Perspectives on a Contested Topic: Individual Criteria, Interactive Conditionality and Political Outcomes of Legitimacy

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Individual Criteria, Interactive Conditionality and Political Outcomes of Legitimacy

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Contents

1 SYNOPSIS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

What is legitimacy and why should scientists inquire about the legitimacy of political actors and systems? The concept of political legitimacy lies at the very heart of governance and power dynamics within societies. It serves as a foundational pillar upon which the authority of governments and leaders is built, determining the extent to which their decisions and actions are accepted and obeyed by the governed. Understanding and studying political legitimacy is essential for a multitude of reasons, as it provides valuable insights into the functioning of political systems and the maintenance of social order. Some call it the "central issue" (Beetham, 1991, p. 41), "the master question" (Crick, 1993, p. 150), "central to virtually all of political science" (Gilley, 2006, p. 499) or "the core of political organization" (Alagappa, 1995, p. 3).

According to the Cambridge dictionary, legitimacy comes in two categories: The first refers to "the quality of being legal" and the second to "the quality of being reasonable and acceptable" (*Cambridge Dictionary: Legitimacy*, 2023). The former seems to indicate that legitimacy is a tangible property derived from law and thus clearly observable. The latter attributes to it a subjective nature. Political science makes a similar distinction. Philosophers have debated for centuries which factors make or break legitimacy and which political system is legitimate in and by itself. The questions raised by this literature touch upon human nature, and how to control our innermost desires and impulses through authoritative institutions that focus on the common good. Contrary to this normative ideal of a legitimate political system, more contemporary authors argue that legitimacy is derived through acts of legitimation, which require a sender and an addressee who believes or rejects the sender's claims to legitimacy. The most known author in this respect is Max Weber (1978 [1922]), who inspired the empirical-analytical analysis of legitimacy with his distinction into tradition-, charisma- and procedure-based beliefs in legitimacy. Authors in his line of thought argue that there is no normatively superior concept of legitimacy that is morally universal and independent of context, but rather that legitimacy is highly context-dependent and a property that may exist in *degrees*. Based on these thoughts, regimes are seen as legitimate when there is a congruence between individuals' legitimacy criteria[1] and a

[1] This is also referred to as legitimacy demand, which I find misleading since it suggests an active role of the population to *demand* certain claims to legitimacy. What is meant here is the underlying preference or value that lets people evaluate governmental action more or less preferably. Tannenberg (2023) calls this 'appetite'. In this synopsis, I use the more neutral word *criteria* but will occasionally use *demand* as it is commonly used in the literature.

regimes' claims to legitimacy (Beetham, 1991; Tannenberg, 2023; von Haldenwang, 2017; Suchman 1995). Claims are targeted at the general population and have the goal to convince the population of the leaders' right to exercise political power. They can take the form of leader-centered narratives, ideological doctrines, materialistic promises, or democratic procedures, to name but a few distinctions made in the literature (Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017; Matheson, 1987; Tannenberg et al., 2019; von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017; Weber, 1978).

On the other hand, the citizens which form this general public hold their own views on what constitutes proper and just authority. The long-standing literature on political and socio-cultural values, beliefs and behavior teaches about the development of these legitimacy criteria. We know from this literature, that individuals' views on politics and their feelings towards authority shape their demands towards political systems. For example, whether one is an allegiant (Almond & Verba, 1963) or an assertive citizen (Dalton & Welzel, 2014) changes one's self-prescribed role in relation to political authority. While the former accepts governments as wise decision makers and only participates within non-confrontative channels, the latter takes a more critical stance towards institutions and his/her trust must be earned. The value-change implied by societies moving from allegiant to assertive citizens leads to a more critical stance towards authorities which, in turn, influences the digestion of governments' claims to legitimacy (Inglehart, 1977; Norris, 1999, 2011; Welzel, 2013). Overall, this change to a more critical citizen and less acceptance of traditional hierarchy develops in conjunction with socio-political modernization and increasing human agency in the form of material and cognitive empowerment (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Lipset, 1959). This literature suggests that socio-political development should culminate in the establishment of democratic governance, for which there is universal support around the globe (Claassen, 2020; Inglehart, 2003). However, the ubiquitous support for democracy rests on different conceptual notions of what democracy means and subsequently alters the way in which individuals evaluate their governments (Cho, 2014; Dalton et al., 2007; Kirsch & Welzel, 2019; Kruse et al., 2019). Contemporary autocrats use this imprecise understanding of democracy to justify their right to rule by claiming to be democrats and relying on citizens' inability to factually evaluate their claims due to their lack of conceptual knowledge (Brunkert, 2022). For established democracies, Norris (2011) argues the opposite and shows that most of the evidence points towards growing criticality and less pre-emptive obedience on the side of the populace, who is in favor of democratic governance but critical of its application. Accordingly, contemporary (democratic) elites should face increasingly hard times to justify their right to rule based on personalist, ideological or purely performance-based claims to legitimacy. In many developing democracies, however, citizens' legitimacy criteria remain underspecified and respond positively even to undemocratic claims to legitimacy (Brunkert, 2022; Kirsch & Welzel, 2019; Shin & Kim, 2018).

In conjunction with this numbing observation, the growing literature on democratic deconsolidation, backsliding or autocratization paints a worrisome picture (Foa & Mounk, 2016; Hellmeier et al., 2021; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). The talk of a "third wave of autocratization" (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019) and the growing influence of far-right populist parties in established democracies seems to indicate that citizens' criticality gives way to nationalist aspirations that endanger liberal democracy's promises. Whether this development becomes a trend or whether it simply is a temporal fluctuation remains to be seen. In spite of all doomsayer-ism, the continuing global value-change towards more – rather than less – emancipatory progress opposes this view and sees democracy's long-term development in a more positive light (Brunkert et al., 2019; Welzel et al., 2022).

Investigating this interplay of claims to legitimacy, legitimacy criteria, their genesis and consequences may shed further light onto the maintenance and establishment of both democratic and autocratic rule. In the long run a political system cannot rely on repression and cooptation alone to ensure its survival and must establish a narrative as to why its authority is justified (Gerschewski, 2013; Tyler, 2006). While true democratic systems, build around deliberative and transparent procedures, clearly have an innate advantage at procuring and maintaining legitimacy, there is a growing focus on pathways to legitimacy in authoritarian systems, which remain stubbornly present even after the initial democratic euphoria of the early 1990's (see e.g. Fukuyama, 1993). By using a Weberian notion of legitimacy and emphasizing the conditionality between legitimacy claims and criteria, I connect the research on values, attitudes and beliefs with political outcomes (such as the autocratization debate), thereby providing further evidence for the relevance of legitimacy as a bridging concept. To visualize these introductory thoughts, imagine the following example:

A coup d'état removes an elected head of state, who successively abolished legislative and judicial constraints on his rule to increase his/her personal power. This coup may seem "reasonable and acceptable" to many individuals and may prevent further democratic decline. But who is the legitimate actor in this situation? The incumbent who initially assumed his position through publicly legitimized elections or the putschist who may have acted to prevent further centralization of power? As is often the case in political situations and in social sciences, it depends. Both, the former and the latter, can *claim* to be the legitimate actor: The first being formally elected and the second being mandated by the public's desire to protect democracy. That is, also the elected – but autocratizing leader – can sustain a claim to legitimacy and can be successful in doing so, even if he acts against the common good (Brunkert & von Soest, 2022; Tannenberg et al., 2019; von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017). Who is successful in this case is to a large degree (if we neglect highly repressive states) determined by the publics' perception and evaluation of these competing claims. To make things more complicated, there may be multiple

competing interest groups with different legitimacy criteria within this exemplary society. This dilemma constitutes the backbone of major political crises, where legitimacy claims differ among the public actors involved and the beliefs of those that perceive and evaluate them – leading to civil wars, intra-elite splits, mass protest, decreasing trust after electoral loss (Kern & Kölln, 2022) and party-political instability (Gilley, 2006). Though often dressed in different conceptual definitions, questions of legitimacy touch most political debates that have to do with contention, justifiability, and stability.

Democracy is one of these areas of contention. 90% of the world's constitutions make references to the word democracy (Marquez, 2016a, p. 22) and most citizens of the world see democracy as something worth striving for (Bratton & Mattes, 2001; Dalton et al., 2007; Inglehart, 2003). But there is a twist to this "lip-service" to democracy. If something is seen as desirable, righteous, and just, it can serve as a tool to justify political systems and create a balance between claims and beliefs that helps regimes to be seen as legitimate. While scientists mostly agree about the elementary conceptual boundaries of democracy – contestation and participation (Dahl, 1971; Vanhanen, 2000) – autocrats around the world use democracy's legitimizing power as a tool to justify their claim to power. They use the ubiquitous support for the word democracy and fill it with their own interpretations of what democracy is and is not.

This is where the central article of this dissertation picks up. I call this phenomenon "Overselling democracy–claiming legitimacy?" and analyze the "the link between democratic pretention, notions of democracy and citizens' evaluations of regimes' democraticness" (Brunkert, 2022). At its core stands the idea that as long as citizens' legitimacy criteria do not feature a liberal understanding of democracy, autocrats can bend the term democracy to their will and fill it with meaning that suits their leadership ambitions. Autocrats seek to make citizens believe that the supply of democratic institutions, however flawed they may be, matches their legitimacy criteria by making exaggerated claims about the state of elections and the rule of law. In the article, Mugabe's successor Mnangagwa serves as a case in point. He successfully claims to being a rational-legal, publicly legitimized leader while simultaneously ignoring the most basic principles of democratic rule (Brunkert, 2022; Feldstein, 2022; Mnangagwa, 2018). Quite ironically, after his accession to power also the number of references to democracy in the Zimbabwean constitution (Elkins et al., 2005) more than doubled (9 to 19 mentions), while the peoples' knowledge of democracy did not improve and evaluations of their country's democracy levels remain surprisingly positive. Using the idea of democracy's legitimizing power, the article exemplifies the conditionality behind claim, demand, and evaluations of regimes' legitimation attempts. That is, individual notions of democracy condition the effectiveness of regimes' claims, allowing well-informed citizens to see through blatant lies. Accordingly, this paper establishes the interaction between individual notions of democracy and a regime's attempt to oversell

democracy, emphasizing the congruence between legitimacy criteria and claims as the central factor for the legitimation of political power.

Given the importance of citizens' legitimacy criteria as a conditioning factor for effective legitimation, the question arises which factors contribute to the formation of citizens' legitimacy criteria. We already know that citizens' understanding of democracy is influenced by socio-economic development (Almond & Verba, 1963; Lipset, 1959), emancipative values (Kirsch & Welzel, 2019) and part of national political cultures, which only change at a *glacial pace* (Brunkert et al., 2019). As the article on overselling democracy makes clear, notions of democracy are part of individuals' evaluation criteria. While democratic education and changing context factors might help to update these criteria, there are other culturally embedded factors that predispose individuals towards the valuation of obedience to authority as a value in and by itself. Accordingly, the next contribution – labelled "Why do people value obedience?" – argues that the words obedience and legitimacy oftentimes inhibit the same sentences and are conceptually linked. Because the concepts are intertwined, it is difficult to assert if individuals obey because they perceive someone as the legitimate authority or if they perceive someone as a legitimate authority because they are culturally pre-disposed to value deference to authority and value disobedience as immoral. I aim to answer the second half of this question: why do people value obedience to authority in the first place?

While Milgram (1963, 1965) and his successors (e.g. Burger, 2009; Miller, 2014) argue that perceived legitimacy leads to situational obedience, others see social, cultural and religious factors as more influential and argue that societies can develop a culturally anchored *"inner obedience"* (Hofstede, 2001; Morselli & Passini, 2011; Thiruchselvam et al., 2017; Welch et al., 2006). If this results in an unquestioned acceptance of authority it can dampen the desire to follow one's conscience and encourage obedience to immoral requests (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989; Milgram, 1963). Passini and Morselli (2009) anchor the different manifestations of obedience in the self-perceptions that individuals have. That is, whether individuals base their evaluation of authoritative demands on self-perceived roles and rules in society or if they base it on universal values that set moral limits to authoritative demands (see also Kohlberg, 1958). These different pre-dispositions for individual evaluations of authoritative demands should be visible in different beliefs in obedience measured in cross-national surveys. I see these attitudes towards obedience as an influential pre-condition for the development of different individual legitimacy criteria, since they define the socio-cultural setting in which authority unfolds. Thus, explaining the roots of beliefs in obedience helps to shed light on the socio-psychological criteria used for the assessment of claims to legitimacy. The results of this study point towards a mixture of individual- and context-factors that encourage individuals to value obedience. Most notable explanations for beliefs in obedience are the societal dominance of religion, support for the

governing regime, differences between high-educated and low-educated individuals, the continuing effect of historical family systems and the inter-individual differences in experience with autocracy. These results help to understand where (illiberal) claims to legitimacy fall on fertile ground and why some countries' citizens support autocratic rule and do not withdraw their consent for normatively illegitimate systems. It helps to better understand the baseline from which societies begin to form their legitimacy criteria and how the evaluation of claims to legitimacy unfolds.

As the final step, I show that the conditionality, identified in "overselling democracy", and the cultural pre-disposition to obedience are *real in their consequences* and at times produce undemocratic outcomes. In the article titled: "Praising the leader: personalist legitimation strategies and the deterioration of executive constraints" Christian von Soest and I provide evidence for the implications that successful claims to legitimacy may have (Brunkert & von Soest, 2022). We show how claims to legitimacy that focus on the person of the ruler pave the way for decreasing legislative and judicial constraints on the executive. Normally, these institutional guardrails limit overambitious leaders' personal power and, accordingly, are often attacked first by leaders with autocratic ambitions (Maerz et al., 2020). We argue that it is of course not the personalist rhetoric itself (i.e., the speaking of words) that dismantles democratic checks and balances, but that it provides a guiding narrative wherein the person of the ruler manifests himself as the central pillar for the advancement of the state. Using a large temporal and spatial sample, we find support for our hypotheses and show that the growth in personalist claims to legitimacy oftentimes precedes decreases in legislative and judicative constraints on the executive. We conclude that these claims should be taken seriously and that they can function as an early warning signal. Our observation is most critical for not yet consolidated democracies, where the weakening of executive constraints can accelerate democratic backsliding. On the bright side, we find no anti-democratic effect of this rhetoric-action-link for the most consolidated and liberal democracies.

Put together, the three articles that form this dissertation start from the socio-cultural roots that explain beliefs in obedience, then use these roots to analyze how legitimacy criteria condition the effectiveness of claims to legitimacy and finally show how this mechanism leads to undemocratic outcomes if not contained.

1.2 AIMS OF THIS DISSERTATION

The topic of legitimacy is as old as social science itself and so broad that it is researched by management studies, sociologists, culturalists, psychologists and political scientists. While scientists in the 90's had to read around 'a quarter of an article' on the topic of legitimacy per week to keep up to date on their research interest, there are now 3-4 articles published in peer-reviewed science press weekly. It also seems quite notable that the growth of articles concerned with legitimacy goes hand in hand with fears about democratic deconsolidation[2], as Figure 1 shows. This increasing publication count speaks to the re-discovered relevance of the topic of legitimacy and its potential to explain and connect different fields of research within the social sciences – an endeavor I aim to contribute to.

Figure 1: Publications on Legitimacy and "Autocratization"

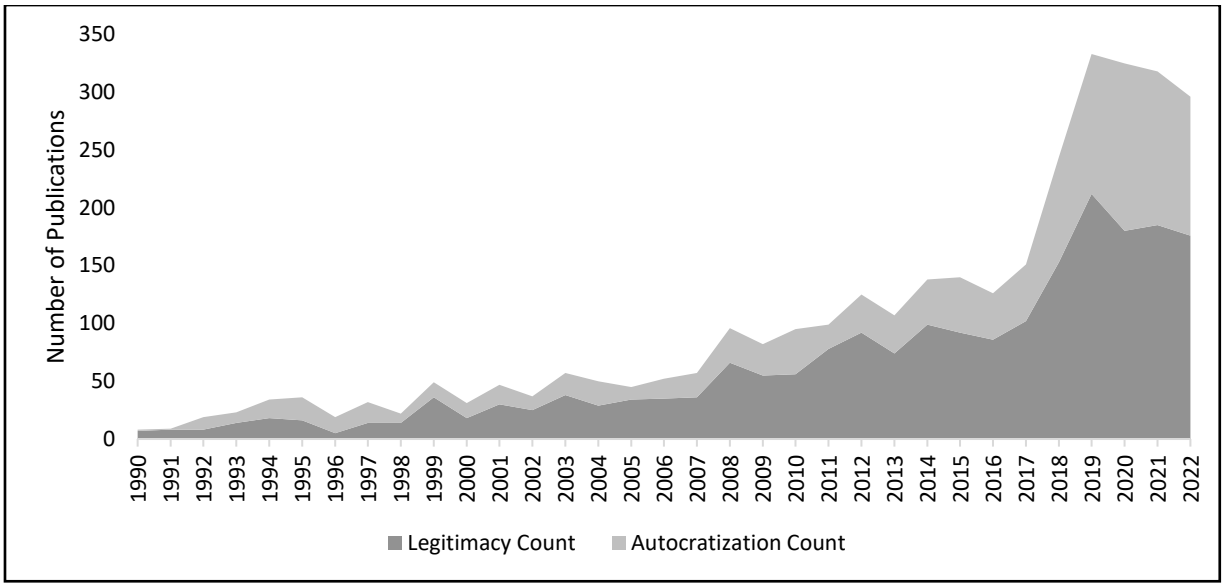


Figure 1: Legitimacy Count: Web of Science search for "legitimacy" OR "legitimation" OR "legitimate" in Political Science, Philosophy, Social Psychology, Political Philosophy and Sociology. Autocratization count: Web of Science search for "autocratization" OR "democratic recession/decline/deconsolidation" in Political Science, International Relations, Economics, Sociology, Area Studies, Social Science Interdisciplinary (etc.).

At first glance, we all have some layman's understanding of what *legitimate* means and use the word in everyday language – it even became a youth slang where *legit* refers to *genuine, actual, literal or honest.* However, outside everyday language the word represents much more than an acknowledging statement. In fact, there is *legit* criticism brought up against the concept which undermines its credibility and leaves much room for debate. It is difficult to assert legitimacy empirically since it is not directly measurable and mostly operationalized by looking at acts of legitimation. These acts take the form of other more easily measurable concepts – such

[2] I use the terms democratic deconsolidation, democratic recession and autocratization interchangeably throughout this work. While they capture slightly different aspects, they all clearly refer to decreasing democracy levels, which is meant here.

as performance, fairness, trust or the rule of law. To make it a credible concept that is more than its reliance on conceptual proxies and helpful for scientific inquiry, its empirical realization has to be:

1. theoretically grounded (to ensure content and face validity),
2. rigorously operationalized (to ensure construct validity),
3. *real* in its consequences across a range of different analytical levels (to ensure nomological validity).

For example, why might economic performance lead to legitimacy? Critics would argue that we could simply say 'individuals are happy with the regime, because of a good economic situation' instead of using the label *legitimate*. To connect it with legitimacy, I would now respond with Beetham (1991, 11) and argue that "[…] a power relationship is not legitimate because people believe in its legitimacy, but because it can be *justified in terms of* their beliefs". Thus, in this example, if people are output-oriented and value prosperity as a major political goal (which we can measure), then a regime can use its actual performance and claims of performance to justify its right to rule: Performance becomes a legitimizing feat. If performance is not part of citizens' legitimacy criteria, then the regime cannot achieve legitimacy *in terms of* output performance. Thus, there is a theoretical basis as to why (e.g.) performance can contribute to legitimacy: It is part of citizens' evaluation criteria and works towards congruence between claim and criteria[3]. We have measurable concepts: Regime performance (GDP, distributive fairness, etc.) and public opinion data addressing economic preferences (prompted in all major international social surveys). Finally, there needs to be an observable outcome. That is, where congruence between legitimacy criteria and government performance is established, citizens' satisfaction or their willingness to obey should be higher than in comparable countries that lack this congruence. Thus, by combining legitimacy criteria, regimes' claims and behavior with a related outcome, a valid measurement of legitimacy is possible. While performance might be a relatively easy example, since citizens rarely reject increased living standards, the same task can be repeated with more ideological orientations.

Where individuals' legitimacy criteria contain the desire for public policies to be based on religious norms, claims to legitimacy and policies that adhere to these norms should allow the regime to be seen as legitimate. However, more secular citizens now do not see their criteria fulfilled and may see governmental decisions as illegitimate and downgrade their evaluation of governmental performance and finally engage in protests. Hence, maintaining this delicate balance makes or breaks public legitimacy perceptions. While an empirical-analytical approach

[3] for more details on congruence, see: Eckstein, 1997; Eckstein & Gurr, 1975; Gerschewski, 2018; Suchman, 1995.

supports this analysis of more-or-less legitimate rule, normative accounts of legitimacy fail to explain legitimacy in systems that are outside of their definition of justice, freedom and common good.

Accordingly, one major question that social science should answer to further our knowledge in this field of research is which acts of legitimation are successful in which setting. This dissertation's contribution to this growth in knowledge is inspired by the following guiding questions:

1. *Which factors contribute to citizens' valuation of obedience?*
2. *To which extent can citizens' legitimacy criteria condition the effectiveness of regimes' claims to legitimacy?*
3. *To which extent do illiberal claims to legitimacy encourage autocratization?*

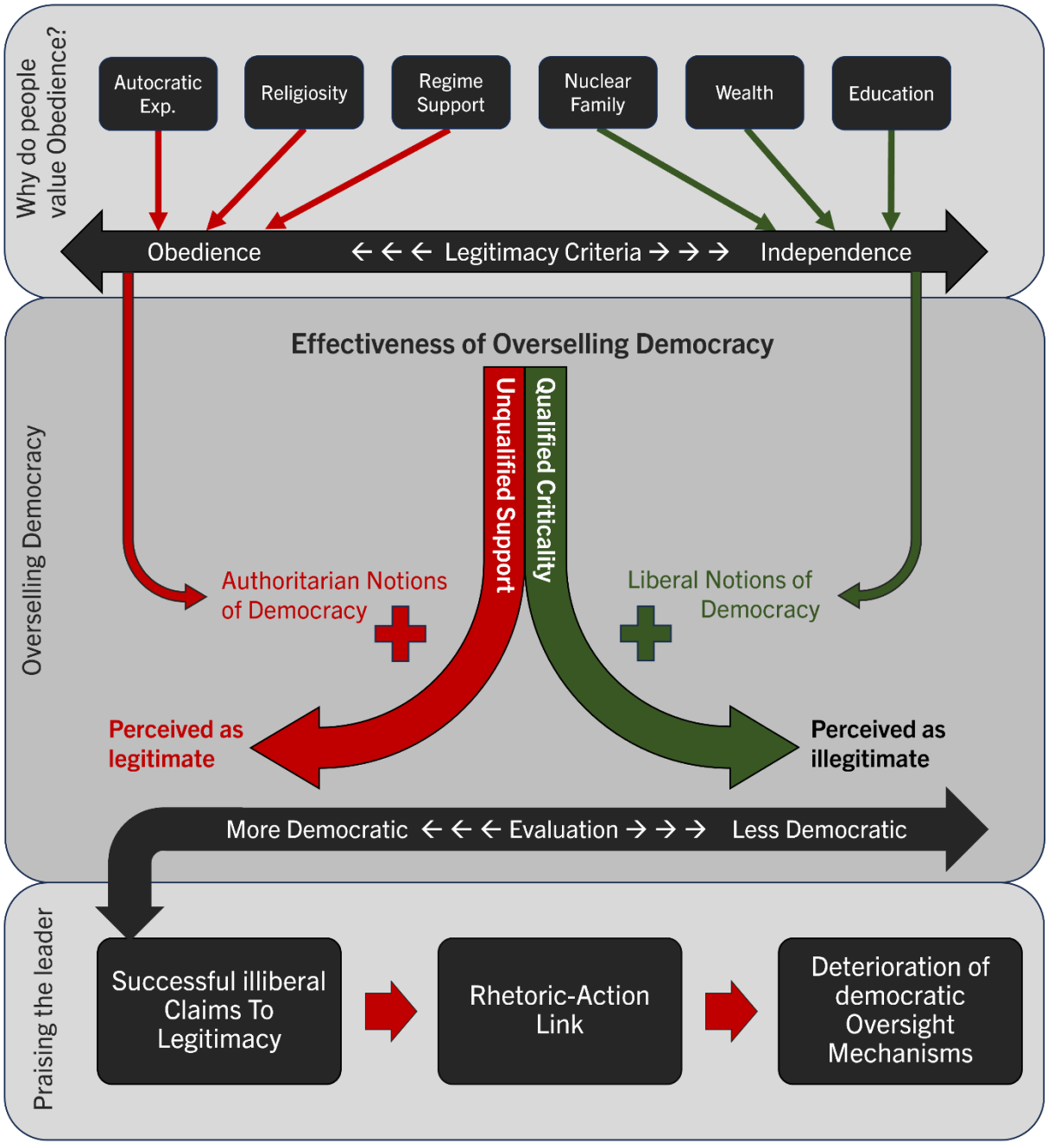
As should be clear by now, this work is located at the crossroad of three perspectives – individual-level determinants of legitimacy criteria, conditions for effective legitimation and attitudinal and institutional manifestations of successful legitimation strategies. Thus, it connects social-psychological, cultural and political institutionalist approaches. As evident from the introductory chapter it does not focus on one distinct area and does not aim to provide niche expertise on a geographically and conceptually limited area of research. Instead, it aims to produce generalizable results with a focus on external validity and to widen the scientific perspective on legitimacy by connecting different theoretical and disciplinary debates. Summarized, the overarching research interest of this dissertation amounts not to a single question but to the concept's empirical relevance more generally and how it contributes to our understanding of current debates in political science, such as "the third wave of autocratization" (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019).

Figure two summarizes the three parts and the argumentative flow that connects them. Herein, each box refers to one of the three articles which are connected via their theoretical and conceptual overlap. The left-hand side of the figure shows that I expect beliefs in obedience to influence individuals' notions of democracy. These in turn interact with "overselling democracy" to create a positive image of the regime. Lastly, when illiberal claims are well accepted, they can lead to anti-democratic outcomes. The right-hand side repeats the opposite logic. However, once individuals see through exaggerating claims to legitimacy, they can withdraw consent and (hopefully) stop the autocratization process from unfolding. In conjunction with the separate articles, the final section of this synopsis demonstrates that this connection holds empirically.

By following Weber and his epistemological successors who see legitimacy to occur in matters of degrees, this debate on legitimacy turns into an open marketplace of ideas and competing empirical evidence. To emphasize and visualize the relevance of the concept, this

dissertation adopts a multi-disciplinary perspective and shows that it has widespread applicability, is real in its consequences and goes beyond idiosyncratic measures and operationalizations. To fit into publishable journal formats, each of the three articles addresses only a specific aspect of the overarching model. This synopsis extends the articles' findings and embeds them in a bigger picture. It shows that questions of legitimacy are no non-sensical research practice without external application, but rather that the existence of differing legitimacy criteria can be explained, their interaction with claims to legitimacy disentangled and their outcomes clearly observed.

Figure 2: Argumentative flow of the three studies.



In short, the results of the three articles suggest that:

(1) individuals' legitimacy criteria are shaped by an identifiable set of socio-cultural context factors and individual experiences.
(2) The congruence between these legitimacy criteria and claims to legitimacy is the condition for effective legitimation.
(3) Two worrying outcomes of a successful legitimation strategy can be observed:
    a. Regimes can convince citizens that they are more democratic than they really are, thereby dampening demands for true democratization.
    b. And second, by using claims based on personalism, leaders can justify the reduction of horizontal constraints to their rule, unleashing their autocratic potential.

The following sections provide additional background information that helps the reader to look beyond the singularity of streamlined articles towards a more encompassing perspective. The conceptual background contrasts normative and empirical-analytical approaches to the study of legitimacy, locates the presented research in the cross-centennial, epistemological debates about what constitutes legitimacy and justifies the focus on the empirical-analytical understanding of legitimacy. In the final sections, the results of the three separate studies are discussed in more detail, before combining them into a path model which shows their empirical interconnection. Last, the results of this model and potential limitations are discussed. The already published articles have been re-formatted to fit into this final work. The content remains identical to the open access publications. The Synopsis and three articles each come with their own appendix and references. Table and figure numbering restart at the beginning of each chapter.

Table 1: Summary of dissertation articles

Abstract	Key-points
Why do people value obedience? A multi-theoretical perspective on individual and societal beliefs in obedience.	
Why do people value obedience? This article tries to answer this question from a multidisciplinary point of view and pitches several theoretically derived factors against another. It compares two different aptitudes for beliefs in obedience based on the World Values Surveys's child obedience item and the ISSP's obedience to laws item. Using Random Effect Within-Between models, it shows that deep-rooted family systems, education, religion, political support and personal political experiences all have theoretical and empirical connections to beliefs in obedience. While both used measures of attitudes towards obedience are conceptually distinct, they nevertheless respond to the same explanatory factors, implying that they are manifestations of underlying inner beliefs in obedience. The findings suggest that religiosity and historical family systems shape beliefs on societal level, while education, experience with autocracy and regime support explain inter-individual differences. The article anchors this debate in the connection between obedience and legitimacy and concludes that beliefs in obedience help political leaders to legitimize their rule based on a socio-culturally embedded inner acceptance of authority.	**There are large cross-national differences in beliefs in obedience. Both contextual and individual factors matter. Obedience as an important child quality and obedience to the laws share most of their predictors.** Takeaway: Inter-individual and cross-societal differences in beliefs in obedience provide different breeding grounds for legitimacy claims to unfold.
Overselling democracy—claiming legitimacy? The link between democratic pretention, notions of democracy and citizens' evaluations of regimes' democraticness.	
Many non-democratic countries anchor the word "democracy" in their national constitutions and everyday rhetoric, while ignoring the conceptual roots of democracy and its scholarly-defined procedural standards. This article argues that governments intentionally "oversell" democracy to their people, in order to exploit the legitimizing effect that the word embodies. This can, however, only succeed if the receiving side is susceptible to such claims to legitimacy. Accordingly, this study investigates how effective "overselling" attempts are considering individuals' liberal vs. illiberal notions of democracy. Building on congruence theory, it juxtaposes the, at times blatant, "overselling" with individual-level notions of democracy and, thus, investigates whether governments' attempts to claim democratic-procedural legitimacy are contingent on citizens' understanding of the concept. Using multilevel moderation analyses, it shows that illiberal, authoritarian notions of democracy can convert "overselling" into positive evaluations of a regime, whereas prevailing liberal notions unmask "overselling" governments and create additional criticality. The conclusion argues that notions of democracy function as a filter, which matches true and false demand and supply of democracy. The findings help to understand why and how democratization movements can unfold and why some citizens see their country as democratic even though it is not.	**The effectiveness of gaining legitimacy via democratic *overselling* is moderated by individual notions of what democracy means.** Takeaway: Legitimation works at the intersection of demand (evaluation standard) and supply (claim to legitimacy) in creating legitimacy for the ruling elite.
Praising the leader: personalist legitimation strategies and the deterioration of executive constraints.	
In the face of current democratic backsliding and autocratization processes, research has rediscovered issues of autocratic legitimation. However, the question of whether rulers' personalist rhetoric to bolster their legitimacy is followed by congruent political action remains underspecified. Using new expert-coded measures for 164 countries from the Varieties of Democracy project, we examine the political rhetoric—action link using fixed effects models. The results confirm that shifts towards personalist legitimacy claims are no cheap talk but oftentimes important warning signals for a substantial deterioration of democratic quality, manifested in weaker judicial and legislative oversight of the executive branch. However, in contrast to much current concern, we show that liberal democracies seem to largely escape the negative repercussions of government discourses that increasingly stress the uniqueness of the ruler.	**An increasing focus on personalist legitimation strategies signals the deterioration of judicial and legislative constraints. This effect is not visible in highly democratic countries.** Takeaway: Illiberal claims to legitimacy are signals of envisioned changes and – if accepted – can function as early warning signals for changes to political institutions.

1.3 Conceptual Background: perspectives on legitimacy

This dissertation works with an empirical-analytical – also called descriptive – comprehension of legitimacy. Nevertheless, to gain insights into its inception and current state, it is helpful to examine preceding normative discussions and to justify the use of the former over the latter. Therefore, this section includes a brief exploration of political philosophy and the historically predominant normative perspective on political legitimacy, as well as critiques directed towards legitimacy research in general. The intention is not to comprehensively survey the centuries-old, library-filling discourse on legitimacy but to establish a rationale for the suitability of an empirical-analytical approach in a contemporary context characterized by a multitude of political systems, voting mechanisms, and evolving or regressing democracies.

1.3.1 Normative accounts of legitimacy

Normative accounts of legitimacy can be found in nearly all well-known philosophers' repertoires – from Rosseau to Mills to Rawls. The debate is closely related to question of justice and authority and oftentimes begins with the identification of human nature and how to tame it (Hobbes, 1996 [1651]) or protect it (Locke, 1690). In this debate, the main premise is to define the outlines of a political authority that is supported by public consent and passes binding decisions that advance the common good. From here on, there is wide disagreement as to how such an authority may be established and how its control of power can be justified. One example derives from Locke's view on the state of nature. In his view, each individuals' initial freedom may not be subject to another's coercive power. As this freedom is unprotected in its natural form, a social contract is created which projects individuals' original freedoms to a higher-level authority bound by this contract. This authority can only be legitimate if it is the explicit will of its society's members to become the subjects of this authority and if the authority respects the state of nature – that is protecting individual liberty. Those who consent to the social contract are then bound to obey the authorities created by it. This consent takes the form of "originating consent" (Rawls, 2008, p. 124) at the time of the initiation of authoritative institutions and must be constantly checked. An authority forfeits the right to be obeyed once it no longer respects the initial human freedoms that it is supposed to protect or once consent is withdrawn (Pitkin, 1965; Simmons, 1976). In addition to consent, Rawls (1993) connects a system's legitimacy to its justification of political power. In his view, without a morally grounded justification for the monopoly on force and for the imposition of rules on normal people's life, authority cannot be legitimate. According to him a political system may be legitimate but at the same time unjust, but never the other way around. In that sense, a just system is a legitimate system.

In this debate, a system built around democratic institutions is generally seen as the closest empirical approximation of most philosophers' ideas to date. However, the opinions differ as to where its legitimating properties stem from. Utilitarians would argue that legitimacy derives from laws that increase citizens' life satisfaction (Bentham, 1987 [1843]). Democratic instrumentalists argue that rational and egalitarian distribution (i.e. outcomes) are creating legitimacy (Raz, 1994; Wall, 2007) and proceduralists stress that a fair input and throughput may legitimize even irrational outcomes (Christiano, 1996; Dahl, 1956). Others (Habermas, 2001) see deliberative procedures as central for the acceptance and quality of political outcomes since even the most rational and beneficial decision may not be perceived as such if those that are meant to obey it are completely detached from its genesis. However, once established, legitimacy has several properties that decrease the efforts of governing a heterogeneous society. According to Raz (1988, 1994) the main benefit of maintaining legitimacy is that legitimate authority can rely on pre-emptive obedience which does not need to be repeatedly justified. Being a legitimate authority *is* the justification for any command issued by that authority and "[b]eing able to gain voluntary acquiescence from most people, most of the time, due to their sense of obligation increases effectiveness during periods of scarcity, crisis, and conflict (Tyler, 2006, p. 375)". In contrast, an authority without legitimacy cannot rely on an internalized obligation of its subjects and may have to rely on repeated justifications, co-optation or coercion (Gerschewski, 2013; Tyler, 1997, 2006). In simpler words, individuals accept an authority, that they perceive as legitimate, to create binding rules for society in a similar way to how they trust a doctor with their health and a mechanic with their car. A doctor does not have to prove time and time again that he or she has passed medical school. As long as the authority consciously acts in society's legitimate interest – that is protecting its initial freedoms – they are owed obedience. This approach might seem rather naïve, as most ordinary citizens do not spend their time debating philosophical questions of justice, authority and morality and might perceive of someone as a doctor as soon as they see a white coat. Claims to legitimacy resemble this white coat and need to be analyzed to understand their effectiveness vis à vis citizens' perceptivity. If citizens have the capacity to factually evaluate their government's (or doctor's) proclaimed performance, the internalized obligation to obey might give way to justified criticality and the questioning of authority.

While being logically sound, the presented philosophical debates in this section build on a plethora of normative ideals whose acceptance and applicability differs across the many cultures of our world. The historically most influential thinkers in this field stem from European Enlightenment thought and while they may claim that their thoughts are universal, their cultural descendants only make up a small and WEIRD (Henrich, 2021) fraction of the world's population. To assume that their normative concepts of justice, freedom and legitimacy are indeed universal is a bold assumption and gives further credibility to Weberian descriptive approaches to

legitimacy – which *measure what is* rather than *debate how it should be*. That is, not all world citizens may perceive of these influential philosophers as the *legitimate* authority that identifies what defines justice, freedom or legitimacy and may have their own cultural perspectives on what defines legitimate authority.

Confucian thought serves as a powerful counter-perspective to Western philosophers' ideals. Confucianism shaped Chinese (and neighboring) culture for close to 2000 years (Jiang, 2018) and in contrast to European Enlightenment it does not concentrate on individual rights and freedoms but stresses cultural homogeneity and benevolent outcomes as foundations of political legitimacy (Ma, 2000). In Confucian logic a ruler maintains legitimacy by being benevolent, caring for society and striving for harmony:

"[…] [T]heorists of Western civic republicanism from Aristotle, Cicero, and Machiavelli to Rousseau all emphasize the importance of political participation for good citizenship, but traditional Confucians never deem political participation so critical that one must put it in front of personal moral perfection or familial duty." (Jiang, 2018, p. 159)

If this system of thought is culturally embedded and societally rooted in individuals' understanding of justice, power and morale, then it would be dogmatic to argue that our (Western) normative understanding of legitimacy was the only truth. If a society does not see individual liberty but – say – communitarian solidarity as most central for human well-being, then the debates that our understanding of legitimacy build on, fail to provide answers for the creation of authoritative institutions. Since normative theories always carry subjective meaning of their time and age, they do not easily adapt to a neutral cross-national analysis of political legitimacy. While they may be fitting from Western liberal democracies' point of view, their normativity necessitates the use of an impartial approach if one is to analyze a global sample and inquire about individuals' legitimacy perceptions. This can be achieved by approaching legitimacy research as a marketplace of competing claims to legitimacy under the umbrella of Weberian *Legitimitäts-glauben.*

For example, both democratic instrumentalists and proceduralists may be normatively right, but from a pure theorist's perspective, there is no aim to test their claims and potentially accept defeat – or in Popper's words *falsification* (2010 [1959]). However, we know from empirical research that both approaches have some merit, when viewed through a descriptive lens. People in south-east Asia often feature a more outcome-oriented understanding of democracy and thus see their governments' performance as a legitimizing factor (Chu et al., 2008; Shin & Kim, 2018). To the contrary, Northwestern Europeans have a more procedural understanding of democracy where participation and equality during the process play a bigger role and thus legitimize the outcome (Scharpf, 1999; Schmidt, 2013). By using the descriptive

approach both systems can achieve a congruence between legitimacy beliefs and claims, which helps to understand policy decisions, democratic development, and regime stability.

