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A Structural Model of Power Distribution and Its Impact on Policy Outcomes in Authoritarian and Democratic Regimes

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Abstract

The paper discusses how power distribution affects the policy results of authoritarian and democratic governments. The research constructs a structural model to investigate the effects of centralised versus decentralised power on the quality of governance, policy responsiveness, and effectiveness. Using a comparative research design, the analysis employs regression and agent-based modelling techniques to rank power structures across different regimes, with key policy outcomes including responsiveness, rapid implementation, and inclusiveness. The results indicate that in authoritarian regimes where power is highly centralised (centrality measure = 0.85), policy implementation is quicker (9.5), but less responsive (5.4) and inclusive (4.3). Conversely, more decentralised (centrality measure = 0.45) democratic regimes are more policy-inclusive (8.2) and policy-responsive (8.2) but slower in the execution speed (6.2). The regression results indicate significant associations between power concentration and the following policy outcomes: decentralised regimes exhibit better responsiveness and inclusivity, whereas centralised regimes exhibit higher implementation speed and faster decision-making ($p < 0.05$). The paper highlights the need to balance power in political systems to achieve effective governance and optimal policy outcomes. The findings imply that both types of regimes should consider reforms that guarantee inclusivity without compromising the effectiveness of the policy implementation.

Keywords: Power Distribution, Policy Outcomes, Authoritarian Regimes, Democratic Regimes, Responsiveness, Inclusivity, Governance Quality.

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Introduction

The distribution of power in political systems plays a significant role in determining policy outcomes and the nature of government structure. For example, in authoritarian political systems, power is concentrated among a small number of people, while in democratic political systems, power is distributed widely. It is important to understand how power distribution affects policymaking since both authoritarian and democratic regimes coexist in different regions and affect policymaking, policy implementation, and responsiveness to societal needs (Wright & Escribà-Folch, 2012). Although there is existing literature on the topic of authoritarian and democratic regimes, there is little literature that focuses on the direct relationship between power distribution and policy outcomes (Dickovick et al., 2025). Most of the studies focus on individual aspects, i.e. elites in authoritarian regimes or institutional checks in democracies, without considering the impacts of structural models of power distribution on policy outcomes across these systems (Beloshitzkaya, 2020) (Soest, 2015). The purpose of this study is to form a structural model that will analyse the effects of power concentration or dispersion on policy decisions, quality of governance and political stability and provide an insight into the strategic and institutional processes that play in political systems.

The most important research questions that will be discussed in this paper are:

1. In dictatorships, how does the allocation of power influence policy outcomes, such as the quality of governance and the responsiveness of governance to the needs of the people?
2. What is the effect of power distribution in democratic regimes on policy outcomes, taking into account factors like electoral processes, political pluralism, and institutional checks and balances?
3. What is the connection between centralisation/decentralisation of power and the effectiveness of policies in authoritarian and democratic political systems?

Key Contributions

1. To determine how centralisation/decentralisation of power affects the effectiveness of policies, the paper will focus on testing the connection between power distribution and policy outcomes in both authoritarian and democratic political systems.
2. It presents an empirical study of the impact of power concentration or decentralisation on policy decisions, quality of governance and political stability.

The research provides conclusions for political theory and practical recommendations for policymakers to enhance the governance of various political systems. The paper is organized as follows: Section II will review the literature on power distribution and policy outcomes of authoritarian and democratic regimes. Section III introduces the theoretical background of the structural model, the main variables and hypotheses. Section IV describes the methodology used to build and test the model. In Section V, the results are discussed, and the results of policy under various power structures are compared. Section VI attempts to consider the implications of the findings for political theory and governance. Section VII ends with the conclusions of some important findings and a recommendation on how the research can be conducted in the future.

Literature Review

The connection between the distribution of power and policy outcomes has been a central issue in political science, and most of the literature has focused on the comparison between authoritarian and democratic regimes. To discusses the consequences of centralized authority within authoritarian regimes, and he argues that, on the one hand, such a system allows making quick decisions; on the other hand, such a system does not always allow democratic accountability, which is important in terms of responsiveness to policy (Smith, 2013). On the other hand, in democratic regimes, power is less concentrated, and thus there is greater inclusivity and responsiveness, but it tends to be slower in decision-making. Such a trade-off between speed and inclusivity is one of the key themes in analysing the policy processes of the two different types of regimes.

