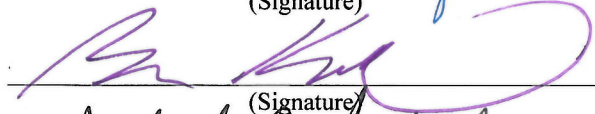The Dark Side of Democratization Movements: Repression and
Authoritarian Backsliding

Presented to the faculty of Lycoming College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for Departmental Honors in
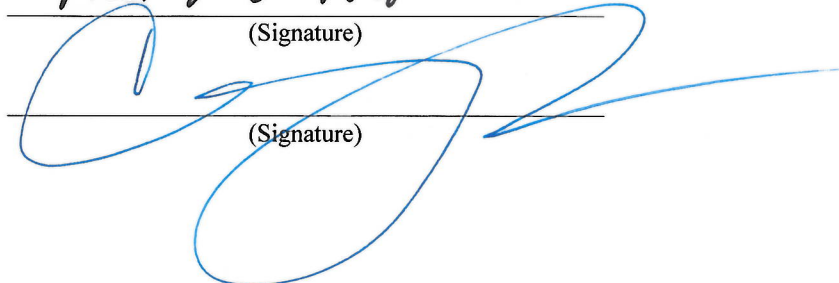Political Science

by
Aseel Tork
Lycoming College
May 2022

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The Dark Side of Democratization Movements: Repression and Authoritarian Backsliding

A thesis presented

by

Aseel Tork

to

The Joanne and Arthur Haberberger Fellowship

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Project Title:

The Dark Side of Democratization Movements: Repression and Authoritarian Backsliding

Research Question:

Under what conditions do contemporary democratization movements result in an authoritarian backsliding?

Abstract

This paper contributes to our understanding of government repression in response to domestic dissent. In contrast to previous research, it focuses on the impact of internal democratization movements on regime transition. It focuses on whether and how democratization movements make defective democracies and electoral autocracies more authoritarian despite attempts to move them in the other direction. I hypothesize that repression increases the likelihood of authoritarian backsliding. The linear regression analysis tests the link between dissent and repression in all countries that experienced at least one democratization episode between 1973 and 2017. It provides statistical significance to the hypothesis—that the longer a country manages to avoid repression, the less likely it is to experience authoritarian backsliding. The results also show that civil liberties are typically repressed first. In addition to the quantitative analysis, I examine eight case studies that have experienced democratization episodes in the last few decades to examine the impact of regime type, threat size, and military involvement in politics on the outcomes of democratization movements. The findings suggest that regime type has no impact on the likelihood of authoritarian backsliding, however, politicized military does.

Introduction

One of the policies on which much of American foreign policy rests is the Democratic

Peace Theory, which suggests that democracies[1] rarely, if ever, go to war with each other. This

insight now serves as a justification for promoting democratization around the world. However,

despite the increased number of democratic countries, freedom scores worldwide have been in

decline (Freedom House 2020). In other words, although promoting democratization had

decreased interstate conflicts, human rights violations within states have soared. Moreover, many

of these "democracies" have transitioned back to semi-autocracies or autocracies, a phenomenon

that has been referred to as *democratic backsliding* or *autocratization*, which refers to the decline

of democratic regime attributes.

Autocratization has been on the rise since 2000. The pace of this trend has escalated in

the last few years and became known as the "third wave of autocratization" (Luhrmann 2019).

According to *State of the World* 2020 report, there were 25 countries undergoing autocratization

in 2020 compared to less than ten a decade ago. At the same time, the number of democratizing

countries had declined to only 16 countries compared to more than 30 countries a decade ago.

When taking the population size into account, about 34 percent of the world's population was

undergoing autocratization in 2020 compared to only 4 percent of the world's population that

was undergoing democratization.

Scholars in this field have studied the causes and the consequences of this phenomenon,

however, a piece has been missing: the impact of anti-regime movements on autocratization.

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[1]By "democracy" I refer to political systems that have constitutionally guaranteed free and fair
elections, meaning that there is free media that allows citizens to get information about the
different perspective on the political process, as well as civil society groups and political parties
that citizens can find different alternatives to choose from in the political process

This research questions how democratization movements, dissents, or anti-regime protests impact the transition of a regime type.

Samuel P. Huntington's 1993 book "The Third Wave of Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century," which was considered an insightful and useful contribution to American foreign policy, offers guidelines for democratizers who want to overthrow authoritarian regimes and achieve democratization. Among these guidelines, Huntington suggests the protesters to: (1) focus on the illegitimacy of the authoritarian regime, (2) cultivate generals, (3) practice and preach nonviolence, (4) develop contacts with the global media and foreign human rights organizations, and (5) promote unity among opposition groups. Eighteen years later, the Arab Spring spurred in six countries: Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen. Protesters who took to the streets to demand the fall of the authoritarian regimes, took Huntington's guidelines into account. They viewed their regimes as illegitimate, they practiced nonviolent protests and approaches, reached out to global media and foreign human rights organization, and some of them, like in Tunisia, Egypt, and Bahrain, promoted unity among opposition movements. Huntington's guidelines were present in these six countries, but only one out of the six countries achieved successful democratization. In some cases, like in Bahrain, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Egypt, these democratization movements caused an authoritarian backsliding—a gradual transition towards consolidated authoritarianism, despite attempts to transition them towards democracies. This raise the following question: under what conditions do contemporary democratization movements result in an authoritarian backsliding[2]?

