

Fwd: [External] Research and Politics - Decision on Manuscript ID RAP-24-0058

Solt, Frederick <frederick-solt@uiowa.edu>

Thu 2024-06-27 02:18

To: Tai, Yuehong Cassandra <yhcasstai@psu.edu>; yuehu <yuehu@tsinghua.edu.cn>

Good news!! R&R

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Research and Politics <onbehalf@manuscriptcentral.com>  
**Date:** June 26, 2024 at 10:40:13 AM CDT  
**To:** "Solt, Frederick" <frederick-solt@uiowa.edu>  
**Subject:** [External] Research and Politics - Decision on Manuscript ID RAP-24-0058  
**Reply-To:** rkennedy@central.uh.edu

26-Jun-2024

Dear Dr. Solt:

I have now received the reviews for Manuscript ID RAP-24-0058 entitled "Support for Democracy Is Multidimensional: Why Unidimensional Latent Variable Measures of Democratic Support Are Invalid" which you submitted to Research and Politics. The excellent comments of the reviewer(s) are included at the bottom of this letter.

The reviewer(s) overall recommended publication, yet they also suggest some revisions to your manuscript. Therefore, I would like to invite you to respond to the reviewer(s)' comments and submit a revised version of your manuscript within 4 to 6 weeks.

To revise your manuscript, log into <https://nam12.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fmc.manuscriptcentral.com%2Frap&data=05%7C02%7Cfrederick-solt%40uiowa.edu%7Cdac1b68845c340f3468a08dc95f64421%7C1bc445959aba4fc3b8ec7b94a5586fdc%7C1%7C0%7C638550132135181902%7CUnknown%7CT1> and enter your Author Center, where you will find your manuscript title listed under "Manuscripts with Decisions." Under "Actions," click on "Create a Revision." Your manuscript number has been appended to denote a revision.

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You will be unable to make your revisions on the originally submitted version of the manuscript. Instead, revise your manuscript using a word processing program and save it on your computer. Please also highlight the changes to your manuscript within the document by using bold or colored text.

Once the revised manuscript is prepared, you can upload it and submit it through your Author Center.

When submitting your revised manuscript, you will be able to respond to the comments made by the reviewer(s) in the space provided. You can use this space to document any changes you make to the original manuscript. In order to expedite the processing of the revised manuscript, please be as specific as possible in your response to the reviewer(s).

IMPORTANT: Your original files are available to you when you upload your revised manuscript. Please delete any redundant files before completing the submission.

Because we are trying to facilitate timely publication of manuscripts submitted to Research and Politics, your revised manuscript should be uploaded as soon as possible. If it is not possible for you to submit your revision in a reasonable amount of time, we may have to consider your paper as a new submission.

Once again, thank you for submitting your manuscript to Research and Politics and I look forward to receiving your revision.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Ryan Kennedy  
Editor in Chief, Research and Politics  
rkennedy@central.uh.edu

Reviewer(s)' Comments to Author:

Reviewer: 1

#### Comments to the Author

I have rather mixed feelings about this paper. I think a version of it could definitely be published and would probably find a significant readership. It engages in an impressive data exercise that addresses an important topic and question. The analysis seems well-executed and very plausible. I find the results quite striking and interesting. Beyond that, the paper is well-written and easy to read.

However, I struggle to understand the main take-home point of the paper. Why do the authors find the results that they do? Why do the unidimensional measures fail to correlate with support for features of democracy? How are we supposed to interpret the lack of a correlation? None of this is made clear in the paper. I was left wondering these questions even after just reading the abstract. Ultimately, I feel that the paper is written for a very niche literature that I personally don't know much about, even if I care about these questions and would be, in principle, interested in the question and the paper. The paper needs to engage in more explanation to help readers who are not deeply knowledgeable about the "measurement of democratic support" literature (and maybe even those who are) to understand what is going on.

