

README – Dataset and Methodology Description

Project Title

Cracks in the System: A Democratic Inoculation Intervention that Enhances Recognition of Authoritarian Weaknesses

Study Overview

This dataset originates from a preregistered online survey experiment conducted in Hungary examining whether brief, narrative-based democratic inoculation interventions can influence how citizens interpret authoritarian rhetoric and recognize early signs of authoritarian regime instability.

The study compared two intervention conditions:

1. **Gradual Build-Up condition:** emphasizing the slow and incremental erosion of democratic institutions.
2. **Cracks condition:** emphasizing early signs of authoritarian weakening and regime fragility.

These were compared to a non-political **Control condition**.

The study investigated effects on:

- agreement with authoritarian rhetoric,
- perceived authoritarian tone,
- concern about authoritarianism,
- moral outrage,
- perceived democratic threat,
- recognition of early regime-instability signals,
- reactions to a proposed restrictive Hungarian media-and-NGO law.

The study was preregistered on OSF:

<https://osf.io/h9dnm/overview>

Data Collection

Data were collected online in Hungary through a professional survey company. Participants were adults (18+) recruited to approximate the national distribution of:

- gender,
- age,
- education,
- settlement type

among regular internet users in Hungary.

Participants provided informed consent and were randomly assigned to one of the three experimental conditions. All outcome measures were administered immediately after the intervention during the same session.

Sample

The final analytic sample consisted of **1,175 participants** after applying preregistered exclusion criteria:

- failed attention checks,
- duplicate responses,
- extreme completion times (± 3 SD from the mean).

Experimental Conditions

0 = Control condition

Participants completed a non-political reading and reflection task about constructive competition and self-development.

1 = Cracks condition

Participants read historically grounded narratives and expert commentaries highlighting early signs of authoritarian weakening (e.g., elite defection, propaganda inconsistency, protest coordination).

2 = Gradual Build-Up condition

Participants read narratives and expert commentaries illustrating how authoritarian systems consolidate power gradually through incremental institutional erosion and normalization.

All intervention conditions included a self-persuasion (“saying-is-believing”) writing exercise in which participants explained the core message to a younger person.

Condition Variable

The shared raw dataset does **not** contain the finalized experimental condition variable (cond). The condition variable was created during data processing using page-submit timing indicators.

The variable can be reconstructed using the following R code:

```
d <- d %>%
  mutate(
    cond = case_when(
      cont_time_1_Page_Submit > 0 ~ "0", # control
      rep_time_1_Page_Submit > 0 ~ "1", # treatment cracks
      kiep_time_2_Page_Submit > 0 ~ "2", # treatment build-up
      TRUE ~ "other" # participant exited early
    )
  )
```

Condition labels:

- "0" = Control
- "1" = Cracks intervention
- "2" = Gradual Build-Up intervention
- "other" = participant did not complete condition exposure

Measures

Primary Outcomes

Participants evaluated authoritarian-style political statements on:

- agreement,
- perceived authoritarian tone,
- concern about authoritarianism,
- moral outrage,
- perceived democratic threat.

The study also included a **Cracks Recognition Index**, measuring recognition of signals of authoritarian instability.

Secondary Outcomes

Participants evaluated:

- agreement with a proposed restrictive Hungarian media-and-NGO law,
- emotional reactions toward the government proposing the law,
- emotional reactions toward civil-society organizations and independent media.

Moderators

The dataset also includes measures of:

- partisanship,
- populist attitudes,
- cognitive reflection,
- demographic variables.

Detailed variable names, labels, coding schemes, and response scales are documented in the accompanying **codebook file**.

Data Processing and Analysis

All preregistered primary and secondary analyses were completed using OLS regression models with Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons. Robustness analyses controlled for demographic covariates where necessary.

Exploratory moderation analyses tested interactions with:

- partisanship,
- populist attitudes,
- cognitive reflection.

The dataset has been cleaned and documented for repository sharing and research dissemination.

Associated Manuscript

The accompanying manuscript provides detailed theoretical background, intervention materials, measures, hypotheses, and statistical analyses:

“Cracks in the System: A Democratic Inoculation Intervention that Enhances Recognition of Authoritarian Weaknesses”