

# Democracy, Dictatorship and People's Beliefs: Evidence from the World Value Longitudinal Survey

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**Abstract** The relationship between economic outcomes and political institutions is a topic of extensive debate. Political institutions influence not only economic results but also societal norms and beliefs. This study utilizes two global datasets, the World Values Longitudinal Survey and the Global State of Democracy Index from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, alongside economic data to examine how beliefs and values vary across different political regimes. This study has three main findings. First, political regimes significantly alter individuals' perspectives on the trade-off between equality and freedom. Specifically, under authoritarian regimes, individuals with higher incomes tend to prioritize freedom over equality more than those with lower incomes do. Second, across various regime types, individuals in higher-income categories consistently exhibit less concern for income equality than those in lower-income categories do. Third, within democratic regimes, individuals with lower incomes consistently prioritize income equality over their higher-income counterparts, regardless of regime type. These findings underscore the dynamic interplay between political institutions and societal values, highlighting how political regimes shape individual beliefs about equality, freedom, and economic fairness.

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## I. Introduction

In the last decade, there has been a debate over political institutions, economic outcomes, and social values, including religious freedom and secularism. Institutions determine the behavioral parameters within a society. Institutions are the rules of the game in society; more precisely, they are humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction (North, 1991). Similarly, Ostrom (2009) describes an institution as a prescription that people use to arrange all sorts of repeated and organized interactions within rule-structured settings. These definitions include the rules of the game, which impose limitations on human behavior, and incentives, which are the means through which institutions make their marks. Insofar as constraints are concerned,

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they may be broken down into two categories: informal constraints, such as penalties, taboos, and conventions, and formal restrictions, such as laws. The provision of incentive structures that are responsible for molding economic shifts is another significant aspect of this concept. Interactions at social, economic, and political levels are fostered by the limits and incentives outlined here. The last component of this definition states that institutions are products of human ingenuity, which indicates that aspects beyond human control, such as geographic aspects, are not included in the definition of the institution. Humans create institutions to establish order and decrease uncertainty in the process of exchanging goods and services. This helps determine transaction costs, production costs, and ultimately, the outcome of economic activity (North, 1991).

Institutions play a critical role in shaping the behavior of individuals within a society. Extensive research has highlighted the economic and social impacts of political institutions and regimes (Bourguignon and Verdier, 2000; Chong and Calderon, 2000; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2001; Plümper and Martin, 2003; Przeworski, 2004; Chong and Gradstein, 2007; Acemoglu et al., 2008; Scanlon, 2018). However, the empirical relationship between different political regimes and individuals' opinions, beliefs, and preferences for social values such as freedom and equality remains underexplored. Although existing studies have examined the effects of regimes on participation, opinions, demands, and protests, the ways in which people value factors such as freedom and equality have not been fully investigated. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring how political regimes influence beliefs about economic equality, focusing on the interaction between individual income levels and regime type in shaping these beliefs. This study aims to answer the following primary research questions: How do the boarder political institutions that is political regimes (democracies versus dictatorships) influence individual preferences for economic equality, and how does this relationship vary with individual income levels?

This paper is organized into three main sections. The first section provides a literature review examining both theoretical and empirical studies on the impact of political institutions. The second section details the data and methodology, including the integration of three primary data sources: the World Values Survey (WVS) database, the Global State of Democracy Indices (GSoD Indices), macroeconomic data from the World Bank Open Data, and the implementation of regression analysis, specifically a two-stage regression method to address endogeneity to examine the relationship between political institutions and individuals' beliefs and values. The third part of the study discusses the conclusions.

## II. Literature Review

Political institutions fundamentally shape power dynamics and governance structures within a society. They establish the rules and incentives that influence power-sharing, determining

how power is distributed across groups and how governments interact with citizens (Acemoglu et al., 2005; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006). This impact on individual rights, liberties, and preferences is a central area of research, often comparing democracies with autocracies.

