

Political Fatigue Syndrome and The Demand for Strong Leaders in International Politics

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ABSTRACT: This study defines Political Fatigue as a state of societal exhaustion and disenchantment due to the perception that political institutions have once again failed in their delivery of effective governance or fulfillment of long-term pledges. It delivers its analysis within theoretical constructs on how 'fatigue publics' characterized by emotional withdrawal from politics because they no longer believe in efficacy, switch towards an authoritative figure who gives quick responses with firmness to complex global issues. This leadership is analyzed concerning its capability both for reframing problems through crisis articulation and commanding legitimacy while exposing the danger inherent when authority becomes instrumentalized sustaining power under conditions where trust at a systemic level is collapsing. The paper contextualizes the Public Financial Sector (PFS) within contemporary global uncertainties, specifically in a post-pandemic world, to critically comprehend a cyclical dynamic between governance failure and psychological yearning for order in international relations. This makes it possible to understand better the perpetual swing of international political pathology that moves from anarchy back toward rules whenever there is governance failure.

KEYWORDS: Political Fatigue Syndrome, Strong Leadership, International Politics, Governance Failure, Political Legitimacy, Crisis Management, Public Disillusionment

1. INTRODUCTION

Political Fatigue Syndrome (PFS) emerges as a framework for understanding the shifting dynamics of leadership in international relations, particularly in the context of rising discontent with traditional political models and institutions. This syndrome reflects a growing crisis of confidence among the public, resulting from a perceived inability of political actors to effectively address pressing challenges. Such fatigue manifests as emotional exhaustion and disconnection from political engagement, prompting the electorate to seek decisive leaders who promise immediate action in the face of uncertainty (Sachs et al., 2022).

The advent of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified these public sentiments, illustrating how failures in governance can lead to calls for strong leadership. Public health crises have highlighted the critical need for credible leadership that addresses immediate issues and fosters trust in public institutions (Uyheng et al., 2024). The demand for leaders who can command legitimacy and leverage their authority to enact rapid responses reflects a broader societal desire for stabilizing figures during turbulent times (Uyheng et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the landscape of international politics demonstrates that strong leaders may emerge as key agents of stability when faced with a backdrop of failure and disillusionment with existing powers. Credibility plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, with leaders facing diminished legitimacy due to past inaction ultimately becoming ineffective in influencing foreign policy (Goldsmith & Horiuchi, 2009). This necessitates a re-evaluation of the social contract between leaders and the public, further underscoring the need for leaders who can decisively navigate complexities inherent in international relations.

In examining historical precedents and contemporary examples, it becomes evident that the call for strong, decisive leadership is not a novel development but rather a recurring theme amidst political turmoil. The reactions to crises frequently reveal an inclination towards leaders who promise not only stability but also a viable path forward in the global sphere. Thus, PFS serves as a crucial lens through which one can understand the evolving landscape of authority and influence in international politics (Masciulli, 2011).

Political Fatigue Syndrome encapsulates contemporary disillusionment with political leadership and the resulting demand for authoritative figures who can navigate crises with effectiveness and decisiveness. The implications of this phenomenon extend beyond national borders, shaping international relations and influencing how governments and organizations engage with the global community.

2. PURPOSE

Political Fatigue Syndrome (PFS), a phenomenon characterized by the human tendency to seek new solutions to public governance after a political system has failed to deliver effective governance for an extended period, is increasingly prevalent both in established and emerging democracies. Although the lingering effects and repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic have created a rigorous demand for strong leadership in various political systems worldwide, the impact of PFS on strong-leadership preferences in international relations remains significantly understudied. Insight into the relationship between PFS and the demand for strong leadership can help leaders navigate the political terrain more adeptly in an increasingly uncertain environment, as well as yield a broader understanding of the political dynamics shaping the contemporary international landscape.

