Democratic Erosion Event Dataset and Autocratic Consolidation Event Dataset

Codebook v.6 – October 2023

Collaborating Institutions:

1. American University
2. Arizona State University
3. Bilkent University
4. Boston University
5. Brown University
6. California State University, Sacramento
7. Dartmouth College
8. Duke University
9. George Washington University
10. Georgia State University Perimeter College, Newton Campus
11. James Madison University
12. Koc̦ University
13. Northeastern University
14. Ohio State University
15. Sabancı University
16. Sacramento State University
17. Saint Louis University
18. Stanford University
19. Suffolk University
20. Texas A&M University
21. University of Chicago
22. University of Georgia
23. University of Houston
24. University of Memphis
25. University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
26. University of Pennsylvania
27. University of Utah
28. University of West Georgia
29. University of the Philippines, Diliman
30. Ursinus College
31. Williams College

Acknowledgements:

Contents

1 Explanatory Notes

1.1 What's New in Version 6 of the Dataset?

Version 6 of the Democratic Erosion Event Database (DEED) includes a revised classification scheme and new sourcing procedure. DEED categories have been further developed with the inclusion of 24 new event categories that have been added from the Autocratic Consolidation Event (ACE) project, sourced from the [Patterns of Autocracy Capstone Report](#) created by researchers at Texas A&M's Bush School of Government & Public Service. The current autocratic years have been coded using this unified codebook (v6).

The quality of the data has also been improved through stricter sourcing requirements for coders. Furthermore, the date range of data entries now captures erosion-related events between 2000 and 2023. More countries are now included, due in part to the expansion of the date range. DEED v6 includes 5985 unique erosion events, building on the 5522 events in DEED v5, the 977 events incorporated in DEED v4, the 1763 events incorporated in DEED v3, and the 823 events presented in DEED v2.

1.2 Variable Information

The following information is available by variable (if applicable) in Part 2, Data Set Indicators.

- **Question:** The question that the variable attempts to measure.
- **Clarification:** Definition of key terms, clarification of scope-conditions, contexts, and any other features needed to understand the question (if any).
- **Responses:** Numeric, Percentage, Text, Date, Countries, or specific response categories.
- **Answer-Types:**
  - *Multiple-choice:* Where a coder can select only one answer.
  - *Multiple-selection:* Where a coder can select more than one answer.

1.3 Suggested Citation

Democratic Erosion Event Dataset:

Gottlieb, Jessica, Rob Blair, Hannah Baron, Aries Arugay, Cameron Ballard-Rosa, Grant Beatty, Berk Esen, Laura Gamboa, Guy Grossman, Shelby Grossman, Christina Kulich-Vamvakas, Nancy Lapp, Jennifer McCoy, Laura Paler, Sal Peralta, Adriana Qubaiova,

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Democratic Erosion Event Dataset Codebook:

Democratic Erosion Consortium. 2023. "Democratic Erosion Event Dataset Codebook v6." *Democratic Erosion: A Cross-University Collaboration.*

1.4 Coders of Data

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DEED v5: Fiona Brauer, Ramy El-Dowek, Leyla Jacoby, Jasper Long, Aniyah Nelson, Mitchell Randsen, Rihana Zaiani, Suzie Zhang

DEED v4: Caleb Benjamin, Alan Chen, Uma Gaunt, Isaiah Holquist, Tzion Jones, Justin Kramer, Yohan Mutta, Ashley Myers, HyounJung Noh, Laila Rodenbeck, Iris Wang

DEED v3: Charlotte Bairey, Dakota Fenn, Isabela Karibjanian, Meryl Seah, and Carter Squires

DEED v1/v2: Christopher Hill, Kyle Rueschhoff, Silvio Simonetti Neto, Joanne Teng, and Bryce Watson

1.5 Inclusion of Countries in the Dataset

To identify the list of countries for students to write case studies on democratic backsliding or autocratic consolidation, we use the Varieties of Democracy dataset (v12) (Coppedge et al 2022). The country-year dataset was restricted to the 2000-2023 period.

Because we were initially looking for cases of democratic erosion, we originally defined `democratic backsliding' as starting in a country-year in which the country is coded as an electoral democracy or liberal democracy (values of 2 or 3 on the Regimes in the World

index *e_v2x_regime*). In the current iteration of the dataset, however, we aim to capture autocratic consolidation in addition to democratic backsliding. We thus include countries in the sample that take *any* value on the Regime in the World index during the years in which they exhibit a decline. The full coding of this variable is as follows:

- 0: Closed autocracy: No de-facto multiparty elections for the chief executive).
- 1: Electoral autocracy: De-facto multiparty elections for the chief executive, but failing to achieve a minimum level of Dahl's institutional prerequisites of polyarchy as measured by V-Dem's Electoral Democracy Index (v2x_polyarchy).
- 2: Electoral democracy: Free and fair multiparty elections and a minimum level of Dahl's institutional prerequisites for polyarchy as measured by V-Dem's Electoral Democracy Index (v2x_polyarchy), but liberal principles of respect for personal liberties, rule of law, and judicial as well as legislative constraints on the executive unsatisfied as measured by VDem's Liberal Component Index (v2x_liberal).
- 3: Liberal democracy: Free and fair multiparty elections and a minimum level of Dahl's institutional prerequisites for polyarchy as measured by V-Dem's Electoral Democracy Index (v2x_polyarchy), and liberal principles of respect for personal liberties, rule of law, and judicial as well as legislative constraints on the executive satisfied as measured by V- Dem's Liberal Component Index (v2x_liberal).

To identify country cases for inclusion in the DEED, we use V-Dem's liberal democracy index (*v2x_libdem*). This measure places special weight on constraints on executive power. We code a country-year *t* as backsliding if the country received a lower score on the Liberal Democracy Index in year *t* than in year *t-1*. In addition to coding if backsliding occurred in that country-year, we also code the change in backsliding as a percentage (defined by a change in Liberal Democracy Index divided by last year's score).

To prioritize cases, we constrained the list using two criteria.

- We eliminated islands or micro-states with a population of under 200,000 people.
- We eliminated cases in which the mean amount of backsliding was less than 1%.

2 Dataset Indicators

This section lists variables contained in DEED v5. (Not yet fully updated for v5 of the dataset.)

2.1 Timestamp (Timestamp)

- **Clarification:** This information is noted by the coding form to indicate when the event data was recorded by the coder.
- **Responses:** Date and time.

2.2 Coder (Coder)

- **Question:** Who coded the erosion-related event?
- **Clarification:** The list of coders for each version of the dataset is found in Section 1.4.
- **Responses:** Text.
- **Answer-Types:** Multiple-choice.

2.3 Course Instructor of Case Study Author (Instructor)

- **Question:** Which instructor taught the course in which the case study author was enrolled?
- **Clarification:** 29 professors have taught versions of the Democratic Erosion course that produced country case studies.
- **Responses**: Text.
- **Answer-Types:** Multiple-choice.

2.4 Case Study Name (CaseStudyName)

- **Question:** What is the identifier for the case study?
- **Clarification:** Each case study has a unique identifying label to clarify the source of the case study, i.e. instructor, academic year and semester, and country case.
- **Responses:** Text.
- **Answer-Types:** Multiple-choice.

2.5 Country (Country)

- **Question:** In which country did the erosion-related event occur?
- **Clarification:** 142 countries are included in DEED v6.

- **Responses:** Countries.
- **Answer-Types:** Multiple-choice.

2.6 Month (Month_1 & Month_2)

- **Question:** In what month(s) did the event occur?
- **Clarification:** While coders worked to record erosion-related events in the month and year they occurred, certain events warrant a range of months or years (e.g., in Turkey, doctors, lawyers, and journalists were arrested, threatened and harrassed starting in June 2013 and ending in July 2013) if that is the case, coders register the month when the event started (**Month_1**) and the month when the event ended (**Month_2**). If the event only occurred in a particular month, **Month_2** is left blank.
- **Responses:** Date.
- **Answer-Types:** Multiple-selection.

2.7 Year (Year_1 & Year_2)

- **Question:** In what year(s) did the event occur?
- **Clarification:** While coders worked to record erosion-related events in the month and year they occurred, certain events warrant a range of months or years (e.g., in Turkey, doctors, lawyers, and journalists were arrested, threatened and harrassed starting in June 2013 and ending in July 2013) if that is the case, coders register the year when the event started (**Year_1**) and the year when the event ended (**Year_2**) If the event only occurred in a particular year, **Year_2** is left blank.
- **Responses:** Date.
- **Answer-Types:** Multiple-selection.

2.8 Type of Event (Type)

- **Question:** Is the captured event evidence of a precursor to, symptom of, or resistance to democratic erosion?
- **Clarification:** We distinguish between events that lead to severe erosion (precursors) and events where erosion is institutionalized (symptoms). Citizens or institutions may also push back against erosion-related events (resistance).
- **Responses:** Text.
- **Answer-Type:** Multiple-choice.

2.9 Event Category (Category)

- **Question:** How is this event more specifically categorized?
- **Clarification:** Every event type (e.g. precursor) has multiple categories. More information is provided about these categories in chapters 3, 4, and 5 of this codebook.
- **Responses:** Text.
- **Answer-Type:** Multiple-choice.

2.10 Event Description (EventDescription)

- **Question:** How can this event be described qualitatively?
- **Clarification:** This category provides a qualitative description of the erosion event.
- **Responses:** Text.

2.11 Unconfirmed (Unconfirmed)

- **Question:** Is there reason to question the veracity of the entry?
- **Clarification:** Despite the new requirements for sources, some events are still classified as "unconfirmed," indicating that a reliable source for the event could not be found. For example, in 2008, journalists filming a documentary in El Salvador were allegedly harassed, yet there were no independent accounts confirming the incident.
- **Responses:** Text.
- **Answer-Types:** Multiple-choice.

2.12 Source Type (SourceType)

- **Question:** What type of source was used to verify this event?
- **Clarification:** Our coders sought to verify every event with a source. This variable describes the type of source used (e.g., news article).
- **Responses:** Text.
- **Answer-Types:** Multiple-choice.

2.13 Source (SourceDescription)

- **Question:** How can the source be located if a user would like to review it?
- **Clarification:** Identifying information is included for each source (author, title, date of publication, and publisher).
- **Responses:** Text.

2.14 Erosion Rating Provided by Student (StudentRating)

- **Question:** What overall erosion or consolidation rating of the case study country did the author provide?
- **Clarification for DEED:** Case study authors were asked to rate the overall erosion of a country's democracy on the following five-point scale:
  - 0: No backsliding, and weak threat of future backsliding.
  - 1: There are precursors to backsliding, e.g. the rise of extremist parties, but erosion of democratic institutions has not yet taken place.
  - 2: There is weak erosion of democratic institutions, perhaps the institutions being eroded are not critical for the functioning of democracy.
  - 3: There is moderate erosion of democratic institutions.
  - 4: There is severe erosion of democratic institutions; it is unclear whether democracy will recover.
- **Clarification for ACE:** Case study authors were asked to rate the overall consolidation of a country's autocracy on the following five-point scale:
  - 0: Autocratic consolidation in the country is moving strongly in a positive direction. The autocracy is securing itself from democratic resistance.
  - 1: Autocratic consolidation in the country is moving slowly in a positive direction. Consolidation is consistent, though resistance to consolidation remains.
  - 2: Autocratic consolidation is moving in neither a positive nor a negative direction.
  - 3: Autocratic consolidation is moving slowly in a negative direction. While slow, resistance to the autocracy is reversing consolidation.
  - 4: Autocratic consolidation is moving rapidly in a negative direction. Resistance to the autocracy is creating a rapid thaw in the autocratic structures of the regime as it moves either towards instability or democracy.
- **6Responses:** Numeric.
- **Answer-Types:** Multiple-choice.

2.15 Erosion Rating Provided by Coder (CoderRating)

- **Question:** What overall erosion or consolidation rating of the case study country did the coder provide?
- **Clarification for DEED:** Trained coders rated the overall erosion of a country's democracy on the same five-point scale identified above:
    - 0: No backsliding, and weak threat of future backsliding.
    - 1: There are precursors to backsliding, e.g. the rise of extremist parties, but erosion of democratic institutions has not yet taken place.
    - 2: There is weak erosion of democratic institutions, perhaps the institutions being eroded are not critical for the functioning of democracy.
    - 3: There is moderate erosion of democratic institutions.
    - 4: There is severe erosion of democratic institutions; it is unclear whether democracy will recover.
- **Clarification for ACE:** Trained coders rated the overall consolidation of a country's autocracy on the same five-point scale identified above:
    - 1: Autocratic consolidation in the country is moving strongly in a positive direction. The autocracy is securing itself from democratic resistance.
    - 2: Autocratic consolidation in the country is moving slowly in a positive direction. Consolidation is consistent, though resistance to consolidation remains.
    - 3: Autocratic consolidation is moving in neither a positive nor a negative direction.
    - 4: Autocratic consolidation is moving slowly in a negative direction. While slow, resistance to the autocracy is reversing consolidation.
    - 5: Autocratic consolidation is moving rapidly in a negative direction. Resistance to the autocracy is creating a rapid thaw in the autocratic structures of the regime as it moves either towards instability or democracy.
- **Responses:** Numeric.
- **Answer-Types:** Multiple-choice.

2.16 Entry Identifier (id)

- **Clarification:** Each event was given a unique identifier based on coder, case study instructor, and event number.
- **Responses:** Text.

2.17 Last Year Coded (Year_Last)

- **Clarification:** The data for each country is updated when a student writes a case narrative about that country. This variable indicates the most recent year in which the country case was coded with a new case study.
- **Responses:** Numeric.

2.18 Number of Cases Coded (Number_Case)

- **Clarification:** The data for each country is generated by coding case narratives written by students enrolled in the Democratic Erosion course. This variable indicates the number of case narratives that contribute to the data for each country.
- **Responses:** Numeric.

2.19 Region (Region)

- **Clarification:** This variable indicates the highest-level political-geographic region to which the country belongs. We use the 6-category V-Dem regional classification variable, *e_regionpol_6C*.
- **Responses:** Text.

2.20 Sub-region 1 (Subregion_1)

- **Clarification:** This variable is a more detailed indicator of the region to which the country belongs. We use the 10-category V-Dem politico-regional classification variable, *e_region_pol*.
- **Responses:** Text.

2.21 Sub-region 2 (Subregion_2)

- **Clarification:** This variable indicates the sub-region to which the country belongs. We use the 19-category V-Dem geographic regional classification variable, *e_regiongeo*.
- **Responses:** Text.

3 Precursor Categorization

3.1 Threats to Horizontal Accountability

3.1.1 Delegitimizing or Weakening the Judiciary

Charged with interpreting a country's laws and constitution and ruling accordingly, the judiciary plays a critical role in protecting democracy. The judiciary can help prevent backsliding by ensuring respect for laws, ruling certain threats to democracy as illegal, and convicting those responsible (Gibler and Randazzo 2011). Ideally, the judiciary acts as an independent party in the legal process, free of party loyalty (Shapiro 1981). This autonomy safeguards against power consolidation by other branches of government. Attempts by political parties and individual members to weaken the judiciary's checking ability or disavow its decisions can lead to democratic erosion.