The literature on political institutions and public opinion highlights the complex relationship between governance structures and individual beliefs. The studies by Campbell et al. (1960), Jacoby (1988), Carmines and Kuklinski (1990) and Zaller (1992) show that party identification significantly shapes issue attitudes. More recent research (Kam, 2005; Bullock, 2011; Bolsen et al., 2014) explores the limits of partisan influence, finding that competing information can moderate the effects of partisan cues. Lenz (2012) demonstrates how political events and campaign dynamics can shift voter attention to party stances, influencing public opinion. Slothuus and Bisgaard (2021) provide empirical evidence on how citizens respond to changes in party positions, particularly during significant welfare policy shifts, emphasizing the influence of partisan cues in shaping public opinion. Conversely, Boudreau and MacKenzie (2014) and Druckman et al. (2013) find that competing arguments and policy information can reduce partisan influence, highlighting the importance of political context and information availability, which may be limited in authoritarian regimes.

The impact of authoritarian rule on citizens' political opinions, particularly the legacies of these regimes, is another critical area of study. Traditional research has focused on aggregate outcomes such as institutional developments and elite actions (Bernhard and Karakoç, 2007; Ekiert and Kubik, 2014; Northmore-Ball, 2014; Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2014), essential for understanding post-authoritarian politics. However, recent studies emphasize individual-level perceptions of authoritarian legacies. Research by Cantoni et al. (2017) and Pereira et al. (2022) shows how authoritarian regimes use education, media, and other tools to align attitudes with regime values. Tertychnaya (2020) and Neundorf and Pop-Eleches (2020) explore how authoritarian legacies influence individual attitudes long after regime transitions, examining when indoctrinated beliefs persist or erode. Despite this, some individuals resist these ideologies based on pre-existing beliefs, social networks, and alternative information sources, leading to different political orientations after regime change (Dinas and Northmore-Ball, 2020). The following subsection explores the broader impact of political institutions on shaping individual preferences and beliefs.

### **A. Impact of political institutions on preferences**

Political institutions, by design, influence individual preferences, beliefs, and behaviors. In democracies, the freedom of expression and participation in the electoral process allows for a diverse range of opinions and preferences to be represented in the government. Studies show that the type of political parties and electoral systems that exist within democracies influences citizen preferences and beliefs (Green et al., 2002; Huddy et al., 2015; Mullinix, 2016; Slothuus

and Bisgaard, 2021). In contrast, autocracies are usually the primary impediments to information and public discussions, thereby shaping preferences and attitudes in an approach that resonates with the perception of the leaders. It is thus that Neundorf (2010) and Pop-Eleches and Tucker (2014) establish how regime type determines individualist values. Indeed, democratic institutions are more predisposed to values that promote individual rights, equality, and civic participation. Autocratic regimes tend to operate on elements of conformity, authority, and state control. The mechanisms shaping the development of such preferences include education, regulation of the media, and political socialization (Cantoni et al., 2017; Pereira et al., 2022). However, the persistence of these preferences varies, depending on post-regime socialization and exposure to alternative narratives (Neundorf et al., 2020; Darden and Grzymala-Busse, 2006). Alesina and Giuliano (2011) push this discussion forward by considering the role of inequality and cultural factors in preferences for redistribution. They argue that individual preferences on redistribution are formed by a variety of determinants, including religion, race, and cultural norms and that are often influenced by the broader political and economic environment.

## **B. Impact of income levels on preferences**

Economic variables also play a significant role in shaping individual preferences, particularly in relation to political regimes. There have been academic debates regarding how income thresholds correlate with the level of support for democracy over autocracy. Some studies suggest that higher income levels correlate with stronger support for democratic values, as economic security allows individuals to concentrate on the personal freedoms and political rights (Lipset, 1959; Acemoglu et al., 2008). Conversely, lower income levels may lead to a greater tolerance for autocratic governance (Barro 1996; Przeworski et al. 2000; Przeworski 2005). Discussing the impact of income distribution, Meltzer and Richard (1981) provide a theoretical framework for understanding how income distribution influences the size of government through preferences for redistribution. They conclude that in a labor market under majority rule, the size of government—that is the share of income redistributed—depends on where the median voter is located within the income distribution. In other words, as long as mean income rises relative to the income of the decisive voter—which is normally taken to be the median voter—the demand for redistribution rises, and hence the size of government goes up. This model underlines the importance of income inequality in the determination of preferences for redistributive policies, as voters anticipate the disincentive effects of taxation on labor and adjust their preferences accordingly (Meltzer and Richard, 1981).

