

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Unity makes strength: Patterns of democratic resistance against autocratization

Guido Panzano¹  and Luca Tomini²

¹Department of Political Science, University of Kiel, Kiel, Germany and ²Centre d'Etude de la Vie Politique, Université libre de Bruxelles, Bruxelles, Belgium

Corresponding author: Guido Panzano; Email: gpanzano@politik.uni-kiel.de

(Received 17 December 2024; revised 23 July 2025; accepted 29 September 2025)

Abstract

Today, autocratization is the predominant trend of regime development. However, if we focus on autocratization as democratic erosion or decline, such a trend is not matched by an equivalent increase in the number of democratic breakdowns or autocracies. Why (and how) do some democracies survive autocratization, while others do not? Current research on autocratization has recently turned toward studies on democratic endurance. In particular, mostly large-N contributions focusing on structural factors protecting democracy from autocratization onset (democratic resilience) have lately been complemented by numerous small-N contributions exploring concrete actions that can stop ongoing autocratization processes before democratic breakdown (democratic resistance). However, due to its necessarily limited scope, such qualitative evidence on democratic resistance may be subject to internal and external validity issues. Therefore, we systematically advance the research on resistance to autocratization within a comparative framework. Using a fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis, we examine 69 autocratization episodes that began in democracies in the 21st century (2000–23). Our analysis reveals the combinations of institutional, political, social, and external conditions of democratic resistance that impede democratic collapse during autocratization episodes. While the success of individual actions is mainly context-specific, we demonstrate that it is the cooperation across various areas of resistance (*unity makes strength*) that characterizes the multiple, and cross-nationally robust, sufficient configurations of democratic survival during autocratization processes. Through alternative analytical choices, robustness tests, and integration of sources, we bolster the validity of prior studies on democratic resistance to autocratization and point to further research avenues.

Keywords: Autocratization; resistance; democracy; qualitative comparative analysis

Introduction

Democratization's opposite, autocratization – the process of political regime transformation toward autocracy and away from democracy (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019; Cassani and Tomini 2020; Møller and Skaaning 2023; Croissant and Tomini 2024) – is today predominant in various continents. A new research field has been thence striving to examine how it starts, unfolds, and can be prevented (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2019; Boese et al. 2021; Diamond 2021; Haggard and Kaufman 2021; Bermeo 2022; Coppedge et al. 2022). However, while autocratization as a decline of (mainly, non-electoral) aspects of democratic quality is widespread, the current number of democratic breakdowns remains less touched, as is the global share of democracies (Skaaning 2020; Ding and Slater 2021; Brownlee and Miao 2022; Treisman 2023).

Against this backdrop, the article advances previous investigations on different autocratization outcomes (Maerz et al. 2024). It is obviously essential to explore the conditions under which autocratization can *not* lead to an autocratic regime (qualitative) change, such as democratic breakdown. In short, what can prevent democratic collapse? Why (and how) do some democracies survive autocratization episodes, while others do not? What, and *who*, can stop an autocratization process once it has begun, and avert democratic breakdown? These questions are normatively pressing and empirically relevant, considering that many contemporary autocratization processes in democracies are gradual, do not necessarily result in fully fledged autocratic regimes, and are sometimes reversed to original democracy levels, usually after governmental alternation.

Current research on autocratization has already turned the spotlight on democratic endurance. On the one hand, mostly large-N contributions have investigated structural conditions (democratic resilience) that can protect democracy from the very occurrence of autocratization (Schedler 2001; Svobik 2008; Boese et al. 2021; Lührmann and Merkel 2023). On the other, a recently burgeoning research concentrates on actor-centered resistance to autocratization (Gamboa 2017, 2022; Somer et al. 2023; Carothers 2024; N. Truong et al. 2024; van Lit et al. 2024; Weyland 2024a; Williamson et al. 2024; Panzano et al. 2025; Riedl et al. 2024a, 2024b), as ‘any activity (...) taken by a changing set of often interconnected and interacting actors who, regardless of the motivations, attempt at slowing down, stopping, or reverting the actions of the actors responsible for the process of autocratization’ (Tomini et al. 2023, p. 121).

As relevant as the findings are due to their focus on agency, democratic resistance studies remain broadly centered on small-N designs. This article systematically advances them into a broader comparative framework. This is crucial to prevent case selection bias (*internal validity*, misconsidering background conditions) and identify factors that may be context-dependent or generalizable (*external validity*, establishing clear scope conditions). We therefore employ the state-of-the-art tools of fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) to study 69 autocratization episodes started in democracies in the 21st century (2000–23) and examine the combinations of democratic resistance actions that are associated with democratic survival. Our analysis directly takes as unit of analysis such autocratization episodes in democracies (country-start/end-years) defined by the Episodes of Regime Transformation framework (ERT, Maerz et al. 2024, related to the Varieties of Democracy, V-Dem, Coppedge et al. 2025), which we modify to include all crucial cases identified by autocratization studies – while incorporating countries with a substantial and persistent democratic decline (Pelke and Croissant 2021). We then distinguish whether such episodes include a democratic breakdown, defined by the ERT as a shift to an autocratic regime followed either by an election or by a permanence in such a new regime category.

We take information on actions opposing autocratization attempts from an event-based source: the Democratic Erosion Event Dataset (DEED, Gottlieb et al. 2023). The DEED reports monthly information on the occurrence of events associated with democratic erosion and resistance. We group resistance events within each autocratization episode and reorganize them into five macro-areas: checks and balances provided by institutions such as the judiciary and bureaucracy (1, *institutional resistance*); actions of opposition parties through electoral alliances and coalitions or within the legislature, or (with data from the Varieties of Party Identity and Organization, V-Party, Lindberg et al. 2022) splits within incumbent parties (2, *political resistance*); nonviolent and violent protests (3 and 4, *social resistance*); and the intervention of external actors (5, *external resistance*).

Our analysis unveils 4 sufficient configurations associated with democratic survival during such recent 69 autocratization processes: in short, the combinations of institutional, political resistance and nonviolent actions, as well as institutional resistance, nonviolent actions, and external pressure, are the most robust. Single conditions of resistance, such as those related to institutions and political actors, can also be effective, although they are more context-dependent. However, we also found that, absent democratic resistance, democracy is not inevitably lost.

Such patterns are validated across alternative analytical choices, clusters of observations (world regions, wealth, and liberal-democracy levels, episode duration), and case selections (censoring, ERT versions, etc.). The remainder of the article assesses autocratization and democratic resistance studies. Next, it illustrates the methods, data, and results through short case-based evidence from each configuration, and further research avenues.

Democracy trends and resistance to autocratization

In line with current developments in many political regimes, studies on autocratization processes have proliferated, providing valuable insights into the causes of their beginning, progression, and different outcomes. Existing research provides us with crucial information on the factors that facilitate autocratization onset, e.g., the populist, authoritarian, illiberal, or anti-pluralist tendencies of incumbent elites (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2019; Juon and Bochsler 2020; Medzihorsky and Lindberg 2024). Far from taking the executive as the only initiator of autocratization, scholars have alternatively examined economic conditions (Teorell 2010; Haggard and Kaufman 2012; Scheve and Stasavage 2017; Haggard and Kaufman 2018; Gerring et al. 2021; Lachapelle and Hellmeier 2024), inequalities (Houle 2015; Leipziger 2024; Panzano 2024), polarization-related factors (Laebens and Öztürk 2021; Somer et al. 2023; Hur and Yeo 2024), specific subnational settings (Stenberg et al. 2022; Grumbach 2023), citizens' (un)democratic values (Claassen 2020; Bryan 2023; Frederiksen and Skaaning 2023; Wunsch and Gessler 2023), or triggering crises (Edgell et al. 2021).

Yet, in those contexts where autocratization is underway, our understanding of the factors that shape its resolution remains more limited. Autocratization processes are known to be to a considerable extent open-ended (Nord et al. 2025). Consequently, the initial causes and modalities of autocratization onset do not inherently predetermine its outcome (Riedl et al. 2024b). Such an outcome can rather yield a range of potential scenarios, e.g., the failure or exhaustion of the process, a return to the initial state, a change within the regime, or an outright transition to autocracy. Using a widely accepted classification of political regimes (Regimes of the World, RoW, Lührmann et al. 2018) between liberal/electoral democracies and electoral/closed autocracies (Levitsky and Way 2010; Schedler 2013), Maerz et al. (2024) distinguish between autocratization episodes (or time frames) depending on their starting and ending points. This approach differentiates episodes resulting in a qualitative regime change (*between*), e.g., democratic breakdown, from episodes terminating without (*within* political regimes, Edgell et al. 2022; Wilson et al. 2023).

The recognition that autocratization can lead to different outcomes is a very significant development in the literature: shortly, not all autocratization processes necessarily result in a regime change. This specification is pivotal not only for academic discussions but also for evaluating today's global trends in democracy. Figure 1's top panel reports the number of countries divided by the RoW categorization under autocratization and democratization episodes using the standard ERT classification (cf. *infra*). While autocratization episodes clearly outnumber democratization ones (in part because there are more democratic regimes today than in the past), the proportion of democratizing, stable, and autocratizing regimes does not change dramatically (bottom panel). Such clarification, still, does not contend that autocratization is the prevailing regime development: Figure 2 plots the yearly averages of negative (downturns) and positive (upturns, Teorell 2010) within-country and year-to-year (between t and $t-1$) differences in global democracy levels from the V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index (Coppedge et al. 2025). While autocratization as a within-regime transformation currently represents the dominant trajectory in democracy trends – downturns outnumber upturns (resulting in a net negative change, Miller 2024) – this has not translated into a massive shift toward authoritarianism (Skaaning 2020; Tomini 2021; Treisman 2023).

