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Autocratic immigration policymaking:

The illiberal paradox hypothesis

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Abstract

Open immigration policy changes are often cast as a feature of democracy and restrictive immigration policy changes as a feature of autocracy. This paper shows that the relationship between political regime type and immigration policy change is not as clear cut. Empirical evidence suggests that the *substance* of immigration policy change — in terms of openness or restrictiveness — does not significantly differ between democracies and autocracies. However, political regimes shape immigration policy *dynamics*, with autocracies having more leeway than democracies to open (or restrict) immigration according to their economic, geopolitical, or domestic priorities. Autocracies *can* more easily enact open immigration policy reforms compared to democracies if they wish to do so, a dynamic I call the 'illiberal paradox' and illustrate with empirical examples from across the globe. I also outline the limits of the autocratic openings on immigration, related to policy implementation, sudden policy backlashes and migrants' integration rights. To move towards more global immigration policy theories, this paper suggests combining analyses that identify *ideal types* of democratic or autocratic immigration policymaking with studies of the nuances of real-life *political practices*. This would allow scholars to conceptualise immigration policy dynamics across the entire democracy-autocracy spectrum, for instance by capturing authoritarian practices within formal democracies and democratic practices within formal autocracies.

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1 Introduction

Immigration policies have received growing attention from academia over the past decades. Today, the literature offers various theories of immigration policymaking. However, their applicability is almost always restricted — explicitly or implicitly — to so-called Western liberal democracies (Boswell, 2007; Castles, 2004a; Freeman, 1995, 2006; Hampshire, 2013; Hollifield, 1992; Joppke, 1998a, 1998b; Meyers, 2000; Sassen, 1996).[1] Among the most prominent and widely cited theories features the 'liberal paradox'. Hollifield (1992) pioneered the term to explain why, despite growing politicization of immigration and popular calls for restrictions, open immigration policies have prevailed across 'Western liberal-democracies'. He argued that liberal democracies are confronted with contradictory drivers when elaborating their immigration policies. On the one hand, the dominant ideology of economic liberalism pushes (labour) markets to globalise and immigration regimes to open up. On the other hand, the political logic of democratic nation-states is dominated by electoral objectives and national identity concerns and therefore seeks to limit immigration.

Complementing this argument, other researchers have pointed to the fact that immigration policies in liberal democracies have a built-in tendency to liberalise because powerful employer lobbies succeed in pushing governments to open immigration (Freeman, 1995). Also, legal constraints, such as constitutional or international norms and their enforcement through national courts, limit the extent to which liberal democracies can restrict immigration (Joppke, 1998a; Sassen, 1996). As a result of these dynamics, discourses about immigration, which respond mainly to national audiences, tend to be more restrictive than policies in practice — policies that also have to integrate the demands of markets and international norms. Immigration policy is therefore often characterised by a 'discursive gap' (Boswell, 2007; Joppke, 1998a).

By linking the liberal-democratic character of Western states to the open nature of their immigration policies, the literature has suggested a 'regime effect': Despite restrictive discourses, democracy is said to align with de-facto open immigration policies. The reverse assumption, namely that autocracies go together with restrictive immigration policies, has received less academic attention. Yet it seems intuitive: If autocratic state curtail their citizens' socio-political rights, why should they grant them to foreigners? For a long time, studies that examine *immigration* policymaking in autocracies have been lacking or have remained apart from theoretical discussions. This is partly because autocratic policymaking is assumed to be centralized and devoid of negotiations dynamics — and thus of minor interest to scientific investigation — and partly because scholars have presumed that apart from the wealthy Oil monarchies of the Gulf, few people migrate to autocracies, as these are usually places people leave.[2] Therefore, the 'regime effect' — linking democracy and open immigration policies — has largely remained at the level of an educated guess.

This paper explores the existence of a 'regime effect' in immigration policy and in particular the ways in which autocracy shapes states' immigration policy dynamics. In doing so, it draws on the

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[1] The term 'Western liberal democracy' is rarely (if ever) explicitly defined in the migration literature, which is highly problematic. In fact, authors use the term as a shortcut to set the boundary condition of their theory, applicable to an 'exclusive club' of 'rich, developed' countries (for a more thorough literature review and critique, see: Natter 2018).

[2] The literature contains a theoretically more consolidated body of research on the drivers of emigration policies and politics in autocracies (Brand 2002; de Haas and Vezzoli 2011; FitzGerald 2006; Gamlen 2008; Glasius 2017a; Miller and Peters 2018; Vezzoli 2015).

theoretical reflections that have emerged from my research on Morocco and Tunisia, as well as the recently emerging quantitative and qualitative insights on this question (see for instance: Breunig, Cao, & Luedtke, 2012; FitzGerald & Cook-Martín, 2014; Klotz, 2012; Natter, 2014; Norman, 2018; Paoletti, 2011; Russell, 1989; Shin, 2017; Thiollet, 2016; Tsourapas, 2017).

1.1 Defining key concepts

For this exercise, conceptual clarity is crucial. First, what is immigration policy? This paper adopts a broad definition of immigration policy, covering both issues of immigrant admission (such as border controls; entry requirements for labour and family migrants, as well as refugees and asylum seekers; and deportation policies), and immigrant rights (such as access to permanent residence permits; employment, social and welfare benefits; voting rights and the right to hold public office; and ultimately citizenship). It encompasses both policy discourses and enacted policy changes, but it does not systematically touch upon issues of policy implementation, which raise a different set of questions linked to bureaucratic efficiency, corruption, and the financial and human resources available to government agencies (de Haas & Vezzoli, 2011: 28).[3]

Second, immigration policy analyses can focus on various aspects that might yield very different conclusions. This paper looks at immigration policy *change*. It explores both the *substance* of immigration policy reforms in terms of introducing a change towards more or less restrictiveness, as well as the *dynamics* underlying immigration policy change, namely how state authorities deal with various international and domestic forces in their immigration policymaking. Importantly, my analysis therefore offers comparative insights on immigration policy change in autocracies and democracies, but not on a state's *absolute* levels of openness or closure towards immigration.

Finally, what are democracies and autocracies? Exploring the vast literature on this topic (see for instance: Brooker, 2014; Diamond, 2002; Glasius, 2015; Linz, 2000 [1975]) is beyond my scope. For the purpose of this paper, I adopt a two-step approach. First, I make use of the *political regime ideal types* of democracy and autocracy used in the widely referenced Polity IV project. Democracy is defined as a combination of three elements: "One is the presence of institutions and procedures through which citizens can express effective preferences about alternative policies and leaders. Second is the existence of institutionalized constraints on the exercise of power by the executive. Third is the guarantee of civil liberties to all citizens in their daily lives and in acts of political participation" (Marshall, Gurr, & Jaggers, 2016: 14). In opposition, "autocracies sharply restrict or suppress competitive political participation. Their chief executives are chosen in a regularized process of selection within the political elite, and once in office they exercise power with few institutional constraints" (Marshall et al., 2016: 15). Hybrid regimes are seen as an intermediate category.[4]

In a second step that considers the limits of binary regime ideal-types, I integrate *political practices* into the discussion on immigration policymaking. As Glasius (2018b) writes: "Practices are

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[3] For a conceptualization of the difference between policy discourses, policies on paper and policy implementation, see: Czaika and de Haas 2013.

[4] "For example, a polity is coded here to reflect a weakening of executive authority vis-à-vis the legislative and/or judicial branches or a strengthening of executive authority vis-à-vis these branches of government. This code may also reflect the decision on the part of the legislature to grant the chief executive "emergency powers" in times of a national crisis or, in a hybrid regime – which grants significant executive powers to both a president and prime minister – when the head of state and the head of government are from the same party" (Marshall, Gurr and Jaggers 2016: 66).

much more than the action or behaviour of an individual, but much less than a state structure. A focus on practices allows a shift away from designating only 'regimes' as authoritarian, recognizing that in contemporary politics, governance arrangements can be more fluid". Indeed, combining theories of immigration policymaking (within political system ideal-types) and a political practice approach allows to identify authoritarian practices[5] within formally democratic systems and democratic practices within formally autocratic systems. As I hope to show, this perspective provides the foundation for a more global theorization of immigration policymaking beyond the simplistic democracy/autocracy dichotomy.