1.3.2 Criticism

Some authors argue that prior legitimate rule is only perceivable after the loss of legitimacy and that researchers are better off spending their time finding the reasons why consent is withdrawn. According to them, before its decline it is not possible to precisely argue why one should attribute legitimacy to an actor or a political system or which components make up its legitimacy (Connolly, 1987; Marquez, 2016b; O'Kane, 1993). Accordingly, defining legitimacy as the non-absence of legitimacy would make the whole idea of the concept redundant and immeasurable. Schaar (1981) sees the conceptual re-orientation towards empirical-analytical approaches of the late 1950's as a nonsensical conflation of public opinion and legitimacy without additive theoretical purpose and Przeworski (1991) goes even further and sees legitimacy as irrelevant altogether. In his view it is a micro-level concept and legitimacy perceptions are attached to individuals. Since single individuals do not determine the stability of political systems, we could not learn anything new from it. King et al. (1994), Easton (1965) and Huntington (1991) warn of the analysis of something that seems immeasurable, but at the same time Huntington acknowledges "[…] that it [legitimacy] was 'essential' to understanding the democratizations of the late twentieth century" (Huntington, 1991 in: Gilley, 2006, p. 524).

While some of this criticism is clearly warranted and legitimacy indeed difficult to measure, it is nevertheless semantically anchored in our everyday language and serves as a unifying concept. In this role, it gives a name to a *felt* status that describes individuals' willingness to relinquish power and to obey. In its aggregate form, this acceptance of authority is a core condition for effective government and empowers and stabilizes political regimes. Tyler (2006, p. 375) sees it as a "[…] psychological property of an authority, institution, or social arrangement that leads those connected to it to believe that it is appropriate, proper, and just." I follow this logic and argue that legitimacy describes the status of congruence between citizens' evaluation criteria and regimes' behavior and can be easily adapted to different circumstances within and outside the world of political science (see e.g. Suchman, 1995).

The main difference between normative and descriptive approaches to legitimacy thus boils down to the difference between *being* legitimate based on a normative set of criteria and the identification of *acts of legitimation*, which may be more or less successful (Barker, 2001; von Haldenwang, 2017). Thus, the descriptive approach employed here relies on the country-specific congruence of *internal* criteria and claims rather than relying on expert-defined *external* criteria. Identifying the time- and country-specific mechanisms that allow regimes and leaders to

legitimize themselves is central to understanding regime-dynamics, in contrast to what some of the critics argue.

1.3.3 Development of descriptive perspectives on legitimacy

The empirical-analytical approach to legitimacy that followed the normative debates developed alongside social sciences' growing desire to *explain* real-world phenomena (Hempel, 1965; Hempel & Oppenheim, 1948), culminating in a critical-rational epistemology (Popper, 2010 [1959]). Herein, Weber's (1978) initial thoughts on the idea of *Legitimitätsglauben* (legitimacy beliefs) feature three pathways through which leaders may be seen as legitimate: (1) Tradition, (2) Charisma or (3) through Rational-legal bureaucracies[4]. His idea of legitimacy beliefs focuses on the receiving part of the political system – that is citizens' beliefs about a regimes legitimate status. However, it pre-supposes that there also is a supply dimension, where political leaders may deliberately claim as to why they are entitled to rule. In comparison to the meritocratic rational-legal political system, his concepts of charismatic and traditional authority are clearly at a performative disadvantage but analytically helpful in their own right.

Charismatic rulers may lose their appeal through mismanagement or may simply die and remove a political system's raison d'être – think of Hugo Chávez and his unsuccessful successor Nicholás Maduro. Similarly, traditional authority faces the issue of ideological stasis. Historical texts, such as the Quran or the Bible, whose interpretations laid and lay the foundation for many political systems do not change alongside a modernizing society and are mostly unable to adapt to changing circumstances (with the Reformation being the last major exception). Their tenets are in some instances quite literally carved in stone, while at the same time political culture changes *glacially* (Brunkert et al., 2019) and accrued incongruences may cause uncompromising tectonic shifts that offset previous regime-vs.-culture mismatches (Welzel et al., 2016). 2022's protests in Iran are a resemblance of traditionalism's inability to accommodate societal change and maintain legitimacy in a society that moves away from traditional values (Brinkhof, 2022; Freedom House Perspectives, 2022). By analyzing how legitimacy criteria have shifted in comparison to governments' claims to legitimacy, we can better understand why some regimes lose legitimacy and others do not. For these kinds of analyses, an empirical-analytical understanding of legitimacy is the logical choice and adapts better to different circumstances than the reliance on fixed normative boundaries of legitimacy.

[4] This idea has been further extended by Matheson (1987), who provides a more fine-grained typology of Weber's three initial categories. These are convention, contract, universal principles, sacredness, expertise, popular approval, personal ties and personal qualities.

Building on Weber's initial thoughts, a growing strand of research now extends this research by focusing on claims to legitimacy. Dukalskis and Gerschewski (2017) argue for four mechanisms of autocratic legitimation that consist of indoctrination, passivity, performance and democratic procedures, each of which relies on a different governmental narrative. Grauvogel and von Soest (2017) find six relevant claims to legitimacy and Tannenberg et al. (2019) introduce a new expert-coding which groups claims to legitimacy into performance-based, centered on the person of the leader, on rational-legal procedures and on ideology. While some regimes might not actively pursue a legitimation strategy, others clearly do so. For example, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan increasingly uses religious traditionalism to convince his voters of his right to rule, by relying on societal values among some of his voters that reflect his claims to power (The Arab Weekly, 2021; Yabancı, 2022). In a similar vein Victor Orbán uses a personalist rhetoric to convince his potential voters that he is the legitimate leader whose main goal is the advancement of the Hungarian nation which must not be restrained by media or competing political institutions (Lendvai, 2018; Rupnik, 2012). He uses traditionalist claims in combination with this focus on personalism and openly proclaims that the "[…] Hungarian nation is not a simple sum of individuals, but a community that needs to be organized, strengthened and developed, and in this sense, the new state that we are building is an illiberal state […]" (Tóth, 2014). And even though it may sound frustrating to every convinced democrat: In an empirical analytical sense, also Orbán's regime can legitimize itself based on the congruence between claim and legitimacy criteria.

Beetham (1991) criticizes Weber's original approach as too shallow and makes clear that two additional aspects are necessary to inform scientific evaluations of legitimacy. He argues that a regime must achieve legality vis à vis the rules that are in place and that "[a] given power relation is not legitimate because people believe it is but because it can be justified in terms of their beliefs" (1991, p. 11). Additionally, he connects his thoughts to the normative debate by demanding 'acts of consent' that reinforce the leaders' claims to power through some form of public ratification. Thus, in contrast to Weber he sees an active role of the citizens and adds a legal dimension to the concept. Building on these theoretical premises of Weber and Beetham, there have been many attempts to further define the concept empirically (e.g. Gerschewski, 2013, 2018; Tyler, 2006; von Haldenwang, 2016, 2017) and to operationalize its key components in a stringent manner (e.g. Gilley, 2006, 2012; Levi et al., 2009; Mauk, 2020; Weatherford, 1992). Thus far, most analyses have focused on legitimacy as the object of research itself and not on how it is connected to other real-world phenomena. For example Gilley (2006) operationalizes *state legitimacy* and then orders the world's countries along his scale, Levi et al. (2009) show how perceptions of authority influence acceptance of authority and Weatherford (1992) creates a measurement model which combines micro- and macro-level measurement of legitimacy and most recently Tannenberg (2023) empirically connects claims and beliefs and further establishes

legitimacy as congruence (Appendix table A1 provides an overview of some operationalizations found in the literature).

1.3.4 Conceptual "takeaway"

Between normative and empirical approaches, I would agree that the concept is still 'essentially contested' (Gallie, 1956; von Haldenwang, 2017; Wiesner & Harfst, 2022). While the normative debate seems to be close-ended and dominated by Western philosophers, there is a fruitful growth towards more and better understanding of what legitimacy is and is not within the empirical-analytical field. A valid point against working on legitimacy from an empirical point of view remains that it heavily relies on other concepts to establish whether an authority can be evaluated as legitimate, as is evident from the overview in Appendix Table A1. That is, there is no direct survey question asking "do you see X as legitimate?" and no governments that straightforwardly proclaim "we justify our claim to power by Y". Well-grounded theory and insightful proxies must still be used to locate other concepts within the larger idea of legitimacy. Still, the presented examples make clear that it is indeed possible to empirically approximate legitimacy using related concepts and theory. By following Beetham (1991), we may see that a system is not normatively just and fair, but as long as the system has legal validity (conforms to its own rules), rulers and ruled share some common beliefs and majority of the populace does not withdraw consent, it seems wrong to define it as illegitimate. A reliance on Western philosophy's understanding of legitimacy would conflate the sober analysis of data with normative meaning. Thus, whenever scientists take the step to evaluate a system as legitimate or illegitimate, they should clearly distinguish these two dimensions. In more technical terms, empirical analysts should argue that country A's government is legitimate because the dominant public belief X is congruent with the government's claim Y and actual behavior Z. Each of these variables needs to be measured and can be rightfully criticized. Normativists would probably disagree and argue that the system can never be legitimate because it does not have W. The latter brushes over meaningful analyses which can shed light on many research questions that are all linked to issues of legitimacy, such as voter turnout, compliance with laws, support for democracy, public protest, intra-elite splits and more.

1.4 SYNTHESIZING THE RESULTS

Having justified the epistemological approach underlying this analysis and returning to the empirical studies at hand, this section connects the three articles that form this dissertation starting with the socio-cultural determinants of beliefs in obedience, continuing with overselling democracy as one mechanism of achieving legitimation and concluding with the outcomes that

can follow successful claims to legitimacy. After a short discussion of the individual studies' results, I provide an additional analysis, which connects the three analyses in a cross-sectional path-model. This model shows that the studies are indeed connected and together form pieces of a larger body of evidence.

1.4.1 Why do people value obedience?

The (conceptually) first study uses Random Effects Within-Between models (REWB, also called Hybrid models) to identify drivers of *beliefs in obedience.* To measure these, the study relies on the World Values Survey and the International Social Survey Program. The former asks respondents about obedience as an important quality during child-rearing and the latter inquires about obedience to the laws. While educational values and law abidance are clearly conceptually distinct, the study nevertheless sets out to evaluate whether they are influenced by similar explanatory factors. If there are similar determinants, then we may conclude that there is a broader, underlying *"[…] inner obedience, implying being susceptible to the influence of the authority"* (Morselli & Passini, 2011, p. 294). That is, the two distinct survey questions are treated as empirical realizations of an underlying dimension of beliefs in obedience and should accordingly be driven by similar socio-cultural variables. Based on the social psychology literature and theoretical considerations that tap into social learning theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977), social conformity theory (Asch, 1956) and Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1958), I argue that *beliefs in obedience* are anchored in individuals' socio-cultural history and reproduced by society. They serve to maintain the functioning of hierarchies in societies and enable individuals to navigate and find their (oftentimes pre-described) position in society. A societal aptitude for obedience should then (in theory) shift the population's legitimacy criteria towards the valuation of authority and the punishment of disobedience, making it easier for leaders to convince the population of their right to rule. Identifying the drivers of this aptitude for obedience, is the main goal of this contribution.

The study shows that there are indeed socio-culturally embedded, individual and political drivers that precede obedience. Its use of REWB-models splits the explanatory variables into their within- and between-variance components. This allows the assessment of each variable's effect on an average level – comparing countries with higher and lower levels of each variable – and on an inter-individual level (within countries). The main concepts that were tested as predictors of beliefs in obedience are: Religiosity, education, historical family/marriage patterns, experience with autocracy and regime support, while also controlling for GDP, sex, corruption, and repression.

The most notable effects are linked to education, religiosity and experience with autocracy. In more detail, I find that religiosity, measured as attendance of religious services, affects both dependent variables on the within- and between-level of analysis in a positive manner. The hierarchical rules, clear moral values and societal roles that (at least Abrahamic) religions presuppose, shape contemporary social preferences for both child obedience and adherence to laws. The opposite holds true for individual education levels. People with comparatively higher education levels do not subscribe to law- and family-related *beliefs in obedience*[5]*.* They become more critical of authority and rather consult their conscience. Another long-term pro-obedience factor is the individual experience with autocracy – measured as the years that a respondent lived under autocratic rule from the age of 15 to the year of the survey. Autocratic life experiences increase the odds of valuing obedience to the law by about one percent for every year lived under autocracy. Interestingly, this effect is reversed on the between-level of analysis (for the WVS' child obedience item). This means that – generally speaking – countries with a longer, shared autocratic experience value child obedience less, but within countries individuals with a higher than country-average experience with autocracy have a higher aptitude to value obedience. This variable takes the complete life-history of individuals into account and should in the future be extended to other concepts that may enable cultural change through extended exposure.

Following the literature, I also expect that nuclear family patterns and exogenous marriages encourage independent thinking and discourage unquestioned obedience (Enke, 2019; Henrich, 2021). And indeed, historically dominant nuclear family patterns decrease the aptitude for obedience to the laws and for the valuation of obedience as an important child quality to a large degree. In societies comprised of mostly nuclear families, individualism is the dominant societal guideline and favors a social contract enforced by law, consented through public elections, while at the same time extended families and adherence to patriarchal values are less present. Preferences for cousin marriage on the other hand resemble exactly these extended families and tight-knit kinship groups and encourage beliefs in obedience that sustain a patriarchal social fabric. (Enke, 2019; Giuliano & Nunn, 2021; Woodley & Bell, 2012)

The goal of this Y-centered analysis was to explore which factors shift individuals' baseline aptitude for beliefs in obedience. The findings suggest that two historical factors – religiosity and dominant family patterns – shape societies beliefs in obedience writ large, while inter-individual factors – such as education, regime support, and personal experience with autocracy – can move

[5] This effect weakens and finally turns insignificant once it is interacted with the intensity and content of political indoctrination during each individuals' education period (see Varieties of Indoctrination, (Coppedge et al., 2023)). That is, indoctrination during individuals' school-period diminishes the liberating effect of education on beliefs in obedience – but only in relation to law abidance.

this historical baseline further up or down for individuals within a society. The results provide important basic knowledge for the future analyses of individuals' evaluation standards vis à vis their governments legitimation strategies.

1.4.2 Overselling democracy

Having shown how culture, politics and history matter for the creation of beliefs in obedience, the next question relates to *how* citizens' legitimacy criteria interact with rulers' claims to legitimacy. Using multilevel models with cross-level interactions, random intercepts, and random slopes, I show how the mechanism of legitimation works in the context of individuals' understanding of democracy. The article's main argument is that many rulers attempt to legitimize themselves by *overselling democracy*, which is measured by subtracting their actual procedural democracy level from their procedural claims[6]. Through globalization's international exposure, individuals have learned that democracy is good and worth achieving – as global support for democracy makes adamantly clear (Dalton et al., 2007; Inglehart, 2003). However, many individuals are not well informed about the conceptual content of the word (Kirsch & Welzel, 2019; Kruse et al., 2019), which makes it a flexible shell that can be repeatedly filled with leaders' political ambitions hidden under democracy's positive connotation. In this study, understanding democracy is measured by liberal versus authoritarian notions of democracy (Cho, 2015; Kirsch & Welzel, 2019) which I hypothesize to moderate the effectiveness of governmental overselling of democracy. In short, if a government claims to be democratic but in fact is not, then individuals will only evaluate this government as democratic if they are not well informed about the concept. That is, authoritarian notions of democracy enable overselling to succeed and create unqualified support for the regime in place. If, on the other hand, individuals have a liberal notion of democracy, they are able to see through this façade and reject the governments claims to legitimacy by rightfully evaluating their political system as less democratic.

My article proves that this mechanism holds empirically across a wide range of cultures and countries. Notions of democracy indeed moderate the effectiveness of overselling democracy in creating democracy evaluations – which I equate with legitimacy perceptions[7]. This means that only an understanding of democracy that is liberal in nature can enable the consolidation of

[6] High scores thus indicate that rulers claim to act democratically, but in fact do not. Low values indicate that they act in accordance with a procedural understanding of democracy but do not openly stress how democratic they are. Balanced scores indicate that claims and performance are on an approximately equal level.

[7] Democracy evaluations are measured as the product of the importance that individuals give to being governed democratically and their evaluation of the current state of democracy in their country. High values thus indicate *wanting democracy* and simultaneously *being satisfied with democracy* – irrespective of the individual's understanding of democracy.

democracy that coincides with academic standards. If authoritarian notions of democracy prevail, regimes can reframe illiberal policies as democratic and maintain a democratic façade – thereby stabilizing and advancing autocracy in the name of democracy. On a more positive note, the opposite can also be observed: Citizens with liberal notions of democracy downgrade their current legitimacy perception if they are confronted with overselling. Thus, the study provides important clues for the emergence of pro-democracy movements, but also for the numbing stagnation of worldwide democratic development after the initial euphoria following the *third wave of democracy* (Huntington, 1991). The identified mechanism exemplifies the congruence logic that I see as central for the scientific analysis of legitimacy.

1.4.3 Praising the leader

Following these clear – but partially worrisome – conditional effects, the question arises whether alternative claims to legitimacy function in a similar manner and which consequences shifting claims to legitimacy can have. Together with Christian von Soest, I show that certain changes in leaders' claims to legitimacy are followed by democratic backsliding and can serve as early warning signals for ensuing autocratization. In particular, using Varieties of Democracy data (Coppedge et al., 2023) we show that governments increased orientation towards personalist legitimation strategies puts democratic oversight mechanisms at risk. Using fixed effects models and a large temporal and spatial sample, the article finds a generalizable decrease of judicial and legislative constraints on the executive following the growth of claims to legitimacy that put the leader centerstage.

These findings are important because they confirm that one of the biggest threats to political systems comes from incumbents and their unwillingness to be constrained by oversight institutions (Linz & Stepan, 1978). We argue that "[…] 'autocratizers' often pursue a majoritarian understanding of their rule [and] downplay institutional safeguards against their executive dominance" (Brunkert & von Soest, 2022, p. 425). This 'rhetoric-action link' shows that governmental statements about their entitlement to rule have real consequences and should be seen as important omens of autocratization. To further refine the results, we include levels of electoral democracy as a moderator. This interaction reveals that this rhetoric-action link only manifests in a significant manner in states that do not fall into the category of most liberal democracies. That is, consolidated electoral competition and civic participation can counter elected leaders' attempts to remove constraints on their rule. Or in other words: A strong democratic baseline – consisting of free and fair election, universal suffrage and the protection of freedom of association and expression (Coppedge et al., 2023, p. 44) – are the best guarantee against an inside-out erosion of democracy. Nevertheless, the picture remains worrisome for the many consolidating democracies, hybrid regimes and other forms of rule that were once seen to

be on the right track to becoming full-fledged democracies. It also provides an analytical starting point for the identification of potentially unfolding autocratization processes. By taking a closer look at political rhetoric which increasingly emphasizes the centrality of the leadership figure, political science can point towards potential democratic regressions before these take place on an institutional level. This, of course, is limited to the analysis of democracy's gradual changes and cannot pinpoint spontaneous governmental collapses or coups. Nevertheless, the findings are important for our understanding of autocratization processes, especially in the face of growing populist movements which oftentimes evolve around a charismatic leader and aim to undermine (pluralistic) democratic principles.

1.5 Completing the picture

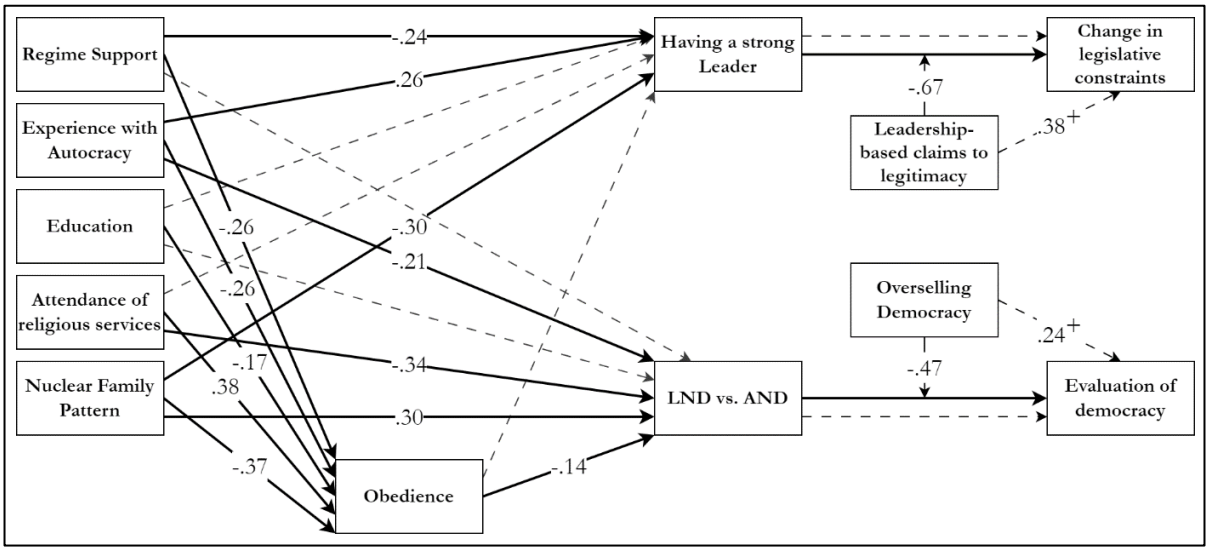
These three studies each rely on a suitable theoretical basis, operationalize and analyze the respective hypotheses and carry substantial evidence that helps to paint a larger picture of the importance of political legitimacy as a central academic concept. To show that the presented articles form a conceptual whole and to counter the criticism that legitimacy's explanatory power does not go beyond situational window-dressing, the next section connects the dissertation's three articles in a combined path model. The goal of this model is to show that the three studies *speak* to each other, and that the overarching picture advocated in this synopsis also holds empirically. To prove this, I line up and connect the socio-cultural determinants of beliefs in obedience, the mechanism of overselling democracy and the institutional outcomes of successful claims to legitimacy. The added value of such a model lies in its ability to estimate all hypothetical relationships at once and thereby bridge the analytical gaps between separate publications. The price to pay for such a combined analysis is the reduction of temporal and spatial coverage. Still, I expect all main results of the single studies to be replicated and the argumentative flow presented in figure 2 above to be flushed out. If successful, the replication of the studies' initial results and their connection creates additional validity for the separate findings and emphasizes the interplay of legitimacy's multiple conceptual layers.

One additional novelty (in comparison to the separate studies) is this model's extension of the mechanism identified in "Overselling Democracy". Originally, this mechanism showed that notions of democracy moderate the effectiveness of overselling democracy. In this combined model it is now possible to also estimate whether the effectiveness of "Praising the Ruler" is conditional on specific legitimacy criteria. Logically, claims to legitimacy that focus on the person of the ruler should be most successful in societies that favor a strong leader as the head of state. Accordingly, I add the WVS' question addressing exactly this demand for a strong leader to the

path model. Figure 3 summarizes the full model and makes clear that the congruence logic is easily adapted to different claims and criteria.

The inclusionary framework relies on the aggregated country-wave-level data from the WVS' waves 5-7 and is modelled in a SEM path-modelling environment using only the most important predictors.[8] The analysis consists of 147 aggregated country-waves when using maximum likelihood estimation and 314 country-waves when using full information maximum likelihood (with missing values). The results for both analyses are very similar, but for the following discussion the more conservative estimation without missing values is used. To keep the paragraph reader-friendly, the technical details and the full model output are moved to the end of this document (Appendix Table A2). The analysis helps to better understand *which* socio-cultural factors weaken democratic legitimacy criteria and subsequently shows *how* these criteria condition the effectiveness of illiberal claims to legitimacy that have the goal of justifying and advancing autocratic governance. Additionally, it helps to identify which of these paths significantly run from root to outcome.

Figure 3: Structure and Results of the unifying Path-Model



Notes: Standardized coefficients on paths; Solid paths indicate significance at 95% level and above; All left-hand variables and beliefs in obedience are also connected to the two outcomes on the right-hand side (see Table A2 for coefficients and significance). N=147.

In short, the results presented in figure 3 confirm the bigger picture that this dissertation advocates. Several key-findings are worth additional emphasis:

1. For one, the path model shows that **the socio-cultural roots of beliefs in obedience also influence notions of democracy and the demand for a strong leader**. For the former, some

[8] Unfortunately, the replication and merging of the three studies does not work in a multilevel environment, fails to converge and needs multiple days to deliver unsuccessful results. For a detailed description of the included variables, please refer to the separate articles.

of the effect is mediated by beliefs in obedience. The latter is primarily driven by historical family patterns, experience with autocracy and the support for the current government. Accordingly, **the findings of the study on beliefs in obedience can be extended to other variables that capture people's socio-culturally rooted legitimacy criteria**. That is, political culture, history and individual experiences define the standards that citizens use when evaluating their governments claims to legitimacy.

2. In the next step of the sequence, the results of "Overselling Democracy" are replicated and the newly added interaction between "Praising the Leader" and demand for a strong leader turns up significant as well. This confirms that **citizens' legitimacy criteria condition the effectiveness of governments' attempts to justify their right to rule.** Both – claiming to be more democratic than reality permits and stressing the importance of the person of the ruler – can diminish democratic quality if public legitimacy criteria feature authoritarian notions of what constitutes *good* rule. However, deviating from the long time-series cross-sectional analysis in "Praising the Ruler", I only find supportive evidence for changes in legislative constraints and no support for changes in judicial constraints.
3. The final dependent variables show that **personalist claims to legitimacy lead to stronger decreases in legislative constraints (measured as change from on wave to the next) when citizens favor strong leadership persons** (and vice versa). Identically, **people's evaluation of current democracy levels increases when overselling is met with predominantly authoritarian notions of democracy** (and vice versa – as shown in figure 3). Both findings speak to the autocratization literature and can provide new avenues for the analysis of fluctuating democracy levels. However, the results can also be interpreted in a more positive light. **Where people become more liberal and reject the centralization of power in a few hands, leaders' illiberal claims to legitimacy loose effectiveness and become meaningless or even counter-intentional.**

In these country-level results, 37% of the variance of people's valuation of obedience as an important childhood quality can be explained. This suggests that there is more to this question and that individual-level factors play an important role (as the separate article shows). In the next step of the analysis 61% of LND-vs.-AND's cross-country-variance and 28% of 'having a strong leader' are explained. Accordingly, beliefs in obedience and their socio-cultural roots are able to make sense of a large share of aggregated understanding of democracy that define part of citizens' legitimacy criteria. Lastly, 49% of peoples' aggregated democracy evaluations can be explained, while only 6% (Δ judicial constraints) and 15% (Δ legislative constraints) of change in executive constraints is explained. Because the latter two variables are measured as the country-level change between two survey-waves and because institutional settings are relatively stable, I

still interpret this explained variance as meaningful. That is, the weakening of institutional guardrails that follow the rhetoric-action link may simple not have occurred, yet. Nevertheless, the results make clear that the mere demand and proclamation to focus on the person of the ruler already matters and may set in motion a chain of events that weakens legislative constraints on the executive. But without doubt, more case-specific knowledge of the exact causal path from claim to deterioration of constraints on the executive is needed here. Lastly, it is noteworthy that the theorized path from roots, via mechanism, towards the outcomes clearly shows in the analysis.

To sum up, the results of this path model confirm that socio-cultural, historically grounded factors matter for the mechanism through which regimes justify their claim to power vis à vis citizens' demands. This mechanism then connects the second and third study by relying on congruence between popular legitimacy demands and officials' legitimacy claims. It shows that this logical chain is real in its consequences and best analyzed by closely reviewing each step of the sequence moving from political culture to legitimation via congruence to political consequences. By linking the three dimensions of the analysis of legitimation, a larger picture emerges and shows that questions of regime legitimacy cut across social psychology, political culture and political institutions and can function as an epistemological glue that connects seemingly unrelated analyses. The presented results further our knowledge of the complexities of political legitimacy, connect research on legitimacy with relevant theories and provide generalizable empirical results. Through the analysis of three separate domains in which legitimacy plays a central role, I show its relevance, its empirical and theoretical power to shape real-world phenomena in the center of political science and its related disciplines.

1.5.1 Discussion

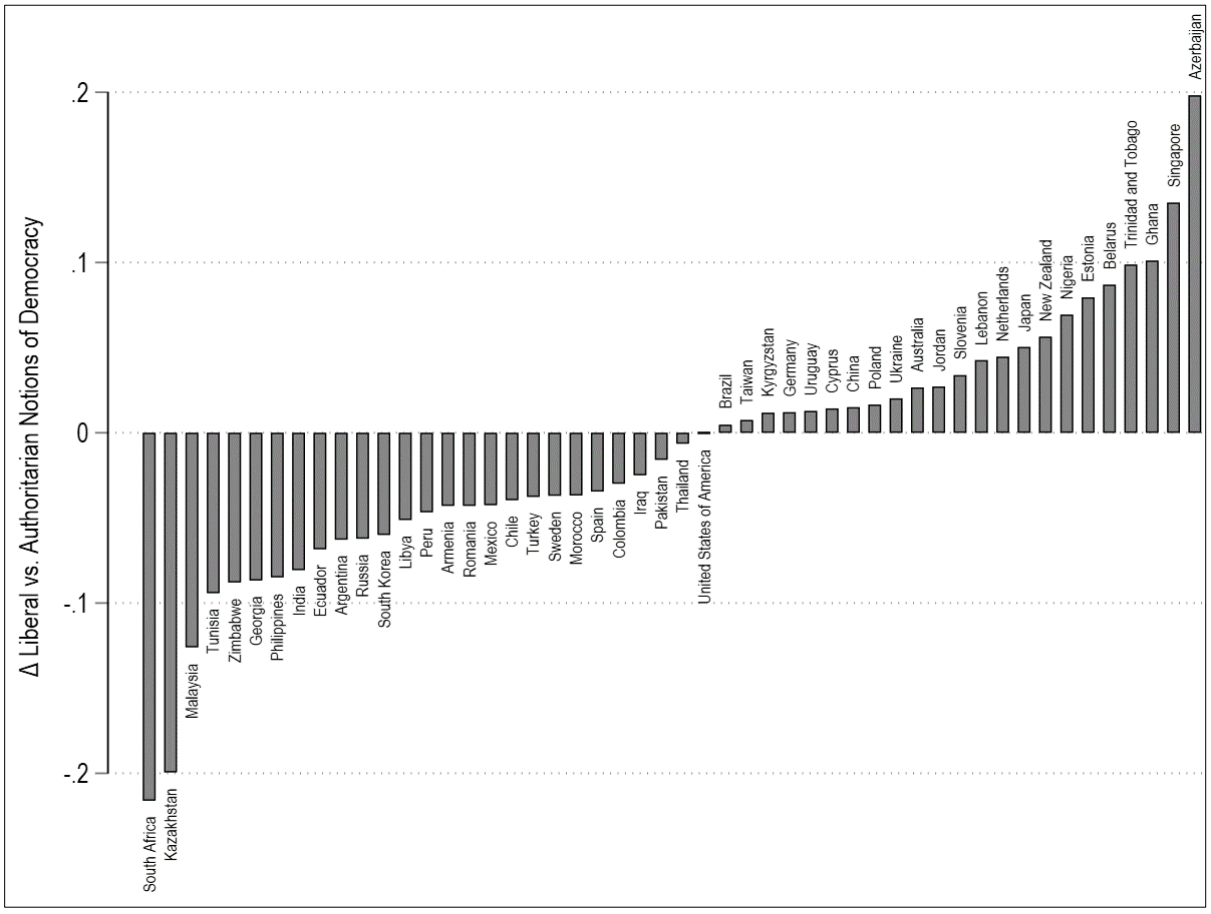
As teased in the introductory sections, the presented results can help to better understand contemporary political science debates, such as discussions about unfolding autocratization processes. Figure 1 of the introduction showed in all clarity, that the scientific attention towards democratic recession and legitimacy follow the same trend and seem to develop uniformly. This co-development makes sense since questions of legitimacy, democratization and autocratization events are closely interrelated. Institutional change never occurs in a vacuum and the past has shown the power of popular protest (Braithwaite et al., 2015; Kim & Kroeger, 2019; Reuter & Robertson, 2015; Welzel & Deutsch, 2012), but also the strength of autocratic repression (Carey, 2006, 2010; Davenport, 2007), propaganda and de-legitimation attempts (Dukalskis & Patane, 2019). From Beetham's (1991) perspective the occurrence of large-scale protest would imply the withdrawal of consent, thereby delegitimizing the political system under protest. This can help to topple autocratic systems but does not guarantee the development of democratic governance thereafter. Establishing a new congruence in a political system which has fallen into disfavor can

just as well lead to a new autocratic system, with slightly less autocratic contours (Geddes et al., 2014). For example, the (hypothetical) introduction of publicly demanded elections in a closed autocracy marks a notable step towards democratic governance but does not guarantee proper democratization without the introduction of civil liberties, competition and civic participation. Thus, the withdrawal of consent may lead to an adaptation of the political system but the (democratic) reach of this adaptation depends on citizens' legitimacy criteria and can work both ways. Similarly to how Welzel (2022) describes it in his Cultural Theory of Autocracy vs. Democracy, regimes may over- and underachieve in terms of democratic governance. The above example refers to the corrective reestablishment of congruence in the case of underperformance: People demand more democracy and subsequently elections are introduced to still this *appetite*. However, if a system is more democratic than contemporary legitimacy criteria support, it may well regress backwards towards a new equilibrium and thereby reestablish congruence between claims and criteria. It is Political Science's task to identify these incongruencies and show where such developments may unfold.

In contrast to what some of the literature suggests, I do not see that we are approaching a period of unrestrained autocratization, but also not one of democratic brilliance. The many recent cases of withdrawn consent in autocratic regimes point towards the ordinary citizens' desire to overcome repressive authorities: The 'color' revolutions in many post-soviet countries, the 2011 Uprisings in the MENA-region, the 2020 protests in Belarus 2022's and the women's movements in Iran are just a few examples. However, many of these protests failed to establish a new (democratic) congruence yet but nevertheless emphasize the power of individuals' changing legitimacy criteria. On the other hand, it is undeniable that the initial optimism of the 'third wave of democracy' has come to a hold (Hellmeier et al., 2021; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019; Maerz et al., 2020). Democracies once thought consolidated begin to weaken and populist leaders claim to represent the 'real' people and to have the recipe to rebuild the great homogenic nations of the past (Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018; Waldner & Lust, 2018), an endeavor that is hardly compatible with pluralistic democracy. To empirically support this ambiguous outlook Figure 4 shows the development of liberal vs. authoritarian notions of democracy. As mentioned, the picture provides mixed results. While some countries' citizens' understanding of democracy grew to new heights between 2010 and 2022, others experience a regression of notions of democracy, making it easier for rulers to misappropriate the term democracy. Similarly, preferences for strong leaders grew in many countries and regressed in some (Appendix figure A1). Understanding why these legitimacy criteria change is crucial for any prediction about democracy's future. "Beliefs in Obedience" are just one piece of a larger puzzle that can help to shed light on the development of the congruence between claims and criteria. Education and secularization drive the development towards liberal notions of democracy (Cho, 2014, 2015;

Kirsch & Welzel, 2019), but the strength of their influence depends on citizens' culturally- and historically-embedded baseline valuation of authority (see e.g. Diamond, 1997; Enke, 2019; Henrich, 2021; Schulz et al., 2019). However, the long-term, overall trend points towards a more liberal and emancipative future (Brunkert et al., 2019; Welzel et al., 2022).

Figure 4: Changes in LND-vs-AND from 2010-2022.



If one begins from the observation of autocratization events and proceeds backwards in time, then the (reserve) logic presented in this synopsis becomes clearer and emphasizes legitimacy's role as the conceptual kit. My contribution can, thus, help to brighten the pathways towards autocratization or democratization through a dedicated political culture lens. Simplified, it provides empirically backed explanations for a set of simple questions.

Why do we observe autocratization events? Because anti-democratic changes in institutional structures – such as weakening executive oversight mechanisms – remain unchallenged if they are carried out by a legitimate authority. Such an authority uses claims to legitimacy to establish this legitimacy.

Which claims were used and why are they effective (in this case)? If the claim is met with congruent legitimacy criteria of the population, a regime is perceived as legitimate by its population and its decisions (mostly) do not require additional justification. Thus, governments that can adapt to their citizens' legitimacy criteria have a competitive advantage.

How did these legitimacy criteria develop? The character of legitimacy criteria – democratic or autocratic – follows from individuals' life-experiences, cultural background, religiosity, education and regime-support. Accordingly, there are some factors which set countries on different trajectories and some factors which alter these trajectories and encourage an update of the underlying legitimacy criteria.

Of course, also claims to legitimacy do not operate in a vacuum. This parsimonious 3-step logic brushes over questions of repression and co-optation, which play a central role in many non-democracies (Frantz & Kendall-Taylor, 2014; Gerschewski, 2013; Schedler, 2002; Schneider & Maerz, 2017). Even in highly incongruent political systems, individuals will not take to the streets if their withdrawal of consent is met with imprisonment, torture or worse. Especially when protesters challenge a regime which relies heavily on personalist claims to legitimacy, repression can be fierce (Keremoğlu et al., 2022). Considering the oppressive nature of many non-democracies, citizens' bravery to challenge regimes to bring forth change or adaptation remains all the more impressive. By taking congruence between claims and criteria as an analytical starting point, this analysis can contribute to the understanding of both autocratization and democratization events.

1.5.2 Limitations

No study is without limitations. Accordingly, this section will also point towards several aspects that are outside the scope of this dissertation as a whole. Each of the three articles already discusses its own shortcomings, which will not be detailed again here. Still, the conclusions drawn in this inclusionary framework have their own limits and require some critical revision.

First, legitimacy remains a contested topic and critics will most likely not be convinced by the presented evidence. Nevertheless, an ever-closer empirical approximation and application to real-world phenomena closes some of the remaining gaps that are open to criticism. As mentioned in the part on descriptive legitimacy research, there still is no *direct* measurement of legitimacy available, no questions that directly ask about this concept. Accordingly, the approximation via empirical relatives also remains the main limitation of this study. Theory and argument help to circumvent this limitation but cannot overcome potential measurement error or preference falsification.

Legitimacy remains a psychologically felt property of a political system (Tyler, 1997, 2006) and is far from a hard fact that immediately exists once certain criteria have been fulfilled. It may exist in matters of degrees based on subjective legitimacy criteria and strategic claims to legitimacy. This makes it a fuzzy and elusive concept. Still, its ubiquitous applicability and use in

everyday language necessitate a closer scientific scrutiny of its roots, conditionality and outcomes, which may not shy away from conceptual and empirical difficulties.

In "overselling democracy" I see the combination of the valuation of democracy as a good political system and the subsequent evaluation of the current system as democratic as a measure for legitimacy perceptions. That is, people may generally see democracy as important and if they simultaneously evaluate their current government as democratic, they express their legitimacy beliefs in the current system. Of course, there are alternative pathways through which congruence between claims and criteria can be achieved next to overselling democracy and stressing the centrality of the leader – some of which were discussed in the conceptual background. Additionally, the focus on political regimes brushes over their sub-units such as subnational governments or political parties (on legitimacy perceptions of political parties: Kölln, 2023).