Examples

- In 2011, Prime Minister Sali Berisha of Albania argued against the judiciary's decision to detain police accused of killing protesters. The court struggled against his attempts to hide evidence and discredit the prosecution, and were only able to detain the men after severe international backlash against Berisha.
- In 2015, the Polish Civic Platform (PO) party passed a law allowing the government to replace judges with terms ending in 2015, ensuring the seats would be PO-appointed. The judges would have otherwise been chosen by the incoming elected government, who opposed the PO.

3.1.2 Delegitimizing or Weakening the Legislature

A robust legislature can check the authority of an executive. By responding to constituents, the legislature can also boost public trust in democratic governance.

Executives who undermine democracies may attack or weaken the legislature in an attempt to expand their own power (Levitsky and Way 2002). A would-be authoritarian benefits from eroding trust and support for the legislature, so that the executive and their office may become the primary or sole legitimate governing institution (Linz 1990). Frequently, as a precursor to erosion, an executive publicly denounces the legislature for

inefficiency or unresponsiveness to the people, especially if an opposition party controls the legislature.

Other instances of delegitimizing or weakening the legislature include attacks on opposition parties or coalitions, the closing of one or more legislative chambers, and the stripping of constitutional powers from the legislature.

Examples

- After the Mauritanian Senate blocked President Aziz's proposed amendment to abolish the Senate and merge the civil and Islamic courts, Aziz passed the amendment in a legally dubious public referendum.
- Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski ejected opposition lawmakers and journalists from the parliament chamber, then proceeded to pass the government's budget for the next year without dissent or press coverage.
- President Guterres of Timor-Leste dissolved parliament when the opposition coalition blocked the Fretilin party agenda and prevented budgets from passing.

3.1.3 Delegitimizing or Weakening Subnational Units

In federalist political systems, a certain degree of power and autonomy is allocated to subnational units, namely states or provinces. These powers, such as referenda, subnational judiciaries, or discretion in applying certain laws and regulations, check the central government. When the federal government of a country attempts to delegitimize or weaken the power of these subnational units, it can be a precursor to erosion.

Note on coding: Not all cases of a national government attempting to weaken a subnational unit are signs of erosion per se. For example, such actions may be legitimate if a subnational unit is promoting undemocratic agendas or attempting to unduly consolidate power. Some of these cases may be situationally complex or politically contentious. If unsure whether an event constitutes a precursor, make a note of this in the coding of the event.

3.1.4 Manipulation of Civil Service

Broadly, a case of manipulation of the civil service occurs when an executive or incumbent party uses nonpartisan, bureaucratic institutions for political, electoral, or personal gain.

The civil service is sometimes thought to be insulated from political contests, insofar as civil servants are not elected directly by the people. Bureaucracies, however, can and do safeguard democracy. Huq and Ginsburg note that effective civil services restrict state officials from misusing state power for private or electoral gains and can mobilize and represent groups otherwise shut out of politics.

Authoritarian tendencies can manifest in the executive manipulating the civil service to aggrandize power or weaken democracy generally. Sometimes, this appears as suppression of speech or intimidation of bureaucrats. Conversely, the executive may buy support from elites and the public by overpopulating the civil service with their allies (Brancati 2014).

This patronage system undermines electoral institutions, since opposition parties or groups cannot necessarily provide the same rewards. Moreover, filling the civil service with loyalists effectively removes another constraint on executive power.

Examples

- Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban reorganized a number of government agencies, including those responsible for transparency and accountability. He removed incumbent officials from the civil service in the Budget Council, the Media Council, and the Election Commission, among others, and replaced them with party loyalists.
- Argentinian President Cristina Kirchner fired the head of the Central Bank and forced the National Institute for Statistics to report lower inflation figures.
- Zambian President Edgar Lungu enacted an amendment stipulating that all public servants must have at least a high school education, disenfranchising many ordinary Zambians from holding bureaucratic office.

3.1.5 Coup or Regime Collapse

3.1.5.1 In Democracies

A coup, coup attempt, or other event threatening regime collapse, such as the illegal ousting of officials, can lead to democratic erosion. Successful coups, necessitating an abrupt shift in power, pose particular threats to democracy. When a democratic regime is ousted or collapses, there is often a sudden loss of democracy and reversion to authoritarianism (Huq and Ginsburg 2018). While coup d'etats in the typical sense have become less frequent, promissory coups, which instead frame the coup as a temporary but necessary step for an improved version of democracy, have become more frequent (Bermeo

2016). Promissory coups are conducive to backsliding in that they often falsely promise an eventual return to democracy, and may thus be met with complacency.

Even failed coups can lead to the destabilization of a democratic regime. The government's legitimacy can come into question, especially if it struggles to combat the coup. Moreover, coups often become excuses for the government to limit media freedom, expand their power, or even suspend the constitution in the name of preventing further insurrections.

3.1.5.2 In Autocracies

When a long-standing autocracy became toppled by discontented elites or the masses, it might create an opening for democratic transition. However, it may also be replaced by another autocratic regime that continues the repressive policies of the earlier regime under the pretext of restoring stability. Given the inherent uncertainty associated with regime change, it is classified as a destabilizing event.

Note on coding: The event description should include a description of the coup as well as answer these questions to the fullest extent possible: Which individual or group instigated the coup? Was the coup promissory, i.e., was it rationalized as a defense of democracy and framed as temporary? Was the coup successful or a failed attempt? Was the coup violent, either on the part of the coupmakers or on the part of the executive attempting to maintain power?

Examples

- When newly-elected President of Mauritania Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdhalli attempted to lessen military influence in government by removing four military leaders from high-level government positions, General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz launched a coup and overthrew the regime.
- Following a failed coup in Turkey in 2016, the government limited press freedom in the name of preventing terrorism and further revolutionary action.
- In November 2008, following months of tension with the military, President of Guinea-Bissau João Bernardo Vieira was blamed for a bombing on military headquarters (which had killed a military general) and was subsequently assassinated by the military.

3.1.6 Horizontal Corruption

Horizontal corruption occurs between government actors, encompassing abuses of public office for private gain or for the benefit of friends and allies. Generally, horizontal corruption involves less direct interaction with the citizenry.

Horizontal corruption may affect the deliberative process of policymaking. This would include civil servants, executives, and legislators deciding on how an issue affects their own power or resources, rather than the public welfare (Bailey 2009). Horizontal corruption also covers more egregious abuses of authority, including embezzlement, misallocation of funds, cronyism, nepotism, sale of party nominations, and tax evasion.

By distorting policy decisions, horizontal corruption thus decreases a government's responsiveness to its citizens. It can also reduce the ability of democratic institutions or other agencies to function properly, as corrupt executives appoint unqualified or ill-intentioned allies to high ranking posts. Parties may also reward wealthy allies or donors with high-ranking government positions or party nominations.

Examples

- The Mensalao scandal in Brazil involved clandestine payments to ˜ legislators by the PT party in return for support of certain policies.
- South African President Jacob Zuma appointed ally Arthur Fraser, formerly a spy in Zuma's intelligence networks, to serve as DirectorGeneral of the State Security Agency (SSA). Fraser then restructured the agency so the bureau heads reported directly to him.
- In Hungary, loyalists of the dominant Fidesz Party were appointed to lead ostensibly independent institutions, including the State Audit Office, the Competition Authority, and the Constitutional Court.

3.1.7 Electoral Boycott

In response to what is perceived as an unfair election process, the opposition to the main political party or ruling regime may completely forgo participation in elections in anticipation of an unfavorable outcome. This boycott can occur through a formal opposition party. The ruling party could potentially use electoral boycotts of this type to

consolidate power and erode democracy, since the ruling party would be running unopposed. Additionally, this boycott, especially if accompanied with voter suppression, could present the ruling party with an opportunity to delegitimize the opposition party and diminish its public credibility.

Examples

- In Bangladesh's 2104 elections, the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) refused to participate in elections and actively attempted to suppress voter turnout. This occurred after the ruling Awami League did not consent to allow a caretaker government to oversee the elections. The BNP boycott and voter suppression movement was intended to force new elections under more favorable circumstances.

3.1.8 Opposition Alliance Hedging

In electoral or non-consolidated autocracies and eroding democracies, the executive can be confronted with multiple, legitimate challenges to their ability to govern, including opposing political parties, trade unions, domestic political institutions (such as hereditary monarchies), and citizen movements. Some executives may choose to regularly shift alliances with opposition groups to accomplish short-term goals at the expense of other opposition groups. Key to this indicator is the ephemeral nature of any alliance, with the autocrat quickly ejecting the newfound ally after the goal has been accomplished.

Examples

- In Cambodia, Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party has utilized short-term political alliances to weaken the ability of its political rivals to compete. In 2006, the CPP allied with the Sam Rainsy Party, a populist, pro-democracy party, to eliminate the need for a supermajority in parliament. This law change was intended to eliminate the royalist FUNCINPEC from being able to hold influence in coalitions.

3.1.9 Rejecting Election Results

3.1.9.1 In Democracies

In democracies, rejecting, or indicating the likely rejection of, election results allows executives and ruling parties to bypass both the will of the people and checks and balances, and retain more power for themselves. If opposition candidates or the people reject the results, it is often an indicator that there are not strong democratic institutions within the

country. Rejection results generally means that there was perceived or actual electoral fraud, both of which are harmful, and erodes the democratic values. In either case, the rejection of election results by either the ruling coalition or the opposition leads to democratic erosion.

3.1.9.2 In Autocracies

In autocratic regimes, elections are typically rigged and m designed to lend legitimacy to the ruling coalition. Therefore, when opposition leaders or the electorate openly reject election results and call out electoral fraud, it challenges the legitimacy of the authoritarian leader. Hence, rejecting election results corresponds to a destabilizing event.

Examples

- The rejection of the Bolivian 2019 general election results, which re-elected the incumbent President Evo Morales to office, was met with widespread protests and a rejection of the election results by the opposition.
- The 2016 Gambia election saw the incumbent president Yahya Jammeh reject election results that saw his election and call up another election. This would lead to a major Gambian constitutional crisis, as Jammeh would deploy military forces in the capital, and lead to a long standoff with other West African states and the domestic opposition until his eventual exile.

3.2 Threats to Vertical Accountability

3.2.1 Co-optation of the Opposition

Political competition and meaningful opposition between parties support democratic elections and democracy more broadly. The mere existence of opposition parties is insufficient, as they must be able to meaningfully compete for votes and potentially win power from the incumbent. Cooptation of the opposition allows an incumbent regime to appear democratic while ensuring their own electoral victory (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).

Co-optation occurs when the ruling party strategically incorporates members of, or entire, opposing political parties into their own. This consolidation can stop rival coalitions from forming and challenging the regime, silence dissent in exchange for patronage, and the transfer of voters from smaller opposing parties to the incumbent. While overt repression

of the opposition is outwardly undemocratic, co-optation allows regimes to continue to hold seemingly free and competitive elections, concurrent to the weakening of opposition parties and the strengthening of the regime.

Examples

- In Namibia, the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) brought on the former head of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), a figure they had historically criticized, in order to gain local support in a region where the SWAPO had historically performed poorly.

3.2.2 Malapportionment

Robert Dahl's most basic conception of democracy necessitates that all citizens have their preferences weighed equally in the conduct of the government, ensuring equitable government responsiveness (Dahl 1972). In essence, democracies must uphold the principle of 'one person, one vote. Malapportionment entails a discrepancy between shares of seats in a legislature and the populations of districts represented by those seats (Samuels and Synder 2002). This can lead to outcomes where a party or candidate does not receive a majority of votes, yet receives a majority of seats or wins election. This undermines each citizen's ability to have their preferences considered equally by the government.

Bermeo notes that modern democratic backsliding can take the form of strategic electoral manipulation, in which the playing-field is tilted in favor of incumbent or dominant parties. Electoral manipulation differs from fraud because it often occurs through legal means, months or even years before elections take place (Bermeo 2016). This manipulation manifests as malapportionment, as incumbent parties can redraw electoral boundaries which favor the election of their party's candidates. Malapportionment decreases democratic responsiveness by offering incumbents easier re-election and making them less beholden to their constituents (Norris and Gromping 2017).

Examples

- Moldova added a law which transitioned their proportional-representation electoral system into a mixed system, in which half of legislators would be elected by individual constituencies but the other half via a national vote. By institutionalizing a national winner-take-all system for half of the seats in Parliament, Moldova increased the margins of plurality for the two largest parties in the country, further decreasing the ability of smaller parties and interests to have a say in government.

- The Tanzanian constitution was amended to allow candidates to win by a plurality of votes instead of a majority. Due to the amount of opposition parties in Tanzania diluting the vote, this rule has enabled the dominant party to consistently win the majority of the seats.
- Since 2017, the Mapuche natives in Chile (10% of the population) have held only 1 of 43 Senate seats and 1 of 155 seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

3.2.3 Electoral Fraud and Voter Suppression

When opposition groups are electorally threatening, incumbents, may be tempted to safeguard electoral victories through electoral manipulation (Schedler 2002).

Electoral fraud entails serious bias in the administration of elections. Such fraud includes: forging voter ID cards, deleting names from voter lists, stuffing or burning ballot boxes, expelling voters from polling stations, and padding the vote totals of favored parties and candidates, among others (Schedler 2002). This voter suppression is often targeted at the opposition, and can create structural barriers that prevent the formation of an observable or effective anti-regime voice at the ballot box.

Electoral fraud is a precursor insofar as it tends to occur in sporadic and decentralized instances–often, it appears as massive irregularities at polling stations on election day. Events in which elections are systemically and systematically made unfree and unfair should instead be coded as "Systemic Reduction in Election Freedom/Fairness," detailed under the "Symptoms" category. If electoral districts are drawn unfairly or voter preferences are not weighted equally, the event should be coded as "Malapportionment" (Bermeo 2016).

Examples

- The 2009 elections in El Salvador the Supreme Electoral Tribunal included 85,000 deceased voters in the registry and released the registry prior to the publication of updated census data.
- During the 2010 parliamentary elections in Kosovo, over 40% of the votes cast had to be recounted, over 500 officials were indicted for committing fraud, and widespread vote buying attempts occurred in ethnic Albanian and Serbian municipalities.
- The 2005 elections in Togo were marred by widespread allegations of fraudulent votes, voter intimidation, and a complete blackout of media and communication on election day.

- In Cuba, state sanctioned Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) have certain functions that could lend themselves as a tool of voter suppression. CDRs maintain the Registry Book of Addresses which reports which citizens in that jurisdiction are eligible to vote. CDR National Coordinators have served on the Council of State and PCC Central Committee. Additionally, at least under Cuba's old electoral law, the Office of Voter Registration fell under the Ministry of the Interior, which is a military institution.