1.2 Outlining the argument

This paper first of all shows that the link between political regimes and immigration policy is not as clear-cut as expected: First of all, quantitative empirical evidence on immigration policies shows a high level of continuity; policy changes are an exception, regardless of regime type. Second, those immigration reforms that are enacted generally open entry and post-entry rights for migrants, while tightening border controls and return policies - regardless of whether decision-makers are autocrats or democratically elected. Contrary to widespread beliefs, *there seems to be no a priori substantive difference across political regimes in terms of the change in restrictiveness introduced by immigration policy reforms*. In other words, democracies do not enact overall more or less restrictive immigration reforms compared to autocracies. Instead, immigration policy changes seem rather driven by a state's broader economic, geopolitical or ideological interests.

Thirdly, however, qualitative empirical evidence suggests *a 'regime effect' when it comes to the dynamics underlying immigration policy change,* i.e., the domestic and international influences states have to reconcile when elaborating reforms. I argue that autocracies have greater leeway in devising their immigration policies and a broader range of policy options at their disposal, whether it is towards more openness or more closure. Indeed, autocratic regimes, while bound by the same international forces of economic and rights-based liberalism as democracies, are freer from nation-state logics and potential popular anti-immigration sentiments. Paradoxically, *autocratic regimes <u>can</u> enact open immigration reforms more easily than democracies <u>if</u> this suits their economic, foreign policy, or domestic political priorities.* To explain why and under what circumstances autocracies can have greater leeway to enact liberal policy reforms, I introduces the 'illiberal paradox' hypothesis as a complement to the liberal paradox (Hollifield, 1992).

To conclude, I seek to stimulate reflection on how to move towards a more global theorization of immigration policy dynamics. One way forward is to combine (1) existing conceptual work that identifies *ideal types* of democratic or autocratic immigration policymaking with (2) empirical analyses exploring the nuances of real-life political practices. This would allow scholars to capture authoritarian practices within formal democracies and democratic practices within formal autocracies. Within such a perspective, the dynamics that both the liberal paradox and the illiberal paradox theorize would provide useful theoretical frameworks for understanding immigration policymaking in countries across the democracy-autocracy continuum.

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[5] Glasius (2018: 527) defines authoritarian practices as "a pattern of actions, embedded in an organised context, sabotaging accountability to people ('the forum') over whom a political actor exerts control, or their representatives, by disabling their access to information and/or disabling their voice".

2 The substance of immigration policy change

Existing datasets provide first quantitative insights into the relationship between political regimes and immigration policy change. In the following analysis, immigration policy change is captured in two ways. First, I examine the declared immigration policy objectives of a country's government according to the UN World Population Policies Database.[6] Second, I review the migration policy changes enacted by a government in a particular year, as recorded in the DEMIG POLICY database.[7] As discussions around the 'discursive gap' show, declared policy intentions often differ from enacted policy changes. Therefore it is important to look at both facets of a country's immigration policy. To match these immigration policy changes to a country's political system, countries were categorized as 'democracy', 'autocracy', or 'hybrid regime' according to the global Polity IV dataset.[8]

2.1 Declared immigration policy objectives

With its global coverage, the UN World Population Policies Database offers unprecedented insights into governmental positions on immigration across political systems and world regions, even if it only captures government positions on legal immigration (and not irregular migration or integration issues). Descriptive analyses yield a surprising picture of global immigration policy objectives. Against assumptions of growing restrictiveness, the data suggests that, since the mid-1970s, on average 68% of governments worldwide sought to maintain their levels of legal immigration.[9] Another 24% declared their ambition to reduce immigration and 8% to increase immigration (see Figure 1). Thus a high level of continuity seems to characterise immigration policy.

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[6] The UN World Population Policy dataset provides insights into 197 governments' self-declared policies on immigration over the 1976-2015 period. It asks governments to indicate whether they wish to lower, maintain or raise legal immigration. The database is compiled using various governmental and non-governmental sources, and provides a general overview of government views and policies on migration. It comprises 11 rounds so far between 1976 and 2015 (for more details, see: https://esa.un.org/poppolicy/about_database.aspx).

[7] DEMIG POLICY tracks 6,500 changes in migration policy restrictiveness of 45 countries over the 1900-2013 period. Migration policies are defined as "rules (i.e., laws, regulations, and measures) that national states define and [enact] with the objective of affecting the volume, origin, direction, and internal composition of [...] migration flows" (Czaika and de Haas 2013: 489). Policy changes are coded according to policy area (border controls, entry and stay, integration, and exit), as well as the migrant groups targeted (for instance: low-skilled workers, high-skilled workers, family members, international students, irregular migrants, refugee and asylum seekers, or members of the diaspora) The 45 countries included in DEMIG POLICY are: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Czech Republic, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, German Democratic Republic, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Morocco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America, and Yugoslavia. All 45 countries are also covered by the UN World Population Policies Database. For more details, see: de Haas, Natter and Vezzoli (2015).

[8] Polity IV classifies countries in terms of degrees of democracy and autocracy on a -10 to 10 scale. It provides global coverage of countries' political systems since 1800. A democracy is defined as scoring 6 or above, an autocracy as scoring -6 or less, and a hybrid regime as scoring between -5 and 5 on the Polity IV scale (for more details, see: http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/p4manualv2016.pdf).

[9] Note that interpreting the category of 'maintaining' immigration is problematic, as 'maintaining' can apply to both immigration-lowering and immigration-raising policies.

Figure 1: Declared policy on immigration, global average over the 1976-2015 period
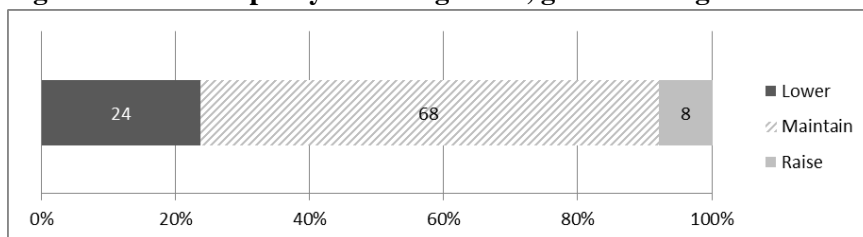
Figure 2: Declared policy on immigration over the 1976-2015 period, in % of countries
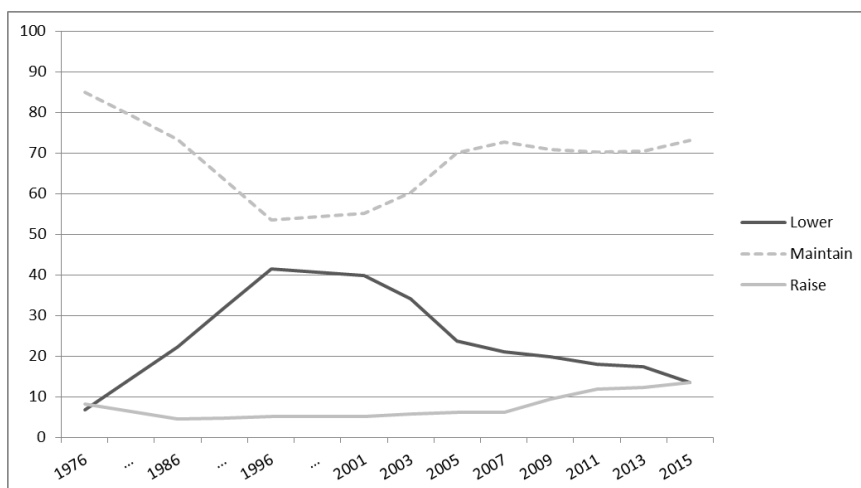

The analysis over time shows two main trends (see Figure 2). First, the share of countries seeking to increase immigration grew over time, from under 5% in the 1980s to over 13% in 2015. This could be partly due to the development of policies in Europe and North America seeking to attract skilled migrants for particular economic sectors (Czaika, 2018). But it might also reflect the industrialization and transformation of Asian economies and the accompanying transition from emigration to immigration country, such as in China, Thailand and South Korea. Second, the number of governments seeking to lower immigration peaked in the mid-1990s. This might be partly due to the end of the Cold War and its associated geopolitical shifts. In particular, the rapid switch of many countries around the world from autocracies to democracies (see Polity IV dataset) and the related 'exit revolution' (Zolberg, 2007), namely the dismantling of emigration restrictions, boosted emigration from those countries. Larger flows may have led to a backlash in destination countries, mirrored in the declared policy objectives.

