



The Case for Democracy:

Do Democracies Perform Better Combatting Climate Change?

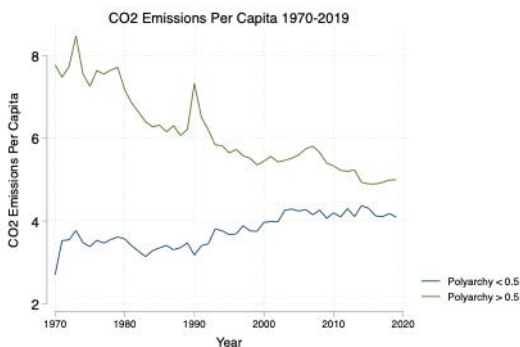
Scientific Evidence Shows:

- Democracy is critical for achieving SDG 13 “Climate Action”.
- Democracies produce more ambitious climate policies - in the nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement, a fully democratic country on average set targets of 1.6C lower than full autocracies.
- Each new climate policy reduces CO2 emissions by 1.79% within three years .
- Civil liberties empower environmental NGOs. A 1% increase in civil liberties generates a 0.05% reduction in national CO2 emissions.

Democracy is Good for Climate Ambitions

Robust empirical evidence shows that democracy is critical to combating climate change. Democracies consistently perform better than autocracies when it comes to committing to policy on climate change mitigation. **Moving from the lowest levels of democracy (e.g., China) to the highest (e.g., Canada) equals an increase in policy commitments to climate change mitigation by 19%** (Bättig & Bernauer 2009). The effect is similar for the signing of multilateral climate agreements (Neumayer 2002).

FIG 1. EMISSIONS DEMOCRACIES AND AUTOCRACIES (V-DEM DATA AND OUR WORLD IN DATA)



A 10% increase on the V-Dem democracy index equals a 3% increase in the level of ambition of the degree target under the Paris Agreement. **Moving from a fully autocratic to a fully democratic regime therefore generates a large increase in ambition, equal to almost -1.6°C** (Tørstad et al. 2020). This has major consequences for global climate change (see Fig 1.). In addition, evidence demonstrates that more egalitarian democracies have higher commitments toward combating climate change than other democratic types (Povitkina & Jagers 2021).

Democracies Are Better at Taking Action

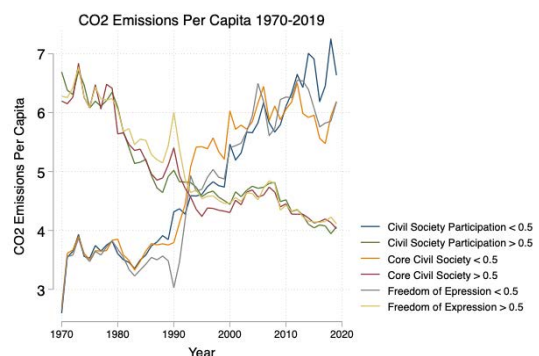
Ambitions produce outcomes. Ample evidence shows that each new climate policy enacted by governments on average reduces CO2 emissions per unit of gross domestic product by 0.78%, over the first three years, and by 1.79% in the longer term. In 2016, the reduction in global CO2 emissions due to additional climate policies was larger than the total US yearly emissions. The cumulative CO2 emission reductions related to climate policies between 1999 and 2016 amount to one year’s worth of global CO2 emissions (Eskander & Fankhauser 2020).

Evidence also demonstrates that democracies perform better than autocracies in mitigating domestic environmental degradation. **Air quality in cities is found to improve by 0.14% with each 1% increase on a democracy index** (Bernauer & Koubi 2009). Data shows that democracy also led to the improvement of the marine environment in coastal countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Sjöstedt & Jagers 2014).

Civil Society Freedom Is Key

Democracies provide more freedom for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that can educate citizens about climate problems, and exert pressure on governments to take action.

FIG 2. CO2 EMISSIONS/C, COUNTRIES ON THE LOWER AND UPPER HALF OF THREE INDICES ENABLING NGOS (V-DEM, OUR WORLD IN DATA).



Extensive empirical evidence shows that civil liberties and freedom of expression are critical for environmental NGOs to pressure governments to reduce environmental and climate change impact.

10% increase on V-Dem's civil liberties index leads to a substantial 0.5% decrease in country CO2 emissions through environmental NGOs' greater actions (Pacheco-Vega & Murdie 2020).

Off-Shoring Pollution and Corruption

Democracies offshore pollution by increasing the ecological footprint of their imports (Kolcava et al. 2019). Yet, evidence from 18 high-income democracies in 2005-2015 found that the emission reductions over this period – which were substantial – were only to a small part owed to the off-shoring of emissions (Le Quéré et al. 2019).

Rather, the largest contributions came from increases in renewable energy and reductions in energy use, which accounted for a median of 47% and 36% of reductions in CO2 emissions respectively.

Research also shows that democracy's positive effect on climate change outcomes is reduced if levels of corruption are high. Only democracies with low levels of corruption effectively implement policies that reduce climate impact (Povitkina 2018). For instance, new climate policies produce a 2.43% reduction in national CO2 emissions within three years when rule of law is strong, compared to 0.27% when rule of law is weak (Eskander and Fankhauser 2020). Effective implementation of policies is essential for making the most of democracy's dividends.

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The Case for Democracy week 22-25 March 2021 set out to gather evidence on what democracies deliver with a focus on: economic development, human development, domestic and international security, and combating climate change. With increasing levels of autocratization around the world, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute in collaboration with the Directorate-General for International Partnerships of the European Commission initiated this joint project. The objective is to build a strong case for policy makers and other development actors to continue their engagement for promotion and protection of democracy. The 'Case for Democracy' week was partly funded by the European Union and was organized by Nazifa Alizada, Dr. Vanessa Boese, Prof. Staffan Lindberg, Martin Lundstedt, Natalia Natsika, and Shreeya Pillai.

ABOUT V-DEM INSTITUTE

V-Dem is a unique approach to conceptualization and measurement of democracy. The headquarters – the V-Dem Institute – is based at the University of Gothenburg with 23 staff, and a project team across the world with 5 Principal Investigators, 19 Project Managers, 33 Regional Managers, 134 Country Coordinators, Research Assistants, and 3,500+ Country Experts. V-Dem is one of the world's largest data collection projects on democracy.



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