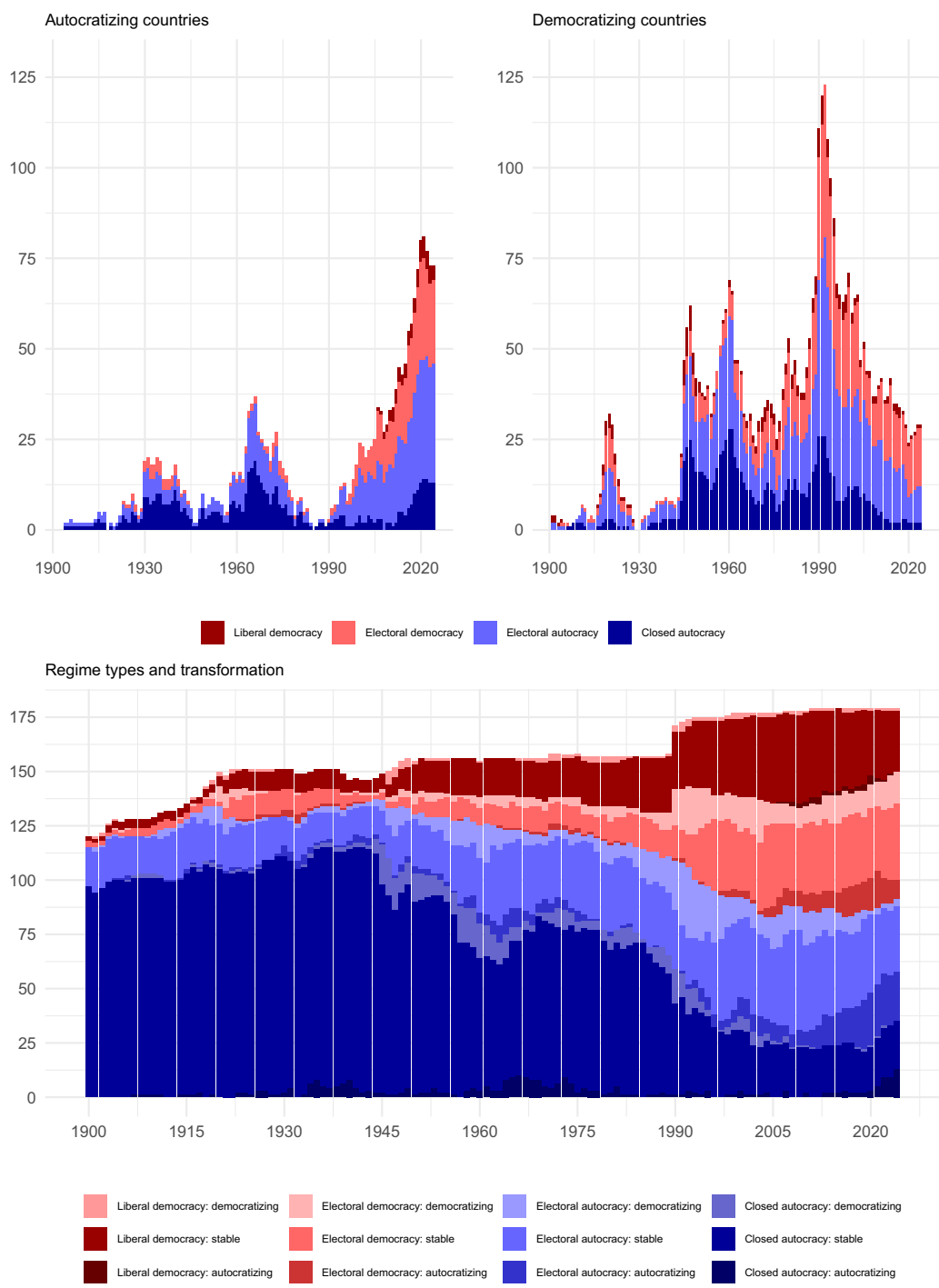


Figure 1. Political regimes and regime transformation (ERT, RoW, V-Dem, v.15).

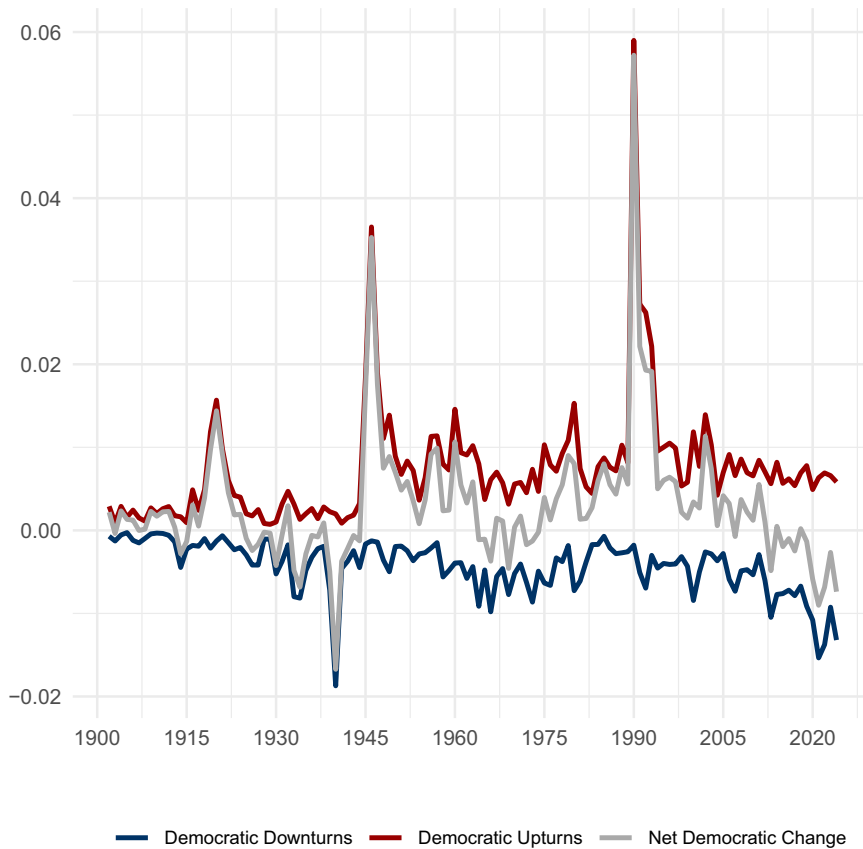


Figure 2. Global averages of democratic change (V-Dem, v.15).

The key question thus becomes what factors may contribute to the spectrum of autocratization outcomes. Until recently, scholars have focused mainly on the drivers of the autocratization process that – at least in democratic regimes – most studies identified in the incumbent government (cf. the concept of ‘executive aggrandizement’, Bermeo 2016). When autocratization is not driven by external or extra-institutional actors (e.g., the military), researchers have examined the party- or leadership-related characteristics, decisions, and goals of the incumbent government (Günay and Dzhic 2016).¹ Others have underscored the central role of institutions, e.g., in enforcing accountability (Mechkova et al. 2019; Boese et al. 2021; Laebens and Lührmann 2021; Holloway and Manwaring 2023). However, a third element was absent from these contributions: the opposition in its various forms (Wegmann 2022). From this perspective, we assume that analyzing the constellation of actors who oppose autocratization is crucial for determining its outcomes: democratic breakdown or survival. The article contributes to this debate by investigating (a) whether resistance actions are systematically linked to the termination of autocratization, e.g., the absence of democratic breakdown, and (b) their specific configurations explaining democratic survival. Obviously, the relationship between the ‘autocratizing incumbent’ and ‘democratic resisters’ is cumbersome, and the

¹This includes opposition actors who, once in power, reveal themselves as ‘disloyal’ (Linz and Stepan, 1978; Przeworski, 1991) and start attacking democracy. Recent studies have focused on identifying different autocratization patterns based on the characteristics of their leading actors beyond the incumbent government (Cianetti and Hanley, 2021; Balderacchi and Tomini, 2024; Riedl et al. 2024b).

conclusion discusses the limitations of our research. Yet, we argue that a comparison between autocratization processes, together with a conscious evaluation of the findings, will greatly improve our understanding of this phenomenon.

Expectations

We rely on the definition of democratic resistance to autocratization developed by Tomini et al. (2023, p. 121): ‘as any activity, or combination of activities, taken by a changing set of often interconnected and interacting actors who, regardless of the motivations, attempt at slowing down, stopping, or reverting the actions of the actors responsible for the process of autocratization’. This definition identifies institutional, political, social, and external actors resisting autocratization. It also assumes that resistance is a collective effort that can thwart autocratization, envisioning continuous interactions among different agents. In this regard, we adopt a neutral perspective on autocratization concerning the actors driving the process. Whether autocratization’s main agents are governing parties, previously opposition parties, authoritarian leaders, the military, other state institutions, or a combination of these actors, we focus on *any* type of action that opposes such an autocratization attempt. We reframe the current knowledge in the mainly qualitative field within this categorization. This survey of the literature identifies specific claims, which we will evaluate through a medium-N perspective.

First, **institutional resisters** operate within state institutions to ensure compliance with constitutional rules and democratic norms, and enforce accountability on the executive. This category includes judges at various levels of the judicial system, top bureaucrats, and officials within independent authorities, which can constrain would-be autocratic governments. The impact of precisely judicial actions on democratic backsliding has been assessed by Gibler and Randazzo (2011) through a relatively rare large-N analysis. Their results confirm that an independent judiciary has a positive effect on democratic survival and can prevent authoritarian reversals, especially where the judicial system has been consolidated. Such findings have been corroborated qualitatively in Latin America (Gamboa 2017, 2022), e.g., in Brazil during Jair Bolsonaro’s presidential term (Bogéa 2024), and in Hungary, Poland, and Romania (Puleo and Coman 2024). Institutional resistance against autocratization can also be carried out by public officials within state bureaucracies (Bauer and Becker 2020; Munoz and Briceño 2023). Gamboa (2017) highlights how institutional resistance may be the most effective in reversing autocratization compared to extra-institutional strategies (in her sample of cases). This finding is echoed by Somer et al. (2023), who noted that institutional strategies of resistance ‘may serve to contain abuses by a polarizing executive’ (p. 8), and Tomini et al. (2023), who emphasized the effectiveness of such actors especially in autocratization in liberal democracies, rather than in countries without a consolidated liberal-democratic tradition (Weyland 2024b). Therefore, we expect that:

1. *The presence of institutional resistance, e.g., judicial and administrative actions against a would-be authoritarian government, can serve as a sufficient condition to prevent democratic breakdown during autocratization processes.*

Political resisters are leaders or parties acting in opposition to the incumbent that has initiated an autocratization process. They belong to the parliamentary opposition and take initiatives within national or local institutions, e.g., by organizing legislative actions against the government, forming electoral coalitions (Obydenkova and Libman 2013; Whiting and Kaya 2021), or promoting an inclusive agenda toward discriminated groups (Rovny 2023). Cleary and Öztürk (2022) compare cases of democratic breakdown in Turkey, Venezuela, and Thailand with democratic survival in Bolivia and Ecuador to emphasize the crucial – and, at least in these cases, successful – decision of the political opposition to keep participating in constitutional procedures

in parliament and in the elections. Gamboa (2017, 2022) corroborates this, highlighting the importance for the opposition to adopt parliamentary procedures to restore legislative accountability. Similarly, Tomini et al. (2023) note that such political resistance actions can be effective even when the space of public contestation and political participation becomes more arbitrary and repressive (Cassani and Tomini 2018). The importance of electoral coalitions has also been emphasized in the Polish (Solska 2020) and Turkish cases (Selçuk and Hekimci 2020). Somer et al. (2023) similarly suggest that political rather than institutional actions may be more effective in halting autocratization, especially when such a process is already advanced. In fact, institutional actors such as courts may backfire against the opposition, especially when polarization is high and non-elected actors are perceived as illegitimate. Still, opposition coalition-building can be challenging due to various perceptions of the autocratic threat and the interests of democratic ‘defenders’ (Nok Hin et al., 2024; van Lit et al., 2024).

However, the opposition is not the only political actor to be considered here. Some factions within the incumbent party or coalition may break away from a government that is becoming increasingly autocratic. Resistance studies have in fact mentioned the central role of incumbent divisions (Cleary and Öztürk 2022; Lührmann and Merkel 2023; Somer et al. 2023; Tomini et al. 2023). As discussed in democratization theories (O’Donnell et al. 2013[1986]), ‘soft liners’ within the incumbent can be relevant actors in blocking autocratization. Within autocracies, similarly, del Río (2022) has illustrated how, under certain circumstances – e.g., during a crisis or upon bottom-up social pressure – autocratic elites may defect, potentially opening the way to a regime liberalization. We therefore expect that:

2. The presence of political resistance, e.g., the use of accountability procedures within parliament, the formation of electoral coalitions and alliances among opposition parties, or divisions within the incumbent party (or parties), can serve as a sufficient condition to prevent democratic breakdown during autocratization processes.

Social resisters represent actors able to mobilize the society: non-governmental organizations, grassroots, or cultural movements. They can rally citizens in support of specific causes, organize public events, e.g., strikes, protests, marches, or demonstrations, and engage in organized dissent against the autocratizing government. These actions serve to sensitize public opinion to promote broader political change (Bermeo 2003; Alemán and Yang 2011; Markoff 2015; Dahlum et al. 2019; Tong and Cheng 2022). Tomini et al. (2023) have mentioned the importance of peaceful social mobilization, especially when institutional channels are no longer viable (as in electoral autocracies). This is supported by case studies (Cleary and Öztürk 2022), e.g., in Sub-Saharan Africa, where Rakner (2021) provides evidence of how democratic resistance can succeed when social mobilization is peaceful or even issue-based (cf. M. Truong 2024). However, their rate of success depending on the identity and methods of the social resisters has been questioned by quantitative research, which suggests that while having a general positive effect, pro-democratic mobilization alone may not always be sufficient to prevent democratic collapse (Hellmeier and Bernhard 2023). It thence appears that social actions work more effectively when combined with actions at different levels, whether in the political, institutional, or external arenas (Sjögren 2024). Others (Gamboa 2017) even categorize these actions as ‘extra-institutional strategies’, underlining how they can be ineffective or counterproductive in ensuring democratic survival.