Distinguishing between regime types does not fundamentally alter these pattern (see Figure 3): Overall, governments classified as democracies, autocracies, or hybrid regimes by the Polity IV dataset do not differ much in their declared intentions to make immigration policies more or less restrictive. About two-thirds of governments — regardless of regime type — intended to maintain their policies, around 25% to reduce immigration and less than 10% to raise legal immigration levels.

**Figure 3: Declared policy on immigration, 1976-2015, by regime type**
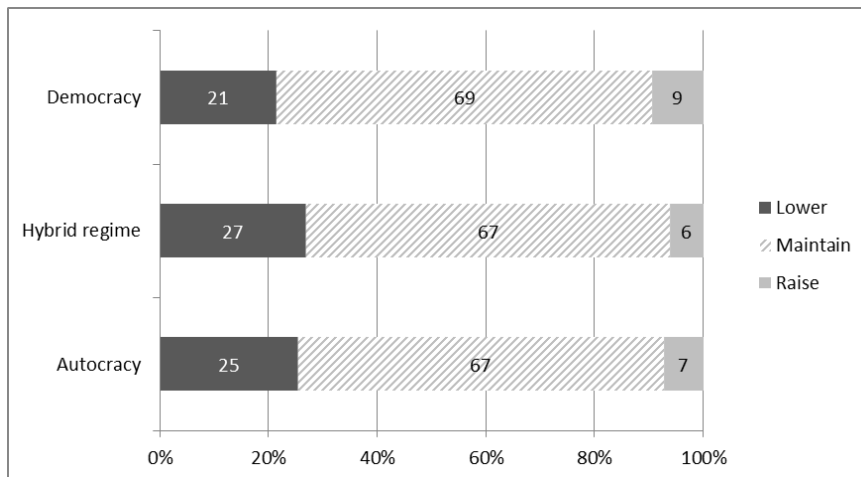
Development levels[10] seem to be a stronger predictor of declared immigration policy objectives. Highly developed countries seek to raise immigration more frequently than lesser or least developed countries: 14% compared to 9% and 1%, respectively (see Figure 4). Strengthening this finding are regional analyses showing that in highly developed Europe and North America, governments have indicated the greatest willingness to increase immigration, in 13% and 18% of the country-year cases, respectively (see Figure 5). The data confirms that advanced economies are structurally dependent on immigration to function and grow (Piore, 1979). More generally, these findings suggest that immigration policymaking cannot be analysed only through the lens of political regimes. Economic openness and development levels must also be considered.

Figure 4: Declared policy on immigration, 1976-2015, by development level

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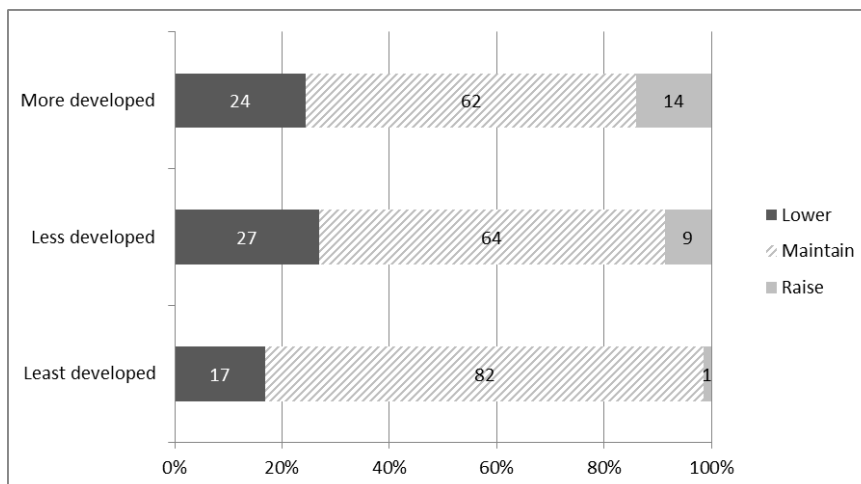
[10] Countries are categorised as 'more developed', 'less developed', and 'least developed' by the UN according to a set of development indicators, mainly per capita gross national income (GNI), but also a human assets index (based on indicators of nutrition, health, education and adult literacy) and an economic vulnerability index (based on (in)stability of agricultural production, exports of goods and services, or the percentage of population displaced by natural disasters). Half of the countries covered by the dataset are categorised as 'less developed', 25% as 'more developed', and 25% as 'least developed' (for more information, see: https://esa.un.org/poppolicy/ExplanatoryNotes.aspx and http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/wesp/wesp_current/2014wesp_country_classification.pdf).

Figure 5: Declared policy on immigration, 1976-2015, by world region
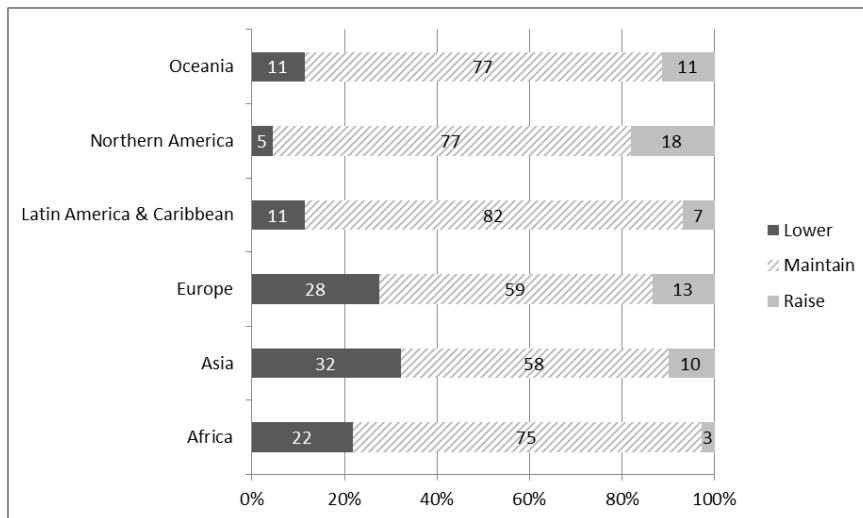
2.2 Enacted migration policy changes

As we have seen, declared immigration policy objectives over the past four decades are characterised by a high level of continuity, with two-thirds of governments intending to maintain immigration levels. DEMIG POLICY, which focuses on enacted policy changes, allows us to zoom into the (rather rare) instances in which governments have taken measures to open up or restrict their immigration policies. Taking all migration policy changes recorded since 1900 in the 45 countries covered by the dataset together, 53% enacted permissive changes, 37% made restrictive changes, and 10% experienced no change in restrictiveness (see Figure 6).[11]

Figure 6: Restrictiveness of migration policy changes since 1900
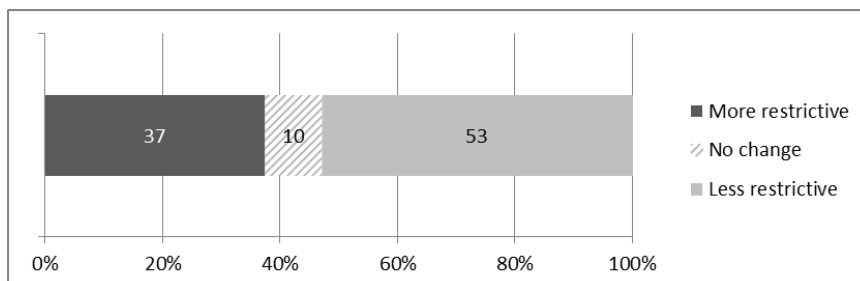
Over time, three different periods can be discerned: (i) From 1900 until the end of WWII, restrictive changes prevailed; (ii) from the end of the 1940s until the end of the 1980s, permissive migration policy changes dominated; (iii) and from the 1990s onward, the proportion of more and less restrictive changes nearly converged, although permissive changes continued to outnumber restrictive ones (see Figure 7). As detailed elsewhere (see: de Haas, Natter, & Vezzoli, 2016), these patterns reject the widespread assumption of growing migration policy restrictiveness.

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[11] The DEMIG POLICY dataset covers both democracies and autocracies: Over the 1900-2014 period, 17% of the recorded migration policy changes (roughly 1,000) have been enacted by autocratic or hybrid regimes, the remaining 83% (roughly 4,500) by democratic regimes.