The presented evidence is only generalizable for these two pathways to legitimacy but falls short of an all-encompassing analysis. While writing the final sections of this dissertation Markus Tannenberg (2023) explored some of these alternative ways to achieving congruence in a Varieties of Democracy Working Paper. His analyses add to my own views on this topic and explore alternative ways to achieve congruence between legitimacy criteria (what he calls *appetite*) and claims to legitimacy (what he calls *menu*). This is a laudable step into the right direction, which should help to weaken some of the previous criticism and create more encompassing picture of the different pathways towards legitimation via congruence.

In all endeavors dealing with legitimacy, endogeneity in the form of reverse causality remains the elephant in the room. Without theory, social sciences would oftentimes be guideless since most researched concepts exists in parallel and are always connected through some third concept (see e.g. Franzese, 2009, 2015). There is no mechanical causality as in the natural sciences. This leads to the obvious question: What if claims to legitimacy directly influence individuals' legitimacy criteria? This would entail that regimes are able to reinforce the justification for their right to rule by changing individuals' underlying demands and would turn the moderation identified in the presented path-model and in "Overselling Democracy" into a mediation. I test for this mediation but find no support for it (see the Appendix of "Overselling Democracy"). Nevertheless, alternative factors that *are* under governmental control, such as education, can influence individuals' legitimacy criteria. This grants governments some degree of control over their citizens' demands. In "Why do people value obedience" I find further support for this limitation in an auxiliary analysis which takes official propaganda into account. However, by including additional control variables, such as censorship effort, democracy stock (Gerring et al., 2005) and repression, this influence can be taken into consideration and become a source of knowledge in itself. Introducing temporality in the selection of the used variables should also

mitigate some endogeneity issues. By relying on measures such as experience with autocracy, nuclear family patterns and widespread religiosity, I introduce this temporal ordering and aim to mitigate this effect. Since a societal aptitude to favor obedience will not have developed in the year of the survey, many of these concepts developed side by side and I hope that my theoretical approximation of their ordering convinces the reader of the proposed relationship. To further support these assumptions, Welzel, Kruse and I provide ample evidence that the causal flow within these analyses moves from culture towards political institutions and not vice-versa (Brunkert et al., 2019). That is, even if political regimes can shape the demand side of their political system to some degree, they cannot overcome the inescapable drift of culture's glacial change.

1.6 Concluding remarks

Against much of the criticism that has been brought up, it should by now be evident that using legitimacy as a unifying concept helps to make sense of phenomena that are more than the mere labelling of their empirical proxies. The ubiquitous use of the word in everyday language already makes it clear that most individuals have a personal notion of what *legitimate* means. And while it may sometimes refer to hard facts that equate legitimacy with lawfulness, in most cases it resembles an abstract feeling of what *ought to be* or who *has a right to* (French Jr. & Raven, 1959).

A legitimate system does not need to rely on force or co-optation to ensure compliance and is better able to achieve a sense of belonging and trust (Gerschewski, 2013; Tyler, 1997, 2006). Achieving such legitimacy perceptions among the ruled is no easy task and its scientific debate remains separated into normative and empirical-analytical perspectives. Using the latter approach, this synopsis emphasizes that the roots of beliefs in obedience influence the mechanism of legitimation in shaping the outcome and thus connects the first and second and third study. It combines the three separate articles into a country-level path-model and extends the initial analysis by introducing another moderator which functions akin to notions of democracy used in "Overselling Democracy". Through this extension, it becomes clear that the socio-cultural roots of beliefs in obedience define which types of political leadership are valued by a societies' citizens. I argue and show that this *inner obedience* influences the demand side of a congruence-based understanding of legitimation in such way that citizens' personal experiences, their surrounding culture and historical contexts shape the underlying (oftentimes implicit) evaluation criteria. The differences in evaluation criteria then moderate which claims to legitimacy fall on fertile ground and which claims are rejected – leading to congruence or incongruence. Finally,

when claims and demands are congruent, two things may follow: First, citizens express satisfaction and consent to the current regime – exemplified by evaluating their government as democratic even if it is not. Second, regimes can use this legitimate status to change the institutional structure based on their visions. This is especially worrisome, as it allows also elected rulers to gain more leeway and pave the way for further autocratization.

Summing up: Each presented article builds on a theoretical foundation, uses appropriate methods and connects to a larger picture which this synopsis puts forward. By connecting the threads of the three separate analyses, this larger picture emphasizes the relevance of legitimacy and legitimation as core concepts of political science and political culture research. In conclusion, the study of political legitimacy is fundamental to comprehending the intricacies of governance, authority, and social stability. It provides a lens through which we can analyze the functioning of political systems, the dynamics between rulers and the ruled, and the factors that shape public acceptance and obedience. By delving into this essential concept, science can gain valuable insights into the foundations of political power and work towards creating more inclusive, effective, and finally legitimate governance systems that promote the well-being of societies as a whole. Policy recommendations do not easily follow from this analysis. However, some key aspects are worth noting. Taking claims to legitimacy seriously is essential for the prediction of regime dynamics. A political leader who begins to increasingly stress his/her centrality for the nation rarely does this purely due to narcissism but rather with political changes in mind. This becomes ever more important to monitor once populist leaders assume political offices. Additionally, the results point to the importance of democratic education. A surprisingly large share of citizens sees democracy as worth achieving but is unable to conceptually delineate it from autocracy (Kirsch & Welzel, 2019). As long as democracy remains a catchphrase for something worth striving for but does not build on a common conceptualization, it remains a tool for autocrats to rebrand themselves. Thus, international actors and organizations should repeatedly stress what they mean when they talk of democracy. Of course, a Western dominated concept of democracy is not universally applicable, but a clear delineation from autocracy is necessary and can be reinforced through education efforts, political modernization and secularization. This does not only apply to countries where this baseline knowledge is missing altogether, but also to liberal democracies which experience populist movements that reframe democracy in majoritarian rather than pluralistic terms (Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018; Waldner & Lust, 2018). Democracy cannot be imposed but needs to be learned and maintained. The unprecedented period of peace between European nations after the Holocaust makes adamantly clear that any maintenance cost is well warranted and pays of a thousandfold.

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1.8 APPENDIX

Table A1: Measurement approaches for political legitimacy

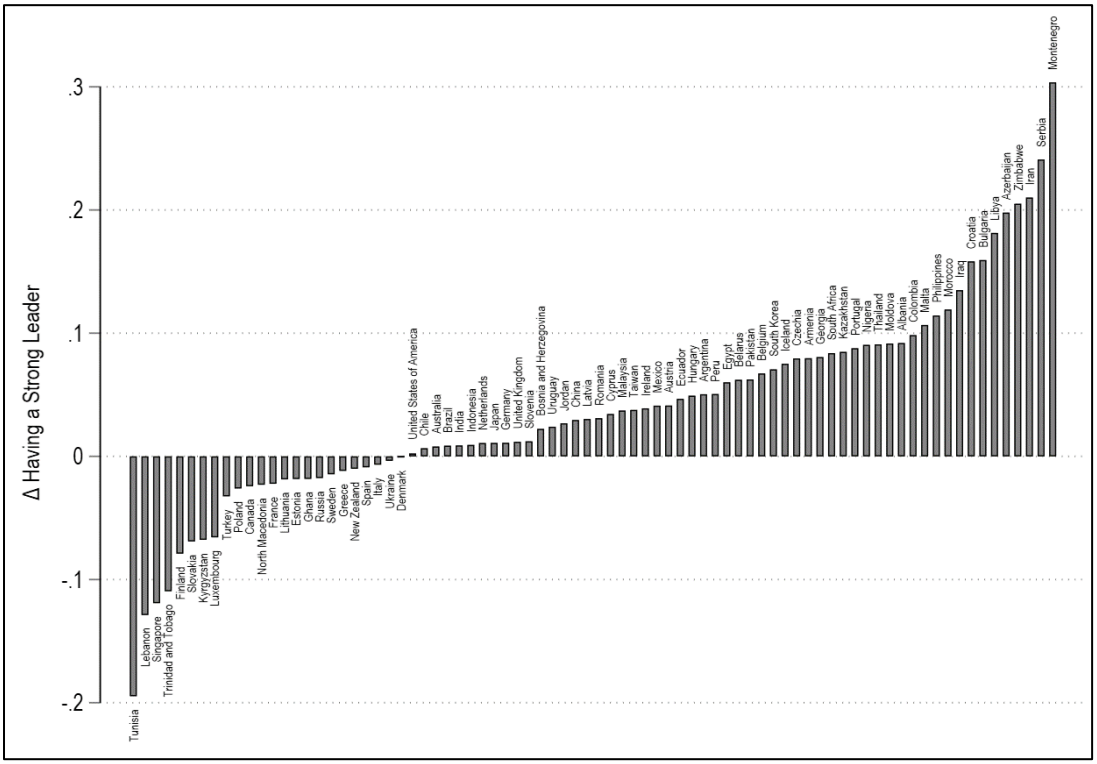
Author-Year	Conceptualization	Operationalization
Weatherford (1992)	**System-level aspects of legitimacy**, which rely on macro-level data and aims to assess the (normative) legitimacy of political systems.	1. **Accountability** Government accountable via participatory control 2. **Efficiency** Achieving common good without undue waste of time and resources 3. **Procedural fairness** Predictability of decisions, equal access to offices 4. **Distributive fairness** Benefits and costs equally distributed
	The view from the grass roots Attitudes and actions of the public vis à vis the regime.	1. **Political attitudes and behavior** Feeling of commitment and efficacy 2. **Perceptions of trust** Interpersonal and institutional trust 3. **Optimism towards accountability** Perceptions of fairness See Weatherford (1992, p. 155) for a measurement model.
Gilley (2006, 2009, 2012)	Aims to measure state legitimacy and not the legitimacy of governments. Separates analysis based on Beetham (1991) into **views of legality, views of justification and acts of consent.**	1. **Views of legality** measured by attitudes towards state respect for human rights, confidence in the police and civil service (World Values Survey). 2. **Views of justification** measured by Satisfaction with democratic development, evaluation of current pol. system (WVS), satisfaction with operation of democracy (Global Barometer regional surveys) Use of violence in civil protest (World handbook of pol. and soc. Indicators) 3. **Acts of consent** measured by Voter turnout (Int. Inst. For Democracy and Electoral Assistance) Quasi-voluntary taxes (IMF)
Levi, Sacks, Tyler (2009)	Focus on governments. Authors model how **sense of obligation to obey authorities translates into acceptance of authority.**	1. **Value-based legitimacy** Trustworthiness of government (leadership motivations, administrative competence, government performance) Procedural justice (Afrobarometer) 2. **Behavioral legitimacy** Seen as important, but not measurable.
Mauk (2020)	Analysis of **regime support**, no explicit focus on legitimacy	Regime support as a latent construct consisting of: 1. **Trust in government** 2. **Trust in parliament** 3. **Trust in army** 4. **Trust in police**
Tannenberg (2023)	Legitimacy based on **congruence** between claims and demands	Match between legitimation “appetite” and legitimation “menu” based on 1. **Personalism** Match between claims stressing person of the leader and demand for a strong leader. 2. **Performance** Match between performance claims and demand for economic growth (even against democracy). 3. **Rational-legal** Match between rational-legal claims and demand that the leader always obeys the laws. 4. **Ideology-Communism** Match between ideological claims and rejection of market economy. 5. **Traditional-Religion** Match between religious claims and demand for religious influence in politics.

Table A2: Path-model output

Important child quality: Obedience	ML		FIML	
Nuclear Family Pattern	-0.369***	(0.036)	-0.349***	(0.028)
Attendance of Religious Services	0.380***	(0.075)	0.399***	(0.052)
Education	-0.167*	(0.107)	-0.167***	(0.074)
Experience with Autocracy	-0.254**	(0.056)	-0.148*	(0.043)
Regime Support	-0.258***	(0.089)	-0.132**	(0.062)
Liberal vs. Authoritarian Notions of Democracy				
Child Quality: Obedience	-0.142*	(0.061)	-0.184***	(0.049)
Nuclear Family Pattern	0.303***	(0.029)	0.319***	(0.025)
Attendance of Religious Services	-0.348***	(0.061)	-0.296***	(0.051)
Education	0.097	(0.081)	0.068	(0.070)
Experience with Autocracy	-0.210**	(0.043)	-0.223***	(0.037)
Regime Support	-0.014	(0.069)	-0.071	(0.052)
Strong Leader Important				
Child Quality: Obedience	-0.071	(0.075)	-0.092	(0.056)
Nuclear Family Pattern	-0.295**	(0.035)	-0.365***	(0.029)
Attendance of Religious Services	0.133	(0.075)	0.047	(0.055)
Education	-0.005	(0.100)	0.014	(0.073)
Experience with Autocracy	0.258**	(0.053)	0.185**	(0.042)
Regime Support	-0.244***	(0.086)	-0.199***	(0.061)
Evaluation of Democratic Quality				
Child Quality: Obedience	0.044	(0.056)	0.094	(0.052)
Liberal vs. Authoritarian Notions of Democracy	-0.114	(0.079)	-0.116	(0.076)
Nuclear Family Pattern	0.239***	(0.027)	0.213**	(0.028)
Attendance of Religious Services	-0.094	(0.060)	-0.115*	(0.057)
Education	-0.033	(0.073)	-0.002	(0.071)
Experience with Autocracy	-0.310***	(0.048)	-0.279***	(0.045)
Regime Support	0.545***	(0.066)	0.624***	(0.059)
Overselling Democracy	0.241	(0.141)	0.251	(0.134)
LND vs. AND * Overselling Democracy	-0.469**	(0.132)	-0.471**	(0.131)
Judicial Constraints on the Executive				
Child Quality: Obedience	0.180	(0.045)	0.137	(0.040)
Strong Leader Important	0.041	(0.094)	0.046	(0.084)
Nuclear Family Pattern	-0.004	(0.022)	0.032	(0.020)
Attendance of Religious Services	0.008	(0.046)	0.052	(0.043)
Education	0.208*	(0.059)	0.160*	(0.057)
Experience with Autocracy	0.005	(0.037)	0.143	(0.033)
Regime Support	0.043	(0.057)	0.001	(0.048)
Leader-based Claim to Legitimacy	-0.126	(0.104)	-0.077	(0.097)
Strong Leader Important * Leader-based Claims	0.055	(0.223)	-0.170	(0.204)
Legislative Constraints on the Executive				
Child Quality: Obedience	0.170	(0.062)	0.098	(0.050)
Strong Leader Important	0.242	(0.129)	0.110	(0.104)
Nuclear Family Pattern	0.002	(0.030)	-0.015	(0.025)
Attendance of Religious Services	-0.006	(0.063)	0.027	(0.053)
Education	0.168	(0.082)	0.136	(0.071)
Experience with Autocracy	0.120	(0.051)	0.088	(0.041)
Regime Support	0.085	(0.078)	-0.043	(0.060)
Leader-based Claim to Legitimacy	0.398	(0.143)	0.235	(0.121)
Strong Leader Important * Leader-based Claims	-0.705*	(0.307)	-0.478+	(0.254)
N	147		314	
AIC	-2609		-3975	
BIC	-2436		-3555	
SRMR (Standardized root mean squared residual)	0.048			
CD (Coefficient of determination)	0.935		0.913	

Standardized coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure A1: Changes in Preferences for a Strong Leader from 2010-2022.



2 WHY DO PEOPLE VALUE OBEDIENCE?

A multi-theoretical perspective on individual and societal beliefs in obedience.

Abstract

Why do people value obedience? This article tries to answer this question from a multidisciplinary point of view and pitches several theoretically derived factors against another. It compares two different aptitudes for beliefs in obedience based on the World Values Survey's child obedience item and the ISSP's obedience to laws item. Using Random Effect Within-Between models, it shows that deep-rooted family systems, education, religion, political support and personal political experiences all have theoretical and empirical connections to beliefs in obedience. While both used measures of attitudes towards obedience are conceptually distinct, they nevertheless respond to the same explanatory factors, implying that they are manifestations of underlying *inner* beliefs in obedience. The findings suggest that religiosity and historical family systems shape beliefs on societal level, while education, experience with autocracy and regime support explain inter-individual differences. The article anchors this debate in the connection between obedience and legitimacy and concludes that beliefs in obedience help political leaders to legitimize their rule based on a socio-culturally embedded inner acceptance of authority.

KEYWORDS Obedience, Attitudes towards authority, Political Culture, Legitimacy, Legitimation

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

Ever since the infamous Milgram-experiment, scientists debate whether the perceived legitimacy of an authority can lead individuals into a form of obedience that values deference over conscience. While this experiment encouraged countless, valid criticism, it nevertheless inspired scientific endeavors that analyze legitimacy and obedience (e.g. Mantell & Panzarella, 1976). The words *legitimacy* and *obedience* regularly inhabit the same sentences, seem to be intrinsically linked and apparently co-exist in a symbiotic relationship. A political system that is perceived as being legitimate does not need to maintain the same security apparatus as an illegitimate system built on coercion and can convince their subjects to obey without the use of force (Tyler, 2006). Morselli and Passini (2011) argue that "[…] legitimacy is the fundamental basis for obedience and its attribution is continuously negotiated between the authority and the individual. Legitimacy is a powerful predictor of obedience: the individual actively recognizes the legitimacy of the authority and for this reason he/she obeys." (pp. 296-297). I rely on an empirical-analytical understanding of legitimacy, following Weber (1980) and Lipset (1970), in whose writing's legitimacy beliefs are not limited to democracies but also matter for autocracy (see also Gerschewski, 2018). While this conceptual link between legitimacy and obedience makes sense, little has been done to compare theoretically suitable predictors of obedience in a broad cross-national setting and from a political culture perspective that moves beyond the dyadic legitimacy-obedience model.

This article takes a closer look at this gap and asks: Which societal, political, and individual characteristics can best explain peoples' beliefs in obedience? Accordingly, this analysis features a y-centered approach and pitches several explanatory factors against each other. That is: The focus is on explaining beliefs in obedience using a cross-sectional research design with a global sample, while considering both individual- and societal-level predictors. To achieve this goal, I use secondary data from two well-established global surveys – the International Social Survey Program and the World Values Survey. Each survey asks about attitudes towards obedience in a different way – leading to a more encompassing understanding of its socio-cultural roots. In the ISSP 'Role of Government Surveys', people are asked whether 'you should always obey the law' or whether 'you should follow your conscience at times' (ISSP Research Group, 2018). The World Values Survey (Haerpfer et al., 2021) includes in all its rounds an item which asks whether obedience is an important child-quality. Law-abidance and obedience to parents are two conceptually different aspects of obedience and, hence, not seen as conceptual equivalents. However, the aim is to explore whether both are influenced by the same societal and individual

explanatory factors and thus tap into some deeper-rooted beliefs in obedience which manifests in both surveys' obedience items.[9]

In this article, I speak of these attitudinal statements as *beliefs in obedience*. The reason is straightforward: talking about obedience more generally implies a behavioral dimension, which is rarely captured by cross-national surveys like the ISSP and the WVS (on the issue of measuring obedient behavior see also Levi et al., 2009). Thus, beliefs in obedience refer to individuals' statements that they see obedience to authority – parents, the laws, the government – as important or valuable. They express an attitude favoring obedience. While the laws are an impersonal object and thus not directly deducible from charismatic, personal legitimacy, they resemble state authorities and can serve as a proxy for obedience towards the state as an actor. Beliefs in obedience may capture the underlying societal norms that encourage or discourage individuals to obey or disobey. That is, societal imprints that demand indisputable obedience to elders, religious figures or hierarchical superiors put a burden on individuals to act in accordance with their personal moral conscience. To the contrary, when a society sees disobedience as justifiable and values constructive disobedience, individuals' threshold to act against unjust authorities should shrink. Accordingly, I ask to what extent the expressed tendency to favor obedience follows from individual experiences and to what extent is it a reaction to extrinsic norm pressures at the societal level?

To put this research into the bigger picture, one has to acknowledge that questions of regime and leadership legitimacy have returned to the forefront of political science (see e.g. Passini & Morselli, 2015; Brunkert, 2022; Brunkert & von Soest, 2022; Gerschewski, 2018; Nathan, 2020) and new in-depth inquiries opened new avenues for research. The gap that this research aims to fill is the role that obedience plays in it – focused through a political-culture lens.

Previous research on obedience shows that belief, consent, habituation or tradition (Matheson, 1987), force (Merrylees, 1932), the need for guidance (agentic state: Milgram, 1965) and legitimacy (Helm & Morelli, 1979; Weber, 1965) are factors that contribute to individuals' beliefs in obedience. As far as data availability allows, these mentioned factors are pitched against each other in random effects *within* and *between* models (REWB-models). While these random effects models per se allow for a large degree of cross-country heterogeneity, I additionally run country-by-country analyses and discuss the findings that deviate from the bigger picture.

The article is structured in the following way. The theory section debates different explanations for beliefs in obedience coming from sociology, social psychology and political science. Based on the presented theoretical considerations, the following section derives the

[9] Additional WVS items referring to obedience are included in additional tests in the Appendix table A2.

potential predictor variables. The next part describes data, variables, and methodology. Descriptive statistics give a better insight into cross-country variation of beliefs in obedience and presents bi-variate linkages between dependent and independent variables. The results section presents the results of the REWB-models before discussing and embedding the findings into the broader literature.

2.2 Literature, Theory and Concepts

Many theories touch upon questions of obedience and legitimacy. From a historical perspective, the theoretical roots of this research rest on many years of political culture and social psychology research, which – since Durkheim (1982 [1895]) – argue that 'social facts' are transmitted via cultural traditions and lead people to behave according to customs that transcend the individual. Several well-known theories point into the same direction, and all argue that social habituation and cultural learning manifest attitudes towards authority in a given society. For example, social learning theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977) explains how these 'facts' are transmitted within social units and how they stick to them. Norms are mimicked by members of a society and the environment that individuals grow up in plays a major role in shaping attitudes towards other people and towards authorities. Social Conformity theory (Asch, 1956) explains why the desire to fit in encourages obedient behavior. Individuals might follow seemingly wrong decisions if they see their peers to comply with these. Accordingly, social conformity can in the long run also change how societies think and which norms are reproduced via social learning. The reasons for adhering to social norms and valuing obedience may follow Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1958). These stages reach from obedience to avoid getting into trouble or gaining rewards (pre-conventional morality) to maintaining a positive image vis à vis one's peers or to uphold social order (conventional morality) to the final stage, where universal ethical principles guide attitudes and behavior towards authority. Individuals with an authoritarian personality (Adorno et al., 2019 [1950]), characterized by rigid adherence to authority and conventional values, may be more likely to operate at the lower stages of Kohlberg's moral reasoning. They follow rules unquestioningly and be less open to considering more nuanced and universal ethical principles. However, it is important to note that not all individuals with an authoritarian personality necessarily operate at lower stages of moral reasoning, and not all individuals at higher stages of moral reasoning necessarily reject authority or conventional values.

These theoretical considerations exemplify how values that favor beliefs in obedience perpetuate this belief and make it a defining feature of political culture. If obedience to authorities manifests as a social fact that is a desired trait and helps a society maintain stability or rewards individual subservience, then individuals will aim to conform to this fact and start their social

learning of this conformity in their childhood (exemplified by Inglehart's socialization hypothesis (1977)). By identifying historical, individual, and societal correlates of these beliefs in obedience, science can try to shed more light on the hidden social facts and their roots. For example, historically present tight-knit kinship circles and a focus on the sanctity of the traditional family – oftentimes promoted through religious practices – should increase individuals' aspirations to conform to social norms and internalize beliefs in obedience as a societal value (Thiruchselvam et al., 2017; Welch et al., 2006). Shame, revenge and disgust serve as factors that coerce individuals into obedience within tight-knit groups, which ensures survival, conformity and protection against outside threats (Enke, 2019). Secular education and family systems built around bridging social capital, on the other hand, should encourage the opposite. By freeing individuals from pre-determined relationships and traditional hierarchies that position key-authorities in their center, education should disfavor unconditional obedience (Macfarlane, 1993). In this line of thought, obedience can maintain stability in a society defined by social representations (Elcheroth et al., 2011; Moscovici, 1972), where societal norms are of a historical and cultural nature and deeply embedded within a local population. This 'stickiness' is evident in Burger's replication of Milgram's original study, which shows that "Obedience rates in the 2006 replication were only slightly lower than those Milgram found 45 years earlier" (Burger, 2009, p. 1). This may easily take a destructive bent once obedience to laws that are harmful to society become the norm. Kelman and Hamilton (1989) and Fromm (1997) engage with this destructive form of obedience, which enabled genocides and human rights violations to happen and makes people act in accordance with powerful elites for their self-preservation or lack of better knowledge.

The theories outlined in this section relate to encultured and socially transmitted roots of beliefs in obedience. Including this socio-cultural perspective into this research is warranted, as "[…] there is an overfocus on the study of the authority at the individual level, underestimating societal aspects" (Morselli & Passini, 2011, p. 291). We know from the presented theories and from contemporary political culture research that culture changes at a '*glacial pace*' (Brunkert et al., 2019). Hence, differences between countries' aggregated beliefs in obedience should remain visible even in a more secularized and globalized world and define authority-relationships to this present day.

However, there are also more ad-hoc perspectives of obedience, of which the empirical roots can be found in Milgram's experimental study on obedience to authority (Milgram, 1963, 1965). In this influential contribution, Milgram shows that the perceived legitimacy of an authority leads individuals to follow orders that may hurt another individual. He concludes that the subjects assume an "agentic state" in which they follow orders from a seemingly competent authority and do not consult their consciousness as thoroughly as one would expect. Thus, in this case

obedience would be situational and not driven by an internalized *belief in obedience*. His conclusion and externalization of these results have led to several re-iterations of the experiment (for an overview: Blass, 2012) and extensive criticism (i.e. Baumrind, 1964; Kaufmann, 1967). It was argued that these experiments are not addressing questions of obedience but rather resemble situational, engaged followership, where an individual sees the authority as virtuous and aims to please and be respected in a one-on-one situation (Haslam & Reicher, 2017).

2.2.1 Deriving the hypotheses

As argued in the introduction, the concepts of obedience and legitimacy seem intrinsically linked and one is rarely discussed without the other. Thus, it is unsurprising, that they also regularly inhibit each other's definitions.[10] Gerschewski (2013, p. 18) argues – based on Weber (1980) – that "legitimation seeks to guarantee active consent, compliance with the rules, passive obedience, or mere toleration within the population." Tyler (2006, 2021 [1990]) adds morality as a third component. In his view, people obey the laws based on their legitimacy perceptions of the ruling authority and because disobedience is against their moral convictions, which in turn may be rooted in social facts. Others see morality as a check against seemingly immoral orders given by legitimate actors, in which case legitimacy perceptions may overrule moral principles – as was the case in Milgram's experiments. More specifically, the (perceived) legitimate status of the authority overrules the individuals' desire to benchmark orders against their moral compass and instead they follow a felt obligation to obey (Kelman, 2001; Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). This also follows suit from philosophical debates, in which legitimacy *is* the justification for obedience (Raz, 1988, 1994). Kelman's (2001, p. 54) work stresses the factor of perceived legitimacy, where people "[…] accept influence insofar as they see the influencing agent as having the right to make certain demands or requests and see themselves as having the obligation to adhere to them". Of course, also physical repression and coercion are recurring topics when discussing obedience. If possible, authorities do well to convince their subjects of their demands without the use or threat of force (Popitz, 2004; Turner, 2005). Based on these considerations, hypothesis one entails:

H1: More pronounced regime support[11] corresponds with higher beliefs in obedience.

[10] I rely on a Weberian understanding of legitimacy which allows leaders or governments to be seen as more or less legitimate in the eyes of the ruled (Beetham, 1991; Gerschewski, 2013; Weber, 1980). This nuanced, gradual understanding of legitimacy stands in conflict with more normative and theoretical approaches, that debate how a perfectly legitimate political system might look like.

[11] I rely on a regime support as measured by Mauk (2020) in this case. It is no conceptually pure equivalent for legitimacy, but the closest empirical approximation that is easily operationalized in cross-national surveys. For a debate about the relationship between legitimacy, trust, support see Gerschewski (2018).

Morselli and Passini (2011) summarize these aspects and argue that "[…] it is at first an inner obedience, implying being susceptible to the influence of the authority. On the other hand, obedience dictated by fear is not a consequence of influence but a consequence of power. It is submission to an external power and is far from an inner choice." (p. 294) Accordingly the models will also control for levels of repression.

For this article I aim to follow this line of thought: People have (inner) beliefs in obedience to authority because they (may) have been socialized to believe that obedience is necessary for personal gain, social order or morally decent behavior (Kohlberg, 1958). This may include values taught in religious or cultural traditions, as well as social norms and expectations. For example, in some societies, obedience to parents and authority figures is seen as a core value (Hofstede, 2001). Anchored in political culture are also other factors that have been found to contribute to an internalization of beliefs in obedience. Matheson (1987, p. 200) extents Weber's (1965) threefold classification of legitimacy and argues that legitimations "[…] form part of the prevailing form of explanation or understanding within a society." These explanations are anchored in culturally transmitted forms of understanding or belief and may lead to beliefs in obedience based on convention or norms, contract, universal principles (morality), sacredness, sanctity of (immemorial) tradition, expertise, the knowledge of historic laws or acceptance of procedures (Matheson 1987). Hereof, religion is one of the strongest man-made forces that shaped cultural norms and practices and encourages *conventional moral* reasoning where societal conformity and fitting in matter most. (Kohlberg, 1958; Schulz et al., 2019).

H2: More frequent attendance of religious services corresponds with higher beliefs in obedience.

Religion and religious dutifulness should influence beliefs in obedience as an actor-less, undirected form of obedience, which is not directed at a charismatic leader or towards specific institutions but exists independent of these as a cultural norm. In other words, cultural norms reinforce individual adherence to societal, religious, and political hierarchy and individuals obey the rules prescribed by these. Obedience becomes a norm and plays a role independent of specific authority figures. In these cases, questioning authority figures is not encouraged and can lead individuals to fall into disfavor with their social environment (Hofstede, 2001). These norms can be reinforced through long exposure to autocratic rule that shaped individuals' life history and perpetually discouraged political participation and open objection to political decisions. If being political and openly confronting and breaking away from traditional society is a threat to

individual safety and cross-generationally transmitted through long exposure to autocratic government, then this should have a strong effect on the valuation of obedience.

H3: Longer experience with autocracy corresponds with higher beliefs in obedience.

At the grassroots of society, family types form the lowest hierarchical unit of social systems. They have been found to impact the emergence and stability of democracy (Dilli, 2016) and correlate with a plethora of socio-economic variables, such as GDP, household size, social capital and gender equality in the workplace (Duranton et al., 2009). Of these family-types the nuclear family pattern is the one with the least restrictions for adolescents and the one promoting individualism the most. Contrarily, in family systems based on patrilocality, high fertility and an early female marriage age, patriarchal values reinforce the adherence to authority, materialized in authoritarian father figures inside and outside the household (Szołtysek et al., 2017; Szołtysek & Poniat, 2018; Therborn, 2004). From a theoretical perspective, these historical family types put societies on different trajectories. Countries with a dominant nuclear family type should be less likely to exhibit strong obedience norms, as grown-up children are encouraged to form their own households, leave previous authority circles, and can make important life-decisions without paternal or maternal consent. The existence of extended families with close ties, on the other hand, is exemplified by a preference for cousin-marriage, which unites the family-ingroup in disfavor of the larger societal outgroup and consolidates strong authority relationships around central father(-like) figures.

H4a: Nuclear family patterns correspond with lower beliefs in obedience.
H4b: Cousin-marriage preferences correspond with higher beliefs in obedience.

In contrast to this assumed path dependency, sociology and political culture studies have shown that post-materialism (Inglehart & Appel, 1989), individualism (Triandis, 2019; Triandis & Gelfand, 2012) and emancipation (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Welzel, 2013) are factors that emerge from growing existential and political freedoms and consequently allow individuals to become the main authority over their own decision-making, thus making internalized beliefs in obedience less likely to survive. Unfortunately, directly testing the effect of Emancipative Values is not suitable in this case, as (absent) beliefs in obedience are part of this construct. However, one of emancipative values precursors – universal, quality education – should enable societies and individuals within them to embark on a path that values individual freedom over communitarian unity and frees people from traditional constraints that impose upon them specific

roles in family, society and state. Education drives democratization (Murtin & Wacziarg, 2014) and encourages perspectives outside each individuals' inner circle. Thus, this hypothesis reads:

H5: higher education levels correspond with lower beliefs in obedience.

However, the effect of education may be dependent on the content of the education. There may well be an educational indoctrination based on the political system in place which decreases the liberalizing effect of education. To account for this possibility, I run an additional robustness check which contains an interaction between education and educational indoctrination and include it in Appendix table A3 and figure A1.[12]

2.3 Data, Variables and Descriptives

The data used in the empirical analyses rest on two major international surveys which collect data on a global scope: the International Social Survey Programme and the World Values Survey (Gedeshi et al., 2021). The surveys were selected because they ask about similar concepts, cover two separate dimensions of beliefs in obedience, are widely used and of high quality. Each survey has had multiple waves, covering different countries and topics. I use the ISSP Role of Government Survey round five (ISSP Research Group, 2018), which has a good cross-continental sample including 35 countries and waves five to seven of the World Values Survey, which cover 86 countries in multiple waves. These waves have the highest variable-coverage for the operationalization of the hypotheses and measure the key variables between 2004 and 2021. Additional country-level context factors come from the Varieties of Democracy Project (Coppedge et al., 2020). This section operationalizes the hypothesized key predictors and locates empirical equivalents in the used survey projects.

2.3.1 Dependent variables

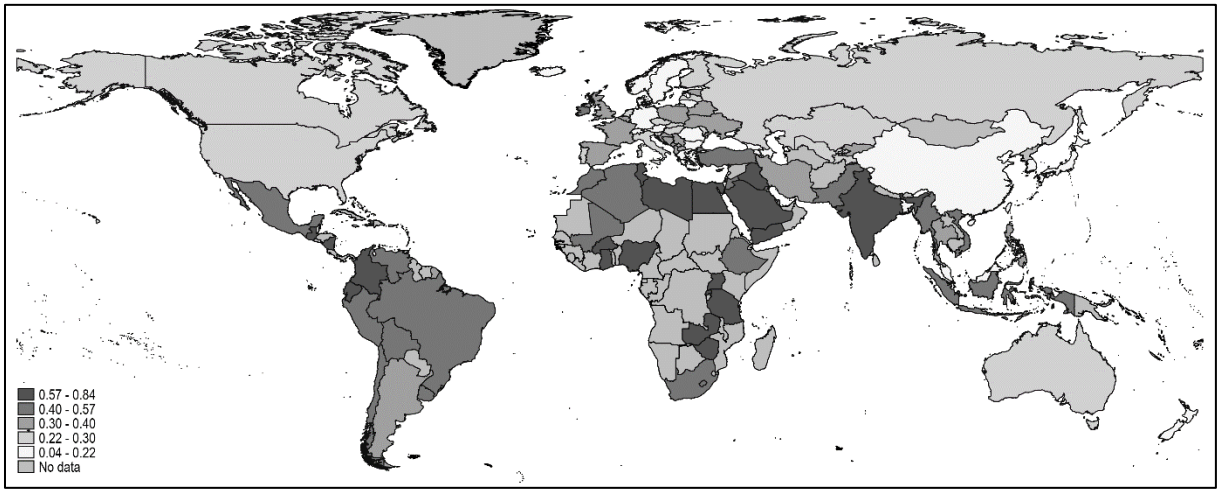
Beginning with the dependent variable – beliefs in obedience – the statistical models rely on the ISSP's binary variable *obedience to laws* and the WVS' binary variable *important child qualities: obedience*. As argued before, these two questions relate to two different dimensions of beliefs in obedience but help to create a broader picture of the research topic at hand. While both questions directly ask about *obedience,* they address different societal levels of obedience to

[12] Unfortunately, using interactions in a REWB model is tricky and interpretation difficult (Schunck, 2013). For this reason, the interaction is added as a separate classical random effects model without the separation into within and between effects. Its results are included in the discussion.

authority. The former refers to the laws, while the latter captures beliefs in obedience towards education and child rearing. They are connected insofar as social learning theory proposes that political attitudes and their underlying values are transferred from one generation to the next – with parents as the "middlepersons" in political socialization (Beck & Jennings, 1975). That is, political socialization begins in the family and values are often transmitted from parents to children (Jennings et al., 2009). If obedience is a core societal value that is transmitted to children, then we can expect that children internalize these values and rely on the learned hierarchy when dealing with younger siblings, peers, as well as with authorities in the future. The rules set by society and family define the amount of leeway that young adolescents have when negotiating their individual autonomy with their parents (Darling et al., 2005). If parental authority is seen as legitimate (through norm, tradition, or religion) adolescents may feel the need to obey it, which they internalized during their formative years and may carry over into their future dealing with authorities outside the family home (Inglehart & Appel, 1989). In other words, an obedient society precedes the obedient individual, which should subsequently manifest in both used measures.[13]

The ISSP's question gives respondents the alternative to choose "you should follow your conscience at occasions", which seems like an easy way out for individuals who have doubts about the absolute statement "you should obey the law without exception". Rejecting to approve of obedience in this case does not imply that one disrespects or even breaks the law and gives a good approximation of how strong individuals have internalized beliefs in obedience.

Figure 1: Important child qualities: Obedience, surveyed countries in WVS waves 5-7.

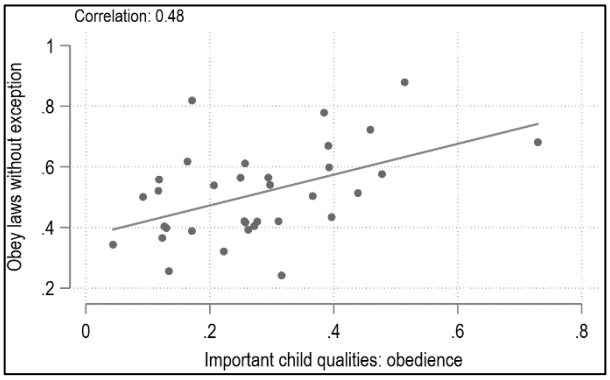


Note: Country-level averages of individuals who see obedience as an important childhood value.

[13] In an ideal case, we would have a battery of questions that refer to obedience on different levels of authority. This would allow testing whether these different beliefs in obedience are manifestations of specific latent (societal) constructs. Unfortunately, questions on obedience do not feature very prominently in cross-cultural surveys.

In comparison, the WVS' questions provide the respondent with a list of child qualities and lets her decide which of these are 'important'. Accordingly, there is a bigger variety of options to choose from. Nevertheless, Figure 1 shows that there are some countries, where up to 84% of the population see obedience as an important childhood quality, making it a notable aspect of some national cultures. After aggregating both WVS and ISSP indicators to the country-level their correlation amounts to $r = .48$ (n=35, $p < .05$) as Figure 2 shows.

Figure 2: Correlation of "beliefs in obedience"



2.3.2 Independent variables

To measure religiosity, I rely on both surveys' measure for "attendance of religious services". Though I am aware that religiosity can also play out privately, this measure is a good approximation of individuals' and societies' adherence to religious rules (visiting places of worship).

