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Mauk, Marlene

Postprint / Postprint

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Mauk, M. (2017). Fostering support for non-democratic rule? Controlled political liberalization and popular support for non-democratic regimes. *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft : Comparative Governance and Politics*, 11(1), 24-49. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12286-017-0325-1>

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Fostering support for non-democratic rule?

Controlled political liberalization and popular support for non-democratic regimes

Marlene Mauk

Abstract When the Cold War ended, many non-democratic regimes across the globe embarked on a course of controlled political liberalization, hoping to stabilize their autocratic rule by mitigating popular demands for democratization and increasing regime legitimacy. But does this strategy actually work? This article uses multi-level analyses to examine how the degree of political liberalization affects regime support in non-democratic political systems and to ascertain which mechanisms underlie this effect. Drawing on aggregate measures of political liberalization and comparative survey data from four regional survey projects and 31 non-democracies, the study's results indicate that the degree of liberalization has no decisively positive effect on regime support, suggesting controlled political liberalization might not be an effective legitimizing strategy after all.

Keywords Autocracies • Hybrid regimes • Liberalization • Political support • Regime support

Förderlich für nicht-demokratische Herrschaft?

Begrenzte politische Öffnung und die Unterstützung nicht-demokratischer Regime

Zusammenfassung Nach Ende des Kalten Krieges haben viele nicht-demokratische Regime weltweit einen Kurs der begrenzten politischen Öffnung eingeschlagen, um öffentliche Forderungen nach Demokratisierung zu entschärfen und auf diese Weise die Legitimität ihrer autokratischen Herrschaft zu erhöhen. Doch ist diese Strategie tatsächlich effektiv? Der Beitrag verwendet Mehrebenenanalysen, um zu untersuchen wie der Grad an politischer Öffnung die Regimerunterstützung in nicht-demokratischen politischen Systemen beeinflusst. Auf Basis von Aggregatmaßen zur politischen Öffnung und Individualdaten aus vier regionalen Umfrageprojekten und 31 Autokratien kann kein klarer positiver Effekt des Grads der politischen Öffnung auf die Regimeunterstützung nachgewiesen werden, was eine begrenzte politische Öffnung als wenig effektive Legitimationsstrategie erscheinen lässt.

Schlüsselwörter Autokratien • Hybride Regime • Liberalisierung • Politische Unterstützung • Regimeunterstützung

1 Introduction

When the Cold War ended, many non-democratic regimes across the globe followed a course of controlled political liberalization, allowing more political pluralism, providing at least limited multiparty competition, and granting more civil liberties (Levitsky and Way 2010a, pp. 16-20; Schedler 2015, pp. 1-5).

M. Mauk, M.A.

Institut für Politikwissenschaft, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz,
Jakob-Welder-Weg 12, 55099 Mainz, Germany
E-Mail: Mauk@politik.uni-mainz.de

While this trend has certainly been beneficial to citizens in the short run, its long-term consequences are still unclear. Will this process of opening up continue or even spin out of control, eventually leading to actual democratization? Or will it instead stabilize non-democratic rule by attenuating international and internal demands for democratization? The literature on autocratic stability points to several possible effects of political liberalization. For example, political liberalization may expedite the erosion of non-democratic rule by legalizing opposition and political competition. This provides an additional venue for challenging incumbents and engenders the possibility of “liberalizing electoral outcomes” in which opposition forces manage to gain power and eventually overturn the incumbent non-democratic regime (Brownlee 2009; Howard and Roessler 2006). However, political liberalization may also in various ways be instrumental in perpetuating the non-democratic regime, for example by facilitating the co-optation of both regime elites and potential opposition forces (Boix and Svolik 2013; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007), by providing information about its bases of support (Brownlee 2007), or by alleviating international pressures to democratize and thus securing external economic assistance conditional on at least formally democratic institutions (Levitsky and Way 2010a, pp. 16-20).

All of these discussions focus predominantly on elite actions and pay only slight attention to the effect political liberalization may have on the general population. However, as I suggest, political liberalization may also contribute to the stability of non-democratic rule by enhancing popular support for the ruling non-democratic regime: by granting certain political rights and guaranteeing certain civil liberties, non-democratic rulers in more liberalized regimes may meet some of the demands articulated by their citizens, improving their satisfaction (or mitigating their dissatisfaction) with the regime and ultimately spawning more positive attitudes towards it. Such positive attitudes towards the political regime – or regime support – have been regarded as indispensable for the persistence of any political system ever since Almond's and Verba's (1963) seminal work (see also Brooker 2009, pp. 130-161; Gerschewski 2013; Gilley 2009). As a consequence increasing popular support for the political regime should have a decisively positive effect on autocratic regime stability.

But do more liberalized non-democratic regimes really receive more popular support, and does controlled political liberalization thereby contribute to the stabilization, as opposed to the erosion, of non-democratic rule? Very little research exists on the sources of political support in non-democracies, and the dominant explanations pay little to no attention to system-level political liberalization as a source of political support. Rather, they concentrate on two sets of individual-level factors: anti-democratic or traditional value orientations (e. g., Dalton and Ong 2005; Ma and Yang 2014; Shi 2001) and economic or administrative performance evaluations (e. g., Thompson 2004; Zhong and Chen 2013).

Adding to these established explanatory approaches to political support for non-democratic regimes, this study introduces the degree of political liberalization as a determinant of political support in non-democratic regimes. In this way it links two previously unrelated strands of research: one, the predominantly institutionalist literature on the conditions of autocratic stability and the effects of political liberalization and, two, the political-culture literature on sources of political support in non-democracies. I argue that controlled political liberalization enhances popular support for a non-democratic regime. As a result, citizens in more liberalized non-democracies should be more supportive of their political regimes than citizens in more politically closed non-democracies. Specifically, I propose that two distinct mechanisms underlie this relationship between the degree of political liberalization and regime support: first, an indirect effect that is mediated through individual-level evaluations of democratic performance; and, second, a moderating effect that mitigates the negative effect

of individual-level pro-democratic value orientations on regime support.

To investigate these effects, the empirical analysis uses representative survey data (Afrobarometer, Arab Barometer, Asian Barometer, Latinobarometro) and aggregate-level measures of the degree of political liberalization (Freedom House) for 31 non-democratic political systems. Within a multi-level framework, it examines both the relationship between these countries' different degrees of system-level political liberalization and individual-level regime support as well as explicitly models the two causal mechanisms underlying this overall effect.

This study thus contributes to the literature in two important ways. One, it introduces the degree of political liberalization as a source of regime support in non-democracies, presenting a coherent theoretical argument concerning how system-level political liberalization may affect individual-level regime support. Two, it performs the first empirical analysis of this relationship using a global sample of non-democratic political systems, thereby enhancing our knowledge concerning how political support can be generated and maintained despite a lack of democratic legitimation. The main result indicates that the degree of political liberalization has only a limited and not decisively positive effect on popular support for non-democratic regimes. It therefore demonstrates that controlled political liberalization is not a promising strategy for increasing popular support for non-democratic rule.

