

Political Behavior in Developing Countries

Majoritarian Attitudes

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Democratic Backsliding

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- Many democratic theories assume that voters have *liberal* democratic preferences (with an internalized dislike)
- Nevertheless, recent evidence reveals that '*majoritarian*' understanding of democracy might also drive this phenomenon (Wunsch, Jacob, and Derksen 2022; Grossman et al. 2022).
- '*Majoritarian*' understanding of democracy assumes that
 - the highest source of legitimacy is the majority's will,
 - power grabs are consistent with democracy, and they are always supported, and
 - citizens perceive the incumbents' power grabs as legitimate as long as they are popularly elected.

Majoritarian Attitudes: Empirical Evidence

Opposition party		Same party		Label	Description	Proportions		
S	C	S	C			Overall	Low WVS	High WVS
0	0	0	0	Liberal democrats	Power grabs are inconsistent with democracy and always opposed	0.36	0.31	0.39
0	0	1	0	Militants	Power grabs are inconsistent with democracy but supported for co-partisans	0.05	0.06	0.04
0	0	1	1	Rationalizer	Power grabs are only consistent with democracy and supported for co-partisans	0.19	0.13	0.21
0	1	0	1	Anti-Majoritarian	Power grabs are consistent with democracy but always opposed	0.08	0.11	0.07
0	1	1	1	Partisans	Power grabs are consistent with democracy but only supported for co-partisans	0.03	0.03	0.04
1	0	1	0	Autocrats	Power grabs are inconsistent with democracy but always supported	0.05	0.07	0.04
1	1	1	1	Majoritarians	Power grabs are consistent with democracy and always supported	0.24	0.30	0.21

Figure 1: Source: Grossman et al. (2022)

Implications

- Grossman et al. (2022)'s findings have significant implications.
 - If a considerable number of people are likely to have a majoritarian democratic understanding, then the distribution of majoritarian voters and the drivers of majoritarian attitudes are likely to affect the frequency and intensity of power grabs.
 - *Majoritarian* voters do not consider undermining democratic institutions illegitimate as long as the autocrat incumbents are popularly elected (Grossman et al. 2022; Wunsch, Jacob, and Derksen 2022).
 - This attitude towards democracy sees executive power grabs consistent with democracy, which is alarming for the normative liberal democratic theory and applied policymaking.

Potential Interventions to Majoritarian Attitudes

- **Perspective-Taking:** Familiarizing majoritarian participants with the implications of majoritarian democracy and minority vulnerabilities
 - Negative domestic experiences of minorities groups under majoritarian decisions (confiscations, forced taxation, forced migration)
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- **Self-Positioning:** Priming majoritarian participants on their relative minority status:
 - Intervening to one's perception of personal status by emphasizing the relative minority status
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- **Pragmatic-Skepticism:** Nudging majoritarian participants to be more skeptical of majoritarian decisions.

Contribution

- A new perspective to polarization-dominated democracy backsliding literature
- Drawing from the long-dormant literature on the role of political attitudes in political behavior
- A more dynamic approach to the democratic understanding, which is often considered as static
- Policy implications for democratic consolidation in new democracies

References

Grossman, Guy, Dorothy Kronick, Matthew Levendusky, and Marc Meredith. 2022. “The Majoritarian Threat to Liberal Democracy.” *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 9 (1): 36–45.

Wunsch, Natasha, Marc Jacob, and Laurenz Derksen. 2022. “The Demand Side of Democratic Backsliding: How Divergent Understandings of Democracy Shape Political Choice.”