Government of or for the people?
Preferences for democratic decision-making in challenging times

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February 8, 2022
Background

• Covid-19 pandemic has led to unprecedented restrictions of political, economic, and civil liberties for the greater good of public health

• Especially in democratic societies, long-term viability of such measures hinges on citizen acceptance and support

• Yet acceptance of, and compliance with, countermeasures varies substantially across countries (van Bavel 2022), and we do not fully understand why

• Pandemic is truly global and provides unique opportunity to study citizen evaluations of liberty vs. public goods trade-offs in a comparative fashion
1. **Restrictions of freedoms and liberties**
   To what extent will citizens accept restrictions of personal freedoms in a public health emergency?
   Are they more likely to accept some restrictions than others?
Research questions

1. **Restrictions of freedoms and liberties**
   To what extent will citizens accept restrictions of personal freedoms in a public health emergency?
   Are they more likely to accept some restrictions than others?

2. **Decision-making procedures**
   How do citizens think far-reaching decisions concerning major societal challenges should be made?

3. **Country-level heterogeneity**
   How do the answers to these question vary by political system and national culture?

4. **Individual-level heterogeneity**
   How do the answers vary across different groups of citizens?
Our study

• Conjoint survey experiment and best-worst scaling with priming treatment to elicit citizen preferences concerning
  1. specific restrictions of political, economic, and civic liberties
  2. (democratic) decision-making procedures

• Citizens aged 18-75, six countries (1500 cases each)
  • Germany, Spain, Hungary, Poland, Japan, South Korea

• Online access survey fielded with IPSOS in November 2021
  • Post-stratification weighting according to region, gender, age, education
Exp 1: forced-choice conjoint on restrictions of freedoms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaving home without special reasons</td>
<td>avoid if possible</td>
<td>prohibited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International travel without special reasons</td>
<td>avoid if possible</td>
<td>prohibited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure facilities (e.g., cinemas, restaurants, fitness clubs)</td>
<td>avoid if possible</td>
<td>closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shops and services beyond basic supply</td>
<td>avoid if possible</td>
<td>closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools and childcare facilities</td>
<td>open</td>
<td>closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers must enable home office or alternating presence</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private gatherings beyond the own household</td>
<td>avoid if possible</td>
<td>prohibited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory contact tracing (e.g., smartphone app)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political rallies or demonstrations</td>
<td>avoid if possible</td>
<td>prohibited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct political elections</td>
<td>as scheduled</td>
<td>postponed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact-checking of news media output</td>
<td>encouraged</td>
<td>fines for false information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⇒ 2 levels per attribute, 5 policy pairs per respondent
Exp 2: best-worst scaling of decision-making procedures w/ priming treatment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Attribute/option shown to respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Technocracy</td>
<td>Evidence-based decisions by consulting relevant experts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Participatory democracy</td>
<td>Decisions in accordance with public opinion by seeking citizen input (e.g., referenda, opinion polls, fora).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Oversized consensus</td>
<td>A broad consensus across political camps by discussing options with all relevant political parties and groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Executive dominance</td>
<td>A resolute and swift response by taking decisions as quickly as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Economic interests</td>
<td>Minimize negative effects on the national economy by consulting with businesses and companies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 International cooperation</td>
<td>An international or even global strategy by coordinating with other governments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Legislative control</td>
<td>Support from elected representatives by putting decisions to a vote in the national parliament.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⇒ Preferences elicited by showing respondents 7 subsets of 4 options each
⇒ Priming treatment mentioning Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, or “major societal challenges” in a generic way
Exp 2: best-worst scaling of decision-making procedures w/ priming treatment

Please consider the following four approaches future **German** governments might take in order to tackle **major societal challenges like climate change**.

Please indicate which one you think is most important and which one you think is least important for coming up with a good decision.

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Input or output orientation?

Sanctity of democratic rights (cf. Arceneaux et al. 2020)

Even in times of crisis, citizens will be reluctant to (temporarily) give up core political rights relating the input side of the political process, including their ability to vote and control the government as well as freedom of speech.
Input or output orientation?

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Even in times of crisis, citizens will be reluctant to (temporarily) give up core political rights relating the input side of the political process, including their ability to vote and control the government as well as freedom of speech.

Thirst for expertise (cf. Bertsou and Caramani 2022)

A sizable and growing segment of the electorate favors a ‘technocratic’ approach to governance, particularly when it comes to dealing with major challenges such as Covid-19 or climate change. The focus is on policy output in terms of swift and efficient action, and the input side of the political process becomes a secondary concern.
Country selection
Democracy and national culture

![Country selection diagram](image_url)
Country selection
Established liberal vs. more authoritarian democracies

- Citizens in liberal democracies less likely to accept restrictions of liberties due to political socialization, more polyphonic media landscapes and simply “having more to lose”

- Particularly reluctant to accept restrictions of core democratic liberties (elections, demonstrations, free media)?

- Citizens in more authoritarian regimes less likely to accept restrictions of private gatherings and contact tracing (‘arenas of last resort’)
Country selection
National culture I: Individualism vs. collectivism

- Aggregate relationship between individualism and Covid-19 deaths, oft-cited explanation for relative success of many Asian countries (Maaravi et al. 2021; Rajkumar 2021)

- Fincher et al. (2008) argue that collectivist orientations have actually developed as a response to high prevalence of pathogens

- Collectivism predicts mask usage at individual and aggregate levels (Lu et al. 2021)

- We look into acceptance of restrictions as another plausible mechanism

Flexibility (vs. monumentalism) is a less-studied aspect of culture proposed by Minkov (2008), related to Hofstede’s (2001) concept of long-term orientation.