To measure regime support as a proxy for perceived legitimacy, I follow Mauk (2020) and combine the WVS' questions on confidence in the police, the political parties, the government and the army. To match this with ISSP questions, I combine the ISSP's questions "trust in civil servants", "MPs keep their promises", "perception of officials' corruption" and "perception of political corruption". The final measures, thus, capture the degree of perceived trustworthiness towards office holders within a political system. Both variables correlate with $r = 0.66$ ($N = 33$, $p < .05$) on the country-level.

To measure the experience with autocracy, I expand the survey data to capture all years that a person has been older than 15 years of age, merge in the Regimes of the World categorization of political regimes (Lührmann et al., 2018) and count the years of autocracy from a person's 15th birthday to the date of the survey. This age cutoff marks the begin of what some call the "impressionable years" where political opinion formation takes place (Neundorf & Smets, 2017).

Nuclear family systems are measured by a dummy variable which captures the prevalence or absence of this type of household organization. The variable and its conceptualization are based on Enke's "nuclear" measure (2019) and are originally derived from the Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1981). It measures the extent of household complexity (nuclear vs. extended) in pre-industrial regional societies and is then aggregated by using migration- (Putterman & Weil, 2010)

and language-adjustments (Giuliano & Nunn, 2013) to match historical with contemporary populations[14].

Education is measured as educational degrees from no formal education to university education. To create the interaction effect for education with educational indoctrination presented in Appendix table A3 and figure A1, I use the newly introduced V-Dem measures for "political education effort in education" and "indoctrination coherence in education" (Coppedge et al., 2023; Neundorf et al., 2023). More specifically, I 'open up' each respondents' life from the age of 5 to the end of their schooling and fill these years with their state's educational propaganda measures present at this stage of their lives. I then re-collapse the data and generate an average of the two variables measuring educational propaganda for each individuals' schooling years.

Last, the analyses include several context factors – measured at the country level. Specifically, I include V-Dem's indices for regime corruption and physical violence (Coppedge et al., 2023), as both have hypothetical linkages to the outcome variable. The former captures political trustworthiness and rule of law, while the latter controls, whether authorities coerce individuals into obeying the law.

2.4 METHODS

Random Effects within-between models (REWB) (Allison, 2005; Bartels, 2015; Bell & Jones, 2015) are a specific configuration of the classical random-effects (also called hierarchical or multilevel) model. In contrast to the commonly used fixed effects models, the REWB approach allows the inclusion of time-constant context variables, avoids some of the problematic assumptions of classical random effect models and models both cross-country (between) and within-country effects separately (Bell et al., 2018). To achieve the separation into within and between effects, each variable that has within-cluster variation is de-meaned. Thus, all between country variation is eliminated, all clusters have a mean of zero and differences only refer to the within-cluster variation between surveyed individuals. The between cluster effect is then calculated by adding the cluster-mean values as separate predictors into the model. This type of modelling is appropriate to this research and additionally takes contextual, country-level factors into account. By de-meaning the within-cluster covariates, any possible correlation between covariates and the random effects is eliminated and, thus, avoids any bias that might come from violating the assumption of zero correlation between the two. Additionally, the inclusion of within

[14] Unfortunately, it is not possible to match the survey's immigrant respondents with their country of origin's historical family pattern, as the information on country of birth is rather patchy. For those waves and countries where this information is available, the share of individuals born in another country is less than 5% and should thus not impact results.

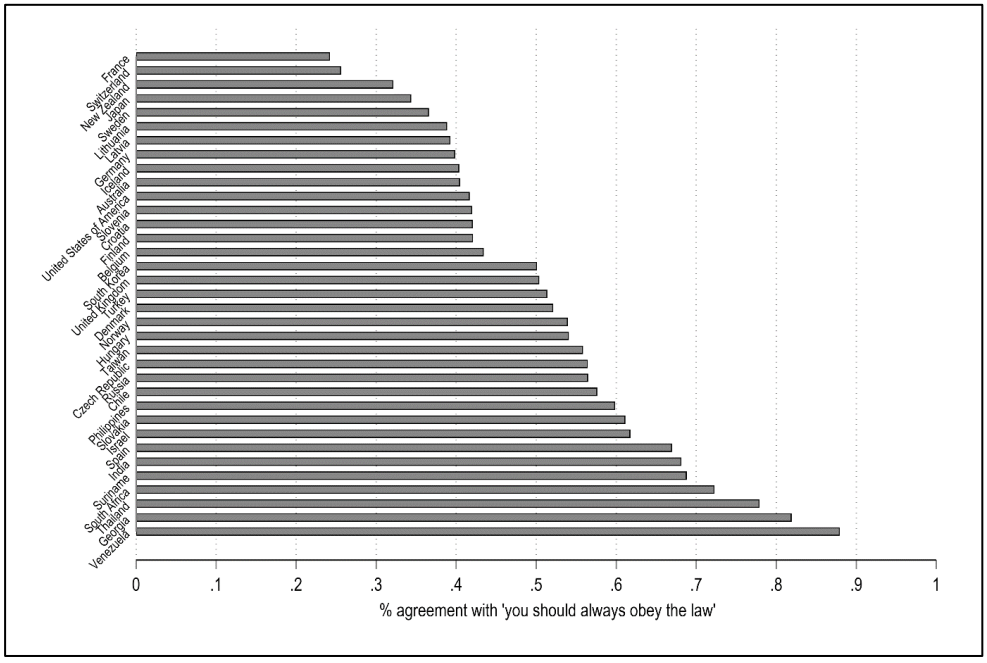
– and between effects mitigates *cluster confounding* (Bartels, 2015). Due to the clustered nature of the observations, the model additionally includes cluster-robust standard errors, to account for heteroscedasticity. This approach is also suitable for mixed effects generalized models with binary dependent variables (Schunck & Perales, 2017), as used in this analysis. Table 2 presents the result in their exponentiated form, also called odds ratios. Accordingly, a significant odds ratio larger than one indicates that changes in the independent variable increase the odds of the outcome and vice versa.

2.5 RESULTS

2.5.1 Descriptive

Figure 3 gives a first glimpse at beliefs in obedience asked in the ISSP Role of Government Study (wave 5). The graph depicts the share (%) of individuals that agree with the statement "you should always obey the law" (vs. "you should follow your consciousness at times"). The protest-friendly French citizens show the lowest level of beliefs in obedience, while almost 90% of the sampled Venezuelans agree that 'you should always follow the law'.

Figure 3: Share of agreement with the statement "you should obey the law without exceptions" (ISSP)



A country's share of individuals who have beliefs in obedience shows some strikingly strong correlations with other country-level factors (see Appendix Table A1), such as attendance of religious services, experience with democracy, and nuclear family pattern, as well as age and education. Based on purely correlational evidence, countries with long democratic histories, a comparatively older and well-educated society and small households are expectedly those that

show lower levels of beliefs in obedience. On the contrary, extended households with patrilocal settlement, lower education, and a shorter democratic history show both – more *obedience to laws* and more *demand towards child obedience*. Compared to men, women seem to have stronger beliefs in obedience in relation to the law and weaker preferences when it comes to children. Experience with autocracy is not related to child-rearing in a cross-national perspective but strongly related to beliefs in obedience referring to the law.

2.5.2 Models

Based on the presented models and the descriptive evidence, it is evident that there is some overlap between beliefs in obedience in the domain of child education and in the relation to the laws when controlling for the competing predictors. Still, there are also some areas where both dimensions behave differently. Table 2 summarizes the results for both dimensions, with an increasing number of predictors and controls. Models 1.1 and 2.1 estimate the effect of nuclear family patterns and preferences for cousin marriage – the most historical predictors. Models 1.2 and 2.2 add the political variables: physical integrity index, political corruption, experience with autocracy and regime support. Models 1.3 and 2.3 add religiosity, 1.4 and 2.4 add education and sex.

Two factors stand out and significantly affect both dependent variables in a similar manner: Citizens with a comparatively higher education (in relation to their fellow citizens), are less likely to express beliefs in obedience – and much more so in relation to obedience as an important child quality. Additionally, the results also show that societies with higher average education levels give less importance to child obedience. In reverse, the same can be said about citizens with more frequent attendance of religious services, who have higher odds to express stronger beliefs in obedience than their less religious countrymen and countrywomen. This finding is also replicated on the between-level of analysis, where the odds of seeing obedience as an important child quality more than triple between secular and highly religious societies. Both findings are in line with Inglehart and Welzel's idea of cultural modernization (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Welzel & Inglehart, 2010), which stress the role of secularization and cognitive mobilization as driving forces for a critical citizenry (that does not pre-emptively obey). Additionally, it shows that both, individual and contextual factors, are important.

The significant coefficient of experience with autocracy shows that with each additional year – compared to her fellow citizens – that an individual lived under an autocratic government, her odds to express beliefs in obedience *to the laws* increase by about 1.1% (0.3% for obedience as child quality). However, citizens in countries with longer average experience of autocracy have slightly lower odds to value obedience in relation to child education than countries with less overall

autocratic experience. This may seem counter-intuitional at first but points to the analytical benefits that REWB models have. In a classical random effects model within- and between-coefficients would be combined and brush over this interesting differentiation.

Continuing with the results where the two dependent variables diverge. In the ISSP sample, individuals who see their government as more trustworthy and less corrupt are around 2.5 times more willing to obey the laws. There is no observable effect on the between-level. Accordingly, it seems that (among others) Kelman (2001), Tyler (2006, 2021), Weber (1980) and also Milgram (1963) were correct in their focus on perceived legitimacy as a predictor of obedience. That is, the perception of ruling elites' trustworthiness drives individuals' willingness to abide by their rulings. However, this cannot be said about the societal orientation that puts emphasis on child obedience. Here, countries with higher average regime support have lower odds to see child obedience as important, while on an individual level there is evidence for slightly increased odds with higher levels of regime support. This result again emphasizes the importance of a clear division into between and within effects but should be regarded with caution, as this variable is operationalized differently in both samples.

Of the two variables measuring historical family patterns, tight-knit family systems which use cousin marriage to ensure in-group unity show the expected effect direction and are a driver of beliefs in obedience in reference to the laws and obedience as a child quality. The same holds true for nuclear family patterns. As expected, their dominance in a national culture lowers the odds for obedience in both analyzed domains. However, their coefficients seem counterintuitive in the case of law abidance and their interpretation require further scrutiny. The problem lies in the correlational structure present in the data. In descriptive Figure 3 most countries with the lowest share of people that value obedience to the laws have a nuclear family system and the bivariate correlations in Appendix Table A1 support this picture. However, once additional covariates are included the results in Table 2 suggest that having a historical nuclear family setting *increases* the odds of having beliefs in obedience in the law domain (model 1.2-1.4). Polyserial correlations and previous studies (Dilli, 2016; Duranton et al., 2009) now reveal that nuclear family patterns are highly correlated with all country-level variables (including the REWB's *between* components) that relate to rule of law, economic performance and secularity. Since measurement of nuclear family patterns are based on historical data and a temporally prior to these other variables, these can be seen to be caused by nuclear family patterns and the societal characteristics that follow from them (see also Enke, 2019; Henrich, 2021; Schulz et al., 2019). Accordingly, the inclusion of these mediator variables distorts the initial effect that nuclear family patterns have in model 1.1.

Table 1: Random Effects Within-Between models both dependent variables

	(1.1)	(1.2)	(1.3)	(1.4)	(2.1)	(2.2)	(2.3)	(2.4)
	ISSP Obedience of the Laws				**WVS Obedience as important childhood quality**			
Nuclear family pattern	0.520**	1.572*	1.562*	1.470+	0.577***	0.645**	0.660**	0.628**
	(0.120)	(0.337)	(0.335)	(0.318)	(0.073)	(0.099)	(0.100)	(0.093)
Cousin marriage preference	1.145	1.325***	1.308***	1.330***	1.178**	1.300***	1.201*	1.162*
	(0.169)	(0.112)	(0.104)	(0.100)	(0.069)	(0.100)	(0.086)	(0.086)
(B) Years of autocratic experience		1.021	1.027	1.032		0.962***	0.964***	0.967***
		(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.020)		(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
(W) Years of autocratic experience		1.014***	1.013***	1.011***		1.003***	1.003***	1.000
		(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)		(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
GDP (logged)		0.015**	0.067+	0.125		0.633***	0.711**	0.744**
		(0.023)	(0.100)	(0.197)		(0.064)	(0.080)	(0.081)
Physical Integrity Index		1.815	2.444	2.640		0.942	0.898	0.906
		(1.414)	(1.944)	(1.917)		(0.089)	(0.078)	(0.080)
Regime Corruption Index		4.784+	4.340+	3.724		1.035	0.964	0.962
		(4.181)	(3.456)	(3.902)		(0.092)	(0.079)	(0.078)
(B) Regime Support		2.157	2.972	4.416		0.214**	0.143***	0.128***
		(2.644)	(3.952)	(5.618)		(0.123)	(0.069)	(0.065)
(W) Regime Support		2.560***	2.478***	2.595***		1.160**	1.109*	1.093*
		(0.357)	(0.349)	(0.388)		(0.053)	(0.051)	(0.050)
(B) Attendance of religious services			1.209*	1.196*			3.626***	3.062**
			(0.107)	(0.103)			(1.277)	(1.118)
(W) Attendance of religious services			1.038***	1.036***			1.289***	1.287***
			(0.011)	(0.011)			(0.035)	(0.036)
(B) Education				0.866				0.020**
				(0.194)				(0.030)
(W) Education				0.918***				0.146***
				(0.020)				(0.026)
Female				1.091*				0.974+
				(0.045)				(0.014)
Variance Random Intercept	1.438***	1.231***	1.219***	1.216***	2.078***	1.707***	1.619***	1.601***
	(0.127)	(0.054)	(0.059)	(0.061)	(0.147)	(0.096)	(0.088)	(0.083)
N	40789	34983	34051	33854	345159	272632	263803	263718
AIC	52486	44887	43604	43217	385502	302968	292186	290402
BIC	52521	44980	43713	43352	385545	303083	292322	290569
Intraclass correlation	0.0994	0.0593	0.0568	0.0560	0.1819	0.1398	0.1278	0.1252
Countries / Country-Wave	32	32	32	32	220	196	192	192

Notes: Exponentiated coefficients (Odds Ratios); (B) denotes between coefficients, (W) denotes within coefficients; Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses.
+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

When all between-level predictors that are correlated with nuclear family patterns are excluded and only additional *within* coefficients are considered, the initial effect remains. As I deem historical family patterns an important theoretical factor for these analyses, they are kept in the model presentation.

2.5.3 Hypothesis evaluation and Discussion

The evaluation of the hypotheses reveals the following: Hypothesis one cannot be rejected on the within-dimension of this analysis. First, inter-individual differences in the perception of a regime's trustworthiness increase the odds of subscribing to obedience. On the between level, I find conflicting evidence. It should however be noted that this variable is also most prone to change. Regime support depends on the evaluation of the *current* government and its effects may be much more ad-hoc than those of deep-rooted institutions like the family and religion.

Second, attendance of religious services works stronger in relation to childhood qualities but shows equally significant effects for obedience of the laws. This effect is also observed between countries and not only when comparing more or less religious individuals within a country. Hence, hypothesis two also cannot be rejected.

The third hypothesis builds on years of autocratic experience which remains significance predictor *within* countries in all, but the last WVS model (2.4) and thus cannot be rejected on this level of analysis. On the between-level its effect is reversed for obedience as an important child quality. Thus, it seems that when a large share of the population has experienced long-term autocracy, their likelihood to pass on obedient behavior to their offsprings becomes less likely, but within countries those with above average autocratic experience still put a stronger emphasis on obedience.

Regarding hypothesis 4a, the results section already discusses the statistical difficulties with nuclear family patterns. Taken alone, this variable decreases the odds of beliefs in obedience, but should be further investigated in a more encompassing mediation model. Hypothesis 4b cannot be rejected: Preferences for cousin marriage are a significant predictor of beliefs in obedience.

Lastly, hypothesis 5, needs a closer look. The results of the REWB model show that higher education levels decrease the odds of beliefs in obedience in both domains. However, appendix Table A3 and Figure A1 makes clear that the effect of education is contingent on the degree of educational propaganda during individuals' educational period. That is, with high levels of political propaganda in individuals schooling years, the effect of education diminishes until it finally turns insignificant. This is not reproduced in the WVS sample and in relation to obedience as an important child quality. Thus, the evaluation of H5 is ambiguous and the negative impact of

political education on adherence to public laws can only unfold when this education is not (strongly) guided by political goals.

Summing up, all theoretically derived predictors of beliefs in obedience have some merit depending on the level of analysis. Some results are best taken with a pinch of salt and with slightly different implications for the two separate dimensions of beliefs in obedience. As previously mentioned, Morselli and Passini argue that "[…] there is an overfocus on the study of the authority at the individual level, underestimating societal aspects" (2011, 291). The results of the presented analyses add some more nuance to this statement. Societal factors that encourage obedience seem to be deeper rooted, historical in nature and relate mostly to long-standing institutions like family and religion. These non-state institutions infuse national cultures with different pre-dispositions to value obedience and set them up on different trajectories. However, individual level factors can alter citizens' trajectories within the same societal context. Depending on their relative education levels, their relative experience with autocracy, their religiousness, and their relative regime support, individuals differ in their valuation of obedience. Interestingly, most derived predictors point into the same direction for both analyzed dimensions, supporting the idea that beliefs in obedience are an empirical realization of underlying attitudes towards obedience that surface in both childhood education and law abidance in a similar manner.[15] By separating the analysis into between and within effects, the analysis shows that beliefs in obedience may be somewhat pre-determined by societal context but can still be overcome though education and secularization which lead people to post-conventional stages of moral development that questions pre-emptive obedience.

There are several limitations that this study cannot overcome, and which need to be addressed transparently. The first is the attitude-behavior linkage. Experimental research does a better job to show when and how individuals respond to authoritative demands with actual obedient behavior. However, these situations often resemble ad-hoc responses and do not necessarily point towards societal norms with long-term roots. This is where I aim to fill a gap and use a strong data-driven approach to better understand societal and individual differences in the attitudinal dimension. The second limitation is the missing specificity in regard to country-specific effects. The REWB models show the average effects within and between countries for the complete sample but cannot pinpoint differences in coefficients and significance in specific cases. In other words, which explanatory concepts work in which country, or do they all work equally everywhere? Why is it that for example Danish and Turkish people express similar beliefs in obedience *of the laws*? To mitigate this issue, I ran additional country-by-country analyses,

[15] Appendix Table A2 provides additional analyses for two WVS variables referring to obedience ("Democracy means people obey their rulers" and workplace obedience). The results differ in their significance but mostly confirm the findings for the child quality item.

discussed next. In the Denmark – Turkey example, the regime (government) support of their political system drives the Danes beliefs in obedience, while Turkish people are moved towards beliefs in obedience by their long individual experiences with autocracy. The REWB results help to identify generalizable effects of the theoretically derived predictors at individual- and country-level, but only with the additional country-wise logistic regressions we can see which factor is prominent in which case.

2.5.4 Country-level results

Hence, to get an even better understanding of the presented results, I run separate logistic models for each country involved in the two separate samples – ISSP Role of Government V and WVS waves 5-7. This additional analysis helps to validate the aggregate results of the REWB model and provides additional nuance for the drawn conclusions. In large part the models reflect the results of the REWB model. However, for some variables there are noteworthy differences between countries, which point toward specific political cultures.[16]

In the case of the ISSP-sample regime support remains a major predictor, with the individuals' odds of showing attitudes to obey the laws quadrupling when moving from no support to full support. Exceptions for this finding are Thailand, Slovenia, South Korea, Croatia, Turkey, Australia, Venezuela, Czech Republic, Germany, the Philippines and South Africa, where this variable remains insignificant. Regarding experience with autocracy, some countries with autocratic legacies stand out. That is, for Chile, Croatia, Georgia, Russia, Slovenia, South Korea, Thailand and Turkey each additional year that a respondent lived under autocratic rule increases their odds to value obedience by around 2.5%. Regarding religiosity, education, and sex, I find that in most countries attendance of religious services increases the odds of beliefs in obedience. The opposite is true for Thailand and Georgia, whose results show a negative effect. As to why this is the case I can only speculate and urge country experts to jump on the bandwagon here. More educated individuals are less likely to express beliefs in obedience, except for the Philippines and, again, Thailand. Lastly, women are generally more likely to value obedience to the laws, but not so in Turkey and South Korea. Here women have significantly higher odds of "following their conscience at times".

The country-by-country results of the WVS sample support the findings for religious practices and education. Especially education turns out significant in almost all individual analyses and reduces the odds of favoring obedience as an important childhood quality. The only exemption is Ethiopia. Attendance of religious services works as a significant predictor in about

[16] Please refer to the Appendix for the full model output, which would overload this manuscript (Table A4 and A5).

half of the individual cases and always increases the odds of valuing obedience as an important childhood quality, except for Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The results for the remaining variables are mixed. Regime support shows significant, increasing and decreasing odds in a about half of the individual countries. Women are less likely to demand obedience from their children except for Myanmar, Colombia, Bolivia, Nigeria, Turkey, and Pakistan. Last, experience with autocracy mostly increases support for obedience as an important childhood value. The opposite holds true for Mexico, Slovenia, Albania, Indonesia, Ecuador, Colombia, Nicaragua, France.

While it becomes evident that most of the results of the REWB model can be replicated, these country-level results provide further nuance. For some variables a non-significant finding in the large model does not imply that there is *no* effect. Rather, it shows that besides the generalizable observations, some of the selected concepts work differently in different societies.

2.6 Conclusion

This article set out to empirically analyze historical-vs.-contemporary and societal-vs.-individual explanations for beliefs in obedience, based on a wide array of theoretical perspectives from social psychology, political sciences and related fields. While obedience is only one specific concept within political culture research and, in this case, measured purely by its attitudinal dimensions, it nevertheless is of great importance through its theoretical link to regime legitimacy.

The interest towards legitimacy of political systems and actors is a temporal constant in political science, addressing all fields from political theory to international relations and serving as an explanation for regime breakdown, (re-)elections, stability of international organizations and many more. As shown by early experiments by the likes of Milgram's "Behavioral Study of Obedience" pairing this systemic understanding with an individualized social psychology perspective helps to broaden the scientific knowledge of political cultures around the globe. To further contribute to this field of research this analysis relies on the ISSP's question addressing *obedience to the laws* and the WVS' repeatedly asked questions about *obedience as an important child* quality. It makes clear that both dimensions of beliefs in obedience are driven by similar explanatory factors. While these dimensions may be conceptually distinct, the aptitude to unreflectedly obey the laws or to demand obedience from one's children draws from the same cultural norms. However, education, secularization, and a younger generation with less autocratic life experiences alters the trajectory that societies are set on. Political culture changes slowly and concurrently debated "culture wars" about the sanctity of the traditional family – even in the most emancipated societies – points towards the centrality and stickiness of the family as the major socializing institution. Emancipation is a constant struggle against historical norms that demand obedience to authority – be it father, God or state – and only progressed where education,

secularization and critical perspectives towards elites manifested. The results of this analysis clearly show that adherence to religious rules infuses people with beliefs in obedience. In most religions obedience to divine laws and to their earthly representatives is a central pillar of communal life. This pillar can be knocked over by education, which encourages free thinking and opens up alternative life plans outside pre-determined authority and family relationships. Political culture debates about the progress from Almond and Verba's (1963) allegiant citizen of the 1960's to Welzel and Dalton's (2014) assertive citizen of the early 2000's or Norris' Critical Citizen (1999) resemble this development towards peoples' desire to "follow their conscience at times". Most democratic breakthroughs would not have been possible without a form of constructive disobedience towards authorities.

2.7 References

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2.8 APPENDIX

Why do people value obedience?

A multi-theoretical perspective on individual and societal beliefs in obedience.

Table A1: Individual- and country-level correlations of beliefs in obedience and independent variables.

		ISSP: *"Obedience to laws"*		**WVS: *"Childhood quality: obedience"***	
Concept	**Measure**	Individual (N)	Country (N=35)	Individual (N)	Country-Wave (N)
Legitimacy	Principle component of Confidence in institutions and representatives	0.024* (38537)	-.293	-.033* (336451)	-.201* (237)
Repression	Physical violence index (measures absence of repression)		-.535*		-.35* (243)
Corruption	Regime Corruption Index		.621*		.359* (243)
Religiosity	Attendance of religious services	.174* (43425)	.605*	.202* (364996)	.547* (239)
Political experience	Experience with autocracy	.207* (44796)	.534*	.061* (372771)	.118 (243)
Family pattern	Nuclear family pattern		-.479* (32)		-.352* (222)
	Cousin marriage preference		.158		.285 (235)
Socio-Demographics	Sex (1 = female)	.05* (44820)	.359*	-.018* (376509)	-.276* (243)
	Education	-.175* (44390)	-.548*	-.197* (376670)	-.38* (243)

Notes: * indicates significance at $p < 0.05$

Table A2: Robustness checks using two additional WVS variables.

	Democracy: People obey their rulers (1-10)				**Follow work order or need to be convinced (0-1, Odds Ratios)**			
Nuclear family pattern	-1.106***	-0.041	0.109	0.091	1.107	1.256	1.215	1.297
	(0.239)	(0.271)	(0.274)	(0.275)	(0.128)	(0.319)	(0.285)	(0.303)
Cousin marriage preference	0.216*	0.173	0.007	-0.012	0.987	0.994	1.095	1.109
	(0.090)	(0.118)	(0.099)	(0.098)	(0.070)	(0.077)	(0.083)	(0.087)
(B) Years of autocratic experience		0.008	0.011	0.015		0.984	0.980*	0.981*
		(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.013)		(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.009)
(W) Years of autocratic experience		0.010***	0.010***	0.008***		1.011***	1.011***	1.009***
		(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)		(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
GDP (logged)		-0.758***	-0.887***	-0.859***		1.147	1.362	1.278
		(0.179)	(0.211)	(0.210)		(0.240)	(0.268)	(0.233)
Physical Integrity Index		-0.041	-0.109	-0.084		0.965	0.915	0.907
		(0.181)	(0.173)	(0.185)		(0.089)	(0.066)	(0.060)
Regime Corruption Index		0.115	-0.021	-0.019		1.364**	1.279**	1.231*
		(0.178)	(0.177)	(0.178)		(0.151)	(0.121)	(0.118)
(B) Legitimacy perception		3.260***	2.661**	2.636**		2.589	1.331	1.274
		(0.962)	(0.951)	(0.945)		(1.869)	(0.762)	(0.739)
(W) Legitimacy perception		1.422***	1.367***	1.361***		1.819***	1.769***	1.726***
		(0.095)	(0.093)	(0.093)		(0.133)	(0.129)	(0.131)
(B) Attendance of religious services			0.917	0.851			7.868***	6.780***
			(0.850)	(0.858)			(4.679)	(3.835)
(W) Attendance of religious services			0.288***	0.293***			1.192***	1.191***
			(0.064)	(0.065)			(0.060)	(0.060)
(B) Education				-2.138				7.182
				(2.400)				(9.997)
(W) Education				-1.142***				0.307***
				(0.219)				(0.044)
Female				-0.122***				0.958+
				(0.025)				(0.024)
N	203525	154871	150380	150344	83306	136615	86440	85064
AIC	995659	753050	731109	730638	406302	170525	107974	106446
BIC	995710	753169	731248	730806	406479	170564	108077	106568
Intraclass Correlation	0.15	0.12	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.07	0.07	0.06
Country-Waves	131	110	107	107	57	92	62	62
Chi^2	36.2298	476.6339	485.7296	511.8045	426.4897	1.3629	192.5377	263.5515

Standard errors in parentheses; $^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A3: Moderation Analysis for Education (ISSP)

	Obey the law without exception	
Nuclear family pattern	1.544*	(0.324)
Cousin Marriage Preferences	1.297***	(0.092)
Years of autocratic experience	1.012***	(0.003)
GDP (logged)	0.015**	(0.025)
Physical Integrity Index	2.028	(1.407)
Regime Corruption Index	5.358*	(4.216)
Legitimacy perception	2.705***	(0.393)
Attendance of religious services	1.037***	(0.011)
Education	0.606***	(0.064)
Political Education Effort and Coherence	1.056	(0.259)
Education* Political Education Effort and Coherence	5.197**	(2.710)
Female	1.087*	(0.045)
Variance Random Intercept	1.242***	(0.060)
N	32966	
AIC	41978	
BIC	42095	
Intraclass Correlation	0.062	
Countries	32	

Exponentiated coefficients; Robust standard errors in parentheses.
$^{+}p < 0.10$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$

Figure A1: marginal effects of interaction

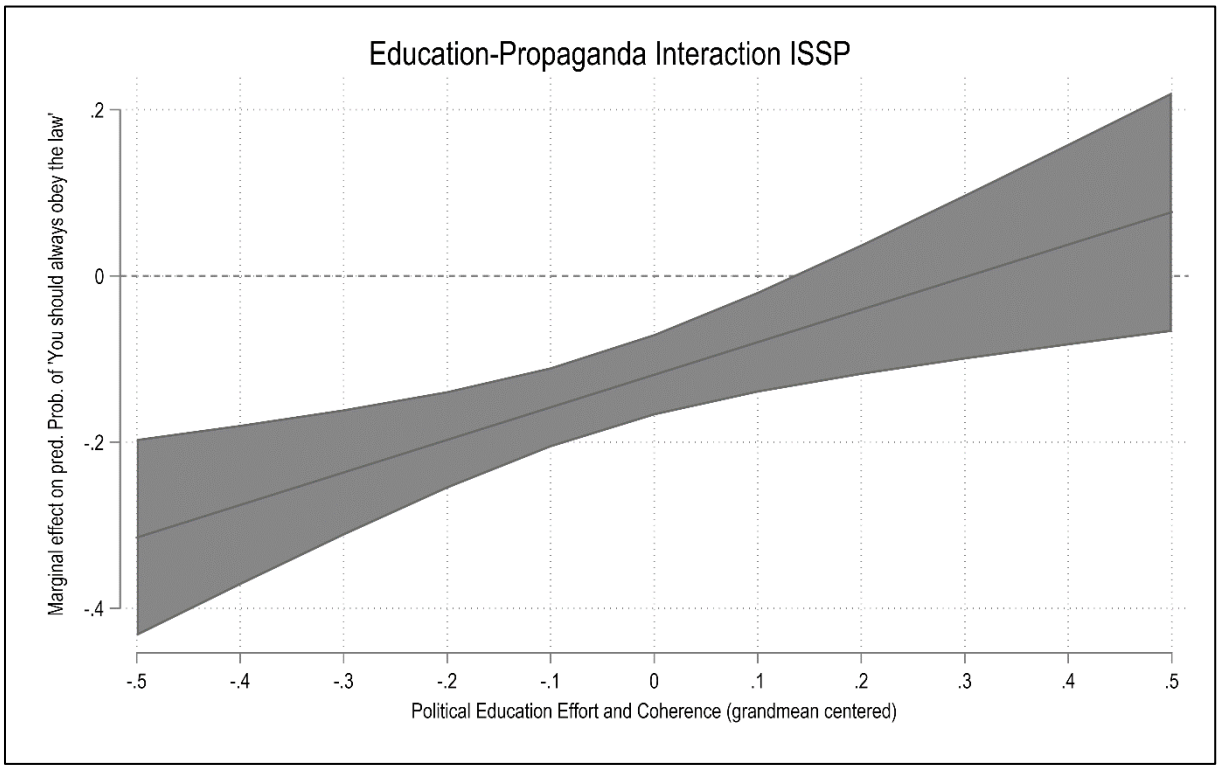

Table A4: Country logit regression results of ISSP wave 5

	Experience with autocracy		Legitimacy perceptions		Attendance of religious services		Education		Female		Constant		N
Australia	1.000		0.932		1.176	***	0.797	***	0.870		1.367		621
Belgium	0.541		3.613	***	1.109	**	0.800	***	1.219		0.795		1371
Chile	1.027	**	3.213	*	1.063	*	1.058		1.089		0.550	*	844
Croatia	1.019	***	1.691		1.011		0.887	*	0.821		0.762		934
Czech Republic	0.999		0.800		1.136	***	0.880	**	1.089		1.985	*	1024
Denmark	1.000		3.468	***	1.035		0.946		1.242		0.472	*	867
Finland	1.000		3.208	**	1.011		0.992		1.403	*	0.322	***	911
France	1.126		2.850	**	1.010		0.895	**	1.459	**	0.210	***	1108
Georgia	1.028	***	4.012	**	0.856	**	0.799	*	1.370		4.745	**	555
Germany	1.441		1.394		0.970		0.864	**	1.072		0.960		1253
Hungary	1.008		6.510	***	1.084		1.091		0.984		0.357	**	757
India	1.085		2.777	***	1.108	**	0.931		0.920		1.183		1194
Israel	0.641		12.962	***	1.000		0.805	***	1.127		1.306		1027
Japan	1.037		9.283	***	0.940		1.031		1.438	**	0.199	***	1113
Latvia	1.004		5.094	***	1.060		0.888		0.963		0.470	*	732
Lithuania	0.996		45.165	***	0.998		1.048		0.850		0.203	***	797
New Zealand	1.000		4.675	***	1.049		0.822	***	1.242		0.268	***	1058
Norway	1.000		4.229	***	1.039		0.937		1.474	**	0.474	*	976
Philippines	1.008		1.770		0.995		1.098	*	0.868		0.906		1144
Russia	1.012	**	5.386	***	0.989		1.019		1.236		0.470	*	1191
Slovakia	1.007		2.321	*	0.976		0.905		1.143		1.624		890
Slovenia	1.027	***	1.991		1.021		0.886		1.100		0.711		875
South Africa	1.007		0.885		1.038		0.954		1.122		2.171	***	2578
South Korea	1.035	***	1.360		1.028		0.950		0.704	**	0.819		993
Spain	0.999		4.424	***	1.050		0.908	**	0.884		1.583	*	1530
Sweden	1.000		3.046	**	1.036		0.901	*	1.575	**	0.275	***	867
Switzerland	1.000		4.274	**	1.025		0.925		1.312		0.158	***	851
Thailand	1.019	*	2.345		0.780	***	1.316	***	0.992		2.958	*	982
Turkey	1.036	*	1.220		1.026		1.049		0.635	***	0.694		1059
United Kingdom	1.000		2.904	**	1.101	**	0.712	***	1.245		1.396		993
United States of America	1.000		2.712	**	1.115	***	0.805	***	1.621	***	0.505	**	1301
Venezuela	1.046		1.274		1.039		0.759	***	0.962		7.217	***	903

Notes: each row summarizes the results of a single logit model for the respective country. Cells show odds-ratios (exponentiated log-odds). Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A5: Country logit regression results of WVS wave 5-7.

WVS: Obedience as important child quality	Experience with autocracy		Legitimacy Perceptions		Attendance of religious services		Education		Female		Constant		N
Albania	0.994		0.657		1.019		0.717	*	0.841		0.450	***	2663
Algeria	1.005		0.489	**	1.099	***	1.378		0.936		0.694		924
Argentina	0.996		0.982		1.093	***	0.504	***	1.023		0.535	***	2753
Armenia	1.007	**	1.760	**	0.991		0.452	***	1.169		0.245	***	3752
Australia	1.000		2.150	***	1.110	***	0.256	***	0.800	**	0.498	***	4062
Austria	1.113		2.367	**	1.041		0.345	***	0.797	*	0.179	***	2776
Azerbaijan	1.003		0.416	**	1.244	***	0.610		0.963		0.110	***	2545
Bangladesh	0.995		0.604		1.147	**	0.727		0.901		0.147	***	1111
Belarus	0.998		1.280		1.054	*	0.574	***	0.930		0.668	**	4019
Belgium	0.986		0.677		1.036		0.361	***	0.984		1.043		1471
Bolivia	1.013	*	1.979	**	1.014		0.990		1.264	*	0.573	**	1902
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1.000		1.527	*	1.019		0.840		1.028		0.494	***	3018
Brazil	1.000		1.100		1.060	***	0.685	***	1.026		0.843		4387
Bulgaria	1.002		1.148		0.969		0.396	***	0.812	*	0.444	***	3355
Burkina Faso	0.991		1.020		1.033		0.583	*	0.904		2.527	***	1133
Canada	1.000		0.906		1.213	***	0.313	***	0.942		0.327	***	5883
Chile	1.008		0.976		1.004		0.523	***	1.150		0.987		2798
China	1.001		2.455	**	1.068		0.455	***	0.773	*	0.047	***	5320
Colombia	0.988	***	1.352	**	1.020		0.582	***	1.308	***	1.374	***	5767
Croatia	1.000		2.991	***	1.029		0.238	***	0.834	*	0.624	**	2592
Cyprus	1.004		1.131		0.997		0.609	***	1.010		0.864		3334
Czech Republic	0.995		1.006		1.089	***	0.739		0.947		0.454	***	2794
Denmark	1.333	**	1.877	*	1.086	*	0.249	***	0.668	***	0.171	***	4576
Ecuador	0.984	*	1.161		1.022		0.761	*	1.056		1.569	**	2360
Estonia	0.999		2.185	***	1.025		0.831		0.903		0.466	***	3851
Ethiopia	1.026	***	2.828	***	1.059		1.323	*	1.071		0.190	***	2360
Finland	1.000		1.236		1.009		0.336	***	0.809	*	0.584	**	3153
France	0.939	*	0.643	*	1.028		0.246	***	0.908		1.065		4141
Georgia	1.005	*	0.574	***	1.046	*	0.425	***	0.908		0.371	***	5578
Germany	1.103	***	1.020		1.072	***	0.209	***	0.688	***	0.270	***	7854
Ghana	1.002		1.095		0.997		0.586	***	0.957		3.996	***	3024
Great Britain	1.000		0.922		1.096	***	0.395	***	0.928		0.681	***	4008
Greece	1.002		1.296		1.021		0.562	***	1.031		0.322	***	2564
Guatemala	0.982	***	0.572	*	0.951		1.084		1.097		2.475	***	1869
Hungary	1.002		0.820		1.026		0.500	***	1.030		0.579	***	3726
India	0.901	***	0.795		1.014		0.904		0.963		5.111	***	4645
Indonesia	1.000		0.798		1.016		1.076		1.017		0.670	**	4962
Iran	0.997		1.195		0.991		0.508	***	0.914		0.713	*	3850
Iraq	1.009	*	1.161		1.081	**	0.916		1.247		0.907		2131
Ireland	1.000		0.849		1.079		0.952		1.003		1.025		501
Italy	1.137	***	1.499	*	1.038		0.562	***	0.809	**	0.330	***	4404
Japan	1.174	***	0.367	*	1.035		0.988		1.322		0.050	***	3939
Jordan	0.999		1.038		1.009		0.846		1.118		1.039		2073

Kazakhstan	1.001		0.912		0.959		0.750		1.087		0.602	*	2572
Kyrgyzstan	1.003		1.611	**	1.004		0.700	*	0.939		0.397	***	2600
Latvia	0.998		0.819		0.965		0.650	*	1.048		0.579	**	1300
Lebanon	0.997		0.739		1.091	*	0.680	*	0.955		0.152	***	2084
Libya	0.995		1.280		0.957		0.932		0.930		1.777	**	1591
Lithuania	1.008		0.537		1.079		0.825		0.750	*	0.256	***	2255
Malaysia	0.994	*	0.944		0.999		0.953		0.716	***	0.383	***	3800
Mexico	0.995	*	1.107		1.014		0.562	***	1.120	*	1.518	***	5147
Moldova	1.001		2.823	***	0.974		0.565	**	0.943		0.267	***	2328
Morocco	1.005		0.890		0.968		0.829		0.956		1.259		1081
Myanmar	0.995		1.075		0.969		0.577	**	1.417	**	1.213		1198
Netherlands	1.028		0.860		1.128	***	0.339	***	0.721	***	0.545	***	6059
New Zealand	1.000		0.688		1.164	***	0.292	***	0.871		0.587	**	2343
Nicaragua	0.979	**	0.703		1.042		0.583	***	0.904		2.708	***	1199
Nigeria	1.002		0.464	***	0.964		0.974		1.249	**	2.437	***	2958
Norway	1.472	**	0.705		1.072	*	0.222	***	0.754	**	0.703	*	3152
Pakistan	1.001		0.700	*	0.969		0.864		1.164	*	1.264		2864
Peru	1.005		1.055		1.012		0.482	***	0.959		1.247		3900
Philippines	1.003		0.950		1.044		1.013		0.923		0.474	**	2394
Poland	1.014	***	1.465	*	1.099	***	0.537	***	0.895		0.284	***	3975
Portugal	1.000		0.655		1.049		0.680	**	1.105		0.403	***	2381
Romania	1.009	***	2.263	***	1.057	**	0.529	***	0.919		0.172	***	6583
Russia	1.000		0.906		1.034	*	0.470	***	0.949		0.616	***	7867
Rwanda	0.993		1.511		1.144	***	0.688	*	0.845		0.841		1527
Singapore	0.999		0.840		1.052	**	0.528	***	1.099		0.489	***	3809
Slovakia	1.007	*	0.736		1.077	**	0.409	***	0.707	***	0.447	***	2492
Slovenia	0.996		0.533	**	1.087	***	0.365	***	0.896		0.714	*	3988
South Africa	1.000		0.825		1.021		0.649	***	0.980		0.886		5867
South Korea	1.019	**	0.667		1.286	***	0.468	***	0.785		0.059	***	3595
Spain	0.996		1.461	*	1.118	***	0.528	***	0.953		0.421	***	4543
Sweden	1.000		0.397	**	1.059		0.206	***	0.747	**	0.546	***	4107
Switzerland	1.000		1.421		1.101	***	0.325	***	0.649	***	0.220	***	5044
Tajikistan	1.018	***	0.406	**	0.871	***	0.554	**	0.921		1.249		1063
Thailand	0.999		0.377	***	1.146	***	0.904		1.057		0.575	***	3768
Tunisia	1.006		0.468	***	1.016		0.745	*	1.272	**	1.441	*	2179
Turkey	0.979	***	1.330	*	1.059	***	0.478	***	1.129		0.765	*	5373
Ukraine	1.005	**	1.144		1.096	***	0.558	***	1.054		0.522	***	5826
United States	1.000		1.314		1.155	***	0.397	***	1.002		0.310	***	5803
Uruguay	0.977	*	0.725		1.031		0.416	***	1.032		1.364	*	1800
Uzbekistan	1.002		0.235	***	0.909	*	1.013		1.033		1.273		1311
Yemen	0.976		6.241	***	0.918		0.706		0.450	*	4.832	*	495
Zambia	0.995		2.784	***	1.025		1.018		1.154		1.080		1329
Zimbabwe	1.001		1.564	**	0.995		1.396	*	1.082		1.175		2683

Notes: each row summarizes the results of a single logit model for the respective country. Cells show odds-ratios (exponentiated log-odds). Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

3 Overselling democracy - claiming legitimacy?

The link between democratic pretention, notions of democracy and citizens' evaluations of regimes' democraticness

Abstract

Many non-democratic countries anchor the word "democracy" in their national constitutions and everyday rhetoric, while ignoring the conceptual roots of democracy and its scholarly-defined procedural standards. This article argues that governments intentionally "oversell" democracy to their people, in order to exploit the legitimizing effect that the word embodies. This can, however, only succeed if the receiving side is susceptible to such claims to legitimacy. Accordingly, this study investigates how effective "overselling" attempts are in light of individuals' liberal vs. illiberal notions of democracy. Building on congruence theory, it juxtaposes the, at times blatant, "overselling" with individual-level notions of democracy and, thus, investigates whether governments' attempts to claim democratic-procedural legitimacy are contingent on citizens' understanding of the concept. Using multilevel moderation analyses, it shows that illiberal, authoritarian notions of democracy can convert "overselling" into positive evaluations of a regime, whereas prevailing liberal notions unmask "overselling" governments and create additional criticality. The conclusion argues that notions of democracy function as a filter, which matches true and false demand and supply of democracy. The findings help to understand why and how democratization movements can unfold and why some citizens see their country as democratic even though it is not.