3.2.4 Electoral Violence

A functioning democracy requires that citizens are able to hold the government to account by expressing their preferences in elections. Electoral violence marks a breakdown in the electoral process, creating an environment where authoritarians face fewer constraints on their power.

Electoral violence takes many forms, including: pro-state militias targeting the supporters of opposition parties; states using security forces to repress dissidents and intimidate the electorate; political parties building armed wings; and insurgents attacking voters and candidates, among others (Schedler 2002). Electoral violence does not always manifest as election-day attacks on voters near polling stations (though this is an all-too-common occurrence, especially in sub-Saharan African elections). Schedler notes that sustained or common electoral violence can fundamentally change political practices by stifling the democratic voice among citizens, who lack coercive capability themselves. This trend paves the way for autocratic consolidation by the incumbent party.

Examples

- In 2007, the home of the chairwoman of a municipal electoral committee in Bulgaria was set on fire.
- Religious extremists drastically decreased voter turnout in northern Mali during the presidential election, with 20% of polling stations affected by violent disruptions.
- Following incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo's refusal to step down after his electoral defeat in the Ivory Coast, a civil war broke out between his supporters and those of opposition candidate Alassane Ouattara.

3.2.5 Increasing Control over Civil Society

An open and robust civil society helps citizens defend democracy. Participation in civil society organizations can provide political information, develop civic virtues, serve as a

medium for broad political discourse, and equalize representation—all of which enables effective resistance, alternative governance, social coordination, and democratic legitimization (Fung 2003). When civil society comes under threat, so does this litany of benefits.

This category captures the less-institutionalized threats to civil society that tend to impede its full and free operation rather than directly repress it. Events indicating an increased control of civil society include: requiring organizations to report all funding sources (especially foreign sources); mandating registration, certification, or re-certification with the government; and increased regulation of the freedom of association, among other possible events. While these may not portend democratic erosion *per se*, all such actions expand government control over what should ideally be independent organizations.

Instances where a government has banned large civil society organizations or categories thereof, arrested activists, or otherwise directly repressed civil society, are more severe and should instead be coded as "Curtailed Civil Liberties" found under the "Symptoms" category. To note, control over opposition groups, specifically, is a distinct event, coded either as "Cooptation of the Opposition" or "Repression of the Opposition."

Examples

- The Law and Justice Party (PiS) in Poland changed the ways in which NGOs can receive funding through government channels, supporting NGOs more in line with party values and directly harming those that diverge from those ideals.
- In 2016, the Israeli Knesset passed legislation which created new registration and identification requirements for NGOs who receive foreign funds. The vast majority of NGOs falling under the law's jurisdiction, 25 of 27 NGOs listed by the Justice Ministry, were left-wing.
- The Indian government used the Foreign Contributions Relations Act to restrict the entry and exit of civil society organizations, and an estimated 20,000 organizations have lost their licenses under the new regime.

3.2.6 State-Conducted Violence or Abuse

This category examines instances where an autocratic regime uses violence or abusive tactics against its citizens for political ends. Events that should be coded as state-conducted violence or abuse include: violent suppression of protests by police/military, police brutality, extrajudicial killings of suspected or actual criminals, and the use of thugs/gangs/terror groups by state actors.

Dahl writes that a functioning democracy requires citizens to form and express preferences, and later scholars deemed protests a key tool of dissent that checks the government by disrupting daily order (Krastev 2014). When police forces brutally or violently repress protests, it not only hampers that particular protest's ability to create change, but also creates a climate of self-censorship in which would-be protesters are less likely to take to the streets.

The executive may circumvent the law through other abuses of violence, including extrajudicial killings and the use of gangs and thugs. When an executive is less beholden to judicial criminal processes, a constraint on executive power is removed (Thompson 2016). The support of violent criminal groups by state actors (executives, legislators, judges, etc.) further places governing officials above the rule of law, undermining core democratic norms.

Examples

- The Spanish central government directed authorities to stop the 2017 independence referendum in Catalonia, leading to the assault of voters and the use of rubber bullets.
- In 2013, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey violently responded to mass protests during the Gezi Park movement, killing five protestors and injuring more than 9,000.
- In Kenya, following the withdrawal of opposition candidate Raila Odinga's name from the ballot and incumbent President Kenyatta's subsequent landslide re-election, immense political violence broke out, with police and government-sponsored gangs targeting protesters in response. Approximately 150 people were killed.

3.2.7 Ethno-Religious Tensions

Ethnic and/or religious tensions can be used by people in power to stoke fear and increase division, giving them both an excuse to expand their powers, and preventing people from effectively mobilizing against them. This scapegoating of ethno-religious minorities also undermines liberal democratic principles.

Examples

- In Uganda, tensions between the government and the Acholi, a people from Northern Uganda who had supported the previous Okello regime, have resulted in the government engaging in a campaign to suppress dissent in the region. This, coupled with the emergence of the millenarian Lord's Resistance Army, has given the National Resistance Army/Ugandan People a justification for military action in the region.
- Various governments of Myanmar conducted concerted campaigns against the primarily Muslim Rohingya since the 1970s, ultimately leading to the 2017 ethnic cleansing and genocide of the Rohingya people from Myanmar. This was done to bolster Myanmar's Buddhist nationalists and confer legitimacy for the various military dictatorships and governments through the redistribution of Rohingya land.

3.2.8 Overstayed Welcome

There are cases where norms or promises have signaled to the public that the executive will step down from his positions, but the executive actively disregards these signals to maintain their position in power. This is separate from an unconstitutional overstay in power, but rather a situation where the executive has disregarded an informal understanding that they will not continue. This desire to stay may be covered in rhetoric stating how the executive's continued service is necessary to avoid disorder or violence.

Examples

- In Uganda, President Yoweri Museveni famously stated in 1986 that one of the key problems in Africa has been political leaders who have overstayed their welcomes; however, Museveni has now been the president of Uganda for over three decades.
- In Armenia, President Sargsyan led an effort to change the country from a semi-Presidential system to a parliamentary republic, led by a Prime Minister. He stated that he was not planning on running for any other political office after his term as President ended, but became Prime Minister, triggering massive protests.

3.2.9 Media Bias

A free press is essential to liberal democracy, increasing the accountability of elected officials and the transparency of the democratic process. Researchers Daniel Hill and Yonatan Lupu found that restrictions on media lead to less competitive elections and a reduction in the ability to check the executive (Hill and Lupu 2017). The reduction of media freedom is conducive to erosion by increasing media bias. Media bias attempts to influence either the content of the media or the perception of the media itself without exercising the

direct control implied by media oppression. Media bias can impact the dissemination of information which is essential for the public to hold the government accountable and make informed decisions.

Examples

- In 2010, a loyalist to the South Korean government was appointed the network president of MBC, the country's second-largest television network, skewing MBC's coverage in favor of the administration.
- During the 2014 Bolivian Presidential elections, state-run Bolivia TV showed a soccer game instead of a debate between President Morales' opponents.
- The Ghanaian Parliament in 2015 required operators of electronic communications or broadcasting services to get approval from a government media commission for information broadcasts.

3.2.10 Co-optation of Citizens

According to political scientist Milan W. Svolik, authoritarian regimes can solve the problem of authoritarian control through either the repression or co-optation of the masses (Svolik 2012). While many authoritarian regimes use repression as the primary method, other regimes distribute political or economic benefits in a way that will compel parts of the populace to cooperate with or at least acquiesce in continued authoritarian rule.

Examples

- The 2003 Qatari constitution stipulates that the government will provide free education and free healthcare to all citizens. In effect, the state distributes its oil wealth to the citizenry in exchange for their acceptance of the political status quo.
- Although these initial protests signaled a possible overthrow of the Hashemite dynasty, quick maneuvering by King Hussein, localized the protests on economic issues and on reopening parliament.
- President Paul Kagame has overseen a massive expansion of healthcare and education in Rwanda, all the while curtailing civil liberties and consolidating political power in his Rwandan Patriotic Front.
- The Assad regime lifted its 2007 ban on Facebook and YouTube in August 2011 in an attempt to appease protesters, even though these sites remained heavily policed and online dissent were criminalized.

3.2.11 Rhetorical Attacks against Democracy or Accountability Institutions

Authoritarian leaders can engage in rhetorical attacks against democracy or institutions important to democratic accountability to undermine public trust in a democratic regime and promote authoritarianism as an alternative. However, note that rhetorical attacks specifically targeting the legislature, the judiciary, or subnational units should fall under delegitimizing the legislature/judiciary/subnational units label.

Examples
- Chinese media outlets published a series of attacks against US democracy and promoted the Chinese model of governance before Biden's democracy summits were scheduled to take place.
- Philippines strongman Rodrigo Duterte encouraged violence against journalists and referred to journalist Maria Ressa as "every inch a prostitute" for her anti-government coverages.

3.2.12 Cult of Personality

Milan W. Slovik offers a theory that executive aggrandizement, propelled by a strong and charismatic leader, can lead an otherwise democratic nation down the path of authoritarianism by eroding institutions in favor of concentrating power in a leader. Some authoritarian leaders use their personal charisma or ability to consolidate power in the self, rather than state institutions, though this ability largely depends on their popularity and ability to wield that influence. One tactic that is often used by authoritarians to build the cult of personality is to manipulate the bureaucracy to put family members in the line of succession.

Note on Coding: Limit Cult of Personality events to events that further expand upon a figure's personality cult as opposed to using broad timeframes to encompass an entire period of time in which a leader exists within a cult of personality. For example, do not put the entirety of Putin's tenure (1999 to present) as a single cult of personality event.

Examples
- Evidence of Vladimir Putin's cult of personality includes products named after him, a fan club, his various publicity stunts, and the widespread statues and portraits of him throughout the country.

- The Chinese Ministry of Education's integration of "Xi Jinping Thought" into education curricula serves to cement the status of Xi as a paramount figure in Chinese society.
- Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev, leveraging his hold on the elites, was able to get his son Ilham Aliyev to succeed him as both Prime Minister and President, ensuring his family's continued hold on Azerbaijani politics and people.
- In the years since President Paul Kagame took office, he has gradually reduced the profile of other politicians in Rwanda, including firing popular ministers that are seen as developing adjacent power bases, leaving most citizens with no viable political alternative but also making him personally popular as a result of Rwanda's economic prosperity and increasing health and education statistics; that has contributed to his reelection by increasingly improbable margins (98.8% of the vote in 2017) over the opposition.
- The Kim family has created an elaborate cult of personality around its members, particularly those who have held power, with tales of extraordinary feats and supreme devotion to the North Korean state to justify their rule.

3.2.13 Democratic Facade

Nancy Bermeo describes a process in which authoritarians utilize promises of democracy to foster legitimacy and strengthen their regime. Authoritarian regimes sometimes adopt "democratic" institutions that are devoid of actual power in response to demands for political competition. These democratic facades contribute to autocratic consolidation because they lend a degree of legitimacy to authoritarian rule. Note that if a country pursues reforms that involve concrete changes to the status quo, it should be coded as "state attempts at democratization" even if they do not achieve their intended effect. Otherwise, the event should be coded as a "democratic facade."

Example:
- Qatar established a partially-elected legislature called the Shura Council in response to demands for political liberalization. However, the assembly cannot pass any laws without the emir's approval and cannot dismiss cabinet members without a two-third majority.
- Bahrain passed a new constitution, making it a constitutional monarchy with an elected parliament; however, much of the power remains vested in the King, and the government is mostly comprised of members of the royal family.
- Though the new 2011 constitution of Kenya established an Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission to facilitate free and fair elections, the agency was unable to operate independently from the ruling government in the 2013 elections

with regard to purchasing electronic voting machines and comparing vote totals against a register of voters.

3.2.14 Oligarchic Consolidation

Oligarchic consolidation refers to the concentration of economic and political power within the ruling elite in the hands of a few, often monopolizing such power and systematically repressing attempts at challenging their power.

Examples
- Nationalization of private enterprises in highly corrupt countries.
- Hungary's media buyouts by Orban's allies.
- Following the fall of the Soviet Union, privatization led to many oligarchs controlling large sectors of the economy and concentrating the political power in their hands
- By the time Fidel Castro stepped down in 2008, roughly 85 percent of the country's private savings in Cuban pesos were held in around 15 percent of the bank accounts.

3.2.15 Lack of Legitimacy

A lack of legitimacy arises when the current government institutions are not considered those best suited for the society (Lipset 1959). This belief can come from the citizenry, the opposition, or the armed forces. Events which demonstrate a lack of legitimacy may include: polls showing a dramatic decreases in public trust in government; unelected candidates or opposition figures declaring themselves the "rightful" authority; failure of the government to respond to urgent needs; failure to govern the entire territory of the country; existence of breakaway territories or other self-determination movements; and dissent by opposing political actors through political stalemates of electoral boycotts.

All of these events can weaken public trust and lead the citizenry to doubt that the status quo institutions are those best-suited for society. This introduces a risk that the public abandons democratic institutions in exchange for support of more authoritarian alternatives.

Note on coding: Lack of legitimacy can be a standalone event, but it can also be either a cause or an effect of another precursor or symptom of erosion. For example, a lack of legitimacy may be caused by corruption or an executive attack on the judiciary, or lack of legitimacy may have the effect of low voter turnout or non-state violence. An instance of corruption causing a lack of legitimacy should thus be coded as two distinct events: the

cause (corruption) and the effect (lack of legitimacy). If the causal link is inverted (i.e. lack of legitimacy causing too low voter turnout), code as such, again as two events.

On polling data: Polling data can be helpful for identifying a sharp decline in a government's legitimacy (for instance, trust in the government of Ghana fell from 60% to 30% following fraudulent elections). That said, if a sharp decline or other compelling sign of legitimacy decreasing is not evident in polls, then general polling data should not be coded.

Examples

- In the 2017 Kenyan re-elections, opposition-supporting voters boycotted the election after their candidate Raila Odinga withdrew his name from the ballot.
- In Thailand in 2012, Prime Minister Yingluck's rice subsidy program led to billion-dollar losses and large piles of unsold rice, causing resentment and distrust of the government among farmers.
- Viktor Yanukovych, a Russian-supported presidential candidate in Ukraine, won the election, despite opinion polls showing that opposition candidate Yushchenko was by far the most popular. Mass protests ensued, resulting in a new election.

3.2.16 Polarization

Political polarization, typically instigated by political elites and then expressed in the general public, can enable democratic erosion. While some political polarization is normal and perhaps expected, extreme polarization increases the stakes of politics and reduces parties' desire and ability to cooperate. Extreme polarization can also lead to a general disrespect for political pluralism and the abandonment of the notion that other parties have a right to exist, both of which are fundamental to democracy. Polarization can result in a lack of forbearance and extreme political maneuvers to ensure one's opponent stays out of power (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). This can then transfer to the public: when one group believes that they are fundamentally at odds with another group, the former will perhaps be more willing to grant power to political leaders so as to circumvent institutional structures, ensuring the competitor loses (Svolik 2019).

