Supplementary Materials, The Global Economic Crisis and Domestic Political Agendas

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Acknowledgements

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Measuring the Economy's Salience

The most common method for testing whether the economy's salience varies is to measure whether the marginal effect of economic fluctuations on government support is larger in some contexts than in others (e.g. Edwards et al 1995, Abramson et al 2007). However, this method has two shortcomings. First, if it is more difficult for governments to lose voters from the coalition that elected them/supported them when they took office than to gain them, then we might see larger losses when things go bad than when things improve without the underlying salience of the economy actually varying (Fiorina and Shepsle 1989, van der Brug et al 2007). Second, showing that the marginal effect of the economy varies across contexts is not sufficient to explain why that effect varies. In particular, economic voting might be magnified during a recession not because its importance has increased and voters/parties/the media are paying more attention to it but because economic shocks provide leverage for assessing the government's competence as an economic manager (Duch and Stevenson 2008, 2010).

An alternative method is to measuring issue salience is to directly ask voters about their motivations for voting the way they did. Previous work by Young et al (1987), Blais et al (1998), Bélanger and Meguid (2008), and Singer (2009, 2011a, 2011b) shows that respondents who identify an issue as the most important issue to them personally demonstrate a closer correspondence between their evaluations of the government's performance on that issue and their overall evaluations of the government.[1] Specifically, Singer shows that economic outcomes are more closely tied to government support if voters say that the economy is an important issue to them. Thus this question provides a direct measure of the economy's salience. It also has the additional advantage of asking about the most important *issue* in a country and not the most important *problem* and so it potentially taps into issues on which the government has succeeded

[1] Because I do not have access to the individual-level data for studies not included in the preliminary CSES releases but whose aggregate data I obtained from the PI's, I cannot confirm that the important issue question used in the third wave of the CSES mediates the relationship between economic outcomes and government support in the same way the question used on the second wave of the CSES did.

and which voters wish to reward them or performance on issues that are not widely perceived as "problems" (Wlezien 2005, although see Jennings and Wlezien 2011).[2]

Coding data

For example, consider responses to this question in a post-election survey following the October 2009 elections in Greece (Table 1). The most common answers related to "the economic crisis", but other economic performance issues included questions of unemployment, prices, and poverty levels. All together, economic issues were deemed the most important issue by 64.7 percent of the electorate, which is not surprising given the depth of the economic crisis at the time of the election. The second most common set of responses reflect a general desire to replace the government given their failures. This sense of general dissatisfaction may very well reflect the economic malaise surrounding the election, but because respondents did not focus specifically on economics we do not lump these responses the economic-voting category. I considered placing these responses in the government competence category, but because more of these responses focus on scandals and corruption I did not feel like they necessarily reflected the same dynamic. Thus they are lumped into the "generic issue" category that includes comments about the balance of power/election outcome but not why the voter wanted it to change/stay the same. Concerns about corruption and then various social programs followed well behind with 9 and 5 percent of the electorate respectively and then no other issue was mentioned by more than one percent of voters.

(Table 1 about here).

Across these 72 elections, economic issues are mentioned as the most important issue more frequently than any other issue was (Table 2). Yet in the average election in this decade, a majority of voters were focused on non-economic issues. Social policy was the second most frequently mentioned issue, and in 19 elections (27 percent of the sample) voters were more likely to have social policy questions at the core of their vote instead of economic outcomes. Foreign policy and terrorism were the third most frequently mentioned issues, with most of these responses coming from elections in the United Kingdom, United States, Spain, and Israel in the middle of the decade or (to a much lesser extent) European elections focused on questions of EU relations. Smaller numbers of respondents provided generic/election specific responses or focused on corruption and crime and no other issue had an average salience above 5 percent, although these issues were important in a handful of elections. I combine those respondents who explicitly chose not to mention an issue into the generic issue category. Excluding them from the analysis does not change the conclusions.

(Table 2 about here)

Of course these averages miss differences across countries. Figure 1 graphs their distribution for each country (feel free to email me for the raw data in a legible form).

(Figure 1 about here)

[2] An additional advantage of this question is that it forces voters to identify the most important issue to them instead of giving them the option to say that many issues are important to them.

Data used in the multivariate analysis

The specific countries included in the analysis are listed in Table 3 (below). This data includes countries who were included in the second wave of the CSES, the first public release of the third wave in 2011, and then I have supplemented this data with data from elections which have not been publically released but whose aggregate data was obtained via personal communication with the survey directors. These last surveys are especially important because nearly all of them were held after the slowdown began.

(Table 3 about here)

The measures of economic grow and volatility were calculated from the IMF's World Economic Outlook database. I use the weighted average of growth from the year before the election and the year of the election to approximate the economic trends in the year before the election.[3] The homicide rate comes from the United Nations and measures the number of homicides per 100,000 people in a given year.[4] To capture data on terrorism, I initially measured the number of deaths due to terrorist attacks in the 4 years before the election (given the relatively long memories the public seems to have with these events) using data from the Global Terrorism Database.[5] However, the main difference in the sample seemed to be between those where terrorist attacks were really frequent and or deadly and those where there were none at all, and so I simply use a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if there were 50 or more deaths from terrorist events in the 4 years before the election and 0 otherwise.[6] Data on government spending comes from the ILO.[7] The measure of the developing world is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if the country is developing (from any region outside Western Europe, North America, or Oceana) and 0 if it is in an established democracy per Singer (2011). Finally, the globalization indicator is the KOF economic globalization flow index (http://globalization.kof.ethz.ch/).