These considerations apply specifically to violent mobilizations. However, although conventional wisdom may suggest that violent protests can have detrimental effects on democracy, especially during autocratization processes, in the literature there is also a more nuanced account of violent protests and democratization (Della Porta et al. 2017; Kim and Kroeger 2019; Marino et al. 2020), with some contributions showing how parties formerly at the forefront of violent movements, when they institutionalize and renounce violence, may provide legitimacy to new democracies (Ishiyama 2018). We consequently anticipate that:

3. *The presence of social resistance, e.g., non-violent protests against a would-be authoritarian government, can serve as a sufficient condition to prevent democratic breakdown during autocratization processes. Moreover, social resistance serves as an INUS condition, an insufficient but necessary part of a larger, jointly sufficient set of democratic resistance actions.*

4. *Violent protests exhibit an ambiguous impact, contributing inconsistently to the prevention of democratic breakdown.*

Finally, **external resisters** encompass state- and non-state-based collective actors capable of supporting democratic resistance from abroad. It is well known how autocratic linkages can legitimize would-be authoritarian leaders externally (Tansey et al. 2017; Kneuer and Demmelhuber 2020). Coming from democratic actors, pro-democracy policies can leverage international influence (Levitsky and Way 2006; Levitz and Pop-Eleches 2010; Tolstrup 2013) to enforce the rule of law and promote democratic reforms through conditionality, aid to domestic NGOs (Carothers 2011), or direct methods, i.e., imposing sanctions (Von Soest and Wahman 2015). Such external actors can engage in various activities, e.g., fostering cultural exchanges, supporting opposition parties, advocating for democracy, and initiating cooperation projects with domestic non-state actors (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2011). However, when international agents intervene, their actions are often seen to complement domestic actors (Gamboa 2022), rather than as a primary source of resistance. This can also explain the various effectiveness of such external pressures (Jenne and Mudde 2012; Džankić et al. 2018; Carothers 2024). We therefore expect that:

5. *External pro-democracy actors opposing a would-be authoritarian government can contribute to averting democratic breakdown during autocratization processes. Moreover, external resistance serves as an INUS condition, an insufficient but necessary part of a larger, jointly sufficient set of democratic resistance (domestic) actions.*

Such studies on democratic resistance are flourishing. However, they might still suffer from serious inconsistencies. First, it remains unclear the extent to which the conclusions recapitulated earlier can be extended beyond these case studies (*external*), and whether such findings are to be understood as causal or descriptive arguments (*internal validity*). Indeed, most of these case-based analyses – while empirically rich – do not always present a well-articulated case selection strategy, which could lead to a potentially biased interpretation of the results (Geddes 2003) and of alternative explanations (Møller 2013; Slater and Ziblatt 2013). Second, rather than considering one single aspect (or single type of actor) of democratic resistance, it is necessary to systematically examine the joint impact of its possible combinations. Some of the discrepancies of the aforementioned studies can be addressed by simply hypothesizing that, even if the success of a single resistance strategy can be context-dependent and difficult to consider as a ‘model’, what matters the most is that such resistance actions occur *together across different arenas*, maximizing relative strengths and minimizing weaknesses of a variety of institutional, political, social, and external actions. Such coordinated resistance (*unity makes strength*) can be more effective in protecting democracy across various contexts and stages of autocratization:

6. *The combination of resistance actors across different dimensions (institutional, political, social, or external) is the most robust sufficient configuration for averting democratic breakdown during autocratization processes.*

A configurational analysis

Case selection

We base our case selection on version 14 of the Episodes of Regime Transformation (ERT, Maerz et al. 2024) framework centered on the Varieties of Democracy project (V-Dem version 14, Coppedge et al. 2025, with data until 2023). The ERT adopts the electoral definition of democracy of the V-Dem Polyarchy Index or Electoral Democracy Index (EDI, 0–1).² The ERT codebook (Edgell et al. 2024) specifies inclusion thresholds for coding as autocratization episodes those time frames with a significant and durable decline of the EDI, including the minimum annual change required to initiate an episode (-0.01) and a cumulative inclusion score (-0.1). Using these criteria, 52 autocratization episodes (in 46 countries) can be identified in (liberal or electoral) democracies since 2000.³

This sample contains cases that are central to democratic resistance studies, e.g., Venezuela (1998–2018), North Macedonia (2005–13), or South Korea (2008–13). However, some cases that experienced significant declines in the EDI but did not reach the -0.1 threshold are excluded. Notable examples include the US under Donald Trump's first administration (2016–20, EDI from 0.91 to 0.85, Levitsky and Ziblatt 2019) or Israel under Benjamin Netanyahu (Prime Minister 1996–99, 2009–21, 2022–, EDI from 0.76 to 0.72 between 2009 and 2023; Gidron 2023). Following the ERT standard thresholds, such an operationalization identifies only 25 autocratization episodes without an event of democratic breakdown, which is coded by the ERT as the shift of a political regime toward (electoral and closed) autocracies (Lührmann et al. 2018), plus the occurrence of a first election in the new autocratic regime or a 5-year permanence period.⁴

As we focus on democratic resistance to autocratization, we remain flexible with the ERT thresholds. Although such baseline operationalization has been obtained through multiple validity tests, what is the necessary amount of decay on a democracy index to score an autocratization episode is an empirical more than a theoretical question. For instance, some successful instances of democratic resistance (resulting in a EDI decrease of 0.09 instead of 0.1) might be excluded from the analysis if we are too rigid with such a definition.

Therefore, we have re-operationalized autocratization episodes in the minimum overall decline of the EDI: with the **R** ERT package (Edgell et al. 2024), we have lowered the cumulative threshold to reach a more permissive -0.05 of the EDI to include those cases with a significant decline in democratic quality, still higher than the minimum annual value (cf. Wiebrecht et al. 2023). By expanding the autocratization episode pool to 89 (including 72 countries that autocratized since 2000 within democratic regimes), we have assembled a larger dataset that facilitates testing our expectations, specifically about the success of democratic resistance. This larger dataset provides a more diverse range of cases, including a larger amount of autocratization episodes without regime change (55), without omitting relevant cases – often included in the small-N studies described above – ended before the last measurement (2023, Table 1). This is our baseline case selection. However, different thresholds and ERT versions (up to 2024) are tested as well in our analysis.

²Based on an expert assessment of the extent to which electoral democracy is fulfilled in a country at a given point in time, aggregating indicators on free, fair, and competitive elections for representatives and public bodies coupled with freedom of association and expression.

³We limit our analysis after 2000 because this is the period covered by our main sources on resistance. An autocratization episode ongoing in 2000 but started earlier is Venezuela (1998–2018), before the first election won by Hugo Chávez (President 1999–2013) – such episode is included.

⁴Armenia (2020–23), Botswana (2015–23), Brazil (2016–21), Bulgaria (2001–18), Croatia (2013–23), Ecuador (2007–13), Ghana (2013–23), Greece (2013–23), Guatemala (2018–23), Guyana (2019–23), Indonesia (2009–23), Lesotho (2015–17), Mauritius (2014–23), Mexico (2020–23), Moldova (2012–17), Mongolia (2015–23), Niger (2016–23), Peru (2016–23), Poland (2015–23), Romania (2021–23), Senegal (2017–23), Slovenia (2012–21), South Korea (2008–13; 2019–23), and Ukraine (2021–23). As most of these cases are censored, this would leave us with a few non-ongoing autocratization episodes without breakdown (7 in 2023).

Table 1. ERT autocratization episodes and outcomes since 2000

Overall EDI decline	N	with breakdown	without
−0.10 (standard)	52 (25)	27 (7)	25 (18)
−0.05 (this paper)	89 (43)	34 (10)	55 (33)

Ongoing cases (in 2023) in parenthesis, ERT v.14.

Empirical strategy

As we are interested in various patterns of resistance actions associated with democratic survival in autocratization episodes, we adopt a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA, Rihoux and Ragin 2008; Schneider and Wagemann 2012). The QCA logic espouses an outcome-centered perspective to assess the generalization potentials of case-based experiences as broader, comparative cross-case patterns. Being rooted in set theory and Boolean algebra, QCA is designed to deal with causal complexity (Schneider and Wagemann 2012), such as the absence of democratic breakdown resulting from different configurations (*equifinality*) of multiple resistance actions (*conjunctural causation*).

We set the unit of analysis at the autocratization-episode level. To measure Table 1’s last column (democratic survival or the absence of democratic breakdown), we use the ERT codification, which adopts the RoW categorization – applying a series of sequential thresholds to certain indicators from the V-Dem dataset to distinguish between liberal/electoral democracies and electoral/closed autocracies (Lührmann et al. 2018) – to which it adds a first election in the new autocratic regime or a 5-year permanence period in the new regime, as mentioned previously.⁵ A binary condition is created to indicate the outcome: the presence (1) or absence (0) of democratic breakdown during the autocratization episode (‘DBR’). This coding includes shifts from liberal or electoral democracies to autocratic regimes, or sequences involving both types of regime change (from liberal to electoral democracy and then to electoral autocracy, e.g., Hungary since the second term of Viktor Orbán as Prime Minister, 2010–). Other autocratization episodes that do not correspond to this scenario (i.e., without a democratic breakdown in the episode or before the last measurement in 2023) are assigned a value of 0. As Table 1 shows, this gives us a sufficiently large set to test for cases in which resistance actions successfully reverse autocratization (even if they involve relatively small variations in democratic quality in episodes without regime change).

To measure democratic resistance, we use the Democratic Erosion Event Dataset (DEED, version 6, Gottlieb et al. 2023, Baron et al. 2024). The DEED codes events of democratic resistance to autocratization based on expert codification of factual data, e.g., the occurrence of a protest against a would-be authoritarian government, from press releases. We select only such DEED indicators that are consistent with our theoretical framework and restricted to the events collected for the years that overlap with our list of autocratization episodes. Because of DEED’s limitations, we could collect events of democratic resistance in 69 of the 89 episodes between 2000 and 2023 reported in Table 1.⁶ We consider ongoing autocratization episodes – if they do not involve a

⁵Such a tolerance period is not applied in case of discrepancies between the versions of the ERT with a threshold of −0.10 and of −0.05. Although the RoW categorization relies on somewhat arbitrary thresholds, it is one of the most widely used measures to distinguish between regime types. Georgia (2008) and Malawi (2014–19) are the only cases that score autocratizing only with our threshold but still have a democratic breakdown according to the RoW (from electoral democracy to autocracy). Georgia is considered to have been autocratizing during the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and the Mikheil Saakashvili presidency (2004–13). Malawi is so after the 2014 elections in which the former president, Joyce Banda, lost the elections and a subsequent attempt to annul the results, then Peter Mutharika took office and led the country in the 2019 elections, widely recognized as fraudulent, annulled by the Constitutional Court, repeated in 2020, and won by opposition leader Lazarus Chakwera.