Alesina and Giuliano (2011) further examine how income inequality mediates both the direct and indirect routes of preference for redistribution. They highlight several channels through which inequality may influence aggregate income; among others, the effect on education and

crime. For instance, larger levels of inequality in poor countries are associated with keeping people out of school, and this then reduces the overall human capital and economic growth. Inequality also tends to rise with crime, leading to a vicious circle because crime worsens inequality, with the poor mostly suffering from it. Such patterns reveal the complex interaction of income, inequality, and redistributive preference that shift with the changing political regime.

Despite the extensive literature on the impact of political institutions and income levels on individual preferences, there is a notable gap in understanding the interaction between these two factors. Few studies take effort to understand the impact of income level, income distribution and individual preference on the stability and durability of political regimes, as well as the potential for regime change. What remains to be explored at this confluence is how the different income levels across different political regimes influence the individual preferences for freedom and equality. Understanding these impacts on individual preferences provides insight into the complex dynamics within societies and, ultimately, their political trajectories.

To understand how income levels within different political regimes shape preferences for freedom and equality, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1:** Individuals in democratic regimes exhibit stronger preferences for economic equality than those in dictatorships do.
- H2:** The relationship between political regimes and the preference for economic equality is moderated by individual income levels, with lower-income individuals in democracies showing a greater preference for equality than their counterparts in dictatorships.

### III. Data and Methodology

This study employs two comprehensive data sources to examine the relationship between political institutions, beliefs, and values, with a specific focus on individual heterogeneity and the nuances of belief and value systems, which have been identified as missing factors in the literature. The first data source was the World Value Survey (WVS) database, which spans 1981 to 2020 and includes responses from 92 countries. This dataset offers insight into individuals' opinions on income equality, freedom, and broader social values. It also provides detailed demographic information such as income category, religion, gender, and the presence of children, enabling an analysis of how these personal characteristics influence perceptions of inequality and freedom.

The second data source is the Global State of Democracy Indices (GSoD Indices), developed by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. This dataset tracks democratic trends in 174 countries from 1975 to 2022 using 116 indicators across 29 aspects of democracy. These indicators include measures of representative governments, fundamental rights, checks

on the government, impartial administration, and participatory engagement, providing a detailed picture of the political landscape over time. This study incorporates a diverse range of political regimes to ensure that the analysis is not constrained by a narrow set of political regimes. It should be noted that GSoD Indices are a comprehensive tool that provides valuable insights into the state of democracy around the world. They can be categorized into three distinct categories: democracy, hybrid regimes, and authoritarian regimes. Each category represents different levels of political performance and governance. Democracies are defined as political regimes that witness free and fair elections, with minimal standards of meaning, competitiveness, and suffrage. These countries typically have a high level of political freedom and civil liberties as well as a strong commitment to the rule of law and human rights. They are often characterized by robust institutions that provide checks and balances on the power of government officials, such as an independent judiciary, a free press, and an active civil society. On the contrary, hybrid regimes are middle-level performers with the same factors. These countries may hold elections but often fall short of democratic standards in terms of competitiveness and suffrage. They may also have limited political freedom and civil liberties and may be characterized by corruption and abuse of power. In some cases, hybrid regimes may be transitioning towards democracy, while in others they may be backsliding towards authoritarianism. Authoritarian regimes are countries with poor performance in democratic governance indicators. These regimes are typically characterized by a lack of political freedom, civil liberties, and basic human rights. In these countries, the government has a monopoly on political power and the media, civil society, and opposition parties may be severely restricted or suppressed.

GSoD data and WVS data can be merged to understand the linkages between political regimes and individual beliefs. However, there can be endogeneity bias which may arise from the simultaneous causality between democratization and individual beliefs. To address endogeneity bias, the average score of the representative government component of the GSoD Indices was used as an instrumental variable. This component score reflects the evolution of democratic structures and provides a historical sequence that helps isolate the influence of democratization on individual beliefs, thereby mitigating the bias in the analysis.

