



Konrad Adenauer Research Chair
in Empirical Democracy Studies
Chaire de recherche Konrad-Adenauer
en études empiriques de la démocratie

Workshop

Democracy Under Scrutiny: An Interdisciplinary Workshop on the Causes and Consequences of Democratic Dissatisfaction

Organized by Dr. Daniel Stockemer and Kamila Kolodziejczyk and Engi Abou-El-Kheir

October 3-4th , 2024

University of Ottawa

Program



Synopsis

In this two-day workshop in Ottawa, we will investigate the causes and consequences of democratic dissatisfaction throughout different Western and non-Western countries. What are the main drivers behind democratic dissatisfaction, how do these factors vary across different countries, and what effects do they have? What are the consequences of democratic dissatisfaction on political participation, electoral outcomes, and legitimacy of institutions? With colleagues from around the world, we will discuss and exchange ideas on democratic dissatisfaction and what changes can counter this and renew trust in liberal democracies.

Day 1 – Thursday, 3 October 2024

Room: 5028

Time	Agenda
11:30-12:30	Welcome Address (Dr. Daniel Stockemer) and Lunch
12:30-13:30	Saira Bano (Thompson Rivers University) : “Democratic Dissatisfaction: Impact of Misinformation in the Political Information Environment” Discussant: Kamila Kolodziejczyk
13:30-14:30	Dr. Yen-Pin Su (National Chengchi University): “Health Crisis and Satisfaction with Democracy: Evidence at the Subnational Level” Discussant: Dr. Samuel Umoh
14:30-14:45	Coffee Break
14:45-15:45	Rafaa Chehoudi (Fulda University of Applied Sciences)*: “AI and Democracy: Pathway to Progress or Decline?” Discussant: Dr. Yen-Pin Su
15:45-16:45	Valere Gaspard and Dr. Daniel Stockemer (University of Ottawa): “Democratic Dissatisfaction in Canada: The View of Citizens”

	Discussant: Dr. Duff Conacher
18:00	Dinner at The Lieutenant's Pump 361 Elgin St, Ottawa, ON K2P 1M9, Canada http://www.lieutenantspump.ca/

Day 2 – Friday, 4 October 2024

Room: 8003

Time	Agenda
8:30-9:00	Coffee/Pastries
9:00-10:00	Dr. Juan Pablo Luna (McGill University): “Better Polarized than Unstructured? The Underpinnings of Political Discontent with Democracy in Four (Small) Latin American Countries” Discussant: Daniel Stockemer
10:00-11:00	Mohammad Sayyadi (Florida International University)*: “Corruption Perception, Satisfaction with the Political System, and Trust in Elections in the United States” Discussant: Saira Bano
11:00-12:00	Dr. Samuel Umoh (University of Hradec Kralove): “Emi lokan, awa lokan’ Electoral System and Discontent of Democracy in Nigeria” Discussant: Engi Abou-El-Kheir
12:00-13:00	Lunch (provided)
13:00-14:00	Dr. Nataly Viviana Vargad Gamboa & Dr. Magnus Lembke* “Electoral Management Bodies and Democratic Dissatisfaction” Discussant: Juan Pablo Luna
14:00-15:00	Dr. Duff Conacher (Democracy Watch):

	<p>“Canada as a case study of how increasing democratic dissatisfaction is a rational response by voters, and proposed reforms to increase satisfaction”</p> <p>Discussant: Valere Gaspard</p>
15:00-15:15	Concluding Remarks

*** These presentations will be virtual**

Papers and Presentations

Presentations should last 15-20 minutes. Each presentation will be followed by a 40-45 minute discussion before moving to the next presentation.

You may upload your presentation, paper or both at the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/36aoon6mdjrhd0g8vtrd2/AGbhMriC-j2YLWc6fP9X20w?rlkey=7ifawa3xmi62w5dt4jnuvn9w3&st=6rfme7ps&dl=0>

Paper Abstracts

Saira Bano (Thompson Rivers University) : “Democratic Dissatisfaction: Impact of Misinformation in the Political Information Environment”