2 Sources of regime support in non-democratic political systems

Regime support, meaning the attitudes of citizens towards the basic institutional structure of their respective political system (Easton 1965; Fuchs 2009), and its sources have long been a central topic in political-culture research. A vast variety of theoretical arguments and empirical tests has been brought forward, identifying a multitude of individual- and system-level determinants of political support in both established and new democracies: On the system level, for example, the age of democracy (e. g., Aarts and Thomassen 2008), institutional characteristics such as unitary government (e. g., Fitzgerald and Wolak 2016), or welfare state policies such as the generosity of unemployment benefits (e. g., Kumlin 2011) have been shown to exert a positive influence on political support. On the individual level, the two sets of determinants derived from David Easton's (1965) classic model of political support are most commonly studied: value orientations and performance evaluations. For example, pro-democratic attitudes (e. g., Singh 2016), positive evaluations of the national economy (e. g., Cordero and Simón 2016), or perceptions of procedural fairness (e. g., Linde 2012) have all been related to political support. Moreover, many other determinants such as social trust (e. g., Zmerli and Newton 2008), ideological congruence with the government (e. g., Stecker and Tausendpfund 2016), voting for the winning or losing camp (e. g., Jou 2009), political participation (e. g., Quintelier and van Deth 2014), personality traits (e. g., Freitag and Ackermann 2015), or policy preferences (e. g., Citrin et al. 2014) have been identified as influencing political support.

However, with the bulk of political-culture research concentrating on democracies, political attitudes and their generation in non-democratic regimes have so far received only limited theoretical or empirical attention. With regard to the sources of regime support in non-democracies, two individual-level explanatory approaches that draw on the classical explanations developed for democracies have dominated the literature thus far: a culturalist tradition focuses on traditional societal and anti-democratic political value orientations as bases of support for non-democratic regimes (e. g., Dalton and Ong 2005; Ma and Yang

2014; Shi 2001), while a rational-choice tradition emphasizes the role of economic and administrative performance evaluations (e. g., Thompson 2004; Zhong and Chen 2013).¹ The empirical evidence, albeit collected exclusively within East Asia, lends ample support to both of these propositions: one, individuals committed to traditional societal and anti-democratic political value orientations are more supportive of their non-democratic regimes than those with more modern and pro-democratic outlooks (Chang et al. 2013; Chen and Dickson 2008; Chu 2011; Chu et al. 2013; Lewis-Beck et al. 2014; Shi 2001; Wang and Tan 2013; Yang and Tang 2010; Zhong and Chen 2013; for a more differentiated account, see Park 2013); two, individuals viewing their political system's economic and administrative performance more favorably express more support for that system than those critical of its performance (Chang et al. 2013; Chen and Dickson 2008; Chen et al. 1997; Chu 2011; Chu et al. 2013; Wang and Tan 2013; Zhong and Chen 2013).

A third, less frequently cited explanation points to indoctrination as a source of political support in non-democratic regimes: because citizens are exposed to information that is primarily controlled and regulated by the regime, they should adopt the media's favorable depiction of the political system. Individual-level media exposure should therefore be positively related to regime support in non-democracies (Chen and Shi 2001; Geddes and Zaller 1989; Wang 2005, p. 160; on the supposedly more ambiguous influence of the internet, see Tang and Huhe 2014; Xiang and Hmielowski 2016). However, the empirical evidence – collected exclusively within China – suggests a (weak) negative effect of media exposure (Chen and Shi 2001; Xiang and Hmielowski 2016; but see Yang and Tang 2010) on political support.

3 Political liberalization and regime support

Adding to these prominent explanations of regime support in non-democracies, this article suggests another factor that may also play an important role in shaping support for non-democratic regimes: the degree of political liberalization. Since non-democratic rulers are confronted with increasing public demands for democratization, they often embark on a course of controlled political liberalization, for example permitting (limited) multiparty competition in the electoral arena (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Levitsky and Way 2010a, pp. 16-20; Schedler 2015, pp. 1-5). As a result, their non-democratic regimes often take on a hybrid nature, combining formally democratic structures with autocratic practices. On the one hand, such a hybrid configuration allows non-democratic rulers to retain control over the election outcome via the unfair use of state power, generating what is often termed “an uneven playing field” (Levitsky and Way 2010b). On the other hand, such a configuration also provides not only purportedly democratic elections, but in fact more political competition than closed authoritarian rule. One rationale behind such controlled and strictly limited liberalization is that by meeting some of the public demands for greater political openness, non-democratic rulers expect to alleviate pressures, increase regime legitimacy, and so ultimately stabilize their non-democratic rule (Brooker 2009, pp. 136-139).² Controlled

¹ In democratic contexts, performance evaluations are often conceptualized to affect support for the incumbent government rather than for the political regime itself (see, e. g., Citrin 1974). Due to the often far reaching fusion of incumbents and regime in political systems that lack regular alternation in office, however, this distinction is rarely made for non-democratic contexts.

² Another reason for implementing formally democratic institutions can be found in authoritarian rulers' efforts to solicit the cooperation of regime elites or opposition forces (Boix and Svolik 2013; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007). Apart from these internal rationales, there are also external reasons for controlled political liberalization: Since the Cold War, democracy has emerged as the only legitimate form of political rule across the globe, and economic assistance from Western countries is now often conditioned on holding free and fair elections. Providing

political liberalization should as a consequence increase popular support for the political regime.³ While this effect operates over time, i. e. regime support within a given country should increase following a process of controlled political liberalization, its results can also be observed cross-nationally: Since controlled political liberalization is expected to lead both to a higher degree of political liberalization and to a higher level of popular support, citizens in more liberalized non-democracies should be more supportive of their respective political regimes than citizens in less liberalized non-democracies. I therefore expect a positive relationship between the current degree of political liberalization and regime support across different non-democratic regimes.⁴

H1. The higher the political regime's degree of political liberalization, the higher the citizens' support for the political regime.

On the theoretical level, this effect could be based on two distinct mechanisms: first, an indirect effect that is mediated through individual-level factors; second, a moderating effect that affects the relationship between individual-level factors and regime support.

As far as the first, indirect effect is concerned, the degree of political liberalization could affect the way citizens evaluate their regime's performance – more specifically, its democratic performance. This form of performance is often overlooked by proponents of the rational-choice approach, which focuses on economic and administrative factors. While these economic and administrative factors can be subsumed as “systemic performance”, “democratic performance” in contrast encompasses the provision of political rights and freedoms as well as the responsiveness and accountability of the ruling with regard to the ruled (Fuchs 1998). In this respect, non-democratic regimes are of course inherently inferior to democracies (Dahl 2006; Fukuyama 1992; Shapiro 2003). However, democratic performance can still vary across non-democratic regimes as a result of political liberalization processes. For example, to the extent that they allow for at least limited multiparty competition and grant extended civil liberties, the hybrid regimes of Mozambique and Malaysia boast a higher democratic performance than the politically closed authoritarian regimes of China and Sudan. Insofar as citizens in the former two countries are able to recognize these comparative advantages, they should evaluate their regimes' democratic performances more positively than citizens in the latter two countries. Evidence presented by Norris (2011, pp. 190-202) suggests that citizens are indeed reasonably capable of judging their political system's democratic performance.

