

Measuring the Understandings of Democracy – Alternative Approaches

Panel Chair:

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Serious doubts on the global triumph of democracy are appropriate, facing the numerous problematic transformation processes and declines of democracy in some consolidated democracies, failed external democratization efforts in the Middle-East, the future of the countries of the Arab Spring or the Chinese way into democracy without democratization. At the same time, few governments do not seek to justify their rule by reference to democracy. But there is a “distinction between democracy as a political theory of legitimation of government and democracy as a mechanism or instrument of government” (Kausikan 1998: 18).

Reviewing the difficulties of all those examples, one fundamental question comes into focus. Are we right with the expectation of a universally homogenous understanding of democracy in the entire world? Or is there different understanding of democracy that affects different perception on democracy and its institutions? The author argues, that there is a diverging understanding of democracy in countries beyond the west (Dalton et al. 2008; Diamond 2010; Schubert 2012; Welzel 2013; Lu u. Shi 2015; Cho 2015) and political science should be aware of its euro-centric view (Yildiz 2012) of the D-Word (Bratton 2010).

A number of standardized surveys offer comparable data on peoples' attitudes towards the principles and institutions of democracy (Diamond 2008; Welzel/Inglehart 2008). Faced with numerous unexpected findings, such as a more favourable opinion on democracy in Albania and Azerbaijan than in Switzerland or Sweden (Welzel/Inglehart 2008), the credibility of a world-wide overwhelming support for democracy is questionable (Inglehart 2003; Pickel 2006; Dalton/Shin/Jou 2007). Even studies, combining the support for democracy with additional alternative variables such as support for strong leaders or army in governmental accountability, generated contradictory results. These inconsistencies led to the exclusion of certain autocratic ruled countries from various analysis (Pickel 2006). Considering the number of outliers in various researches, the statement of overwhelming positive attitude towards democracy loses its significance, as it remains valid only for Western Europe and North America. Before analysing the support of democracy, we have to clarify whether the meaning of democracy is homogenous (Dalton et al. 2008). Neither by qualitative (Dalton et al. 2008) nor by quantitative research (Inglehart/Welzel 2005; Mattes/Bratton 2007; Welzel/Inglehart 2008) political science has come up

with appropriate explanations for the above-mentioned “unexpected findings” (Welzel/Inglehart 2008) and the contradictions between empirical observations and theoretical research on democracy.

The described problems highlight the methodological challenges, in particular the phenomenon of linguistic and functional equivalence. They become an obstacle especially for cross-culture and cross-country studies, as there is probably neither a comparable understanding of the questions or an equal meaning of the used terms, nor their associations (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2009). In addition, because of subjective bias by social desirability and paying lip-service, it is doubtful if expressed opinions about social issues are reliable (Pickel 2006).

Facing those inconsistencies and obstacles in the current research on democracy, the Panel seeks to discuss alternative and innovative approaches to measure the understanding of democracy in different countries. The Panel seeks for qualitative or quantitative approaches as well as for mixed method designs. Critical reviews of the state-of-the-art in measuring the understanding of democracy are also welcomed.

Proposals should be sent to norma.osterberg-kaufmann@hu-berlin.de, toralf.stark@uni-due.de and Sophia.Schubert@fu-berlin.de by February 13. The Panel and Paper proposals will be submitted collectively by the Panel Chairs by February 15. Paper proposals should include an abstract (max 500 words) and 3-8 keywords. Please ensure you inform the Panel Chairs of your email address as registered with your MyECPR account. If you do not have a MyECPR account, you can create one [here](#).