Visualizing Some of the Relationships

One of the advantages of the supplemental materials section suggested by this edition's editors is the chance to prepare multiple visualizations of the raw data and to note which of the findings most clearly stand out in the raw data before controlling for other trends. I focus in the figures on the # of people mentioning economic outcomes because that is the main theoretical focus of the paper. I also include the bivariate line of best fit between the two variables.

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[3] Specifically, the weighted GDP growth measure for an election that happened in month M $=m/12*Growth_{t}+(12-m).12*Growth_{t-1}$

[4] http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=UNODC&f=tableCode%3A1

[5] http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/

[6] Using 25 deaths or 100 deaths as alternative cutoffs does not change the conclusion. I have also included in alternative specifications the measure used by Singer (2011) of involvement in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars which has similar results but I prefer this measure because it captures a larger sense of foreign policy crisis.

[7] http://www.ilo.org/dyn/sesame/ifpses.socialdbexp. For consistency, I used data from the IMF government financial statistics when multiple sources existed in the ILO repository, although the non-results reported below also occur if the OECD estimates are used.

Looking first at economic factors, the predicted negative relationship between economic growth and attention to the economy is visible in Figure 2 as is the positive relationship between economic volatility and the economy's salience (Figure 3). This relationship is especially clear if we focus exclusively on differences among developed countries over time (Figure 2a). Similarly, there is a clear difference in means between the most established democracies and the developing countries even if there is quite a bit of variance around that mean (Figure 4). Yet the negative relationships between homicide rates and the economy's importance or terrorism and the economy's importance that are documented in the article are results that are obtained only after controlling for the other variables in the analysis. Finally, the negative relationship between globalization and the economy's salience exists in the bivariate relationship.

(Figures 2-7 about here).

An extension of the analysis-Government approval 2007-2010

Taken together, the results in the article are consistent with the hypothesis that voters are likely to respond asymmetrically to the economy. When it is bad or unstable, people are more likely to consider it important. When it is good, other issues rise in importance even if the economy usually remains one of the important issues in the election. Other issues can also distract voters from economic performance as well, although the evidence for this proposition was less consistent than was the evidence for the economic performance indicators. Thus as the global economic slowdown affected some countries more than others, those that were hardest hit should be most likely to see the economy come to the forefront of the agenda.

What this analysis cannot show is that the asymmetric response to economic fluctuations documented in the empirical analysis translates into a shift in public opinion. Thus to further confirm the role of slow growth on citizen agendas during the recession, I look at trends in government support around the world. Specifically, I look at aggregate data compiled by The Gallup World Poll, a survey conducted roughly annually in over 150 countries around the world. While Gallup makes data from previous rounds of the survey available to subscribers, they make the aggregate marginal frequencies from the most recent surveys available on-line through their website.[8] Starting in 2008, I began compiling data on government approval and opinions about the state of economy as well as the month and year that the survey was in the field. I continued this data collection through 2010; the full release of 2011 data has not happened as of the time of writing and the available 2011 data does not include the dates of the survey-a necessary component to link popularity to economic indicators using the weighted average described above. The sample is then further limited by whether or not Gallup asked about government approval in the survey and also by whether there were sufficient observations to correct for autocorrelation in government approval.[9] Finally, I restrict the analysis to countries who scored a 5 or higher on the PolityIV democracy scale because of concerns about respondents' freedom

[8] https://worldview.gallup.com/.

[9] The substantive results are generally consistent if we include country years which had a gap of two years or more between surveys using the *force* command, although the variance in the estimates is greater.

to criticize the government in a survey setting.[10] The resulting sample contains data from 73 countries, encompassing 198 survey-years.

The dependent variable for this analysis is answers to the question "Do you approve or disapprove of the job performance of the leaders of this country?" The percentage of respondents who approved ranges from a low of 4 percent in the Ukraine in May 2009 to a high of 92 percent in Sri Lanka in June 2009 and Malawi in September 2009. In an average country-year roughly 42 percent of respondents approved of the government's leadership. With yearly observations and relative stability in presidential approval within administrations, I find evidence of autocorrelation within the government approval series.[11] Thus in the models that follow I model government approval as an AR(1) series using a GLS estimator.

The primary question of interest in this analysis is how government approval over the period of economic crisis has been shaped by economic fluctuations. I thus model government support as a function of the GDP growth rate, inflation rate, and unemployment rate in the 12 months prior to the election, using data from the IMF's World Economic Outlook database. Because economic variables are measured for the January-December period while surveys are conducted at various points throughout the year, I follow several exemplars (e.g. Powell and Whitten 1993, Pacek and Radcliff 1995, Remmer 2003, Singer forthcoming 2013) and use the weighted average of the previous two years' economic outcomes to approximate the trend in the previous 12 months before the survey.[12] After generating a baseline model of how government popularity responded to economic swings, I then test if the marginal impact of economic performance asymmetrically differs across economic contexts.