These individual-level evaluations of the political system's democratic performance in turn should then affect the individual's support for the political regime delivering this (perceived) performance.⁵ This reasoning ties in directly with the classical rational-choice approach

purportedly democratic multiparty elections may thus also be a way to gain international legitimacy and secure external economic assistance while still retaining autocratic power (Levitsky and Way 2010a, pp. 16-20).

³ Of course, political liberalization may not always be temporally prior to changes in regime support: Non-democratic rulers may also choose to embark on a course of controlled political liberalization as a reaction to dwindling popular support, i. e. changes in the degree of political liberalization may follow changes in the level of regime support. However, the expectation would then still be that regime support increases as a result of this liberalization and not the other way around – it seems highly unlikely that non-democratic rulers would choose to liberalize as a reaction to increasing popular support, i. e. that liberalization occurs after regime support has increased.

⁴ While it would be more faithful to the process nature of controlled political liberalization to analyze the relationship between changes in the degree of political liberalization and changes in the level of regime support, suitable longitudinal data are not available. The hypothesized causal relationship therefore can only be examined using cross-national variations in the levels of political liberalization and regime support, and all hypotheses are formulated accordingly.

⁵ Conceptually, regime support and evaluations of democratic performance are two distinct constructs. While

presented in the previous section. From a rational-choice perspective, citizens will grant support to a political regime or withdraw it depending on the benefits they expect to receive from this regime. That these benefits may not only be of a material nature has long been discussed in research on democratic systems (e. g., Clarke et al. 1993; Evans and Whitefield 1995; Kornberg and Clarke 1992). Plenty of empirical evidence confirms that citizens are motivated not only by economic goods but also take into account immaterial benefits such as political freedom, fairness, or accountability when evaluating their political regime (e.g., Huang et al. 2008; Linde 2012; Luhiste 2006; Magalhaes 2016; Rose and Mishler 2011).⁶ In research on non-democracies, however, this effect of individual-level democratic performance evaluations on regime support has so far received only scant attention. The only exceptions are all narrow in scope, concentrating exclusively on countries within East Asia; nevertheless, their results confirm the findings from democracies: Individual-level democratic performance evaluations appear to also be positively related to regime support in non-democratic political systems (Chu 2011; Park 2013; Wang and Tan 2013). By combining these two propositions – that the degree of system-level political liberalization positively affects individual-level democratic performance evaluations and that individual-level democratic performance evaluations positively affect individual-level regime support – the causal chain that links the degree of political liberalization with regime support is formed: democratic performance evaluations mediate the effect that the degree of political liberalization has on regime support (Fig. 1, dashed lines). Overall, controlled political liberalization, accordingly, should indeed foster regime support, and the degree of political liberalization should be positively related to regime support. Yet, the empirical evidence on this overall effect as presented in the literature remains fairly inconclusive. On the one hand, studies on democracies in Eastern Europe and worldwide do in fact find such a positive effect (Ariely 2015; Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014; Mishler and Rose 1999; Norris 1999; Rose and Mishler 2002; Wagner et al. 2009). But on the other hand, studies on East Asia and/or including non-democracies yield contradictory results, finding either negative effects (Ikeda 2013; Rose and Mishler 2011) or no effect at all (Kotzian 2011; Rich 2015). More comprehensive analyses which clarify not only the theoretical but also the empirical relationship between the degree of system-level political liberalization and individual-level regime support are thus needed. This study aims to fill this gap by examining not only the overall relationship between the degree of political liberalization and regime support (H1) but also the particular mediation mechanism proposed above as linking system-level political liberalization with individual-level regime support in non-democratic political systems. It sets out to test the following hypothesis pertaining to this mediation mechanism:

democratic performance evaluations refer to a specific attitude based on cognitive assessments of the regime's democraticness (and nothing else), regime support refers to a more general and diffuse attitude that may be based not only on judgments of the regime's democratic performance but also on judgments of its economic performance, the perceived legitimacy of the regime, the popularity of the ruler, and so forth.

⁶ It is also conceivable that regime support affects democratic performance evaluations: if citizens are satisfied with their political regime – for whatever reasons – they might also evaluate this regime as being more democratic. While this endogeneity problem cannot be resolved empirically with the data available, the theoretical considerations outlined above (rational-choice approach) as well as prior research strongly suggest that evaluations of democratic (as well as economic or administrative) performance are indeed causally prior to regime support and not the other way around.

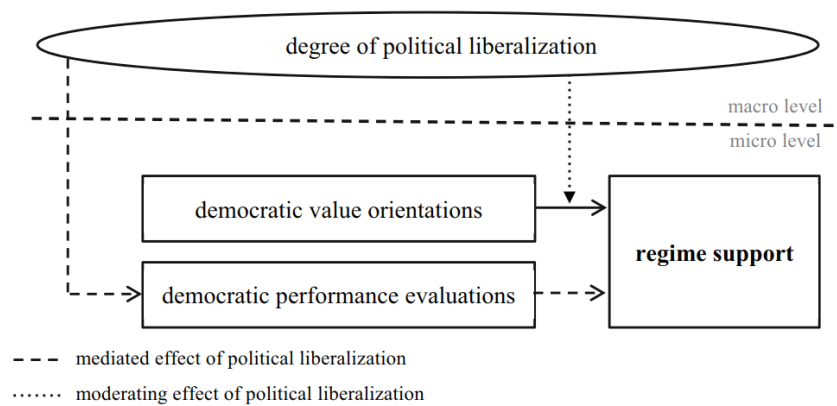


Fig. 1 The mechanisms linking the degree of political liberalization and regime support

H2. Democratic performance evaluations mediate the effect the degree of political liberalization has on regime support: the higher the political regime's degree of political liberalization, the more favorable are individual-level evaluations of its democratic performance; and the more favorable individual-level democratic performance evaluations are, the higher individual-level regime support will be.

Additionally, a second, moderating effect of the degree of political liberalization on the relationship between individual-level political value orientations and regime support can be anticipated (Fig. 1, dotted line). This expectation rests on the assumption that people will more likely support their political regime if its institutional structure conforms to their personal value orientations: If individuals hold democratic political values, they will evaluate their non-democratic regime more negatively due to the apparent discrepancy between their personal political value orientations and the regime's structure. The larger this discrepancy between the individual's pro-democratic value orientations and the regime's non-democratic institutional structure is, the stronger this negative effect should be. Its strength can therefore be expected to be dependent on the degree of political liberalization. While the gap between the individual's democratic value orientations and the regime's institutional structure is particularly big in politically closed one-party authoritarian regimes, this gap is reduced in more liberalized hybrid regimes. Thus, the more liberalized a political regime is, the weaker the negative effect of democratic value orientations on regime support should be.⁷ This kind of moderating effect would be beneficial to the non-democratic rulers who have embarked on a liberalizing course since the negative effects of citizen demands for democracy (rooted in their commitment to democratic political values) would be mitigated in more liberalized political regimes.