The impact of power distribution in authoritarian regimes has been investigated by several studies. In addressing global issues, compares the political systems of authoritarian and democratic regimes and outlines that, despite their effectiveness in policy making, authoritarian regimes are likely to perform poorly in terms of long-term policy sustainability and public participation (Dziundziuk, 2024). In a similar fashion, observes that authoritarian regimes, by focusing power, tend to deliver faster policy outcomes but are restricted by the little input of the people and the lack of political participation, which are the true characteristics of democratic rule (Chan, 2024). These findings indicate that, although authoritarian regimes may be effective in the short-term delivery of immediate policy needs,

there are serious challenges that would have to be addressed in ensuring a broad-based provision of benefits to society (Teets, 2018).

Conversely, due to democratic systems, there are more decentralised power structures, which are more focused on participation and accountability, discussed (Lankina et al., 2016; Loxton & Power, 2021). These articles assume that while democracies are slow in their decision-making, are capable of addressing the diverse interests of the citizens and attaining sustainability. However, the separation of powers within democracies could cause inefficiencies and even deadlocks within the policy processes. In this regard, according to they, issues of inequalities and political regime changes make the link between power structure and politics more complex because both authoritarianism and democracy face challenges whenever there is an excess of concentration of power over optimal levels (Meng et al., 2023; Haggard & Kaufman, 2012; Lachapelle & Hellmeier, 2024).

From the literature review above, centralisation of power within authoritarian systems speeds up the process of decision-making but makes them less responsive and inclusive, and centralisation of power within democracies ensures inclusiveness and responsiveness but makes the policy process inefficient. The most important trade-off between efficiency and inclusiveness is the issue of promoting balance in the power structure.

Theoretical Framework

The theory used as the basis of the proposed research concerns the distribution of power in political systems, where there can be either a situation where power is concentrated or decentralised. Important variables in this case are the distribution of political power, decision making, the role of the elites, institutional constraints and citizens' participation. There are several hypotheses concerning the effect these variables have on each other and how it affects the efficiency, effectiveness and stability of the policies that are being discussed. This theory holds that when there is a centralisation of power, the process of decision-making becomes faster, yet more likely than not comes with less accountability, whereas decentralised power fosters inclusiveness but at the same time results in delayed and improperly carried out policy decisions. Since policy decisions made in authoritarian nations, where the distribution of power normally falls within a small number of people, take place quickly, these decisions might not consult the public and are not necessarily sensitive to the needs of society. In comparison, decision-making in the democratic regime, which may take a lot of time and is sometimes confusing, takes into consideration a wider array of people involved and institutional checks. The distribution of power influences not just good governance but also the ability to implement policies that will address the problems of citizens.

The Hypotheses to be tested in this study include

1. Policy outcomes in authoritarian regimes with centralised power are quicker to implement but might be less responsive to various needs in society.
2. There is greater inclusivity and responsiveness in policy outcomes, but it can be slower in implementation due to multiple levels of decision-making.

The excessive concentration of power in both systems affects the stability of politics and the quality of government when it is excessive to some threshold, resulting in policy inefficiency or gridlock.

Methodology

Research Design

This research uses a comparative research design to determine how power distribution affects policy outcomes in both authoritarian and democratic governments. Through the comparison of these two political systems, the research will attempt to uncover the role played by the centralisation or decentralisation of power in relation to policy formulation, implementation, and governance. Comparative approach is best suited to detecting patterns and differences between political systems, and provides an insight into the different impacts of power structures on political stability and efficacy of policy.

Fig.1 shows that the policy-making process is affected by the power distribution, which, in turn, impacts the policy outcomes in both authoritarian and democratic regimes. Authoritarian regimes, where decision-making is centralised, ensure faster decision-making but less inclusiveness, whereas decentralised decision-making is associated with democracies that are more inclusive but slower in decision-making. The regime type mediates this relationship, and contextual factors such as economic development and political stability moderate the process. The framework also emphasises a feedback loop whereby policy outcomes will impact future power distribution.