KEYWORDS support for democracy, notions of democracy, regime legitimacy, autocracy, hybrid regimes, democratic pretention

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

The ideal of democracy has spread across the globe with more than 90% of the world's constitutions asserting democratic rule (Marquez, 2016, p. 22). Indeed, a truly astonishing variety of political systems around the world use the label *democracy* in their self-portrayal – from Swiss' direct democracy to Victor Orbán's envisioned "illiberal democracy" (see e.g., Buzogány, 2017; Bogaards, 2018) to the Chinese "socialist consultative democracy." Aside locally and ideologically sourced labels for different political systems, scholars debate and define very clear criteria, which help to identify when a political system deserves the label "democracy" and when it does not. Procedural democracy – or in Dahl's (1971) words "Polyarchy" – is present when the population is guaranteed effective participation, voting equality, enlightened understanding, control of the agenda and inclusiveness. While some political leaders strive for such ideal-typical democratic systems and respect the "rules of the game," others bend these rules and maintain "democracies with adjectives" (Collier and Levitsky, 1997) or straight-out autocracies. Though these regimes distort the ideals of democratic rule, many refer to themselves as democrats vis-à-vis their population. In fact: Marquez (2016) finds that of those 184 countries that proclaim democratic standards in their constitutions, only around 50 are certainly governed democratically[17]. Constitutional references to the word democracy clearly do not make a political system democratic – just as government's repeated claims to a rational- legal, democratic rule do not guarantee the adherence to the procedural fundamentals that define said rule. But how is this "overselling" of democracy perceived by the population and when and why does it fall on fertile ground?

Political scientists have long argued that non-democratic regimes make strategic use of the positive image that concept of democracy embodies by misappropriating multiparty elections and pseudo-democratic institutions (Diamond, 2002; Levitsky and Way, 2002; Wahman et al., 2013). The ubiquity of the term democracy also reaches individual citizens in varying ways, leading to individual concepts of democracy: some of these are more liberal, some are rather illiberal (Dalton et al., 2007; Schedler and Sarsfield, 2007). Regimes that pretend to be more democratic than they actually are, should, thus, be able to maintain a congruence between their flawed delivery of democracy and their citizens often illiberal notion of the term.

The proposed concept of "overselling" relates the *claim – to* follow democratic-procedural norms – to the observed level of procedural democracy, as attributed by "objective" scholarly

[17] As Marquez (2016) points out, apart from a few exceptions, almost all regimes around the world describe themselves as a democracy. Leaving the definition of democracy to the countries' regimes would, thus, make the distinction between democracy and non-democracy meaningless. Therefore, the term "non-democracy' refers here and throughout the manuscript to "non-democracies' due to the scholarly standards of academic experts, in deliberate juxtaposition to how regime elites brand their political order.

definitions. Empirically, this is operationalized by subtracting a countries level of procedural democracy from its rational-legal claims to legitimacy, which capture governments' *claims* to adhere to electoral principles and the rule of law. All countries that do not refer to democracy in their constitutions are excluded from the analysis which ensures that these rational-legal claims are backed by some form of constitutional promise of democratic rule. The main aim is to analyze the effectiveness of such governmental attempts to "oversell" procedural democracy to citizens, treating "overselling" as the main country-level explanatory variable. In the multilevel models, the individual's concept of democracy plays a moderating role, translating the governmental "overselling" attempts into individual assessments of current democracy-levels of their respective country. While most citizens are able to identify key components of democracy, others fail to do so and subsume illiberal, anti-democratic practices into their individual concept of democracy (Dalton et al., 2007; Cho, 2015). Concurrent with "democracies with adjectives," Schedler and Sarsfield (2007) label these "democrats with adjectives."

But how do "democrats with adjectives" perceive and evaluate "democracies with adjectives" and can "overselling" help to foster legitimacy-perceptions of political regimes?

Building upon previous work about "democracy misunderstood" (Kirsch and Welzel, 2019) and the citizens' "overrating" of their country's democratic quality (Kruse et al., 2019), this article adds an important puzzle-piece to the research on contemporary understanding of democracy and autocracy and its consequences. I argue that the missing piece lies in the interconnection of people's understanding of the concept democracy, the degree of "overselling" used by the ruling elite and the subsequent evaluation of democracy by said individuals. That is individuals' notions of democracy function as a filter used to process and reality-check governments' statements and transfer these into positive or negative evaluations of the incumbent regime. In order to legitimize their rule, political leaders create narratives that maintain a congruence between the concept of democracy that they supply and the concept that citizens demand. When supply and demand are incongruent, dissatisfaction with current levels of democracy and political opposition to the status quo might follow.

In technical terms, this paper investigates how "overselling" democracy affects people's evaluation of their governments' level of democracy and how this evaluation is moderated by different individual notions of democracy – while accounting for alternative explanatory factors. It fills a gap left in the literature, which has so far mostly focused on describing and explaining why people have different notions of democracy (see e.g., Dalton et al., 2007; Schedler and Sarsfield, 2007; Shin and Kim, 2018; Kirsch and Welzel, 2019). Going beyond these previous studies, this article does not inquire about the causes of popular "misunderstandings" of democracy but rather about their implications in the light of governmental legitimation strategies that "oversell"

procedural democracy. It bridges the gap between questions of legitimation strategies, notions of democracy and support for democracy or autocracy, respectively.

The analysis uses data from the World Values Survey (WVS), the Varieties of Democracy project and additional sources, specified below. Using multilevel modeling, it clearly shows the importance of civic, political education when it comes to unmasking "overselling" governments' democratic rhetoric for what it really is – propaganda. The findings show that people with authoritarian notions of democracy fall for false claims and evaluate their country's level of democracy more positively than those who possess liberal notions of democracy. But even more so, liberal notions of democracy enable criticalness which allows citizens to see through the democratic façade of "overselling" regimes.

Previous research shows that education, emancipative values and individual-level socioeconomic conditions are the main drivers of individuals' liberal notions of democracy (see e.g., Cho, 2015; Kirsch and Welzel, 2019; Zagrebina, 2020). Accordingly, this study does not assume that regimes' "overselling" strategies shape people's notions of democracy. In that case, different popular notions of democracy could not moderate whether governmental "overselling" leads people to inflationary or deflationary ratings of their regimes' democratic legitimacy due to a lack of variance within countries[18]. As there are many alternative explanations for satisfaction with democracy (see e.g., Claassen, 2020b; Kriesi, 2020; Wegscheider and Stark, 2020), I do not deem these findings as a penultimate causal explanation of how "overselling" works, but rather as highly relevant and informative description of how "overselling" and notions of democracy interact in forming democracy evaluations of citizens. The findings help to better understand, how and why seemingly authoritarian propaganda falls on fertile ground and why some populations reach a tipping point which makes them doubt their "overselling" governments and demand true democratic procedures. Potential causes for changing notions of democracy and their implications are picked up again in the discussion. Additional robustness checks presented in the Appendix further increase the credibility of the presented study and support the drawn conclusions.

The remainder of the paper is structured in the following way. The next section anchors the proposed argument on a theoretical foundation and presents testable hypotheses. Thereafter I discuss the conceptualization of "overselling democracy" and individuals' "notions of democracy" and operationalize the remaining variables. The section on data and methods summarizes the used modeling approach. Descriptive graphs and regression tables present the results, before turning to the evaluation of the hypotheses and a discussion of the results. The

[18] An additional mediation analysis (Appendix Figure A3 and Table A4) supports this assumption.

conclusion completes the previous discussion and embeds the findings in the larger political science literature.

3.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

This study argues that a government's "overselling" and individuals' notions of democracy are the two main components that define whether or not citizens' legitimacy demands and the respective government's supply are congruent and thus helpful for the maintenance of a regime's legitimacy. Congruence between what governments say and what citizens want to hear leads to a "perceived obligation to obey," making the demand and supply logic of legitimation "a relational concept that connects a dominant A to a subordinate B" (Gerschewski, 2018, p. 653–55). Also Suchman (1995) relies on congruence to elaborate on his idea of legitimacy. He argues, that "legitimacy is socially constructed in that it reflects a congruence between the behaviors of the legitimated entity and the shared (or assumedly shared) beliefs of some social group" (1995, 574). These considerations make congruence theory suitable to this research, as it proposes that a well- functioning political system be contingent on a sufficient level of congruence between governmental authority structures and the citizens' authority beliefs (Eckstein and Gurr, 1975; Eckstein, 1997). Following Haldenwang's (2017) supply and demand approach to legitimate rule, this analysis posits that governments offer different interpretations of democracy – exaggerated or understated – to their subordinates, who wish for their individual demands to be met. Hence, congruence – and in this sense also legitimacy – can be achieved on two paths. An uninformed public matched with an exaggerating government, or a democratic-enlightened public matched with true adherence to democratic standards that do not require additional legitimation attempts. So why is this relevant for our understanding of political regimes?

Legitimation forms a major pillar of political rule by enabling a governmental system to be seen as "proper and just" (Tyler, 2006, p. 375) and thereby allowing ruling elites to govern without the constant need for justification (Beetham, 1991; Gilley, 2009; Levi et al., 2009; Gerschewski, 2013). Legitimate rule is based on the adherence to established laws and the absence of "arbitrariness and despotism" (Tannenberg et al., 2020, 2). Two strands of research coexist here. On one hand, the search for the ideal political system, which is legitimate in and by itself, based on a normative, philosophical understanding of legitimacy. On the other hand, the empirical-analytical understanding of legitimacy, coined by Weber (1978 [1922]) and more recently Beetham (1991, 1993), allows governments and regimes to be seen as more or less legitimate (Haldenwang, 2017). Suchman (1995) stresses the subjectivity and manipulability of legitimacy, while arguing that it is something that cannot be attributed to a system by any individual but is

created by the general acceptance of those that are subject to its decisions. Governments' legitimation strategies – exemplified here by the "overselling" of democracy – are an example of the empirical-analytical approach, as the need for justification exemplified by these strategies precludes an inherent legitimacy of the political system. Mimicking democracies and selling this façade to the population, thus, becomes a way to attempt to procure legitimacy (Schedler, 2002). Kruse et al. (2019, p. 319) argue that (non-democratic) regimes "[. . .] indoctrinate people, so as to make them believe to live in a democracy, even though they do not." Their analysis points to the effectiveness of governmental legitimation attempts by explaining how and why people "overrate" their country's level of democracy and hence ascribe democratic- procedural legitimacy to their regime or do not. Complementing their analysis, in my article the question is no longer how right or wrong ordinary people are in their assessment of their country's level of democracy. Rather, the question is how effective are governmental attempts to claim democratic-procedural legitimacy and how is this effectiveness moderated by different popular notions of democracy?

Summing up the argument: When demand for and supply of democracy are in congruence, evaluations of the regime's democraticness should be more positive than in times of incongruence, reflecting the support for the regime and perceived legitimacy in the eyes of the ruled. If democracy, however understood, is in high demand everywhere[19], then evaluations of a government's current level of democracy resemble either desire for change or satisfaction with the status quo. Building on the premises of congruence theory, this article asks how different portrayals of democracy interact with different notions of democracy in establishing regime evaluations. The main proposition is that popular notions of democracy moderate governmental "overselling" in such fashion that:

H1: Overselling *in*creases ratings of the regime's democratic legitimacy among citizens with prevailing *illiberal* notions of democracy.

H2: Overselling *de*creases ratings of the regime's democratic legitimacy among citizens with prevailing *liberal* notions of democracy.

[19] As Appendix Figure 1 clearly shows.

3.3 CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND VARIABLES

3.3.1 What exactly is "overselling"?

"Overselling" democracy – as defined here – refers to the *claim* to follow democratic procedures, without translating these into political practice. For example: Following the ousting of Mursi's Muslim-Brotherhood led government, Egypt's 2014 election-winner al-Sisi asserted to have the goal of following a previously established "roadmap to democracy," while simultaneously preventing opposition candidates from competing and culminating in the return to military rule (Debre and Morgenbesser, 2017). In a similar vein, the Communist Party of China refer to their system of government as a "socialist consultative democracy." Their permanent mission to the United Nations states that "China's democratic system has been continuously improved, and the forms of democracy are becoming more varied. The people are exercising fully their right to be masters of the state." (Perm. Miss. of PRC to the UN, n.d.). Both countries are ranked as unfree by Freedom House (2020). Still, they make references to democratic principles and make claims they cannot or do not uphold. They are "overselling" democracy in order to profit from its universal positive connotations. Aside these two examples, the third wave of democratization (Huntington, 1991) brought with it a wave of democratic pretention, as most of the regimes that began transition did not fully consolidate and created a democratic gray zone – mostly populated by "hybrid" or "competitive authoritarian" regimes (O'Donnell, 1996; Carothers, 2002; Diamond, 2002; Levitsky and Way, 2002, 2010). These regimes rely on the "dictator's toolkit" (Frantz and Kendall-Taylor, 2014) to prevent meaningful regime change. I argue, that one of these tools is the "overselling" of democracy. International aid and status are often subject to improvements toward democracy (see e.g., Dietrich and Wright, 2015) and, more generally, democracy has a universal positive connotation and is deemed desirable by most citizens around the world (Bratton and Mattes, 2001; Inglehart, 2003; Dalton et al., 2007; Chu et al., 2008; Rose et al., 2011; Klingemann, 2014)[20]. Hence, it seems only logical for rulers to wave a democratic flag, anchor the term in their constitutions and thus exploit the lip-service to the word as a way to procure legitimacy. This sounds rather uninventive and easy to see through, but by anchoring a rational-legal rhetoric in everyday politics, citizens without the proper education and conceptual understanding of democracy potentially take these *claims* at face value and rate their respective regime as more democratic than it actually is: "overselling" succeeds. On the other hand, we know that individual-level socioeconomic conditions, education (Almond and Verba, 1963), emancipative (Kirsch and Welzel, 2019) and liberal democratic values (Nathan, 2020) improve

[20] Appendix Figure A1 visualizes this ubiquitous, overt support for democracy based on two WVS questions.

individuals' conceptual knowledge of democracy in the long run and thus increase pressure on the supply side of the political system.

Measuring these governmental claims and relating them to measures of procedural democracy is a challenge, in so far that governments' claims differ in their intention and scope and are not readily quantifiable and comparable. Fortunately, the V-Dem Project introduced new expert-coded questions on claims to legitimacy (Coppedge et al., 2020, p. 208–10). Of these, the claim that most closely relates to concepts of procedural democracy measures regimes' use of rational-legal justification (Tannenberg et al., 2020)[21]. Rational-legal claims "pertain to legal norms and regulations as laid out for instance in the constitution regarding access to power (e.g., elections) as well as exercise of power (e.g., rule of law)." Thus, the rational-legal claims evolve around two main concepts, (1) electoral access to power and (2) rule of law-based exercise of power. For each country-year coders then evaluate the extent that "the current government refer[s] to the legal norms and regulations in order to justify the regime in place" (Coppedge et al., 2020, p. 209– 10; Tannenberg et al., 2020). Though electoral access to power and rule of law are not sufficient to call a country a democracy, they form a necessary procedural basis of democracy[22]. Being well aware of these empirical limitations, rational-legal claims are *the closest and most credible approximation* for which a large set of empirical data is available. To ensure that regimes are not referring to undemocratic legal norms and regulations when resorting to rational-legal claims to legitimacy all countries that do *not* refer to "democracy" or "democratic" in their constitutions are excluded based on the coding of the Comparative Constitutions Project (Elkins et al., 2005)[23].

The final variable "overselling democracy" is created by subtracting a measure of procedural democracy from the claims to rational-legal rule. This subtrahend of the equation needs to reflect the logic of the rational-legal claim, while being inclusive enough to measure levels of democracy. Accordingly, it mirrors the claims' two main concepts: (1) electoral access to power and (2) rule of law-based exercise of power. The final "procedural democracy" variable is created by combining the V-Dem's variables *clean elections*, *elected officials* and *suffrage*

[21] For more detailed information on alternative regime legitimation- strategies, see Appendix Notes 2.

[22] for conceptual debate on the rule of law see e.g., Møller and Skaaning (2012).

[23] Interestingly, the countries that make the least references to the word democracy are some of the most established democracies (e.g., USA, Belgium, Denmark). Obviously, those are not excluded. Jordan, Malaysia, Singapore, Yemen and Cyprus are dropped from the sample, as they make no references to democracy in their constitution (Elkins et al., 2005).

(access to power) with the *rule of law index*[24] (exercise of power). The aggregation combines complementarity – and substitutability- based understandings of democracy (see e.g., Brunkert et al., 2019) by using an equally weighted average of the sum and the product of the index's subcomponents (all variables taken from V-Dem V10 by Coppedge et al., 2020, p. 281–82, 42)[25].

Figure 1 visualizes the idea of "overselling" democracy by plotting procedural democracy against rational-legal claims to legitimacy. Subsequently, the space can be separated into "oversellers" and "undersellers" along a 45° line. In wave six, New Zealand uses barely any *claims* but features high levels of procedural democracy. Zimbabwe occupies the opposite end of the scale and Georgia sits right in the middle. Georgia, thus, backs up its modest claims with modest procedural democracy, while Zimbabwe's claims are far from their actual democratic performance. After subtracting procedural democracy from rational-legal claims to legitimacy, governments that rely heavily on these, while simultaneously not backing them up *via* institutional and procedural performance, score high on "overselling." The other end of the scale is occupied by countries that show very high levels of procedural democracy and completely or predominantly refrain from using related claims to legitimacy[26].

To put these observations into perspective, the two extreme cases – Zimbabwe and New Zealand – can serve as further insightful examples. Zimbabwe is in the WVS sample for wave six and seven and maintained a V-Dem coding of high levels of rational-legal claims to legitimacy even after long-term president Robert Mugabe was removed from office in 2017. His successor and former vice president Emmerson Mnangagwa has since taken over and reaffirmed his claim to power in the contested 2018 election, which he won with a majority of 50.8% of the votes (BBC News, 2018). In a New York Times opinion piece, he commits:

"[. . .] that in the new Zimbabwe, all citizens will have the right of free speech, free expression and free association. At the heart of this will be free and fair elections, to be held as scheduled in 2018, with all impartial observers who wish to witness the Zimbabwean democracy

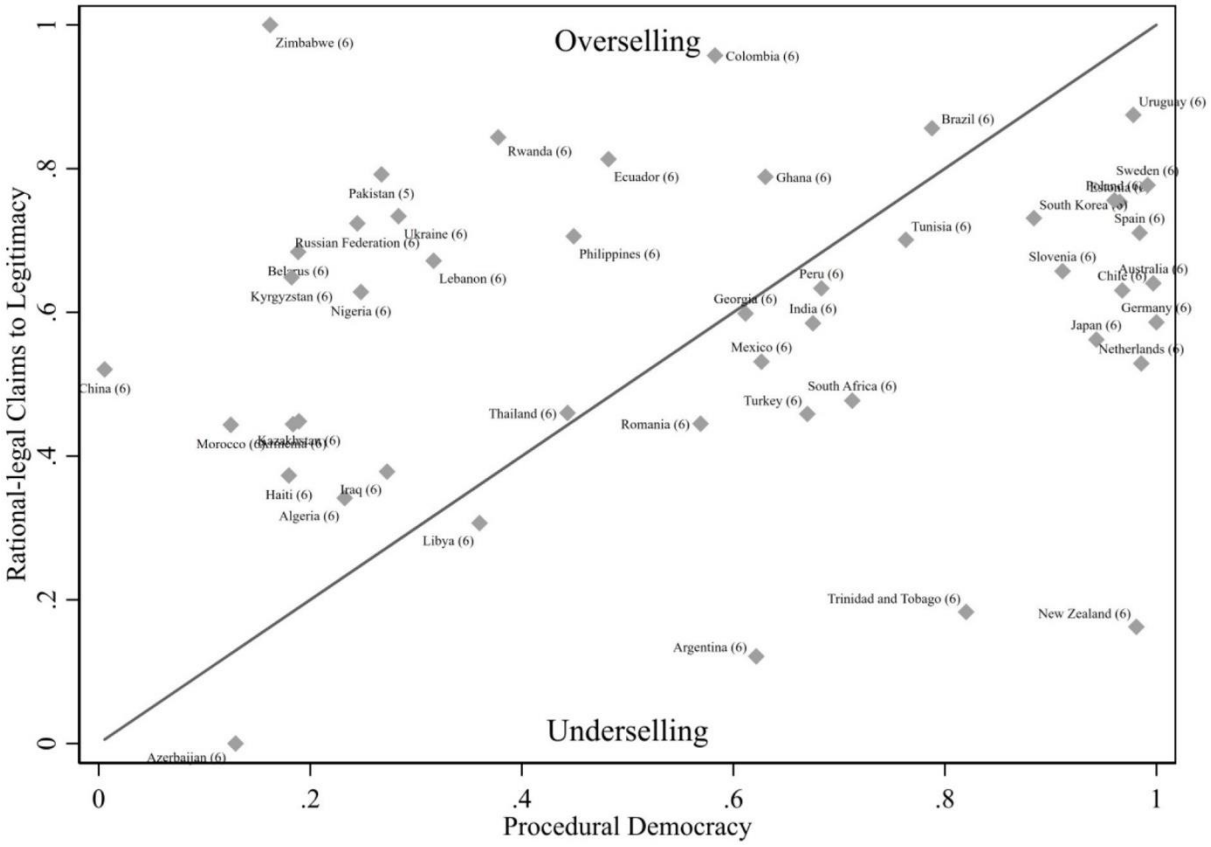
[24] Which in itself is a composite variable formed by Bayesian factor analysis. It combines the following indicators: Compliance with high court; compliance with judiciary; high court independence; lower court independence; executive respects constitution; rigorous and impartial public administration; transparent laws with predictable enforcement; access to justice for men; access to justice for women; judicial accountability; judicial corruption decision; public sector corrupt exchanges; public sector theft; executive bribery and corrupt exchanges; executive embezzlement and theft. (Coppedge et al., 2020, 282) For more details consult the V-Dem Codebook v10 pp. 281-282.

[25] Using V-Dem's unaltered, original "Liberal Democracy" or "Polyarchy" instead of the procedural democracy measure does not change the results of the analyses (Appendix Table A3, model 3 and 4).

[26] Both components are measured in the year preceding each national survey of the WVS' waves five to seven to account for temporal ordering and the possibility that the survey interviews were conducted early in the specified year. Descriptive statistics for all variables can be found in the Appendix Table A2.

at work welcome to attend." And "[. . .] that we are bringing about a new era of transparency, openness and commitment to the rule of law" (Mnangagwa, 2018).

Figure 1: "Overselling" and "underselling" democracy



While these claims stand prominent in the media, Zimbabwe has been found to crack-down on opposition actors, limit the space for free speech and held a highly contested election (Feldstein and Steven, 2022). In contrast to Mnangagwa's claims, V-Dem's measure for rule of law is on a downward trend since 2013. Freedom of expression and association are in decline since the 2018 election, though still above the levels experienced under Mugabe. At the same time, the references to the word "democracy" or "democratic" reached an all-time high with Zimbabwe's new constitution of 2013 (from 9 to 19 references). Taken together, the public statements of Mnangagwa and the countries continuing struggle to introduce real political reform and respect individual liberties paint a very clear picture of what this article defines as "overselling" democracy.

For New Zealand (NZ) the story is much simpler. According to the Comparative Constitutions Project (Elkins and Ginsburg, 2021), there is no mention of the word "democracy" or "democratic" in the long history of New Zealand's constitution. Simultaneously, NZ is a prime member of several scientific democracy scoreboards. Freedom House ranks them as "free" with a score of 97–99 out of 100, Polity IV awards them their highest score from 1945 to today and

also in V-Dem's coding the country scores just a few decimals below the hypothetical maximum of one. These academic measures of democracy go hand in hand with an unobtrusive use of rational-legal claims to legitimacy by leading politicians in the country. Even though these claims are used, these are truthful depictions of institutional reality and not used to "oversell" something that does not exist, as shown in the case of Zimbabwe. The modesty of the used claims and the high level of democratic performance to back it up, thus, make NZ a quintessential case of underselling democracy. In fact, the NZ government could stress their adherence to established rule of law, electoral integrity and turnover much more extensively, without coming close to falling into the "overseller"-category.

3.3.2 Individual notions of democracy

The literature on support for democracy points out with increased frequency that democracy is not a universally understood concept (Dalton et al., 2007; Cho, 2014, 2015; Shin, 2015; Shin and Kim, 2018; Kirsch and Welzel, 2019), while its philosophical propositions – freedom, equality and self-determination – can be regarded as universal human values (Sen, 1999; Beetham, 2009). Dalton et al. (2007) combine existing survey research and use recoded open-ended questions about the content of democratic government to assess what the world's citizens associate with democracy. Their evidence suggests a relatively universal, positive notion of democracy, relating it foremost to individual freedoms and civil liberties. Besides overwhelming overt support for democracy (Inglehart, 2003), most individuals are able to identify the key components of democracy, defined as free elections, civil liberties and the rule of law (Cho, 2015). While being able to identify these key components, a surprisingly large share of citizens from new democracies, autocracies and even from established democracies fail to reject false statements about democracy and attribute illiberal governmental practices to the term democracy (Schedler and Sarsfield, 2007; Cho, 2015; Kirsch and Welzel, 2019). These divergent "notions of democracy" help explain the seemingly ubiquitous support for democracy, while, in extreme cases, reverting the meaning of support for democracy to support for autocracy (Kirsch and Welzel, 2019; Kruse et al., 2019). However, democratic experience can help overcome misunderstandings and long exposure to democratic institutions can engender the acculturation of democratic values (Mishler and Rose, 2002). Better knowledge of democracy also helps citizens to evaluate their countries levels of democracy more precisely (Wegscheider and Stark, 2020), while general support for democracy can speed up democratic consolidation and de-stabilize autocratic rule (Claassen, 2020a). From a political culture perspective, the elimination of existential threats and societal and economic modernization have been found to enable individuals and societies to move from survival to self- expression and emancipative values and

subsequently drive demand for political change (Inglehart and Appel, 1989; Welzel et al., 2003; Welzel, 2013; Brunkert et al., 2019).

The moderator, notions of democracy, is conceptualized following Cho (2015) and Kirsch and Welzel (2019). For their analysis, Cho argues that "only those who were able to evaluate both sets of democratic and non-democratic regime characteristics accurately are rated [. . .] as fully informed about democracy" (p. 241). Following Kirsch and Welzel (2019), this is measured by the variable "liberal notions vs. authoritarian notions of democracy" (henceforth LND- vs.-AND), which captures individuals' appraisal of liberal notions while simultaneously rejecting authoritarian notions of democracy. The variable is created using the item-battery on "essential characteristics of democracy" included in waves five to seven of the World Values Survey (Inglehart et al., 2020). Of these 12 items, four are best suited to represent the procedural understanding of democracy, featured here. The selection of political leaders *via* free elections and the attribution of the protection of civil liberties onto democracy form the liberal notions of democracy (aggregation *via* arithmetic mean). In opposition to these, authoritarian notions attribute to democracy the role of "religious authorities in interpreting laws" and the "takeover of the military in case of an incompetent government" (aggregation *via* arithmetic mean). LND-vs.-AND are then created by subtracting the values of the latter from the former[27]. Hence, this measures a liberal notion of democracy in its higher scores that is free from illiberal, authoritarian notions.

3.3.3 Perceived democraticness of own country

The dependent variable of the multilevel model builds on the WVS' variable, in which respondents are asked "[. . .] how democratically is this country being governed today" on a 10-point scale. It is rescaled to a range of zero to one. Contrary to the questions on support for democracy or support for democratic government in general, this variable captures individuals' assessment of their current government's democratic performance. If democracy is seen as generally good and desirable, then evaluation of each government's democratic performance involuntarily become a measure of support for the current government, based on the notions of democracy which were inquired upon previously. Hence, it is only applicable to equate democracy ratings with support for the regime under the condition that individuals also express general support for democratic governance. To account for this conditionality, the dependent variable is

[27] Herein I slightly deviate from Kirsch and Welzel, as they add gender equality to LNDs and obedience to authorities to ANDs. While I generally support their approach, the aggregation used here is capturing the procedural understanding of democracy better. As the logical opposite of "liberal' would be "illiberal', I repeatedly refer to authoritarian notions of democracy as illiberal notions of democracy throughout the text.

multiplied (weighted) with the WVS' variable which asks respondents about their personal importance of democracy on a ten-point scale. High scores now indicate support for democratic governance and high evaluations of the current government, which I equate with a perceived legitimacy of the regime in place. Low values indicate that respondents either (1) do not support democratic governance in general and do not see their country as democratic, (2) do not support democratic governance, but think that their current regime is democratic or (3) support democratic governance but do not see the current regime as democratic.

3.3.4 Country-level control variables

To take into consideration the democratic learning perspective emphasized by Mishler and Rose (2002), the duration of the current regime, as well as the countries "democracy-stock" (Gerring et al., 2005) are included. The latter is created using each country's cumulative sum of their liberal democracy score (Coppedge et al., 2020) up to the year in which the country was surveyed. It captures the cumulative experience with liberal democracy since 1945. To account for skewness due to some longstanding highly democratic countries in the sample, the variable is log-transformed. The regime duration is captured by counting the years since regime change identified by V-Dem's regime information variable (Coppedge et al., 2020, p. 130).

A free media would potentially counter governments' attempts to convince the public of their democraticness and unmask political corruption and propaganda. Hence, the regime's censorship efforts are included using a combined variable (aggregated using the arithmetic mean) for broadcast, print and internet censorship efforts (Coppedge et al., 2020).

Also, political violence might bias individual assessments of the current state of democracy of their country and is accordingly controlled for using the political terror scale (Gibney et al., 2020). Lastly, the log-transformed gross domestic product is added to account for performance-based regime support (World Bank, 2019). Period affects are controlled *via* the inclusion of wave dummies.

3.3.5 Individual-level control variables

More educated and politically interested citizens should be better equipped to see through governments' false claims (Almond and Verba, 1963; Geddes and Zaller, 1989; Inglehart and Welzel, 2010; Campbell, 2019). On the other hand, education also reinforces the visions of the current political system in younger generations (e.g., Alwin and Krosnick, 1991; Sears and Valentino, 1997). Thus, the effect might be ambiguous. Education is recoded to harmonize previous WVS waves with the latest wave seven. Political interest is measured as the mean of the two WVS variables "interest in politics" and "important in life: politics," after rescaling both to a

zero to one range. Also, financial satisfaction and income-scales might lead to ambiguous regime evaluations, if individuals attribute their economic situation to governments' performance (see e.g., Chu et al., 2008). Emancipative values (Welzel, 2013) are included at the individual and the country level, as these have been found to enhance criticalness and stand in opposition to authoritarian values (Kirsch and Welzel, 2019).

3.4 DATA AND METHODS

To probe the hypotheses, two analytical steps follow. First, a descriptive analysis outlines the basic relationship between the variables. Second, multilevel moderation analysis with cross-level interactions, random intercepts and slopes tests the proposed relationships while controlling for alternative explanatory factors. The nature of the data and research goal necessitate the use of a multilevel framework (Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal, 2012), as individual survey participants are nested within countries and waves. The total scope of the analyzed sample comprises 70 countries, of which 31 have been surveyed only once, 27 have been surveyed twice and 12 have been surveyed three times[28]. All level one variables are country-wave mean-centered, which is recommended especially in an interaction analysis, since it "[…] minimizes the possibility of finding spurious cross-level interaction effects" (Hofmann and Gavin, 1998; Aguinis et al., 2013, p. 1512;). Additionally, Heisig and Schaeffer (2019) argue for the inclusion of random slopes for lower-level variables in cross-level interactions, as estimates can otherwise be biased anti-conservatively. Following their recommendation, the effect of notions of democracy is allowed to vary for each country-wave. The main model, with evaluations of current democracy levels as the dependent variable, can be spelled out as follows:

$$(1)\ \mathrm{Y_{ij}} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mathrm{z_{ij}} + \beta_2 \mathrm{x_j} + \beta_3 \mathrm{x_j z_{ij}} + \beta_{4-10} \mathrm{I_{ij}} + \beta_{11-19} \mathrm{C_j} + \mathrm{u_{0j}} + \mathrm{u_{1j} z_{ij}} + \mathrm{e_{ij}}$$

Where β_0 denotes the constant, β_1 the coefficient for the individual level moderator liberal vs. authoritarian notions of democracy (z_{ij}) and β_2 the coefficient for the country-level variable "overselling" (x_j). The coefficient of the interaction term ($x_j z_{ij}$) is captured by β_3. Additionally, the overall intercept and the slope for the level one moderator are allowed to vary across countries. Thus, the random part of the model includes the random intercept u_{0j}, the random-slope parameter $u_{1j} z_{ij}$, as well as the level one error e_{ij}. I_{ij} denotes a vector of level one control variables with β_{4-10} as its set of coefficients. C_j is a vector of the level two control variables, with its associated coefficients β_{11-19}.

[28] For a detailed list of all countries, waves and number of interviewees see Appendix Table A1.

All individual level data is taken from wave five to seven of the World Values Survey (WVS). By now, the WVS covers a majority of the world's population and provides the most extensive data to test the derived hypotheses. Each country-wave is considered as a separate level-two entity. Regime specific effects which might have changed in-between survey-waves are absorbed by the level-two random effect attributed to each country-wave cluster.