Other studies have failed to present theoretical arguments explaining how the degree of political liberalization should moderate the relationship between individual-level political value orientations and regime support. Some, however, have reported empirical evidence that points to the existence of such an effect. Both Chu et al. (2013) and Chang et al. (2013) find that political value orientations are more important in more authoritarian regimes. Yet, Ma and Yang (2014) state that the influence of what they term as "authoritarian value orientations" – a mixture of political and societal value orientations – on regime support is

⁷ Huhe and Tang (2016) have recently (and independently of this contribution) also suggested a moderating effect of this type. They, however, do not offer a coherent theoretical argument for this effect. Empirically, they find that pro-democratic value orientations do exert a stronger negative influence on political support in non-democracies than in democracies.

independent of the actual democratic performance of the regime in question. Park (2013) likewise asserts that the effects of pro-democratic value orientations on regime support follow no coherent pattern. So while this empirical evidence is far from definitive, it is, moreover, again limited exclusively to political systems in East Asia, which raises doubts about its generalizability. In an attempt to clarify the relationship between the degree of system-level political liberalization, individual-level political value orientations, and individual-level regime support not only conceptually but also empirically, this study investigates a third hypothesis:

H3. The degree of political liberalization moderates the effect of democratic political value orientations on regime support: the higher the political regime's degree of political liberalization, the weaker the negative effect that individual-level democratic political value orientations have on regime support.

In summary, I expect two mechanisms that link the degree of political liberalization and regime support in non-democratic regimes. First, liberalization should indirectly affect regime support through individual-level evaluations of democratic performance. Second, it should moderate the effect of political value orientations, weakening the negative effect of democratic political value orientations on regime support.

4 Data, measurement, and method

All effects proposed here are located on two analytical levels. Hypothesis 1 posits the effect of a system-level variable on an individual-level variable, and hypotheses 2 and 3 propose a cross-level mediation and moderation, respectively. Examining these effects requires both aggregate-level data on the degree of political liberalization as well as individual-level data on regime support, democratic performance evaluations, and democratic value orientations for a sufficiently large number of non-democratic political regimes. In order to gather this information, data from several sources had to be merged. While aggregate-level data on degrees of political liberalization were obtained from datasets provided by Freedom House, individual-level data on citizens' attitudes had to be compiled by combining four regional survey projects: the

Afrobarometer (wave 5, 2011-2013), the Arab Barometer (wave 3, 2012-2014), the Asian Barometer (wave 3, 2010-2012), and the Latinobarometro (wave 16, 2011).

Of the 74 political systems covered in these four surveys, 31 can be characterized as relatively stable non-democracies during the period interviews were conducted.⁸ Sample sizes range from 1000 (Honduras, Nicaragua, Singapore) to 3473 (China).⁹ Algeria, Morocco, and Sudan were covered by both the Afrobarometer and the Arab Barometer. In order to use all available information, the data from both surveys for these countries were combined and the resulting higher sample sizes were corrected for through weighting.¹⁰ The total number of respondents is 48,850. Table 1 provides details of the countries, the survey years covered, and the sample sizes. The 31 political systems included in the cross-national analysis vary considerably with regard to their level of political liberalization, ranging from

⁸ All political systems not listed as "electoral democracies" by Freedom House for the respective survey years were classified as non-democracies. Four of these non-democracies were excluded due to the apparent instability of their political regimes (Egypt, Thailand) or the lack of state monopoly (Libya, Palestine (West Bank)) during the survey fieldwork period.

⁹ To avoid structures in a single country (China) dominating the results, all countries are weighted equally for all analyses. Net sample size remains unaffected by this weighting.

¹⁰ Robustness checks using instead either the Afrobarometer or the Arab Barometer data did not yield substantially different results.

politically closed authoritarian regimes such as Sudan to fairly competitive and open hybrid regimes such as Kenya (see Table 1).

On the system level, the degree of political liberalization is measured by the inverted Freedom House scores (Political Rights and Civil Liberties combined). In contrast to other measures of democracy such as Polity IV (Polity IV Project 2016) or the Democracy-Dictatorship Measure (Cheibub et al. 2010), Freedom House places special emphasis on individual political rights and civil liberties. For this reason, it best captures those aspects of political liberalization that can be assumed to affect ordinary citizens most strongly. This makes Freedom House particularly suitable for analyzing the effects the degree of political liberalization has on citizens' attitudes towards the political regime.¹¹

On the individual level, combining four different cross-national surveys limits the availability of indicators. Nevertheless, all central variables can be operationalized adequately enough (for details on question wordings, refer to Appendix). Regime support as the dependent variable is measured by an additive index containing three items asking about confidence in different institutions: the government or president, the parliament, and the police.

Dimensionality analyses (CFA) indicate that all three items indeed tap into the same underlying theoretical construct,¹² and

¹¹ Robustness checks using changes in inverted Freedom House scores over the past 5 and past 10 years, respectively, as a measure of liberalization did not yield substantially different results.

¹² All three items load highly on a single factor both in the pooled sample and in individual countries (standardized factor loadings generally >0.5). Measurement invariance across all countries, however, could not be established. This is a common issue in cross-national comparative research (see, e. g., Ariely and Davidov 2011; Coromina and Davidov 2013; Davidov et al. 2014). While a lack of measurement invariance makes an interpretation of the results methodologically problematic, this issue cannot be resolved with the data currently available.

Table 1 Survey coverage and degrees of political liberalization in non-democratic political systems

	Year	Sample size	Inverted FH		Year	Sample size	Inverted FH
Afrobarometer				Arab Barometer			
Algeria ^a	2013	1204	2.5	Algeria ^a	2013	1220	2.5
Burkina Faso	2012	1200	4.0	Iraq	2013	1215	2.5
Burundi	2012	1200	3.0	Jordan	2012-13	1795	2.5
Cameroon	2013	1200	2.0	Kuwait	2014	1021	3.0
Cote d'Ivoire	2013	1200	3.5	Lebanon	2013	1200	3.5
Guinea	2013	1200	3.0	Morocco ^a	2013-14	1116	3.5
Kenya	2011	2399	4.5	Sudana	2013	1200	1.0
Madagascar	2013	1200	3.5	Yemen	2013	1200	2.0
Mali	2012	1200	2.0	Asian Barometer			
Morocco ^a	2013	1196	3.5	Cambodia	2012	1200	2.5
Mozambique	2012	2400	4.5	China	2011	3473	1.5
Nigeria	2013	2400	4.0	Hong Kong	2012	1207	4.5
Sudana	2013	1199	1.0	Malaysia	2011	1214	4.0
Swaziland	2013	1200	2.0	Singapore	2010	1000	3.5
Togo	2012	1200	3.5	Vietnam	2010	1191	2.0
Uganda	2012	2400	3.5	Latinobarometro			
Zimbabwe	2012	2400	2.0	Honduras	2011	1000	4.0
				Nicaragua	2011	1000	3.5
				Venezuela	2011	1200	3.0

