

Why do democratic and authoritarian regimes result in different types of public policies?

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Public policy is a set of laws, guidelines, regulations, and actions implemented by the government that aim to solve issues. They differ significantly depending on a multitude of factors, one of them being the political regime of the state in which a government is implementing them. This assignment will argue that democratic and authoritarian regimes result in different types of public policies because they have different ruling objectives and goals. Democracy's primary objective is to serve the citizens' interests, while authoritarianism's is to stay in power. Democracy can be defined as a system of government in which political power resides with "the people" and where human rights, as well as fundamental freedoms, are respected (Democracy | United Nations, n.d.) Authoritarian regimes on the other hand are often defined negatively, as not a democracy. They are characterized by centralization of power and are known to be intrusive as the government imposes over civil liberties. To support my thesis, I will present arguments regarding the differences between both regimes in government degree of power centralization, media policy, military, and law enforcement as well as economic policies and international trade policy.

Firstly, authoritarian states lack separation of power, which results in very little horizontal accountability and a centralized decision-making process, meanwhile the very foundation of a democracy is a system of checks and balances in which responsibilities, authorities, and powers are divided between the three branches of government (executive, legislative, and judicial). Separation of powers not only protects citizens from abuse of power and prevents corruption in the government, but also keeps governance effective as each branch can be more specialized and therefore productive. Local governments are an example of decentralized power that "play a critical role in delivering services to the public" (Walker & Andrews, 2013), as their focus is improving quality of life in smaller communities. They are elected by locals and champion social issues most relevant to the community they represent. Representatives not only know the fabric of the community, but they are also a part of it themselves, which allows them to make meaningful change. This does not apply to authoritarian states, as the power is centralized as there is either an individual or a small group of people ruling an entire state. Additionally, their main goal is to retain power and not the quality of life of the citizens. Society's ability to hold the rulers accountable for their actions is constricted. Meanwhile, in democracies, it's the citizens that rule the state as they moderate the government themselves by electing representatives that align with their beliefs, thanks to political pluralism. In authoritarian regimes people often do not have the privilege of choice and free elections.

Authoritarian states are characterized by lower degrees of freedom of speech than democracies (Stier, 2015), because state owned media in authoritarian regimes plays a big role in maintaining power. That can easily lead towards manipulation and propaganda. In addition, it is not uncommon for authoritarians to ban independent media or limit access to online and international platforms thereby taking away citizens' possibility to become aware of the actual political situation or form informed opinions about significant matters. Manipulation can now also be achieved through social media and the internet as they became political tools used for computational propaganda, which, according to Wooley and Howard (2018) is the distribution of purposefully misleading information through the use of algorithms, automation and human curation. This strategy was used by the Chinese government to change the narrative on the politics of Covid-19. The research found many political bots tweeting and retweeting statements trying to draw attention to the "selfless acts of the Chinese Nation" and build a narrative where China was the "protagonist, the victim, and the savior" (Duyar, 2020). On the other hand, media presented by democratic governments should in theory try to remain as objective and true as possible. Independent press cannot be restricted as freedom of speech is one of the principles and is fundamental in a democratic system. There are multitude of opinions and stances that report on current events rather than a narrative forced by an authoritarian government. It is important that people can learn unbiased information in the media, as their political decisions rely on them. One can say that political pluralism is reflected in the pluralism of the media.

In democracies, police forces, as well as the army serve the purpose of protecting citizens. Leaders of democratic countries are chosen fairly by citizens in contrast to authoritarian rulers, who usually don't come/stay in power through democratic means but through the abuse of power. They rely heavily on a strong police force, including the secret service/political police, and military to assure their security as leaders by spending a significant amount of public funds on them. That is why military expenditure in authoritarian regimes ends up bigger than in democratic ones (Brauner, 2015). The military in authoritarian states enforces the regime onto its citizens. Both the police force and military have the competences to suppress civilian dissent, therefore ensuring the safety of the regime leaders over the protection of civilians. Dictators use physical force as an instrument to help them stay in power and keep civilians in line by intimidation which often means violating basic human rights, like imprisonment or even murder of innocent people. The political, military, or intellectual elite is dangerous for authoritarian rulers, as they are the most likely to fight for rights or revolt against the occupation. In the massacre of Katyn in 1940, 14,500 Polish army officers, policemen and highly educated civilians were executed by the special Soviet NKVD forces (Materski & Cienciala & Lebedeva,