Polarization, especially in nascent democracies, often occurs across ethnic, racial, religious, or other cultural lines. While the existence of differences does not, in itself, represent polarization, elites or politicians can stoke fear, distrust, or disunity among a society's disparate groups (Posner 2004). Besides elite attempts to foment divides, other events which should be coded as polarization include: violence along ethnic/racial/religious lines, failure of political parties to cooperate at the expense of effective governing, the

codification of preferences for one group above another, extreme political appeals to ethnic/religious/racial division, among others.

Examples

- In 2018, the Islamabad High Court decided that Pakistani citizens had the right to know the religious affiliations of high-profile government officials, reinforcing already-inflamed social cleavages and sectarian tensions.
- In 2016, the Democratic Socialist Party (DPS) and the Socialist Democratic Party of Montenegro (SDP) split. The SDP boycotted their parliamentary seats in 2018, accusing the DPS of electoral fraud, leading to protests and the stalling of EU membership.
- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sought to turn out rightwing voters by asserting that leftist NGOs were busing Arab voters to the polls.

3.2.17 Extremist/Populist Parties

The rise of extremist and populist parties is a pressing concern for democracy globally. Populism is a political logic which separates a "pure" or "true" people, from political elites and outsiders (Mudde ˙2004). Populist leaders pose themselves as the only ones able to represent the will of these "pure" or "true" people, while painting other politicians as corrupt. This often also includes a rejection of outsiders, such as refugees and immigrants, who are seen as a threat to the purity of a country's populus. Populism relies on the belief that there is only one group of people who are "true," and one leader or party who can represent them. This ideology poses a threat to democracy in three particular ways. Firstly, it allows for the accumulation of a large amount of power, the rejection of certain democratic institutions, and authoritarian-leaning actions justified as "the will of the people." Secondly, it encourages the expression of nationalist sentiment and hatred towards outsiders, often resulting in the oppression of immigrants. Lastly, it rejects political pluralism, an essential aspect of democracy (Muller 2016).

Examples

- Established in 2001, the Law and Justice (PiS) party in Poland has become the largest party in Parliament. Running on nationalistic and anti-immigrant platforms, PiS has been rising in popularity since.
- In October of 2018, Jair Bolsonaro was elected the president of Brazil. With his history of threats to the opposition, the press, indigenous groups, LGBTQ people, and women, Bolsonaro capitalized on many Brazilians' frustration to gain power.

- The New People's Party (NPA) is an increasingly-popular armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines. The number of NPA attacks went from 60 in 2016 to 260 in 2017 with the group killing or wounding 281 in 2018.

3.2.18 Party Weakness

In both presidential and parliamentary electoral systems, political parties have the ability to influence who does and does not gain power. Particularly, strong political parties can prevent individuals they see as too extreme or unfit to rule from gaining power within their own party through gatekeeping. This strategy can include expressing a public lack of support, using institutional checks, and leveraging their political clout (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). While not entirely successful, U.S. politician Mitt Romney's public condemnation of Donald Trump in 2016 can be seen as an attempt at gatekeeping within the Republican party. When a political party becomes too weak to gatekeep, perhaps due to internal fragmentation, outsiders who may create instability or introduce extreme ideas have a greater opportunity to gain power.

Alternatively, strong opposition parties and coalitions can prevent individuals with authoritarian or anti-democratic leanings from gaining power. When these parties and coalitions weaken, they open the door for one party or individual to take control.

Examples

- In Serbia, the Democratic Opposition of Serbia was a large alliance of political parties which formed to oust the ruling Socialist Party. By the 2003 presidential election, the coalition had fragmented and the individual parties proved to be too weak, allowing for the election of Tomislav Nikolic of the Serbian Radical party.
- After failing to prevent the appointment of Jussi Halla-aho as the head of the Finns Party in 2017, the coalition of which the Finns Party was a member split due to the belief that Halla-aho was too extreme.

3.2.19 Vertical Corruption

Vertical corruption is corruption in the input procedures in democracy, or procedures and norms which are necessary for citizens to have their interests equally represented in, and responded to, by government actors through democratic channels (Bailey 2009).

Instances of vertical corruption reduce the willingness and ability of policymakers to listen to the preferences of the public and pass them on to decision and policy making bodies

(Bratton 2012). When corruption is prevalent, political decisions are made in the pursuit of personal enrichment, rather than the fulfillment of the preferences of the people. If bribery is seen as a normal "cost of doing business," then corruption, rather than taxation, becomes the economic link between the citizens and their government. This causes elected officials and bureaucrats to be less responsive to the needs and requests of the citizenry without bribery (Bratton 2012).

Vertical corruption may also impact electoral outcomes, as wealthy elites allied with a regime can fraudulently fund campaigns or finance lobbying efforts to circumvent a democracy's responsiveness to the public. Finally, vertical corruption may occur as a result of a conflict of interest, in which government contracts are sold to firms owned by party or regime loyalists, providing unique and exclusive economic benefits to political allies.

In short, examples of vertical corruption include: bribery of government officials or bureaucrats, extortion/blackmail, influence peddling, sale of government contracts to party loyalists or regime allies, patronage networks, ties to organized crime groups, campaign finance abuse, and illegal lobbying.

Examples

- South Korean President Park Geun Hye and her adviser and friend Choi Soon Sil embezzled state money, which led to Choi amassing a "large, private fortune." Choi was found to have immense influence over Park, and they were accused of coercing the business community to make donations that support the presidency.
- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his wife accepted cigars, jewelry, and champagne from Israeli expatriates in return for the extension of a 10-year tax exemption to expatriate Israelis returning to the country.
- In a scandal known as Oilgate, South Africa's state oil company, PetroSA, paid 15 million Rand in 2004 to a company called Imvume Management as an advance payment for oil condensate, which the company then diverted to the ANC (African National Congress party) to help fund election campaigns.

3.2.20 Civil War/Revolution

The violence and conflict of a civil war, or the popular upheaval caused by a revolution, can be used by the ruling coalition or executive as evidence that more control is necessary to maintain the status quo. The authorization by the legislature to allow the executive to utilize emergency powers or to suspend existing civil liberties may allow the executive to further consolidate power, a situation that remains even as the emergency passes.

Additionally, the environment generates a "common enemy", potentially allowing the executive to claim that any opposition to his measures is in fact support for the enemy. However, a civil war or revolution can also result in opposition forces toppling the regime and instituting a more democratic system. For this reason, civil war/revolution is a destabilizing event.

Examples

- In Cambodia, the post-Paris Peace Accords status quo led to the Khmer Rouge never disarming, permitting Hun Sen and Prince Ranariddh of FUNCINPEC to label domestic press who opposed actions as pro-Khmer Rouge outlets. Additionally, the imminent threat of the Khmer Rouge gave the CPP the cover to maintain their own security forces, which would later be used to throw FUNCINPEC out of power.

3.2.21 Increased Surveillance

Increasing surveillance on civilians can be used by authoritarians to keep checks on the general public and target individuals who are seen as a threat to central power. An authoritarian may watch over citizens' movements, their social media platforms, and/or their private messages to ensure information which could be harmful to their legitimacy remains out of public awareness. Authoritarians may increase surveillance in times of crisis or scandal which would harm their standing in the international and domestic community.

Examples

- 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic in China - Chinese officials used surveillance to respond to the Chinese whistleblower, Dr. Li Wenliang, who warned other medical officials of COVID-19. Surveillance allowed Chinese officials to block and monitor private messages discussing the outbreak on private messaging platforms (i.e. WeChat).

- Example: In 2011, Chinese Premier Wen Wiabao introduced the Social Credit System. This system is a set of databases that holds current and frequently updated information on the behavior of individuals, corporations, and governmental entities across China.

3.3 Exogenous Risk Factors

3.3.1 Non-state Violence

3.3.1.1 In Democracies

The presence of non-state violence—organized crime, terrorist groups, gangs, and violent cartels, among others—is a precursor to democratic backsliding for two main reasons. First, the endemic existence of violent non-state actors indicates weak rule of law and may undermine citizen perception of regime legitimacy. Second, non-state violence poses a threat insofar as candidates from populist, extremist, or authoritarian parties can rise to power, promising to eradicate the threat by any means necessary, including the erosion of democratic institutions (Norris 2017). The latter has materialized in Europe with the rise of extreme-right parties in France, Germany, Hungary, and Poland, in response to sporadic terrorist attacks on the continent. In the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte has similarly campaigned on and implemented tough-on-crime policies, often at the expense of civil liberties and judicial processes.

3.3.1.2 In Autocracies

The presence of non-state political violence is a destabilizing event for autocratic regimes because it signals weakness in the regime. This weakness or lack of control by the state could pave the way for coups or mass revolts, and potentially lead to either autocratic consolidation, democratization, or civil war depending on the political dynamics.

Examples

- In 2001, an armed conflict between ethnic Albanians and Slavic Macedonians killed dozens.
- Following the collapse of the Qaddafi regime, weapons from Libya streamed into Mali and ended up in the hands of Tuareg insurgents, resulting in heightened violence in the Northern regions of the country and the inability of the military to quell it.

3.3.2 Refugee Crisis

3.3.2.1 In Democracies

The influx of refugees into a country does not itself pose a risk to democracy, but it may create conditions which inspire harsh reactionary movements that can threaten regime stability. Harsh reactionary movements often lead to other precursors to erosion, as the capacities of host countries come under increased strain (Mudde 2013). Thus, a massive refugee crisis, and in particular a heavy influx of refugees into a single country, can be considered a precursor to democratic erosion.

3.3.2.2 In Autocracies

A refugee crisis in an autocratic country does not itself pose a risk to its regime. But, like in a democracy, it can induce harsh reactionary movements. Those movements can either destabilize the authoritarian government, or prompt further autocratic consolidation. Thus, a refugee crisis in an autocracy is thus categorized as a destabilizing event.

Examples

- Beginning in the summer of 2012, the Syrian refugee crisis has spilled into Lebanon, with refugees now comprising approximately ¼ of Lebanon's population. Pre-existing tensions have been exacerbated in a country already beset with a weak economy and complex political situation, and deadly clashes between Sunni Muslims and Alawites in Lebanon's major cities have ensued.
- In 2015, a large number of refugees entered Hungary. After the EU began to mandate quotas for how many asylum applications EU countries must accept, Prime Minister Viktor Orban refused to participate and criminalized NGO support for asylum seekers.

3.3.3 External Influence or Invasion

3.3.3.1 In Democracies

External political alignment can take many forms, including membership in international organizations, economic agreements, or military alliances with other countries. International organizations, such as the CSTO or the EU, often have requirements for membership and threaten to revoke membership (and the benefits that come with it) if they are not upheld. International organizations can thus hold member countries to certain base standards, including standards that contribute to regime stability. On the other hand, when a country leaves an international organization, it may lose a level of accountability to uphold certain norms. This same accountability mechanism is seen in alliance structures or certain bilateral agreements, where states can threaten to withhold benefits or break the relationship if another country acts in a way that does not abide by common norms. The choice to leave an international organization or end an international agreement can be a sign that a government no longer wants to be held accountable, and can open the door for future actions that may consolidate autocracy or lead to democratization.

Alternatively, countries can politically align themselves with international actors (e.g., a larger, more authoritarian neighbor) that reduces local independence. This localized

{autocratic consolidation}OR{erosion} may happen in exchange for financial support or political favors from the more powerful country, with major destabilizing effects.

In aligning with a foreign actor, some countries may deliver weapons or guns to support internal forces. Both the illicit and legal weapons trade can exacerbate domestic crises to destabilize existing conflicts

3.3.3.2 In Autocracies

External political alignment could induce either democratizing efforts or autocratic consolidation. The former is often from the requirements of accession or alignment, such as the CSTO or the EU, to uphold democratic accountability. On the other hand, alignment with autocratic external powers can support autocratic consolidation through the provision of weapons or financial support without liberal requirements. Given these disparate plausible consequences, external influence or invasion in autocracy is classified as a destabilizing event.

Examples

- In 2013, Ukrainian president Yanukovych made a deal with Russia, following a financial crisis, for 15 billion dollars and a cut to natural gas prices . This was seen as reducing the president's independence from Russian influence.
- Starting in 2010, media groups associated with the Chinese government began to purchase stakes in Taiwanese media outlets and air propaganda, influencing Taiwanese elections.
- Example: The United States has held sanctions over Iran since the Hostage Crisis in 1979. Since then, various presidents have held maximum pressure sanctions over Iran, coinciding with rising levels of poverty, hunger, and underdevelopment in the country. Without external aid, sanctions have made Iranian leaders the sole providers of goods and services and facilitated the process of democratic backsliding.

3.3.4 Economic Shocks and Health Shocks

3.3.4.1 In Democracies

Democracies are often most fragile in the face of economic shocks, crashes, or crises (Przeworski 1996). These shocks may include a dramatic drop in the price of a key export, a monetary crisis, a global recession, among others. Such crises also tend to increase economic inequality, further heightening social tension and making democratic erosion even more likely (Huntington 1991).

If shocks persist, public frustration with the government response can lead to a perceived de-legitimization of democratic governance more broadly. Facing an economic crisis, the public may favor drastic measures that can be imposed only by (more) authoritarian governments (Huntington 1991).

At minimum, economic shocks set the stage for outsider entries into political, especially executive, office. Riding a wave of popular support, would-be authoritarian outsiders can exploit majoritarianism, especially in the absence of robust party and civil society opposition, and use their political mandate of repairing the economy to justify the removal of horizontal checks, the extension of term limits, the reduction of civil liberties, and the subversion of elections (Haggard and Kaufman 2016). Due to the myriad potential impacts to democracy, economic shocks are thus a precursor to erosion.

Health shocks can be equally catastrophic and are often followed by economic shocks. Autocrats can use times of crises to further consolidate power. When a country is constrained and officials need to take immediate action, they may have the authority to take immediate action to "solve" a crisis. Authoritarians can use a state of emergency as an opportunity to take control over society.

3.3.4.2 In Autocracies

In an autocracy, the economic crisis might bring out divergent outcomes regarding the political regime. In response to widespread complaints from economic stagnation, authoritarians can either tighten the society and restrict civil rights to prevent popular uprisings or provide political concessions, such as liberal reform or political openness. In some extreme cases, regime challengers with popular support could topple the incumbent authoritarian, leading to democratization.

Likewise, the effect of health shocks can be ambivalent. On the one hand, they may pave the way for an autocratic incumbent to take control over society in the name of preventing the spread of diseases, which has the potential to undermine civil liberties and rights. But if the government fails to manage the risk, it could withdraw public support, leading to popular uprisings. In some cases, the regime challenges prevail, implying the potential for regime breakdown or political liberalization. Therefore, economic and health shocks in an autocracy are categorized as destabilizing events.