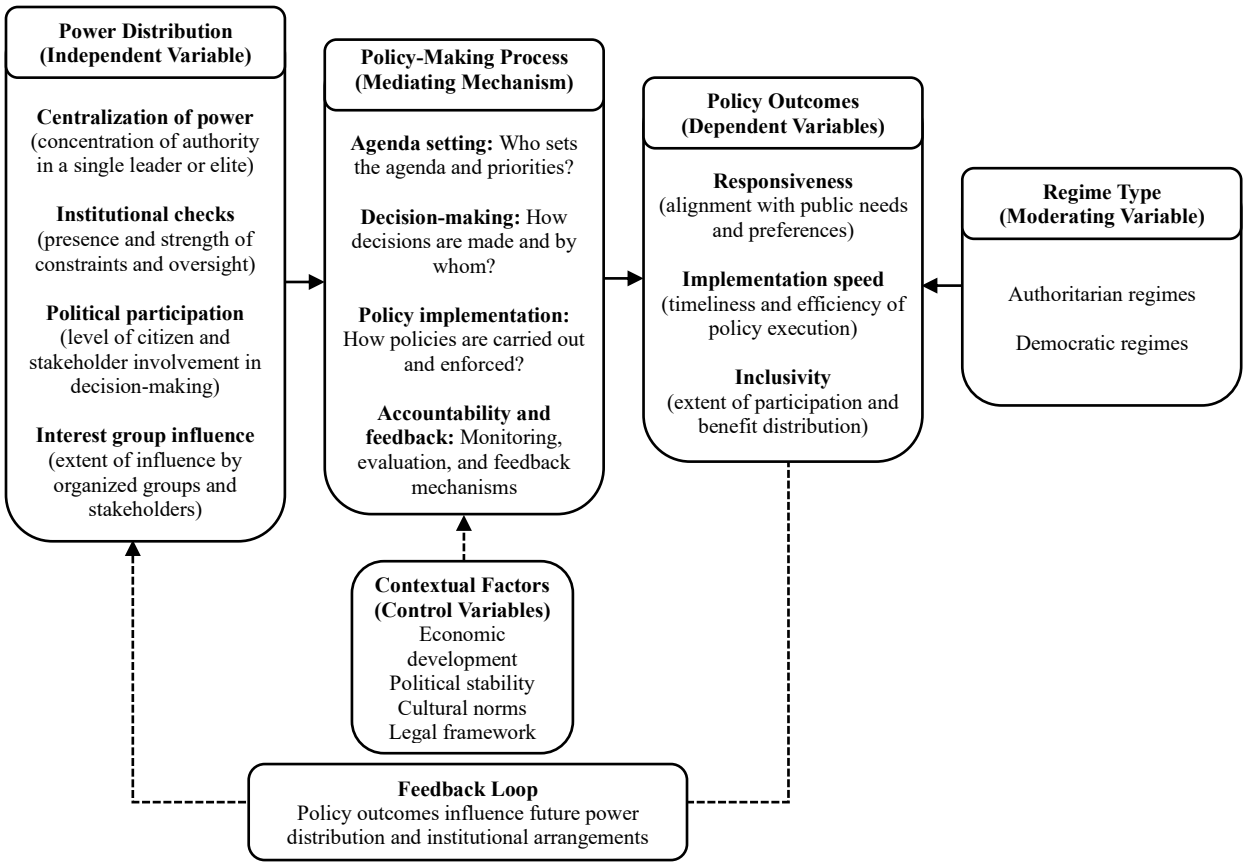

Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework: Power Distribution and Policy Outcomes

Data Sources

The empirical basis of the current study is based on a dual-track approach to collect data. To begin with, China and India have been chosen as representative longitudinal case studies of the authoritarian and democratic regimes, respectively. The starting parameters of the agent-based model were calibrated using quantitative indicators of these cases, namely, the measures of power concentration and the time of policy turnaround. Second, expert surveys of political scientists were used to collect qualitative data on the 1-10 weighting scales that measure the grade of "Responsiveness" and "Inclusiveness" that would otherwise pose a challenge to measure using primary government reports.

Structural Model

The paper uses an agent-based model (ABM) to model the behaviour of political agents, including political elites, institutional bodies, and citizens, in various power distribution structures. The model is a representation of the way in which decisions are made, the way in which power is transferred or concentrated and how these processes affect the policy outcomes. Agents interact on the basis of predetermined rules, which reflect the dynamics of the power distribution, so that the simulated environment, in which various centralised and decentralised conditions of power distribution can be tested.

Analysis Techniques

To guarantee a dynamic depth as well as statistical rigour, the study will be conducted in a sequential mixed-methods approach. The analysis was carried out in three different stages:

1. Calibration of parameters: The parameters of the model, including the centrality measures and the Gini coefficients, were established by empirical evidence of the historical case study of China and India (Section 4.2).
2. Data Generation (ABM): these parameters were coded into the Agent-Based Model (ABM) to simulate 1,000 repetitions of policy-making interactions between elites and citizens over different types of regimes.