Dissatisfaction with the performance of democracy is widespread in Western liberal democracies, where discontent is often linked to economic concerns, individual rights, perceived detachment of elites, and rapid social transformations. Media and political landscapes have undergone significant shifts, overwhelmed by torrents of information. The extensive spread of information, coupled with declining trust in media and governmental institutions, as well as the ascent of right-wing populism and increased political polarization, have fostered a political information environment where truth and falsehood intermingle. This convergence creates disparate narratives, exacerbating polarization and challenging the cohesion of democratic societies. This paper explores how the current political information environment shapes citizens' perceptions and susceptibility to misinformation, analyzing its repercussions for social cohesion and democratic integrity. Citizens' perceptions are significantly molded by their political information contexts. In the context of current political debates on misinformation, individuals with right-wing ideologies

often tend to underestimate the prevalence and harmful impact of misinformation on social media platforms, compared to their left-wing and centrist peers. Furthermore, right-wing individuals exhibit a greater apathy towards misinformation and show less support for measures designed to combat it. This attitude is partly fueled by their perception that discussions surrounding misinformation and content moderation are unfairly biased against them. This paper investigates the discourse around climate change to illuminate the roles of misinformation, perception of misinformation, and their effects on the waning public trust in political leaders. It posits that democracies are intricate systems where providing simple solutions to complex issues proves challenging for political leaders. In the absence of simple answers, citizens become susceptible to misinformation and the appeals of populist leaders who offer oversimplified solutions to complex problems. This erosion of trust in political leadership provides an opening for populist figures to implement authoritarian measures, thereby exacerbating political polarization. The paper argues that such polarization impairs our collective response to misinformation and underscores the need for comprehensive awareness campaigns to safeguard against authoritarian inclinations.

Dr. Nataly Viviana Vargad Gamboa and Dr. Magnus Lembke: “Electoral Management Bodies and Democratic Dissatisfaction”

Latin America after its third wave of democratization faces a systematic crisis of its institutions, which directly contributes to a high index of corruption and poverty. Democracy no longer seems to be perceived as the answer to increasing violence, drug trafficking and organized crime. The relation between the governed and those who govern has turned increasingly conflictive, owing to an augmenting popular sense of political unresponsiveness. In this situation, elections are in the spotlight. During the 1990s, several Latin American countries introduced Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) with the objective of strengthening democracy and generate confidence in elections. The EMBs are extraordinary actors with unique competences, placed as they are in the very point where horizontal and vertical accountability converge. We label this combined capacity “the third dimension of accountability”, that is, the dual power to formally and independently sanction the co- equal branches of power and ensure that the electorate, by means of free, fair, competitive and periodic elections, is invested with the capacity to vote corrupt and unresponsive officials out of office. But as these EMBs are frequently coopted by the executive and legislative branches, they have often failed in defending democracy. Many people have sought remedies in more authoritarian governments, thus showing a disaffection with political alternations and the rule of law.

Our paper deals with the question: “To what extent has the EMBs played a role in producing this democratic disaffection?” The objective is to analyze the implications on citizen’s democracy engagement in a context of weakened systems of Checks and Balances, by zeroing in on four critical cases: El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua. A particular emphasis is placed on the ruptures and co-optations of this body during the last 40 years during its insertion in the traditional triangular relation between the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches. We turn our spotlight on the EMBs in Central America, a region marked by high levels of poverty and corruption and where signals of democratic backsliding are increasingly worrisome. We have excluded Panama and Costa Rica (for having better economic and democratic indices) and Belize (for having a parliamentary system). However, although the remaining countries - El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua - share the aforementioned characteristics, they are not unique from a Latin American viewpoint. The attacks on the EMBs by the executive is a regional phenomenon, as are poverty, corruption and, increasingly, democratic backsliding. The paper is comparative, descriptive and analytical.

Rafaa Chehoudi (Fulda University of Applied Sciences): “AI and Democracy: Pathway to Progress or Decline?”

The debate surrounding artificial intelligence (AI) as either a threat or a supporter of democracy is highly contested and vibrant. Numerous studies have portrayed AI as a potential danger to various aspects of democratic governance, including representation (Kreps & Kriner, 2023), accountability (Duberry, 2022), trust (Kreps & Kriner, 2023; Danaher, 2016), the quality of political discourse (Kaye, 2018), adherence to international human rights laws (Donahoe & Metzger, 2019), social equality (Benjamin, 2019; Noble, 2018), and economic disparities (Acemoglu & Johnson, 2023). In contrast, a subset of scholarship posits potential benefits of AI in enhancing democratic processes. Addressing a gap in the existing literature, this research employs a quantitative methodology, which is notably absent in the primarily interpretative approaches of prior analyses. Specifically, this study focuses on countries that have formulated national AI strategies, measuring AI engagement through the volume of AI-related scholarly publications and assessing democratic health via the Freedom House Index. By applying regression analysis, this study aims to empirically test the hypothesis that advancements in AI are positively correlated with improvements in democratic indices. This approach not only contributes a new empirical perspective to the debate but also explores the complex relationship between technology and political systems.