All data are reported for the respective survey years

Sources: Afrobarometer 2011-2013; Arab Barometer 2012-2014; Asian Barometer 2010-2012; Latinobarometro 2011; Freedom House 2015a, 2015b

^aAfrobarometer and Arab Barometer data for respective country have been combined for analysis

index reliability is good, considering the index contains only three items ($\alpha = 0.776$).¹³ Institutional confidence is a commonly used measure of regime support in both democratic and non-democratic contexts (e. g., Criado and Herreros 2007; Dalton 2004; Lü 2014; Moehler 2009; Seligson 2002). This measure is preferred here to the equally popular “satisfaction with the way democracy works” item for two reasons: institutional confidence is more clearly directed at support for the political regime itself and avoids using the term “democracy” which is problematic generally, but particularly in non-democratic contexts (see, e. g. Ariely 2015; Canache et al. 2001; Ferrín 2016; Linde and Ekman 2003; Marien 2011). Moreover, by probing support for a number of different institutions rather than just government, social desirability effects caused by political fear should be mitigated.¹⁴

¹³ For individual countries, alpha ranges from 0.563 (Honduras) to 0.842 (Morocco). Apart from Honduras, only Uganda ($\alpha = 0.598$) and Kenya ($\alpha = 0.602$) yield similarly poor reliability values. While alphas below 0.65 or even 0.7 are often considered problematic, they are not uncommon with very short scales such as the one used here (e. g., Cortina 1993; Hair et al. 2010, p. 125). Since dimensionality analyses (CFA) confirm the unidimensionality of the scale, even the poor values for Honduras, Uganda, and Kenya are deemed acceptable.

¹⁴ Of course, social desirability and political fear are always problematic when conducting survey research in non-democratic political systems. However, only small minorities (an average of 4.8%) of respondents in African non-democracies appeared suspicious during the interviews (the highest proportions being 16% in Algeria, 11% in Sudan, and 10% in Cameroon); no more than 4% of respondents in East Asian non-democracies seemed insincere in answering the interviewer's questions; and a maximum of 10% of interviewers reported difficulties in asking questions about politics in Latin American non-democracies (in Venezuela; less than 5% in Honduras and

The individual-level mediating variable, democratic performance evaluations, is measured by an item asking respondents where they would place the country's current system of government on a scale from completely undemocratic to completely democratic. Despite being a single-item measurement, this question has great face validity since it probes directly into the overarching evaluation of the regime's democratic performance.

The individual-level moderated variable, democratic value orientations, is measured by a question regarding the superiority of democracy over other forms of government. While this item surely has limitations since it has been shown not to measure a robust commitment to democratic values (see, e. g., Chu and Huang 2010; Inglehart 2003; Rose et al. 1998), it is the only one available for all four survey projects.

Corresponding to the other explanatory approaches discussed and to the determinants identified in prior research on sources of political support in non-democratic regimes, the model also contains two groups of control variables: economic and administrative performance evaluations and proxies of exposure to indoctrination. Questions on the current national economic situation and personal or public safety measure economic and administrative performance. Use of traditional mass media (TV, radio, and press) approximates exposure to indoctrination. In addition, standard sociodemographics (age, gender, education, employment status) are controlled for.¹⁵ Question wordings and response scales vary from survey to survey. To harmonize response scales, all items were linearly transformed so that the value ranges are identical and that high values indicate strong support for the respective construct (see Appendix for details).

Multi-level modeling is then used to estimate both the overall effect of the system-level degree of level political liberalization on individual-level regime support and the particular mediation and moderation mechanisms proposed above. This is the most appropriate modeling technique for two reasons. One, the data used here have a hierarchical structure (individuals are nested within political systems) which would result in an underestimation of standard errors when using individual-level ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis (cf. e. g., Hox 2010, pp. 4-7). Two, other than a purely aggregate-level analysis, multi-level modeling is capable of controlling for composition differences, i. e. differences in the distribution of individual-level characteristics such as democratic value orientations between the system-level units (the political systems). Based on the variation in the degree of political liberalization between countries, multi-level analysis can then estimate the effect the degree of political liberalization has on regime support while controlling for various individual-level variables.

To examine the overall effect of the degree of political liberalization on regime support, a simple multi-level regression model is sufficient; however, for the mediation and moderation mechanisms, advanced multi-level modeling techniques need to be used. This is because obtaining unbiased estimates for the 2-1-1 mediation¹⁶ requires multi-level structural equation

Nicaragua). While surely not definitive (and of course disregarding those refusing to be interviewed altogether), these numbers do provide some indication about the willingness of citizens in non-democracies to respond to survey questions and can be interpreted as a sign that their answers can be deemed reasonably valid. In addition, prior studies report only weak correlations between measures of political fear and political support (Chen and Shi 2001; Shi 2001; Yang and Tang 2010), corroborating the proposition that political fear has no major effect on response behavior even in non-democracies.

¹⁵ Unfortunately, no comparable measures for socioeconomic status or household income were available for all four surveys.

¹⁶ A "2-1-1" mediation depicts an independent variable on level 2 (in this case: the degree of system-level political liberalization), a mediating variable on level 1 (in this case: individual-level democratic performance evaluations), and a dependent variable on level 1 (in this case: individual-level regime support) (see, e. g., Zhang et al. 2009).

modeling (cf. Preacher et al. 2010). Such a multi-level structural equation framework can explicitly model both parts of the mediation mechanism – i. e. the effect of the degree of political liberalization on democratic performance evaluations (path “a”) and the effect of democratic performance evaluations on regime support (path “b”) – and determine the indirect effect of political liberalization that is mediated via democratic performance evaluations. At the same time, estimating the moderating effect of the degree of political liberalization on the effect of democratic value orientations on regime support requires a random-slope multi-level model including a cross-level interaction effect (cf. Preacher et al. 2006).

5 Results

The empirical analysis of the effect political liberalization has on regime support will proceed in two steps. First, I examine the overall effect of the degree of system-level political liberalization on individual-level regime support (H1) for 31 non-democratic political systems (Sect. 5.1). Second, I test the cross-level mediation (H2) and moderation (H3) mechanisms that have been proposed to link the degree of system-level political liberalization and individual-level regime support using multilevel structural equation and cross-level interaction models, respectively (Sect. 5.2).