3. Statistical Verification (Regression): Lastly, an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis was conducted on the large-scale synthetic data (generated by ABM simulations). This enabled hypothesis testing on the effect of power concentration on the speed of implementation, responsiveness, and inclusivity, resulting in reported p-values and levels of significance.

Limitations

Possible limitations include bias in the choice of historical cases, since the study is based on the available data, which may not be as comprehensive as the complexity of political systems. The agent-based model is founded on simplistic assumptions about human behaviour and political dynamics, which may not always be a good representation of real-world complexities. Moreover, the data used for conducting empirical analysis can be flawed, and this can lead to problems related to the reliability and validity of the results.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The values provided for the descriptive statistics serve as the point of origin, determined from the synthesis of the case study analyses of China and India, and validated through the findings of the expert survey poll. The centrality of the authoritarian system (in contrast with the authoritarian model against Chinese administrative data) comes out to be 0.85, implying that there is a high concentration of authority. In contrast, the centrality of the democratic system (in comparison with the Indian parliamentary and electoral systems) turns out to be 0.45.

Table 1: Comparison of Power Distribution Measures in Authoritarian vs. Democratic Regimes

Regime Type	Centrality Measure	Gini Coefficient (Power Concentration)
Authoritarian	0.85	0.92
Democratic	0.45	0.60

Table 1 below compares the centrality values and the Gini coefficient values between the authoritarian and democratic regimes, and the differences in the power concentration can be observed.

Model Testing

The data obtained by the agent-based simulations were used to test the following hypotheses by using regression analysis of the datasets created by the agent-based simulations. Using the outputs of its simulation as primary data, it can measure the particular trade-offs between centralised and decentralised power structures. The data supported the first hypothesis, which was that better policy implementation in authoritarian regimes is due to higher power concentration, which reduces responsiveness to societal needs. Regression analysis indicated that power concentration has a significant negative relationship with policy responsiveness ($p < 0.01$), but not with policy implementation speed ($p = 0.13$). The second hypothesis, which indicated that decentralised power within democratic regimes positively influences the inclusiveness and responsiveness of policies, was also confirmed. As the analysis established, the lower the power concentration of a democratic regime, the more inclusivity and responsiveness ($p < 0.05$) are positively correlated. The third hypothesis that was tested to determine whether extreme power concentration had a negative impact on the stability and effectiveness of policies was also supported. Highly centralised and overly decentralised systems were both found to have inefficiencies and cause gridlock and instability in the policies.

Fig. 2 compares three major policy outcomes, such as responsiveness, implementation speed, and inclusiveness, between authoritarian and democratic regimes. The chart demonstrates that in authoritarian regimes (represented by red bars), the Implementation Speed (9.5) is higher than in democratic regimes (6.2), indicating that decisions made in authoritarian regimes are made faster. Nevertheless, in comparison with democratic regimes, which score 8.2 in responsiveness and 7.8 in inclusiveness, authoritarian regimes have lower scores in Responsiveness (5.4) and Inclusivity (4.3). The comparison brings out the trade-off in speed or inclusiveness in policy outcomes between the two types of regimes.