From the WVS database, two key dependent variables are identified:

*Preferences between freedom and equality:* This binary variable captures individuals' choice between the two values.

*Views on income equality:* This is measured on a scale of 1-10, providing a gradient of opinions on income distribution.

A two-stage regression analysis was employed to handle endogeneity and to test the relationship between political institutions and individuals' perceptions. For the binary variable of freedom versus equality, a two-stage ordered probit-probit model is used, where the first stage is an

ordered probit model for the political regime (with three categories: authoritarian, hybrid, and democratic), and the second stage is a probit model for the binary outcome. For the views on income equality, a two-stage ordered probit-ordered probit model is used, applying an ordered probit in both stages to handle the ordinal nature of the dependent variable appropriately.

The inclusion of control variables, such as economic growth and trade data extracted from the World Bank Open Data source, further enhances the robustness of our analysis. These macroeconomic indicators are crucial because they have a well-documented impact and may affect the relationship between political institutions and people's beliefs and values.

The WVS database is instrumental in capturing the diversity of opinions and individual characteristics across contexts and periods. This allowed for a detailed examination of how factors such as income category, religion, gender, and parental status influence individuals' perceptions of inequality and preferences for freedom versus equality. The heterogeneity of these individual factors is pivotal to understanding the nuanced ways in which political regimes impact social values and economic perceptions. The GSoD Indices complement this by identifying political regimes. The instrumental variable approach, which utilizes the average score of the representative government component, is a novel strategy to correct for potential endogeneity, thus providing a more accurate depiction of the causal relationship between political regimes and individual beliefs about inequality.

Overall, by merging these two datasets and applying econometric models, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of the intricate dynamics between political regimes and people's views on freedom and equality. This approach highlights how varying political regimes influence beliefs and values regarding economic equality, and addresses the critical research gap in the literature concerning the heterogeneity of individual responses to diverse political regimes.

The structure of our econometric models is as follows:

*First Stage:* An ordered probit model is applied to the political regime variable, which is categorized into authoritarian, hybrid, and democratic regimes.

*Second Stage:* For the binary variable of freedom versus equality, the model became an ordered probit in the first stage, followed by a probit in the second stage (probit probit).

Regarding views on income equality, the model remains an ordered probit in both stages (oprobit and oprobit).

This methodological framework ensures a robust and nuanced analysis of the relationship between political regimes and individual preferences for economic equality, while accounting for the complexity and diversity of individual and macroeconomic factors.

*Second stage equation for freedom vs equality:*

$$Y_{i,d,s,t} = f(\beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Political regime}_{i,d,s,t} * \text{Income category}_{i,d,s,t}) + \beta_2(X_i) + \beta_3(X_c) + \beta_c + \gamma_t + \epsilon_{i,d,s,t})$$

$Political\ regime_{i,d,s,t} * Income\ category_{i,d,s,t}$  is the interaction between two categorical variables: political regimes that have three categories: authoritarian, hybrid, and democratic, and income category, which has three categories: low, middle, and high. This interaction generates nine categories of individuals: individuals belonging to middle-income category in authoritarian regime, individuals belonging to high-income category in authoritarian regime, individuals belonging to low-income category in hybrid regime, individuals belonging to middle-income category in hybrid regime, individuals belonging to high-income category in hybrid regime, individuals belonging to low-income category in democratic regime, individuals belonging to middle-income category in democratic regime, individuals belonging to high-income category in democratic regime. In the model low-income category in authoritarian regime is base category.

$X_i$  represents the control variables for individual characteristics including gender, number of children, and religion<sup>1</sup>).

$X_c$  represents the control variables for country characteristics which economic growth, trade etc.

$\beta_c$  represents country fixed effects.

$\gamma_t$  represents time fixed effects.

$Y_{i,d,s,t}$  is individuals' perception about equality.

*Second stage equation for views on income equality:*

$$Y^* = X'\beta + u$$

Where  $u \sim N(0,1)$

$\beta$  is vector of parameters which doesn't include the intercept.

X represent our set of variables.