Note on coding: If an autocrat changes the constitution, implements laws, or revises laws to enforce this event, code twice.

Examples

- The 2009 Eurozone Crisis caused an employment shock throughout the EU, though the UK was less affected due to use of the Pound. The UK then began to absorb unemployed individuals from the EU.
- De Beers diamond company lost control over the global diamond supply, causing the volatility of global diamond prices to increase, hurting Botswana's economy. In 2009, Ian Khama's first year as president, Botswana's GDP contracted by 7.8%, and GDP has continued to drop since.
- Brazil experienced an economic crisis when its economy contracted by nearly 7% in 2015-2016.
- In 2009, Uganda drafted the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Bill mandating HIV testing of pregnant women, their partners, and other specified populations, and criminalizes the intentional transmission (or attempted transmission) of HIV. The bill also grants health practitioners the power to notify sexual partners of a person living with HIV of that person's sero-status, and criminalizes a wide range of conduct related to failure to follow medical orders or follow "safe procedures."
- In March of 2020, President Musevni of Uganda announced a series of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including a ban on private and public transportation and most business, places of worship, the airport, and the country's borders. The government implemented these measures with considerable force, and were reported to beat, extort, shoot, and arrest people and opposition leaders who disobeyed.

3.3.5 Regional Unrest Spillover

3.3.5.1 In Democracies

Regional conflict has been shown to make civil war in neighboring countries more likely, so the governments of neighboring countries are more likely to implement anti-democratic policies as a form of preemptive repression. This repression is more likely when the leader is already threatened by domestic factors, such as a powerful opposition in an election year. Repression most often comes in the form of human rights abuses, such as political imprisonment and extrajudicial killings (Danneman and Ritter 2013). Regional unrest can also lead to more exogenous precursors of democratic backsliding, such as economic shocks and refugee crises (Ades and Chua 1997).

3.3.5.2 In Autocracies

Regional unrest is often associated with subsequent anti-democratic policies as a form of preemptive repression. But it can also contest the authoritarian's hold on power, which could, in turn, usher in democratic movements. Given these uncertain consequences, we classify regional unrest as a destabilizing event in autocracy.

Examples

- After opposition campaigners in Georgia and Ukraine won power through peaceful revolution, the government of Azerbaijan systematically repressed the opposition through human rights abuses such as torture and police beatings as a means to prevent similar democratic gains in their own country.
- As the number of neighboring countries in civil war increased over a decade, Belorussian citizens reported proportionally increased human rights violations.

3.3.6 Border Disputes

Border disputes can be used by authoritarians to exploit domestic divisions and expand their power. Alternatively, this environment could also unite citizens around a "common enemy". Authoritarians could use this opportunity to mobilize forces, utilize emergency powers and expand their legitimacy.

Examples

- Continuing decades of dispute over the official border, Chinese soldiers clashed with and killed 20 Indian soldiers in the Himalayas in May 2020.

3.3.7 Diaspora

3.3.7.1 In Democracies

Dissidents and reformists can influence change, organize protests and demonstrations, and encourage radicalism outside of their own country via social media outlets. This can have both positive and negative effects on the impacted country. Either way, these events can gain traction relatively quickly and are difficult to control once set in motion.

3.3.7.2 In Autocracies

Dissidents and reformists (outside their own country) can impact their countries by demanding political change. Still, this influence could be associated with either organizing

democratic movements or more repressive policies by autocratic incumbents. Thus, such an event in autocracy is categorized as destabilizing.

Examples

Facebook was used to fuel hate speech and misinformation in Myanmar which ultimately resulted in a coup (2021).4 Symptom Categorization

- **Question:** If defined as a symptom, how should the erosion-related event be categorized?
- **Clarification:** The symptoms were split into two subcategories: reduction in vertical accountability and a reduction in horizontal accountability. Within each subcategory, there are several labels to describe a particular event.
- **Responses:** Text.
- **Answer-Type:** Multiple-choice.

4.1 Reduction in Horizontal Accountability

4.1.1 Reduction in Judicial Independence

We define judicial independence as when a judiciary operates as a neutral third party that impartially resolves conflict and is insulated from political actors (Shapiro 1981). Established judiciaries may prevent the executive from gaining undue power under the guise of a crisis, and can directly check the power of the executive, thus maintaining separation of powers (Gibler and Randazzo 2011). In authoritarian regimes, governments often try to subjugate the judiciary through various means including impeachment, co-optation, extortion, or bribery (Levitsky and Way 2002). When a judiciary's failure to be independent is institutionalized or codified, we code this event as a *reduction* in judicial independence, rather than a delegitimizing or weakening of the judiciary. Court packing, circumvention of judicial power, or judicial decisions unduly privileging the executive are all symptoms of a reduction in judicial independence.

Examples

- In 2017, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan appointed 14 of 19 Constitutional Court judges, changing the orientation and disposition of the body from secularist to favoring Erdogan's Justice and Development Party.
- In 2016, the Polish Law and Justice party lowered the mandatory retirement age for Supreme Court judges and the National Council of the Judiciary, resulting in the termination of 31 of 83 judges.

4.1.2 Reduction in Legislative Oversight

In a democratic government, the legislature is capable of serving as a check on the other branches of government. Lust and Waldner argue that the legislature places external restrictions on members of the government, and is therefore an important component of horizontal accountability (Lust and Waldner 2015). A reduction in legislative oversight may manifest as executive actions or constitutional amendments that limit the legislature's formal powers. It may also take the form of a weakened legislature failing to act as an effective check on the executive, where the executive rules without meaningful input from the legislative body. Such cases demonstrate that the elimination of formal checks is not always necessary for an institutional reduction in oversight (O'Donnell 1994). In either case, institutional weakening of the legislative branch signifies a clear decrease in horizontal accountability.

Examples

- In January 2016, President Edgar Lungu of Zambia signed an amendment granting him the ability to dismiss the National Assembly at will.
- In 2017, Venezuela's Supreme Tribunal of Justice dissolved the National Assembly and assumed legislative powers.

4.1.3 Weakened Civil Service or Integrity Institutions

Both the civil service and international integrity institutions can check executive power through nonviolent, deliberate resistance (Ingber 2018). The related precursor category describes replacing these officials with party loyalists, manipulation via patronage networks, or intimidation. However, there are also instances where state agencies are placed directly under executive control or are restructured to reduce their influence. As Huq and Ginsberg discuss, when the executive takes control over the bureaucracy, it eliminates a potential check on their actions (Huq and Ginsburg 2018). Similarly, international integrity institutions– such as the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), or third party electoral evaluators in Bangladesh–may serve as a check on executive power. Impeding or removing these international integrity institutions also qualifies as the institutional elimination of potential avenues for resistance.

Examples

- In 2018, Romania's Social Democratic Party (PSD) fired the chief of the National Anti-corruption Directorate, in what was seen as punishment for attempting to prosecute corrupt elites.
- In 2018, Nepal's President Oli restructured the Nepalese civil service such that the National Investigation Department, the Social Welfare Council, Revenue Investigation and Money Laundering Investigation were placed under his office's control.

4.1.4 Suspension of Laws or the Constitution

Emergency powers enable executives to gain new powers and circumvent democratic procedures. These moments of exception are often utilized by the executive to fulfill an undemocratic agenda. Under a state of emergency, the executive may establish a curfew or suspend the right to assembly (depending on the specific state). These types of emergency powers are easily manipulated to weaken opposition movements, undermine election processes, or otherwise incapacitate democratic machinery. Huq and Ginsberg describe these cases of quick democratic collapse as "authoritarian reversions" (Huq and Ginsburg 2018). In some cases, the suspension of the rule of law might be a proportional response to a genuine emergency, such as the outbreak of a disease. The abuse of emergency powers, however, is symptomatic of executive aggrandizement, thus institutionalizing the erosion of democracy (Freeman 2003).

4.1.5 Relaxation of Term Limits

Democratic erosion or autocratic consolidation often occurs through executive aggrandizement, the increased power and liberty of the executive to act as they please. One of the primary signs of executive aggrandizement is the extension, relaxation, or abolition of term limits placed on the executive or members of the executive's coalition (e.g. members of a legislative body). Executive term limits constrain the power of the executive, limit incumbency advantages, and promote competition and alternation in power (Maltz 2007). Successful attempts to extend term limits demonstrate a systematic entrenchment of executive dominance. Although often related to the symptom category of Constitutional Revision, the relaxation of term limits remains qualitatively distinct due to its role in executive aggrandizement (Baturo 2014).

Examples

- In December 2002, President Eyadema of Togo passed an amendment to the constitution that abolished presidential term limits and would allow him to run for an unlimited number of elections.
- In 2017, Bolivia's Supreme Court eliminated term limits, permitting President Evo Morales to stand for reelection in 2019.

4.1.6 Revision of the Constitution

Not all constitutional amendments should be viewed as democratic erosion or autocratic consolidation events, but revisions that consolidate executive power or undermine checks and balances are symptomatic of democratic erosion. Many executives with authoritarian tendencies have turned to constitutional amendments for executive aggrandizement, a practice termed "abusive constitutionalism" (Landau 2013). When the executive eliminates checks through constitutional revision, it is a clear sign of institutionalized democratic erosion (Huq ˙2018).

Examples

- In 2008, Evo Morales passed a new constitution in Bolivia via referendum.
- In 2011, Viktor Orban's Fidesz party rewrote the Constitution and ´ adopted the new Fundamental Law as a replacement.

4.1.7 Reducing Autonomy of Subnational Units

As noted is the corresponding precursor, some degree of power and autonomy is allocated to subnational units in many federalist systems. This distribution of power allows such units to check the powers of the central government (do Vale 2017).

When the central government of a country reduces the autonomy of these subnational units, it can be symptomatic of erosion, representing an accumulation of power and the elimination of institutionalized limits on the exercise of that power.

4.1.8 Creation of Parallel Structures

Autocrats can consolidate power by creating parallel institutions that mirror official state organizations and agencies. This could especially be the case in one-party states, where the legislature and cabinet members are selected from the dominant, universal party and are subservient to the decision-making bodies of that party.

Examples

- The Cuban Communist Party (PCC) was established as the preeminent authority within Cuban politics under the 1976 constitution. The party is headed by a 24-member Politburo and 149-member Central Committee. The PCC is the only legally recognized party and dominates the high offices. Although non-members can serve in the National Assembly, these members are likely token pieces, with real power vested in the party-loyal establishment.

4.1.9 Purging of Elites

Geddes, Franz, and Wright state that dictators offer their inner circle just enough power/resources to placate the demands of elites (Geddes Wright and Frantz 2018). Since attempting to remove dictators creates risk of removal for the inner circle, the number of elites that accepts the dictators "offer" exceeds the number that attempts a coup. The bargain favors the dictator when the risk of coup is lower. Drawing from this logic, eliminating rivals or troublemakers could be an effective tool of autocrat consolidation, creating uncertainty in the ranks of the inner circle and encouraging compliance among remaining members.

Examples

- After a coup attempt in 2016, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan charged senior officers with treason and purged tens of thousands of police and officers of the judiciary and civil service.

4.2 Reduction in Vertical Accountability

4.2.1 Repression of the Opposition

Autocrats have a vested interest in ensuring there are no threats that could emerge within the in-group, whether that be the legislature or other governing bodies, including parallel structures. By carefully weeding out undesirable candidates, the executive is able to ensure dissenting voices are silenced, maintain cohesion in the ranks of the elite, and prevent any opposition bloc from gaining influence. This candidate selection could take a multitude of forms, including preventing non-approved candidates from running at all, creating requirements that candidates must fulfill before being placed on a ballot, or enacting informal restrictions that otherwise preclude equal and fair access to become a nominee.

Examples

- In Cuba, a host of pseudo-governmental "mass organizations" with extensive connections to the Communist Party comprise the Nominating Committee, which practices active candidate selection. Additionally, positions of real power in the Cuban government, including the position of the President and President of the Council of State, are selected by a circle of elites, not by popular election. Anyone who ascends to positions of power have been carefully groomed through the years by the Communist Party.

According to Schedler, the freedom to "form, join, and support conflicting parties, candidates, and policies" and the freedom to "learn about available alternatives through access to alternative sources of information" are integral to democratic choice (Schedler 2002). We therefore define this category as when the state represses opposition parties through force or harassment or deliberately engineers an uneven playing field for the opposition. An uneven playing field exists when the incumbent abuses state infrastructure to create disparities in access to resources, media, or state institutions, impairing the opposition party's ability to organize and compete for office (Levitsky and Way 2010). To create these conditions, the state may curtail the opposition's ability to disseminate information or assemble.

Examples

- In 2014, South Korean President Park Geun-Hye endorsed the dissolution of the Unified Progressive Party (UPP), an opposition party.
- In 2015, the Polish Law and Justice Party conducted an audit of its main opponent, the Civic Platform (PO) party, six months after the election.

4.2.2 Systemic Reduction in Election Freedom and Fairness

Elections must be "fair and free" to qualify as democratic (Schedler 2002). The difference between electoral democracy and electoral authoritarianism is the "freedom, fairness, inclusiveness, and meaningfulness" of the elections (Diamond 2002). Elections are considered free when there are few barriers to entry into politics, when candidates and supporters of different parties are free to campaign, and when voters do not experience substantial coercion in making choices in elections (Diamond 2002). Accordingly, per Levitsky and Way, political systems become electoral authoritarianism when there is "an

uneven playing field" between the incumbent and the opposition. In most liberal democracies, however, the incumbent has certain structural advantages, such as greater access to the media, better fundraising, and government transportation and staff during the campaign. We therefore define a systemic reduction in election freedom/fairness as the institutionalization of an uneven playing field between the government and the opposition, thereby giving the incumbent an artificial electoral advantage.

Examples

- In 2014, 48 million registered voters were denied the opportunity to vote in the Bangladeshi general election.
- In 2004, South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun violated the constitutional requirement that the president remain impartial in elections by openly advocating for his party in National Assembly elections.

4.2.3 Curtailed Civil Liberties

Schedler asserts that for elections to be democratic, they must occur in an "open environment where civil and political liberties are not subject to repression" (Schedler 2002). Citizens must have the freedom to join and support conflicting candidates and policies, the right to express their electoral preferences, and access to multiple sources of information. Similarly, according to Dahl, two of the four key attributes of procedural democracy are the protections of civil liberties necessary to free and fair elections, including universal adult suffrage and the freedoms of speech, press, and association (Dahl 1972). When a regime systematically denies these rights to the public, autocratic consolidation has occurred.

Examples

- In 2016, the Basic Law for the Protection of Public Safety was enacted in Spain, resulting in fines levied for disrespecting the police, speaking critically of the government, and photographing police operations.
- In 2016, several reports came out of Turkey that trials lacked due process, prisoners faced challenges obtaining legal representation, and detainees were subject to physical and sanitary mistreatment.