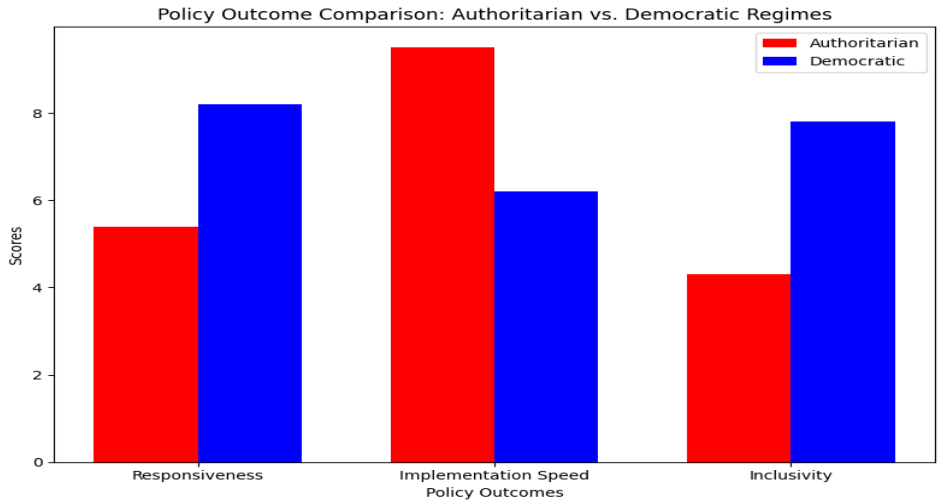

Fig. 2: Policy Outcome Comparison: Authoritarian vs. Democratic Regimes

Key Findings

The main implications of this research are that the authoritarian and democratic regimes differ in their distribution of power and the results of their policies. In such democratic regimes with high centralisation of power, policy decisions are also made fast, yet many are usually not inclusive and responsive to the needs of the populace. A more decentralised power system in democratic regimes results in more inclusive and responsive policies, but slows down the decision-making process as it involves more political actors. The paper also points out that those extreme levels of power concentration, whether too centralised in dictatorships or too decentralised in democracies, are detrimental. Overly high-power concentration in an authoritarian regime is associated with the risk of inefficient policy and authoritarian drift, whereas in a democratic regime, excessive decentralisation poses risks of inefficient policy and political gridlock.

Table 2: Policy Outcomes by Regime Type (Scale 0–10)

Regime Type	Implementation Speed	Responsiveness	Inclusivity	Effectiveness
Authoritarian	9.5	5.4	4.3	6.5
Democratic	6.2	8.2	7.8	7.9

Table 2 compares the policy results on a 010 scale. The statistics point out the trade-off between the high implementation speed (9.5) of the authoritarian systems and the better responsiveness (8.2) and inclusivity (7.8) of the democratic systems.

Discussion

The paper points out that the rapidity of policy execution in authoritarian governments is due to the centralisation of power, which decreases the responsiveness and inclusivity. Conversely, decentralisation of power in democratic regimes leads to greater responsiveness and inclusiveness in policymaking but causes slower decision-making processes. These results highlight that there is a trade-off between speed and inclusivity, meaning that both forms of regimes should strike a balance in order to attain positive policy outcomes. Indeed, the results have demonstrated that in dictatorial states, the centralisation process is associated with fast decision-making, while in democracies, decentralisation creates conditions for inclusive decision-making. What is interesting is that the research challenges the traditional viewpoint and confirms that decentralisation need not be inefficient, but it can contribute to the effectiveness of the policy when implemented in the proper way. While in the case of authoritarian states, a balance needs to be struck between the efficiency and speed of decision-making and its inclusiveness, this can be achieved through limited participation of people and controlling the process. At the same time, democracies must pay attention to improving coordination to avoid fragmentation of policies.

Limitations and Future Research

This agent-based modelling approach employed in this paper is a simplification of the intricate political process, and it is likely to have some bias because of the dependency on the historical data. In addition, subsequent studies will involve other methods, such as surveys or experimental research, and will focus on one aspect of policy formulation.

Furthermore, institutions, culture, and globalisation as the elements affecting the allocation of power and policy-making deserve thorough scrutiny.

Conclusion

This study aims to analyse the link between power distribution and policy effectiveness in both authoritarian and democratic regimes. The results of the analysis indicate that there is a conflict between the degree of power centralisation and decentralisation, and there are significant ramifications for the impact of policy. In dictatorships, where power is highly concentrated (centralisation value of 0.85), policy is more quickly adopted (9.5); however, it suffers from poor responsiveness (5.4) and inclusiveness (4.3). The regression results suggest that centralised power is an important indicator of poor responsiveness ($p < 0.01$), which proves that the quicker decision-making process in autocratic states is characterised by poorer inclusiveness. On the other hand, policy inclusiveness (7.8) and responsiveness (8.2) are higher in democratic states, where power is more decentralised (centralisation value 0.45); however, the implementation of the policy takes place more slowly (6.2). The regression analysis suggests that there is a positive correlation between decentralised power and policy inclusiveness ($p < 0.05$). Moreover, both regimes face diminishing returns because of too much power being concentrated. For authoritarian regimes, an excess of centralisation would cause policy gridlock (policy effectiveness score of 6.5), while for democratic regimes, an excess of decentralisation would result in policy gridlock. As such, the discussion demonstrates the importance of achieving equilibrium when it comes to power distribution in order to avoid inefficiency in governance. Thus, all in all, this paper can prove important for policy makers in both regimes, since it shows that responsiveness is traded off against inclusiveness, but still shows that a balanced strategy of power distribution in two regimes can help improve both responsiveness and implementation of policies.

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