$Y^*$  is a latent variable ( $-\infty < Y^* < +\infty$ ) that shows the propensity of respondent I towards the corresponding question, that is, towards views of income equality.  $Y^*$  is unobserved because it is a latent variable. The relationship between  $Y^*$  and observed Y, that is, individuals' views on income equality, can be represented as

$$Y=1 \text{ if } -\infty < Y^* < k_1$$

$$Y=2 \text{ if } k_1 < Y^* < k_2$$

1) In this study, two types of control variables are incorporated: individual-level controls and country-level controls. Individual controls include gender, number of children, and religion, while country-level controls include variables like economic growth rate. Although education and age are important factors, they were found to be highly correlated with income category and country-level controls, such as the growth rate. This multicollinearity led to the exclusion of education and age from the final model, as their inclusion caused these variables to be dropped during the regression analysis. The decision to retain gender, number of children, and religion as control variables was made because these variables provided independent and relevant insights without introducing multicollinearity. Importantly, including or excluding additional control variables, such as age and education, did not significantly alter the results or their interpretation.



$$Y=3 \text{ if } k_2 < Y^* < k_3$$

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$$Y=J \text{ if } k_{J-1} < Y^* < \infty$$

*First stage equation where political regime is dependent variable*

$$Y^* = X'_z \beta + \epsilon$$

Where  $\epsilon \sim N(0,1)$

Where  $X'_z$  represents explanatory variables including country level controls and instrumental variable.

The choice of a two-stage regression analysis in this study is driven by the need to address potential endogeneity arising from the simultaneous causality between democratization and individual beliefs, which can lead to biased estimates. By using an instrumental variable (IV)—the average score of the representative government component from the GSoD Indices—the first stage isolates the variation in the political regime variable that is exogenous to individual beliefs. This helps ensure that the second stage of the regression accurately estimates the impact of political regimes on preferences for freedom and equality<sup>2)</sup>.

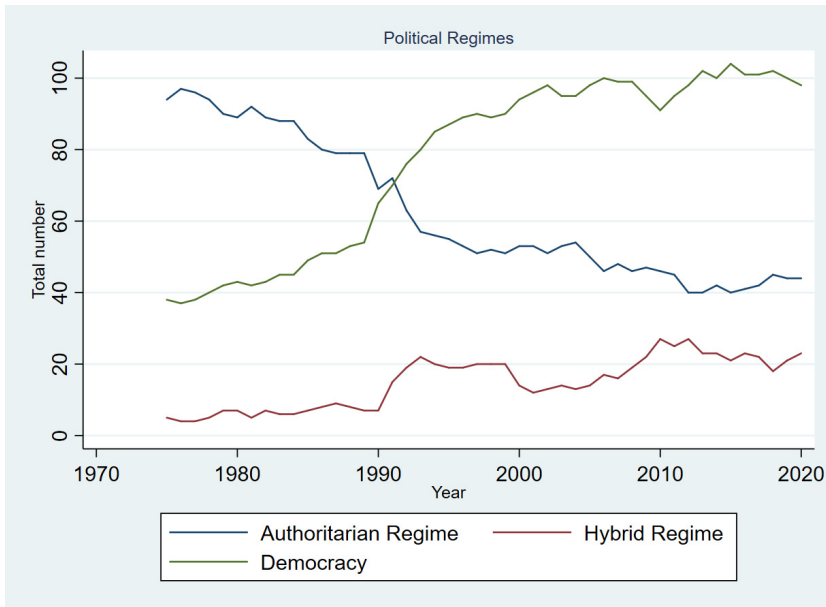
## IV. Results

The analysis reveals significant trends in the global political landscape, particularly the rise in the number of democracies since the 1990s. This increase is partly attributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, which triggered a wave of democratization across Eastern Europe and other regions. However, this trend is not universal, as many countries continue to grapple with persistent authoritarianism. Figure 1 shows the global trends of different political regimes—Authoritarian, Democracy, and Hybrid—from 1970 to 2020. The number of democracies has risen notably since the late 1980s. In contrast, authoritarian regimes have generally declined, while hybrid regimes have gradually increased since the early 1990s.