The current health crisis has heightened an awareness of the challenges faced by political systems and the remedies adopted to address these challenges, which is encouraging the establishment of an emerging narrative surrounding the depletion of the political capital necessary for effective governance. The questions surrounding the political state of various countries and governing bodies have come into sharp relief, elucidating the contours of the components involved. Acquiescence to the call for strong leadership in international politics involves a dissection of the concept of political fatigue in governance more generally, as the factors that contribute to political fatigue also directly shape the demand for strong leadership. A considerable hiatus necessitated by the pressing political situation has confined the discourse on political fatigue up to the contemporary juncture. Attention thus needs to return to the re-examination of political fatigue literature to perceive how palliative measures are being addressed in international politics and governing bodies.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a qualitative literature review and conceptual analysis to examine the interplay between Political Fatigue Syndrome (PFS) and leadership preferences. The research methodology is structured around the following pillars:

- **Theoretical Framework:** The study utilizes the conceptual parameters of Political Fatigue Syndrome (Kis, 2018) to analyze societal shifts in political efficacy and institutional trust.
- **Source Selection:** A comprehensive review of contemporary political science literature, peer-reviewed journals, and international relations theories (2018–2023) was conducted, focusing on sources that address populist dynamics, autocratic tendencies, and crisis management (e.g., Moscatelli et al., 2023; Sprong et al., 2019; Schumann, 2018).
- **Dimensions of Analysis:** The "strong leadership" construct is evaluated through three key dimensions: **decisive decision-making** under uncertainty, **agenda-setting** through crisis-framing, and the **legitimacy-building** processes within "fatigue publics."
- **Comparative Approach:** The methodology involves a comparative discussion of state-centered governance modes in both democratic and autocratic contexts to illustrate how fatigue transcends specific political systems and influences the global demand for authoritative rule.

By synthesizing these theoretical perspectives, the study aims to provide a diagnostic overview of how political exhaustion catalyzes the transition from democratic participation to a preference for centralized authority.

4. THE PHENOMENON OF POLITICAL FATIGUE

Political fatigue represents a gradual decline of interest in the political system characterized by a sense of disillusionment, alienation, and avoidance. This phenomenon emerges when governance becomes stagnant, institutions operate below expectations, and leaders communicate inadequately with the public. Under these conditions, fatigue publics exert pressure on decision-makers to exercise authority in a more pronounced manner, favoring leaders who possess the capability to do so. History illustrates that across different governance structures and international contexts, elevated demand for strong leadership emerges in periods of political fatigue.

Footnote 1 Political Fatigue Syndrome is characterized by increasing demands for authority (demand for strong leadership) and the perception of weakened legitimacy (depleted legitimacy). Interest in politics gradually declines along with political efficacy (Schumann, 2018) ; (Kis, 2018).

4.1. Theoretical Foundations of Fatigue in Governance

Modern governance systems rely on the maintenance of active political societal participation, the requisites of which depend largely on the characteristics of the political system in question. The demand for strong leaders in political systems of various kinds increases as citizens endure repetitive governance issues and public policy failures. Since people naturally aspire to increased societal stability, these demands can arise even in mature democracies with high levels of political and civil rights. During such periods, leaders possessing general characteristics of a strong leader—preferably to be precise and measures—may increase their popularity since highly authoritative individuals appear best equipped to deal with chronic policy failures.

Indeed, Political Fatigue Syndrome (PFS) is a relatively new phenomenon of particular relevance to the contemporary dynamics of international governance and leadership. Political fatigue represents a state of broader societal exhaustion regarding governance, administrative or representative institutions, public discourses, and system maintenance activities. Under circumstances of political

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fatigue, the widely observed willingness of citizens to voice demands for stronger leaders in international relations and politics and public governance becomes topical. Political fatigue may emerge after the perceived resolution of enduring public discontent over governance outcomes or in the temporarily favourable pace of governance-parented and governance-perceived crises and problems—clouding expectations of post-crisis governance. Under fatigue situations, common demands in favour of governing representatives and offices with tighter, briefer, and more committed international and inter-administrative decision-making start surfacing, generating concerns about the democratic dignity of popular participation and representative systems.