In addition to the basic economic variables, I have included a couple of control variables.[13] The first I control for the PolityIV score given each country-although the sample is restricted to democracies it is still possible that respondents in autocratic countries are less likely to criticize government officials. Finally I control for the logged number of months the leader has been in office at the time of the survey to account for honeymoon effects and the costs of ruling.[14]

The results in Table 4 confirm that, on average, government popularity in the 2007-2010 period is associated with economic outcomes. In particular, there is a positive correlation

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[10] Government approval is strongly (and negatively) associated with democracy scores in a global sample, and the correlation with economic indicators is much weaker for non-democratic leaders. These differences may reflect a different process of government approval in these contexts, but it might also reflect respondent concerns about making negative concerns about non-democratic leaders that make the data diverge from reality (e.g the Government of Tunisia enjoyed a 75% approval rating in the months before the Arab spring, according to the Gallup data).

[11] A Wooldridge test for autocorrelation in panel data yields a statistics of 3.004, which has a p-value of 0.08.

[12] Specifically, the weighted GDP growth measure for a survey that happened in month M $=m/12*Growth_t+(12-m).12*Growth_{t-1}$

[13] Unfortunately there is very little data on other forms of government performance; in some specifications of the model I have included the percentage of Gallup respondents who report being the victim of a crime in the last year but this variable does not approach significance in any specification of the model nor does its inclusion or exclusion change any of the results.

[14] Both of these variables are significant in specifications that do not correct for autocorrelation. Their exclusion does not substantially change the results.

between economic growth and government support while increases in unemployment and inflation both are associated with drops in government support. The average trend in government approval during this period is thus consistent with the most basic economic-based models: as the global economic slowdown has lingered in some countries, it has been a drag on government popularity while governments who weathered it better were more likely to remain popular.

(Table 4 about here)

Then in Table 5 I provide an initial rough test of the proposition that voters respond asymmetrically to the economy when it is good compared to when it is bad. To illustrate this possibility, I divide the sample into country-years where per capita GDP contracted and those where it expanded. This strategy reduces the variance on the independent variables, which should make it more difficult to find a consistent effect, but it provides a quick rough cut of the asymmetric economic responses hypothesis. Moreover, each of these subsamples still encompasses a wide range of variance in economic performance, as the shrinking economies range from a small contraction of -.007 percent in the year of the 2008 survey in Japan to the estimated -13.1 percent setback in the 12 months before the 2009 survey in Latvia. Similarly growing economies diverge from 0.06 percent growth in the 12 months preceding the January 2009 survey in Hungary to the estimated growth rates above 9 percent in prior to the polls conducted in Peru, Armenia, and Panama in 2008. Thus while the sample is truncated, there remains substantial variation in economic outcomes.

(Table 5 about here)

The results in the second column of Table 5 show that the relationship between economic performance and government support remains in the expected direction and significantly different from 0 among countries where the economy is shrinking. In contrast, the marginal effect of economic fluctuations is substantially smaller among countries where the economy is not shrinking-there is no evidence in this particular subsample that governments who oversee a lethargic growth are treated differently than are those who oversaw a very strong economy. These differences in the marginal effect of economic performance across the two subsamples are significant at the 0.10 level or better (Table 5, column 3).[15] More generally, there is no evidence that economic performance explains a significant portion of the variance in government approval in growing economies. There are likely subsamples of growing economies for which government popularity is driven by the economic situation, but for many countries other issues which are not included in the model are driving government support instead. Thus government approval during the economic recession is more strongly tied to economic outcomes when the economy is weak than when it is strong.

An alternative test frequently used in the literature on asymmetric voting is to separate the economic performance indicator into separate variables for positive and negative outcomes (e.g. Bloom and Price 1975, Clagget 1986, Nannestad and Paldam 1997). Thus in Table 6 I generate two variables for growth, one that takes the value of the growth rate if it was positive

[15] The last column of Table 5 compares the estimated difference between the slop coefficients in column 2 and 3 by estimating the test statistic $(\beta_2-\beta_3)/\sqrt{(var(\beta_2)+ var(\beta_3))}$

and 0 otherwise and then a separate variable that takes the value of growth if it was negative and 0 otherwise. If growth has a symmetric effect, then there should be no noticeable difference between the estimated slopes for the two variables while if the economy's effect is asymmetric then the slope for the negative growth variable should be larger than is the coefficient for positive growth periods. A similar pattern may also exist with respect to inflation and unemployment-for each variable I follow Nannestad and Paldam (1997) and divide the variable into years where the growth rate/inflation rate is above or below the sample mean.

(Table 6 about here)

The results in Table 6 are again consistent with the asymmetric response hypothesis. The coefficients for negative growth and high inflation have the expected signs and are significant at expected levels while the coefficients for positive growth and low inflation are not significant at conventional levels. Chi-square tests of equality between the "good" and "bad" economic coefficients are significantly larger than 0 at the 0.10 level. The evidence for an asymmetric response to unemployment is weaker: the slope for unemployment is larger when the unemployment rate is above the average than when it is below it, but in this model specification above average unemployment is not significantly associated with government approval. But these results are again consistent with voters being more likely to see the economy as salient when it is bad then when it is good.[16]

The results in Table 5 and Table 6 are based on a relatively simplistic economic-approval function. In alternative specifications, I have tested whether the economics-approval relationship in this sample was changed by variables previous work suggests affect attributions of government responsibility such as the effective number of parties, the share of seats held by the ruling party, and trade exposure/globalization. None of these variables provided to have a significant interactive effect in this sample. There is evidence, however, that that economic factors have a different effect in developing and developed ones, with inflation and unemployment having a more consistent effect on government support in Western Europe/North America while growth has the more consistent effect on developing ones. However the asymmetric relationships estimated above do not differ across levels of development.

