

## Research Question

- What distinguishes the language of democracies and non-democracies?

## Formality and Common Ground

Language helps to identify in-groups and out-groups in the international system by showing how leaders of countries strategically use more or less formal language. We propose that leaders of non-democracies use less formal language in public forums like the United Nations General Assembly general debate because they share less common ground both with each other and with democracies. Leaders use this forum to send signals about their priorities and intentions to international allies and enemies, to shore up alliances, and to build consensus.

## Institutional constraints on regimes

We propose that the differences in language are attributable to more than leader-specific features. We demonstrate that regime characteristics influence leaders' language, and that the level of formality in language signals the degree to which actors share common ground with one another. Previous research has established that linguistic formality indicates common ground amongst speakers, and that regime characteristics help explain interstate phenomena like conflict involvement and treaty commitments. We show that there are distinguishable differences between the language used by non-democracies and democracies, and between types of non-democratic regimes. We attribute the differences in formality to the institutional features that constrain leaders and regimes. These features include bureaucratic and advisory oversight, and institutional constraints that limit the power of the chief executive.

Citation	Regime Types	Description
Geddes, Wright & Franz, 2014 (Years: 1946-2010)	Party-based (party-based; party-military; party-personal; party-personal-military; oligarchy)	Control over policy, leadership selection, and the security apparatus is in the hands of a ruling party
	Military (indirect military; military; military-personal)	Control over policy, leadership selection, and the security apparatus is in the hands of the military
	Personalist (personal)	Control over policy, leadership selection, and the security apparatus is in the hands of the leader
Gastil Index (Years: 1972-2014)	Monarchical (monarchy)	Control over policy, leadership selection, and the security apparatus is in the hands of a royal family
	Free/Democracy (1-2.5)	Characterized by free and fair elections, competitive political parties, and minority participation and representation
	Partly Free/Anocracy (3-5)	Moderate protection of all political rights, or strong protection of some political rights and weaker protection of others.
	Not Free/Autocracy (5.5-7)	Restricted or no protection of political rights; severe government repression; civil war; lacking authoritative or functioning central government

## Hypotheses

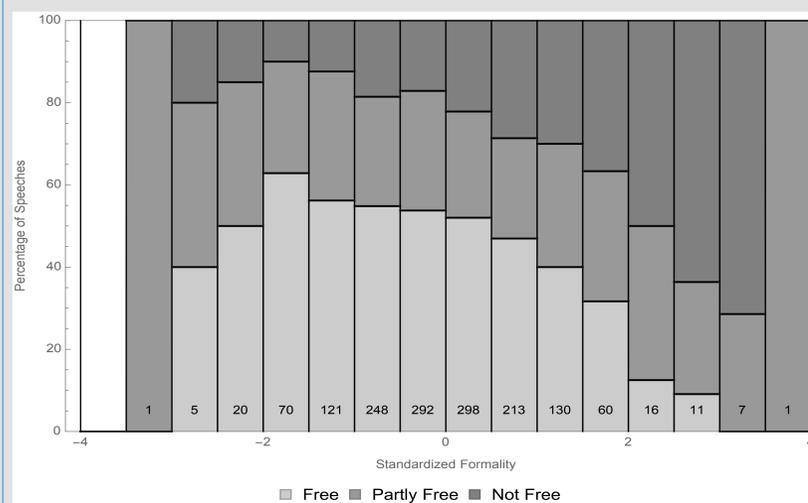
- Hypothesis 1: Countries with more institutional constraints (democracies) should use less formal language than those with fewer constraints (non-democracies).
- Hypothesis 2: Authoritarian regimes should use more formal language than democratic regimes.
- Hypothesis 2a: Personalist regimes and monarchies should use the most formal language.
- Hypothesis 2b: Military and party-based regimes should use less formal language than personalist and monarchical regimes, but more formal than democracies.

## Data

In this paper we introduce a new dataset of leaders' speeches before the General Assembly for the 59<sup>th</sup>-69<sup>th</sup> UNGA sessions, using semantic analysis to evaluate the differences between authoritarian and democratic leaders' speeches.