4.2. Psychological and Social Drivers of Demand for Strong Leadership

Political decision-making is often imbued with great complexity and uncertainty. The consequences of political choices frequently go far beyond one election cycle or even an entire political mandate. Long-term effects are common, when choices made today can impact lives in future decades or even centuries. Hence, political fatigue is unlikely to be self-sustaining from within formal political systems. However, political fatigue appears to have more durable effects on governance globally than on leadership within the international system. The demand for leaders who, once elected, are perceived as having the authority to make policy choices on behalf of the governed—and to remain free from burdensome overrides of accountability or cumbersome consultative processes—has prevailed in international politics in response to prevailing political fatigue.

Feeling overwhelmed and exhausted by life's demands is a stressor that can impact attention resources and motivation to address issues or challenges. In political life, political decision-making is based on two fundamental cognitive processes—that is, attention to goals and motivation to engage actions. The choice of how to govern is arguably one of the most complex decisions in human systems. Every political choice at higher levels of governance requires various facts for analysis; consideration of long-term societal consequences; insight into where shifted political choices would be required in response; and constant situational awareness of myriad local political conditions that vary widely within political units—yet choices are often required on shifting temporal cycles of daily, weekly, or monthly. Thus, governance becomes far more complex than “just make a decision,” even though such calls are often publicly maintained. These circumstances provide the foundations for an exploring feeling of political fatigue to arise that, if prolonged, can eventually escalate into the far less frequent state of political fatigue syndrome.

Factors such as uncertainty, insecurity, crisis, threat, change, fragmentation, and disintegration can lead to a situational rise in political fatigue syndrome and a strong demand for a focused concentration in governance (Moscatelli et al., 2023). These drivers can further elevate the demand for strong leadership, as they embrace substantial economic preconditions to societal functionality and social contract foundations at the global level.

4.3. Historical Patterns in International Politics

Political fatigue directly impacts public sentiment toward governance, political regimes, and the demand for leadership styles in all political systems. The emergence of political fatigue is evident from the international trends of rising support for authoritarian leaders after a period of democratic transition; democracy thus cannot be sustained without public political interest and engagement. In the late 2020s, major democracies worldwide still remain under a quasi-democratic siege, during which their public express increasing political frustration. For instance, the Prague Spring was a period of political liberalization in Czechoslovakia in 1968 lasted only 8 months. The Arab Spring uprisings for drinking of political freedom and civil rights started in 2010 in many North African and Arab countries never yields democratic transition, many of these countries have returned to a more repressive regime than prior to the uprisings. Political fatigue phenomenon occurs for both short terms and long terms, it not only influences political system choice but also impacts political leader acceptable styles of governance. Independently of democracies or autocracies, the demand for strong political leader may decline, during Political Fatigue Syndrome (Kis, 2018).

5. STRONG LEADERSHIP AS A RESPONSE MECHANISM

The demand for strong leadership under Political Fatigue Syndrome manifests through three interrelated dimensions—decisiveness, coercive authority, and an emphasis on crisis framing. First, political fatigue elevates demand for leaders perceived as decisive, able to circumvent dysfunctional routines and mitigate crisis. Second, fatigue publics favor leaders willing to deploy coercive authority against dissenters; force is viewed as legitimate to restore order under systemic fatigue. Third, fatigue energizes the framing of governance challenges as crises requiring exceptional measures; crisis discourse stimulates yearning for strong leadership and signifies institutional deterioration (Alsubaie, 2019).

Strong leadership opens strategic opportunities—accelerating decision-making, reinforcing order, and mobilizing resources for pro-elite policies. However, it is also fraught with risk. Fatigue decreases the legitimacy of radical change; leaders who govern exclusively through strong instruments invite challenges and surveillance; and a focus on decisiveness may exacerbate rather than mitigate crises. The preference for strong leadership is thus shaped by a series of trade-offs: strong measures are attractive yet hazardous, and a positional–situational hybridity determines the expected political return. Normative concerns arise at the level of democratic theory. Strong leaders, moreover, must contend with significant drawbacks. Under pressure to govern decisively, downsizing, public spending cuts, and fiscal squeezing are frequently prioritized, raising further questions about the appeal of strong leadership (Moscatelli et al., 2023).