Figure 7: Migration policy restrictiveness over time, in % of changes
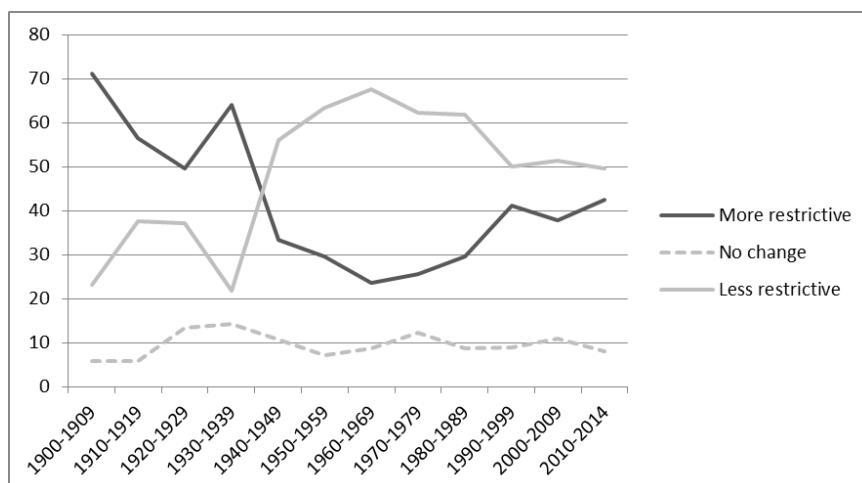
As with declared policy objectives, the disaggregated analysis of enacted policy changes along regime types does not change these results substantially. The proportions of more and less restrictive changes enacted by democracies, hybrid regimes, and autocracies do not significantly differ, with about 50% of immigration policy reforms across all regime types enacting less restrictive changes (see Figure 8). This finding seems to indicate that a country's openness (or restrictiveness) towards migration is not fundamentally linked to the political system in place, but driven by other factors that could include the economy, foreign policy priorities, or state ideologies. It also complements a similar finding on the drivers of immigration policy in 21 liberal democracies showing that political party ideologies do not significantly affect the restrictiveness of enacted immigration policy compared to factors such as economic growth, demographics, or welfare systems (de Haas & Natter, 2015).

Figure 8: Restrictiveness of migration policy changes since 1900, by regime type
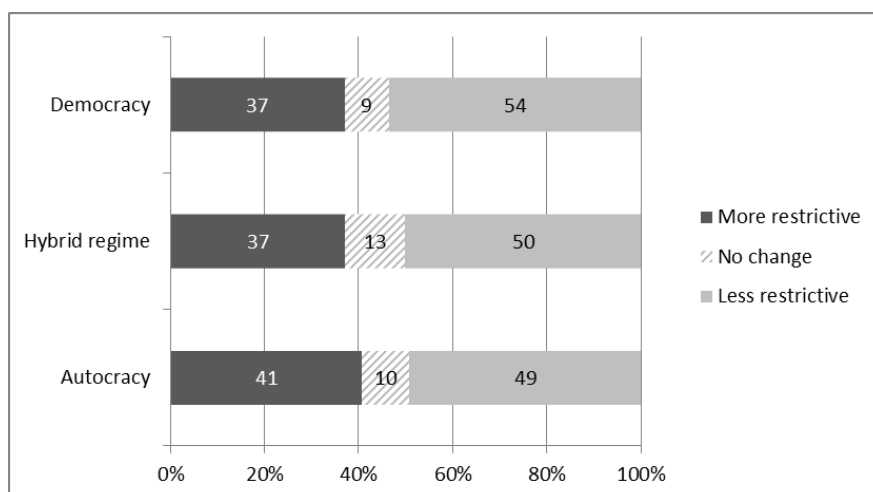
DEMIG POLICY also allows to disaggregate the analysis along four different migration policy areas, namely border controls, entry and stay rules, integration, and exit measures. Results show that while proportions of more and less restrictive changes vary significantly depending on the policy area, they are roughly comparable across regime types. For instance, policy changes targeting border controls are overwhelmingly restrictive (Figure 9-a) and integration measures are

overwhelmingly permissive (Figure 9-c), but these results hold for democratic, autocratic, and hybrid regimes to a similar extent. The results for integration measures are particularly striking, as migrants' post-entry rights are expected to be weaker in autocracies where even citizens' socio-political rights are often curtailed. More quantitative and qualitative research is necessary to investigate this finding in-depth.[12]

Legal entry and stay policies are slightly more permissive on average in democracies than in autocracies and hybrid regimes (see Figure 9-b). This is partly explained by development levels: the democracies included in DEMIG POLICY are generally wealthier than the autocracies and thus more structurally dependent on immigration. On the contrary, exit and return policies are, on average, more permissive in autocracies (see Figure 9-d). Such permissiveness might be surprising, but is ultimately linked to the fact that the autocracies included in DEMIG POLICY are mainly emigration countries,[13] hence their exit policies target mainly their own emigrants. In contrast, the exit policies of democracies capture mainly return policies targeting the foreign born. These results suggest that the drivers of border control, entry and stay, integration, and exit policies are intrinsic to their respective areas and not per se linked to the regime type in place.

Figure 9: Restrictiveness of policy changes since 1900, by policy area and regime type
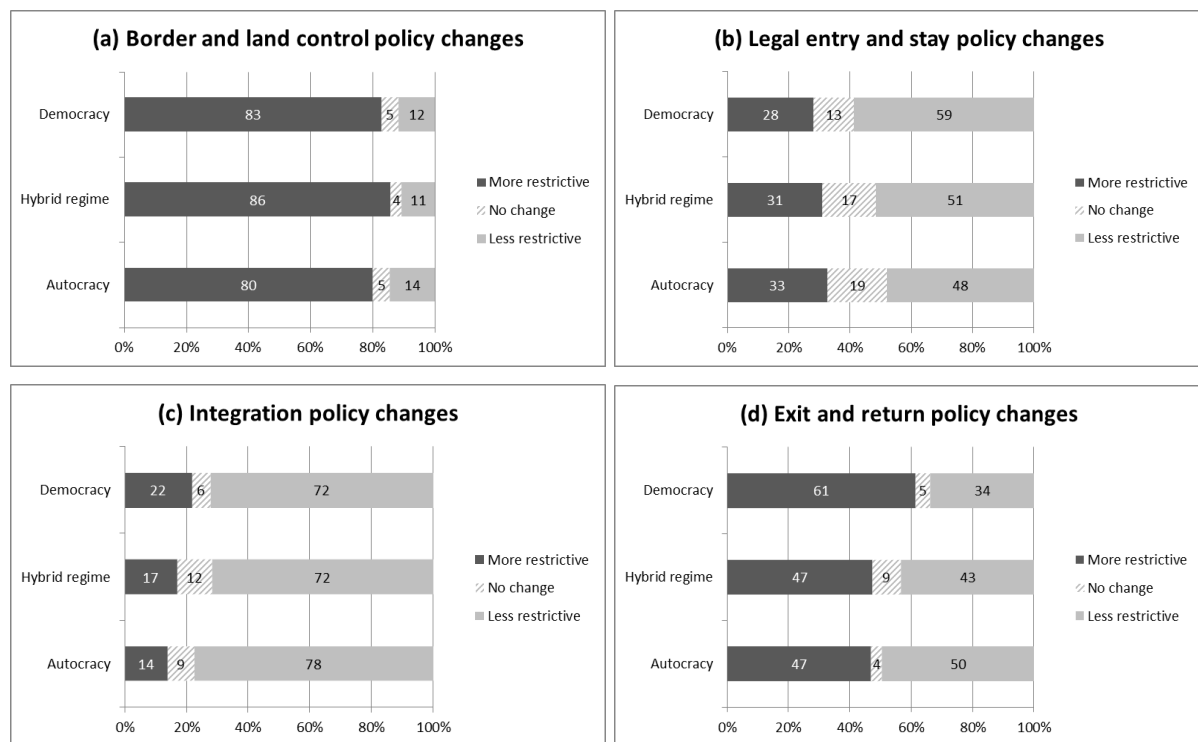
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3 The dynamics of immigration policy change

Contrary to assumptions that a 'regime effect' links open immigration policy changes to democracy, the empirical evidence presented so far suggests no a priori difference in the *substance* of immigration policy change (i.e., openness or restrictiveness) across political regimes. In other words, democracies do not seem to enact overall more or less restrictive immigration policy changes compared to autocracies. However, as the remainder of this paper will show, political regimes do shape *immigration policy dynamics* in terms of the domestic and international influences states must reconcile and the resulting leeway states have in devising their immigration policies. As a result, autocracies usually have a wider range of policy options at their disposal than democracies, be it to open or restrict immigration.