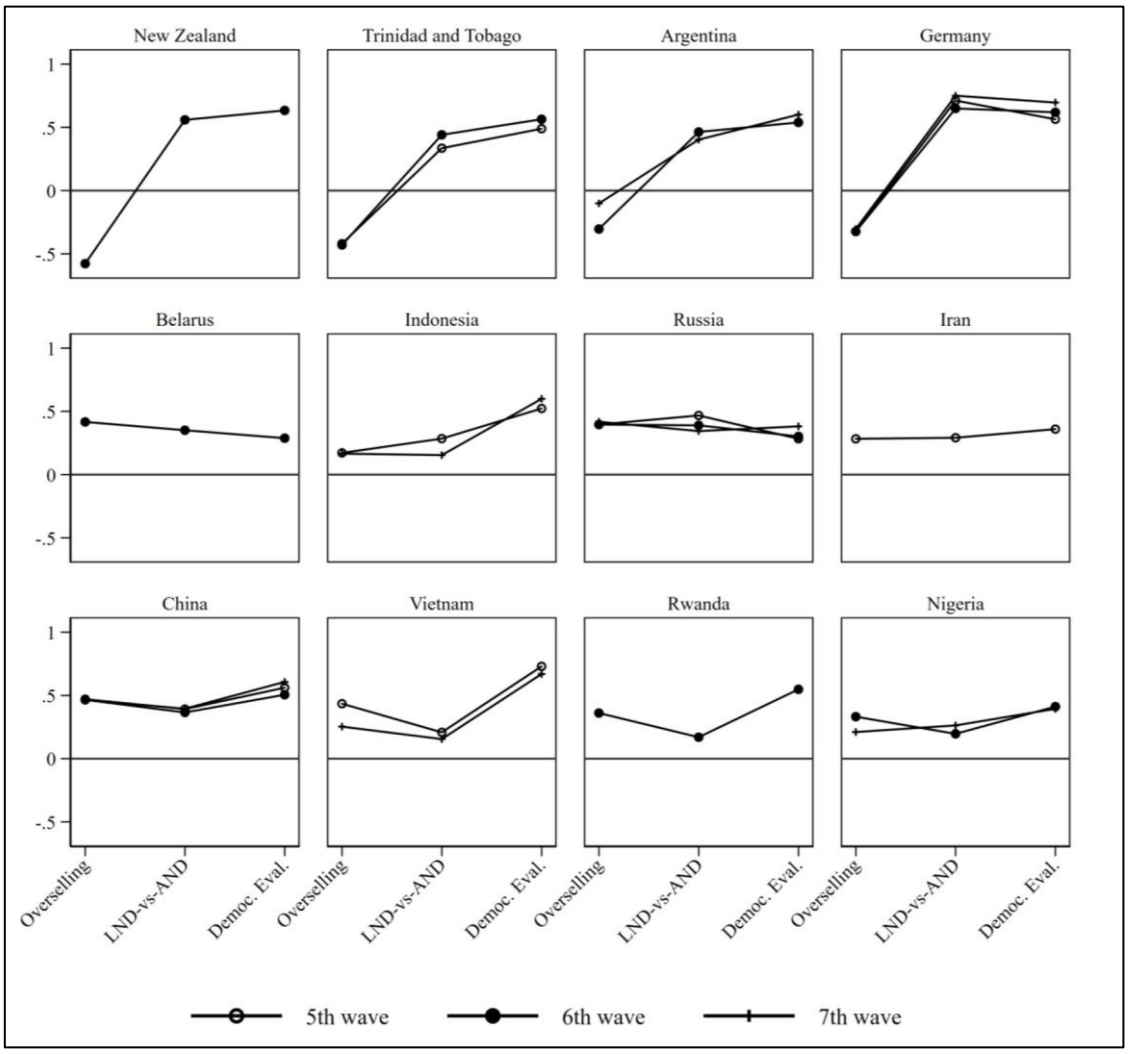
There exists some valid criticism toward the reliability of survey-responses in authoritarian countries (see e.g., Kuran, 1997). Citizens might fear negative repercussions when criticizing their government's performance – for instance appraising democracy while living under autocratic rule. To account for this potential bias, the notes (Appendix Notes A1) and robustness-check section (Table A3 in Appendix, model 2) of the appendix discuss this in detail and provide additional analyses, which validate the results presented here.

3.5 Descriptive analysis

Figure 2 visualizes the main argument and shows the level two variable "overselling," the country-level average of the level one moderator LND-vs.-AND and the dependent variable in relation to each other. The first four graphs depict a selection of democratically run countries, in which "underselling" meets a democratic, critical and liberal citizenry which is then transferred into positive evaluations of each country's level of democracy. The second line shows countries with unclear or arbitrary relationships and the last line depicts the effectiveness of "overselling" democracy when combined with prevailing authoritarian notions in the citizenry. The "arbitrary" group does not seem to support any clearly observable patterns, however, when put into relation with the more extreme examples, a clearer picture emerges. Without the LND-vs.-AND in-between the other two variables, there is no observable pattern, as high levels of democracy evaluations seem to exist for different levels of "overselling." Especially the first and last line emphasize this observation – for example Germans and Chinese see their country as similarly democratic. The variance of "overselling" alone cannot explain the democracy-ratings of the individual citizens. As hypothesized, the notions of democracy now function as a filter through which the claims of the regime are assessed and transferred into regime-evaluations. The bottom-line graphs show that if exaggerated claims to democratic legitimacy meet a flawed notion of democracy, regimes are evaluated more democratically than one would expect. On the other hand, if high levels of democracy and low levels of claims to legitimacy meet an "enlightened," liberal public, the evaluations also turn out positive, but move closer to their associated notions of democracy.

The varying angles that can be seen at the LND-vs.-AND-link between "overselling" and the dependent variable can be interpreted as varying levels of criticalness. The pointier the V-shape becomes, the less critical the population. This occurs most frequently in South-East Asian countries and Central-Asian countries, where citizens often attribute economic performance to democratic governance as the findings of Chu et al. (2008) and Shin and Kim (2018) suggest. The most critical publics approximate the shape of an inverted letter L – with LND-vs.- AND, on the one hand, and democraticness ratings, on the other, tending to be at a par. Understood quite visually, the notions of democracy become the turning point, which defines when unqualified support for an "overselling" regime turns into qualified criticalness. Once the public embraces liberal notions of democracy, the angle shifts from a positive evaluation toward a more critical evaluation, which does not take the government's claims at face value and evaluates their level of democracy accordingly.

Figure 2: "Overselling," LND-vs.-AND and Democracy Evaluations: Country-wave mean values.



Indonesia can serve as an example for such a within- country shift. In-between wave five and seven, liberal notions have given way to authoritarian notions (ΔLND−vs.−AND =−0.13***), while "overselling" remained stable. The result is an increased effectiveness of "overselling" and higher attributions of democracy to the incumbent government (ΔDemocEval= 0.09***) due to lower normative evaluation-standards. Unfortunately, there is no new data available for Belarus, as the recent protests and the exposure of governmental lies would suggest that the public has moved toward liberal notions of democracy and has reverted the weak convex relationship visible in Figure 2 into a weak concave relationship with the notions of democracy resembling the turning point from unqualified support to qualified criticality.

Clustering the different types of regimes into "overseller," "intermediate" and "underseller" and the individuals into "illiberal," "mixed," and "liberal" can help to better understand the distribution of these two main variables and their interaction in the following multilevel models. Table 1 shows the cross-tabulation of these two variables. As with most transformations from continuous to categorical measurement, the right selection of cut-off values is crucial[29]. Keeping these limitations in mind, the cross-tabulation shows that in each type of regime, individuals with all three categorized notions of democracy exist. However, there also is a premium of illiberal individuals in "overselling" regimes and of liberal individuals in underselling regimes. The category of mixed individuals makes up the largest fraction. This is in line with the findings of Schedler and Sarsfield (2007), Cho (2015), and Kirsch and Welzel (2019), who find that most individuals are able to identify key elements of democratic rule but – at the same time – fail to reject authoritarian practices as clearly undemocratic. Re-using the example of Indonesia, this categorization reveals that from wave five to seven, the share of individuals with illiberal notions of democracy increased by 5% (from 3.5 to 8.8) and that of individuals with liberal notions decreased by 10% (23– 13%), which explains how and why "overselling" falls on fertile ground. Additional notable examples of "overselling" regimes with large shares of individuals who subscribe to liberal notion of democracy include: Kazakhstan (wave 6: 41% LND), Moldova (wave

[29] The original WVS items (scaled 1-10) were each recoded into a binary variable, which shows support of a notion of democracy, if the individual gave it a score of 8 or higher, meaning that this aspect is a very important part of democracy for this individual. The binary scores are then summarized by subtracting the sum of important authoritarian notions from the sum of important liberal notions (resulting in five categories from−2 to 2). The categories are then labelled in such a fashion, that only those that fully subscribe to "free elections' and "civil liberties' and reject "religious laws' and "military takeover' are seen as fully liberal. Individuals who fully subscribe to one or two of the authoritarian notions and reject the liberal notions are seen as fully authoritarian. All others are classified as mixed. Changing the cutoff-value to 7 shifts the distribution slightly in favour of the liberal individuals. For the classification of regimes into "underselling', "intermediate' and "overselling', I use the variable metrics to identify the categories. Those regimes that lie ½ standard deviation (~0.13) above or below zero—the point where claims and institutions are in balance—are identified as "intermediate. Regimes outside this threshold are "oversellers' for values above this cutoff and "undersellers' for values below.

5: 49% LND), Belarus (wave 6: 42% LND), Armenia (40% LND), Burkina Faso (wave 5: 42% LND), Ukraine (wave 6: 48% LND), Russia (wave 6: 46% LND), and Morocco (wave 5: 44% LND).

Table 1: Cross-tabulation of categorical versions of "overselling" and "notions of democracy."

	"Illiberal" individuals	"Mixed" individuals	"Liberal" individuals	Total
Underselling regimes	1,305	19,717	20,304	41,326
	3.16	47.71	49.13	100.00
Intermediate regimes	22,69	26,066	11,416	39,751
	5.71	65.57	28.72	100.00
Overselling regimes	3,775	41,435	13,887	59,097
	6.39	70.11	23.50	100.00
Total	7,349	87,218	45,607	140,174
	5.24	62.22	32.54	100.00

Row-percentages shown in second line. For the creation of the categorical variables, please see footnote 13.

If I were asked to make any predictions based on the claims of this article, it would be that these countries are most likely to experience protest – leading them to a new equilibrium between their regimes' democratic performance, claims to legitimacy and public demands for civil liberties, free and fair elections and the rule of law. In fact, we already saw an outburst of protest in early 2022 in Kazakhstan. Though fueled by rising prices, the protest included demands for more civil liberties and the fight against corruption (Khashimov and Couch, 2022). Morocco was part of the Arab Uprisings in 2011–2012, but opposition was appeased and co-opted by the existing regime. In line with this article's story, Thyen and Gerschewski (2017, p. 49) find that "[. . .] in Morocco, the perceived incongruence between claims to democratize the political regime and the perceived violation of these claims influenced the decision to participate in the 2011 protests." Also, Moldovans repeatedly protested against corruption and false promises and Belarussian pro-democracy protests dominated the media in 2020–2021. These examples exemplify how notions of democracy, that are present within a society, matter. Though, without more in-depth qualitative data, it is difficult to draw a causal arrow from widespread liberal notions of democracy to specific protest movements.

3.6 MULTILEVEL REGRESSION RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the multilevel moderation analysis are summarized in Table 2, whereof model one contains only the main variables and their interaction. Model two adds all individual level control variables and model three additionally tests for country-level confounders.

The initial results are robust to the inclusion of a wide array of alternative explanatory factors. Since the level one moderator LND-vs.-AND is country-wave mean-centered, it captures the within variance partition. That is, comparing citizens with mean levels of LND-vs.-AND with those that score one unit higher. As extreme changes regarding "overselling" are not expected, the variable has been rescaled to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. In substantial terms and in the unaltered version of this variable the standard deviation amounts to 0.26. Thus, a one standard deviation increase in the model (toward more "overselling") implies either a decrease of procedural democracy by 0.26, an increase of rational-legal claims to legitimacy by 0.26 or a combination of both (on a hypothetical range from −1 to 1 in the unaltered variable). These come close to changes that we can observe in i.e., cases of regime change or a leadership change, which may bring new claims to legitimacy.

In the main models including the interaction "Overselling," LND-vs.-AND, as well as their interaction show high levels of significance. In interaction analyses, the "main" effect of the two interacted variables is contingent on another. This implies that a significant finding for a single coefficient shows that this variable has an effect on the outcome, when the second variable of the interaction is zero (here its mean value). Thus, "overselling" is perceived negatively and decreases the perceived level of democracy by citizens who lie on the mean value of LND-vs.-AND, which falls into the "mixed individuals" category of Table 1. Similarly, for LND-vs.-AND the results show that for a case which shares the global mean value of "overselling" a more liberal notion of democracy enhances positive evaluations of a country's level of democracy. However, the interaction reverses this effect. When "overselling" meets a democratically well-informed citizen, their evaluation of their country's level of democracy becomes significantly more negative, speaking in favor of the hypothesized moderation. If authoritarian notions of democracy prevail, "overselling" can successfully enhance assessments of democratic performance.

Thus, notions of democracy indeed function as a filter, which helps individuals to separate true democratic, procedural performance from empty claims. Figure 3 disentangles this complex relationship and visualizes the interaction effect. It shows that liberal vs. authoritarian notions of democracy completely reverse the possible effect that "overselling" can have: even in case of strong moderations, complete reversals in the direction of an effect are rarely seen. The marginal effects plot supports the findings from the previous descriptive analysis, while simultaneously

Table 2: Evaluation of democratic quality.

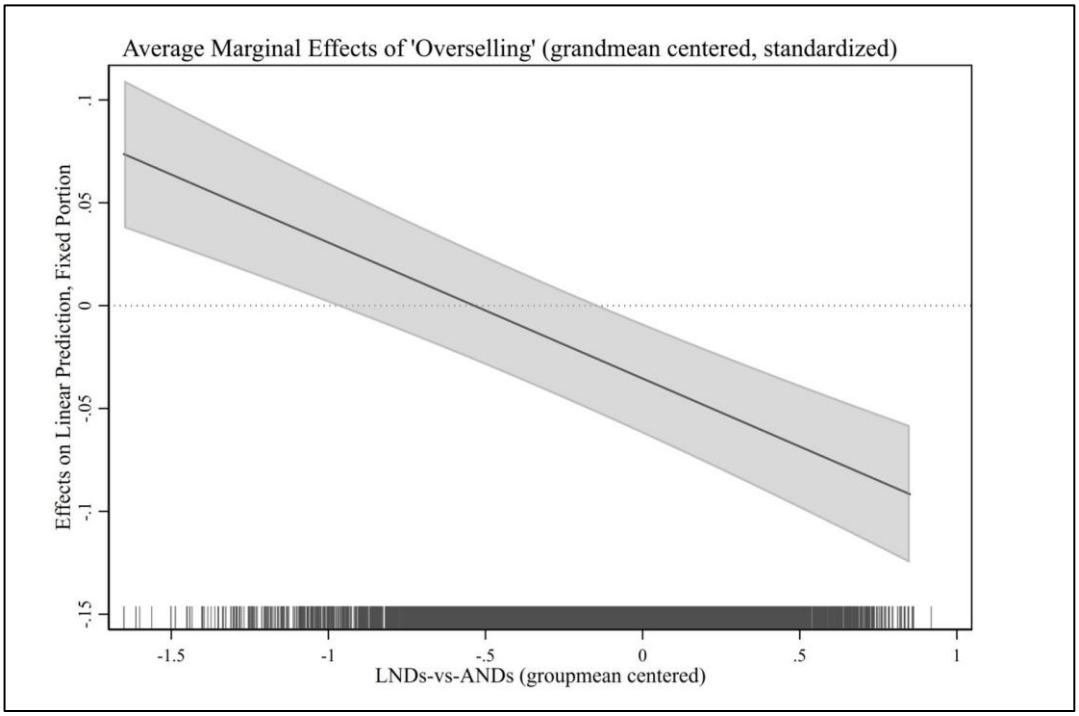
	(1)		(2)		(3)	
Overselling democracy	−0.047***	(0.010)	−0.048***	(0.010)	−0.035**	(0.014)
LND vs. AND	0.105***	(0.009)	0.111***	(0.008)	0.111***	(0.008)
Overselling * LND vs. AND	−0.071***	(0.010)	−0.066***	(0.009)	−0.066***	(0.009)
Individual-level control variables						
Education			−0.006	(0.006)	−0.006	(0.006)
Income			0.044***	(0.009)	0.044***	(0.009)
Political interest			−0.066***	(0.006)	−0.066***	(0.006)
Trust in media			0.126***	(0.008)	0.126***	(0.008)
Financial satisfaction			0.131***	(0.008)	0.131***	(0.008)
Emancipative values			−0.066***	(0.012)	−0.066***	(0.012)
Age			0.000**	(0.000)	0.000**	(0.000)
Country-level control variables						
Regime duration					0.001	(0.001)
Censorship effort					−0.119*	(0.059)
Political terror scale					−0.012	(0.013)
Emancipative values (Mean)					−0.050	(0.168)
GDP (logged)					0.010	(0.006)
Democracy Stock					0.031	(0.019)
Wave 6 - 2010–2014					−0.057**	(0.022)
Wave 7 - 2017–2019					−0.056*	(0.027)
Constant	0.483***	(0.011)	0.483***	(0.011)	0.296*	(0.149)
AIC	23953		17522		17520	
BIC	24032		17670		17747	
Intraclass correlation	0.162		0.168		0.145	
Variance random slope	0.008		0.007		0.007	
Variance random intercept	0.013		0.013		0.011	
Covariance RS RI	0.005		0.005		0.004	
Variance residuals			0.066		0.066	
Number of Country-Waves	121		121		121	
Observations	140174		140174		140174	

Robust standard errors in parentheses (* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, and *** p < 0.001); All individual-level variables are country-wave-mean centered; Reference category for wave dummies is wave 5.

controlling for all potentially confounding variables (kept at mean values). Hence, hypothesis H1 cannot be rejected. When "overselling" falls on fertile ground – that is individuals with authoritarian notions – individual evaluations of democracy turn out positive and supportive of the regime in place. Though there is statistically significant support for this claim, these results should be taken with a grain of salt as the majority of the observations lays outside of the range that supports H1 and the previous cross-tabulation shows that only a minority of people hold truly authoritarian notions of democracy. However, hypothesis H2 cannot be rejected. Figure 3 makes clear that citizens with LND-vs.-ANDs around their respective country mean and above are well-equipped to critically assess their government's "overselling" attempts, leading to *lower* ratings of the regime's democratic legitimacy compared to citizens who score below the country-mean.

That is, if "overselling" is met with predominantly liberal notions of democracy, citizens see through this façade and rate their country's level of democracy accordingly. In more substantial terms: Citizens with above mean LND-vs.-AND- scores that are subject to "overselling," rate their countries level of democracy 0.05–0.1 points lower, which amounts to 5–10% of the dependent variable's scale. Strictly authoritarian citizens, on the other hand, see their country around 5% more democratic when they are a subject to "overselling." Taking into consideration, that many other variables – many of which have been included here – influence citizens' evaluation of their countries democraticness, the findings of these models are substantial to warrant further in-depth analyses in the future. In summary, congruence between citizens' demands and governments' supply of democracy is an important factor which helps explain evaluations of governments and subsequently their legitimacy in the eyes of the ruled.

Figure 3: Marginal effects plot.



3.6.1 Robustness checks

The results are robust to the exclusion of all countries that have been surveyed several times, keeping only the latest wave for each country (see Table A3 in Appendix, model 1) and to the exclusion of extremely repressive countries (see Table A3 in Appendix, model 2). Also, the use of V-Dems original, unaltered democracy measures does not lead to substantially different results (see Table A3 in Appendix, model 3–4). Additionally, it might also be that LND-vs.-AND mediates the effect of "overselling." Mediation in this case, would imply that "overselling" affects notions of democracy which then in turn influence survey-based assessments of a country's current level of democracy. To lend further credibility to the used multilevel moderation model, Figure A3,

Table A4 in Appendix summarize the supplementary test for mediation. The results show no significant indirect effect and re-affirm that LND-vs.-ANDs are mostly driven by education, emancipative values and individual-level socioeconomic conditions, rather than by "overselling" of democracy. I see this as additional support for the moderation analyses employed here.

3.6.2 Control variables

The control variables mostly point in the expected direction. All individual level controls except for education have a significant effect on the evaluation of democratic quality. More interest in politics and individual level emancipative values create additional criticality and are associated with weaker perceived democracy levels. Higher income and financial satisfaction go along with better evaluations of the dependent variable, supporting a resource-based argument about the understanding of democracy (Dalton et al., 2007; Chu et al., 2008). Also confidence in the media results in supportive evaluations, as governmental communications are potentially evaluated less critical. Though the individual trust in the media has a positive effect, governmental censorship efforts do not go unnoticed and lead to a devaluation of democratic quality.

3.6.3 Discussion and implications

The possibility to benefit from democratic-procedural legitimacy, opens the door for non-democrats to justify their rule using democratic narratives while maintaining their grip on power. Many of the "democracies with adjectives" (Collier and Levitsky, 1997) that exist since the third wave of democratization (Huntington, 1991) have halted their development toward further liberal interpretations of democracy (Diamond, 2002; Levitsky and Way, 2010; Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019). Depending on the "democrats with adjectives" (Schedler and Sarsfield, 2007) that populate their electorate, they can maintain a congruence between popular demands and governmental supply of democracy by establishing their own versions of democracy that satisfy the contemporary demand. Previous studies have shown that this demand can shift due to increasing education, growing critical liberal desire for democracy (Nathan, 2020) or the development of emancipative values (Kirsch and Welzel, 2019). As lip service to democracy seems to be universal, it cannot be understated how important questions of democratic understanding in the form of "notions of democracy" are for scholarly analyses in this field of research. Without these, we fly blind and ignore substantial differences that can make the difference between the acceptance and condemnation of "overselling" governments.

Cultural demand for democracy moves at a glacial pace, slowly accumulating and increasing the pressure on the supply side (Welzel et al., 2016). If this pressure is not met by accommodating some of these demands, it can force a new equilibrium by challenging

governments *via* popular dissent, coups, protests and the withdrawal of diffuse support (Easton, 1965). Growing liberal notions make the demand for true democratic procedures more widespread and increase incongruence with unprogressive governments. As also Nathan (2020) shows, liberal democratic values decrease support for illiberal leaders, whose "overselling" becomes increasingly ineffective – as this study proves. Hence, bottom-up democratization outcomes are closely linked to the prevailing notions of democracy and the citizens' ability to see through "overselling" attempts. If movements for democracy are not anchored in an untainted demand for democracy, then the following supply will also not be truly and sustainably democratic. This becomes evident in half of the observed transitions being transitions from autocracy to autocracy (Geddes et al., 2014).

3.7 Conclusion

Shin and Kim (2018) summarize this field's puzzle quite well by arguing that "[i]ronically, those who consider themselves to be avid supporters of democracy show support for authoritarian rule, while those who live in authoritarian regimes view their countries to be more democratic than those who live in democratic ones" (p. 225). The literature on support for democracy and understanding of democracy has already uncovered many missing pieces in its research agenda and provides extensive explanations for misinterpretations of the term "democracy." Still, it is obviously puzzling how high democracy ratings found around the world clearly do not map on the objective truth in countries governed by non-democrats.

So why do people see their country as democratic even though it is not and why are some true democrats more critical of their democratic governments than others? To create a clearer picture, this article adds another missing piece to this field of research. Namely, the "overselling" of democracy by governments around the world.

The term democracy carries a multitude of positive connotations within and can be found in a majority of contemporary constitutions, public speeches and governmental narratives. Its ubiquitous appraisal creates a "legitimizing ideology" which governments have learned to utilize. By claiming to be democrats they harvest the fruits of democratic pretention, while maintaining their grip on power. However, this strategy is only effective if it falls on fertile ground. Individuals' notions of democracy shape the outcome of governments' "overselling" and can change unqualified support for autocrats into qualified criticality. The descriptive evidence and multilevel moderation analysis support this claim and clearly exemplify the importance of a well-educated and democratically enlightened public for truthful evaluations of a government's democratic vigor. Prevailing authoritarian notions of democracy *can* convert "overselling" into support for the

regime, whereas liberal notions of democracy make people reject these false claims and evaluate governments more negatively. We already know that value change, education and modernization are drivers of liberal notions of democracy. Hence, these are enablers of qualified criticality. Many citizenries have not yet reached this tipping point, where "overselling" is no longer an effective tool of regime legitimation. Thus, "[a] major conclusion from these findings is that authoritarian regimes may seek to justify and strengthen their rule by attempting to induce constituents' perception of living in a democracy" (Thyen, 2017).

It remains to be seen in which direction individuals' notions of democracy develop in the future. Recent examples, such as the protests in Belarus or Thailand show the role that increased criticality plays in response to electoral irregularities like disbanding opposition parties or the claiming of victory by long-term incumbents. It also remains a question of the relation between demand and supply. Increasing liberal notions of democracy *might* be appeased by the accommodation of some demands, thereby re-establishing a new equilibrium close to the status quo. Recent debate about autocratization processes in established democracies point toward an alternative development (see e.g., Inglehart and Norris, 2017; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2019; Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019). People with illiberal notions of democracy *might* perceive globalized democracy as an elite project detached from the individual citizen and the nation. The complexity of this project, combined with an impure notion of democracy, decreases the congruence between demand and supply and benefits those that simplify their language and question key democratic principles. These thought-experiments, *mights* and *wouldѕ* deserve further attention and cannot be answered by this article. Having shown that there exists a generalizable degree of interaction between governments' over- or underselling and notions of democracy, this article creates a starting point for further in-depth inquiries. Ideally, this complex relationship would be explored with qualitative interview data or focus group discussions.

In summary – claiming adherence to electoral and rule- based standards, while neglecting democratic procedures is a widespread phenomenon, exemplified by competitive or hybrid regimes around the globe that did not successfully consolidate true democratic principles but rather consolidated the use of the word "democracy" as a legitimizing narrative vis-à-vis their citizenry.

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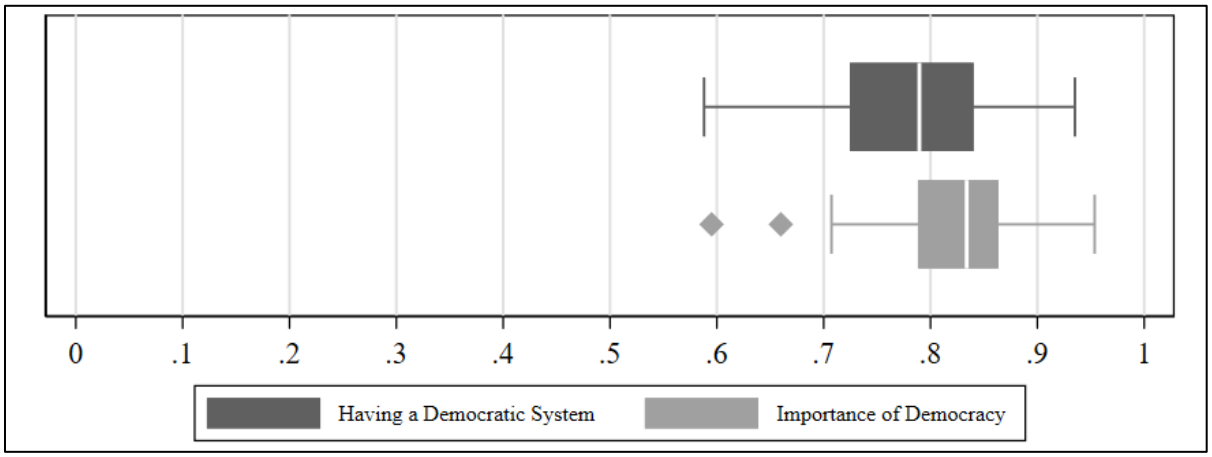
3.9 APPENDIX

"Overselling democracy – claiming legitimacy? The link between democratic pretention, democratic understanding and citizens' evaluations of regimes' democraticness"

Figure A1: Overt support for democracy



Notes: Boxplots display answers to the WVS (2020) questions "Democracy may have problems but is better…" (strongly disagree – strongly agree) and "Political system: Having a democratic political system" (a bad thing – a good thing). Rescaled 0-1 and aggregated by country-wave (N = 121).

Table A1: Included country-waves

	Wave		
Country name	2005-2009	2010-2014	2017-2019
Algeria		703	
Argentina		820	756
Armenia		760	
Australia	1208	965	1562
Azerbaijan		996	
Bangladesh			1183
Belarus		1465	
Bolivia			1718
Brazil	1273	1182	1184
Bulgaria	625		
Burkina Faso	563		
Burma/Myanmar			1198
Canada	1500		
Chile	754	723	787
China	563	1054	2846
Colombia		1211	1498
Ecuador		1164	1104
Estonia		1237	
Ethiopia	1036		
Finland	879		
France	846		
Georgia	964	910	
Germany	1664	1820	1359
Ghana	1075	1444	
Greece			1021
Haiti		1576	
Hungary	833		
India	701	2820	
Indonesia	1394		3004
Iran	2283		

Iraq		951	1130
Japan	615	1187	784
Kazakhstan		1497	917
Kyrgyzstan		1441	
Lebanon		970	1162
Libya		1591	
Mali	446		
Mexico	1218	1767	1589
Moldova	853		
Morocco	388	326	
Netherlands	704	1314	
New Zealand		580	
Nicaragua			1199
Nigeria		1599	1146
Norway	911		
Pakistan		871	1618
Peru	1139	981	1184
Philippines		1163	1197
Poland	732	738	
Romania	1138	1195	868
Russia	1192	1712	1375
Rwanda		1323	
Serbia	905		
Slovenia	762	867	
South Africa	2253	3031	
South Korea	1180	1145	1245
Spain	944	923	
Sweden	894	1047	
Switzerland	1002		
Tajikistan			1105
Thailand	1366	1049	1280
Trinidad and Tobago	910	713	
Tunisia		748	1091
Turkey	1108	1398	
Ukraine	629	1500	
United Kingdom	683		
Uruguay	848	717	
Vietnam	1112		1108
Zambia	1036		
Zimbabwe		1492	1141

Table A2: Summary statistics

Variable	N	Mean	SD	P25	Median	P75	Min	Max
Individual level								
Democracy-Rating (weighted)	140174	0.49	0.29	0.25	0.44	0.69	0	1
LND vs. AND (cluster-mean cent.)	140174	0	0.29	-0.2	0	0.21	-1.65	0.92
Education (cluster-mean cent.)	140174	0	0.27	-0.2	-0.01	0.2	-0.8	0.69
Income (cluster-mean cent.)	140174	0	0.23	-0.16	0	0.16	-0.61	0.82
Political interest (cluster-mean cent.)	140174	0	0.27	-0.18	0.01	0.2	-0.7	0.69
Trust in media (cluster-mean cent.)	140174	0	0.24	-0.16	0	0.17	-0.72	0.75
Financial Satisf. (cluster-mean cent.)	140174	0	0.26	-0.17	0.01	0.19	-0.74	0.74
Emancipative Values (cluster-mean cent.)	140174	0	0.14	-0.09	0	0.09	-0.62	0.66
Age	140174	41.32	16.21	28	39	53	15	103
Country level								
Overselling Democ (grand-mean centered)	140174	0	0.26	-0.21	-0.02	0.21	-0.63	0.59
Regime duration	140174	22.91	18.68	10	18	30	1	73
Censorship effort	140174	0.62	0.27	0.44	0.68	0.86	0	1
Political Terror Scale	140174	2.81	1.12	2	3	4	1	5
Emancipative Values	140174	0.43	0.11	0.34	0.41	0.48	0.26	0.73
GDP (logarithmic)	140174	26.87	1.68	25.7	27.14	27.98	23.38	30.62
Liberal democracy stock (logarithmic)	140174	2.73	0.81	2.19	2.8	3.25	0.76	4.18

Table A3: Robustness-checks

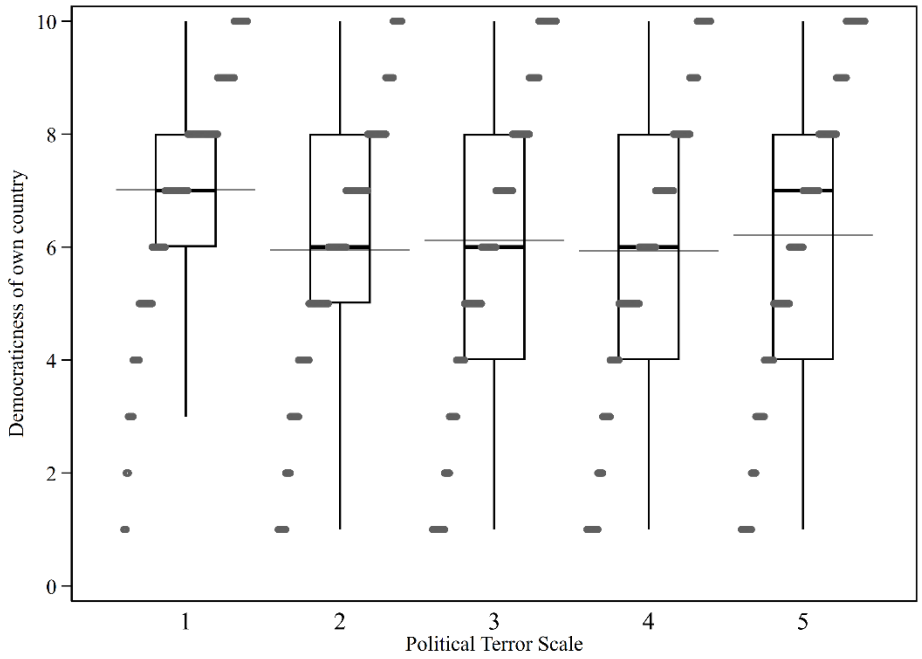
	(1) Last Wave only	(2) PTS < 4	(3) Overselling Liberal Democracy	(4) Overselling Polyarchy
LND vs AND	0.116***	0.111***	0.111***	0.112***
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.009)
Overselling Democracy	-0.207**	-0.158**	-0.143**	-0.100
	(0.075)	(0.056)	(0.051)	(0.053)
Overselling * LND vs AND	-0.313***	-0.289***	-0.220***	-0.211***
	(0.043)	(0.045)	(0.033)	(0.039)
Education	-0.004	0.004	-0.006	-0.006
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Income	0.052***	0.036**	0.044***	0.044***
	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Political Interest	-0.056***	-0.063***	-0.066***	-0.066***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Trust in Media	0.127***	0.129***	0.126***	0.126***
	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Financial Satisfaction	0.136***	0.125***	0.131***	0.131***
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Emancipative Values	-0.064***	-0.053***	-0.066***	-0.066***
	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Age	0.000*	0.001***	0.000**	0.000**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Regime Duration	0.001	0.000	0.001	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Censorship Effort	-0.111	-0.240*	-0.132*	-0.114
	(0.074)	(0.105)	(0.062)	(0.063)
Political Terror Scale	-0.018	-0.012	-0.010	-0.012
	(0.018)	(0.025)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Emancipative Values (Mean)	-0.063	0.065	-0.053	-0.047
	(0.204)	(0.226)	(0.171)	(0.169)
GDP (logged)	0.012	0.009	0.009	0.010
	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Democracy Stock	0.014	0.045	0.029	0.033
	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Constant	0.251	0.312	0.321*	0.285
	(0.198)	(0.198)	(0.159)	(0.153)
AIC	10800	7229	17524	17538
BIC	11015	7446	17751	17764
Intraclass Correlation	0.1509	0.1540	0.1452	0.1491
Variance Random Slope	0.0065	0.0072	0.0076	0.0086
Variance Random Intercept	0.0118	0.0114	0.0112	0.0116
Covariance RS RI	0.0043	0.0033	0.0042	0.0048
Country-Waves	70	88	121	121
N	84180	93685	140174	140174

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses (* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$); All individual-level variables are country-wave-mean centered.

Notes A1: Reliability of survey-based regime evaluations

Kruse, Welzel and Ravlik (2019) provide some plausibility checks, which argue against the 'public lies' (Kuran, 1997) argument. Their argument stresses the ubiquitous desire for democratic rule even in the most repressive regimes, which would be equal to a dangerous, insurrectionary desire in these regimes and should accordingly be hidden behind 'public lies'. Additionally, it might be that citizens evaluate their country's current level of democracy more positively because they expect that this is what their superiors – in line with their 'overselling' of democracy – want to hear. In this case, the level of repression limits the discursive space and determines what is sayable without fearing repercussions. This, in turn, should be visible in strongly skewed response patterns for more repressive regimes, symbolizing the tight 'discursive space' and limited willingness to express discontent. Figure A2 below shows the distribution of citizens' democracy evaluations grouped by the five ordinal response-values of the political terror scale (Gibney et al., 2020). Though the median response for those individuals that are subject to the most excruciating repression (5) lies above the other categories', people still utilize the whole evaluation scale. Not surprisingly, citizens of the freest countries also value this freedom most. One would expect more criticality from those who live under repressive regimes, but exactly this – the puzzling positive democracy ratings – are what this study wishes to explain. To counter any remaining criticism, relating to a potential bias, Table A3 (model 2) replicates the main analysis without the two most repressive categories of the political terror scale. The results remain robust to this exclusion.

Figure A2: PTS Robustness Check: Cumulative frequencies of 'democraticness of own country' by levels of repression (Political Terror Scale)



Notes: Additional reference line (light grey) depicting the mean values; overlaid, stacked dots show cumulative frequencies of responses. N = 140174

Notes 2: Alternative legitimation strategies

Besides the rational-legal/procedural legitimation strategy, which is central in this analysis, there are several alternative propositions which regimes can utilize to legitimize their rule. For legitimate authoritarian rule, Gerschewski and Dukalskis (2017) propose indoctrination, passivity and performance as three alternative mechanisms next to democratic-procedural legitimacy. Beetham (1991) sees legitimation as the combination of legality, justifiability and the expression of consent coming from the ruled. Von Soest and Grauvogel (2017) additionally show that there is clear differentiation between claims to legitimacy coming from closed authoritarian regimes and those that allow elections. The latter mimic democratic procedures to claim legitimacy whereas the former rely on identity-based legitimation strategies (foundational myth, ideology, personalism) more frequently. With legitimation strategies based on performance, the person of the ruler and ideology the Varieties of Democracy Project offers three additional claims to legitimacy besides rational-legal narratives (Coppedge et al., 2020, pp. 208–210; Tannenberg et al., 2020). All of these originate in the thoughts of Weber's (1978 [1922]) empirical analytical understanding of legitimacy. This understanding also informed Weber's original typology of legitimate rule (rational-legal, charismatic and traditional legitimacy).

Notes A3: Mediation analysis

It might well be that governmental 'overselling' is not moderated by notions of democracy but rather mediated by it. Mediation in this case, would imply that 'overselling' affects notions of democracy which then in turn influence survey-based assessments of a country's current level of democracy. To lend further credibility to the used multilevel moderation model in the main manuscript, this section tests this. The idea is simple: If overselling influences LND-vs-AND which in turn impacts citizens' evaluation of current democracy levels, then moderation is no longer the suitable analytical assumption, and the effect is instead mediated. In substantial terms this implies, that overselling in itself is a factor that shapes peoples' understanding of democracy, which then leads to different evaluations of democracy. As we already know from e.g. Kirsch and Welzel (2019) and Cho (2014), several alternative factors can explain the emergence of authoritarian notions of democracy. These are described in the variables section of the article and will be used throughout this analysis as additional controls for both the mediator (LND-vs-AND) and the dependent variable (Evaluations of democracy).

This mediation analysis follows the suggestions of Preacher et al. (2010) and is carried out in Mplus. A SEM-based approach to mediation analysis is preferable to the simpler mediation analysis relying on separate regressions (Iacobucci et al., 2007). Nevertheless, the underlying logic is still the same. We can speak of full mediation when the indirect effect (Overselling → LND-vs-AND → DemocEval) is significant and there is no direct effect from Overselling to citizens' evaluations of current levels of democracy. Partial mediation is found, when both indirect and direct effect are significant. Figure A3 summarizes the model and the evaluated paths.

The key takeaway from this analysis is the insignificant effect from 'overselling' on LND-vs-AND. That is, LND-vs-AND seem to be unaffected by the level two variable overselling, when controlling for alternative explanatory factors. Accordingly, there is no indirect effect and, thus, no mediation. The results also show that LND-vs-AND are mainly driven by

(1) individual education levels,
(2) individual emancipative values,
(3) individual trust in the media,
(4) country-level emancipative values,
(5) country-level censorship,
(6) country-level democratic maturity.