5.1. Definitions and Dimensions of Strong Leadership

The concept of strong leadership occupies a special strategic niche in contemporary governance systems. During periods of Political Fatigue Syndrome, fatigue publics typically focus on three dimensions of strong leadership: decisiveness, coercive authority, and crisis framing. A leader perceived as decisive can expedite the political process and address fatigue-induced bottlenecks. A leader viewed as exercising coercive authority can bypass paralysis and mitigate the stifling effects of fatigue. A leader capable of framing a situation as a crisis heightens public urgency and expedites the resolution of governance quandaries. These dimensions of strong leadership remain salient across democratic and non-democratic systems. Individuals of strongly preferred leaders commonly differ in their desired approach to governance, yielding distinct sets of expected behaviours and strategic advantages, risks, and trade-offs. Strong leadership confers a range of strategic advantages and entails specific risks. Decisive, authoritative, and crisis-propelling strategies may enhance system stability in a fatiguing context. However, exerting strong leadership simultaneously raises concerns over the protection of rights, due process, and accountability. The greater the perceived alignment of a leader with the public and the more procedurally sound the corrective measures undertaken, the more tolerable the trade-off between stability and these normative considerations becomes (Alsubaie, 2019).

Strong leadership interacts with fundamental considerations such as governance, rights, accountability, and legitimacy. Accordingly, appropriate and inappropriate responses to Political Fatigue Syndrome development can exert a profound influence on the medium- and long-term viability of democratic governance and popular trust (Cox Han, 2008).

5.2. Strategic Advantages and Risks

Strong leadership offers strategic advantages but also entails significant risks, posing a dilemma for leaders, regimes, and international order. Political fatigue can elevate the demand for leadership surpassing the conventional limits implied by governance systems (Alsubaie, 2019). Three dimensions of strong leadership—decisiveness, coercive authority, and crisis-framing—help clarify not only its forms but also its advantages, management, restrictions, and legitimacy. Decisive leadership provides quick recovery from crises, while coercive authority addresses safety issues or enforces repeated restrictions. Crisis-framing terms extreme times and enhances public legitimacy in intrusion. However, excessive or long-term use can elicit counter-responses. Diminished interest undercuts the preferred demand for leader-initiated authority, and competing demands emerge among strong-coercive, strong-decide, and weak leader agendas.

5.3. Normative Considerations and Democratic Implications

The legitimacy of strong leadership in democracies has been assumed and debated, but whether the demand for strong leadership under fatigue relates to leaders' legitimacy and the robustness of democratic norms merits examination. Strong leadership has historically been associated with a lack of legitimacy, such as authoritarianism and dictatorship, or at least a legitimacy deficit rooted in restrictions on citizens' liberties and participation (Blühdorn, 2019). Democratic, participatory systems cannot fully close the gap without reverting to a status contrary to the supposed benefits. At the same time, liberating strong leadership from a legitimacy viewpoint seems to encourage, rather than curtail, the demand—contrary to democratic ideals. Hence, investigating the specific link between legitimacy and the demand for strong leadership and its associated damage or reinforcement to democratic norms proves necessary. Public trust in institutions and leaders constitutes another related consideration. Under Political Fatigue Syndrome, both institutions and conventional leaders score poorly because they fail to address pressing problems and lose the confidence of citizens across a wide spectrum of locations and systems (Kis, 2018).

Legitimacy and institutional faith therefore emerge as central themes within the prospect of strong leadership sustaining rather than undermining fundamental democratic principles. Under the pressure of Fatigue, the intent among citizens becomes more focused on desperately expediting resolution of problems, alongside delegating more considerable executive responsibility, than sustaining democratic procedures for their own sake.

6. EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE AND CASE STUDIES

The demand for strong leaders in times of political fatigue is examined with both quantitative and qualitative evidence. A quantitative analysis of public opinion, conducted across twenty-eight countries and using survey data from the past two decades, shows a significant increase in the desire for strong leadership when political fatigue is perceived. The analysis reveals that this relationship holds even after controlling for additional economic and political factors. A qualitative review of recent political regimes in thirteen diverse countries further underscores the impact of political fatigue on leadership preferences. Routine political discourse during periods of marked fatigue indicates that many fatigued publics explicitly call for strong leadership to restore social order, signalling awareness of underlying mechanisms. These cases illustrate not only the prevalence of political fatigue in contemporary democracies but also its critical influence on leadership demand. International comparisons highlight both commonalities and differences across regimes and cultures, suggesting that specific electoral and political-institutional settings can shape the nature and manifestation of fatigue and the accompanying demand for strong leaders (Jørgensen et al., 2022) ; (Sprong et al., 2019).

6.1. Quantitative Analyses of Public Opinion and Leadership Preference

Political fatigue, an increasingly relevant phenomenon in both democratic and authoritarian contexts, denotes the exhaustion of the electorate with existing political systems and leaders. As citizens contend with perceived ineffectiveness in electoral processes, their preferences shift towards seeking strong leaders who promise decisiveness and stability. This shift, rooted in public opinion and reflective of broader societal sentiments, is pronounced, especially during periods of crises and dissatisfaction.

Political Fatigue and Leadership Demand

A significant body of research indicates that during times of political fatigue, characterized by dissatisfaction and cynicism towards the political system, there is a corresponding increase in the demand for strong leadership both domestically and internationally. Historical trends illustrate that periods of heightened public discontent are closely aligned with an increased expectation for decisive leaders who can circumvent legislative bottlenecks and deliver immediate results (Amat et al., 2020). This has been particularly evident during major crises such as economic downturns, health emergencies, or geopolitical conflicts, where leaders who appear capable of making swift and unilateral decisions are often favored (Margiansyah, 2022).

Longitudinal studies reinforce that dissatisfaction with existing political frameworks compels populations to prioritize the need for strong personalities in leadership roles. For instance, it has been observed that public opinion reflects a growing preference for authoritarian measures during crises, as citizens express a willingness to sacrifice democratic principles for perceived stability and order (Amat et al., 2020; Margiansyah, 2022). This pattern suggests that as political fatigue sets in, the electorate becomes increasingly receptive to narratives that promote strong leadership as a remedy for their discontent.

Strong Domestic Vs. International Leadership

Interestingly, the dynamics of political fatigue also underscore the multifaceted nature of leadership preferences, as evidenced by how domestic political pressures can influence the public's expectations regarding international leadership. Citizens often perceive that strong domestic leadership can alleviate systemic pressures and instability by enhancing a nation's standing on the global stage (Alter & Meunier, 2009). That is, when a nation projects strong leadership internationally, it can also foster a sense of internal unity and purpose, thus serving to mitigate public fatigue.

A historical perspective highlights that prominent world leaders often rise to prominence not merely during periods of domestic political stability but in contexts where substantial political fatigue exists (Margiansyah, 2022). Leaders who have gained significant international recognition often possess the ability to navigate and leverage public sentiment towards crises, using it as a platform to consolidate their power. Archival analyses suggest that these public perceptions are intricately linked to national character and leadership style, where traits such as decisiveness and visibility correlate with strong leadership expectations (Wang & Tao, 2021).

Theoretical Implications and Case Studies

The interplay between political fatigue and leadership preferences can be thoughtfully analyzed through various case studies. For example, the post-World War II era demonstrated a global shift towards favoring strong leaders, as nations emerged from turmoil seeking stability through unified governance structures. The continuity of this trend can be observed in contemporary politics where the demand for leadership that promises resilience against global crises—such as pandemics or economic volatility—is increasingly vocal (Margiansyah, 2022; , Amat et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the qualitative assessment of leaders' discourses reveals how the rhetoric surrounding leadership has evolved in conjunction with public expectations. Textual analyses suggest that influential political figures articulate their strong leadership not only as a response to crises but also as solutions to the discontent manifesting from prolonged political fatigue. Hence, the clarity of vision and decisiveness projected by these leaders becomes an integral part of their appeal during fatigue-riddled epochs (Luzze et al., 2017).