⁶The DEED does not include information on Bosnia and Herzegovina (2004–7), Botswana (2015–23), Guinea-Bissau (2022), Lesotho (2007, 2015–17), Malawi (2014–19), Maldives (2010–17), Malta (2013–17), Mauritius (2014–23), Moldova (2001–6), Mongolia (2000–1), Namibia (2018–23), Niger (2016–23), Palestine/West Bank (2006–8), Papua New Guinea (2007–13), Senegal (2017–23), and Sri Lanka (2004–6).

democratic breakdown – along with autocratization episodes that ended before the last year of measurement and without a regime change. Although autocratization may not be complete, such cases have not yet experienced a democratic collapse, which we interpret as successful resistance. The analysis is nonetheless replicated with alternative choices regarding episode duration and truncated cases.

We are interested in whether such episodes include events, as coded by DEED experts, related to democratic resistance. First, we take a set of variables from the DEED indicators that encode checks on the executive by the judiciary⁷ and the civil service (e.g., autonomous bureaucratic agencies or civil servants),⁸ the parliament,⁹ electoral coalitions against the autocratizing government,¹⁰ violent or non-violent protests,¹¹ and actions from external powers in support of democracy.¹² We also consider the extent to which the autocratizing elite is cohesive: for this, we use the internal party cohesion index from the Varieties of Party Identity and Organization dataset (V-Party, Lindberg et al. 2022).¹³

Given the nature of our data, we use the fuzzy set (fs) direct calibration. Since the dataset is organized at the autocratization-episode level and DEED is an event format, we calculated the total number of resistance events within each autocratization episode. We then set the 0.5 qualitative anchor to 0.9 to consider the presence of one event as a manifestation of being more in than out of the set membership of the said condition. In some cases, in fact, especially in short autocratization episodes, a single significant event – e.g., a successful impeachment procedure carried out by the parliamentary opposition – may be decisive. Concerning the V-Party condition at the election-year level, for each episode we calculated the mean of those cohesion scores for incumbent parties in the elections during the autocratization episodes. We did not weight such an indicator for party seat share, as small parties are frequent defectors. We rather inverted the variable (to see the extent to which incumbent parties are *not* cohesive) and set our qualitative anchor of 0.5 below the median. For all conditions, the 0/1 anchors are the minimum/maximum number of resistance events or reverse cohesion index scores: we fit the data between these anchors via the logistic function (Table 2).

While the DEED provides a fine-grained categorization of such events, the number of conditions in a fsQCA setup is limited to avoid issues of limited diversity, i.e., combinations of conditions without empirical referents and, consequently, overly complex solution formulas. Hence, a further aggregation procedure is necessary. From 8 possible indicators of resistance actions (Table 2's second column), we combine the calibrated conditions via the logical OR (Boolean addition '+'), as we interpret some individual conditions derived from the DEED or V-Party variables as instances of two broader dimensions of democratic resistance. The condition of institutional resistance ('INS') is based on whether the autocratization episode has membership in the sets of judicial ('JUD') or bureaucratic ('BUR') resistance, and political resistance ('POL') whether it has membership in the sets of electoral ('ELE'), legislative ('LEG'), or intra-incumbent ('INC') resistance (Table 2's last column). We keep the two social resistance conditions as separate

⁷As an example from 'Check on Executive by Judiciary' (Gottlieb et al. 2023, pp. 64–5, version 6's codebook): 'Under the direction of Justice Alexandre de Moraes, the Supreme Court tried and convicted several allies of Bolsonaro's on charges of inciting and financing violence, as well as facilitating the spread of misinformation'.

⁸'Check on Executive by Judiciary' (Gottlieb et al. 2023, pp. 66–7).

⁹'Check on Executive by Legislature' (Gottlieb et al. 2023, p. 65).

¹⁰'Coalitions or Elite Pacts' (Gottlieb et al. 2023, p. 64).

¹¹'Non violent protests' and 'Violent protests' (Gottlieb et al. 2023, pp. 69–71).

¹²'Pressure from Outside Actor' (Gottlieb et al. 2023, p. 74).

¹³'To what extent do the elites in this party display disagreement over party strategies?', p.35. The V-Party covers elections until 2019. Although we could not integrate this measure with more recent data, we are confident that this does not bias our analysis. If autocratization is still ongoing after 2019 in a specific case, the articulation of governmental parties should be comparable to the last covered election, and we can confidently 'drag our last observation forward', building on party politics literature illustrating how party organizational features change only slowly over time (Marini, 2025; Panzano and Marini, 2025).

Table 2. Operationalization and calibration of the conditions

Sources/Variables	Conditions	0	0.5	1	Aggregated conditions
DEED: 'Check on executive by judiciary'	Judicial resistance: JUD	0 (no event)	0.9 (> 1 event)	7 (max events)	Institutional resistance: INS = JUR+BUR
DEED: 'Check on central power by civil service'	Bureaucratic resistance: BUR	0 (no event)	0.9 (> 1 event)	3 (max events)	
DEED: 'Coalitions or elite pacts'	Electoral resistance ELE	0 (no event)	0.9 (> 1 event)	4 (max events)	Political resistance: POL = ELE+LEG+INC
DEED: 'Check on executive by legislature'	Legislative resistance: LEG	0 (no event)	0.9 (> 1 event)	3 (max events)	
V-Party: Party internal cohesion ('v2padisa'), reversed	Resistance within the incumbent: INC	−2.0120 (lowest value)	0.238 (< median 0.2385)	2.9965 (max value)	
DEED: 'Violent protest'	Violent social resistance: VIO	0 (no event)	0.9 (> 1 event)	3 (max events)	
DEED: 'Nonviolent protest'	Nonviolent social resistance: NVI	0 (no event)	0.9 (> 1 event)	11 (max events)	
DEED: 'Pressure from outside actor'	External resistance: EXT	0 (no event)	0.9 (> 1 event)	8 (max event)	

since we expect that there might be a divergent impact for violent ('VIO') and nonviolent ('NVI') protests. The same goes for external democratic pressure ('EXT'). We still test individual conditions as a robustness test.

The online Appendix includes the raw and calibrated data (Tables A.1 and A.2), graphs of conditions and variables, and the calibration diagnostics (Figures A.1 and A.2). The conditions of judicial, bureaucratic, legislative, and electoral resistance have skewed membership (most autocratization episodes have very few events of such type), which further justifies their aggregation.

Results

The necessity analysis looks at conditions that are necessary (or supersets) for the absence of democratic breakdown, meaning that there is no observable case of democratic survival where such conditions are absent. We did not get any single condition above meaningful consistency thresholds (Appendix Table A.3), neither necessary disjunctions nor SUIN conditions, combined with the logical OR (Oana et al. 2021).¹⁴ This already tells us that democratic resistance to autocratization is largely context-dependent, as there is no condition (or combination of conditions) that is always present where democracy survives.

In the sufficiency analysis, the truth table (Table 3) illustrates all logical combinations and empirical references ('?' when missing) of democratic resistance actions for the absence of democratic breakdown (OUT = 1).¹⁵ Simplifying such a truth table, Table 4 shows the parsimonious formula looking at whether conditions are present or absent,¹⁶ labels specific configurations, and assigns cases. We further report the typical cases of each solution term (presenting the configurations), the others explained (by such configurations), the inconsistent ones (included in the truth table minimization even though they have democratic breakdown), and finally those cases deviant in coverage (without democratic breakdown and not covered by any solution term) and irrelevant (with democratic breakdown and not explained). The solution covers 42 out of 43 cases of democratic survival in autocratization episodes started in democracies included in the analysis.

At the bottom, the table is integrated with cluster diagnostics (Thiem et al. 2016; Oana and Schneider 2021) – a procedure that has been developed to examine whether the QCA solutions are affected by 'omitted variable bias': whether specific configurations occur systematically in certain subsets of cases, hiding factors relevant for the outcome. First, we divide such autocratization episodes into six political regions (V-Dem). Second, we cluster countries depending on their GDP per capita (Fariss et al. 2022; in V-Dem): although we concentrate on actor-based conditions, regional factors or economic structures might still be relevant to determine specific agents' possibilities and choices. Third, we cluster on the solidity of liberal-democratic institutions at the beginning of autocratization (V-Dem liberal component index),¹⁷ as the occurrence of a

¹⁴The absence of violent protests (~VIO) gets close to the 0.9 consistency threshold. However, the calibration diagnostics (Appendix Figure A.2) illustrate that its set membership is skewed, with most episodes without such events. Therefore, we do not interpret it as a causally meaningful necessary condition. Similarly, SUIN combinations (Appendix Table A.4) close to meaningful standards are still related to the absence of violence protests.

¹⁵Consistency cut-off: 0.58. Cf. *infra* for robustness analyses with other cut-offs.

¹⁶Consistency and coverage values: 0.655 and 0.768. This formula is identical to the intermediate and conservative formulas. The conservative solution does not use logical remainders (configurations without empirical manifestation), while the parsimonious solution uses them if they contribute to a simpler formula. The intermediate solution includes only remainders consistent with theory-driven counterfactuals (directional expectations). We set those as the presence of institutional resistance plus the absence of violent protests – the most uncontroversial findings from resistance studies (other directional expectations revealed identical solutions). More visualizations of the formula are reported in Appendix Figures A.3, A.4, A.5, and A.6.

¹⁷Based on variables on equality before the law and individual liberties, judicial constraints on the executive, and legislative constraints on the executive (Coppedge et al. 2025, pp. 52–3).

Table 3. Truth table for the absence of democratic breakdown

Row	INS	POL	NVI	VIO	EXT	OUT	N	Consistency	Cases
32	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.612	Indonesia (2009–23)
31	1	1	1	1	0	1	4	0.644	Greece (2013–23), India (2009–23), Sri Lanka (2019–23), South Africa (2013–23)
30	1	1	1	0	1	1	7	0.656	Bosnia and Herzegovina (2013–23), Brazil (2016–21), Czechia (2013–21), Georgia (2018–23), Ghana (2013–23), Hungary (2006–23), Philippines (2016–23)
29	1	1	1	0	0	1	4	0.731	Ivory Coast (2020–23), Dominican Republic (2010–17), Romania (2021–23), USA (2016–18)
28	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0.497	Honduras (2006–10)
27	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0.542	Zambia (2010–17)
26	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0.555	Fiji (2000–1)
25	1	1	0	0	0	1	3	0.614	Philippines (2001–5), Paraguay (2011–13), Uruguay (2015–23)
24	1	0	1	1	1	1	2	0.593	Australia (2013–23), Venezuela (1998–2018)
23	1	0	1	1	0	0	2	0.524	Serbia (2010–23), Türkiye (2005–17)
22	1	0	1	0	1	1	2	0.714	Poland (2015–23), Slovenia (2012–21)
21	1	0	1	0	0	1	3	0.664	Guatemala (2018–23), Israel (2010–23), North Macedonia (2005–13)
20	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0.559	Burkina Faso (2018–23)
19	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0.581	Guyana (2019–23)
18	1	0	0	0	1	?	0		
17	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	0.61	Niger (2009–10), Peru (2016–23)
16	0	1	1	1	1	0	3	0.45	Benin (2018–21), Bolivia (2006–20), Mali (2007–13)
15	0	1	1	1	0	0	3	0.438	Argentina (2002–16), Georgia (2008), Ukraine (2010–14)
14	0	1	1	0	1	1	3	0.589	Spain (2013–23), Croatia (2013–23), Nigeria (2019–23)
13	0	1	1	0	0	1	8	0.671	Armenia (2020–23), Chile (2018–20), South Korea (2008–13), Mexico (2006–7), Mongolia (2015–23), Nepal (2018–19), Portugal (2019–23), Tunisia (2013–22)
12	0	1	0	1	1	?	0		
11	0	1	0	1	0	?	0		
10	0	1	0	0	1	1	3	0.602	Benin (2008–11), Cyprus (2017–23), Ecuador (2007–13)
9	0	1	0	0	0	1	5	0.649	South Korea (2019–23), Mexico (2020–23), Senegal (2001), Thailand (2005–7), Kosovo (2017)
8	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0.438	Nicaragua (2006–23)
7	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0.445	Burkina Faso (2014–15)
6	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	0.578	Bulgaria (2001–18), El Salvador (2018–23)
5	0	0	1	0	0	1	3	0.604	Armenia (1993–2008), Iceland (2019–23), Moldova (2012–17)
4	0	0	0	1	1	?	0		
3	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.436	Bangladesh (2002–7)
2	0	0	0	0	1	?	0		
1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.585	Sierra Leone (2007–12)

democratic breakdown can be affected by being closer to a mid-level of democratic consolidation before autocratization starts. We also cluster on episode duration, which may affect different frequencies of resistance events.