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2) The two-stage method is preferred over alternatives like Difference in Differences (DiD) because it better handles the continuous nature of the data and the complexity of interactions across different countries and time periods. This approach provides a more robust framework for mitigating endogeneity and producing reliable results.

Figure 1. Political regimes



(Source) Global State of Democracy Indices (GSoD)

As the WVS longitudinal survey covers 92 countries, after merging the WVS dataset with the GSoD data, there were 49 authoritarian, 177 democracies, and 30 hybrid country-level observations. Table 1 provides the descriptions of the merged data. This table provides data on the distribution of countries across different political regimes as classified by the Global State of Democracy Indices, which are covered in the World Value Surveys (WVS) conducted between 1981 and 2022. Table 1 shows the number of countries categorized as authoritarian, democratic, or hybrid regimes for each WVS wave. The number of democratic countries has increased over the past few years.

Table 1. Political Regimes in WVS-GSoD Merged Data

WVS waves	Authoritarian	Democracy	Hybrid Regime	Total
1981-1984	3	6	0	9
1989-1993	4	11	1	16
1994-1998	3	37	6	46
1999-2004	11	21	3	35
2005-2009	6	39	6	51
2010-2014	12	34	9	55
2017-2022	10	29	5	44
Total	49	177	30	256

Table 2 provides a tabulation of preferences for freedom, equality, and income categories in different political regimes. For authoritarian regimes, 51.52% prioritized freedom compared to 48.48% for equality. In democracies, 55.29% prioritized freedom, whereas 44.71% prioritized equality. In the hybrid regimes, 49.25% prioritized freedom and 50.75% prioritized equality. With regard to income categories, it can be observed that respondents from authoritarian and hybrid regime countries tend to have a higher percentage in the medium-income category, whereas respondents from democracies tend to have a higher percentage in the low-income category. Among respondents from authoritarian countries, 31.49% fell into the low-income category, 59.08% into the medium-income category, and 9.43% into the high-income category. Among respondents from democracies, 35.56% fell into the low-income category, 52.39% into the medium-income category, and 12.06% into the high-income category. Among the respondents from the hybrid regimes, 36.11% fell into the low-income category, 53.83% into the medium-income category, and 10.05% into the high-income category.

**Table 2.** *Income Categories of Respondents (from 1981 to 2020 WVS Survey Period)*

	Income Categories			Sample Observations	What is importance: Freedom Equality		
	Low	Medium	High		Freedom	Equality	Sample Observations
Authoritarian	31.49	59.08	9.43	73754	51.52	48.48	14381
Democracy	35.56	52.39	12.06	231456	55.29	44.71	43011
Hybrid Regime	36.11	53.83	10.05	43144	49.25	50.75	8364
Total	34.77	53.98	11.25	348354	53.7	46.3	65756

(Source) Author's calculations based on WVS and GDoS dataset.

Table 3 presents the results of the two-stage regression analysis of views on equality. The first stage was an analysis of the relationship between freedom, equality, and views on income equality. The second stage is a probit regression of the relationship between income category and views on income equality, as it has ordinal categories, controlling for individual and country-specific factors, whereas it is a probit model for views on equality, as it is a binary variable.

The first-stage model for equality, freedom, and preference for income equality shows that the coefficients of the low-income category in the hybrid regime, the middle-income category in the hybrid regime, and the high-income category in the authoritarian regime are statistically significant. The instrumental variable, the average governance score in the first-stage probit regression, was statistically significant.

The second-stage result for freedom versus equality shows that the low-income category in hybrid regimes and the high-income category in authoritarian regimes are statistically significant. The coefficient of the low-income category in hybrid regimes is positive and statistically significant, suggesting that those with lower incomes in hybrid regimes are more likely to support

equality over freedom compared with the low-income category in authoritarian regimes. The coefficient of the middle income category in the hybrid regimes is positive and statistically significant, suggesting that those with middle income in these regimes are likely to support equality over freedom. However, high-income categories in authoritarian regimes prefer freedom over equality compared with low-income categories, as the coefficient is negative and statistically significant.