In general, then, the results in Table 5 and Table 6 provide evidence that government approval in 2008-2010 has an asymmetric association with economic outcomes. The punishment for negative outcomes is larger and more consistent than is the reward for good ones. This is consistent with the results on issue priorities presented in the main body of the text.

[16] An alternative method for evaluating the claim that voters respond asymmetrically to the economy is to model the economy's effect as a curvilinear variable (e.g. include growth and its square and test whether the squared term as a negative sign, representing declining marginal effects as it gets bigger). I do not present these specifications here, but I find that there is a curvilinear effect for growth inasmuch as its marginal effect is larger for years with slow growth than those where growth was robust. The curvilinear effects from inflation and unemployment are in the expected direction but less consistent.

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Table 1: Most Important Issues, Greece 2009 Elections

Issue	Category	Percent
Economic Crisis	Economy	58.18
Unemployment	Economy	4.90
Cost of Life	Economy	1.08
Poverty	Economy	0.59
Total-Economy		*64.74*
Corruption	Corruption	9.89
Crime	Crime	0.39
Environment	Environment	0.39
Foreign Policy	Foreign Policy	0.69
Immigration	Immigration	0.29
Failure of the Government	Other Generic Issue	14.01
The Need for Change of the Government	Other Generic Issue	4.70
Total-Other Generic Issue		*18.71*
Public Administration	Social Policy	2.94
Pensions	Social Policy	1.27
Education	Social Policy	0.39
Health	Social Policy	0.29
Total-Social Policy		*4.90*

Table 2: Average Issue Agendas 2000-2011

Issue Concern	Percent Saying Was Most Important
Economic Performance/Policy	37.90
Social Policy	17.65
Foreign Policy/Defense/Terrorism	9.98
Corruption	6.98
Crime	5.15
Immigration	2.44
Environment	2.68
Taxes	2.60
Agriculture	0.74
Social Values	0.72
Ethnic Divisions in the Country	0.43
Other Specific Issues	2.15
Other Generic Issues/Election Outcomes	7.75
No Issue	2.17

Table 3: Countries Included in the Analysis

Country	Number of Elections
Albania	1
Australia	2
Belarus	1
Belgium	2
Brazil	3
Bulgaria	1
Canada	2
Chile	1
Croatia	1
Czech Republic	1
Denmark	1
Estonia	1
Finland	2
France	2
Germany	2
Greece	1
Hungary	1
Iceland	3
Ireland	1
Israel	2
Italy	1
Japan	2
Kyrgystan	1
Latvia	1
Mexico	3
Netherlands	2
New Zealand	2
Norway	2
Peru	1
Philippines	1
Poland	2
Portugal	3
Romania	1
Russia	1
Slovakia	1
Slovenia	1
South Korea	2
Spain	2
Sweden	2
Switzerland	2
United Kingdom	2
United States	3

Table 4: Economic Growth and Government Approval

	All Cases
GDP Growth	0.670**
	(0.249)
Inflation	-0.813**
	(0.296)
Unemployment	-0.656*
	(0.282)
Polity Score	-1.517
	(1.235)
Ln(months executive in office)	-1.288
	(1.003)
Constant	67.364***
	(12.594)
Number of Country-Years	198
Number of Countries	73
R^2(Within)	0.064
R^2(Between)	0.111
R^2(Overall)	0.094
Wald χ^2	17.18**
GLS Regression with an AR(1) process and random effects, Standard Errors in Parentheses °p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001	

Table 5: Economic Growth and Government Approval-Split Sample on Growth

	Those With Negative Growth	Those With Positive Growth	Difference in Coefficients between Positive and Negative Growth Cases
GDP Growth	1.461*	-0.145	1.606°
	(0.742)	(0.504)	(0.896)
Inflation	-1.940**	-0.541°	-1.399*
	(0.628)	(0.320)	(0.705)
Unemployment	-1.747***	-0.285	-1.463**
	(0.460)	(0.321)	(0.561)
Polity Score	-2.021	-1.449	-0.571
	(1.907)	(1.337)	(2.329)
Ln(months executive in office)	-0.152	-0.861	0.709
	(1.604)	(1.328)	(2.082)
Constant	81.909***	63.288***	18.621
	(20.290)	(13.668)	(24.465)
Number of Country-Years	65	133	
Number of Countries	44	67	
R^2(Within)	0.203	0.024	
R^2(Between)	0.412	0.052	
R^2(Overall)	0.382	0.031	
Wald χ^2	34.19***	4.74	
GLS Regression with an AR(1) process and random effects, Standard Errors in Parentheses °p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001			

Table 6: Government Approval with Each Performance Indicator Split by Low and High Values