4.2.4 Media Repression

News media and other independent groups act as public watchdogs and promote government transparency by providing information and commentary critical of officials and their policies (Varol 2015). Restrictions on independent media weaken institutional checks and diminish competition among political parties and factions. While media repression may entail jailing journalists, shutting down news outlets, and outright censorship, some authoritarians may opt for less traditional or direct methods. Such leaders may use libel lawsuits against prominent journalists, compelling self-censorship among news outlets, thereby undermining the public's ability to observe the incumbent's behavior and obtain critical news coverage (Varol 2015).

Examples

- In 2012, the Polish government attacked the largest private television channel, TVN24, demanding $3 million in unpaid taxes.
- In 2017, in Turkey, an estimated 245 journalists were jailed, while another 140 faced outstanding arrest warrants.

4.2.5 No-Confidence Votes or Decreased Voter Turnout

Once a substantial number of people living in a democratic society believe they do not have a voice in the political process and choose to no longer participate, then that democracy may lose its legitimacy (Moy Pfau 2000). Public confidence is an indication of how well the political system is performing and how responsive it is to the people's concerns. An erosion of confidence in representative democracy is a serious threat to that democracy (Newton Norris 1999). Politicians facing no-confidence votes or a large decrease in voter turnout are indications that there is a lack of confidence in the political system and that democratic erosion has taken place.

Examples

- In 2017 and 2018, South African President Jacob Zuma faced multiple no-confidence votes.
- In 2014, the voter turnout for the Bangladeshi election was just 22%, down from 87% in the prior election cycle.

4.2.6 Forced/Coerced Exile

A strategy similar to state-sponsored violence, forced or coerced exile occurs when the autocrat needs to remove individuals who may serve as a resistance to their consolidation

strategy. Such exile can be done by the exile themself, with the exile fleeing potential future legal or physical violence, or forcibly imposed, with the exile being detained and then sent to a "neutral" third-party country. Such an arrangement can be temporary, with the individual only being removed for the period of time necessary to consolidate power, or a permanent removal of the individual so they can no longer frustrate the executive's plans in the future.

Examples

- In 2004, Chea Sim, the president of the Cambodian upper house and longtime CPP senior member, refused to sign an amendment that would permit the CPP-FUNCIPEC coalition to establish a government through a "package vote". Sim was then forcibly sent to Bangkok, ostensibly for medical treatment, and his deputy signed the amendment, permitting the government to proceed.

4.2.7 Foreign Military Action

Authoritarians could engage in foreign military action to consolidate power in several ways. First, the executive could use the military in a foreign country to support domestic dissent and terrorist activity in another country. Second, foreign military action could prevent domestic groups from democratizing and organizing around a similar issue. Lastly, foreign military action could be used to grow the military's size. The military's increased size could reinforce the autocrat's national power and legitimacy.

Example: In 2009, the Eritrean government supported Islamist insurgents in neighboring Somalia.

4.2.8 Discrimination against Minorities

Authoritarians and would-be authoritarians may use discrimination against minorities to gain leverage within their party or garner support. Discrimination against minorities may also be a tool to repress opposition members who support liberal agendas. Autocrats may use substantial force to subdue minority voices and use aggressive tactics to repress the marginalized group. Specific tactics to repress minorities may include: writing in laws or revising the constitution to curtail their rights, ordering state-conducted violence to commit acts of aggression against them, or advertently disallowing them from engaging in the labor force, civil institutions, or political life.

Note on coding: If an autocrat changes the constitution to carry out this act, code twice; once for revision to the constitution and once for discrimination against minorities.

Example: In Uganda, police and government officials continue to harass or restrict free expression by activists supporting LGBTQ+ rights. Police arrested three LGBTQ+ activists on June 4 at the 2008 HIV/AIDS Implementers meeting in Kampala after they peacefully protested the lack of official response to HIV/AIDS among community members. They were charged with criminal trespass and abused while in custody.

4.2.9 Systematic Violence against Minorities or Ethnic Cleansing

Authoritarian regimes often violate human rights of undesirable minorities either to remove political opposition or out of general prejudice towards the group. While many democratic countries also have problems of racism and discrimination, systemic organized violence against a minority group that takes the form of ethnic cleansing is generally a symptom of authoritarianism.

Examples
- The Uyghur concentration camps in China which function as re-education camps that target the Uyghur religious-ethnic minority in the Xinjiang region.
- Systemic discrimination and violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar has led to a refugee crisis of Rohingya fleeing Myanmar into neighboring countries.
- The Tigray War in Ethiopia's Tigray region saw both sides commit human rights atrocities and war crimes against the other population; due to the ethnic nature of the conflict, the event falls under systemic violence against minorities, with some atrocities amounting to ethnic cleansing.
- During the Syrian Civil War, Sunni rebels committed numerous atrocities against the Alawites in Syria, who are a minority but wield considerable political power. The Al-Assad family, for instance, are Alawites.
- In December 2015, the then-Tigrayan led Ethiopian government attempted to take Oromo lands to expand the capital Addis Ababa, leading to conflict with the Oromo residents.
- In what has been described as a genocide, the Sudanese government has been systematically killing the ethnic Dafuri minority in Western Sudan.
- Sudanese government forces have consistently perpetrated violence against members of non-Dinka ethnic groups using starvation, gang rape, and the burning of local villages. In 2016, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) went as far as to say that these practices amount to ethnic cleansing.

4.2.10 Politicization of the Education System

A tactic often used by authoritarians to cement their control over the populace is increasing control of the education curriculum, especially as a means of preemptively repressing dissent by indoctrinating the future generation. This could take the form of purges of educators deemed politically suspect, changing of the curriculum to teach certain political issues in a biased manner, or the banning of literature deemed politically unsafe.

Examples
- In Belarus, President Alexander Lukashenko has increased control over the education system to ensure his continued political power, especially through the promotion of Russian language education and official use over Belarusian.
- The Chinese education system has been weaponized to propagandize against democracy and Western influence.
- A Pakistani court sentences a college teacher to 10 years in jail for a "blasphemous" lecture he delivered to students; his actions violated Pakistani laws against blasphemy.
- In 2021, the government passed a law banning non-state-approved educational activities, as well as cooperation with academics outside of Russia, in an effort to fight "negative foreign influence in the educational process" and "anti-Russian propaganda."
- Initially, the Jordanian government acted swiftly by raiding the Teachers Syndicate headquarters and arresting thirteen board members. This was coupled with a press and social media gag on the topic as well. While the government argues that the arrests were done due to financial malpractice within the union, it goes without saying that to some extent, the actions were taken to curb rising tension for a strike. Later that month after the arrest of key board members, the teachers' union did go on strike with 100,000 people participating and shutting down schools for a month.
- The Chinese Ministry of Education has integrated "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" into curricula in Chinese textbooks in 2021. This serves to further Xi's control over public opinion through a process akin to indoctrination of the youth.

4.2.11 State-controlled Media

State-owned media agencies are often staples of authoritarian regimes, and the use of those media to propagandize in favor of the authoritarian leader is a symptom of authoritarian consolidation as it further entrenches the powers of a leader in the minds of

the country's citizens. Authoritarians may use this to control public sentiment, redirect public outrage, or cover-up failures of the regime.

CODING NOTE: Both the expansion of the state media apparatus (via media buyouts) and the promulgation of propaganda campaigns fall under the "state-controlled media" label.

Examples
- In Hungary, Victor Orban's control over the media has resulted in overwhelmingly positive coverage for him and his Fidesz Party over that of the opposition.
- In Venezuela, Hugo Chavez and his successor, Nicolas Maduro, both use public programming to speak directly to the people and cement their popularity.
- Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV) reports, including through a press conference, that election observers from respected international organization Transparency International found that the 2018 Presidential Election was free and fair; however, this was untrue, and Transparency International explicitly states that it had no election observation mission in Cameroon.
- The Russian state media framed the 2020 constitutional revisions as a patriotic move and intentionally highlighted less controversial amendments such as an increase to state funding while downplaying the crucial amendment to change the presidential term limit.
- Russian state-affiliated media promoted and justified the "special military operation" in Ukraine in conjunction with government suppression of independent media sources covering the invasion.
- As the COVID-19 pandemic reached Belarus, President Alexander Lukashenko promoted disinformation regarding the deadliness and the cure for the disease, including claims that vodka, sauna, and tractor rides helped ward off the disease.
- Starting in December 2020, the available channels for North Koreans jumped from 1 to 4, mostly to outcompete illicit material that some North Koreans have managed to obtain and continue monopolizing information for North Koreans.
- In May of 2021, Singapore Press Holdings, which publishes the nation's main newspaper and whose leaders are appointed by the State, announced that they would be transferring their media business to another company in light of financial losses. However, the government announced that they would continue providing financial support to the not-for-profit media arm, signaling their ongoing influence in the media industry.
- After the Vietnamese government intentionally limited traffic on Facebook, the company agreed to significantly increase its compliance with their requests to censor any posts deemed to be "anti-state," giving the government greater control over the content that is visible for members of the public.

5 Destabilizing Events

Destabilizing events are events that undermine the stability of an autocratic regime. These events might lead to greater support for democratization but also lead regime leaders to adopt more repressive policies to restore stability. Hence, the result of destabilizing events can either be greater autocratic consolidation, democratization, or chronic instability depending on the context in which they take place. Therefore, they are placed in a different category than the clear precursors to democratization.

5.1 Domestic Factors

5.1.1 Elite Infighting

Geddes, Frantz, and Wright (2018) explain that a dictator, or an executive aiming at consolidating autocracy, cooperates with an inner circle of elites to prop up the regime, but also engage in "non-cooperative interactions" to gain a relative advantage over each other. These authors explain that the closest elites are the primary culprits in replacing dictators, and as such, dictators have an incentive to increase power relative to the other elites. Elite infighting can either contribute to or undermine autocratic consolidation. It is possible for an autocrat to take advantage of factional conflicts to bring down political opponents and consolidate power, but it is also possible for elite infighting to weaken the ruling coalition and open the door to a coup or a regime overthrow by political outsiders. Given that there is a great variety of possible outcomes, elite infighting is a destabilizing event.

5.1.2 Non-state Violence

The presence of non-state political violence is a destabilizing event for autocratic regimes because it indicates that the regime does not have enough state capacity to enforce its control. The weakness of the state might pave the way for coups or mass revolts, which can potentially lead to either autocratic consolidation, democratization, or civil war depending on the political dynamics.

Examples

- Following the collapse of the Qaddafi regime, weapons from Libya streamed into Mali and ended up in the hands of Tuareg insurgents, resulting in heightened

violence in the Northern regions of the country and the inability of the military to quell it.

- In the third annual Pakistani Womens March ("Aurant March" in Urdu), Islamist groups violently attacked female demonstrators by throwing rocks and mud at the women, despite police attempts to keep protesters protected.
- In September 2013, over 60 people were killed at the Westgate mall in Nairobi by Somalia-based Islamic terrorist group Al-Shabaab, an attack the group characterized as retribution for the Kenyan military's deployment in Somalia.
- Members of G9, a criminal organization with ties to the ruling government composed of the nine largest gangs in Haiti's capital, set fire to homes and shot dozens of civilians in the Bel Air neighborhood of Port-au-Prince, which was populated mostly by supporters of the opposition to President Jovenel Moise.
- A Chechen terrorist group, part of the separatist movement demanding recognition of the area as independent from Russia, took over a school and killed more than 300 people.
- The Syrian Civil War was further complicated by the involvement of ISIS, which invaded from neighboring Iraq and fought both the Syrian Army and the rebel forces.

5.1.3 Challenge from Extremist/Populist Factions

Populism is a political logic which separates a "pure" or "true" people, from political elites and outsiders (Mudde ˙2004). Populist leaders pose themselves as the only ones able to represent the will of these "pure" or "true" people, while painting other politicians as corrupt. In an autocratic regime, regime outsiders could take advantage of populist rhetoric to mobilize the masses against the incumbent. However, due to the authoritarian tendencies associated with most populist movements, the regime challengers themselves might have a low commitment to democratic norms such as political pluralism and respect for minorities. For this reason, a challenge from extremist/populist factions is a destabilizing event.

Examples

- Several prominent Pakistani Imams encourage civilians to defy the government lockdown and ignore coronavirus pandemic restrictions in March/April 2020, especially in order to worship for Ramadan.
- In the first presidential election held after the Arab Spring uprising, Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamad Morsi defeated Ahmed Shafiq after running a

platform of implementing the sharia law and adopting more assertive foreign policies.

5.1.4 Rejecting Election Results

In autocratic regimes, elections are typically rigged and designed to lend legitimacy to the ruling coalition. Therefore, when opposition leaders or the electorate openly reject election results and call out electoral fraud, it challenges the legitimacy of the authoritarian leader. Hence, rejecting election results is a destabilizing event.

Examples

- The rejection of the Bolivian 2019 general election results, which re-elected the incumbent President Evo Morales to office, was met with widespread protests and a rejection of the election results by the opposition.
- The 2016 Gambia election saw the incumbent president Yahya Jammeh reject election results that saw his election and call up another election. This would lead to a major Gambian constitutional crisis, as Jammeh would deploy military forces in the capital, and lead to a long standoff with other West African states and the domestic opposition until his eventual exile.

5.1.5 Coup or Regime Collapse

When a long-standing autocracy became toppled by discontented elites or the masses, it might create an opening for democratic transition. However, it may also be replaced by another autocratic regime that continues the repressive policies of the earlier regime under the pretext of restoring stability. Given the inherent uncertainty associated with regime change, it is classified as a destabilizing event.

Note on coding: The event description should include a description of the coup as well as answer these questions to the fullest extent possible: Which individual or group instigated the coup? Was the coup promissory, i.e., was it rationalized as a defense of democracy and framed as temporary? Was the coup successful or a failed attempt? Was the coup violent, either on the part of the coupmakers or on the part of the executive attempting to maintain power?

Examples

- When newly-elected President of Mauritania Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdhalli attempted to lessen military influence in government by removing four military leaders from

high-level government positions, General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz launched a coup and overthrew the regime.
- Following a failed coup in Turkey in 2016, the government limited press freedom in the name of preventing terrorism and further revolutionary action.
- In November 2008, following months of tension with the military, President of Guinea-Bissau João Bernardo Vieira was blamed for a bombing on military headquarters (which had killed a military general) and was subsequently assassinated by the military.
- In a successful, non-promissory, violent coup by the Taliban, most of Afghanistan was conquered within a few days; the previous government collapsed and President Ashraf Ghani fled the country once the Taliban finally reached the capital, Kabul.

5.1.6 Civil War/Revolution

The violence and conflict of a civil war, or the popular upheaval caused by a revolution, can be used by the ruling coalition or executive as evidence that more control is necessary to maintain the status quo. The authorization by the legislature to allow the executive to utilize emergency powers or to suspend existing civil liberties may allow the executive to further consolidate power, a situation that remains even as the emergency passes. Additionally, the environment generates a "common enemy", potentially allowing the executive to claim that any opposition to his measures is in fact support for the enemy.