3.1 The liberal paradox

The 'liberal paradox', which Hollifield coined in 1992 to capture the contradictory drivers confronting liberal democracies when elaborating their immigration policies, is among the most prominent theories on immigration policymaking. He writes, "States are trapped in a 'liberal paradox'. Since the end of World War II, international economic forces (trade, investment, and migration) have been pushing states towards greater openness, while the international state system and powerful (domestic) political forces push states towards greater closure. […] Hence the liberal paradox: the economic logic of liberalism is one of openness, but the political and legal logic is one of closure" (Hollifield, 2004: 886-7).

Hampshire (2013) further developed Hollifield's liberal paradox by arguing that four features inherent to liberal-democratic statehood create conflicting demands on governments' immigration policy: "Representative democracy, constitutionalism, capitalism and nationhood each generate distinct imperatives for government action on immigration. And none of these imperatives can be ignored because each is rooted in the legitimation of the liberal state" (Hampshire, 2013: 3).[14] On the one hand, constitutionalism, a political system built on checks and balances and in which courts and laws guarantee human rights; and advanced capitalism, with its structural dependence on migrant labour, pull decision makers towards openness. On the other hand, representative democracy, structured around public opinion, political parties, interests groups, and mass media; and nationhood, key for national identity formation and social cohesion, pull decision makers towards restrictive immigration policy changes. The fact that nationhood and capitalism are unrelated to the liberal character of a state and might be equally relevant to autocracies is not further discussed.

Over the years, Hollifield's liberal paradox has been complemented by other scholars (Boswell, 2007; Freeman, 1995; Joppke, 1998a; Sassen, 1996) who point to international and domestic political dynamics, such as the role of business lobbies or legal actors, to explain why liberal democracies tend to enact immigration policies that are more liberal than public opinion supports.[15]

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[14] Hampshire explicitly limits his argument to 'rich liberal democracies', but does not define this term. Instead, he takes it as a shorthand for "the countries of Europe, North America and Oceania (Australia and New Zealand)" (Hampshire, 2013: 2).

[15] For a thorough review of how the 'liberal paradox' has been conceptualised differently throughout the migration literature, see Acosta Arcarazo and Freier (2015) and Bonjour (2011). Other authors, such as Cornelius, Martin and Hollifield (1994) or Castles (2004b), for instance, have defined the liberal paradox in an

Overall, literature on the liberal paradox suggests that immigration policy dynamics in liberal democracies are subject to two contradictory logics: (1) the dominant ideology of liberalism, which pushes (labour) markets to globalise and states to enshrine international human rights into national legislation, providing the ground for open immigration policy changes; (2) the politics of democratic nation-states, which electoral objectives and national identity claims dominate, encouraging closure towards immigration. In this conceptualization, pro-immigration reforms are attributed to the lobbying efforts of employers and business interests, or to the limits imposed on national policymaking by human rights norms and courts; while anti-immigration reforms are attributed to the democratic dynamics of elections, party politics, and public opinion. Because of these dynamics, immigration policy is often characterised by a 'discursive gap', whereby discourses about immigration that mainly target national audiences are often more restrictive than actual policies that need to integrate the demands of markets and international norms. Figure 10 illustrates the dynamics captured by the liberal paradox argument.

Figure 10: Hollifield's liberal paradox, schematized by the author
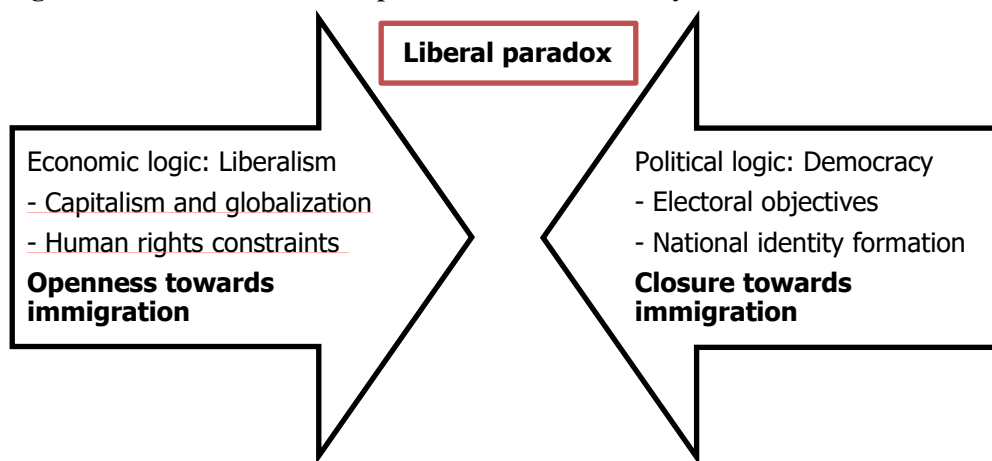
The policymaking dynamic the liberal paradox theorizes operates at the macro level of political economy. The nuances and complexities of real-life political practices, however, reveal some of its inherent limits. Studies have pointed at alternative drivers for open immigration policy changes that are unrelated to the democratic character of the state, such as liberal dispositions among the population or overall economic, ideological, and political cycles. For instance, Bonjour (2011: 111) has argued that "the broadly shared assumption that it is an 'Iron Law' […] for 'the public' to be always, in all historical circumstances, in favour of restrictive immigration policies seems at the very least an oversimplification". In the same vein, research by Acosta Arcarazo and Freier (2015) has identified the emergence of a 'populist liberalism' in Brazil and Argentina, where democratic political leaders have adopted welcoming discourses towards immigration since the mid-2000s as part of a populist strategy.

In addition, researchers have refined the generalizing statement that liberal democracy and open immigration policy changes go together by highlighting a trend towards restrictive immigration policies in liberal-democracies across Europe and beyond, coined 'illiberal liberalism' or 'repressive liberalism' (Adamson, Triadafilopoulos, & Zolberg, 2011; Guild, Groenendijk, & Carrera, 2009; Joppke, 2007). They show that economic logic does not always trump political logic. Despite such

entirely different way (not discussed in this paper), namely as a 'control gap' that highlights the failure of states to effectively control immigration.

limitations, the liberal paradox remains a highly valuable analytical tool for theorizing ideal-typical democratic immigration policy dynamics.

3.2 The illiberal paradox

This paper introduces the 'illiberal paradox'[16] as a complementary analytical tool to explain why autocracies can have more leeway than democracies to enact permissive immigration policies if it suits their economic, foreign policy, or domestic political priorities. The illiberal paradox hypothesis does not suggest that autocracies *do* enact more open policies than democracies. Indeed, many autocracies have drastically restricted immigration and migrants' rights in the past and continue to do so. Instead, I seek to conceptualize the policy dynamics underlying the fact that *autocracies can open their immigration regimes more easily than democracies if they wish to do so.* I argue that while autocratic regimes are bound by the same global forces of liberalism as democracies, they are freer from the type of political logic found in democratic nation states, such as public opinion and bureaucratic dynamics.

Autocracies face the same global forces of liberalism that drive immigration openness as democracies. This is not only true for globalization and trade liberalization, but also for the role of international liberal norms. In fact, in his initial formulation of the liberal paradox, Hollifield (1992: 578) mentioned that "respect for human (and civil) rights can compel liberal states (and some that are not so liberal […]) to exercise caution in dealing with migrants." In Morocco, for instance, international norm adherence and associated symbolic politics were key in driving open immigration reforms (Natter, 2018), confirming that "migration policies are dramaturgical acts aimed at national and world audiences" (FitzGerald & Cook-Martín, 2014: 21).

At the same time, autocracies have more flexibility in enacting fundamental policy shifts compared to consolidated liberal democracies. Democracies are bound by existing legal frameworks, and enacting policy changes is subject to (lengthy) negotiations among different stakeholders and institutions. To change policy, elected officials almost always need to compromise to reach majority decisions or to make policies compatible with constitutional constraints. Thus, initial policy proposals are often watered down. Although autocracies also need to forge compromises and reconcile diverging interests, they have more leverage to enact rapid and fundamental policy shifts. Because of fewer national legal constraints, the range of policy options available at both ends of the spectrum — towards more openness or more restrictiveness — is larger than in democracies. Thus, if it fits their broader economic agenda, foreign policy priorities, and domestic political goals, autocracies can more easily enact open immigration policies because of their relative independence from potential popular anti-immigration sentiment and path-dependency dynamics within the bureaucracy. [17] Figure 11 illustrates the dynamics captured by the illiberal paradox argument.