**Table 3.** *Views on Equality*

	Oprobit-Probit Freedom vs Equality (0 for freedom, 1 for equality)	Oprobit-Oprobit Incomes should be made more equal (Score 1) to We need larger income differences (10)
Second Stage regression		
Low income in Hybrid regime	0.184*** (0.0600)	0.0768*** (0.0167)
Low income in Democracy	0.0594 (0.0622)	-0.232*** (0.0179)
Middle income in Authoritarian regime	-0.0283 (0.0273)	0.0729*** (0.0107)
Middle income in Hybrid regime	0.159*** (0.0531)	0.156*** (0.0147)
Middle income in Democracy	0.0561 (0.0613)	-0.100*** (0.0176)
High income in Authoritarian regime	-0.152*** (0.0484)	0.234*** (0.0184)
High income in Hybrid regime	0.00223 (0.0735)	0.331*** (0.0212)
High income in Democracy	0.0203 (0.0648)	0.106*** (0.0187)
First stage regression		
Average score for governance for all period till WVS survey year	2.859*** (0.0184)	3.147*** (0.00908)
Country specific effect	Yes	Yes
Year specific effect	Yes	Yes
Individual controls (Gender, number of children and religion)	Yes	Yes
Country controls (Economic growth, trade)	Yes	Yes
Observations	62889	303505

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

The second-stage results for income equality preferences suggest that the coefficients of all variables are statistically significant. Except for democratic regimes, the coefficients of all variables are positive, which suggests that, compared to the low-income category in the authoritarian regime,

the preference for high income difference, that is, high income inequality, tends to increase in all income categories in both hybrid and authoritarian regimes. However, in higher-income categories, these preferences tend to decrease. For example, the preference for high income differences tends to be reduced in the higher income category in both hybrid and authoritarian regimes. In democratic regimes, compared to low-income categories in authoritarian regimes, people belonging to low-income categories tend to prefer more income equality, that is, they prefer low-income differences. However, this preference tends to decrease for middle-income categories, but middle-income categories in democratic regimes prefer fewer income differences compared to the low-income category in authoritarian regimes. However, the high-income category in a democratic regime prefers higher income differences, which is the opposite of what low-income and middle-income categories prefer in a democratic regime.

Table 4 compares the preferences for freedom and equality across three different types of political regime: authoritarian, hybrid, and democratic. The analysis was based on three income categories: low, middle, and high income. In democratic regimes, there is no statistical significance in the preference of individuals for freedom and equality across all income categories. In hybrid regimes, individuals belonging to middle-income categories tend to prefer equality over freedom compared with those in the low-income category in the authoritarian regime. However, this preference tends to decrease in the middle income category. In authoritarian regimes, individuals in the high-income category tend to prefer freedom to equality compared to those in the low-income category.

**Table 4.** *Freedom vs Equality*<sup>3)</sup>

	Authoritarian	Hybrid	Democratic
Low Income category	Base category	Tend to prefer equality more over freedom	No statistical significance
Middle Income category	No statistical significance	Tend to prefer equality more over freedom but tendency lesser than low-income category in same regime	No statistical significance
High Income category	Tend to prefer freedom more over equality	No statistical significance	No statistical significance

Table 5 presents views on income equality across three different political regimes: authoritarian, hybrid, and democratic, based on three income categories: low, middle, and high. In the low-income category, individuals living in hybrid regimes tend to place less importance on income equality. However, in democratic regimes, individuals in this income category tend to prioritize income equality more than those in the low-income category in authoritarian regimes. Moving on to the middle-income category, the results show that individuals living under authoritarian and

3) These preferences are compared to the base category i.e. low-income category in authoritarian regime.

hybrid regimes tend to give less importance to income equality than those in the low-income category. However, in democratic regimes, individuals in the middle-income category tend to value income equality more than those in authoritarian and hybrid regimes, although to a lesser extent than those in the low-income category. In the high-income category, individuals across all three political regimes tended to place less importance on income equality. However, the high-income category in democratic regimes prefers income differences that are opposite to the preferences of the low-income and middle-income categories in democratic regimes.