We are now able to identify four patterns of successful democratic resistance to autocratization (i.e., autocratization episodes without democratic breakdown), or combinations of conditions that are sufficient for democratic survival. We define the first pattern as **The rebel alliance: Cross-arena coalitions**, and observe its manifestation in the first two columns of Table 4. We interpret these two configurations together since they share core mechanisms, with 6 cases commonly explained (6 out of 16 for the first configuration ‘INS*POL*NVI’ and 6 out of 10 for the second configuration, ‘INS*NVI*EXT’, for a total amount of 20 cases explained). In the context of ‘The rebel alliance’, institutional resistance combines with non-violent protests from civil society as fundamental components, which is complemented by political resistance actions by domestic actors (Table 4’s first) or external pressure (and second column). This pattern underscores the importance of collaborative and multiple resistance for the prevention of democracy.

Table 4. Baseline sufficiency solution: cases and clusters

	The rebel alliance: Cross-arena coalitions	The institutional shield: Accountability agents	Politics strikes back: Peaceful, domestic defense	Default pluralism: Incumbent restraint
Configurations	INS*POL*NVI	INS*NVI*EXT	INS*~POL*~NVI*~EXT	~INS*POL*~VIO
INS				
POL				
NVI				
VIO				
EXT				
Typical	Dominican R. (2010–17), Romania (2021–23), USA (2016–18)	Poland (2015–23), Slovenia (2012–21)	Peru (2016–23)	South Korea (2019–23), Mexico (2020–23), Kosovo (2017)
Explained	Bosnia and H. (2013–23), Brazil (2016–21), Czechia (2013–21), Georgia (2018–23), Ghana (2013–23), Greece (2013–23), Guatemala (2018–23), Indonesia (2009–23), Israel (2010–23), Paraguay (2011–13), South Africa (2013–23), Sri Lanka (2019–23), Uruguay (2015–23)	Australia (2013–23), Bosnia and H. (2013–23), Brazil (2016–21), Bulgaria (2001–18), Czechia (2013–21), Georgia (2018–23), Ghana (2013–23), Indonesia (2009–23)	Guyana (2019–23)	Armenia (2020–23), Benin (2008–11), Croatia (2013–23), Cyprus (2017–23), Ecuador (2007–13), Chile (2018–20), Mexico (2006–7), Mongolia (2015–23), Nepal (2018–19), Portugal (2019–23), Spain (2013–23), South Korea (2008–13)
Inconsistent	Ivory Coast (2020–23), Hungary (2006–23), India (2009–23), Philippines (2016–23)	Hungary (2006–23), Philippines (2016–23), Venezuela (1998–2018)	Niger (2009–10)	Senegal (2001), Thailand (2005–2007), Tunisia (2013–22), Nigeria (2019–23)
Deviant coverage	Argentina (2002–16)			Armenia (1993–2008), Sierra Leone (2007–12)
Irrelevant	Bolivia (2006–20), Burkina Faso (2014–15), Burkina Faso (2018–23), Bangladesh (2002–7), El Salvador (2018–23), Fiji (2000–1), Georgia (2008), Honduras (2006–20), Mali (2007–13), Nicaragua (2006–23), North Macedonia (2005–13), Philippines (2007–12), Serbia (2010–23), Türkiye (2005–17), Ukraine (2010–14), Zambia (2010–17)			
Parsimonious parameters of fit				
Consistency	0.689	0.678	0.601	0.648
Coverage	0.232	0.161	0.180	0.423
Unique coverage	0.025	0.021	0.001	0.017
Robust clusters				
Region (Table A.6)	ALL	EE, WE-NA	EE, LA, WE-NA	EE, LA, WE-NA
Wealth (Table A.7)	W, VW	W, VW	W, VW	W, VW
Liberal (Table A.8)	H, MH	H, MH	H, MH	H, MH
Duration (Table A.9)	ALL	ALL	ALL	ALL
EE = East Europe and Central Asia, LA = Latin America, WE-NA = West Europe/North America; W = Wealthy, VW = Very-wealthy; H = High, MH = Medium-high				
Conditions	Present	Absent		

A notable illustration is Poland and the demise of the governments of the Law and Justice Party (2015–2023, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS; with Beata Szydło, 2015–17, and Mateusz Morawiecki, 2017–23, as prime ministers, and Andrzej Duda as president, 2015–25). Confronted with autocratizing tendencies within the government – which culminated in the restriction of judicial independence, media outlets, and reproductive rights (Przybylski 2018) – the Polish example demonstrates how a broad coalition of actors successfully resisted and eventually replaced the incumbent government through free and fair elections in October 2023 and the appointment of Donald Tusk as prime minister – despite facing a tilted playing field and institutional encroachments by the PiS. Resistance by Polish judges against breaches of the rule of law (Puleo and Coman 2024) received support from civil society that mobilized against various fronts, including abortion rights (Korolczuk 2016), without resorting to violence. External actors such as the European Commission and the European Court of Justice contributed to putting pressure on the government on the rule of law matter (Pech et al. 2021), while the political opposition skillfully negotiated an electoral coalition that prevented another PiS victory in 2023. Beyond such paradigmatic cases, such coalition-based resistance, resulting in two sufficient configurations, represents the most broadly applicable combination to other fundamental cases of democratic survival (e.g., the US and Brazil).

But the QCA reveals other configurations of democratic survival. We define the second pattern ‘INS*~POL*~NVI*~EXT’ as **The institutional shield: Accountability agents** (third column of Table 4). Here, institutional actors such as judges and bureaucrats are the main agents in a context where there are no other major actions from the side of political, social, or external actors. This configuration is the least representative, explaining only 2 cases of our sample. Nonetheless, it still sheds external validation on the centrality of institutional resistance, which is the only core condition present in the absence of all others. That is exemplified by the autocratization episode in Peru (2016–2023), under cycles of economic crises, political instability (and even would-be authoritarian leaders, such as President Pedro Castillo, 2021–2022, before a successful third impeachment attempt by the Parliament – not covered by the data collection), and social unrest (Barrenechea and Vergara 2023). Democracy did not collapse in this case, also because of the strong actions of the judiciary, among which the DEED reports the reversal of President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski’s pardon of former (and authoritarian) president Alberto Fujimori (1990–2000).

We label the third pattern **Politics strikes back: Peaceful, domestic defense**. It explains 15 cases in which democratic breakdown was prevented not through resorting to violent mobilizations and institutional resistance but rather through the decisive involvement of political actors (‘~INS*POL*~VIO’). An illustrative case is South Korea during the presidency of Park Geun-hye (2013–2017). South Korea’s autocratization was primarily driven by government misuse of intelligence agencies, media manipulation orchestrated by the president, government involvement in corruption scandals, intimidation of journalists, and power abuses (Croissant and Haynes 2021). Civil society took decisive action through mass peaceful protests in 2017, compelling the political opposition to initiate impeachment proceedings against the president. Faced with widespread protests and public pressure, Park’s Saenuri Party fractured, with one faction of the party ultimately voting in favor of the impeachment. President Park’s powers and duties were suspended, leading to her removal from office following the Constitutional Court’s approval of the impeachment. This case vividly illustrates the pivotal and proactive role played by civil society through non-violent protests, as well as the subsequent actions taken by pressured political actors. Interestingly, this pattern of resistance was successfully repeated by South Korea recently in response to the martial law declared by President Yoon Suk Yeol in December 2024.

Lastly, QCA identifies a fourth pattern that we define as **Default pluralism: Incumbent restraint** (Way 2015). This concept captures situations where, even in the absence of active resistance from institutional or social actors, autocratization does not culminate in the establishment of a fully autocratic regime, either because this outcome was never envisioned by the ruling elites (see Iceland, a case that is really borderline or measurement noise, as it presents

really moderate democratic decline) or because they lack the capacity to implement it (see Moldova). According to Way (2015), this outcome may occur because autocrats often lack the organization, authority, or coordination to steal elections, impose censorship, repress opposition, or keep allies in line. In such cases, the failure to consolidate authoritarian power stems not from opposition but from the lack of real authoritarian aims or internal weaknesses within the ruling elite – organizational incoherence, institutional fragmentation, or weak coercive capacity (Treisman 2020). Regimes thus enter a limbo, where the autocratization ambitions are present, without the means to implement them.

This dynamic aligns with the findings of our comparative analysis. In some cases, in short, the absence of organized resistance does not systematically lead to a successful regime change: authoritarian elites may lose elections, fail to control the media environment, or struggle to maintain elite cohesion, leading to stalled autocratization. This challenges the common assumption that once resistance disappears, autocratization will inevitably proceed. Instead, it highlights the contingent and non-linear nature of the process (Cianetti and Hanley 2021) and that resistance is not the only factor shaping autocratization outcomes. While we here focused on resistance, other structural or contingent variables – e.g., state capacity, economic constraints, intra-elite authoritarian politics, and international dynamics – can play a role. However, our analysis shows that an incomplete trajectory of autocratization without democratic resistance depends on two conditions: the absence of violent protest and external interventions. When opposition actors resort to political violence, regimes often find justification to intensify repression and curtail democratic freedoms, accelerating autocratization (Gamboa 2022). Instead, in the absence of such violent protests, governments may lack the perceived legitimacy or incentive to escalate authoritarian measures. Also, foreign actors might have a destabilizing interference. In contrast, when no external actors intervene, governments may be more cautious or less capable of pushing through authoritarian reforms.

To what extent are these configurations robust across autocratization episodes? From Table 4's overview of the cluster diagnostics, we can conclude that the different terms of the solution formula are consistent in some regions but less so in others. Important exceptions are countries in Asia and the Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa (Appendix Figure A.7), with very poor GDP per capita (Appendix Figure A.8) and unconsolidated liberal-democratic institutions (Appendix Figure A.9). Although these cases warrant a more specific study, this is in line with scholarship connecting regime breakdown to situations of low income (Alemán and Yang 2011; Djuve et al. 2020; Mazepus and Toshkov 2022), issues of state building and capacity (Bratton and Chang 2006; Fortin 2012), and defective democratic quality. Clearly, these are the cases where democratic resistance is the least effective, and the configurational analysis (related to democratic resistance only) cannot identify appropriate configurations. Still, our findings equally relate to autocratization episodes of various lengths (Appendix Figure A.10).