	[1]	[2]	[3]
GDP Growth		0.684**	0.631*
		(0.247)	(0.248)
Positive Growth	0.057		
	(0.406)		
Negative Growth	1.528**		
	(0.516)		
Inflation	-0.692*		-0.816**
	(0.300)		(0.295)
Low Inflation		0.221	
		(0.681)	
High Inflation		-0.654*	
		(0.308)	
Unemployment	-0.573*	-0.601*	
	(0.285)	(0.284)	
Low Unemployment			0.166
			(0.566)
High Unemployment			-0.462
			(0.305)
Polity Score	-1.515	-1.309	-1.466
	(1.230)	(1.242)	(1.233)
Ln(Months in office)	-1.431	-1.426	-1.272
	(0.997)	(0.998)	(0.997)
Constant	68.750***	63.244***	62.523***
	(12.559)	(12.833)	(12.903)
χ^2 Test Good and Bad Economy Coefficients Equal	3.59°	2.82°	2.81°
R^2(Within)	0.089	0.092	0.084
R^2(Between)	0.125	0.107	0.119
R^2(Overall)	0.104	0.094	0.097
Wald χ^2	20.99**	20.12**	20.12**
GLS Regression with an AR(1) process and random effects, Standard Errors in Parentheses 198 Country years and 73 Countries, °p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001			