Examples

- The first Libyan civil war occurred from February 2011 to October 2011 between Gaddafi loyalists and rebel groups.
- In Ethiopia, a civil war broke out between the federal government and the Tigray Defense Force.

5.1.7 Economic Reforms

Autocratic regimes might pursue economic reforms due to popular pressure or a need for greater power/legitimacy. However, the effects of economic reforms are difficult to predict. While some reforms increase the extractive capacity of the state and lead to autocratic consolidation, other reforms undermine the interests of the ruling coalition and lead to political backlash against the autocrats. For this reason, economic reforms are classified as destabilizing events.

Examples

- Following the fall of the Soviet Union, massive privatization efforts reversed state control of many key industries, leading to consolidation of wealth in the hands of a few oligarchs who have become politically powerful.
- Economic reforms introduced in China eventually led to democracy movements that were brutally suppressed, like the Tiananmen Square protests and to a lesser extent the Falungong movement.
- After assuming power in 2011, Cuban leader Raúl Castro loosened the strict economic controls placed on the population, allowing for the sale (in convertible pesos, or CUC) of various electronics, including computers, electric mopeds, and cellular phones, and allowing Cubans to stay in hotels.

5.2 Exogenous Factors

5.2.1 Refugee Crisis

The influx of refugees into a country does not itself pose a risk to a regime, but it may create conditions which inspire harsh reactionary movements that can threaten stability. Harsh reactionary movements destabilize the government, as the capacities of host countries come under increased strain (Mudde 2013). Thus, a massive refugee crisis, and in particular a heavy influx of refugees into a single country, can be considered a destabilizing event.

Examples

- Beginning in the summer of 2012, the Syrian refugee crisis has spilled into Lebanon, with refugees now comprising approximately ¼ of Lebanon's population. Pre-existing tensions have been exacerbated in a country already beset with a weak economy and complex political situation, and deadly clashes between Sunni Muslims and Alawites in Lebanon's major cities have ensued.
- In 2015, a large number of refugees entered Hungary. After the EU began to mandate quotas for how many asylum applications EU countries must accept, Prime Minister Viktor Orban refused to participate and criminalized NGO support for asylum seekers.

5.2.2 External Influence or Invasion

External political alignment can take many forms, including membership in international organizations, economic agreements, or military alliances with other countries. International organizations, such as the CSTO or the EU, often have requirements for membership and threaten to revoke membership (and the benefits that come with it) if they are not upheld. International organizations can thus hold member countries to certain base standards, including standards that contribute to regime stability. On the other hand, when a country leaves an international organization, it may lose a level of accountability to uphold certain norms. This same accountability mechanism is seen in alliance structures or certain bilateral agreements, where states can threaten to withhold benefits or break the relationship if another country acts in a way that does not abide by common norms. The choice to leave an international organization or end an international agreement can be a sign that a government no longer wants to be held accountable, and can open the door for future actions that may consolidate autocracy or lead to democratization.

Alternatively, countries can politically align themselves with international actors (e.g., a larger, more authoritarian neighbor) that reduces local independence. This localized autocratic consolidation may happen in exchange for financial support or political favors from the more powerful country,

In aligning with a foreign actor, some countries may deliver weapons or guns to support internal forces. Both the illicit and legal weapons trade can exacerbate domestic crises to destabilize existing conflicts..

Examples

- In 2013, Ukrainian president Yanukovych made a deal with Russia, following a financial crisis, for 15 billion dollars and a cut to natural gas prices. This was seen as reducing the president's independence from Russian influence.
- The United States has held sanctions over Iran since the Hostage Crisis in 1979. Since then, various presidents have held maximum pressure sanctions over Iran, coinciding with rising levels of poverty, hunger, and underdevelopment in the country. Without external aid, sanctions have made Iranian leaders the sole providers of goods and services and facilitated the process of democratic backsliding.
- Saudi Arabia began its military operations in Yemen in support of the exiled Hadi government, which exacerbated the scale of violence in the Yemeni civil war.
- The United States invaded Iraq in 2003, which led to the toppling of Hussein's authoritarian regime but also a period of chronic political instability.

5.2.3 Economic Shocks and Health Shocks

Economic and health shocks are major destabilizing factors for any regime. These shocks may include a dramatic drop in the price of a key export, a monetary crisis, a global recession, among others. Such crises also tend to increase economic inequality, further heightening social tension and creating conflicts (Huntington 1991).

If shocks persist, public frustration with the government response can lead to a perceived de-legitimization of governance more broadly. Facing an economic crisis, the public may favor drastic measures that can be imposed only by (more) authoritarian governments (Huntington 1991).

At minimum, economic shocks set the stage for outsider entries into political, especially executive, office. Riding a wave of popular support, would-be outsiders, whether authoritarian or democratic can exploit majoritarianism, especially in the absence of robust party and civil society opposition, and use their political mandate of repairing the economy to justify the removal of horizontal checks, the extension of term limits, the reduction of civil liberties, and the subversion of elections (Haggard and Kaufman 2016). Due to the myriad potential impacts to regime stability, economic shocks are considered a destabilizing event.

Health shocks can be equally catastrophic and are often followed by economic shocks. Autocrats can use times of crises to further consolidate power, but failure to deal with health shocks can also lead to eroding regime legitimacy and increasing democratization. When a country is constrained and officials need to take immediate action, they may have the authority to take immediate action to "solve" a crisis. Authoritarians can use a state of emergency as an opportunity to take control over society.

Note on coding: If an autocrat changes the constitution, implements laws, or revises laws to enforce this event, code twice.

Coding guidelines: The health/economic shock needs to be distinguished from the response. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic is the shock and should be coded as such, whereas the lockdown procedures themselves should be coded separately as needed (could be Curtailed Civil Liberties or Suspensions of Laws or the Constitution).

Examples

- The 2009 Eurozone Crisis caused an employment shock throughout the EU, though the UK was less affected due to use of the Pound. The UK then began to absorb unemployed individuals from the EU.
- De Beers diamond company lost control over the global diamond supply, causing the volatility of global diamond prices to increase, hurting Botswana's economy. In 2009, Ian Khama's first year as president, Botswana's GDP contracted by 7.8%, and GDP has continued to drop since.
- Brazil experienced an economic crisis when its economy contracted by nearly 7% in 2015-2016.
- The COVID-19 pandemic was a significant health shock that led to millions of deaths worldwide and had an adverse effect on democratic backsliding.

5.2.4 Regional Unrest Spillover

Regional conflict has been shown to make civil war in neighboring countries more likely, so the governments of neighboring countries are more likely to implement anti-democratic policies as a form of preemptive repression. This repression is more likely when the leader is already threatened by domestic factors, such as a powerful opposition in an election year. Repression most often comes in the form of human rights abuses, such as political imprisonment and extrajudicial killings (Danneman and Ritter 2013). Regional unrest can also lead to more exogenous precursors of democratic backsliding, such as economic shocks and refugee crises (Ades and Chua 1997). However, regional unrest can also topple authoritarian governments (like in the Arab Spring) that could potentially usher in democratic movements. For those reasons, regional unrest spillover is considered a destabilizing event.

Examples

- After opposition campaigners in Georgia and Ukraine won power through peaceful revolution, the government of Azerbaijan systematically repressed the opposition through human rights abuses such as torture and police beatings as a means to prevent similar democratic gains in their own country.
- As the number of neighboring countries in civil war increased over a decade, Belorussian citizens reported proportionally increased human rights violations.

5.2.5 Diaspora

Dissidents and reformists can influence change, organize protests and demonstrations, and encourage radicalism outside of their own country via social media outlets. This can have both positive and negative effects on the impacted country. Either way, these events can gain traction relatively quickly and are difficult to control once set in motion.

Examples

- Facebook was used to fuel hate speech and misinformation in Myanmar which ultimately resulted in a coup (2021).

6 Resistance Categorization

- **Question:** If defined as resistance, how should the erosion-related event be categorized?
- **Clarification:** The resistance categorizations were distinguished by three subcategories: an increase in horizontal accountability, an increase in vertical accountability, and an "other" category. Within each subcategory, there are a number of labels to describe a particular event.
- **Responses:** Text.
- **Answer-Type:** Multiple-choice.

6.1 Increase in Horizontal Accountability

6.1.1 Check on Executive by Judiciary

In the context of democratic erosion or autocratic consolidation, the judiciary plays an important role in preventing, or allowing, backsliding. Constitutional courts, for instance, can declare laws totally or partially unconstitutional, preventing a potential authoritarian from manipulating laws for aggrandized executive power. Constitutional courts can serve as powerful veto players in their own right, depending on the particular political system and powers of the court (Brouard and Honnige 2017).

Judiciaries that lack independence can also engage in acts of resistance. Helmke argues that under certain conditions of institutional insecurity, a lack of judicial independence can

actually motivate strategic defection on the part of judges from the government, drawing from data on the Argentine Supreme Court (Helmke 2002).

Examples

- In 2014, the court system of Botswana overturned an attempt by President Ian Khama to elect a vice president via a show of hands vote, rather than by secret ballot.
- In 2008, the Constitutional Court of Kosovo ruled that Fatmir Sejdiu could not serve as both President of Kosovo and president of the political party Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK).

6.1.2 Check on Executive by Legislature

Key to many definitions of democracy (Schumpeter 1947, Dahl 1972, Schmitter and Karl 1991, Alvarez et al. 1996) is a competitively-elected legislative branch, which operates alongside an executive and exists to legislate voters' priorities. Though they may vary in composition and exact capabilities, legislatures can often serve as important checks on executive power through impeachment proceedings, no-confidence votes, public critique, and votes on legislation or constitutional amendments.
Examples

- In 2015, the Congress of Guatemala voted to strip President Otto Perez Molina of his immunity in response to corruption allegations, leading to his resignation from office the following day.
- In 2011, the opposition-controlled Congress in Paraguay blocked a constitutional amendment that would have eliminated presidential term limits.

6.1.3 Check on Central Power by Subnational Units

In federalist systems, subnational governments such as provinces or states can serve as checks on the power of the central government (do Vale 2017). Subnational institutions can harness powers conferred to them by the central government, such as regulation and discretion in policy implementation, and their own capacity to autonomously legislate to express dissent and curb central government power (Bulman-Pozen and Gerken 2009). Acts of "uncooperative federalism" at the subnational level—or "uncooperative localism" at the municipal level—can contest, and even alter, national policy (Bulman-Pozen and Gerken 2009 and Gerken 2017).

Note on coding: Not all instances of uncooperative federalism or localism is a sign of resistance against democratic erosion. In fact, some may be politically contentious to code and should be noted as such. A historical example of this can be found in the United States's Civil Rights movement, during which some states used the rhetoric of "states' rights" to maintain segregation.

Examples

- Several states in the U.S. resisted implementing portions of the Patriot Act that conflicted with constitutional rights (Montana, Connecticut, and others).
- India's subnational governments have become increasingly involved in matters of international diplomatic relations, decentralizing the country's foreign policy-making process (Jain and Maini 2017).

6.1.4 Check on Central Power by Civil Service

Central to effective governance is autonomous bureaucratic capacity. Through its insulation from political control at the day-to-day level, an autonomous bureaucratic capacity serves as a barrier to the misuse of state power, prevents rapid change, facilitates lasting decision making, and creates a meritocratic infrastructure of career civil servants, rather than patronage networks (Huq and Ginsburg 2018).

In such instances where government—or executive—agendas are perceived to be illegal, immoral, or against the stated mandate of a bureaucratic agency, civil servants or government employees can resist through deliberate, nonviolent acts of disobedience or defiance (See Nou 2019, Ingber 2018, and Kestenbaum 2017). Depending on the act of resistance itself, and whether it emerges from within the bounds of the functional or formal power of the bureaucracy, it can come with great risks to those choosing to execute it. Examples include withholding information or approval, releasing public statements of dissent, leaking information to the press, limiting the discretion of political appointees, and seeking judicial recourse.

Example

- United States Foreign Service Officers and other diplomats drafted a dissent memo opposing President Donald Trump's executive order restricting the entry of refugees and immigrants from majority Muslim countries into the U.S.

- Two months before a coup finally toppled President Omar Al-Bashir, his allies in the National Congress Party announced their withdrawal from the government and called for a transfer of power to a transitional government.

6.1.5 Transfer of Power from Authoritarian Leaders

Authoritarians might voluntarily concede power, whether by accepting an election defeat, holding free and fair elections, or even codifying checks and balances between government branches, or outright fleeing the country. These events stop the contestation between the authoritarian leader and the opposition, and is a sign of democratization.

Example

- Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad chose not to back his coalition's plans to exclude a coalition partner in government and instead resigned as prime minister 'to show he wasn't power crazy'.
- The resignation of Prime Minister Desalegn, supposedly in support of Ethiopian democracy, outwardly provided a chance for Ethiopian democracy to develop under a non-authoritarian context. His doing so apparently voluntarily makes it a voluntary abdication of power.
- After losing the support of the armed forces, Algerian President Bouteflika resigned in April 2019, despite his intention of running for a fifth presidential term.

6.1.6 Post-Democratic Transition to New Constitution

The creation of a new, democratic constitution can be a sign of the process of democratic consolidation. Linz and Stepan note that one of the three main conditions for democratic consolidation relies on the content of a state's constitution–that all major actors and state organs reflect democratic norms and practices (Linz and Stepan 1996). Acemoglu and Robinson also note that the detailed structures of durable political institutions must be present for consolidation (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006).

The institutions designed and how a constitution is drafted have a greater effect on the prospect of democratic consolidation than the act of creating a constitution itself (Munck 1994). The most democratic and sustainable constitutions forged during transitions arise from wide coalition-building and broad-based citizen input (Esienstadtetal 2015). Transition constitutions must seek to resolve conflict and tensions between the old guard and those advocating for a democratic transition. They must also develop electoral systems that reflect citizen preferences, establish transparent legal procedures, and build durable

institutions (Lowenthal and Bitar 2017). Otherwise, constitutions that appear democratic may, in reality, be drafted in such a way as to facilitate a power-grab by a select group. Such instrumentalization depends on the structure of the executive branch, the strength of constitutionally mandated checks, the provision of term limits, and other similar factors (Esienstadtetal 2015, Lowenthal and Bitar 2017).

Example

- Following the Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, both countries drafted new constitutions. Today, Egypt remains a hybrid regime, whereas Tunisia's democracy continues to strengthen, a phenomenon that many point to as a direct result of a more deliberative, inclusive constitution-drafting process in Tunisia.
- In Libya, the General National Council was formed in July 2012 following the overthrow of the Gaddafi government and worked on creating a new constitution, even though it failed to propose a constitution by the mandated deadline and gave way to an elected House of Representatives.

6.2 Increase in Vertical Accountability

6.2.1 Coalitions or Elite Pacts

Though political scientists debate the importance of power sharing among elites in relation to active participation of the citizenry, many agree that elite pacts can be beneficial to democratic health. North notes that elite pacts are at the heart of a functioning democracy, creating an understanding that if all political actors respect the rules of democracy, each may have the opportunity to win power in the future, thus reinforcing democratic norms (North 1990).