“Monumentalism is a metaphor for a cultural tendency to encourage people to be like a monolithic monument: proud, stable, and consistent... Flexibility is the opposite cultural tendency, favoring a modest self-regard, duality, and adaptability.”

— Minkov et al. (2018, 320)

⇒ Flexibility might be associated with greater readiness to accept (temporary) restrictions for the sake of greater (long-term) good.
Results
Restrictions (conjoint experiment)
Overall, restrictions are unpopular...

Bars are 95% confidence intervals.
...but restrictions of core political rights are not

Preferences for pandemic policies by type of restrictions
Separately estimated for each of the six country samples

Effect on the probability that respondents prefer a policy
(Average marginal component effects)

Thick/thin bars are 95/99% confidence intervals.
Home office mandates and international travel restrictions positively affect policy choice

Preferences for pandemic policies by type of restrictions
Separately estimated for each of the six country samples

Effect on the probability that respondents prefer a policy
(Average marginal component effects)

Thick/thin bars are 95/99% confidence intervals.
Restrictions of movement and closings of shops (!) very unpopular

Preferences for pandemic policies by type of restrictions
Separately estimated for each of the six country samples

Effect on the probability that respondents prefer a policy
(Average marginal component effects)

Thick/thin bars are 95/99% confidence intervals.
Preferences for pandemic policies by type of restrictions
Separately estimated for each of the six country samples

Country sample:
- Germany
- Hungary
- Japan
- Poland
- South Korea
- Spain

Thick/thin bars are 83/95% confidence intervals. Non-overlapping 83%-CIs are approximately correspond to country difference being significant at 5% level.
No evidence that restrictions of political rights are more unpopular in established liberal democracies

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Restrictions of core democratic rights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Elections postponed</th>
<th>Rallies/demonstrations prohibited</th>
<th>Fines for false information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.00</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
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V–Dem Liberal Democracy Score 2020:

Thick/thin bars are 83/95% confidence intervals. Non-overlapping 83%-CIs are approximately correspond to country difference being significant at 5% level.
Interventions into private sphere/privacy less popular in authoritarian democracies

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Interventions into private sphere/privacy less popular in authoritarian democracies

**Interventions into privacy/private sphere**

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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Effect of restriction on the probability that policy is chosen (Average marginal component effect)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

V–Dem Liberal Democracy Score 2020:

-0.10  -0.05  0.00  0.05  0.10

Thick/thin bars are 83/95% confidence intervals.
Non-overlapping 83%-CIs are approximately correspond to country difference being significant at 5% level.
Individual heterogeneity

- Pooled analysis with country fixed effects (incl. interactions with conjoint attributes)
- Standard errors clustered at the person level
  - Caveat: no correction for multiple testing (yet)
- Meaningful heterogeneity by age, gender, (subjective) standard of living and according to cultural and value orientations and according several dimensions of trust
Gender and standard of living

Female (vs. male)

Standard of living (subj.)
Thick/thin bars are 95/99% confidence intervals.
Individualism and Flexibility

Thick/thin bars are 95/99% confidence intervals.
Results
Decision-making procedures
(Best-Worst-Scaling with priming experiment)
Exp 2: best-worst scaling of decision-making procedures w/ priming treatment

Please consider the following four approaches future **German** governments might take in order to tackle **major societal challenges** like climate change / **major societal challenges like the Coronavirus pandemic**.

Please indicate which one you think is most important and which one you think is least important for coming up with a good decision.

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Preferences for decision-making procedures

Coronavirus pandemic

Experiment 2
Preferred decision–making procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>South Korea</th>
<th>Spain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expert Input</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Business Input</td>
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<tr>
<td>Citizen Input</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quick Action</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internat Coord</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Consensus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parl Vote</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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Average standardized Best–Worst Scores

Treatment: 🌿 Major societal challenges 🌙 Climate change 🦠 Coronavirus

Thick/thin bars are 95/99% confidence intervals.
Preferences for decision-making procedures

Climate change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment:</th>
<th>Major societal challenges</th>
<th>Climate change</th>
<th>Coronavirus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average standardized Best–Worst Scores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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Thick/thin bars are 95/99% confidence intervals.
Preferences for decision-making procedures

Major societal challenges

Thick/thin bars are 95/99% confidence intervals.

Average standardized Best–Worst Scores

Treatment: 
- Major societal challenges
- Climate change
- Coronavirus
Preliminary conclusions and next steps

• Overall, restrictions of fundamental rights and liberties are unpopular...
  • …but strength and even direction of effect varies from one measure to the next

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  • If anything, limited support for more authoritarian democracies in sample
    ⇒ Broadly consistent with Arceneaux et al. (2020)
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  • Expert-guided decision-making ranks at or near top of average citizen’s hierarchy of decision-making procedures
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• Further explore country and individual-level heterogeneity in policy and decision-making preferences
  • Compositional differences wrt socio-demographics and attitudes/value orientations as potential explanations of country differences
  • Refine statistical analysis (multiple testing adjustments)
Additional results
Restrictions: Age

Thick/thin bars are 95/99% confidence intervals.
Restrictions: Education

Thick/thin bars are 95/99% confidence intervals.
Restrictions: Household composition

Thick/thin bars are 95/99% confidence intervals.
Technocratic orientations

Technocracy: elitism

Technocracy: expertise

Technocracy: anti-politics

Thick/thin bars are ±90% confidence intervals.
Restrictions: Risk aversion and empathy

Risk aversion

Empathy

Thick/thin bars are 95/99% confidence intervals.