5.1 The overall effect of political liberalization on regime support

Table 2 presents the results for the overall effect the degree of system-level political liberalization has on individual-level regime support. If we look first at the null model (model 1a), it becomes apparent that about one fifth of the variance in regime support is indeed located on level 2 (the system level), meaning that the 31 political systems analyzed here do differ considerably from one another in their levels of regime

Table 2 Multi-level models on the overall effect of political liberalization

	Model 1 a	Model 1b	Model 1c
Intercept	2.632 (0.074)***	1.441 (0.096)***	1.626 (0.185)***
Individual-level variables	–		
Democratic performance evaluations (DPE) ^a	–	0.106 (0.006)***	0.106 (0.006)***
Democratic value orientations (DVO) ^a	–	0.029 (0.028)	0.029 (0.028)
Nat. economic situation	–	0.130 (0.015)***	0.130 (0.015)***
Perceived safety	–	0.101 (0.012)***	0.101 (0.012)***
Media exposure	–	-0.005 (0.010)	-0.005 (0.010)
Age	–	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Female	–	0.007 (0.015)	0.007 (0.015)
Level of education (ref: none)			
(Some) primary	–	-0.076 (0.028)**	-0.076 (0.028)**
(Some) secondary	–	-0.174 (0.031)***	-0.174 (0.031)***
(Some) tertiary	–	-0.233 (0.031)***	-0.233 (0.031)***
Employed	–	0.006 (0.012)	0.006 (0.012)
System-level variables			
Inverted FH score	–	–	-0.061 (0.050)
Level-1 variance	0.601 (0.037)***	0.473 (0.029)***	0.473 (0.029)***
Intercept variance	0.169 (0.037)***	0.062 (0.015)***	0.059 (0.012)***
Variance of slope DPE	–	0.001 (0.000)***	0.001 (0.000)***
Variance of slope DVO	–	0.019 (0.006)***	0.019 (0.006)***
AIC	94,310	84,758	84,864

Multilevel regression modeling with full-information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation. Unstandardized estimates. Robust standard errors in parentheses

DPE democratic performance evaluations; DVO democratic value orientations

***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05. N = 40,421 (individuals)/N = 31 (political systems). ^aSlopes estimated with a random component

Sources: Afrobarometer 2011-2013; Arab Barometer 2012-2014; Asian Barometer 2010-2012; Latinobarometro 2011; Freedom House 2015a, 2015b

support. The intercept of regime support is 2.6 (on a scale from 1 to 4), indicating that on average across the 31 non-democracies, regime support is of medium strength. Model1binTable2 contains only the predictors on level 1 (the individual level).¹⁷ While demonstrating the effects of some of the individual-level control variables, such as evaluations of the economic and administrative performance, it also shows that including these level-1 predictors explains more than half of the level-2 variance in regime support. This indicates that the populations of the 31 non-democracies differ from one another with regard to the level-1 variables and that these differences in population composition explain about half of the variation in the levels of regime support between these political systems. Nevertheless, there is still a meaningful amount of level-2 variance left to explain.

¹⁷ In order not to underestimate the standard errors for the level-1 slopes, the slopes of the main individual-level variables of interest – democratic performance evaluations and democratic value orientations – were estimated including a (significant) random component. Despite some of the slopes of the level-1 control variables having significant variance on level 2 as well, these slopes were not estimated with a random component in order to keep the model as parsimonious as possible. This is justified for two reasons: one, the effects of the control variables are only of minor interest here; and two, the overall fit of the model is barely improved by including these random components (cf. Hox 2010, pp. 54-59; Snijders and Bosker 2012, pp. 155-161).

Model 1c in Table 2 then adds the degree of system-level political liberalization as a predictor that should contribute to explaining this remaining variance. However, contrary to the expectation in the first hypothesis (H1), the degree of system-level political liberalization does not have a significant positive effect on individual-level regime support. Instead, an insignificant and even negative effect is returned from model 1c. Moreover, including the degree of political liberalization as a level-2 predictor explains barely any of the remaining level-2 variance, lending further support to the conclusion that the degree of political liberalization in non-democracies has a minimal effect on regime support. Hypothesis 1 is therefore not supported by the empirical evidence.

Thus, political liberalization seems to have no direct effect on regime support. However, the degree of political liberalization may still affect regime support through the two mechanisms outlined above: a mediation via individual-level democratic performance evaluations and a moderation of the effect of individual-level democratic value orientations. The next section investigates these mechanisms.

5.2 Mediation and moderation mechanisms linking political liberalization and regime support

With regard to the mechanisms linking system-level political liberalization and individual-level regime support, I have proposed two effects: first, that individual-level democratic performance evaluations mediate the effect the degree of political liberalization has on regime support (H2, 2-1-1 mediation); second, that the degree of political liberalization conditions the individual-level effect of democratic value orientations on regime support (H3, cross-level moderation). To examine these mechanisms, both the mediation and moderation effects have been explicitly modeled within the multi-level framework (Table 3, models 1d and 1e).

With regard to the mediation mechanism linking the degree of political liberalization and regime support, hypothesis 2 formulated two conjectures: first, the degree of political liberalization should positively affect individual-level democratic performance evaluations and, second, individual-level democratic performance evaluations should positively affect individual-level regime support. In combination, these two mechanisms should result in a positive indirect effect of the degree of political liberalization on regime support. Since the independent variable (degree of political liberalization) is located on the aggregate level and therefore only has variance on level 2, both parts of this mediation mechanism as well as the indirect effect needed to be modeled on this aggregate level as well (cf. Preacher et al. 2010).¹⁸

¹⁸ As a consequence, Model 1d in Table 3 contains two effects of democratic performance evaluations on regime support: the first one is the “regular” level-1 effect and the second one is the level-2 mediation effect.

Table 3 Multi-level models on the mediated and moderating effects of political liberalization

	Model 1 d	Model 1e
Intercept	1.213 (0.271)***	1.635 (0.184)***
Individual-level variables		
Democratic performance evaluations (DPE) ^a	0.105 (0.006)***	0.106 (0.006)***
Democratic value orientations (DVO) ^a	0.028 (0.027)	-0.057 (0.086)
Nat. economic situation	0.130 (0.015)***	0.130 (0.015)***
Perceived safety	0.101 (0.012)***	0.101 (0.012)***
Media exposure	-0.005 (0.010)	-0.005 (0.010)
Age	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Female	0.007 (0.015)	0.007 (0.015)
Level of education (ref: none)		
(Some) primary	-0.076 (0.028)**	-0.076 (0.028)**
(Some) secondary	-0.174 (0.031)***	-0.174 (0.031)***
(Some) tertiary	-0.233 (0.031)***	-0.233 (0.031)***
Employed	0.006 (0.012)	0.006 (0.012)
System-level variables		
Inverted FH score	-0.066 (0.046)	-0.064 (0.050)
Cross-level mediation		
Inverted FH → DPE (a)	0.040 (0.217)	–
DPE → regime support (b)	0.178 (0.046)***	–
Indirect effect (a x b)	0.007 (0.038)	–
Cross-level moderation		
Inverted FH x democratic value orientations	–	0.028 (0.025)
Level-1 variance	0.473 (0.029)***	0.473 (0.029)***
Intercept variance	0.054 (0.012)***	0.059 (0.012)***
Variance of slope DPE	0.001 (0.000)***	0.001 (0.000)***
Variance of slope DVO	0.019 (0.006)***	0.018 (0.006)**
AIC	268,281	84,759

Multilevel regression modeling with full-information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation. Unstandardized estimates. Robust standard errors in parentheses

DPE democratic performance evaluations; DVO democratic value orientations

***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05. N = 40421 (individuals)/N = 31 (political systems)

^aSlopes estimated with a random component

Sources: Afrobarometer 2011-2013; Arab Barometer 2012-2014; Asian Barometer 2010-2012; Latinobarometro 2011; Freedom House 2015a, 2015b

Model 1d in Table 3 shows the estimates for these effects. The resulting indirect effect (a x b) of system-level degree of political liberalization on individual-level regime support proves neither strong nor significant, although it does point in the expected (positive) direction. This indicates that regime support is not indirectly affected by the degree of political liberalization. A closer look at the two mechanisms making up this indirect effect reveals the reason for this null finding: conforming to the theoretical argument that regime support should be higher if democratic performance evaluations are more positive, the level-2 effect of democratic performance evaluations on regime support (path b), i. e. the second part of the mediation mechanism, turns out to be positive and significant. In countries where citizens evaluate their regime's democratic performance more positively, they also show stronger support for their

respective regimes. However, contrary to what was expected, democratic performance evaluations are not more positive in countries with a higher degree of political liberalization. The effect of the degree of political liberalization on democratic performance evaluations (path a), i. e. the first part of the mediation mechanism, turns out to be weak and not statistically significant.