This lends further support to the findings of Kirsch and Welzel (2019), who identified emancipative value orientations as a major driver of liberal notions of democracy and further supports this article's use of multilevel moderation analysis. That is, individual level notions of

democracy moderate the effectiveness of governmental overselling strategies in creating *inflationary* or *deflationary* democracy evaluations.

Figure A3: Mediation analysis

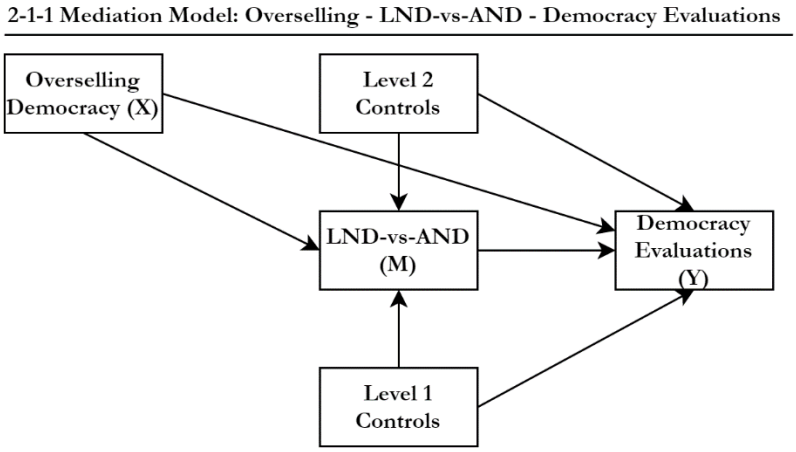


Table A4: Mediation analysis

Within Level	Estimate	SE
Dependent variable: Democracy Evaluations		
LND-vs-AND	0.105***	(0.009)
Education	-0.005	(0.006)
Income	0.045***	(0.010)
Political Interest	-0.073***	(0.007)
Trust in Media	0.129***	(0.008)
Financial Satisfaction	0.134***	(0.008)
Emancipative Values	-0.05***	(0.012)
Age	0.000***	(0.000)
Dependent variable: LND-vs-AND		
Education	0.123***	(0.006)
Income	-0.026**	(0.012)
Political Interest	-0.034***	(0.008)
Trust in Media	-0.047***	(0.007)
Financial Satisfaction	-0.010	(0.007)
Emancipative Values	0.253***	(0.022)
Age	0.001***	(0.000)
Between Level		
Dependent variable: Democracy Evaluations		
LND-vs-AND	0.105***	(0.009)
Overselling democracy	-0.055	(0.057)
Regime Duration	0.001	(0.001)
Censorship Effort	-0.160**	(0.071)
Political Terror Scale	-0.015	(0.014)
Emancipative Values (Mean)	-0.087	(0.157)
GDP (logged)	0.007	(0.007)
Democracy Stock	0.047**	(0.022)
Dependent variable: LND-vs-AND		
Overselling democracy	-0.053	(0.065)
Regime Duration	0.002**	(0.001)
Censorship Effort	0.163***	(0.047)
Political Terror Scale	-0.047**	(0.017)
Emancipative Values (Mean)	0.573***	(0.137)
GDP (logged)	0.006	(0.006)
Democracy Stock	-0.079***	(0.021)
Indirect effect (X → M → X)	-0.006	(0.007)
No. Clusters	121	
Observations	140174	

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; significance levels (*** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.1); all individual level variables are cluster-mean centered. Within and Between coefficient for M → Y restricted to be equal. SEM Goodness of fit: CFI = 0.962; TLI = 0.802; RMSEA = 0.011; SRMR (within) = 0.00; SRMR (between) = 0.322.

Appendix References

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4 PRAISING THE LEADER

Personalist legitimation strategies and the deterioration of executive constraints

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ABSTRACT

In the face of current democratic backsliding and autocratization processes, research has rediscovered issues of autocratic legitimation. However, the question of whether rulers' personalist rhetoric to bolster their legitimacy is followed by congruent political action remains underspecified. Using new expert-coded measures for 164 countries from the Varieties of Democracy project, we examine the political rhetoric–action link using fixed effects models. The results confirm that shifts towards personalist legitimacy claims are no cheap talk but oftentimes important warning signals for a substantial deterioration of democratic quality, manifested in weaker judicial and legislative oversight of the executive branch. However, in contrast to much current concern, we show that liberal democracies seem to largely escape the negative repercussions of government discourses that increasingly stress the uniqueness of the ruler.

KEYWORDS Legitimacy; legitimation strategies; person of the leader; charisma; judicial constraints; legislative constraints; autocratization; political rhetoric–action link

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

Before he regained power in 2010, Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán made his legitimation strategies abundantly clear: Not only did he announce an "electoral revolution" (Rupnik, 2012, p. 132) but also "tapped into longstanding popular resentment against the political elite" (Lendvai, 2018, p. 48; Levitsky & Way, 2020, p. 60) and stressed how he as the leader would overturn the country's existing "corrupt" liberal order. These claims were a precursor of the things to come. Orbán and his Fidesz government changed the Constitution, most notably limiting the separation of powers; filled the Constitutional Court with government supporters; politicized the state-owned broadcaster; co-opted private media; and changed electoral districts to solidify their electoral advantage (Szelenyi & Csillag, 2015, p. 42). The consequences have been dramatic: Hungary, once heralded as a poster child for successful democratic transition in Eastern Europe, has regressed, becoming an electoral-authoritarian regime in 2019 – the first nondemocratic member of the European Union (Coppedge et al., 2020). The public legitimation strategies of Orbán that focused on his personal qualities as a guardian of the people's will and on "religious conservatism and nationalism" (Levitsky & Way, 2020, p. 60) were an important discursive step and indeed a warning signal for the ensuing reduction of judicial and legislative checks on the executive. To what extent is the Hungarian case typical? Investigating a global sample of 164 countries, we take governments' legitimation strategies seriously and ask: Are shifting claims to legitimacy that increasingly stress the uniqueness of a political ruler a precursor to substantial action, namely the deterioration of judicial and legal constraints on the executive?

All governments – democratic and autocratic alike – make claims that provide justification for their right to rule. Accordingly, research on the legitimacy of both democracies (Almond & Verba, 1963; Lipset, 1959) and autocracies (Friedrich, 1961) has a long tradition. While the "third wave" of democratization pushed questions on (autocratic) legitimation strategies into the background for some time, the current scholarly focus on different facets of authoritarian rule has brought issues of political legitimacy back in with a vengeance (Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017; Gerschewski, 2018; Holbig, 2013; Kailitz, 2013; Maerz, 2019). Important triggers for this rediscovery of questions of authoritarian legitimation have been creeping processes of autocratization and democratic backsliding (Bermeo, 2016; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019; Skaaning, 2020; Waldner & Lust, 2018) as well as the success of elected populist leaders that claim to represent the will of the people – such as the United States' Donald Trump, Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro, and, of course, Hungary's Viktor Orbán – across the globe (Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018; Roberts, 2021). Making claims that stress their superior qualities as political leaders are defining features of their rule (Bos et al., 2020).

The collection of new, expert-coded data for almost all the world's countries from 1900 to 2020 by the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project (Tannenberg et al., 2021) allows us for the first time to examine long-standing questions about the political relevance of regimes' claims to legitimacy in both democracies and autocracies in a systematic cross-national investigation. Thus, we assess the rhetoric–action link and evaluate to what extent a country's institutional quality of democracy affects this link.

We focus on governmental *claims* to legitimacy and investigate shifts towards legitimation strategies that put the person of the ruler center-stage which is a key component of illiberal reasoning (Tannenberg et al., 2021). Accordingly, in this initial analysis, we examine whether an increasing use of personalist claims can signal growing executive aggrandizement. Using established fixed effect models as the main modelling technique, we assess how within-country shifts signify ensuing reductions of executive constraints. Our findings show that legitimation shifts indeed are an important discursive step towards substantive action, in particular for a subset of political regimes: In authoritarian regimes, which by definition have fewer constraints on the highest executive power, an increase in personalist rhetoric regularly serves as a precursor to a further decline in institutional constraints, while liberal, established democracies are largely spared from its detrimental negative repercussions, at least on the institutional level. This implies that personalist rhetoric might be less harmful for judicial and legislative constraints in liberal democracies than feared in the current intense autocratization debate (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019; Lührmann & Rooney, 2019; Skaaning, 2020). With this analysis the article adds to the empirical study of the relationship between personalist government rhetoric and subsequent action and thereby contributes to the discussion about legitimation strategies as key means of political rule.

The article proceeds as follows. We first present our theoretical framework and introduce the concept of legitimation and personalist legitimation strategies. We then present our empirical strategy and discuss the findings. We conclude by presenting considerations for future research on claims to legitimacy as precursors to substantial action.

4.2 THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS: SHIFTING LEGITIMATION STRATEGIES

Political legitimacy is a key pillar on which the power of any regime rests – in conjunction with the provision of public goods, repression, and co-optation (Albertus & Menaldo, 2012; Gerschewski, 2013). According to Geddes (1999, p. 125), "even very coercive regimes cannot survive without some support." Citizens see legitimate authorities as "entitled to be obeyed" and "voluntarily defer" to them (Tyler, 1997, p. 323). Compared to repression and co-optation, the existence of legitimacy is therefore a particularly (cost-)effective means of rule.

While there are insightful normative conceptions of legitimacy, we employ an analytical, Weberian understanding of it (Weber, 1978 [1922]). Conceptually, legitimacy consists of two dimensions: the claims invoked by rulers to justify their rule and their reception by the ruled (*Legitimitätsglauben*). In this study, we focus on the first aspect: the claims to legitimacy[30] a government makes vis-à-vis its citizens and members of the political elite regarding why it is endowed with the right to rule (Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017; Holbig, 2013; Kailitz & Stockemer, 2017). These claims can be either purposeful manipulations or genuinely held beliefs among the ruling elite; they can reflect or be totally detached from empirical reality.

In essence, governmental legitimation discourses are concerted efforts to satisfy "the need for justification" (Koschorke, 2018, pp. 125–126). According to Weyland, who refers to Goldstein and Keohane (1993), these ideational factors can shape causal beliefs, which in turn "influence actors' calculations about the benefits and costs that different feasible options are likely to yield" (Weyland, 2017a, p. 1240). More fundamentally, they affect principled beliefs of what is right and wrong. Hence, regime legitimation strategies fulfil three core political functions. First and foremost, they may strengthen the bonds between the regime and citizens and among members of the ruling elite (LeBas, 2013). Second, the claims to legitimacy set the discursive space within which individual actors and organized groups can or cannot express alternative points of view, criticize the government, and voice dissent (Alagappa, 1995, p. 4). Third, they provide the narrative framework within which policy outcomes and political actions are evaluated. In sum, legitimation strategies are the key modes of how governments justify their rule and thereby strengthen their grip on power (Beetham, 2013; Levi et al., 2009; Lipset, 1959).

4.2.1 The increasing importance of personalist legitimation strategies

Political legitimacy may rest on different bases. As Weber found, "the type of obedience, the type of administrative staff developed to guarantee it, the mode of exercising authority […] all depend on the type of legitimacy claimed" (Weber, 1978, pp. 212–213). Most fundamentally, he introduced three ideal-types of legitimate rule: rational-legal, traditional, and charismatic authority (Weber, 1978, pp. 215–216). Our analysis in this article builds on the ideal-type of charismatic rule and its implications. "Charismatic rule," as coined by Weber, stresses that a ruler's personal traits and extraordinary leadership skills can make a political order legitimate in the eyes of their followers. This discursive strategy stresses "the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him" (Weber, 1978, p. 215). In extreme cases the ruler is idealized as the father or

[30] For improved readability, we use the terms "legitimation strategies" and "claims to legitimacy" interchangeably.

mother of the nation, being exceptionally heroic, caring, or wise (Andrews-Lee, 2020; Tannenberg et al., 2021).

Thus, conceptually, while personalism in this context merely is a discursive focus on a leader's extraordinary capacities, the Weberian ideal-type of charisma not only hinges on leaders' portrayal of themselves as indispensable but also focusses on the reception of these strategies by their supporters. Leaders using charismatic legitimation strategies seek to create "linkages with followers that are unmediated, asymmetrical, and deeply emotional in nature" (Andrews-Lee, 2021, p. 15). As outlined previously, in this article we focus on the first aspect, the use of charisma as legitimation strategy, while leaving its reception by followers to future research.

As found by Weyland and others, the discursive focus on the person of the leader also constitutes a central element of the political-strategic approach to populism (Weyland, 2017b). Classic works in this tradition, particularly in the Latin American context, have repeatedly stressed how central the person of the ruler is for populist legitimation strategies. While populist leaders portray themselves as embodying the "true" will of the masses vis-à-vis a "rotten" elite, they downplay the importance of institutional safeguards such as parliaments and the judiciary that restrain their room for manoeuvre (Andrews-Lee, 2021, p. 17; Barr, 2009, p. 40; Roberts, 2006; Tannenberg et al., 2021, p. 88). Furthermore, the discursive attempt to establish a strong direct connection to their followers and to construct "us vs. them" narratives tends to side-line the importance of established formal rules and checks and balances. A distinct but related strand of literature has demonstrated the adverse effects of regime personalization for a host of democratic outcomes (Frantz et al., 2020, 2021; Wright, 2021). Thus, personalism is a key component of both charismatic rule and populist discursive strategies that inherently downplay the importance of institutional safeguards against executive aggrandizement.

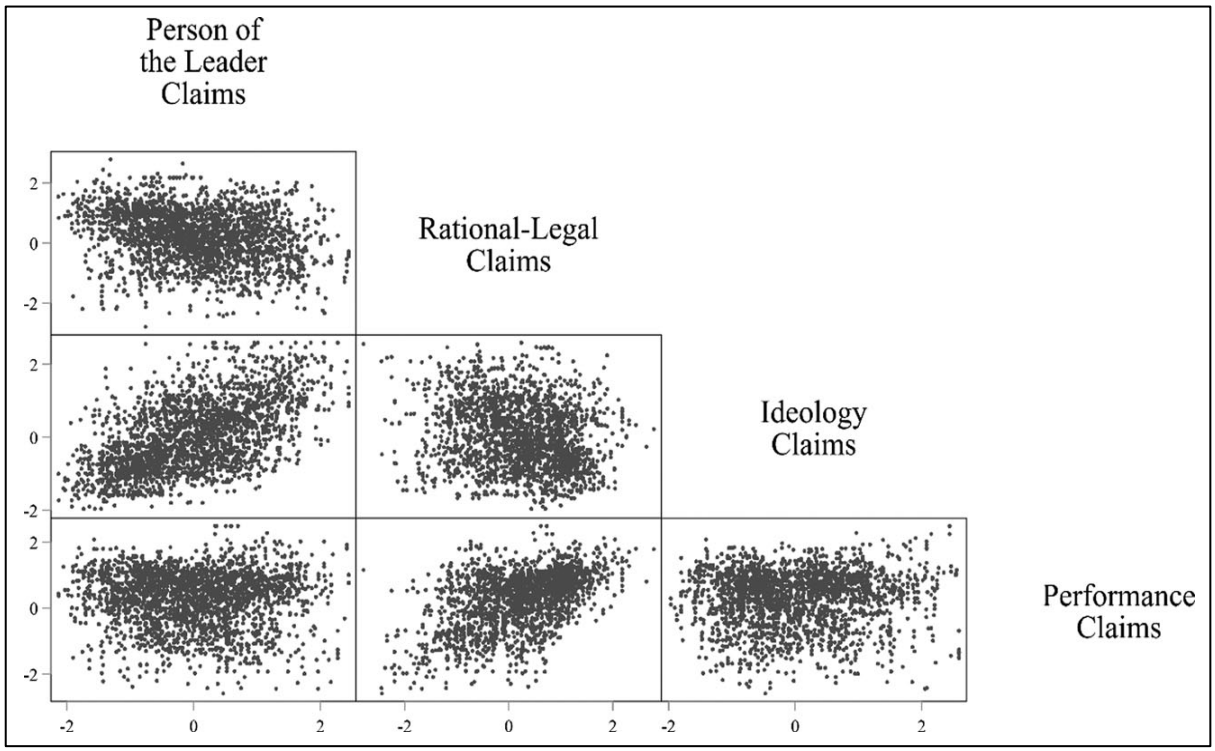
Discursively focusing on the extraordinary capacities and centrality of the ruler may pave the way for silencing counterforces and weakening institutional safeguards (On Russia, Holmes, 2010). It thereby allows a disregard for "formal equality (before the law) and formal freedom (from arbitrary treatment) in the form of civil and political liberties" (Held, 1996, pp. 306–307). This legitimation strategy runs counter to the fundamental tenets of liberal democracy, namely "that the power of the majority must be limited and restrained, the sanctity of individual rights and the principle of the division of powers [preserved]" (Albertazzi & Mueller, 2013, p. 343).

Though we expect personalist claims to stand out in the cases of interest, governments regularly invoke different claims to legitimacy in parallel to strengthen their rule: Legitimation strategies are not exclusive but always multidimensional (Alagappa, 1995). They can even be contradictory. Most notably, in contrast to personalist claims, rational-legal legitimation strategies include a government's claims to have the "right" procedures in place. These legal

norms and regulations can be laid out in the Constitution and/or other laws codifying access to power (e.g. elections) and the exercising of power (e.g. rule of law) (Eisenstadt & Maboudi, 2019; Tannenberg et al., 2021). These claims may diverge widely from the institutional reality. Zimbabwe's current president Mnangagwa has not only repeatedly stressed his role as supreme leader of the nation but has also simultaneously made (completely unrealistic) claims about preserving electoral integrity and procedural fairness (Brunkert, 2022; Mnangagwa, 2018).

Additionally, Lipset (1959), Easton (1965), and more recent research (e.g. Beazer & Reuter, 2019) have underlined the relevance of narratives that laud the performance of a regime in satisfying public demands, be it the provision of security or delivering socioeconomic development. Authors have recurrently stressed how important this performance legitimacy is for authoritarian regimes, particularly for those that do not have strong ideological foundations (E.g. Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017; Kailitz, 2013). Accordingly, we include both performance-based and ideological claims in our analyses. Figure 1 lays out the relationship between the different legitimation strategies, meaning the extent to which they are invoked in parallel.

Figure 1. Bivariate scatterplots of claims to legitimacy (standardized).



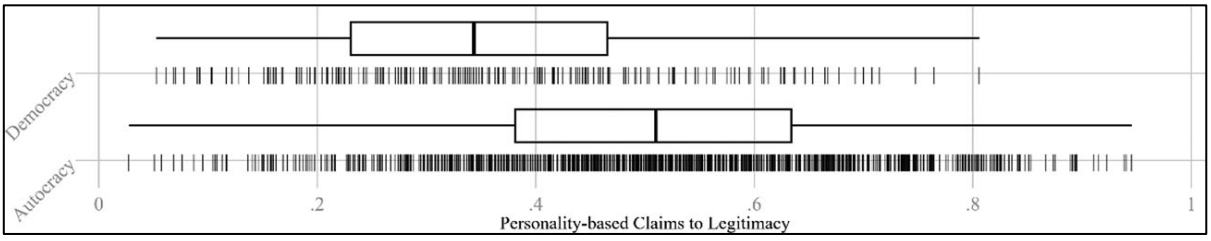
Notes: All variables are centered and standardized with a mean of zero and a SD of one. X-axis measures variable indicated above each column. Y-axis measures variables indicated by each row. Data-source: V-Dem Dataset 2022.

4.2.2 Legitimation strategies and regime type

It is important to note that there is no direct overlap between claims to legitimacy and a particular political regime type. Figure 2 shows the distribution of leader-centered claims across the autocracy-democracy divide. Autocrats most often focus on the uniqueness of the ruler to inflate their appeal among both the population and the political elite (Brooker, 2009, pp. 42–44, 139–144).[31] Still, also in democracies we see – to varying degrees – ruler-based appeals by leading politicians that transcend the routinized application of impersonal rules and laws. In South Africa, for instance, the first democratically elected president Nelson Mandela had an extraordinarily strong personal appeal (Lieberman, 2013). When he held office, ruler-based claims almost doubled in strength and were the most pronounced legitimation strategy, rated between 0.73 and 0.76 (on a 0–1 scale) by the V-Dem project. Similarly, the discursive focus on rational-legal legitimation strategies varies substantially in democracies.

As institutional constraints are already weaker in autocratic regimes than in liberal democracies, it should be generally easier for authoritarian rulers to shift their legitimation strategies and in the following further limit the effectiveness of institutional constraints on executive action. In this sense: Strong democracy may function as a solid barrier against

Figure 2. Distribution of personalist claims to legitimacy in autocracies and democracies.



Notes: Variable rescaled to a range of 0-1. The lines under the boxplot display the measurement-occurrences. Democracy com- bines the Regimes of the World's categories "electoral democracy" and "liberal democracy", Autocracy combines "electoral autocracy" and "closed autocracy".

its own demise. Indeed, two-thirds of cases of gradual autocratization have occurred in nondemocratic regimes (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). However, in order to comprehensively assess the implications of an increased governmental reliance on discursive strategies that focus on the person of the leader it is important to cut across the democracy – autocracy divide. New cross-sectional and longitudinal data on legitimation strategies by the V-Dem project now provide the basis for such a comparative assessment (Tannenberg et al., 2021).

[31] In addition, Appendix Figure A1 provides an overview of the distribution of personalist claims to legitimacy within different regime categories.

4.3 HYPOTHESES

In the early years of the new millennium, the euphoria over the global third wave of democratization had already given way to rising concerns about democracy's "recession" (Diamond, 2020; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). According to data from the V-Dem project, 92 countries are now autocratic, while 2.6 billion people (34% of the world's population) currently live in autocratizing states (Lührmann et al., 2020). Shifting legitimation strategies form an important part of these autocratization processes, also in earlier autocratization periods (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). A government that increasingly stresses the great achievements and personal capacities of the leader might signal its intention to further strengthen its hold on power. In this way, *shifts* towards personalist claims discursively can pave the way for rulers' suppression of institutional checks on executive action. In other words, portraying him-/herself as savoir of the nation and embodiment of the people's will allows to justify the increased centralization of power to fulfil his/her political mission (Krastev, 2020; Vittori, 2021).

For example, in Russia amidst decreasing economic performance (Treisman, 2011) the personal factor has massively gained in importance since President Vladimir Putin's second stint as president began in 2012. In 2011 already, Russia's former deputy prime minister and close advisor Vladislav Surkov declared "that Putin was 'sent by God' to save Russia" (Cannady & Kubicek, 2014, p. 7). Pictures showing the former KGB spy shirtless as a muscular leader who goes fishing and horse riding were meant to contribute to a growing personality cult. As affirmed by Mazepus et al., Putin was increasingly portrayed as the guardian of order, stability and well-being "who understood and represented the needs of ordinary Russians" (2016, p. 355) This shift helped to pave the way for the increasing centralization of power to the Kremlin (Baturo & Elkink, 2014). A case in point are the constitutional changes in Russia in 2020, which have allowed Putin to further expand his executive dominance while facing almost no institutional or societal resistance (The Economist, 2020). Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Putin government further tightened the restrictions on potential opposition while institutional and legal oversight is almost not existent anymore.

Similarly, since 1994 Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko has increasingly relied on personalist claims, stressing his role as "father of the nation" while simultaneously shifting the discursive focus away from the electoral process and the rule of law (Wilson, 2012). This increasing discursive reliance on the person of the ruler stress the centrality of the man/woman at the top and makes the dismantling of institutional safeguards appear more acceptable in the eyes of the population and serve also to raise the discursive costs of voicing dissent (Weyland, 2017a).

In contrast to the comparatively low number of highly-publicized coup d'états where insurgents topple office-holders, elected rulers themselves constitute the biggest threat to democracy (Linz & Stepan, 1978). They attack particular provisions that stand in their way and aim to "sell" the erosion of democratic rights to the public (Levitsky & Way, 2020). This is also relevant for historic and extreme cases such as Adolf Hitler who came to power in Germany in 1933 via electoral means before he and his followers swiftly destroyed all remnants of the Weimar Republic. As "autocratizers" often pursue a majoritarian understanding of their rule, they downplay institutional safeguards against their executive dominance (Waldner & Lust, 2018).[32] Institutional checks, legislative and judicial alike, provide the main guardrails regarding executive power. It is this dimension of democracy that is regularly the first to come under attack (Dresden & Howard, 2016; Lührmann et al., 2020).

Following these findings, the observable implication for autocratizers is to stress the state's prospects under their leadership. This they do while limiting competing institutions' – the judiciary and parliament – control over their power. Ensuing political actions, justified by these personalist claims, can range from ignoring court orders, replacing regime-unfriendly judges, banning opposition parties, co-opting or curtailing the media, or outright altering Constitutions. These claims not only legitimize the goals of the political leader but also serve to delegitimize those oppositional actors and institutions who aim to prevent or hinder changes in this direction (Dukalskis & Patane, 2019; Vittori, 2021). Consequently, we will test the following general hypothesis:

H1: Regimes' increasing reliance on personalist claims to legitimacy is likely to signal a subsequent deterioration of judicial and legislative constraints on the executive.

As outlined previously, we expect this effect to be contingent on a country's existing *level* of democracy. Institutionalized liberal democracies should have an advantage in fending off personalist attacks on their institutional guardrails. Accordingly, Hypothesis 2 proposes:

H2: Regimes' increasing reliance on personalist claims to legitimacy has a particularly detrimental effect on judicial and legislative constraints in regimes with lower levels of democracy.

[32] Following Dahl, the other two key components of liberal democracy – in addition to horizontal checks and balances on executive power – are electoral competition and citizens' ability to participate (Dahl, 1971).

4.4 DATA AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This study utilizes cross-sectional time-series analysis to investigate how shifting claims to legitimacy affected democratic deterioration in 164 countries between 1900 and 2015.[33] In all models, country-years for which all variables are available are included, beginning with 1900 or a country's year of independence. To cover the longest timeframe possible, we employ parsimonious models that focus mainly on the variables of interest (For a similar approach, see Djuve et al., 2020).

We utilize fixed-effects regression models, as these estimate within-unit effects and account for unobserved unit heterogeneity by absorbing the country-specific, time-constant effects. Fixed-effects models are well documented and have several benefits compared to other modelling techniques (Allison, 2005; Bell & Jones, 2015), most notably that they avoid distorted results due to omitted variable bias. We add year fixed effects to account for temporal changes that may affect all included countries in a similar manner (e.g. economic shocks, international disputes, or wars). Lastly, the addition of a set of controls tests for alternative explanations.

4.4.1 Dependent variable – executive constraints

We use two dimensions to test our hypothesis that the increased reliance on personalist claims to legitimacy precedes a deterioration of executive oversight mechanisms: Judicial constraints and legislative constraints on the executive. Both are captured by V-Dems aggregate measures by the same name. The judicial constraints variable relates to the degree that the executive respects the constitution, its compliance with courts' decisions and higher and lower courts' independence from the executive. Legislative constraints combine four subcomponents which measure whether the legislative questions and controls executive decision-making and whether opposition parties can "exercise oversight and investigatory functions against the wishes of the governing party or coalition" (Coppedge et al., 2021, p. 148).

Thus, these measures capture both the potential power and actual performance of courts (judicial institutions) and parliaments (legislative institutions). If, for example, the executive uses its power to limit the courts' independence or simply does not comply with judicial decisions, the individual item-coding would downgrade this index, which we standardize to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. If parliament has the right to question the executive, but rarely executes its oversight function due to increased repression or co-optation, we will also see a decline of this variable. Arguably, the new, comprehensive V-Dem project provides more reliable

[33] An overview of all included country-years can be found in Table A1 in the Appendix. Descriptive statistics of all used variables are shown in Table A2 in the Appendix. Table A3 in the Appendix reports pairwise correlations.

and valid data on democratic quality than other datasets (Boese, 2019; Teorell et al., 2019). Our main analyses, thus, rely on V-Dem's regime coding. Additionally, we run robustness tests using Polity IV's "Executive Constraints" as an alternative dependent variable (Marshall & Jaggers, 2016) to ensure that the results are robust across different specifications (see Appendix Table A4 and Figure A4).

4.4.2 Independent variable – new data on claims to legitimacy

Issues of legitimation are contested and notoriously difficult to analyze empirically. Directly collecting information on these government strategies – for instance, through elite surveys or representative polls – is often impossible, particularly in autocratic contexts (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017). Andrews-Lee (2019) conducted survey experiments on the revival of charismatic rule in Argentina and Venezuela. Unfortunately, such experiments are inconvenient for large-N cross-sectional time-series analyses. The same still holds for the content analysis of ruler speeches and government propaganda (Boussalis et al., 2022). While their internal validity stands out – this study aims to produce generalizable findings spanning many countries across many decades and thus relies on expert-survey data as a second-best option. In doing so we follow other researchers who have used similar data to examine questions of legitimacy and legitimation (Thyen & Gerschewski, 2018; von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017).

For our measures of legitimation strategies, we use the legitimation items that were assessed in the most recent round of the V-Dem project (Coppedge et al., 2021; see extensive validity tests of the new legitimation strategy measure in Tannenberg et al., 2021).[34] Country experts rated the strength of governments' claims to legitimacy on a five-point scale (0-4) annually for 179 countries for the period from 1900 to 2020. These ratings were converted into an interval latent variable, which we standardize to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one, to make the results comparable. On average, 4.5 expert coders rated the legitimation strategies for all country-years.[35] The expert question on personalist claims to legitimacy ("person of the leader") reads as follows: "To what extent is the Chief Executive portrayed as being endowed with extraordinary personal characteristics and/or leadership skills (e.g. as father or mother of the nation, exceptionally heroic, moral, pious, or wise, or any other extraordinary attribute valued by the society)" (Coppedge et al., 2021, p. 222)?[36] There is clearly a challenge in coding historical data by means of expert surveys. To mitigate this to the best possible extent, the V-Dem project

[34] Figure A2 in the Appendix shows well-known examples with highly coded and lowly coded personalist claims, which serve as further face validity tests.

[35] More information in Tannenberg et al. 2021; for the question items see also Notes A1 in the Appendix.

[36] See also Notes A1 in the Appendix.

works with a Bayesian item-response-theory model that estimates country-year point estimates based on the experts' coding (Pemstein et al., 2015). This allows using patterns of coder agreement and dis-agreement to estimate variations in reliability and systematic differences in thresholds between ordinal-response categories (Tannenberg et al., 2021, p. 81).

We hypothesize that increasing claims based on the person of the ruler are first steps and thereby early warning signs for deteriorating democratic quality. Thus, we focus on this variable – personalist legitimation strategies – in our interaction-analysis and in the discussion of the results.

4.4.3 Intervening variable / moderator

To test whether the hypothesized effect is detectable and significant in different regimes we include a moderating variable that captures different levels of (procedural) democracy. Using V-Dem's Electoral Democracy measure (Polyarchy), we rely on a measure that is devoid of our dependent variables' concepts – judicial and legislative constraints – but allows us to differentiate between regimes that allow universal, free and fair elections and respect freedom of speech and association on the one hand and those regimes that do not on the other (Coppedge et al., 2021, p. 43). We rely on this continuous measure for our main analyses, but oftentimes use a categorical distinction of regimes in the text to ease interpretation.[37]

4.4.4 Control variables

Going by existing research, the strength of judicial and legislative constraints in a country might also be influenced by other factors, which we include as control variables. First, as outlined, governments regularly invoke different claims to legitimacy. Legitimation strategies other than personalist claims might also signal government intentions to either strengthen or weaken executive constraints. In contrast to personalist claims, rational-legal claims to legitimacy may have a positive precursor-effect by shifting the narrative towards impersonal procedures. We therefore add the V-Dem's rational-legal claims variable as a control. Additionally, we add the performance-based claims variable, but expect its effect to be ambiguous at best – as all regimes rely on performance-based claims to some degree (Tannenberg et al., 2021). Furthermore, the V-Dem project assesses whether regimes invoke ideological claims to legitimacy. However, these summarize multiple ideological orientations – conservatism, socialism, nationalism, among others – in a single variable and are, unfortunately, too unspecific to allow for a precise

[37] Figure A3 in the Appendix shows that this categorical reference to different Regimes of the World (Lührmann et al., 2018) makes sense, as it separates the continuous Polyarchy measure into distinct ranges.

interpretation (Keremoğlu et al., 2022). Nevertheless, we control for these ideological claims as well.

Second, regime maturity is captured by a "regime duration" variable, as well as by its quadratic and cubic terms. This helps to account for potential nonlinear effects over the life span of a given regime (Carter & Signorino, 2010; Svolik, 2012). We do this by coding changes in V-Dem's "v2reginfo" variable (Coppedge et al., 2021, pp. 133–134) as the beginning of a new regime and then counting the number of years until its demise.

Third, we know from Przeworski et al. (2000) that economic performance makes democracies more durable, while Tanneberg, Stefes, and Merkel (2013) have shown that economic hardship reduces autocratic-regime longevity, thus, potentially influencing our dependent variables as well. We account for this by controlling for GDP growth. Countries' overall prosperity is measured by adding the log of their gross domestic product to the model. Besides negative GDP growth – which serve as an indicator for economic crises – we also control for political crises and natural disasters. All of them create ample opportunities for personalistic rulers to amass power in order to swiftly "solve" a country's predicament (Weyland, 2020). The former is captured by dummies for periods of democratization and democratic breakdown that regularly make the judicial and legislative system more fragile. We control for natural disasters by coding all country-years as 1, where any type of natural disaster occurred as identified by Ritchie and Roser (2014) based on the EMDAT International Disaster Database (EM-DAT, CRED / UCLouvain, n.d.). Fourth, in the final model, year fixed effects are included and to control for any temporal effects that influenced all countries in a similar matter (major wars, economic crises, natural disasters).

4.5 Empirical results

The following section summarizes the results of the multivariate models and relates these findings to exemplary cases, which help to understand the underlying dynamics. The interaction analyses add important nuance and show how institutional limits can curb "would-be autocratizers" ambitions.

Table 1 summarizes the results of the fixed-effects models for the continuous dependent variables "judicial constraints on the executive" and "legislative constraints on the executive." Model 1 contains only the leadership-based claims to legitimacy, polyarchy, as well as their interaction; Model 2 adds the alternative claims to legitimacy and economic prosperity. Model 3 additionally accounts for GDP growth, for periods of democratization or democratic breakdown and natural disasters, while model 4 adds year fixed effects and the linear, quadratic, and cubic terms for regime maturity. All time-varying independent variables are lagged by one year to

Table 1. Fixed-effects models for judicial constraints (1-4) and legislative constraints (5-8).

	Judicial Constraints on the Executive				Legislative Constraints on the Executive			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Leadership-based Claims to Leg.	−0.204***	−0.113**	−0.115**	−0.120**	−0.194***	−0.116**	−0.172***	−0.165***
	(0.033)	(0.037)	(0.039)	(0.037)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.045)	(0.046)
Polyarchy	0.423***	0.358***	0.348***	0.433***	0.708***	0.595***	0.573***	0.557***
	(0.035)	(0.037)	(0.040)	(0.043)	(0.041)	(0.040)	(0.041)	(0.043)
Leadership-based Claims * Polyarchy	0.029	0.031	0.037	0.036	0.093**	0.100***	0.132***	0.107***
	(0.027)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.019)	(0.034)	(0.029)	(0.027)	(0.026)
Ideology-based Claims to Leg.		−0.157***	−0.152***	−0.118***		−0.146***	−0.160***	−0.139***
		(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)		(0.032)	(0.034)	(0.035)
Performance-based Claims to Leg.		−0.059	−0.087*	−0.053		−0.084	−0.076*	−0.084*
		(0.039)	(0.042)	(0.040)		(0.046)	(0.035)	(0.036)
Rational-legal Claims to Leg.		0.226***	0.236***	0.222***		0.269***	0.235***	0.225***
		(0.040)	(0.041)	(0.038)		(0.041)	(0.038)	(0.035)
GDP (log)		−0.078**	−0.060*	0.091*		−0.058*	−0.045	−0.028
		(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.040)		(0.025)	(0.027)	(0.041)
GDP growth			−0.092	−0.079			−0.049	−0.052
			(0.059)	(0.060)			(0.058)	(0.059)
Democratization			✓	✓			✓	✓
Democratic breakdown			✓	✓			✓	✓
Natural disasters			✓	✓			✓	✓
Regime duration (linear, squared, cubic)				✓				✓
Year fixed effects				✓				✓
R2 (within)	0.442	0.588	0.620	0.651	0.632	0.713	0.746	0.758
Countries	179	165	164	164	178	164	164	164
N	17305	12161	10550	10550	13798	11016	9783	9783

Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses; Significance levels: * 0.05, ** 0.01, *** 0.001; All time-varying variables lagged by one year.

account for the temporal ordering that we expect (see Appendix Table A5 for different lags of up to 5 years as robustness checks). Models 5–8 repeat the same analysis for the second dependent variable, legislative constraints.

The results clearly support the hypotheses. For judicial constraints, a one-standard deviation increase in leadership-based claims from one year to the next is related to a reduction of executive constraints by about 0.12 points – or one eighth of a standard deviation of the dependent variable. As outlined previously, both variables are scaled to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. As rulers may formulate their legitimation strategies independently of constitutional reality, claims can be altered more flexibly and to a greater magnitude than institutional structure. Accordingly, even a seemingly small reduction of the dependent variable "judicial constraints" is an important warning sign and can point to gradual changes in this area. By controlling for regime transition periods, we account for times when institutions change rapidly. This finding lends support to H1. That is, changes towards legitimation strategies focused on the person of the ruler signal an erosion of the regime's judicial constraints in the following year, thereby providing the ruler more leeway.[38]

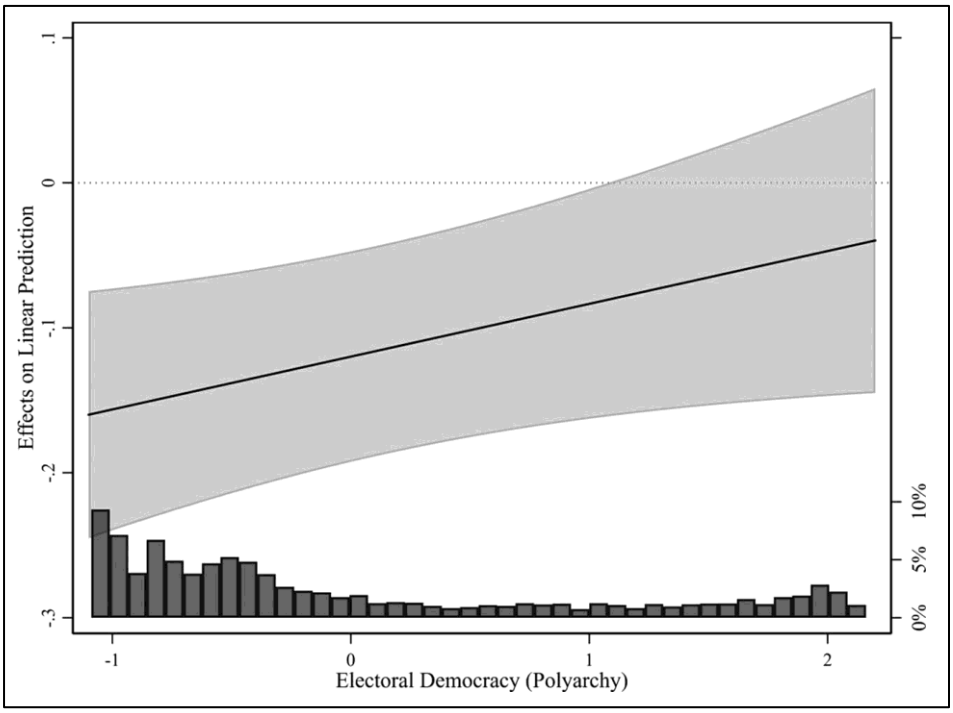
By including the interaction with V-Dem's electoral democracy measure, we test whether this observed effect is contingent on the baseline level of electoral democracy present in a given country and period. Figure 3 visualizes the marginal effect.[39] We conclude that only in the most democratic countries judicial oversight mechanisms – on average – withstand such a personalist attack on its judicial oversight mechanisms. This includes almost all long-standing democracies, which lie more than one standard deviation above the long-term global average of V-Dem's Polyarchy measure, such as most EU member states, or other prominent democracies like Costa Rica, post-2000 Chile, or Uruguay. These findings of our interaction analysis lend support to H2.