2008). The Russians covered that war crime up and even though it was uncovered in 1943, they suffered virtually no consequences for their actions, admitting guilt only in 1990 (after the fall of the Soviet Union and democratization of Poland). In democracies, abuse of power by law enforcement officers is illegal, and the legal systems strive to keep them accountable.

Authoritarian and democratic regimes often have different economic policies due to variations in their underlying principles. In authoritarian countries, the state very often takes ownership of companies and businesses, because they seek accumulation of wealth and resources and it stabilizes their power, as it weakens or even eliminates potential sources of opposition. If the rulers do not take ownership, they still influence the businesses. Research states that institutional pressures and constraints might be far more powerful in authoritarian countries than in free market democracies. Political pressures tend to dominate over other institutional influences, which leads businesses towards aligning tightly with the authoritarian government's objectives. In result, the companies may become less innovative and suffer performance-wise (Wilkins & Emik, 2021). The freedom of economic activity is more limited. There is also research that suggests that "the amount of time a region spends under an autocratic regime is correlated with reduced economic performance" (Carden & James Jr, 2013). Democracies tend to favor market-oriented policies that emphasize individual economic freedom as well as private enterprise. It is not the goal of a democratic government to enrich itself but to help citizens build their own businesses which creates economic growth and therefore raises the standard of living for the whole community.

Authoritarian countries are less integrated in world trade than democracies because they often have protectionist policies, corruption, and lack of transparency as well as political instability that often leads to military conflict. Democracies are also less likely to cooperate with authoritarian states because of human rights concerns. Authoritarian states are found to have about 5 – 22 percent less imports and exports than democracies because democratically elected politicians are less likely to impose tariffs for personal gain and more likely to work towards establishing effective institutions to ensure trouble free and steady trade, while autocrats must satisfy domestic elites who hold interest in trade protection (Aidt & Gassebner, 2010). Authoritarian states are less dependable as they are more likely to engage in military activities. In response to Russia's aggression on Ukraine in February 2022, the western countries as well as world organizations like the European Union tried to economically isolate Russia by commercial and financial sanctions. Even though, according to predictions, Russia is to suffer the most economically, other countries (especially ones that have

strong trade flows with Russia such as Lithuania, Latvia, Finland, Slovakia) are also affected. As a result of the conflict, a plan to end the EU's dependence on Russian fuels was published by the European Commission (Mardones, 2023). Russia's military aggression on Ukraine weakened the world's economy and led to many important and powerful states and organizations putting sanctions on and ending some kind of relationship or cooperation with Russia. That is bound to impact the quality of lives of Russian civilians in the short and long run.

In conclusion, democratic and authoritarian regimes result in different types of public policies because they have different ruling objectives and goals. The government structure of a democracy protects citizens and divides power as opposed to an authoritarian state where it allows rulers a reign of minimal accountability and maximal centralization of power. This paper then presented the reason behind the different media policies. In democratic systems there is an abundance of independent media outlets and unconditional access to information, while in authoritarian states there are usually no unbiased news sources and a forced narrative pushed by the government. The military and law enforcement policies were also recalled, presenting examples of abuse in using of police and military forces in authoritarian regimes. Furthermore, the economic policies differ because state ownership as seen in authoritarian states is meant to serve the ruler/elite by providing rent as well as weakening the possible opposition. In democracies, on the other hand, economic growth and raising the standard of living are priorities. Finally, democracies are more likely to participate in international cooperation and trade than authoritarian states, because of lack of transparency and shared values.

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