**Table 5.** *Views on Income Equality*<sup>4)</sup>

	Authoritarian	Hybrid	Democratic
Low Income category	Base category	Tends to give Less importance to income equality	Tends to give more importance to income equality
Middle Income category	Tends to give Less importance to income equality	Tends to give Less importance to income equality, lesser than low-income category in Hybrid regime	Tends to give more importance to income equality but lesser than low-income category in democratic regime
High Income category	Tends to give less importance to income equality, lesser than middle income category in Authoritarian regime	Tends to give Less importance to income equality, lesser than middle income category in Hybrid regime	Tends to give Less importance to income equality, opposite to low-income and middle-income category in democratic regime

## V. Possible Theoretical Mechanism Underlying the Preferences

The observed U-shaped relationship in preferences for income equality across different political regimes—where low-income individuals in hybrid regimes place less importance on income equality compared to those in authoritarian regimes, while those in democracies prioritize it more—can be attributed to a complex interplay of social norms, governance structures, and political incentives inherent in each system. In hybrid regimes, skepticism towards the government’s ability to effectively manage and redistribute resources may lead to lower support for income equality, as citizens often experience corruption, inefficiency, and a lack of transparency. This eroded trust contrasts with democratic regimes, where higher levels of institutional trust and political accountability encourage support for policies promoting economic equality. The competitive nature of democratic elections incentivizes politicians to address the concerns of lower-income individuals, who benefit the most from redistributive policies.

Conversely, in authoritarian regimes, where institutional trust is generally low, economic equality may still be supported as an aspirational goal, especially as a counterbalance to entrenched elite power. Additionally, the concept of political efficacy—the belief that one’s participation in the

4) These preferences are compared to the base category i.e. low-income category in authoritarian regime.

political process can lead to meaningful change—varies across regimes. In democracies, higher political efficacy among lower-income individuals fosters a preference for economic equality, while in hybrid regimes, uncertainty and mixed governance may diminish such expectations, leading to a de-prioritization of income equality in favor of more immediate concerns. This divergence in preferences is further influenced by the perceived legitimacy of the government and the underlying social contract, with democracies emphasizing fairness and social justice, and authoritarian regimes prioritizing stability and order, often leading to greater acceptance of economic disparities. This can be a potential area for future empirical research to explore the underlying reasons behind the linkages between political regimes and individual preferences.

## VI. Concluding Remarks

This study revealed several important findings regarding the relationship between political regimes, income categories, and preferences for freedom, equality, and income equality. First, in democratic regimes, there is no statistical significance in the preference of individuals for freedom and equality across all income categories. Second, in hybrid regimes, individuals in the middle-income category tend to prefer equality over freedom compared with the low-income category in authoritarian regimes, although this preference tends to diminish in the middle-income category. Third, in authoritarian regimes, individuals in the high-income category tend to prefer freedom to equality compared with those in the low-income category. This preference for freedom may also reflect a growing desire among the population for greater political and social freedom, as evidenced by the increasing movement toward democracy and human rights in many authoritarian regimes around the world. Ultimately, the complex relationship between income, political power, and individual preferences highlights the need for further research and analysis to better understand the dynamics of political systems and their impact on society.

Additionally, the study found that individuals in the low-income category living under hybrid regimes place less importance on income equality, whereas those in democratic regimes prioritize income equality more than those in authoritarian regimes. Furthermore, in the middle-income category, individuals in authoritarian and hybrid regimes place less importance on income equality than those in the low-income category, while those in democratic regimes value income equality more, albeit to a lesser extent than those in the low-income category. Finally, this study found that individuals in the high-income category across all political regimes tended to place less importance on income equality. Interestingly, the high-income category in democratic regimes prefers income differences opposite to the preferences of low-income and middle-income categories in democratic regimes, which highlights the acceptance and ignorance of income inequality in high-income categories in democratic regimes.

Overall, these findings highlight the complex interplay between political regimes, income categories, and preferences for freedom, equality, and income equality. They suggest that political regimes play a significant role in shaping individuals' perspectives on these issues, with people's preferences shifting because of changes in their political leadership. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of the income category in shaping individuals' attitudes towards income equality, with people from low-income categories consistently placing greater value on income equality than those from higher-income categories. These findings have important implications for policymakers seeking to promote greater equality and freedom within their societies and underscore the need for nuanced approaches to addressing these complex issues.

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