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# Managing Foreign Influence: Autocratic Strategies in Regulating the Import of Foreign Movies

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October 27, 2023

#### Motivation





Figure: The 3-fingered salute from "The Hunger Games" flashed by Thai protesters in 2020

- How do autocratic leaders manage inflow of foreign ideas contained in cultural products?
- Autocratic countries regulate foreign movie imports based on political needs.

#### Literature

Motivation

- Ideas and norms are transmitted across borders along with globalization. (Greenhill et al. 2009; Hafner-Burton 2005; Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2005; Greenhill 2010; Mosley and Uno 2007);
- My Contribution: Impact of Cultural Product
- Autocratic leaders optimize information control structures on domestic media.
  (Gehlbach and Sonin 2014; Besley and Prat 2006; Keremoglu and Weidmann 2020; Lorentzen 2014; Djankov et al. 2003)
- My Contribution: Strategy to Foreign Information

#### Impact of Movie

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- Meet consumers' needs for entertainment
- Generate economic value
- Shape opinions on social lissues (Franklin 2006; Ortega-Liston 2000; Pautz and Warnement 2013)
- Propagate political values (Combs 2013; Parry-Giles 2010; Mutz 2001)
- Incite protest (Sun and Li, 2023)

#### Autocratic Leaders' Dilemma:

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- Allowing foreign movie inflow could cause social instability.
- Rejecting foreign movie inflow could causes mass dissatisfaction toward the regime.
  - Entertainment needs unmet
  - Criticism regarding media control: Internal/External

The severity of the dilemma depends on the likelihood of losing office: election year v.s Non-election year

- Chance of losing the power is non-zero
- Chance of increased public sentiment is high
  - Manipulated election to legitimize the continuity of current incumbent leaders. (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Gandhi and Przeworski 2006; Remmer 1999)
  - Attract more anti-regime social unrest during the election year. (Knutsen et al. 2017:Shirah 2016)

Theory

#### Control Content Composition Based on Political Needs:

- Politically stable: high level of tolerance of foreign ideas
  - Less motivation to adjust movie importation
- Politically unstable: low level of tolerance of foreign ideas
  - Minimize domestic consequences from foreign movies
    - Restrict politically sensitive movies
  - Avoid raising dissatisfaction from the public
    - Allow politically non-sensitive movies

Hypothesis 1a: Autocrats are more likely to restrict the import of politically sensitive movies in election years than in non-election year.

Hypothesis 1b: Autocrats are likely to allow the continued import of non-politically sensitive movies during election years.

#### Mechanism: political uncertainty

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- Competitive Election: Elections with opponents
  - Chance of losing power
  - Chance of public sentiment
- Non-Competitive Election: Elections without opponents
  - Lack opponents
  - Lack opposite leadership

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Hypothesis 2: Autocrats are more likely to restrict the import of politically sensitive movies in years with competitive elections than in non-election year.

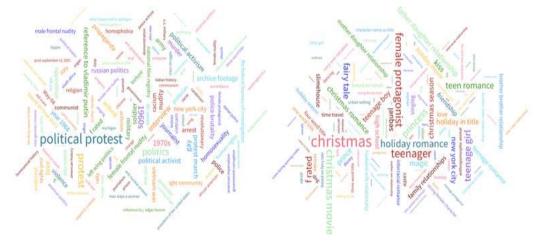
- National Elections Across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA) dataset
- National elections in 193 countries from 1945 to 2020, including executive, legislative/parliamentary.
- I used the Polity IV dataset's POLITY2 score to identify autocratic countries with scores below +6. \*\* skip slide
- Included only regular elections in the sample, taking advantage of the exogenous timing of elections.

