Pocketbook Protests: Explaining the Worldwide Emergence of Pro-democracy Protests

Dawn Brancati, Washington University

Abstract:

Why do pro-democracy protests emerge in some countries at certain times and not others? Pro-democracy protests, I argue, are more likely to arise when the economy is not doing well and when people blame the government for the poor state of the economy, than when it is performing well, or when people do not blame the government for the economy. When the economy is performing well, people are more likely to brush aside democratic shortcomings, to see less of a need for democracy, and to see certain undemocratic measures as necessary to keep the incumbent government in power. My argument is supported by a statistical analysis of pro-democracy protests in 158 countries between 2006-2011, which shows that not only is the economy an important factor explaining the emergence of these protests, but that factors commonly thought to affect pro-democracy protests, including electoral fraud, cell phones and the internet, are not.