Figure 1: Issue Concerns by Election

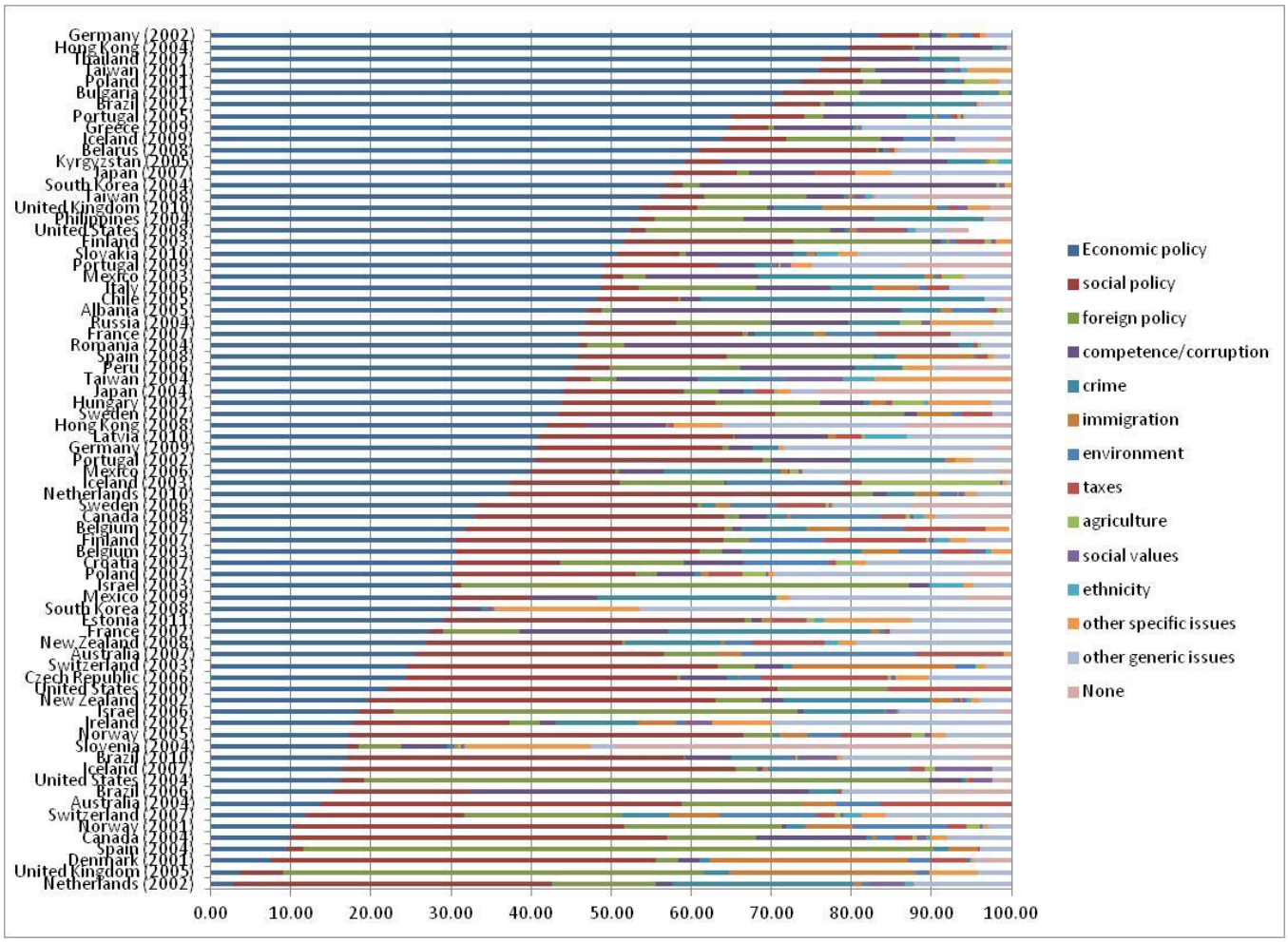

Figure 2: Growth and Focusing on Economics

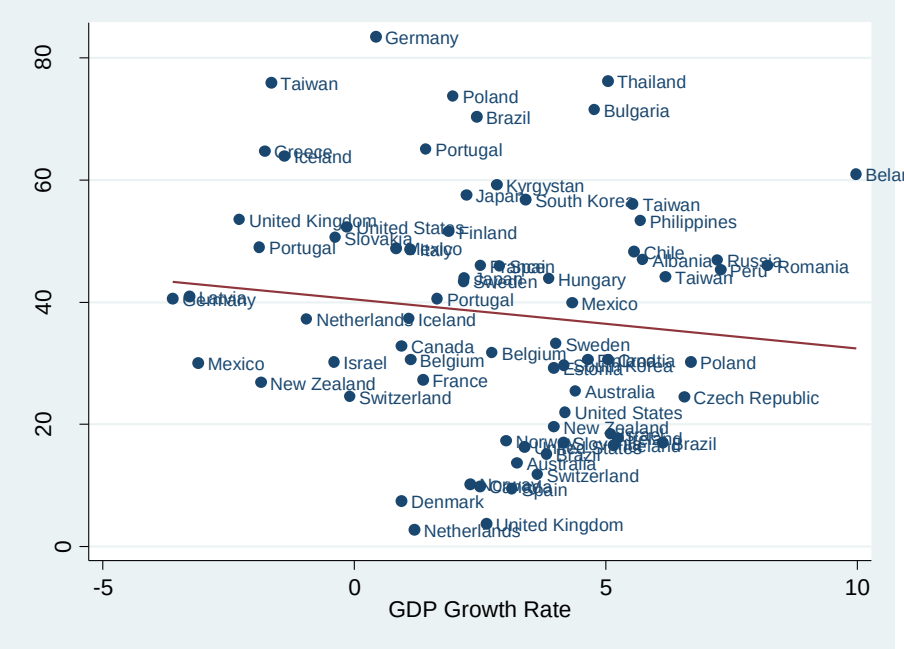

Figure 2a: Growth and Focusing on Economics, Developed Countries Only