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[2] To minimize repetition, I utilize the terms democratic backsliding, authoritarian backsliding, authoritarian backfire, and authoritarian backlash interchangeable.

In this research paper, I focus on three factors that might impact the outcome of a democratization movement[3]: the regime type, the threat perceived by the regime, and the relationship between the military and the regime. I believe that, alongside Huntington's guidelines, these factors should be taken into account in order to ensure a successful democratization movement and avoid an authoritarian backsliding.

The fundamental reason for this research is to explain the impact of democratization movements on the existing democratic deficit and authoritarian persistence. With the research question specified above, I intend to generate empirical conclusions about how repression of opposing movements impacts the directional change in regime types. Most importantly, I hope to contribute to our understanding of how authoritarian regimes become more authoritarian despite attempts to move them in the other direction. This project can serve as a cornerstone foreign policy makers and democratizers, like me, who want to achieve liberal democratic foundation that respects basic human rights in countries that lack these fundamental rights, without having to bear consequences like authoritarian backsliding.

Below, I first pursue a review of the literature followed by the three hypotheses I propose. The following section presents the methodology, I test my hypotheses using both quantitative and qualitative methods. In the quantitative analysis I examine the impact of oppression on regime change. In the qualitative case studies, I examine eight countries, some of which have experienced authoritarian backsliding, and some did not. Then I conclude with a summary of the findings.

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[3] I refer to dissent and anti-regime protests as democratization movements

Literature Review, Theory, and Hypotheses

There has been a huge volume of research in democratization, failed democratization, and autocratization. Scholars have studied the causes of these democratic transitions (Diamond et al. 1989), their modalities (Huntington 1991), the aftermath of democratization (Teorell 2010), the challenges of consolidation (Haggard and Kaufman 1994, and Linz and Stepan 1996) and the problems related to the quality of democracy (O'Donnell et al. 2004). Fish and Wittenburg (2017) defined countries that show promise as potential democracies, but then move toward authoritarianism as failed democratizations. This term has been also referred to as *breakdown of democracy* (Linz and Stepan 1978, and Prezworski et al. 2012), *democratic backsliding* and *democratic recession* (Bermeo 2016).

In reviewing research on democratic backsliding, I found that the term is understood in different ways and embraces multiple phenomena. Overall, the term "backsliding" denotes a "turning away from an ideal" (Bermeo 2016). A backsliding from democracy entails a deterioration of qualities associated with democratic governance. It can be at different speeds, within any regime and can yield different outcomes. In democracies, it could be rapid and involve radical change that results in transition to an authoritarian regime, or it could be gradual and involve gradual change that results in a semi-democratic regime. In autocracies, it can be a decline in democratic qualities of governance. Democratic backsliding can thus denote a complete transition away from a democratic regime or a weakening of democratic traits within democracies or autocracies.

<u>Why Does Democratic Backsliding Occur?</u>

Although the academic interest in backsliding is quite new, there are plenty of theories that examine the causes of backsliding. Existing theories explain how political agency, political

culture, political institutions, political economy, political social structure and political coalitions, and international actors might lead to democratic backsliding. Agency-based theories place the reasoning of democratic backsliding on decisions made by political actors. Linz (1978) argued that some personal attributes of the political leader, like temperament or intellect, lead to democratic breakdown. O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) attributed democratic breakdown to strategic interaction of groups in the government and in the opposition.

Theories of political culture explain democratic backsliding by way of attitudes, beliefs, rituals, and practices that form preferences over forms of political practice or shape form of political practice that makes some forms of political practices more favorable. Fish (2002), for example, claims that this is the reason for Muslim countries democratic deficit. Political institutions theories focus on how some institution traits cause democratic backsliding. Some institutions may affect governmental performance, like the level of accountability and representativeness, in a way that does not deter backsliding. Theories of political economy link structural-economic variables to regime outcomes. They focus on political-economic variables like level of income, distribution of income, source of income, and short-term macroeconomic performance to study their impact on backsliding. The majority of these theories agree that high rates of economic growth are associated with lower risks of democratic backsliding, while high rates of inflation increase the risk of democratic backsliding (Kapstein and Converse 2008, Bernhard et al. 2003, and Burke and Leigh 2010).