Dr. Yen-Pin Su (National Chengchi University): “Health Crisis and Satisfaction with Democracy: Evidence at the Subnational Level”

The COVID-19 pandemic has had tremendous impacts on political attitudes. While many national-level studies have found that rally-round-the-flag effects tend to appear at the onset of the pandemic, few provide evidence at the subnational level. This paper addresses the gap in the literature by examining the changing relationship between nonpharmaceutical interventions and satisfaction with democracy at the subnational level during the COVID-19 crisis. We propose a theoretical explanation grounded in citizens' changing preferences concerning the health-economy trade-off across different phases of the pandemic. Our first hypothesis posits that a change to more stringent nonpharmaceutical interventions is likely to bolster democratic satisfaction in the early phase of the pandemic. Furthermore, we hypothesize that, as the salience of health crisis diminishes and economic costs attributable to the pandemic rise, satisfaction with democracy tends to decrease with a change to stricter nonpharmaceutical interventions. Using survey data and subnational nonpharmaceutical measures in Australia, Brazil, the United Kingdom, and the United States from March to December 2020, the empirical results support our hypotheses. This paper contributes important insights into the nuanced dynamics of public policies and political attitudes during health crisis.

Valere Gaspard and Dr. Daniel Stockemer (University of Ottawa): “Democratic Dissatisfaction in Canada: The View of Citizens”

At first glance, Canada is a resilient democracy. It has so far resisted international trends of democratic decline, it has not had any major populist upheavals aside from the Freedom Convoy 2022, and no extremist parties are in parliament. However, if we look at public opinion data, we find widespread democratic disillusionment. An online representative survey of English-speaking Canadians shows that more than 30 percent of the respondents indicate that they have no trust in democracy, more than 40 percent claim that the government controls what they can say, nearly 50 percent do not feel represented by government, and two thirds of the sample feel some sort of moral decay. These numbers illustrate that there is a growing gap between the preoccupations of large parts of English-speaking Canadians and the institutions of representative democracy. The repercussions of this disillusionment might be (further) democratic backsliding and the possibility of a surge of populist politicians.

Dr. Juan Pablo Luna (McGill University): “Better Polarized than Unstructured? The Underpinnings of Political Discontent with Democracy in Four (Small) Latin American Countries”

Four decades after the last wave of transitions to democracy in Latin America, political discontent is widespread and has contributed to the collapse of post-transitional party systems in many Latin American countries. The underlying factor behind the various populist outbreaks and ill-defined ideological turns observed in the region—the leftward shift in the early 2000s, the rightward shift in the 2010s, and the recent swing back to the left—is massive discontent. Electoral results can be seen as a manifestation of this discontent. However, discontent in some contemporary Latin American countries has been associated with rapid electoral cycling without structure (Barrenechea and Vergara, 2023; Luna, 2024). Moreover, our understanding of the specific characteristics and distribution of discontent in contemporary Latin American societies remains limited, and there has been little study of how discontent evolves and varies across and within societies. Nor has there been much study of the precise mechanics driving the politicization or the eventual crystallization of such discontent into new and stable political alignments that translate social and political conflict into legitimate political order. This paper addresses these gaps by extending an analytical framework proposed in our previous joint work (Luna and Medel, 2023). To that end, we examine the distribution, evolution, and drivers of perceived access to civil, political, and social citizenship rights in four Latin American societies: Bolivia, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay. These countries have experienced distinct political trajectories in recent years, allowing for contextualized comparisons. While Uruguay has remained politically stable, Bolivia, Peru, and Chile have witnessed significant political turmoil. In Bolivia, extensive social protests in the early 2000s produced the rise of a powerful political party (the MAS) that reshaped the party system and incorporated indigenous and popular interests. In Peru and Chile, massive social protests and political unrest have not yet led to a significant realignment of the political landscape, resulting in ongoing electoral volatility and declining institutional legitimacy. Until recently, these countries also experienced a period of unprecedented social incorporation. This process combined the trickle-down effects of economic growth (until 2015) with the expansion of social policy programs, particularly Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programs, which rapidly expanded throughout the region and reached previously marginalized social groups, such as the rural poor. However, this process of social incorporation has been interrupted by declining growth and the social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The level of social incorporation also varies among our target countries, with Chile and Uruguay historically having more robust social incorporation compared to Bolivia and Peru, where recent efforts have reached several social groups for the first time in history.