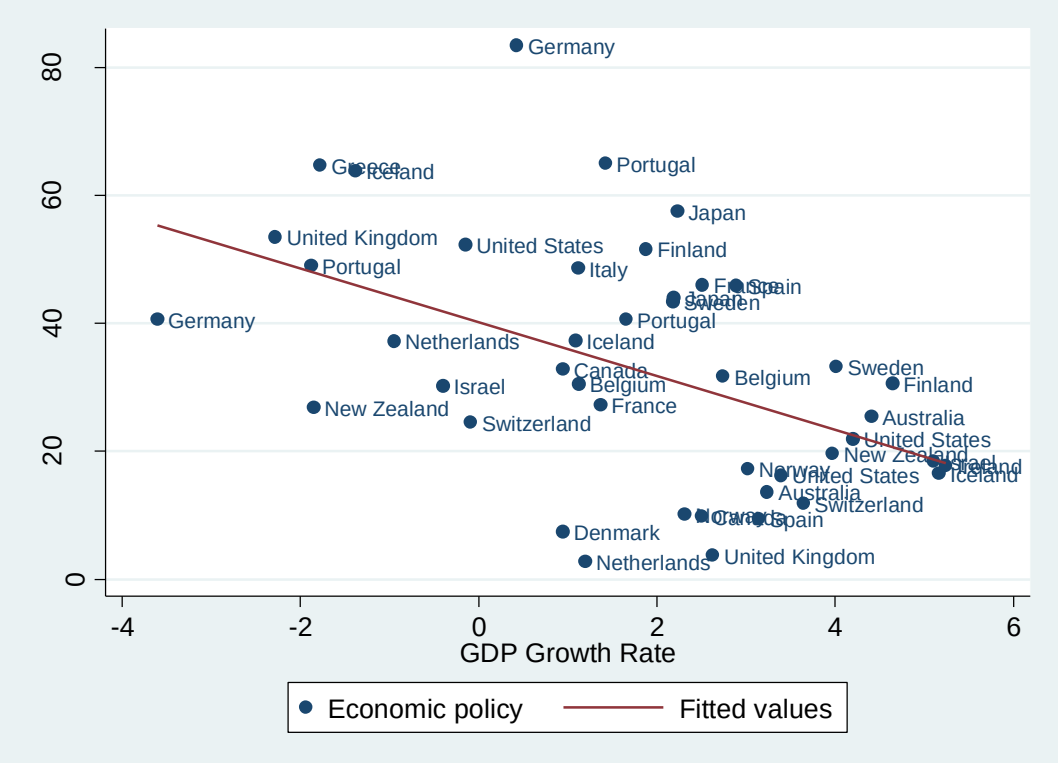

Figure 3: Volatility and Focusing on Economics

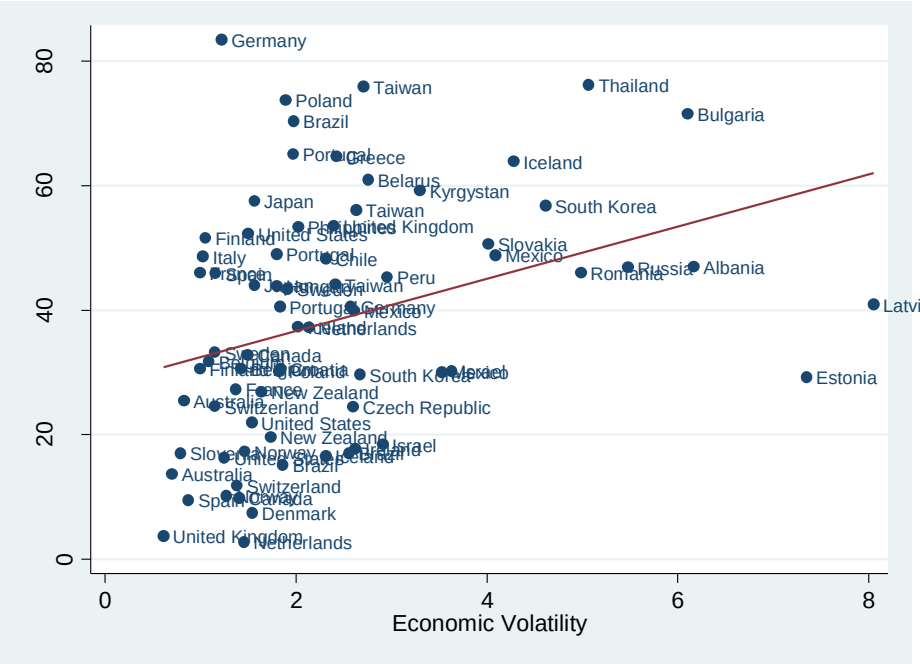

Figure 4: Development and Focusing on Economics

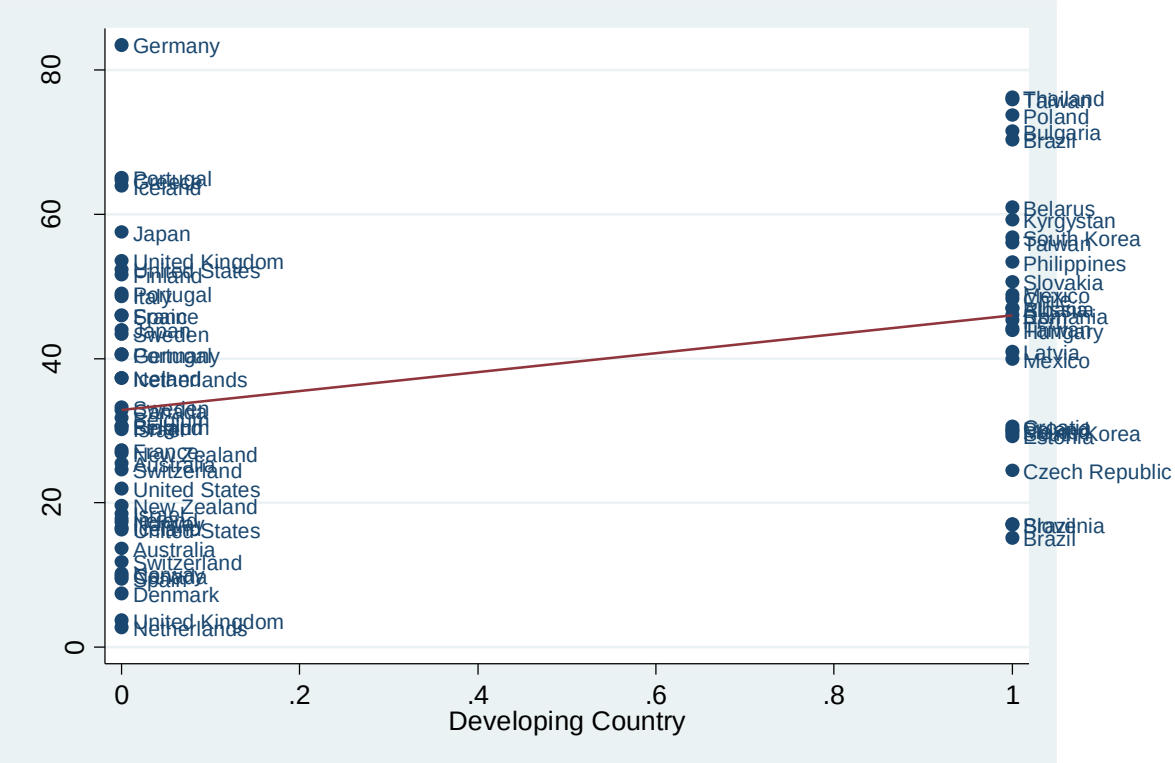

Figure 5: Homicide Rate and Focusing on Economics