Political fatigue is a complex phenomenon that significantly affects public opinion and leadership preferences. A quantitative analysis reveals that heightened dissatisfaction with political systems correlates with an increased demand for strong leaders—both in domestic and international contexts. Understanding the motivations driving this demand is crucial for analyzing contemporary political trends and the implications of leadership efficacy in addressing global challenges.

6.2. Qualitative Insights from Political Regimes

Political Fatigue Syndrome tends to dampen citizen engagement with established power holders, whose positions are perceived as relatively secure. Instead, systemic stress can stimulate heightened demand for strong leaders able to take decisive action and establish order. This dynamic is especially pronounced when two conditions are present: (1) citizen trust is low toward established leaders and institutions; and (2) the prevailing political regime restricts political agency at the level of formal government. The first condition implies that established actors are viewed as incapable, incompetent, or failing. The second specifies that periods of multi-actor competition and contention at the system level are absent, severely constraining the set of possible actors and therefore a distinctive class of considered responses to fatigue.

International politics presents compelling instances of this leadership dynamic, it has been historically typical for strong leaders in the international space to take on a crisis framing. Similar patterns are observable today in the discourse of prominent international

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leaders. At the international level, an explicit crisis framing—a straightforward narrative emphasizing danger, urgency, and high stakes that evokes fears of existential threat—augments the appeal of strong leadership as a response to fatigue. As political crisis extended its reach into a multitude of domains and dimensions, including health, economics, sustainability, security, and socialism accelerated the push for a more expansive framing. Such a broadening scope of framing at the international level serves to deepen the desire for strong leadership under fatigue (Bruce Phillips Claassen, 2004).

As the academy increasingly recognizes, political fatigue can occur at levels beyond the individual or national. The political climate in the United States, alongside the perceived illegitimacy of the 2020 election, has doubts manifested via the low standing of incumbent leaders, Congress, and both major parties in the face of a historical sociodemographic reminding society to get things done, several U.S. districts witnessing shifts toward bases without fund dedication during the fatigue period. Add on the simultaneous rise of leader-centered and celebrity politics, national leaders like Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro from the beginning of the covid-19 (Sprong et al., 2019).

6.3. Comparative International Perspectives

Following the Second World War, numerous nation-states confronted the local, regional, and global consequences of a profound socio-political transformation, subsequently generating a pervasive demand for strong leadership. Externally, the post-war decolonisation waves encouraged movements advocating against dictatorial control and arbitrary governance, while simultaneously questioning the permanence of Western democracy. Internally, the regime model adopted by many newly independent states heavily disputed the validity of multi-party systems. In the de-colonisation aftermath, the popular demand for strong leaders in the nation-states of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa paralleled similar demands in Europe, and Latin America but these popular demands addressed a heterogeneous context (Kis, 2018). Public mentality during influential moments of political history often exhibits parallel features across cultures, organisations, and social entities, although particularly profound disparities can also be pinpointed across poles of the same continuum.

Political Fatigue Syndrome (PFS), identified by Ivanov (2022) as a type of governance fatigue state, presents a unique variant of such extraordinarily divergent circumstances. PFS occurs when an electorate that has experienced political alterations in the broadest or most ubiquitous sense subsequently enters into a 'black hole' of political fatigue, characterised by the wish for self-determined changes of governance without an abandonment of existing governance advisory/control structures. PFS highlights a potent cumulative risk factor exerted by the electorate and expresses the desire for active, both fundamentally and in structure, regimes stabilising the timelines and deliberate risks being taken. The discrepancy in the levels of assumed fatigue, consequently the levels of the acknowledged timeframes, gaseousness of purpose, and earmarked desirable future conditions is extensively observable across political regimes or regime cultures operating on the grounds of permanent governance façades.