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[16] In this paper, the illiberal paradox refers to immigration policymaking. Other researchers are currently developing the idea of an illiberal paradox in relation to autocracies' emigration policies (see Tsourapas 2018).

[17] Path dependence captures the fact that bureaucratic decisions of the past shape and limit future policy options: "Once a country or region has started down a track, the costs of reversal are very high. There will be other choice points, but the entrenchments of certain institutional arrangements obstruct an easy reversal of the initial choice" (Levi 1997: 28, see also: Pierson 2000).

Figure 11: The illiberal paradox hypothesis, schematized by the author
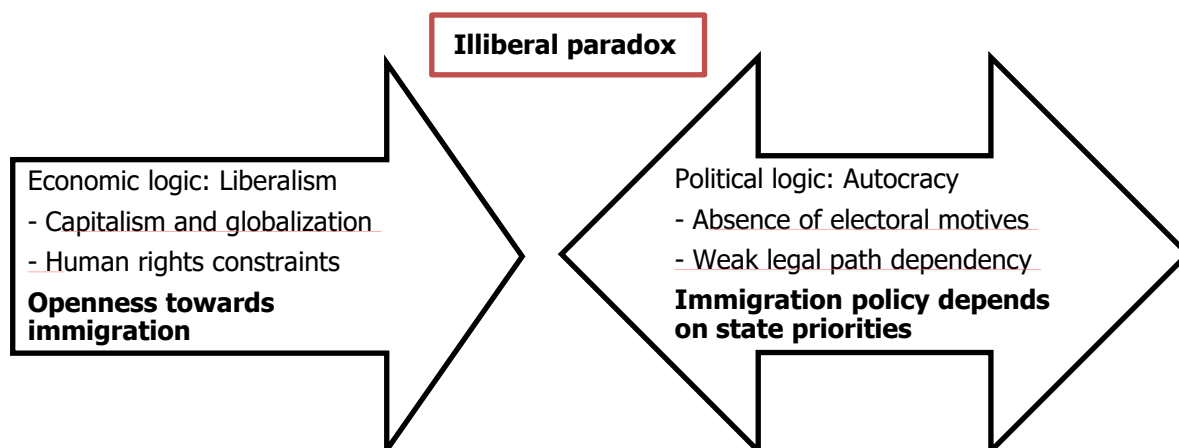
However, the illiberal paradox has three main limitations. Together, these limitations highlight that increased leeway characterises autocratic policymaking — not an autocratic tendency to enact opening reforms: First, permissive changes towards immigration might not always be followed through in practice. Ironically, immigration policies can sometimes end up being open in discourse and restrictive in practice — the exact opposite of what the liberal paradox hypothesis suggests and leading to what one could call a 'reverse discursive gap'. As we will see below, welcoming discourses on immigration might first and foremost fulfil a symbolic role towards a specific (and often international) audience. This is reminiscent of the 'tough talk' of politicians in democracies wishing to please their electorate with restrictive discourses and policy announcements, while not following them through in practice (de Haas et al., 2016).

Second, while autocracies' autonomy from legal constraints and democratic requests can favour more permissive immigration policy changes, it also increases their vulnerability to sudden, restrictive backlashes. Open immigration policy changes in autocratic regimes are often not enshrined in law but emerge from executive decisions, as the next section will show. In addition, the weak rule of law in many autocracies and the (at least partial) dependence of courts on the executive limit judicial actors' ability to enforce migrants' rights (WJP, 2018). As a consequence, immigration policy often fluctuates between progress and backlashes, depending on the state's strategic interests. It is this ability to go forward and then backwards if domestic or international contexts shift that give autocracies more policy options on immigration.

A third limitation is that immigration rights and integration rights do not automatically go hand in hand. An open entry policy does not imply the granting of socio-economic or other rights to the migrants in question. In fact, it might often be the opposite, particularly when the level of immigration is high. According to Ruhs (2013), high-income countries are faced with a trade-off between the numbers and rights of low-skilled workers. They can allow high immigrant numbers and restrict immigrants' integration rights (such as in the Gulf countries) or limit immigrant numbers and offer immigrants full integration rights (such as in Scandinavian countries). Thus, it might be easier for many people around the world, in particularly lower-skilled workers, to migrate to autocracies instead of democracies.

In summary, the illiberal paradox hypothesis suggests that autocratic regimes *can* enact permissive (and restrictive) immigration policies more easily than democracies — if this suits the economic, foreign policy, or domestic political priorities of the regime in place — because they are relatively independent from potential popular anti-immigration sentiments and bureaucratic path-dependency dynamics. However, discursive openness towards immigration is not always implemented, leading to an immigration policy that might ultimately be liberal in discourse and restrictive in practice. In addition, liberal immigration policies can quickly be reversed and replaced by restriction due to policymaking dynamics. Thus, the distinctive characteristic of autocratic policymaking is the increased leeway states have and the larger range of policy options available to them when devising immigration policies.

3.3 Empirical illustrations

Emerging empirical research on autocracies' immigration policies offers preliminary evidence for this 'illiberal paradox'. The historical case studies on Latin America by FitzGerald and Cook-Martín (2014) provide examples of autocracies that abolished ethnic selection criteria, a permissive policy change, long before North American democracies did so. Writing about Mexico under the authoritarian regime of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911) at the end of the 19th century, they conclude, "With a government that was liberal in form but a dictatorship in practice, [Foreign Minister] Vallarta could preach the virtues of racial equality without interference from the citizenry" (FitzGerald & Cook-Martín, 2014: 226). Mexico's open discourse on racial equality was possible only because authorities were independent from anti-immigrant and racist sentiments within the population. This independence allowed Mexico's leaders to pursue broader diplomatic goals: "The impetus for change came from an elite foreign policy project to use anti-racism as a diplomatic tool to challenge the US and increase Mexico's cultural influence in Latin America" (FitzGerald & Cook-Martín, 2014: 219).

In a similar fashion, Brazilian authorities under the Old Republic[18] (1889-1930) reversed the restrictive policy towards Asian immigration that had been introduced in June 1890 to meet economic and geopolitical interests: "Asian exclusion ended after just two years because only oligarchs sat at the policymaking table. The preferences of Brazilian workers were irrelevant to the political process at this point" (FitzGerald & Cook-Martín, 2014: 273). This example shows that autocratic policymaking facilitates radical policy reversals and decreases the weight of legal or institutional path-dependency dynamics, while simultaneously giving priority to strategic interests over domestic public opinion. However, the Brazilian case also highlights the gap between an open discourse (and law), and a restrictive implementation practice. The ethnically neutral policies on paper - including the major immigration reform in 1921 who set out who was not allowed entry - did not exclude ethnic selection in practice: "On its face, the [1921 Law of Undesirables] did not make ethnic distinctions, but its implementation by consular personnel effectively discriminated against individuals of unwanted origins, particularly in the case of blacks" (FitzGerald & Cook-Martín, 2014: 274).

Over the past decades, authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and Africa have also enacted surprisingly open immigration policy changes based on their economic, foreign policy, or domestic political interests. Libya under the rule of Colonel Gaddafi is a prime example. Gaddafi's shift from pan-Arabism to pan-Africanism in the early 1990s sought to position Libya as the new African leader.

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[18] Although formally a democracy, the power was concentrated in the hands of land owners, giving rise to that was called 'Coronelismo', an informal system in which colonels, local oligarchs, and governors were taking political decisions.

Accompanying this change in foreign policy was a decision to open up the country to labour immigration. As a result, several hundred thousand Sub-Saharan African labour migrants moved to Libya during the 1990s and 2000s to work in the booming rentier economy and oil industry (Paoletti, 2011; Tsourapas, 2017). Yet, when geopolitical and economic circumstances changed in the early 2000s, Gaddafi quickly reversed his policy approach and ordered massive expulsions of migrant workers. Given the weak rule of law in Libya, open immigration policies on paper did not offer any legal protections against this political backlash. Thus, the Libyan case forcefully shows the limits of autocratic immigration policy. Towards Arab labour migrants who arrived between the 1960s and 1980s, as well as African labour migrants starting from the 1990s, a "politics of contradictions" (Paoletti, 2011: 221) prevailed. In other words, permissive and restrictive changes alternated and co-occurred, depending on economic and geopolitical interests.