Validations

Building on previous critiques of QCA (Skaaning 2011; Paine 2016), recent techniques have been developed to make configurational analyses more transparent and robust (Oana and Schneider 2021; Oana et al. 2021). After cluster diagnostics, our series of validations continues by illustrating how the baseline sufficiency analysis remains unchanged when adopting more restrictive rules to minimize the truth table (Enhanced Standard Analysis, Schneider and Wagemann 2012), and is comparable with a disaggregated list of institutional and political resistance conditions, e.g., emphasizing the importance of judicial institutions and the combination of incumbent resistance and external support (Appendix Table A.5). We then test whether the baseline analysis is sensitive to different operationalizations of short and truncated cases, as well as ERT thresholds and versions. Inspired by Robinson (2019) and Haesebrouck (2023), Table 5 reports the parsimonious, intermediate, and conservative solutions (the latter adding contextual elements to

Table 5. Alternative case selections (parsimonious parameters of fit)

The rebel alliance: Cross-area coalitions							
Baseline	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
INS							
POL							
NVI							
VIO							
EXT							
The rebel alliance: Cross-area coalitions							
Baseline	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
INS							
POL							
NVI							
VIO							
EXT							
The institutional shield: Accountability agents							
Baseline	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
INS							
POL							
NVI							
VIO							
EXT							
Politics strikes back: Peaceful, domestic defense							
Baseline	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
INS							
POL							
NVI							
VIO							
EXT							
Default pluralism: Incumbent restraint							
Baseline	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
INS							
POL							
NVI							
VIO							
EXT							
Models	Cut-off	Consistency	Coverage	ERT version	EDI decline	Year	Cases
1 (Table A.11)	0.59	0.666	0.777	14	0.05	>1	61
2 (Table A.12)	0.51	0.53	0.183	14	0.05	<2023	45
3 (Table A.13)	0.63	0.732	0.845	14	0.02		92
4 (Table A.14)	0.51	0.564	0.227	14	0.1		43
5 (Table A.15)	0.61	0.677	0.544	15	0.05		72
6 (Table A.16)	0.5	0.384	0.138	15	0.1		43
7 (Table A.17)	0.66	0.769	0.691	15	0.02		97
Solutions		Conditions					
Parsimonious	Present	Absent					
Intermediate	Present	Absent					
Conservative	Present	Absent					

core associations, cf. Baumgartner 2015), simplifying truth tables resulting from multiple case selections. The table compares the results to the configurations of the baseline analysis, following the so-called Fiss logic (Ragin and Fiss 2008; Fiss 2011): conditions from parsimonious solutions (core) are in full, and those from intermediate and conservative formulas (contributory) are in lighter colors.

We examine numerous alternative case selections. First, we test whether the baseline analysis is robust if we exclude cases that lasted only one year, to avoid having cases that did not involve a democratic breakdown because they could simply have been too brief – and not because of the impact of democratic resistance actions. In this case (Table 5's model 1, Appendix Table A.11), the configurations are broadly comparable. Second, to avoid issues with censored data (the ERT version 14 is censored in 2023), we replicate the analysis excluding ongoing autocratization episodes without democratic breakdown (before 2024), which yields robust results for the first combination on cross-arena coalitions (Table 5's model 2, Appendix Table A.12). Third, we further lower the ERT inclusion threshold to -0.02 to increase our sample and include more autocratization episodes with DEED recorded events (Table 5's model 3, Appendix Table A.13): the results are convergent for the first two configurations, while the other configurations are retrieved in intermediate and conservative solutions. Fourth, we redo the analysis with the ERT standard thresholds (-0.1 of EDI) and a reduced set of cases to concentrate on episodes with a really severe democratic decline: despite a lower coverage, we retain similar configurations to the first configuration of the baseline analysis (Table 5's model 4, Appendix Table A.14). Equivalent considerations apply to parallel analyses performed comparing our analysis with ERT version 15 (on comparing ERT versions, cf. Pelke and Croissant 2021; McGuire 2024), available since spring 2025 (Table 5' models 5-6-7, Appendix Tables A.15, A.16, and A.17), where the validity of 'The rebel alliance' is the most robust. Finally, we test whether the baseline analysis is consistent with different cut-offs. With the **R** SetMethods package (Oana and Schneider 2018), we found that our solution is sensitive to the cut-off choice; however, parsimonious solutions with other (higher/lower) cut-offs broadly confirm the first configurations (Appendix Table A.10).¹⁸

Discussion and conclusion

What can prevent democratic collapse? Why do some democracies survive autocratization episodes, while others do not? This article has applied the most developed QCA tools to advance the literature on democratic resistance to autocratization. It has done so by strengthening the validity of previous case studies and illustrating successful patterns of democratic survival in a mid-size sample of autocratizing democracies. This is a highly topical and fundamental research question: even though autocratization (in its various forms, but particularly as a gradual decline of democratic quality) affects many countries worldwide, qualitative regime changes such as democratic breakdown remain overall rare. We have therefore gathered evidence from 69 autocratization episodes started in democracies in the 21st century and evaluated which conditions of institutional, political, social, and external resistance actions can be systematically related to patterns of democratic survival.

The article shows consolidated evidence that the success of democratic resistance actions against autocratization is, to a certain extent, context-dependent. There is no single or combination of necessary factors that can prevent democracies, when they enter an autocratization episode, from collapsing. The autocratizing project of the incumbent elites is rather reverted by a variety of actions, such as the activism of the judiciary, or the political opposition

¹⁸Appendix Table A.11 plots all DEED events of democratic resistance occurring over the course of the autocratization episodes: in few cases, such events are recorded after democratic breakdown. As we focus on its simple occurrence, we did not consider the year of breakdown to be significant: events happening before/after breakdown are analyzed as equivalent manifestations of democratic resistance.

forces, or even social movements. Our results thus corroborate most assumptions of previous small-N research and their internal and external validity. First, our examination confirms and extends to a larger sample of autocratization episodes those claims on the positive impact on democracy of *institutional resistance* (expectation 1). Such a factor is a core sufficient condition in two patterns out of four (present also in isolation in what we call ‘The institutional shield’). When judges or high bureaucrats speak out against the dangers for democracy of autocratizing elites, and when they take direct actions to face breaches of the rule of law, they can contribute to avoiding the most dangerous effects of autocratization, especially (but not only) if this is combined with resistance from political, social, and external actors. Second, we find evidence for those studies emphasizing the importance of *political resistance*. Coalition-making and electoral politics, e.g., a *cordon sanitaire* against the incumbent, legislative actions by the parliament, or elite defections, play a role as a sufficient factor in two out of four resistance patterns (expectation 2), if combined with institutional, nonviolent resistance, and alone, in the absence of violent protests (‘Politics strikes back’).

Third, related to *social resistance*, we find a positive impact of nonviolent protests (expectation 3). However, nonviolent protests always act in conjunction with other political or institutional actions, and they can also be absent in cases of successful resistance. Therefore, even though we are inclined to confirm their sufficient role in averting breakdown, we observe that their impact is somewhat weaker. Consequently, we have evidence of the detrimental impact of violent protests on autocratization. Even though of great symbolic impact, their absence is among the sufficient conditions related to two out of four patterns of democratic survival (expectation 4). Fourth, our analysis shows that the influence of *external* actions matters, but only when this pressure supports internal actors (expectation 5). Nonetheless, the absence of international resistance might be part of two sufficient patterns of democratic survival – a finding that reinforces previous mixed accounts. Fifth, our results point to the conclusion that what really matters for democratic survival is the occurrence of democratic resistance actions across a combination of different arenas (expectation 6 – ‘The rebel alliance: Cross-arena coalitions’). Overall, this finding suggests that, while there is no one-size-fits-all explanation for democratic survival during autocratization, resistance stemming from the *collective efforts* of various actors across different dimensions (institutional, political, social, and external) is sufficient to ensure democratic survival when democracy starts to deteriorate. This pattern relates to two possible configurations, as underlined in the baseline sufficiency analysis.

Nevertheless, a broader perspective on these findings serves as a significant caveat in their interpretation. First, following our examinations of various clusters’ diagnostics, we confirmed previous evidence that the success of democratic resistance is inevitably linked to the same factors that help democratic consolidation, such as high or medium-high wealth levels or already consolidated liberal-democratic institutions. While integrating both structural factors of democratic resilience and agency-based factors of democratic resistance is key to enhancing autocratization research, democratic resistance literature in particular should more consistently examine cases outside the regions of (West and East) Europe and (North and South) America to become really global in its scope. Second, still, alternative case selections have demonstrated that, even though changing, enlarging, or reducing the sample of cases included in the analysis, it is the unity (in diversity) that really makes the strength of the two patterns in the first configuration. ‘The rebel alliance’ is, in conclusion, the most robust and generalizable configuration, which can explain the success of democratic survival in very diverse autocratization episodes, where the strategic co-operation of institutional, political, social, and external actors prevented the would-be authoritarian elites from subverting democracy.

There is substantial room for improvement in our research, particularly regarding more precise measurements of democratic resistance. In fact, the DEED is based on a combination of factual and expert data retrieved from press releases. This can limit the precision of the measurement in cases with limited knowledge or less media coverage (Weidmann 2016; Dawkins 2021).

Combining this source with web-scraped data would be a valuable addition to our work. Similarly, to avoid measurement errors, it is fundamental to retrieve more recent data (post-2019) on party cohesion integrating the V-Party, as well as to corroborate the V-Dem-based understanding of autocratization episodes with other democracy data. Beyond such measurement issues, another possible improvement to our work would be to combine the QCA tools implemented here with large-N statistical event data analysis and within-case studies. This would enable more thorough examinations of the generalizable and observable implications of such patterns of democratic survival in order to join different levels of explanation and incorporate factors related to autocratization onset and end.

Supplementary material. The supplementary material for this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1475676525100595>.

Acknowledgements. We would like to thank the editors of EJPR and the anonymous reviewers for their supporting and guiding insights. We are also grateful to individual colleagues who provided extensive feedback on the manuscript, such as Daniel Bochsler, Seraphine F. Maerz, Jean-Benoit Pilet, Svend-Erik Skaaning, and Lasse Egendal Leipziger. We also thank Steven Levitsky, Theresa Gessler, and Agnieszka Kwiatkowska as discussants of our paper, respectively, in the 2023 APSA panel ‘Investigating Episodes of Autocratization’ in Los Angeles, the 2023 ECPR panel ‘Opposition Strategies Amid Democratic Backsliding: A Cross-Regional Perspective’ in Prague, and the 2023 SISP panel ‘Rethinking Regimes and Regime Change’ in Genoa, as well as others in the audience who have shared ideas and suggestions.

Funding statement. The authors received no specific grant from any public or private funding agency for this paper.

Competing interests. The authors declare none.

References

- Alemán, J. and Yang, D.D. (2011). ‘A duration analysis of democratic transitions and authoritarian backslides’. *Comparative Political Studies*, 44(9), 1123–1151.
- Balderacchi, C. and Tomini, L. (2024). ‘Alternative patterns to electoral autocracy: Recognizing diversity in contemporary autocratization processes’. *Democratization*, 31(8), 1890–1911.
- Baron, H., Blair, R.A., Gottlieb, J. and Paler, L. (2024). ‘An events-based approach to understanding democratic erosion’. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 57(2), 208–215.
- Barrenechea, R. and Vergara, A. (2023). ‘Peru: the danger of powerless democracy’. *Journal of Democracy*, 34(2), 77–89.
- Bauer, M.W. and Becker, S. (2020). ‘Democratic backsliding, populism, and public administration’. *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance*, 3(1), 19–31.
- Baumgartner, M. (2015). ‘Parsimony and causality’. *Quality & Quantity*, 49, 839–856.
- Bermeo, N. (2003). *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times: The Citizenry and the Breakdown of Democracy*. Princeton University Press.
- Bermeo, N. (2016). ‘On democratic backsliding’. *Journal of Democracy*, 27(1), 5–19.
- Bermeo, N. (2022). ‘Questioning backsliding’. *Journal of Democracy*, 33(4), 155–159.
- Boese, V.A., Edgell, A.B., Hellmeier, S., Maerz, S.F. and Lindberg, S.I. (2021). ‘How democracies prevail: democratic resilience as a two-stage process’. *Democratization*, 28(5), 885–907.
- Bogéa, D. (2024). ‘Dialogue’ as strategic judicial resistance? The rise and fall of ‘preemptive dialogue’ by the Brazilian Supreme Court’. *European Politics and Society*, 25(3), 574–596.
- Bratton, M. and Chang, E.C. (2006). ‘State building and democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa: forwards, backwards, or together?’. *Comparative Political Studies*, 39(9), 1059–1083.
- Brownlee, J. and Miao, K. (2022). ‘Why democracies survive’. *Journal of Democracy*, 33(4), 133–149.
- Bryan, J.D. (2023). ‘What kind of democracy do we all support? How partisan interest impacts a citizen’s conceptualization of democracy’. *Comparative Political Studies*, 56(10), 1597–1627.
- Carothers, T. (2011). *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve*. Carnegie Endowment.
- Carothers, T. (2024). ‘Lessons about backsliding and resistance’. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 712(1), 250–257.
- Cassani, A. and Tomini, L. (2018). *Autocratization in Post-Cold War Political Regimes*. Springer.
- Cassani, A. and Tomini, L. (2020). Reversing regimes and concepts: from democratization to autocratization’. *European Political Science*, 19, 272–287.
- Cianetti, L. and Hanley, S. (2021). ‘The end of the backsliding paradigm’. *Journal of Democracy*, 32(1), 66–80.