To put these findings into perspective, President Alberto Fujimori's self-coup in Peru, at that time an electoral democracy, serves as a drastic example. Fujimori's claims to legitimacy prior to and after his first election in June 1990 stressed his personal appeal as an outsider to the political system who fought the traditional political elite in Peru and the "establishment institutions they controlled" (Roberts, 1995, p. 98). By doing so, he portrayed himself as the savior of the people who could not accept any compromises (Personalist Claims $\Delta_{1990\text{-}1993} = 0.11$; all reported changes are on a scale of 0-1).

[38] This effect remains significant with additional lags of two to five years (see Table A5 in the Appendix, Models 1–3).

[39] Though the interaction is not significant for our first dependent variable, the marginal effects plot identifies a significant effect of claims on executive constraints at those levels of the moderator (Polyarchy level) where the confidence interval does not include the zero-line.

Figure 3. Average marginal effects of personalist claims to legitimacy on judicial constraints.



Notes: The superimposed histogram shows the distribution of our moderating variable – Polyarchy. The overlap of the confidence interval and the zero-line indicates a non-significant effect at this level of the moderator.

This set the path for demolishing executive constraints in the 1992 autogolpe. Fujimori dissolved parliament, suspended the Constitution, and replaced High Court judges with loyal supporters (Judicial Constraints $\Delta_{1990\text{-}1993} = -0.37$), and turned Peru's polity into a highly centralized competitive authoritarian regime until he finally fled the country at the end of 2000 (Kenney, 1998; Levitsky & Loxton, 2013).

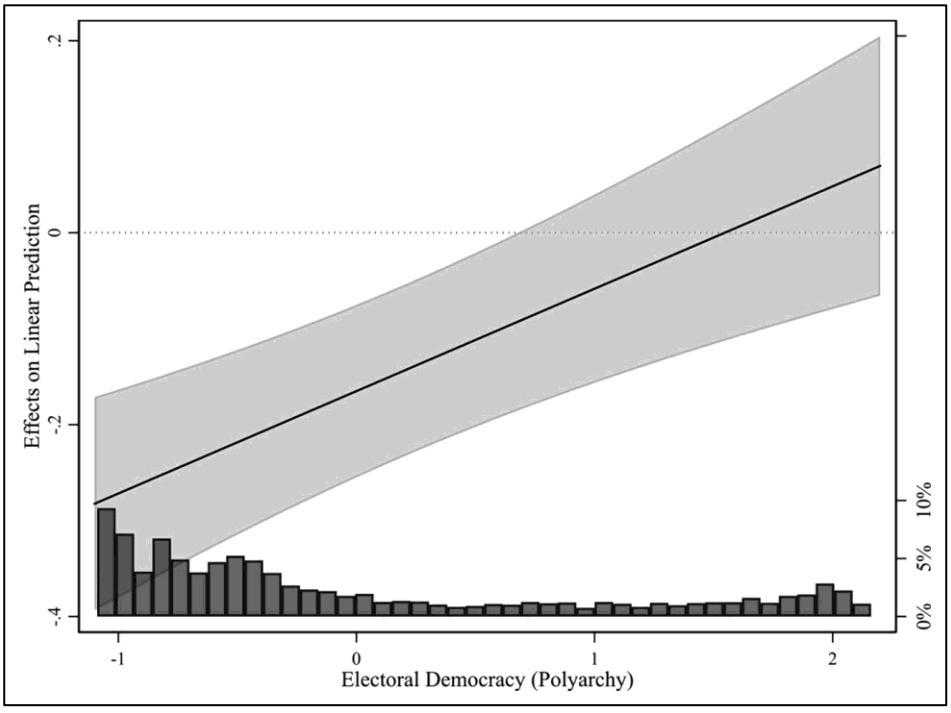
In a similar vein, in the USA Donald Trump stressed his irreplaceability as a leader and personal appeal (Personalist Claims $\Delta_{2016\text{-}2017} = 0.32$) as the savior of the ordinary people who would make America "great again." He subsequently filled open Supreme Court positions with judges that were said to favor his conservative political agenda and recurrently attacked opponents and institutions of executive control. However, the country's courts largely withstood Trump's attacks, and – in contrast to V-Dem's liberal democracy variable – the judicial constraints on the executive variable only slightly weakened during his term (Judicial Constraints $\Delta_{2016\text{-}2019} = -0.015$).

The results for the second dependent variable – legislative constraints – align with the results of the first analysis (Table 1, model 5-8). That is, we also find a negative effect of personalist claims to legitimacy on executive constraints – speaking in favor of H1. The results are significant at the 99% confidence level and slightly exceed those of the judicial constraints in magnitude. The interaction with polyarchy (Figure 4) reveals that this effect is also not significant in regimes

that score approximately one standard deviation and above in the global average of electoral democracy levels. However, in this case we find a highly significant interaction, meaning that country-years with above average levels of V-Dem's Polyarchy measure experience a significantly weaker decrease of their legislative constraints following an increase in personalist rhetoric.

For example, in Argentina – classified as an electoral democracy for the last 40 years – after Néstor Kirchner was first elected President in 2003, there was a huge increase in personalist claims (Personalist Claims $\Delta_{2002\text{-}2003} = 0.34$). The analysis, using V-Dem data, shows that in the following years legislative constraints of executive power slightly weakened (Legislative Constraints $\Delta_{2003\text{-}2008} = -0.06$). After his wife Cristina Fernández de Kirchner was elected president at the end of 2007, personalist legitimation strategies remained high and legislative constraints reduced further. In a country with significantly lower Polyarchy levels, we see a much stronger effect. In Russia, classified as an electoral autocracy since 1993, under President Putin we see increasing personalist claims in 2000, 2004, 2012, 2013, and 2014 (Personalist Claims $\Delta_{2000\text{-}2020} = 0.35$) that were all followed by reductions of legislative constraints (Legislative Constraints $\Delta_{2000\text{-}2020} = -0.51$).

Figure 4. Average marginal effects of personalist claims to legitimacy on legislative constraints.



Notes: The superimposed histogram shows the distribution of our moderating variable – Polyarchy. The overlap of the confidence interval and the zero-line indicates a non-significant effect at this level of the moderator.

These examples demonstrate how leaders with personalist aspirations have a much harder time removing their countries' legislative constraints once a certain level of democratic quality has been surpassed. This might be due to the higher visibility of legislative actions

compared to the judicial and the number of actors and parties involved in the parliamentary branch. Attempting to alter legislative constraints in countries with democracy levels above this threshold, thus, seems to be less successful.

4.6 Control variables and robustness checks

As for the controls, we find that legitimation strategies that increasingly focus on rational-legal claims work in the opposite direction of personalist claims, meaning they are antecedents to strengthened institutional checks and balances and thereby bolster democratic health. Performance based claims only show a significant influence in the full model on legislative constraints (Model 8). That is, governments that shift their discursive focus towards performance to legitimate their rule, may also attack legislative constraints. As mentioned, ideological claims are difficult to interpret, but generally also favor subsequent executive aggrandizement. For the remaining control variables, the only notable influence on judicial and legislative constraints is the economic performance of a country, which – in the case of judicial constraints – is negative in Models 2 and 3 and turns sign, once we control for regime maturity and add year fixed-effects. During political transition periods, executive constraints behave as expected: They increase following democratization events and decrease during democratic breakdowns. Disasters show no significant influence on our dependent variables.

We run three additional models to probe the robustness of our findings. First, using Polity IV's Executive Constraints variable (Marshall & Jaggers, 2016), which combines judicial and legislative guardrails, we are able to reproduce the findings of the original models (see Appendix Table A4). Second, we worked with time lags other than one year. All results hold for two-, three- and five-year lags (see Appendix Table A5). Finally, we find that the effects are not driven by a specific time period. Figure A5 and Table A6 in the Appendix summarize the findings.

4.7 Conclusion

This article has provided first insights into the consequences of shifting regime legitimation strategies for the strength of judicial and legislative constraints of executive actions – an aspect that existing research could hardly comprehensively examine so far. Our findings clearly demonstrate that changing governmental legitimation strategies that increasingly focus on the person of the leader are important signals for the following expansion of executive powers.

With new comprehensive data from the V-Dem project we have for the first time been able to systematically evaluate the political repercussions of shifts in legitimation. However, there are some limitations to this initial assessment. We have not directly tested how legitimation strategies

are utilized as part of the "menu of manipulation," (Schedler, 2002) but rather whether or not changing claims signal a subsequent deterioration of judicial and legislative constraints on executive action. The potential causal pathways that follow the increased reliance on leadership-based claims appear as diverse as the leaders that initiate them. Some denounce oppositional and civil society groups as terrorists or foreign agents and declare them illegal. They may also cut down the oversight powers of parliament. Others might follow a more long-term agenda and replace judges after their term-limit is reached with their supporters. The specificities of this rhetoric–action link warrant further analysis in future qualitative and quantitative work on the topic.

However, our initial macroanalysis already adds important nuance. Most notably, the institutional repercussions of an increased discursive focus on the *grandeur* of the ruler are particularly grave in regimes that are not fully democratic. In contrast to much current scholarly concern, long-standing, liberal democracies with their stronger institutions seem comparatively safe from these executive aggrandizements, at least in the short term.[40] They are able to resist rulers' potential attacks on their judicial and legislative constraints.

Our analysis adds to the rediscovery of questions of political legitimacy and the growing literature on (autocratic) legitimation strategies that has emerged in response to current autocratization processes (Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017; Gerschewski, 2018; Holbig, 2013; Kailitz, 2013; Maerz, 2019; von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017).

It demonstrates that investigating official legitimation narratives enriches comparative politics and comparative authoritarianism approaches that have long had an institutional bent to them. The key theoretical implication is that personalist discursive strategies form an intricate part of, and facilitate, executive action seeking to remove institutional constraints. Systematically analyzing shifting claims to legitimacy and their acceptance should therefore be central to the current scholarly drive to track processes of autocratization.

[40] This supports similar arguments made by Weyland (2020), "Populism's Threat to Democracy" and Welzel, Kruse, and Brunkert (2022), "Why the Future Is (Still) Democratic."

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4.10 APPENDIX

Praising the leader: personalist legitimation strategies and the deterioration of executive constraints

Table A1: Included country-years

Country name	Year (Min)	Year (Max)	Total Years
Afghanistan	1951	2015	47
Albania	1929	2015	67
Algeria	1962	2015	54
Angola	1975	2015	41
Argentina	1900	2015	100
Armenia	1991	2015	25
Australia	1901	2015	115
Austria	1918	2015	90
Azerbaijan	1991	2015	25
Bahrain	1973	2015	27
Bangladesh	1972	2015	44
Barbados	1966	2015	50
Belarus	1991	2015	25
Belgium	1900	2015	109
Benin	1960	2015	48
Bolivia	1900	2015	99
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1993	2015	20
Botswana	1966	2015	50
Brazil	1900	2015	102
Bulgaria	1905	2015	89
Burkina Faso	1960	2015	34
Burma/Myanmar	1952	2015	29
Burundi	1962	2015	33
Cambodia	1955	2015	58
Cameroon	1962	2015	54
Canada	1900	2015	116
Cape Verde	1975	2015	41
Central African Republic	1960	2015	32
Chad	1960	2015	48
Chile	1900	2015	98
China	1900	2015	65
Colombia	1903	2015	112
Comoros	1975	2015	38
Costa Rica	1921	2015	95
Croatia	1992	2015	24
Cuba	1902	2015	114
Cyprus	1960	2015	56
Czech Republic	1971	2015	45
Democratic Republic of the Congo	1960	2015	46
Denmark	1900	2015	113
Djibouti	1977	2015	39
Dominican Republic	1951	2015	63
Ecuador	1900	2008	91
Egypt	1950	2014	58
El Salvador	1921	2015	89
Equatorial Guinea	1968	2015	44
Estonia	1991	2015	25
Eswatini	1968	2015	44
Ethiopia	1951	2015	52
Finland	1917	2015	99
France	1900	2015	110
Gabon	1960	2015	55
Georgia	1991	2015	24
Germany	1900	2015	110
Ghana	1957	2015	59
Greece	1900	2015	98
Guatemala	1921	2015	95
Guinea	1958	2015	52
Guinea-Bissau	1974	2015	41
Haiti	1946	2015	62
Honduras	1945	2015	46
Hungary	1920	2015	90
Iceland	1951	2015	65
India	1950	2015	66
Indonesia	1949	2015	67
Iran	1950	2015	64
Iraq	2005	2015	11
Ireland	1922	2015	94
Israel	1951	2015	65
Italy	1900	2015	116
Ivory Coast	1960	2015	55
Jamaica	1962	2015	54
Japan	1900	2015	116
Jordan	1951	2015	54
Kazakhstan	1991	2015	25
Kenya	1963	2015	53
Kuwait	1961	2015	55
Kyrgyzstan	1991	2015	25
Laos	1989	2015	27
Latvia	1991	2015	25
Lebanon	1951	2015	65

Lesotho	1966	2015	42
Liberia	1951	2015	60
Libya	1952	2015	56
Lithuania	1991	2015	25
Luxembourg	1951	2015	65
Madagascar	1960	2015	53
Malawi	1964	2015	52
Malaysia	1957	2015	58
Mali	1960	2015	43
Malta	2000	2015	16
Mauritania	1960	2015	42
Mauritius	1968	2015	48
Mexico	1900	2015	112
Moldova	1991	2015	25
Mongolia	1951	2015	65
Montenegro	2012	2015	4
Morocco	1962	2015	47
Mozambique	1994	2015	22
Namibia	1990	2015	26
Nepal	1959	2015	57
Netherlands	1900	2015	116
New Zealand	1900	2015	116
Nicaragua	1921	2015	88
Niger	1960	2015	40
Nigeria	1960	2015	30
North Korea	1991	2015	25
North Macedonia	1992	2015	24
Norway	1900	2015	112
Oman	1991	2015	25
Pakistan	1951	2015	47
Panama	1907	2015	105
Paraguay	1940	2015	76
Peru	1900	2015	93
Philippines	1935	2015	69
Poland	1920	2015	79
Portugal	1900	2015	107
Qatar	1971	2015	45
Republic of the Congo	1960	2015	45
Romania	1900	2015	105
Russia	1961	2015	54
Rwanda	1962	2015	44
Sao Tome and Principe	1976	2015	40
Saudi Arabia	1950	2015	66
Senegal	1960	2015	56
Serbia	1953	2015	62
Seychelles	1976	2015	39
Sierra Leone	1961	2015	45
Singapore	1965	2015	51
Slovakia	1994	2015	22
Slovenia	1991	2015	25
South Africa	1910	2015	94
South Korea	1948	2015	68
Spain	1900	2015	103
Sri Lanka	1948	2015	68
Sudan	1956	2010	34
Sweden	1900	2015	116
Switzerland	1900	2015	116
Syria	1951	2015	57
Taiwan	1950	2015	66
Tajikistan	1991	2015	25
Tanzania	1961	2015	55
Thailand	1913	2015	67
The Gambia	1965	2015	49
Togo	1960	2015	44
Trinidad and Tobago	1962	2015	54
Tunisia	1959	2015	57
Turkey	1913	2015	92
Turkmenistan	1991	2015	25
Uganda	1962	2015	44
Ukraine	1991	2015	25
United Arab Emirates	1972	2015	41
United Kingdom	1900	2015	116
United States of America	1900	2015	116
Uruguay	1900	2015	104
Uzbekistan	1991	2015	25
Venezuela	1900	2015	116
Vietnam	1954	2015	62
Yemen	1971	2015	42
Zambia	1964	2015	52
Zimbabwe	1965	2015	51

Table A2: Descriptive statistics

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Judicial constraints on the executive index (standardized)	10556	0.130	1.040	1.730	1.590
Legislative constraints on the executive index (standardized)	9779	0.110	1.040	1.500	1.620
Electoral democracy index (standardized)	10587	0.370	1.000	-1.090	2.160
Claim: Person of the Leader (standardized)	10587	0.020	1.010	-2.140	2.450
Claim: Performance-based	10587	0.590	0.150	0.000	1.000
Claim: Legal-rational	10587	0.580	0.150	0.050	0.980
GDP growth	10587	0.020	0.080	-0.570	2.720
GDP (logged)	10587	8.510	1.090	5.920	11.960
Regime age	10587	18.33	18.98	1.000	116.000
Democratic Breakdowns	10587	0.010	0.080	0.000	1.000
0 (%)	10514			99.310	
1 (%)	73			0.690	
Democratic Transitions	10587	0.010	0.110	0.000	1.000
0 (%)	10463			98.830	
1 (%)	124			1.170	

Table A3: Pairwise correlations

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) Judicial constraints on the executive index	1.000					
(2) Legislative constraints on the executive index	0.771*	1.000				
(3) Electoral democracy index	0.704*	0.816*	1.000			
(4) Claim: Person of the Leader	-0.458*	-0.567*	-0.451*	1.000		
(5) Claim: Performance-based	0.264*	0.213*	0.449*	0.053*	1.000	
(6) Claim: Legal-rational	0.489*	0.523*	0.590*	-0.154*	0.610*	1.000
*** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$						

Figure A1: K-density estimates of personalist claims to legitimacy (standardized with SD = 1) by Regimes of the World.

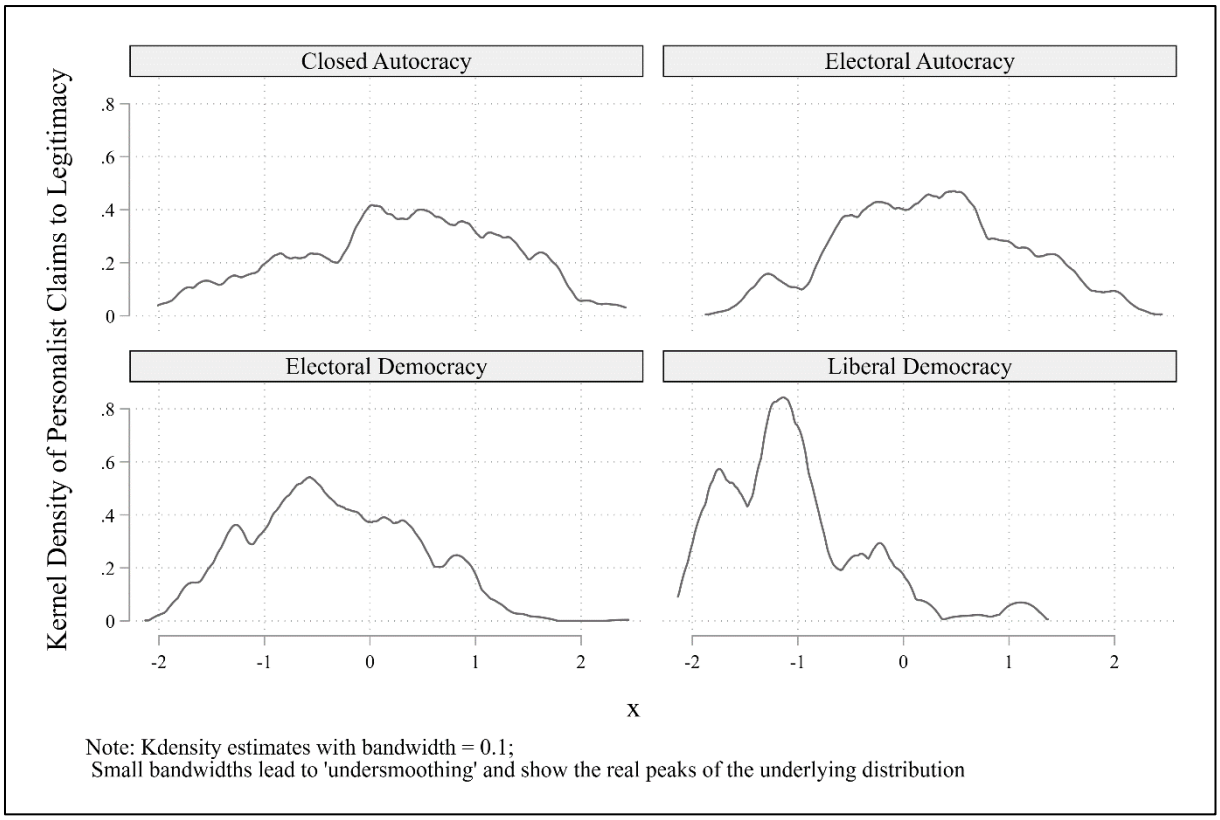


Figure A2: Overview of high and low coded periods for personalist claims to legitimacy.

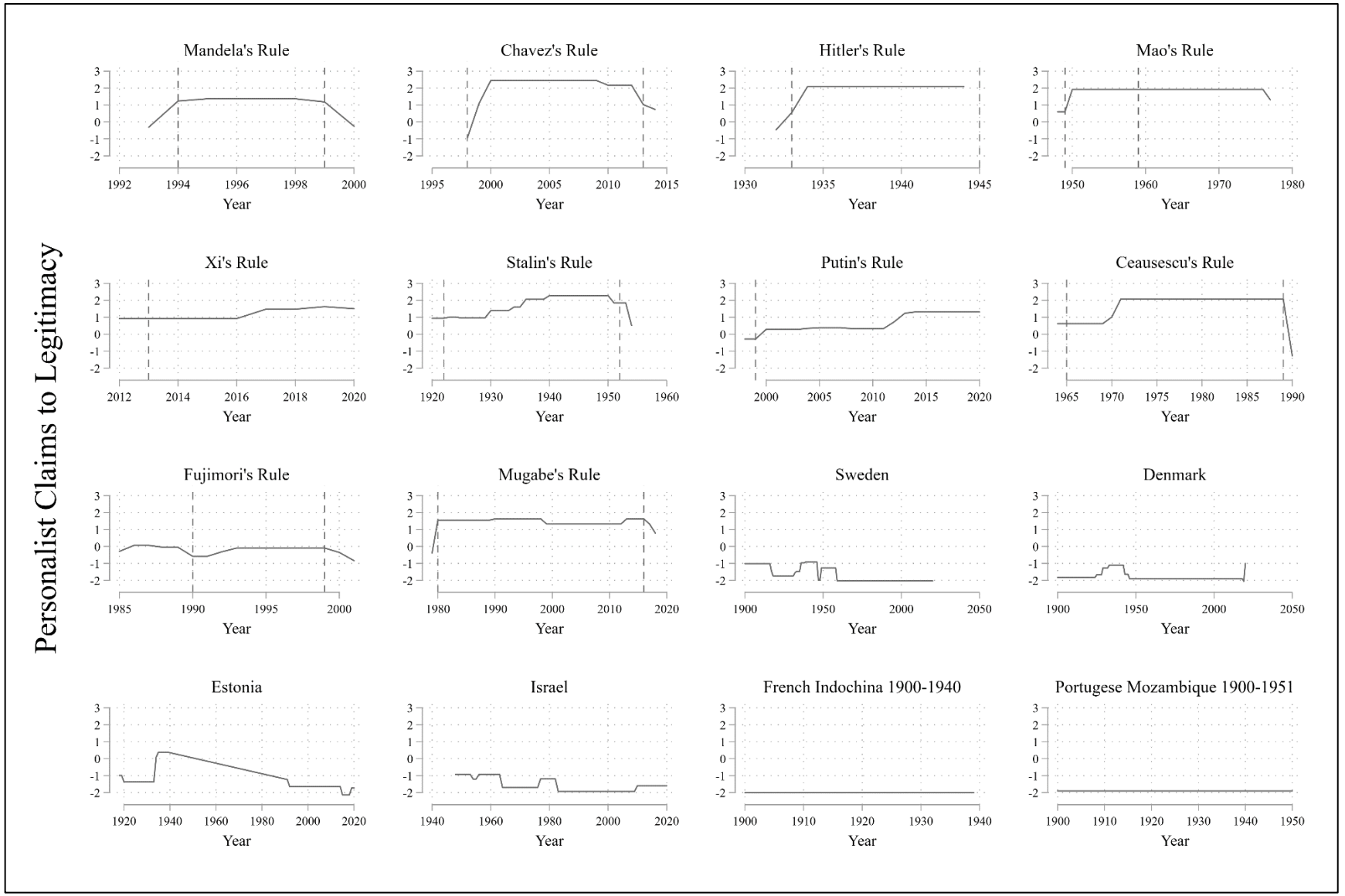


Figure A3: Polyarchy separated by Regimes of the World classification.

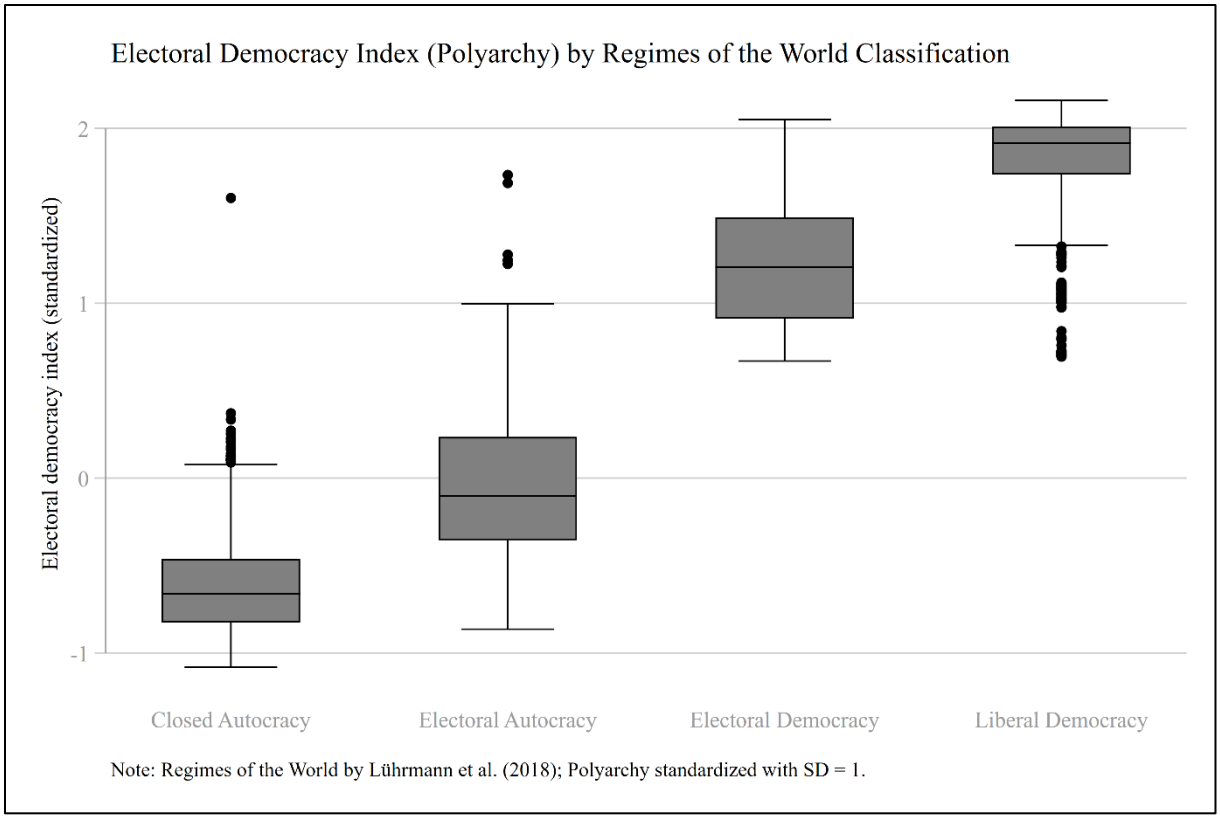


Table A4: Polity IV Executive Constraints as dependent variable

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Executive Constraints (Polity IV: XCONST)			
Leadership-based Claims to Leg.	-0.236***	-0.234***	-0.229***	-0.216***
	(0.040)	(0.038)	(0.038)	(0.040)
Polyarchy	0.665***	0.581***	0.582***	0.505***
	(0.039)	(0.051)	(0.051)	(0.053)
Leadership-based Claims * Polyarchy	0.197***	0.179***	0.178***	0.135***
	(0.027)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.023)
Performance-based Claims to Leg.		0.010	0.013	0.025
		(0.043)	(0.044)	(0.041)
Rational-legal Claims to Leg.		-0.044	-0.037	-0.067
		(0.050)	(0.052)	(0.050)
GDP (log)		-0.051	-0.056	-0.088
		(0.037)	(0.039)	(0.052)
GDP growth			0.018	0.006
			(0.068)	(0.070)
Democratization			?	?
Democratic breakdown			?	?
Natural Disasters			?	?
Regime duration (linear, squared, cubic)				?
Year fixed effects				?
R2	0.522	0.557	0.562	0.593
Countries	168	157	157	157
N	11765	10255	9841	9841
Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001				

Figure A4: Marginal effects plot for Table A4

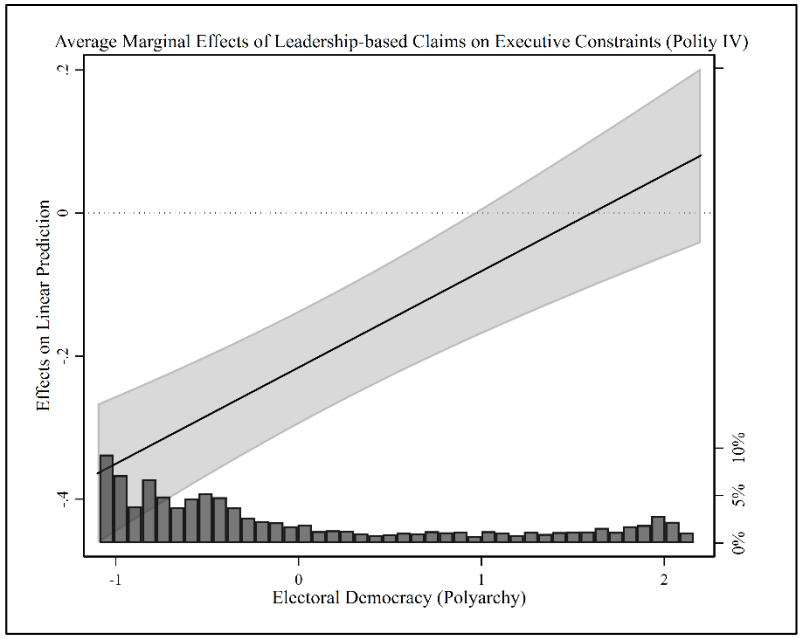


Table A5: Main models with additional time lags

	2-year lag	3-year lag	5-year lag	2-year lag	3-year lag	5-year lag
	Judicial Constraints			**Legislative Constraints**		
Leadership-based Claims to Leg.	-0.117**	-0.114**	-0.105*	-0.166***	-0.168**	-0.152**
	(0.038)	(0.039)	(0.042)	(0.049)	(0.050)	(0.051)
Polyarchy	0.374***	0.318***	0.232***	0.477***	0.411***	0.301***
	(0.041)	(0.040)	(0.039)	(0.043)	(0.044)	(0.048)
Leadership-based Claims * Polyarchy	0.031	0.025	0.014	0.107***	0.106***	0.098***
	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.026)
Ideology-based Claims to Leg.	-0.127***	-0.133***	-0.134***	-0.151***	-0.153***	-0.155***
	(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.031)	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.037)
Performance-based Claims to Leg.	-0.055	-0.054	-0.054	-0.087*	-0.084*	-0.086*
	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.036)	(0.037)	(0.038)
Rational-legal Claims to Leg.	0.217***	0.206***	0.175***	0.219***	0.206***	0.182***
	(0.038)	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.035)	(0.034)	(0.036)
GDP (log)	0.101*	0.111*	0.131*	-0.015	-0.003	0.024
	(0.042)	(0.044)	(0.051)	(0.044)	(0.047)	(0.054)
GDP growth	-0.079	-0.076	-0.038	-0.087	-0.029	-0.040
	(0.054)	(0.050)	(0.053)	(0.063)	(0.056)	(0.065)
R^2	0.591	0.534	0.439	0.708	0.658	0.572
Countries	164	164	163	164	164	163
N	10224	10058	9727	9468	9311	9004

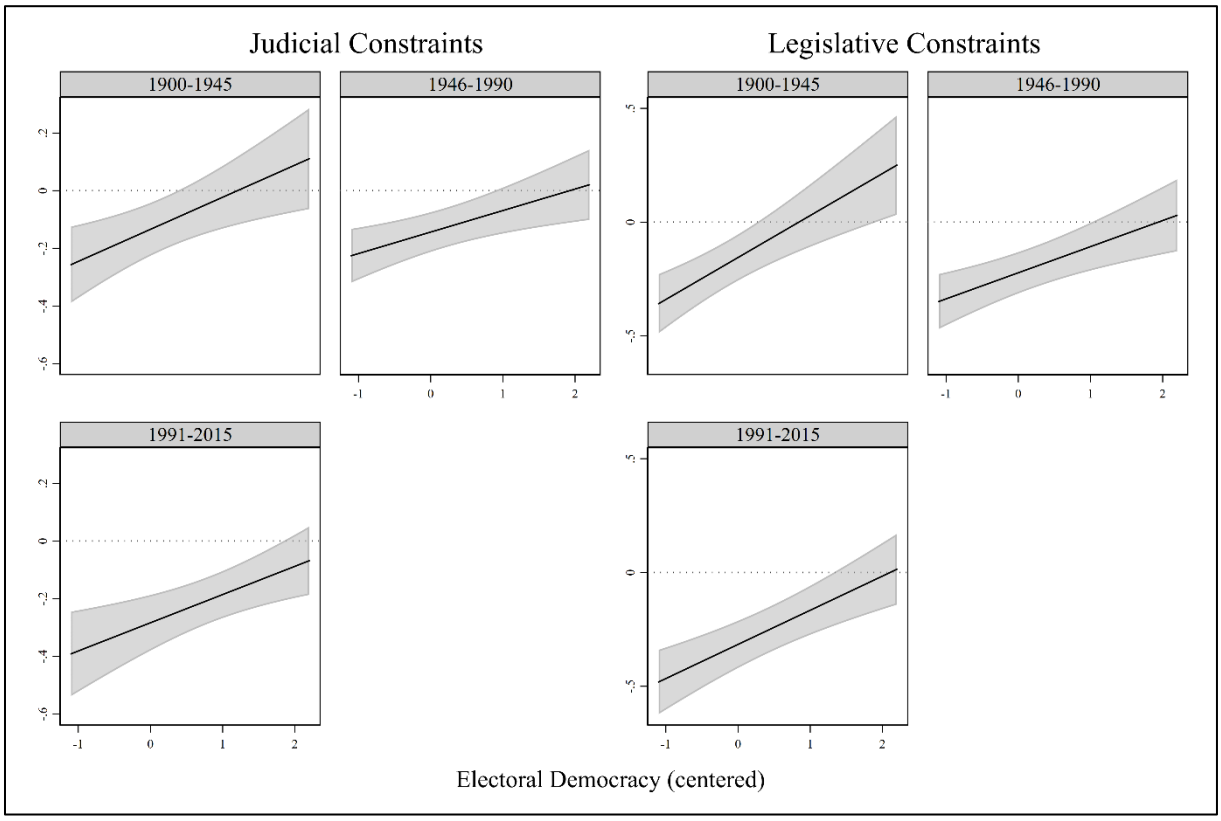
FE regression with additional year-FE. Cluster-robust Standard errors in parentheses.
All models additionally control for democratization, democratic breakdown, natural disaster, regime maturity and year-FE.
* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table A6: Three way-interaction with periods

	(1) Judicial Constraints	(2) Legislative Constraints
Leadership-based Claims to Leg.	-0.134**	-0.155**
	(0.047)	(0.052)
Polyarchy	0.452***	0.664***
	(0.061)	(0.074)
Leadership-based Claims * Polyarchy	0.111**	0.184***
	(0.038)	(0.042)
Leadership-based Claims * Polyarchy * 1900-1945	*Baseline Category*	
Leadership-based Claims * Polyarchy * 1946-1990	-0.037	-0.070
	(0.040)	(0.047)
Leadership-based Claims * Polyarchy * 1991-2015	-0.013	-0.034
	(0.045)	(0.048)
Constant	-0.462	0.156
	(0.297)	(0.304)
R^2	0.649	0.753
Countries	164	164
N	10550	9783

FE regression with additional year-FE. Cluster-robust Standard errors in parentheses.
All models additionally control for the remaining claims to legitimacy, GDP, GDP growth, democratization or democratic breakdown and regime maturity.
* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Figure A5: Marginal effects plots separated by period.



Notes A1: V-Dem Regime Legitimation Strategies (RLS) question battery.

Expert survey questions on regime legitimation strategies from the Varieties of Democracy Codebook v11 (Coppedge et al. 2021, 221-223).

Person of the leader

Question: To what extent is the Chief Executive portrayed as being endowed with extraordinary personal characteristics and/or leadership skills (e.g. as father or mother of the nation, exceptionally heroic, moral, pious, or wise, or any other extraordinary attribute valued by the society)?

Clarification: The Chief Executive refers to the Head of State or the Head of Government, depending on the relative power of each office. We are interested in the key leadership figure.

Performance legitimation

Question: To what extent does the government refer to performance (such as providing economic growth, poverty reduction, effective and non-corrupt governance, and/or providing security) in order to justify the regime in place?

Rational-legal legitimation

Question: To what extent does the current government refer to the legal norms and regulations in order to justify the regime in place?

Clarification: This question pertains to legal norms and regulations as laid out for instance in the constitution regarding access to power (e.g. elections) as well as exercise of power (e.g. rule of law). Electoral regimes may score high on this question as well as non-electoral regimes that emphasize their rule-boundedness.

Possible responses to all questions:

Responses:
0: Not at all.
1: To a small extent.
2: To some extent but it is not the most important component.
3: To a large extent but not exclusively.
4: Almost exclusively.
Scale: Ordinal, converted to interval by the measurement model.

Appendix References

Coppedge, M., Gerring, J., Knutsen, C. H., Lindberg, S. I., Teorell, J., Altman, D., Bernhard, M., Fish, M. S., Glynn, A., Hicken, A., Lührmann, A., Marquardt, K. L., McMann, K., Paxton, P., Pemstein, D., Seim, B., Sigman, R., Skaaning, S.-E., Staton, J., … Ziblatt, D. (2020). *V-Dem Codebook v10*. Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project.