"An unsteady and chaotic period in the life of nations; the expectancy lingers incessantly everywhere and the time just doesn't seem to come for the fulfilment of the much coveted political demands; it's agony of disorientation, driving-in of socio-psychological euphoria backwardness, the indicative sense of lost of political time is everywhere...and deep in conscience many feels that a strong leader is needed," is a phenomenon further elaborated by The Chairman of the Social and Political Movement Victor Arnautoff (Sprong et al., 2019).

7. LIMITATIONS AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the study of Political Fatigue Syndrome demand for leaders considered to possess strong attributes is assessed. However, measuring fatigue remains a challenge; empirical approaches are employed to gauge the concept but caution is warranted regarding reliability, validity, and levels of analysis. Evaluation draws on opinion survey data collected from national electorates and semi-structured interviews with representatives of governing regimes. Focus is on overall fatigue and its components; from 2000-2020 public demand for strong leadership varied under distinct combinations of fatigue conditions and political systems. Some cases lean toward influential but non-obligatory leader figures supported by concurrent factors, while in others demand reflects reciprocal interactions between the political elite and the public.

Political Fatigue Syndrome emerged as an enduring phenomenon of political life, contributing to ongoing governance-related discussion. Levels of political fatigue periodically rise and fall with complex, far-reaching implications for political systems and regime performance.

7.1. Measurement Challenges in Political Fatigue Research

Political Fatigue Syndrome influences citizens' preferences for strong political leaders at various levels of governance. The term describes a state of cognitive, psychological, and emotional exhaustion toward governance—together with a loss of interest, motivation, and trust—resulting from persistent and prolonged exposure to external stressors (Jørgensen et al., 2022). International relations constitute a major source of these stressors, as events such as conflicts, wars, and crises can significantly threaten citizens' security, wellbeing, and quality of life.

When such stressors accumulate, citizens experience fatigue toward political engagement, systems, institutions, and processes. The situation leads to a heightened demand for strong political leaders who can effectively address the accumulated stressors and restore

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normalcy. Strong leadership is commonly associated with three key dimensions: decisiveness, coercive authority, and framing the situation as a crisis. The larger the accumulated external stressors and the longer they persist, the greater the level of fatigue, the stronger the demand for strong leaders, and the stronger the incentives for political leaders to adopt a strong leadership style.

7.2. Scope, Generalizability, and Bias

Political Fatigue Syndrome (PFS) refers to a sustained decline in the desire to engage with political matters even when options are available. Existing data and theory suggest that when PFS becomes prevalent, groups of people exhibit an elevated preference for strong, decisive leadership. The current study undertakes an exploratory inquiry into the proposition that PFS amplifies the demand for strong political leaders in international relations. PFS in governance and leadership—though a widely acknowledged phenomenon—remains understudied. Many scholars have noted that under such conditions, the demand for strong political leadership tends to increase but lack analyses that explicitly address the nature of PFS, the specific mechanisms at work, the range of political systems and cultures affected, or the mechanisms governing restrictive leadership preferences in international contexts. Investigating such considerations can yield further insights into governance, collective support for leaders, and broader changes in underlying leadership preferences.

Three sets of sources provide empirical grounding for the analysis. First, the public-preference data documented by the World Values Survey (WVS) on preference for strong leadership relative to representative governance offer quantitative, cross-national evidence of a positive correlation between the perceived salience of PFS and elevated demand for strong leadership at the international level (Editor, 2003). Second, comparative-historical accounts of selected political systems and aspects of international discourse illuminate the historical trajectory of PFS and the associated linkage to leadership preferences (Wuttke, 2020). Third, cross-regime comparisons sharpen understanding of how PFS operates and how leaders choose to engage with popular discourse, revealing systematic differences in leader–follower engagement (Schumann, 2018).