- Claassen, C. (2020). 'In the mood for democracy? Democratic support as thermostatic opinion'. *American Political Science Review*, 114(1), 36–53.
- Cleary, M.R. and Öztürk, A. (2022). 'When does backsliding lead to breakdown? Uncertainty and opposition strategies in democracies at risk'. *Perspectives on Politics*, 20(1), 205–221.
- Coppedge, M., Edgell, A.B., Knutsen, C.H. and Lindberg, S.I. (2022). *Why Democracies Develop and Decline*. Cambridge University Press.
- Coppedge, M., Gerring, J., Knutsen, C.H., Lindberg, S.I., Teorell, J., Altman, D., Bernhard, M., Fish, M.S. and Glynn . . . (2025). *V-Dem Codebook v15 Varieties of Democracy (VDem) Project*, available at <https://www.v-dem.net/data/the-v-dem-dataset/>.
- Croissant, A. and Haynes, J. (2021). Democratic regression in Asia: Introduction'. *Democratization*, 28(1), 1–21.
- Croissant, A. and Tomini, L. (2024). *The Routledge Handbook of Autocratization*. Routledge.
- Dahlum, S., Knutsen, C.H. and Wig, T. (2019). 'Who revolts? Empirically revisiting the social origins of democracy'. *The Journal of Politics*, 81(4), 1494–1499.
- Dawkins, S. (2021). 'The problem of the missing dead'. *Journal of Peace Research*, 58(5), 1098–1116.
- Della Porta, D., Donker, T.H., Hall, B., Poljarevic, E. and Ritter, D.P. (2017). *Social Movements and Civil War: When Protests for Democratization Fail*. Routledge.
- del Rio, A. (2022). Strategic uncertainty and elite defections in electoral autocracies: a crossnational analysis'. *Comparative Political Studies*, 55(13), 2250–2282.
- Diamond, L. (2021). 'Democratic regression in comparative perspective: scope, methods, and causes'. *Democratization*, 28(1), 22–42.
- Ding, I. and Slater, D. (2021). 'Democratic decoupling'. *Democratization*, 28(1), 63–80.
- Djuve, V.L., Knutsen, C.H. and Wig, T. (2020). 'Patterns of regime breakdown since the French revolution'. *Comparative Political Studies*, 53(6), 923–958.
- Džankić, J., Keil, S. and Kmezić, M. (2018). *The Europeanisation of the Western Balkans: A Failure of EU Conditionality?* Springer.
- Edgell, A.B., Lachapelle, J., Lührmann, A. and Maerz, S.F. (2021). 'Pandemic backsliding: Violations of democratic standards during Covid-19'. *Social Science & Medicine*, 285, 114244.
- Edgell, A.B., Boese, V.A., Maerz, S.F., Lindenfors, P. and Lindberg, S.I. (2022). 'The institutional order of liberalization'. *British Journal of Political Science*, 52(3), 1465–1471.
- Edgell, A.B., Maerz, S.F., Maxwell, L., Morgan, R., Medzihorsky, J., Wilson, M.C., Boese, V., Hellmeier, S., Lachapelle, J., Lindenfors, P., et al. (2024). *Episodes of regime transformation dataset (v14)*. Varieties of Democracy, available at <https://www.v-dem.net/data/ertdataset/>.
- Fariss, C.J., Anders, T., Markowitz, J.N. and Barnum, M. (2022). 'New estimates of over 500 years of historic GDP and population data'. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 66(3), 553–591.
- Fiss, P.C. (2011). 'Building better causal theories: a fuzzy set approach to typologies in organization research'. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54(2), 393–420.
- Fortin, J. (2012). 'Is there a necessary condition for democracy? The role of state capacity in postcommunist countries'. *Comparative Political Studies*, 45(7), 903–930.
- Frederiksen, K.V.S. and Skaaning, S.-E. (2023). 'Do citizens tolerate antidemocratic statements?' *Electoral Studies*, 84(102652), 1–9.
- Gamboa, L. (2017). 'Opposition at the margins: strategies against the erosion of democracy in Colombia and Venezuela'. *Comparative Politics*, 49(4), 457–477.
- Gamboa, L. (2022). *Opposition at the Margins*. Cambridge University Press.
- Geddes, B. (2003). *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. University of Michigan Press.
- Gerring, J., Knutsen, C.H., Maguire, M., Skaaning, S.-E., Teorell, J. and Coppedge, M. (2021). 'Democracy and human development: Issues of conceptualization and measurement'. *Democratization*, 28(2), 308–332.
- Gibler, D.M. and Randazzo, K.A. (2011). 'Testing the effects of independent judiciaries on the likelihood of democratic backsliding'. *American Journal of Political Science*, 55(3), 696–709.
- Gidron, N. (2023). 'Why Israeli democracy is in crisis'. *Journal of Democracy*, 34(3), 33–45.
- Gottlieb, J., Blair, R., Baron, H., Arugay, A., Ballard-Rosa, C., Davidson, D., Gamboa, L., Grossman, G., Grossman, S., Kulich-Vamvakas, C., Lapp, N., McCoy, J.L., Robinson, A., Rosenzweig, S., Royer, E., Schneider, C.L., Stokes, S. and Turnbull, M. (2023). 'Democratic erosion event dataset v6'. Democratic Erosion: A Cross-University Collaboration, available at <https://democratic-erosion.org/dataset/>.
- Grumbach, J.M. (2023). 'Laboratories of democratic backsliding'. *American Political Science Review*, 117(3), 967–984.
- Günay, C. and Džihić, V. (2016). 'Decoding the authoritarian code: exercising 'legitimate' power politics through the ruling parties in Turkey, Macedonia and Serbia'. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16(4), 529–549.
- Haesebrouck, T. (2023). 'Relevant, irrelevant, or ambiguous? Toward a new interpretation of QCA's solution types'. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 52(4), 1737–1764.

- Haggard, S. and Kaufman, R. (2012). 'Inequality and regime change: democratic transitions and the stability of democratic rule' *American Political Science Review*, **106**(3), 495–516.
- Haggard, S. and Kaufman, R. (2018). *The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions*. Princeton University Press.
- Haggard, S. and Kaufman, R. (2021). *Backsliding: Democratic Regress in the Contemporary World*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hellmeier, S. and Bernhard, M. (2023). 'Regime transformation from below: mobilization for democracy and autocracy from 1900 to 2021'. *Comparative Political Studies*, **56**(12), 1858–1890.
- Holloway, J. and Manwaring, R. (2023). 'How well does 'resilience' apply to democracy? A systematic review'. *Contemporary Politics*, **29**(1), 68–92.
- Houle, C. (2015). 'Ethnic inequality and the dismantling of democracy: a global analysis'. *World Politics*, **67**(3), 469–505.
- Hur, A. and Yeo, A. (2024). 'Democratic ceilings: the long shadow of nationalist polarization in East Asia'. *Comparative Political Studies*, **57**(4), 584–612.
- Ishiyama, J. (2018). *From Bullets to Ballots: The Transformation of Rebel Groups into Political Parties*. Routledge.
- Jenne, E.K. and Mudde, C. (2012). 'Can outsiders help? Hungary's illiberal turn'. *Journal of Democracy*, **23**(3), 147–155.
- Juon, A. and Bochsler, D. (2020). 'Hurricane or fresh breeze? Disentangling the populist effect on the quality of democracy'. *European Political Science Review*, **12**(3), 391–408.
- Kim, N.K. and Kroeger, A.M. (2019). 'Conquering and coercing: nonviolent anti-regime protests and the pathways to democracy'. *Journal of Peace Research*, **56**(5), 650–666.
- Kneuer, M. and Demmelhuber, T. (2020). *Authoritarian Gravity Centers: A Cross-Regional Study of Authoritarian Promotion and Diffusion*. Routledge.
- Korolczuk, E. (2016). 'Explaining mass protests against abortion ban in Poland: The power of connective action'. *Zoon Politikon*, **7**(7), 91–113.
- Lachapelle, J. and Hellmeier, S. (2024). 'Pathways to democracy after authoritarian breakdown: comparative case selection and lessons from the past'. *International Political Science Review*, **45**(1), 123–143.
- Laebens, M.G. and Lührmann, A. (2021). 'What halts democratic erosion? The changing role of accountability'. *Democratization*, **28**(5), 908–928.
- Laebens, M.G. and Öztürk, A. (2021). 'Partisanship and autocratization: polarization, power asymmetry, and partisan social identities in Turkey'. *Comparative Political Studies*, **54**(2), 245–279.
- Lavenex, S. and Schimmelfennig, F. (2011). 'EU democracy promotion in the neighbourhood: from leverage to governance?'. *Democratization*, **18**(4), 885–909.
- Leipziger, L.E. (2024). 'Ethnic inequality, democratic transitions, and democratic breakdowns: investigating an asymmetrical relationship'. *The Journal of Politics*, **86**(1), 291–304.
- Levitsky, S. and Way, L.A. (2006). 'Linkage versus leverage. Rethinking the international dimension of regime change'. *Comparative Politics*, **38**(4), 379–400.
- Levitsky, S. and Way, L.A. (2010). *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press.
- Levitsky, S. and Ziblatt, D. (2019). *How Democracies Die*. Crown.
- Levitz, P. and Pop-Eleches, G. (2010). 'Why no backsliding? The European Union's impact on democracy and governance before and after accession'. *Comparative Political Studies*, **43**(4), 457–485.
- Lindberg, S., Düpont, N. and Higashijima, M. (2022). Codebook Varieties of Party Identity and Organization (V-Party) Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project, available at <https://www.v-dem.net/data/v-party-dataset/>.
- Linz, J.J. and Stepan, A. (1978). *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lührmann, A. and Lindberg, S.I. (2019). 'A third wave of autocratization is here: What is new about it?'. *Democratization*, **26**(7), 1095–1113.
- Lührmann, A. and Merkel, W. (2023). *Resilience of Democracy: Responses to Illiberal and Authoritarian Challenges*. Routledge.
- Lührmann, A., Tannenberg, M. and Lindberg, S.I. (2018). 'Regimes of the world (row): opening new avenues for the comparative study of political regimes'. *Politics and Governance*, **6**(1), 60.
- Maerz, S.F., Edgell, A.B., Wilson, M.C., Hellmeier, S. and Lindberg, S.I. (2024). 'Episodes of regime transformation'. *Journal of Peace Research*, **61**(6), 967–984.
- Marini, S. (2025). 'Do more inclusive parties change less? Intraparty democracy and programmatic change'. *West European Politics*, **48**(2), 270–296.
- Marino, M., Donni, P.L., Bavetta, S. and Cellini, M. (2020). 'The democratization process: an empirical appraisal of the role of political protest'. *European Journal of Political Economy*, **63**, 1–20.
- Markoff, J. (2015). *Waves of Democracy: Social Movements and Political Change*. Routledge.
- Mazepus, H. and Toshkov, D. (2022). 'Standing up for democracy? Explaining citizens' support for democratic checks and balances'. *Comparative Political Studies*, **55**(8), 1271–1297.
- McGuire, J.W. (2024). 'Autocratization and health outcomes', in *The Routledge Handbook of Autocratization* (pp. 377–396). Routledge.