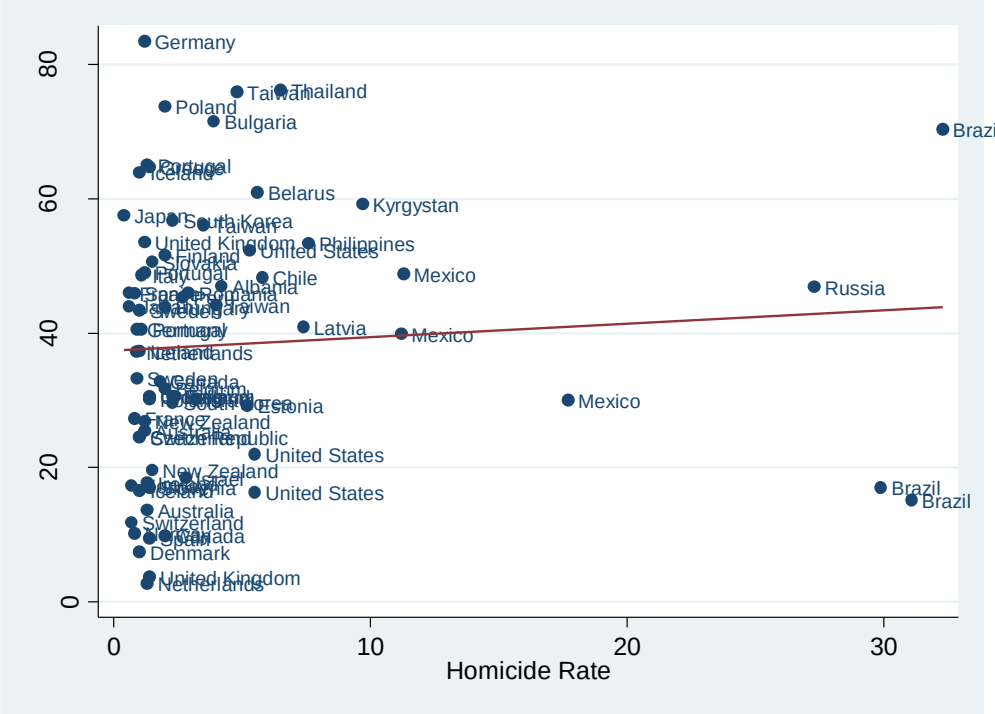

Figure 6: Terror Deaths and Focusing on Economics

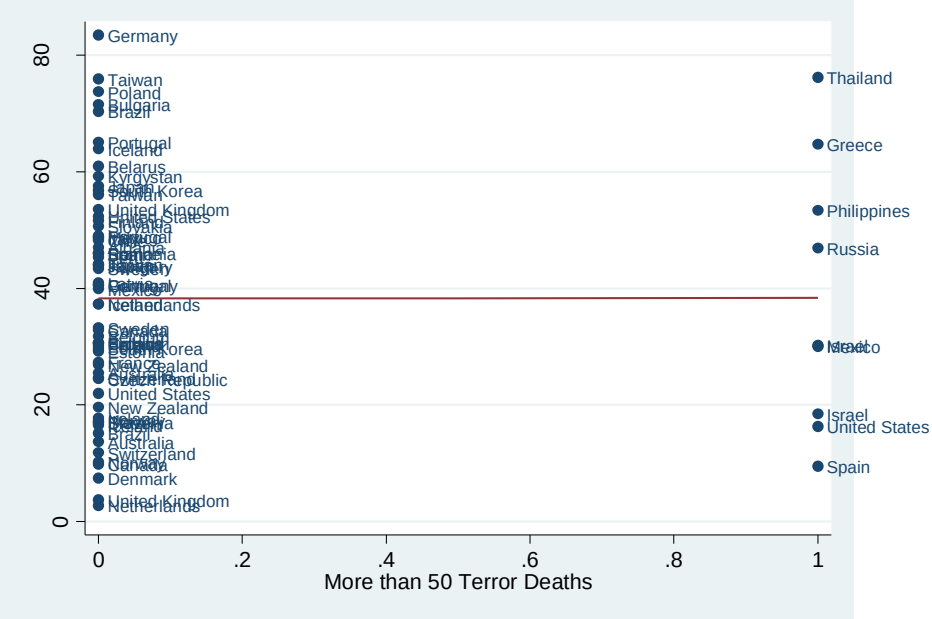
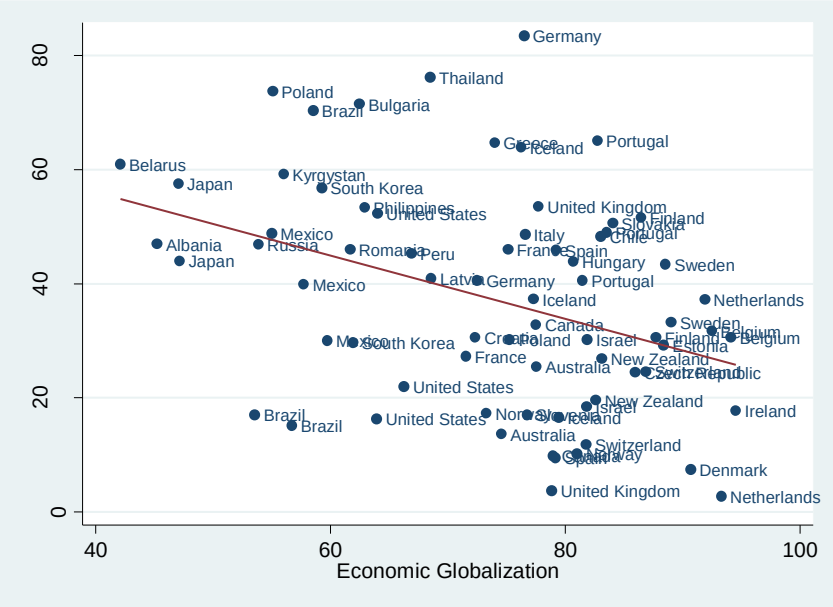
Figure 7: Globalization and Focusing on Economics