Mohammad Sayyadi (Florida International University): “Corruption Perception, Satisfaction with the Political System, and Trust in Elections in the United States”

There is an extended scholarship on clientelism, rent-seeking, corruption, and their impact on the political process, especially democratization and voting behavior in different contexts, including advanced democracies. Corruption is considered less crucial in shaping politics in advanced democracies because democratic theory suggests that political processes tend to be less corrupt in advanced democracies. The scholarship also suggests that corruption affects satisfaction with the political system, satisfaction with the democratic process, and social and political trust in different contexts. Inequality, age, generational gap, and corruption have been discussed as social and political trust determinants in advanced democracies and underdeveloped contexts. However, a gap in the literature overlooks the relationship between the perception of corruption and trust in elections. Therefore, this paper examines the relationship between the perception of corruption and trust in elections using the World Value Survey (WVS) and the American National Elections Survey (ANES). The results of two linear regression models indicate that people who perceive more corruption are less likely to trust elections in the United States.

Dr. Samuel Umoh (University of Hradec Kralove): “Emi lokan, awa lokan’ Electoral System and Discontent of Democracy in Nigeria”

The paper examines vicious downward democratic practices and lack of trust in the democratic system in Nigeria. Nigeria, being a previously unitary state, adopted Federalism (power sharing between the central and regional government) in 1979, after independence in 1960, to forge national unity and inclusive representation and prevent the dominance of sectional groups in governance and peace. Since then, the electoral system has been characterized by power sharing, presidential rotation, federal character principle, zoning, and terminology of 'emilokan' (meaning "it is my turn). Drawing from the lens of Nigeria's 2023 presidential election; the paper unpacks the parlance of 'emilokan' (meaning "it is my turn) in Nigeria's electoral process and to what extent electoral system (aspects such as power sharing, rotational policy, federal character principle, zoning and 'emilokan' strengthens or undermine democratic discontent and quality of democracy in Nigeria. It also analyses how the inauguration of Bola Tinubu as the 16th president of Nigeria, triggers of discontent increased among Nigeria citizens due to draconic policies , hunger and insecurity , leading to a labour union strike, hunger protest and exacerbated cost-of- living). Data was generated from the 2000–2023 Afrobarometer survey, political campaign analysis, news mapping, social survey, and policy analysis. Findings suggest that Nigerian citizens are

dissatisfied with the quality of democracy because of corruption, the type of electoral system, lack of welfare policies and economic conditions. Citizens are satisfied with democracy when they feel represented by parties and politicians who are accountable and responsive. Also, private funding of election campaigns and godfatherism influence those who contest office, who gets elected, who controls the policies, and what policies candidates respond to. The paper argues that Nigerians are losing faith in the democratic system, leading to voters' apathy, gerrymandering and highly skilled citizens leaving the country. The resultant effect is apathy, which affects political participation because most youth voters refrain from voting and politics.

Dr. Duff Conacher (Democracy Watch): “Canada as a case study of how increasing democratic dissatisfaction is a rational response by voters, and proposed reforms to increase satisfaction”

President Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address in 1863 famously urged his listeners to ensure that “...government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” Lincoln also said in his speech that the fathers of those listening to him had, four score and seven years ago, brought forth a “new nation...dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” However, as evaluations by international monitoring agencies have shown clearly, neither the U.S. nor any other country have been dedicated to the principle of equality of all people or to other principles that must be upheld to actually have governments of, by and for the people. Many countries have key flaws and loopholes in their laws and regulations that prevent actual democratic elections and good government by allowing dishonest, unethical, secretive, wasteful and unrepresentative actions and decision-making. Politicians who rail against secret inside deals with “elite” big money lobbyists and against the “swamps” and “gravy trains” of waste, and “rigged” policy-making systems, are having success, I will contend, because they can point to dozens of examples of such scandals in every country that calls itself a democracy. In other words, the promise of democracy has been broken in many countries. As a result, more and more voters feel disempowered and that politicians are out of touch. These feelings are entirely justifiable, and are compounded during times of economic downturn when voters can easily conclude that governments are to blame for their hard times. I will contend that a main cause of dissatisfaction with democracy is that countries have raised false hopes by claiming to be democracies when, in fact, many parts of their electoral, government and policy-making systems are undemocratic. These countries are, at best, very flawed democracies, and it should be no surprise that voters are more and more dissatisfied with them as more and more scandalous decisions are revealed generation after generation, again compounded by times of economic hardship and increasing inequality. When dishonest, unethical, secretive

and wasteful political and government actions are effectively prohibited, more representative decisions will likely result. Through these key reforms, which I will summarize in my paper, government of, by and for the people would be ensured much more than it is currently. These reforms will, I will contend, empower many people who support authoritarianism in many countries and, thereby, help decrease that support. In other words, the way to reduce demagoguery is to, finally, create actual democracies. I will use Canada as a case study of how the promise of democracy has been broken, and how it could be kept.