#### Movie Data

- Movie release data from the Internet Movie Database (IMDb)
- 113 Protest Movies(political sensitive) produced during 1919-2020
- 167 Family Romance Movies(political non-sensitive) produced during 1922-2020
- Producing Country; Release Year; Release Location; Release Format; Box Office; Rating; Language

#### Movie Data

#### Political Protest Movie v.s Family Romance Movie



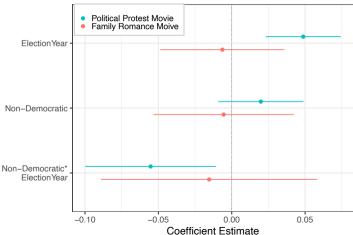
### Data and Method

 $NumofMovies_{i+} = \beta_1 Election_{i+} + \beta_2 Autocracv_{i+} + \beta_3 Autocracv * Election_{i+} + X_{i+} + \pi_i + \pi_t + \epsilon_{i+}$ 

- NumofMovies<sub>it</sub>: number of movies; boxoffice of movies(logged)
- $\beta_1$  Election<sub>it</sub>: election year (Effect of election on democracies)
- β<sub>2</sub> Autocracv<sub>i\*</sub>: autocracy (Effect of autocracy in non-election year)
- $\beta_3$  Autocracy \* Election<sub>it</sub>: interaction term (Differences of effect of election on autocracies and democracies )
- $X_{it}$ : Media Censorship; GDP per capita (log); Population (log); Trade in GDP; Unemployment
- Sample Period: 1945-2020
- Estimator: Negative Binomial Regression, Country FE, Year FE

### Main Results

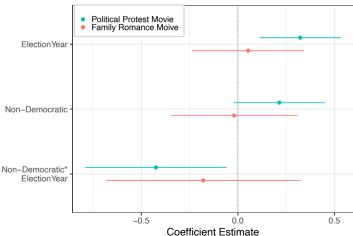
#### Number of Movies Imported in Election Year





### Main Results

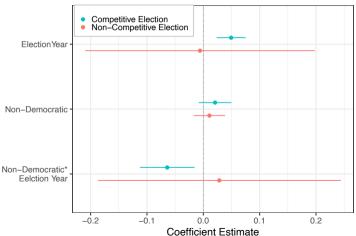
#### Movie Boxoffice in Election Year



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# Heterogeneity Results: Election Competitiveness

#### **Number of Movies Imported in Election Year**



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#### Conclusion

- Autocratic leaders' strategy in managing foreign influence.
- Autocratic countries decrease the import of political protest movies in election years.
- The pattern is driven by the downside risk associate with election.

#### Conclusion

- Contributes to information control in autocratic countries literature by focusing on autocratic strategy regarding foreign information.
- Contributes to globalization's impact literature by including cultural products' influence.

# Thank You!

# My Research Agenda

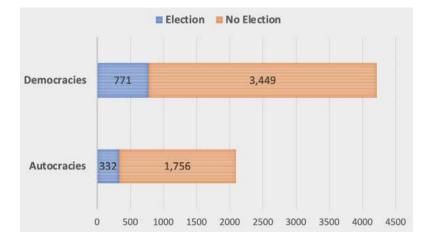
- How autocratic leaders deal with cultural infusion:
  - How autocratic leaders utilize trade agreements to protect their cultural industry
  - How autocratic countries protect their national image in foreign released cultural product
- International Trade of Cultural Product on Individual Behavior:
  - Movie release location and political participation

### Movie Data

Focus on the movies that are watched publicly and potentially have a wide impact:

- Exclude the movies that don't have any release/box office in any country
- Exclude movies that were only released in the movie festival
- Sample: movies with public release information and box office data
- Public releases: Theater, Online Stream, DVD, TV

#### Number of Elections in Sample: 57 Autocracies and 70 Democracies



#### Market Structure

Motivation

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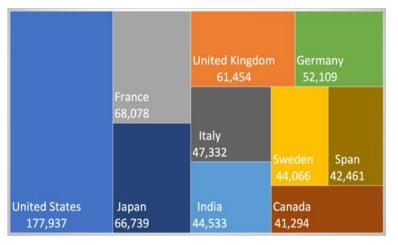


Figure: Number of Movie Produced by Top 10 Countries 1919-2023

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