Similarly, the Moroccan case illustrates how geopolitical and economic priorities can take precedent over domestic opinions and drive open policy reforms. In September 2013, King Mohamed VI announced a fundamental change in immigration policy. The country moved away from its restrictive approach — characterised by state violence towards (irregular) migrants, unlawful expulsions, and socio-economic exclusion — and towards a human-rights based policy built around a regularization campaign and the rolling out of integration measures (Alioua, Ferrié, & Reifeld, 2018; Cherti & Collyer, 2015; Natter, 2015, 2018; Norman, 2016). Morocco enacted these changes to enhance its image abroad, both in Africa, where Morocco sought to consolidate its position as an economic and political leader, and in Europe, where Morocco wanted to reinforce its image as a progressive, rights-respective, and liberal state (for an in-depth analysis of the drivers of this policy change, see: Natter, 2018). However, the opening towards immigration has been first and foremost discursive, used by the regime as a soft power tool; implementation has remained inconsistent.

Research on the Gulf region (Fargues, 2013; Russell, 1989; Thiollet, 2016) demonstrates that domestic political priorities also drive autocratic openness in immigration policy. Indeed, the Gulf states' large immigration programmes are shaped by domestic concerns around securing the benefits of oil revenue for the domestic population through importing a largely rights-less class of foreign workers. Gulf countries also show that open immigration reforms are particularly easy to adopt if entry rights are not automatically coupled with socio-economic rights. As Thiollet has shown in her empirical work on Saudi Arabia, immigration is regulated through a "quasi-open border policy" (Thiollet, 2016: 11). However, this openness does not include access to permanent residency or naturalization, leaving migrants in a fragile legal position and vulnerable to abuse. Quantitative studies on what drives immigration policies in 'wealthy autocracies' confirm this disconnection between immigration and integration rights. In other words, these countries have more flexibility to allow migrants in precisely because they can limit their access to basic rights (Breunig et al., 2012; Mirilovic, 2010; Ruhs, 2013; Shin, 2017).

This numbers vs. rights trade-off (Ruhs, 2013) is not observable in the refugee policies of African countries such as Uganda, Guinea, or Zambia. Since the mid-2000s, Uganda's autocratic government has adopted a vocally open reception and integration policy for refugees despite increasing numbers. With 1.2 million refugees, Uganda is now the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa. Nonetheless, refugees are granted freedom of movement and work, access to education and healthcare, as well as a plot of land to cultivate (Watera et al., 2017). While the drivers behind this open refugee policy have been under-researched from an academic viewpoint, journalistic coverage points to how refugee policy improves the image of Uganda's autocratic regime, as well as how it helps attract development aid and economic investments: "Uganda's refugee policy isn't purely

altruistic. For the underdeveloped northwestern part of the country, the international aid pouring in is extremely helpful. […] The total has quickly swelled to several million euros - of which far too much ends up in the private bank accounts of corrupt elites".[19]

Similarly, Guinea has pursued an open refugee policy since 2003 despite related and growing security concerns, partly for leverage in foreign policy relations, but also "because the nature of the Guinean state […] gives the President a monopoly on power and the ability to pursue policies objectives in the absence of any meaningful political opposition" (Milner, 2006: 210-211). Likewise, Zambia has adopted refugee-friendly policies since 2014, notwithstanding the protracted situation of former refugees from Angola and Rwanda and growing numbers of refugees from neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo. This change in policy occurred simultaneously with the authoritarian shift in Zambia. The president of Zambia has been able to disregard popular calls for restriction and contestation from within the bureaucratic apparatus. Indeed, he has capitalised on international support for his refugee policy — support that lessens criticism of human rights violations and autocratic governance.[20]

In Asia, immigration politics since the 1990s have been closely tied to countries' economic development trajectories, given that economic growth and industrialization has been accompanied by their - at least partial - transition from emigration to immigration countries. Kazakhstan offers a typical example of the 'illiberal paradox' hypothesis: Ruled by the authoritarian regime of President Nazarbayev since 1991, the Central Asian country stands out for its liberalizing immigration policy changes. A one-time regularisation in 2006 granted legal status to around 164,000 migrants, mainly from Uzbekistan but also from Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan (Laruelle, 2008). And policy changes in 2014 and 2017 have facilitated foreigners' access to work permits and liberalized the country's travel visa regime.[21] With GDP growth averaging 8 percent over the 2000s, international immigration has been a declared goal not only to counteract demographic decline but also as part and parcel of the regime's economic development agenda until 2050.

In contrast, developments in Thailand, a major regional destination for labor migrants from Cambodia, Myanmar or Laos, are exemplary for how immigration policy can fluctuated back and forth between openings and restrictions as a result of recurrent political turmoil, including military coups in 2006 and 2014. While the Thai government has administered regularisation campaigns in

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[19] http://www.spiegel.de/international/tomorrow/uganda-is-the-most-refugee-friendly-country-in-the-world-a-1167294.html; see also: http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2016/07/05/l-ouganda-est-il-l-ami-des-refugies_4964193_3212.html, both retrieved on 16 June 2018.

[20] "The driving force for these recent changes appears to be coming not from the international or local level, but rather from the state and specifically, two personalities: the president, Edgar Lungu, and the newly appointed commissioner for refugees, Abdon Mawere. The president personally intervened to develop the new Refugee Act, and he ignored ministerial departments' demands that former refugees from Rwanda be repatriated. […] Lungu is free to implement programs and initiatives based on self-interest and ideological commitments without being overly concerned about opposition parties or losing a re-election. […] Yet Zambia's commitment to sheltering and integrating large numbers of refugees also has international benefits. As seen with Uganda, receiving large numbers of refugees has the potential to make the international community turn a blind eye to declines in democratic principles in the country." (https://www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/community/2018/06/12/whats-behind-zambias-growing-welcome-to-refugees, retrieved on 12 June 2018).

[21] See for instance: https://jamestown.org/program/kazakhstan-adopts-new-policy-toward-foreign-migrants/ or https://www.relocatemagazine.com/immigration-kazakhstan-new-years-immigration-reforms-bring-mixed-impact, both retrieved on 7 October 2018.

1992 and in 2009, granting (quasi) legal status to nearly 1,3 million workers from neighbouring countries (Pracha, 2010), in 2014 and 2017 massive crack-downs on irregular migrants took place and higher penalties for irregular stay and work were introduced. This policy volatility has not only created confusion among migrants, triggering the exodus of a substantial part of the irregular migrant population in a short time-span, but has also increased room for corruption and arbitrary policy implementation by bureaucrats (Bylander & Reid, 2017). Overall, the Thai case shows that it is the ability to rapidly switch from liberalization to restriction and back depending on the state's strategic interests that give autocracies more policy options on immigration.

4   Concluding thoughts: Where to go next?

Open immigration policy changes are not an exclusive feature of democracies, and restrictive immigration policy changes are not an exclusive feature of autocracies. The evidence presented in this article shows that, contrary to widespread beliefs, there is no regime-specific pattern when it comes to the *substance* — openness or restrictiveness — of immigration policy changes per se. First and foremost, immigration policy changes are shaped by states' broader socio-economic and geopolitical interests. Yet, political regimes shape the *dynamics* underlying immigration policy changes in terms of the domestic and international influences states must reconcile. Because of political considerations, democracies have less leeway in devising their immigration policies. Autocracies usually have a wider range of policy options at their disposal to allow (or restrict) immigration, largely because they do not have to always align with public opinion and do not face democracy-style bureaucratic obstacles.

To make sense of open immigration reforms in autocracies and to enlarge the theoretical toolbox available to scholars analysing immigration policymaking dynamics worldwide, I have introduced the 'illiberal paradox' hypothesis as a complement to the 'liberal paradox' (Hollifield 1992). I argue that autocratic regimes, while bound by the same international forces of economic and rights-based liberalism as democracies, are more autonomous from nation-state logics and potential popular anti-immigration sentiments. Autocratic regimes therefore *can* enact liberal immigration policies more easily than democracies, but only if doing so suits the economic, foreign policy, or domestic political priorities of the regime in place.

To conclude, I would like to suggest that the ideal-typical dynamics captured by the liberal and illiberal paradox are not exclusively applicable to their 'natural contexts', i.e., the liberal paradox as a dynamic of democracies and the illiberal paradox as a dynamic of autocracies. In fact, when looking at political practices across a variety of political regimes, the liberal and illiberal frameworks may possibly apply to policymaking dynamics across the entire democracy-autocracy spectrum. This approach provides grounds for a more global theorization of immigration policymaking beyond the democracy/autocracy divide.