In order to warrant publication, in my view the paper needs to do the following things better:

- 1) Better explain the existing unidimensional indices, and discuss the indicators that go into them (not only deep in the appendix but in the paper), including the differences between the Churchill question-style indicators and questions that ask about aspects of liberal democracy. If the questions about general support for the term "democracy" (e.g., the Churchill question) are the primary determinants of the unidimensional scores, the non-result in the paper could be because people don't know what liberal democracy is or what the word "democracy" means? If so, respondents might just see the term "democracy" as something that should be viewed as positive and therefore rate it highly — everyone likes a good thing, without having any idea what liberal democracy means or entails. The authors speculate about this possibility in the paper, but this notion does not get linked back to the unidimensional measures. I was also already wondering about this when reading the introduction and wondering why it wasn't addressed there.
- 2) Rework the abstract, intro and paper as a whole to make clear what the take-away message should be. To make the paper interesting to a wider audience beyond the two sets of authors who seem to be deeply engaged in the topic (e.g. Claassen and colleagues and Solt and colleagues) it needs a clearer message. That message, in my view, needs to be more than "other people's unidimensional measures don't correlate with things with that we think might relate to democracy." Rather, I think the paper needs to explain (or at least speculate) why they don't correlate — e.g., perhaps unidimensional measures are often driven by questions that ask about support for democracy in the abstract, without defining what it is (see point 1). Abstract support for democracy, however, does not correlate with support for items that actually relate to support for features of liberal democracy. Alternatively, it could be people have a different understanding of the term "democracy, even if their understandings do relate to some characteristics of liberal democracy. They even may agree on the basic items by weigh them differently. Or it could, of course, be that democracy as a term is meaningless in the context of a survey, and therefore the "Churchill" style questions, which are most commonly asked in a comparative manner are actually rather meaningless (or at least not related to support for things that we actually associate with democracy). Which of these explanations is most likely behind the lack of a correlation? This needs to be clear from the beginning of the paper.
- 3) Depending on the answers to points 1 and 2, I would have been very interested in questions such as: does region matter? Or are there countries or regions where the understanding of liberal democracy is clearer and more closely associated with responses to the Churchill style questions (or the unidimensional measure)? Does it work better in the West than outside of the West? Has that changed over time or with the advent of authoritarian politicians in Europe? I don't think that the paper necessarily needs to answer all these questions, but the answers would help us to understand why the correlation doesn't exist (or where it does exist) and help address the first two points.

Reviewer: 2

#### Comments to the Author

This manuscript argues against the use of unidimensional latent variable measures of democratic support. This is an important topic given the widespread use of such measures in the literature. Therefore, I think the authors should be invited to revise and resubmit. Below, I list a number of issues I believe the authors should address prior to publication.

First, and perhaps most importantly, the authors make a relatively strong case that unidimensional latent variable measures of democratic support are invalid. However, they say little about potential alternatives. How could we construct a multidimensional measure? Without explaining how this could be done and showing that it leads to a more valid measure, it is difficult to convince the reader that we should stop using unidimensional measures.

Second, the authors should include more information in the text (and the appendix) on why exactly they believe unidimensional latent variables measures are invalid. They show correlations between the measure they constructed and other questions meant to capture democracy, but this does not seem to be sufficient. Could the authors include more tests, for example of the internal consistency of the items (e.g., Cronbach's alpha)? More generally, the appendix includes a lot of information, but I do not believe it is summarized efficiently in the main text.

Third, could the weak correlation between the latent variable measure and other questions on democracy be explained by the fact that the measure relies on different questions in different countries?

Fourth, the authors need to give more information as to why some questions are used to construct the measure (Table A1) and others to validate it (Table A2). It is not clear to me why the variables in Table A2 were not used to construct the unidimensional latent variable measure.

Fifth, the authors focus on country-level measures of democratic support. It would be interesting to address the issue of whether the same issues apply to respondent-level indicators of support for democracy. A large number of studies use survey data to understand the determinants of democratic support.

Associate Editor(s)' Comments to Author:

Associate Editor

Comments to the Author:

Both reviewers were intrigued by this study and suggest that the authors should be given the opportunity to revise and resubmit it. However, they both indicate significant concerns about the framing and presentation of the results. In particular, the authors will need to spend time thinking about the "why" questions around their conclusions. Why are unidimensional measures failing, why is a multidimensional measure better? Just as important, providing a clear understanding of what a multidimensional measure means in concrete terms and how this is different from a unidimensional measure will be critical. If the authors can address these points, the paper will likely have a much greater impact on the overall literature.