On a related note, Levitsky and Ziblatt emphasize the importance of multiparty coalitions as formal "gatekeepers" to prevent the rise of potentially authoritarian executives or party platforms (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Even if an undemocratic candidate should take office, scholars such as Levitsky and Ziblatt (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018) and Gandhi and Buckles (Gandhi and Buckles 2016) agree that if coalitions form, they can prevent further harm to the democracy and even unseat an authoritarian.

Examples

- In Ireland, a coalition between the Fine Gael and Fianna Fail parties helped counter extremism and led to the 2017 election of a young, immigrant, and openly homosexual Prime Minister: Leo Varadkar.
- In 2014, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and the People's Party (PP) signed an agreement to increase transparency in an attempt to lower corruption.

6.2.2 Increase in Electoral Integrity

When the infrastructure allowing for free and fair elections comes under threat through partisan electoral manipulation or tampering from an outside actor, the integrity of elections is put at risk (Schedler 2002). When states take steps to reinforce the security of the ballot box by increasing the scale of electoral monitoring and broadening planning requirements for electoral management bodies as a result of domestic or external pressure, this is a sign of pro-democratic resistance (Darnolf 2018).

States can expand access to the ballot box, by extending the right to vote to formerly disenfranchised groups (e.g., the restoration of voting rights to certain formerly-incarcerated persons in Florida, the global women's suffrage movement) and increasing opportunities to vote (e.g., implementing vote-by-mail, early voting, or absentee ballot programs). Further, states can overturn former policies that restricted access to the ballot box or ensured particular electoral outcomes (e.g., voter ID laws or redrawing districts after gerrymandering).

6.2.3 Increase in Civic Capacity

Civic capacity, or the capacity of individuals and organizations to create and sustain collective action (Britannica), contributes to citizens' sense of ownership over their democracy and the decisions it makes. By increasing the avenues through which citizens, coalitions, and civil society organizations can meaningfully contribute to the policy-making and implementation processes, the degree of perceived legitimacy and accountability of the democracy can increase (Gilman and Rahman 2017). Often accomplished at the local level, increasing civic capacity can take various forms including soliciting public feedback on policy proposals, engaging a community through participatory budgeting, or expanding the reach and scale of civil society organizations (Gilman and Rahman 2017).

6.2.4 Nonviolent Protest

The protection and promotion of freedom of speech and assembly for its citizens is vital for democratic governance (Dahl ˙1972). Without this, citizens are restricted from meaningfully expressing their preferences, and the space for voicing opposing views is limited. By harnessing the power of collective action, citizens can participate in nonviolent protest outside the spaces created for traditional political engagement, opposing government policies and institutions they see as threatening the sanctity of the democracy or contributing to autocratic consolidation(Krastev 2014) Stephan and Chenoweth find that these nonviolent campaigns are more effective than violent protests in producing loyalty shifts and policy changes, particularly when they gain legitimacy among a wide cross section of a population (Stephan and Chenoweth 2008).

Examples

- In 2014, after the Regiment of Presidential Security (RPS) orchestrated a coup, mass protests forced it to apologize and reinstate the former Government of Burkina Faso.
- In Guatemala, citizens took to the streets to peacefully protest when the La Linea corruption scandal was uncovered by the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) and Attorney General Thelma Aldana.
- In 2017, 150 Serbian news outlets and advocacy groups organized a media blackout and warned of media censorship.

6.2.5 Violent Protest

Though Stephan and Chenoweth conclude that nonviolent campaigns are more effective than violent protests in producing loyalty shifts and policy changes (Stephan and Chenoweth 2008), citizen-led protests against a regime may escalate and become violent. Krastev notes that, ideally, nonviolent protests and elections should give citizens an outlet outside of violence through which to voice their opposition or disapproval (Krastev 2014). However, protests resisting acts of democratic erosion or autocratic consolidation may turn violent, whether deliberately or as a declaration of desperation.

Note on coding: In coding events, it is important to differentiate between violent acts of resistance *against* a government and violence that erupts between nonviolent protesters and state forces. A terrorist attack against a democratic government, for instance, should not be marked as "violent protest," nor should police violence against protesters. "Violent protest" should be used exclusively when the protesters themselves initiate or participate in violent acts.

Examples

- In 2009, a peaceful protest demanding the Latvian government's resignation due to a struggling economy turned violent when hundreds of people threw stones at the parliamentary building and looted stores.
- In 2017, protesters in Asuncion, Paraguay entered the Congress building and set it on fire in response to a proposed bill to lift presidential term limits.

6.2.6 Lack of Legitimacy

A lack of legitimacy arises when the current government institutions are not considered those best suited for the society (Lipset 1959). This belief can come from the citizenry, the opposition, or the armed forces. Events which demonstrate a lack of legitimacy may include: polls showing a dramatic decreases in public trust in government; unelected candidates or opposition figures declaring themselves the "rightful" authority; failure of the government to respond to urgent needs; failure to govern the entire territory of the country; existence of breakaway territories or other self-determination movements; and dissent by opposing political actors through political stalemates of electoral boycotts.

All of these events can weaken public trust and lead the citizenry to doubt that the status quo (i.e. democratic) institutions are those best-suited for society. This introduces a risk that the public abandons democratic institutions in exchange for support of more authoritarian alternatives.

Note on coding: Lack of legitimacy can be a standalone event, but it can also be either a cause or an effect of another precursor or symptom of erosion. For example, a lack of legitimacy may be caused by corruption or an executive attack on the judiciary, or lack of legitimacy may have the effect of low voter turnout or non-state violence. An instance of corruption causing a lack of legitimacy should thus be coded as two distinct events: the cause (corruption) and the effect (lack of legitimacy). If the causal link is inverted (i.e. lack of legitimacy causing too low voter turnout), code as such, again as two events.

On polling data: Polling data can be helpful for identifying a sharp decline in a government's legitimacy (for instance, trust in the government of Ghana fell from 60% to 30% following fraudulent elections). That said, if a sharp decline or other compelling sign of legitimacy decreasing is not evident in polls, then general polling data should not be coded.

Examples

- In the 2017 Kenyan re-elections, opposition-supporting voters boycotted the election after their candidate Raila Odinga withdrew his name from the ballot.
- In Thailand in 2012, Prime Minister Yingluck's rice subsidy program led to billion-dollar losses and large piles of unsold rice, causing resentment and distrust of the government among farmers.
- Viktor Yanukovych, a Russian-supported presidential candidate in Ukraine, won the election, despite opinion polls showing that opposition candidate Yushchenko was by far the most popular. Mass protests ensued, resulting in a new election.

6.2.7 Increase in Media Protections/Media Liberalization

Though the scholarship on media liberalization and democratization remains divided about whether independent media leads or follows democratic consolidation (Jebril et al. 2013), deliberate steps by a government to improve protections for independent media or enable further media liberalization can create a landscape open to independent voices, critical opinions, and potential government watchdogs. Implementing laws that reverse criminal libel laws, increase constitutional protections for journalists, privatize formerly state-run media sources, break up media conglomerates, and other state actions can serve to resist media repression.

It is important to note, however, that not all private media outlets are examples of a free and healthy landscape for independent journalism; in Hungary, for instance, the pro-government, but "independent" media conglomerate KESMA reaches 80 percent of the Hungarian audience, while other independent media houses have been closed (Joinken 2019).

6.2.8 Increase in Organized Opposition

The existence of organized political opposition is a prerequisite for a functional democracy. Therefore, the emergence of organized opposition in closed autocracies with very little political competition and the strengthening of opposition parties in unconsolidated autocracies should both be considered a sign of democratic resistance.

Examples
- In Russia, RUDP Yabloko, a socially-liberal political organization that was originally established to promote free markets and better relations with the West after the fall of the Soviet Union, became a political party in 2001 and won four seats in the State Duma in 2003.

- The leading opposition party in Zimbabwe, Citizens' Coalition for Change (CCC), won 19 out of 28 parliamentary seats in the March 2022 parliamentary by-elections.
- Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed legalized previously banned opposition parties in the wake of his accession to power and allowed them to compete in elections and hold power.
- The 2011 Egyptian Revolution was led by increasingly organized opposition groups that ultimately ousted President Hosni Mubarak from power which he had held for 30 years.
- In the wake of the assassination of the Prime Minister of neighboring Lebanon, activists again called for democratization in Syria, producing the October 2005 Damascus Declaration.
- Activists and citizens came together in July 2021 to organize the #Lawan ('Fight Back') rally, demanding Yassin's resignation and calling for the reinstatement of Parliament.
- To challenge President Alexander Lukashenko in the 2020 Belarusian elections, the opposition organized effectively and likely won the election if not for blatant electoral fraud on the part of Lukashenko.
- Starting during the 2013 protests against cuts to gas and fuel subsidies, the protesters began organizing themselves in "Sudanese resistance committees" to better organize and coordinate protests.

6.2.8 Increase in Civil Liberties

When an autocratic regime passes reforms that increase civil liberties, it provides citizens with greater freedom to engage with one another and express their preferences. Therefore, the liberalization of the social sphere holds potential for the emergence of a democratic culture.

Examples
- The new constitution of Afghanistan made women and men more explicitly equal in the eyes of the law, which allowed women to run for office and have an increased role in government.
- King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia announced that women will be given the right to vote and run for office by the 2015 election.
- Qatar reformed its kafala labor system in 2019 and 2020 to give migrant workers greater freedom in changing employers and entering/exiting the country.

6.3 Other

6.3.1 Pressure from Outside Actor

Outside actors, including nongovernmental organizations and international organizations, play a large role in holding states accountable to uphold international democratic norms. The role these peer actors play in naming, shaming, and punishing states for breaching accepted standards of conduct can serve to alter behaviors and strengthen democratic norms. Finnemore and Sikkink write of a "norms cascade" process during which pressure for conformity and a desire for increased legitimacy among actors on the international stage can push states to change their behavior (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Ways outside actors can pressure states include releasing statements of public condemnation, publishing critical reports, imposing economic sanctions, withholding aid, and preventing said state from joining an international organization.

Examples

- In 2018, The United Nations condemned new laws in Hungary which targeted non-governmental organizations and civil society.
- In 2017, the European Union rescinded funding to Poland as a result of its neglect of the Rule of Law framework.

6.3.2 Exit of People or Capital Flight

In some contexts, citizens face legal or institutional barriers to voicing their dissatisfaction with government actions through protests or elections, or perceive that their actions will not accomplish any change. In such instances, exit becomes an attractive option, though not without its own barriers. Removing a significant amount of human or physical capital from a particular state can pressure a state to change (Paul 1992) or draw international attention to the conditions at play. For example, more than 7 percent of Venezuela's population has fled the country since 2014 as conditions continue to deteriorate under the Maduro regime. A historical example of the exit of physical capital to pressure policy change favoring democratic reforms is the international divestment movement against apartheid-era South Africa, which contributed to pressuring the South African government into dissolving apartheid.

6.3.3 State Attempts at Democratization or to Prevent Backsliding

Particular actions by the state may have the consequence of preventing democratic backsliding, though that may not be the expressed intent. This category should be used to classify actions taken by the state to deliberately prevent backsliding that do not fall under existing categories. This can include the creation of programs to resolve long standing ethnic, political, or social divides through the reversal of discriminatory statutes (e.g. legally-mandated racial or ethnic segregation, or the legal distinction of citizens by caste) or through truth and reconciliation commissions. State attempts to prevent backsliding can also take the form of reversing previous policies that allowed for executive aggrandizement or weakened the autonomy of particular branches of government. For instance, upon taking office, President of Argentina Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner removed persons from the judiciary that were loyalists to a previous government.

- Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed legalized previously banned opposition parties and released thousands of political prisoners, seemingly helping Ethiopia enter a new stage of democratization.
- Newly inaugurated President Bashar al-Assad released 600 political prisoners and closed down the Mezze prison.
- In the 2018 elections, BN loses power to the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition, ending UMNO's 61-year reign. Mahathir Mohamad takes office as the Prime Minister. The new government embarks on a series of democratic reforms.

7 Actors and Targets

7.1 Actor and Target (examples)
- Head of State (President, Prime Minister, King/Queen)
- Cabinet Member/s (Secretary of State, Minister of Finance)
- Federal elected official (Senator, Congresswoman)
- The Legislature/Parliament
- Opposition/Opposition Leaders
- The Police (Federal, local)
- The Armed Forces (Military, Navy, National Guard, etc)
- The Government
- The Ruling Party
- State/provincial elected official (Governors, state legislators)
- Local/city/town/county/municipal elected official (Mayors)
- Candidate for federal office (Presidential or legislative candidates)
- Candidate for state/provincial office (Gubernatorial candidate)
- Candidate for local/city/town/county/municipal office (Municipal candidate)

- Former federal elected official (Former Presidents or Prime Ministers)
- Former state/provincial elected official (Former governors)
- Former local/city/town/county/municipal elected official (Former mayors)
- State or local-level campaign (for a referendum, etc.)
- Non-elected federal officials or staff (from agencies, political appointees, etc.)
- Non-elected state/provincial or local/city/town/county/municipal official or staff (Local cabinets and agencies)
- Highest court, or justice on highest court (Supreme Court justice)
- Appellate court, or judge on court (Judges or Magistrates)
- District or federal lower court, or judge on court (District Court)
- State/province high court, or judge on court (State Court)
- State/province/local lower court, or judge on court (Local Court)
- Social movement/protest group, or individual activists/movement's leader/s (BLM, Occupy Wall Street)
- Interest group/PAC/union (NRA)
- Citizens/voters/the public, not organized through interest or other group (Electorate)
- Non-elected public or cultural figure (media commentator, religious leader, actress)
- Media organizations (The New York Times, CNN, Fox News)
- Journalist (Individual or a collective)
- Social Media platforms (Meta, X, TikTok)
- Watchdog (Electoral Institutes)
- Domestic NGOs (ACLU, Planned Parenthood)
- International/intergovernmental organization (UN, World Bank, EU)
- Businessman/businesswoman (or a collective)
- Domestic corporations (With primordial presence in the country you are coding)
- Multinational corporations (Apple, Coca-Cola, Amazon, P&G)
- Foreign leader (Presidents, Prime Ministers, Kings/Queens)
- Foreign country (or a set of countries)
- Civil society (organization, or a collective of them)
- Migrants/refugees (incoming, in transit, outgoing, or returning)
- Union leader (UAW leader/s)
- Criminal organizations (Cartels, mafias)
- Foreign terrorist, or terrorist organization (Al Qaeda, ISIS)
- Domestic terrorist, or terrorist organization (KKK)
- Religious institutions (Catholic Church)
- National legislature (Congress, Senate, House, Deputies, etc)
- State legislature (self-explanatory)
- Local law-making body (self-explanatory)
- Other

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