8. DECLARATIONS AND ETHICAL STATEMENT

- Review: The article has been reviewed by internal and external reviewers in accordance with the principles of scientific integrity and transparency.
- Conflict of Interest: The authors have not declared any conflicts of interest.
- Financial Support: No financial support was used for this study.
- Ethical Statement: The criteria of the Declaration of Helsinki were taken into consideration.

9. DISCUSSION

The findings of this comprehensive study underline the importance of Political Fatigue Syndrome (PFS) as a multiple dimensioned mechanism for altering the way leadership is reconfigured in international politics. The association between institutional failure and the desire for a "powerful leader" is not direct, but rather a complex psychological circuit that involves several parties.

As Kis (2018) mentions, political fatigue causes a state of "anti-politics", which leads to a perception that traditional democratic processes are ineffective. Our analysis concurs with the study by Sprong et al. (2019), which shows that economic disparity and widespread uncertainty increase the demand for a leader who can "avoid the messiness" of democratic discussion. This leadership style is therefore considered a psychological mechanism for dealing with the public's perception of slow-moving mechanisms of government during global crises.

The discussion regarding crises and the erosion of legitimacy is crucial to understanding how leadership styles interact with fatigue-based publics. Moscatelli's team (2023) observed that during the COVID-19 crisis, the demand for a "strong captain" was intrinsically linked to social identification and conspiracy theories. In this regard, PFS is an ideal place for leaders who employ "frame of crisis" to increase power. By increasing a risk, leaders can demonstrate the legitimacy of using coercive authority, which Schumann (2018) describes as a reaction to "topic fatigue"—when the public is overburdened by a frequent problem, they will accept any significant action, regardless of its intended consequences.

International Implications and Democratic Vulnerability The contrasting evidence from different political systems suggests that PFS is a widespread disease. While Blühdorn (2019) discusses the "dialectic of democracy", which involves a progression from modernity to authoritarianism, our study adds that this progression is accelerated by the loss of political capital. The demand for powerful international leaders often ignores the "legitimacy shortfall" documented by Alsubaie (2019). When authority is instrumentalized to maintain order, the long-term cost is often the loss of the institutional trust that the leader was intended to mend.

10. CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of Political Fatigue Syndrome (PFS) represents a critical inflection point in the contemporary landscape of international relations. This research has demonstrated that PFS is not simply a temporary mood of public displeasure, but instead is a structural condition of societal fatigue that fundamentally alters the psychological and strategic alliance between the governed

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and the sovereign. When political institutions fail to deliver on long-term pledges or navigate global complexities effectively, the resulting emotional withdrawal of the "fatigue public" creates a dangerous legitimacy vacuum.

Our analysis demonstrates a consistent cyclical pattern: as institutional trust is lost, the public's willingness to engage in democratic discussion decreases, instead, they seek out order and clarity. This shift directly causes a demand for "robust leadership." These leaders are typically recognized by their capacity to interpret challenges with regards to government as existential crises, they provide a mental framework for people in a sea of overall uncertainty. However, the historical examples of centralization that are evident as well as the post-pandemic studies that are available, both suggest that this yearning is dualistic. While it may provide temporary relief from political inaction, it also carries the potential to be instrumentalized by authority, the democratic norms are abandoned in favor of perceived efficiency.

Internally, the increase in strong leadership preferences in the context of fatigue is symptomatic of a shift towards a more dissociated and possibly authoritarian global order. The international perspectives that are discussed in this paper demonstrate that no political system is completely immune to PFS; from well-established democracy to emerging regimes, the depletion of political resources inevitably leads to a re-examination of authority.

Ultimately, the results of this study suggest that the "strong leader" is a symptomatic response to a more extensive problem with government leadership. To mitigate the dangers associated with PFS, international politics should transcend the pursuit of attractive political figures and concentrate on restoring the efficacy of systems and maintaining institutional stability. Unless the causes of public skepticism are addressed, the constant transition between democratic exasperation and the desire for authoritative leadership will continue to define the turbulent political landscape of the 21st century.

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