While refuting hypothesis 2, this finding points to an interesting phenomenon: apparently, and contrary to what has been suggested by Norris (2011, pp. 190-202), citizen evaluations of their non-democratic regimes' democratic performance match outside assessments of these regimes' degree of political liberalization only poorly. In fact, democratic performance evaluations appear to be almost entirely independent of the system's actual democratic performance, i. e. the degree of political liberalization as demonstrated by the results of a simple correlation analysis. The degree of political liberalization and aggregated democratic performance evaluations are only faintly correlated with each other ($r = 0.04$). One of the factors causing popular evaluations of democratic performance to deviate significantly from the regime's actual democratic performance might be regime propaganda portraying the political system as more democratic than it really is. If this were the case, media use as a proxy of exposure to indoctrination would positively affect democratic performance evaluations. However, a simple bivariate regression analysis yields an almost nonexistent effect ($\beta = 0.002$; $r^2 = 0.000$); when controlling for education, the effect of media use does increase but still remains miniscule ($\beta = 0.023$; $r^2 = 0.005$). Use of traditional mass media thus seems not to have any effect on how citizens evaluate their non-democratic regime's democratic performance, either. Whether this points to the absence of effective indoctrination or indicates that indoctrination happens through channels other than traditional mass media remains an open question.

Summing up, then, political liberalization does not seem like a promising strategy for enhancing popular support in non-democratic regimes in this respect: despite evaluations of democratic performance playing an important role in shaping regime support, these evaluations are not dependent on the actual degree of political liberalization. Political liberalization exerts no positive indirect effect on regime support.

However, political liberalization may still have beneficial effects for non-democratic rulers by changing the relative importance of individual-level political value orientations. Hypothesis 3 proposed that a higher degree of political liberalization could reduce the negative effect of democratic value orientations on regime support. To examine this moderating effect of system-level degree of political liberalization, a random-slope model was estimated including a cross-level interaction term for degree of political liberalization x democratic value orientations (Table 3, model 1e). Despite the almost nonexistent and positive rather than negative effect of individual-level democratic value orientations in the simpler model 1c (Table 2), the results from the random-slope model 1e in Table 3 do offer some tentative support for the proposed moderation: for the least liberalized non-democratic regimes, a more pronounced and negative (albeit still insignificant) main effect of democratic value orientations is indeed found in the empirical data and the interaction term for degree of political liberalization x democratic value orientations does show the expected positive sign. This suggests that citizens holding democratic value orientations in the

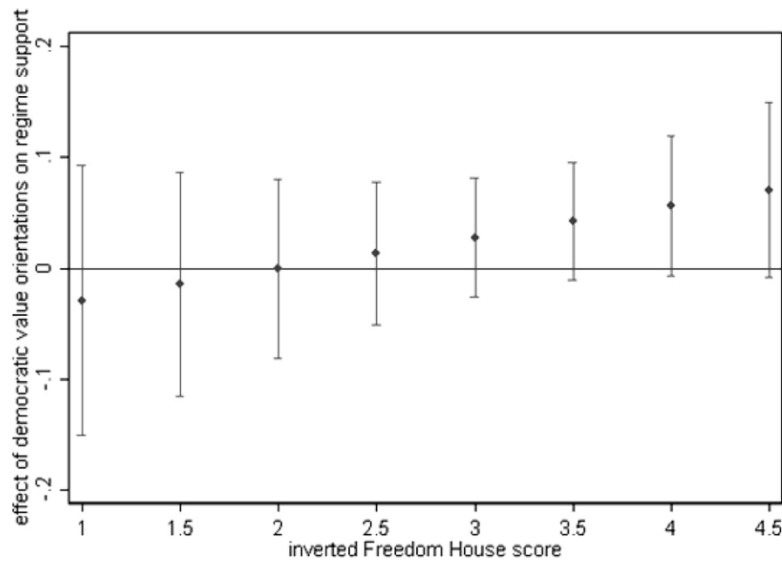


Fig. 2 Conditional effects plot for democratic value orientations. Multilevel regression modeling with full-information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation. Unstandardized estimates and 95% confidence intervals of conditional effect for varying degrees of political liberalization (model 1e, Table 3). $N = 40,421$ (individuals)/ $N = 31$ (political systems). Sources: Afrobarometer 2011-2013; Arab Barometer 2012-2014; Asian Barometer 2010-2012; Latinobarometro 2011; Freedom House 2015a, 2015b

least liberalized non-democratic regimes are more critical of their respective regime than pro-democratic citizens in more liberalized non-democracies.

Fig. 2 plots the conditional effects of democratic value orientations on regime support. Despite the effect never being significantly different from zero (as indicated by the 95% confidence intervals), it still illustrates how the effect of democratic value orientations changes with increasing degrees of political liberalization: from being negative at the lowest possible inverted Freedom House score of 1.0, it reaches clearly positive values for political systems that grant more political rights and civil liberties to their citizens. For example, while more pro-democratic value orientations are related to significantly lower regime support in the least liberalized regime, Sudan ($b = -0.097$; $SE = 0.044$), they have a significant positive effect in Kenya, one of the most liberalized countries ($b = 0.086$; $SE = 0.042$). These results indicate that increasing degrees of political liberalization may attenuate the negative effect democratic value orientations have on regime support in the least liberalized nondemocratic regimes, lending some (limited) support to hypothesis 3.

To sum up, the empirical analysis revealed no substantive positive effect from political liberalization. Overall, the degree of political liberalization had no positive effect on regime support. As far as the indirect effect is concerned, the empirical data support only the second part of the proposed mediation mechanism: while democratic performance evaluations do indeed exert a substantive positive effect on regime support, the degree of political liberalization is barely related to these democratic performance evaluations. The results for the moderating effect of the degree of political liberalization are more supportive of the idea that controlled political liberalization can foster popular support for non-democratic regimes: while democratic value orientations decrease regime support in the least liberalized non-democracies, this negative effect is mitigated in more liberalized non-democracies.