- Corpus: United Nations General Assembly general debate speeches from 2004-2013 (N=1524)
- Regime Type: Gastil Index (Freedom House)
- Authoritarian Regimes: Geddes, Wright & Frantz (2014)
- Leader traits: Goemans, et al. (2009)

## Percentage of Speeches by Regime Type over Formality



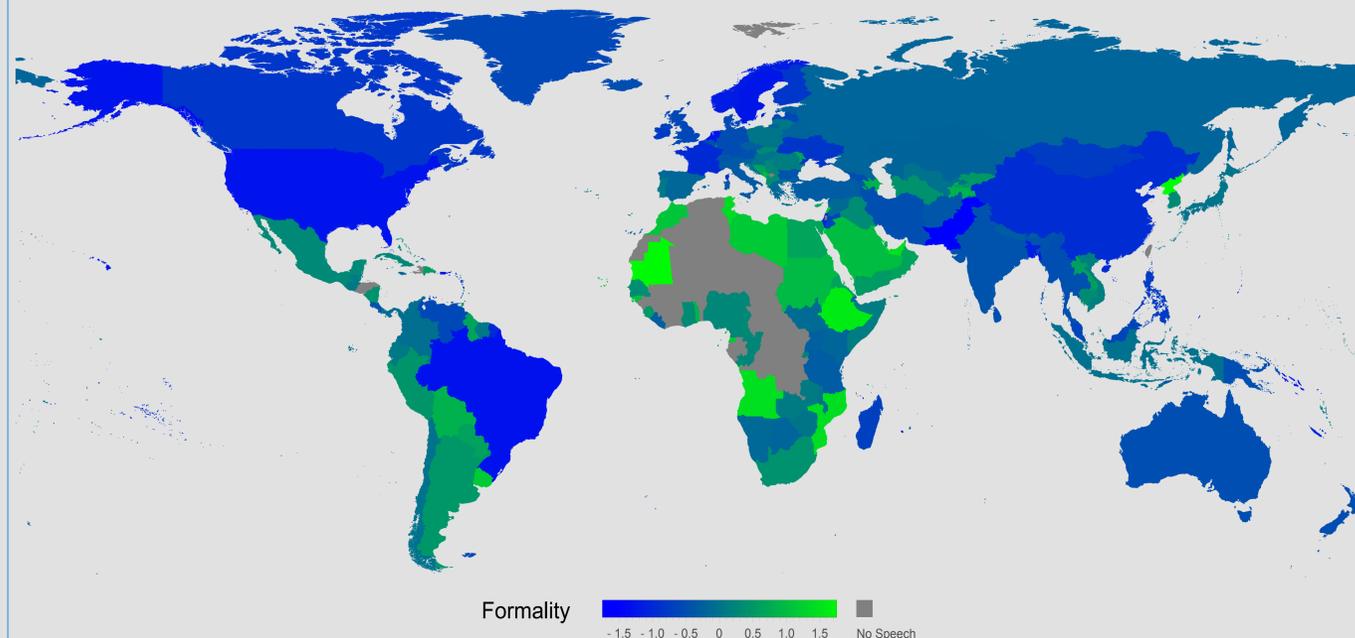
## Key Findings

- More institutionalized regimes use less formal language
- Democracies generally use less formal language than do non-democracies
- Military regimes are the least formal overall, and monarchies the most formal.
- Party-based and personalist regmies have very similar formality levels.

## Discussion

We find that more institutionalized regimes use less formal language, likely because they common ground with other countries (democracies) in the international system. Because non-democracies are a varied group (personalist, party, military, monarchy), they share little in common ground with each other. Non-democracies may also be less interested in appealing to a broad audience, a pursuit associated with less formal language and which democracies are also more apt to embrace. This work contributes uniquely to our understanding of the linguistic features of political regimes and shows that regime-level characteristics, like institutional constraints, influence how leaders speak. These findings can help explain phenomena like the emergence of demise of alliances, the emergence of new alignments, and the onset of democratization or democratic backsliding.

## Distribution of Formality in the World



## Summary Statistics for Principal Components

		Military	Monarchy	Personal	Party	Democracy	Overall
Formality	Mean	-0.00814	0.310	0.211	0.225	0.131	0.166
	S.D.	(0.145)	(0.189)	(0.169)	(0.205)	(0.177)	(0.191)
Expository	Mean	1.129	0.993	1.039	0.961	0.904	0.938
	S.D.	(0.319)	(0.253)	(0.354)	(0.276)	(0.318)	(0.314)
Syntax Complexity	Mean	-0.111	0.976	0.537	0.576	0.250	0.380
	S.D.	(0.379)	(0.538)	(0.505)	(0.530)	(0.533)	(0.568)
Word Abstractness	Mean	0.247	-0.133	0.312	0.238	0.436	0.347
	S.D.	(0.242)	(0.355)	(0.442)	(0.495)	(0.457)	(0.477)
Referential Cohesion	Mean	-0.943	-0.133	-0.632	-0.571	-0.818	-0.713
	S.D.	(0.492)	(0.508)	(0.518)	(0.568)	(0.479)	(0.533)
Deep Cohesion	Mean	-0.363	-0.154	-0.203	-0.0797	-0.116	-0.124
	S.D.	(0.367)	(0.404)	(0.438)	(0.487)	(0.443)	(0.450)

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