- Mechkova, V., Lührmann, A. and Lindberg, S.I. (2019). 'The accountability sequence: from de-jure to de-facto constraints on governments'. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, **54**, 40–70.
- Medzihorsky, J. and Lindberg, S.I. (2024). 'Walking the talk: How to identify anti-pluralist parties'. *Party Politics*, **30**(3), 420–434.
- Miller, M.K. (2024). 'How Little and Meng's objective approach fails in democracies'. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, **57**(2), 202–207.
- Møller, J. (2013). 'When one might not see the wood for the trees: the 'historical turn' in democratization studies, critical junctures, and cross-case comparisons'. *Democratization*, **20**(4), 693–715.
- Møller, J. and Skaaning, S.-E. (2023). *Democratization and Autocratization in Comparative Perspective: Concepts, Currents, Causes, Consequences, and Challenges*. Routledge.
- Muno, W. and Briceño, H. (2023). 'Autocratization and public administration: The revolutionary populist regime in Venezuela in comparative perspective'. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration*, **45**(1), 73–92.
- Nok Hin, A., Ka Ming, C. and Ka Lun, N. (2024). 'Cooperate but divided at heart: analysis of an opposition elite survey during autocratization'. *Political Studies Review*, **22**(1), 156–173.
- Nord, M., Angiolo, F., Lundstedt, M., Wiebrecht, F. and Lindberg, S.I. (2025). 'When autocratization is reversed: Episodes of u-turns since 1900'. *Democratization*, 1–24.
- Oana, I.-E. and Schneider, C.Q. (2018). 'Setmethods: An add-on R package for advanced QCA'. *The R Journal*, **10**(1), 507–533.
- Oana, I.-E. and Schneider, C.Q. (2021). 'A robustness test protocol for applied QCA: theory and R software application'. *Sociological Methods & Research*, **53**(1), 57–88.
- Oana, I.-E., Schneider, C.Q. and Thomann, E. (2021). *Qualitative Comparative Analysis using R: A Beginner's Guide*. Cambridge University Press.
- Obydenkova, A. and Libman, A. (2013). 'National autocratization and the survival of subnational democracy: Evidence from Russia's parliamentary elections of 2011'. *Acta Politica*, **48**, 459–489.
- O'Donnell, G., Schmitter, P.C. and Whitehead, L. (2013[1986]). *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*. John Hopkins University Press.
- Paine, J. (2016). 'Set-theoretic comparative methods: less distinctive than claimed'. *Comparative Political Studies*, **49**(6), 703–741.
- Panzano, G. (2024). 'Do mutually reinforcing cleavages harm democracy? Inequalities between ethnic groups and autocratization'. *Democratization*, **31**(2), 265–289.
- Panzano, G. and Marini, S. (2025). 'Italy's democratic quality and the role of political parties: comparative empirical patterns'. *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, **55**(2), 138–155.
- Panzano, G., Benazzo, S. and Bochev, V. (2025). 'Local democratic resistance to autocratization: evidence from Budapest, Banja Luka, and Zagreb'. *Contemporary Politics*, **31**(4), 522–543.
- Pech, L., Wachowicz, P. and Mazur, D. (2021). 'Poland's rule of law breakdown: a five-year assessment of EU's (in) action'. *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law*, **13**(1), 1–43.
- Pelke, L. and Croissant, A. (2021). 'Conceptualizing and measuring autocratization episodes'. *Swiss Political Science Review*, **27**(2), 434–448.
- Przeworski, A. (1991). *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.
- Przybylski, W. (2018). 'Explaining eastern Europe: Can Poland's backsliding be stopped?'. *Journal of Democracy*, **29**(3), 52–64.
- Puleo, L. and Coman, R. (2024). 'Explaining judges' opposition when judicial independence is undermined: Insights from Poland, Romania, and Hungary'. *Democratization*, **31**(1), 47–69.
- Ragin, C.C. and Fiss, P.C. (2008). 'Net effects analysis versus configurational analysis: An empirical demonstration'. *Redesigning Social Inquiry: Fuzzy Sets and Beyond*, **240**, 190–212.
- Rakner, L. (2021). 'Don't touch my constitution! Civil society resistance to democratic backsliding in Africa's pluralist regimes'. *Global Policy*, **12**, 95–105.
- Riedl, R.B., Friesen, P., McCoy, J. and Roberts, K. (2024a). 'Democratic backsliding, resilience, and resistance'. *World Politics*, **77**(1), 151–177.
- Riedl, R.B., McCoy, J., Roberts, K. and Somer, M. (2024b). 'Pathways of democratic backsliding, resistance, and (partial) recoveries'. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, **712**(1), 8–31.
- Rihoux, B. and Ragin, C.C. (2008). *Configurational Comparative Methods: Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and Related Techniques*. Sage Publications.
- Rovny, J. (2023). 'Antidote to backsliding: ethnic politics and democratic resilience'. *American Political Science Review*, **117**(4), 1410–1428.
- Rubinson, C. (2019). 'Presenting qualitative comparative analysis: notation, tabular layout, and visualization'. *Methodological Innovations*, **12**(2), 1–22.
- Schedler, A. (2001). 'Measuring democratic consolidation'. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, **36**(1), 66–92.

- Schedler, A. (2013). *The Politics of Uncertainty: Sustaining and Subverting Electoral Authoritarianism*. Oxford University Press.
- Scheve, K. and Stasavage, D. (2017). 'Wealth inequality and democracy'. *Annual Review of Political Science*, **20**, 451–468.
- Schneider, C.Q. and Wagemann, C. (2012). *Set-Theoretic Methods for the Social Sciences: A Guide to Qualitative Comparative Analysis*. Cambridge University Press.
- Selçuk, O. and Hekimci, D. (2020). 'The rise of the democracy–authoritarianism cleavage and opposition coordination in Turkey (2014–2019)'. *Democratization*, **27**(8), 1496–1514.
- Sjögren, A. (2024). 'Extending contestation: Opposition party strength and dissenting civil society engagement with autocratic elections'. *Contemporary Politics*, **30**(1), 21–43.
- Skaaning, S.-E. (2011). 'Assessing the robustness of crisp-set and fuzzy-set QCA results'. *Sociological Methods & Research*, **40**(2), 391–408.
- Skaaning, S.-E. (2020). 'Waves of autocratization and democratization: a critical note on conceptualization and measurement'. *Democratization*, **27**(8), 1533–1542.
- Slater, D. and Ziblatt, D. (2013). 'The enduring indispensability of the controlled comparison'. *Comparative Political Studies*, **46**(10), 1301–1327.
- Solska, M. (2020). 'Democratic erosion? One dominant party and ineffective opposition'. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, **58**, 105.
- Somer, M., McCoy, J.L. and Luke, R.E. (2023). 'Pernicious polarization, autocratization and opposition strategies', in *Resilience of Democracy* (pp. 61–80). Routledge.
- Stenberg, M., Rocco, P. and Farole, S.A. (2022). 'Calling in "sick": COVID-19, opportunism, pretext, and subnational autocratization'. *Global Studies Quarterly*, **2**(3), ksac017.
- Svolik, M. (2008). 'Authoritarian reversals and democratic consolidation'. *American Political Science Review*, **102**(2), 153–168.
- Tansey, O., Koehler, K. and Schmotz, A. (2017). 'Ties to the rest: autocratic linkages and regime survival'. *Comparative Political Studies*, **50**(9), 1221–1254.
- Teorell, J. (2010). *Determinants of Democratization: Explaining Regime Change in the World, 1972–2006*. Cambridge University Press.
- Thiem, A., Spöhel, R. and Duşa, A. (2016). 'Enhancing sensitivity diagnostics for qualitative comparative analysis: a combinatorial approach'. *Political Analysis*, **24**(1), 104–120.
- Tolstrup, J. (2013). 'When can external actors influence democratization? Leverage, linkages, and gatekeeper elites'. *Democratization*, **20**(4), 716–742.
- Tomini, L. (2021). 'Don't think of a wave! A research note about the current autocratization debate'. *Democratization*, **28**(6), 1191–1201.
- Tomini, L., Gibril, S. and Bochev, V. (2023). 'Standing up against autocratization across political regimes: a comparative analysis of resistance actors and strategies'. *Democratization*, **30**(1), 119–138.
- Tong, K.-I. and Cheng, E.W. (2022). 'Social movements amidst backsliding', in *Activism and Authoritarian Governance in Asia* (pp. 15–27). Routledge.
- Treisman, D. (2020). 'Democracy by mistake: How the errors of autocrats trigger transitions to freer government'. *American Political Science Review*, **114**(3), 792–810.
- Treisman, D. (2023). 'How great is the current danger to democracy? Assessing the risk with historical data'. *Comparative Political Studies*, **56**(12), 1924–1952.
- Truong, M. (2024). 'The "ironic impact" of pro-democracy activists: how pro-democratic frames undermine support for local policy-based protests in authoritarian regimes'. *Comparative Political Studies*, **57**(7), 1107–1138.
- Truong, N., Ong, E. and Shum, M. (2024). 'Agents of resistance: resolve and repertoires against autocratization in Asia'. *Democratization*, **31**(3), 513–530.
- van Lit, J., van Ham, C. and Meijers, M.J. (2024). 'Countering autocratization: a roadmap for democratic defence'. *Democratization*, **31**(4), 765–787.
- Von Soest, C. and Wahman, M. (2015). 'Are democratic sanctions really counterproductive?' *Democratization*, **22**(6), 957–980.
- Way, L. (2015). *Pluralism by Default: Weak Autocrats and the Rise of Competitive Politics*. John Hopkins University Press.
- Wegmann, S. (2022). *The Power of Opposition: How Legislative Organization Influences Democratic Consolidation*. Routledge.
- Weidmann, N.B. (2016). 'A closer look at reporting bias in conflict event data'. *American Journal of Political Science*, **60**(1), 206–218.
- Weyland, K. (2024a). *Democracy's Resilience to Populism's Threat: Countering Global Alarmism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Weyland, K. (2024b). 'Opposition to populist backsliding: Conditions, limitations, and opportunities'. *Democratization*, 1–26.
- Whiting, M. and Kaya, Z.N. (2021). 'Autocratization, permanent emergency rule and local politics: lessons from the Kurds in Turkey'. *Democratization*, **28**(4), 821–839.
- Wiebrecht, F., Sato, Y., Nord, M., Lundstedt, M., Angiolillo, F. and Lindberg, S.I. (2023). 'State of the world 2022: defiance in the face of autocratization'. *Democratization*, **30**(5), 769–793.

- Williamson, M., Akor, C. and Edgell, A.B.** (2024). *Democracy in Trouble: Democratic Resilience and Breakdown from 1900 to 2022*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wilson, M.C., Medzihorsky, J., Maerz, S.F., Lindenfors, P., Edgell, A.B., Boese, V.A. and Lindberg, S.I.** (2023). 'Episodes of liberalization in autocracies: a new approach to quantitatively studying democratization'. *Political Science Research and Methods*, **11**(3), 501–520.
- Wunsch, N. and Gessler, T.** (2023). 'Who tolerates democratic backsliding? A mosaic approach to voters' responses to authoritarian leadership in Hungary'. *Democratization*, **30**(5), 914–937.