	32	6.073	1.430	9.870
Political Stability	32	0.023	-2.751	1.494

Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression is used to evaluate the correlation between the dependent variable (Homicide Rates) and the independent variable (Political Stability) of interest. The results of the OLS regressions are shown in Table 2. Since the dependent variable is skewed, it is log-transformed. The regime type variable shows it is negatively related to homicide rates. However, the result is not statistically significant since the p -value (0.752) is higher than 0.05. The squared regime type variable also has a negative association with homicide rates, but it is not statistically significant neither because the p -value (0.882) is higher than 0.05. The analysis indicates that political stability is negatively correlated with homicide rates. But its coefficient is not statistically significant since the p -value (0.291) is higher than 0.05. When the political stability variable is squared, it also is negatively related to homicide rates, but it is statistically insignificant since the p -value (0.574) is higher than 0.05.

Table 2. OLS regression results

	OLS Result
Regime Type	-0.282 (0.882)
Regime Type, Squared	-0.019 (0.740)
Political Stability	-2.073 (1.926)
Political Stability, Squared	-0.089 (0.150)

Notes. (1) Dependent variable is homicide rates.

(2) Standard errors are in parentheses.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article argued above that strong democratic and authoritarian countries with strong political stability tend to experience lower homicide rates, while flawed democracies and hybrid regimes with a lower level of political stability tend to experience higher homicide rates. The article first presumed that democracy and homicide rates may show a curvilinear relationship. Based on that assumption, political stability can serve as an explanation of why there is a relationship between regime type and homicide rates. However, the descriptive analysis using OLS regression showed that democracy and homicide are negatively correlated, but with no statistical significance. Furthermore, it reveals that the relationship between homicide rates and political stability is negatively associated, but without statistical significance. Both results do not provide evidence in favor of the argument of the paper.

Since the article uses merely a 34-country sample only from the year 2018 in the statistical analysis, the results of this analysis may have to do with small sample size and a short observation time. If a sample consisting of a greater number of countries from a longer period was used in the analysis in the future, the results may differ. In this context, future research should look at a larger country sample size with a longer period of observation to test the hypothesis.

More study needs to be done to find out a possible causal factor behind the relationship between democracy and homicide rates. This will boost understanding of the global trend of homicide and democracy, and help policymakers to develop policies that can reduce homicide rates while achieving political stability.

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