6 Conclusion

The question that opened this article asked about the medium- to long-term consequences of the processes of political liberalization that many non-democratic regimes around the globe have embarked on since the end of the Cold War. From this query, it developed a more precise research question that focused on the effects of political liberalization on popular support for non-democratic regimes. By introducing the degree of system-level political liberalization as a possible source of regime support, the article linked two previously unrelated strands of research: on the one hand, the predominantly institutionalist literature on the conditions of autocratic stability and the effects of political liberalization and, on the other hand, the political- culture literature on sources of regime support in non-democracies. The theoretical argument suggested two particular mechanisms that link the degree of political liberalization with individual-level regime support: a mediation via individual-level democratic performance evaluations and a moderation of the individual-level effect of democratic value orientations on regime support.

Multi-level analyses based on representative survey data from 31 non-democratic political systems around the globe could not confirm the expected positive overall effect of the degree of political liberalization empirically. However, investigating the particular mediation and moderation mechanisms did yield some interesting insights. First, while citizens do appear to ground their support for their country's political regime in their evaluations of its democratic performance, these democratic performance evaluations are almost entirely independent of the degree of political liberalization, i. e. the system's actual democratic performance. While the reasons for this mismatch could not be investigated fully here, it might point to the success of regime propaganda – potentially going beyond traditional mass media coverage – that portrays the political system as more democratic than it really is. Second, democratic value orientations did not exert a marked negative effect on regime support, despite the obvious discrepancy between democratic ideals and the non-democracies' institutional structures. This may be attributed at least in part to the less-than-ideal measurement of democratic value orientations by asking whether democracy was the best form of government. More sophisticated measurements might have produced a more pronounced main effect on the individual level. In addition, combining four different regional survey projects (Afrobarometer, Arab Barometer, Asian Barometer, Latinobarometro) which do not always employ exactly the same question wordings and response scales may have further distorted the results. Nevertheless, some evidence for the expected moderating effect of system- level political liberalization could still be observed: while democratic value orientations decrease regime support in the least liberalized non-democracies, this negative effect is mitigated in more liberalized political systems.

In sum, however, the degree of political liberalization could not be shown to exert a decisively positive effect on regime support. Consequently, controlled political liberalization does not appear to be a viable strategy by which to increase popular support for and subsequently stabilize non-democratic rule. The in-depth analysis of the proposed mechanisms underlying the effect of political liberalization revealed the main reason for this failure: actual political liberalization seems to have barely any effect on citizens' evaluations of the regime's democratic performance. Apparently, actually providing more political rights and freedoms and opening up to at least limited multiparty competition meets with little response on the part of the citizens; from this point of view, simply claiming to be democratic might be a more viable (and often-used) strategy for autocratic rulers.

These conclusions, however, can only be judged as preliminary due to the limitations in the data. Since suitable longitudinal data on regime support are not yet available, the more

theoretically appropriate effect of changes in the degree of political liberalization on changes in regime support could not be investigated here. With survey data on non-democratic regimes that covers a longer time period, future research might be able to obtain more informative results on the medium- to longterm effects of controlled political liberalization.

Acknowledgements I am grateful to Edeltraud Roller, Nils Steiner, Carl Berning, Sven Hillen, and the participants of the 2015 DVPW General Conference as well as two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments on earlier versions of this paper. I would also like to thank Tizian Lehnert for his research assistance.

Appendix

Table 4 Item wording and operationalization

Question wording		Harmonized response scale
Dependent variable: regime support		
How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? [1-4] (Afro)/I will name a number of institutions, and I would like you to tell me to what extent you trust each of them [1-4] (Arab)/I'm going to name a number of institutions. For each one, please tell me how much trust do you have in them? [1-4] (Asian)/Please look at this card and tell me how much trust you have in each of the following groups/institutions [1-4] (Latino)		No trust at all [1] – a great deal of trust [4]
- The president (Afro)/the government (Arab, Latino)/the national government (Asian)		
- Parliament (Afro, Asian)/the elected council of representatives (the parliament) (Arab)/National Congress/parliament (Latino)		
- The police (Afro, Asian, Latino)/public security (the police) (Arab)		
Independent variable: level of political liberalization		
Freedom House score: combination of Political Rights and Civil Liberties scores, inverted		Not at all liberalized [1] – completely liberalized [7]
Mediating variable: democratic performance evaluations		
On a scale between 0 and 10, where 0 means completely undemocratic and 10 means completely democratic, where would you place our country today?		Completely undemocratic [1] – completely democratic [10]
[0-10] (Afro)/In your opinion, to what extent is your country democratic?		
[1-10] (Arab)/Here is a scale: 1 means completely undemocratic and 10 means completely democratic. Where would you place our country under the present government? [1-10] (Asian)/On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means "not democratic at all" and 10 means "totally democratic", please assess how democratic [country] is? Where would you put [country]? [1-10] (Latino)		
Moderated variable: democratic value orientations		
Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion? Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government [1]; In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable [0]; For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have [0] (Afro)/To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? A democratic system may have problems, yet it is better than other systems [1-4] (Arab)/Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Democracy may have its problems, but it is still the best form of government." [1-4] (Asian)/Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements? Democracy may have problems but it is the best system of government [1-4] (Latino)		Strongly disagree [0] – strongly agree [1]
Control variables:		
National economic situation	In general, how would you describe the present economic condition of this country? [1-5] (Afro)/How would you evaluate the current economic situation in your country? [1-4] (Arab)/How would you rate the overall economic condition of our country today? [1-5] (Asian)/In general, how would you describe the country's present economic situation? [1-5] (Latino)	Very bad [1] – very good [5]

Table 4 Item wording and operationalization (Continued)

Question wording		Harmonized response scale
Personal or public safety	Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family felt unsafe walking in your neighbourhood? [0-4] (Afro)/Do you currently feel that your own personal as well as your family's safety and security are ensured or not? [1-4] (Arab)/Generally speaking, how safe is living in this city/town/village? [1-4] (Asian)/How do you feel in the neighborhood where you live? Do you feel safe or not safe? [1-4] (Latino)	Very unsafe [1] – very safe [4]
Media use	How often do you get news from the following sources? Radio; Television; Newspapers [1-4] (Afro)/In general, do you follow political news through the television; the daily press; the radio [1-5] (Arab)/How often do you follow news about politics and government? [1-5] (Asian)/How many days last week did you follow political news on public tv; in a newspaper; on the radio [0-7] (Latino)	Never [0] – daily [4]
Age	Respondent's age	
Gender	Respondent's gender	Male [0] – female [1]
Level of education	Highest level of education	None – (some) primary – (some) secondary – (some) tertiary
Employment status	Respondent's current employment status	Unemployed [0] – employed [1]

Level of education was transformed into dummy variables for analysis. For items with differing response scales across surveys, linear transformation was applied to arrive at the respective harmonized response scale before merging the data. For instance, in the case of democratic performance evaluations, to transform the eleven-point scale of the Afrobarometer into the ten-point scale used in all the other surveys as well as for the final analysis, values for the Afrobarometer item were first divided by 10 and multiplied by 9 (yielding a 0-9 response scale) and then 1 was added to each value (yielding a 1-10 response scale)

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