4.1 Integrating analyses of political practices and ideal-typical regime dynamics

The liberal and illiberal paradox offer valuable analytical frames to conceptualise some of the ideal-typical dynamics democracies and autocracies face when elaborating their immigration policies. However, remaining at the level of binary regime typologies is ultimately of limited analytical value. One way forward is to combine (1) existing conceptual work that identifies *ideal types* of democratic or autocratic immigration policymaking with (2) empirical analyses exploring the nuances of real-life

political practices. Indeed, looking at political practices would allow researchers to detect similarities in policymaking within and across political regimes, for instance by identifying autocratic or authoritarian practices within formally democratic systems and democratic practices within formally autocratic systems (Glasius, 2018b).

On the one hand, not all decisions in formal democracies are subject to popular control or legislative approval. History and recent politics abound with examples of policy practices within democracies that have an autocratic element, such as executive orders or ministerial decrees that bypass discussions in parliament, among parties, or with the public. These autocratic policy tools offer opportunities to enact open immigration reforms precisely because of the lack of democratic oversight. Ultimately, the illiberal paradox hypothesis posits that authoritarian practices facilitate open immigration reforms if it suits the regime's broader priorities, be it in a democracy or autocracy.

Writing on democratic Canada, FitzGerald and Cook-Martín (2014) showed how the removal of ethnic selection criteria in Canada's immigration policy became possible only through the use of legal channels safe from public debate and popular accountability: "The cabinet ended ethnic selection in 1962 and 1967 through orders-in-council to avoid a full parliamentary debate that would lend voice to domestic actors with a more restrictionist agenda" (FitzGerald & Cook-Martín, 2014: 183-4). Decisions on travel visa requirements are also classic examples of executive decision making that lacks public control and can therefore respond more easily to economic or diplomatic priorities: "As visas can generally be imposed through directives, executive decrees or other administrative measures, and thus do not require cumbersome legal changes, they are seen as a quick, discrete and effective migration policy instrument" (de Haas et al., 2018: 32).

Furthermore, despite the politicization of immigration across Europe, large parts of immigration policy — such as labour shortage lists or bilateral agreements — are negotiated behind closed doors and through typical 'client politics' (Freeman, 1995). The agreement between the Dutch government and the Asian catering industry for the employment of Asian cooks (so-called wok-agreement) is a case in point.[22] Albeit sector-specific and limited in terms of volume, this agreement is exemplary for the ways in which — despite a though rhetoric on immigration — legal mechanisms are opened to allow the recruitment of migrant workers.

On the other hand, autocratic regimes are not entirely immune to public pressures, as they have to secure their legitimacy at home. For instance, to prevent potential social unrest by the country's unemployed youth, the Saudi government in 2011 not only increased the distribution of oil rent to the population, but also launched a series of restrictive changes towards immigrants, including highly symbolic measures such as mass deportations. As Thiollet (2015: 132) writes, "The stated objectives of reducing youth and female unemployment, and of increasing the competitiveness of Saudis compared to immigrant workers are in fact combined with the short term objective of buying social peace, notably among the popular classes and the qualified youth". Given Saudi Arabia's attempts to move towards a post-oil economy, the question of immigrant labour is likely to become more acute even in the strongly controlled public sphere. Similar dynamics in which autocratic

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[22] Signed for the first time in 2014 and prolonged in 2016, this agreement between the Dutch government and the Asian catering industry allows Asian restaurants (Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese, Indian, Korean, Malaysian, Thai, Tibetan and Vietnamese restaurants) to recruit cooks from Asia up to a quota limit - 1,800 cooks in 2017 and 1,400 in 2018. See: https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2016/09/23/kabinet-verlengt-wokakkoord-met-drie-jaar-a1523040, retrieved 7 October 2018.

political leaders face increased popular opposition to their large-scale immigration programmes can also be found in Kuwait or Singapore.[23]

The 'competitive authoritarian' regime of Rafael Correa in Ecuador since 2006 provides another interesting illustration. In June 2008, Ecuador revamped its visa policy by removing visa restrictions for all nationalities in the world: "The official goals of this policy were twofold: one was to encourage tourism, the other to implement the principle of universal citizenship" (Acosta Arcarazo & Freier, 2015: 21). Yet, only a few months later, the open policy was subject to a partial reversal when visa restrictions were reintroduced for nationalities from where immigration was 'not desired'.[24] The Ecuadorian example shows both the enhanced capacity of autocratic governments to open immigration channels, as well as the ultimate fragility of permissive immigration reforms in the face of large-scale popular opposition. According to Freier (2013: 16), "Correa faced internal political pressure from within his administration, from the political opposition and the media to revoke universal visa freedom". Thus, despite the autocratic nature of the Correa regime, immigration policymaking can be influenced by the need to safeguard domestic political legitimacy and popular support.

These examples of democratic dynamics within autocracies and autocratic dynamics within democracies suggest that, when looking at political practices, there might in fact be more similarities in immigration policymaking than expected from a pure political regime perspective. In Brazil, for example, regardless of the formal political system in place, political leaders have used discretionary administrative regulations to avoid political attention and legislative procedures: "Brazilian officials have historically preferred to manage migration with administrative regulations. […] Military rulers, like their democratically elected predecessors, preferred to maximise discretion in matters of immigration" (FitzGerald & Cook-Martín, 2014: 290, 294). More generally, authoritarian policy practices substantially increase the leeway of both democratic and autocratic leaders for opening (or restricting) immigration.

4.2 Towards a global theorization of immigration policymaking

Within a perspective combining ideal-typical, regime-specific immigration policy dynamics and real-life political practices, both the liberal and the illiberal paradox may be useful in explaining certain immigration policymaking across various political regimes. Indeed, countries along the democracy-autocracy spectrum must consider economic lobbies, public opinion, and geopolitical interests in their decision making. Autocracies need to secure their domestic legitimacy and are therefore not entirely immune to popular demands, while democracies have policy instruments at their disposal that allow them to take decisions behind closed doors or free from parliamentary oversight or popular scrutiny.

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[23] In Singapore, large-scale immigration programs of both high- and low-skilled workers have been central to the country's economic success. However, popular opposition to the country's liberal immigration policies - in particular for high-skilled workers - forced the government in place to tighten some of its policy measures in 2011 (Yeoh & Lin, 2012). In Kuwait, anti-immigration sentiments are gaining ground and the population's fears related to temporary foreign workers that represent 70 percent of the country's population start to be politically instrumentalized. See: https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-04-12/arab-populists-also-blame-foreigners-as-gulf-austerity-sets-in, retrieved 6 July 2018.

[24] "Only six months after its introduction, visa requirements were reintroduced for Chinese citizens, and 18 months later for citizens of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Somalia" (Acosta Arcarazo and Freier 2015: 25).

I therefore suggest that there is no need to artificially separate theories on the drivers of immigration policy under democratic or autocratic contexts. The added value of conceptualizations such as the liberal and illiberal paradox is not to provide predictive models of immigration policy change across time and space, but rather to identify dynamics at play under specific constellations of factors. The liberal and illiberal paradox are theoretical frameworks that come alive only in conjunction with empirical observations, a key to read developments, variations, and commonalities across countries; they provide a starting point for further reflection and research. To achieve a more realistic assessment of immigration policy and its institutional or systemic drivers, scholars first need to open up the democratic and autocratic regime boxes and confront their associated assumptions about immigration policy substance and dynamics with policy practices on the ground. Ultimately, an effective and comprehensive analytical framework should capture the political practices in both democratic and autocratic contexts that lead to permissive or restrictive immigration policy reforms.

Researchers have already started to move towards more global theorizations of immigration policymaking (Acosta Arcarazo & Freier, 2015; Adamson & Tsourapas, forthcoming; FitzGerald & Cook-Martín, 2014; Garcés-Mascareñas, 2012, 2018; Natter, 2014, 2018; Norman, 2018). These analyses provide a starting point for theorizing immigration policy dynamics across political regimes, identifying convergences or divergences across and within political systems, and starting a dialogue across the often still distinct literatures on immigration policymaking in 'Western liberal democracies' and elsewhere. Without questioning the importance of networks and other processes which help sustaining migration corridors despite increased policy restrictions, the evidence presented in this paper confirms the crucial role of both origin and destination states in shaping migration.

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