Theories of social structure and political coalition relate social heterogeneity, the formation of groups of citizens, and the potential for conflict among these groups to democratic backsliding (Bernhard et al. 2003). These theories highlight the causal significance of a particular social class: the bourgeoise, the urban working class, and peasants, and highlight the

causal significance of ethnic demography and ethnic cleavages as a source of democratic backsliding.

Theories that study the impact of international factors on democratic backsliding imply the existence of an external actor as the agent of change—they focus on international actors, not domestic actors, as the instrument of regime change. Such theories focus on mechanisms by which international actors may induce democratization: international intervention, occupation-based nation building (like in Germany and Japan) (Gleditsch and Ward 2006), Western leverage[4](Levitsky and Way 2006), membership in international organizations (Levitz and Pop-Elches 2010), international electoral monitoring (Hyde 2007), and foreign aid (Djankov et al 2008). The presence of such international actors creates greater resistance to the democratic ideals.

How Does Democratic Backsliding Happen?

Democratic backsliding can be initiated by different state actors: monarchs, presidents, and military men. A democratic backsliding initiated by military men, like military coups and executive coups, often result in long-lasting and brutal dictatorships (Lust and Waldner 2015). These coup-based backslidings were more common during the Cold War, and since then there has been a decline in this type of backsliding. A democratic backsliding can also take the form of a blatant election-day vote fraud perpetrated by either the military or different political parties. Such form includes count falsification, ballot-stuffing, and ballot-box fraud (Bermeo 2012 and Prezworski et al. 2012). Similar to coup-based backsliding, fraud election backsliding has also been in decline (Bermeo 2012).

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[4] Refers to the authoritarian regime's vulnerability to external democratizing pressure.

Other varieties of democratic backsliding have been on the rise (Bermeo 2016). Such varieties include promissory coups, executive aggrandizement, and manipulating elections strategically. Promissory coups occurs when an elected government is ousted, and a public promise is made to hold elections and restore democracy. According to Bermeo (2016), the share of successful coups that falls into the promissory category has risen significantly from 35 percent before 1990 to 85 percent afterward. Examples of promissory coups include coups in Haiti (1991), Gambia (1994), Pakistan (1999), Fiji (2006), and Honduras (2009). Almost half of the postcoup elections were won either by their coup perpetrators or their favored candidates. Promissory coups sometimes raise expectations at home and broad, but these expectations are nearly always dashed. Thus, such coups have become the route to democratic backsliding (Svolik 2014).

Executive aggrandizement is different from all forms of coups in that it does replace the executive and it happens at a slower pace. This form of backsliding has been on the rise, especially after the end of the Cold War. It occurs when an elected executive weakens checks on its power and hamper the power of the opposition forces. Examples of executive aggrandizement include, but are not limited to, Turkey under the rule of Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) (Turam 2012), Ecuador under the rule of Rafael Correa (Conaghan 2008), Senegal under the rule of Abdoulaye Wade, Ukraine under the rule of Viktor Yanukovych, and other countries like Sri Lanka and Mozambique (Bermeo 2010).

The third form of democratic backsliding that has been on the rise is strategic election manipulation. This form denotes a range of actions aimed at "tilting the electoral playing field in favor of incumbents." (Bermeo 2016). This means that incumbents running for elections take actions that involve hampering media access, using government funds for incumbent campaigns,

keeping opposition candidates off the ballot, hampering vote registration, packing electoral commissions, changing electoral rules to favor incumbents, and harassing opponents in a way that does not seem fraudulent (Beaulieu and Hayde 2009).

To summarize the literature, democratic backsliding can be due to military coups, executive coups, blatant election-day vote fraud, promissory coups, executive aggrandizement, and strategic election manipulation. These mentioned factors can explain the autocratization that is taking place in already established democracies. However, what explains the autocratization that took place in countries that were not yet democracies but showed promises of becoming one?

In no place do we find a better example of the latter than the 2011 Arab Spring in which millions of people took to the streets of Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, and other countries like Jordan and Morocco to demand the fall of their authoritarian regimes. Initially, these democratization movements showed some potential for democratization, however, they slid back into authoritarianism. The autocrats of these countries became more oppressive despite attempts to move them in the other direction, which leads to the following question: under what conditions do contemporary democratization movements result in an authoritarian backsliding?[5]

When the public defies a regime, the most fundamental interest of the regime is to counter the threat to their rule to secure their survival. Once a regime uses violence to secure its position, it is likely to employ violence in the future (Gurr 1986). Accordingly, I argue that when a regime utilizes repressive violence to counter a democratization movement, it will utilize it again in the future, thus, it will slide towards authoritarianism.

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[5] I use the term authoritarian backsliding to describe the condition in which a country slides into authoritarianism after showing some potential promise for democracy.

H1: authoritarian backsliding is more likely when a democratization movement is met with repressive violence.

All of the afore-mentioned discussion serves to demonstrate the breadth of democratic backsliding-related research. What follows is more in-depth discussion of literature that is directly relevant to this question.

Under What Conditions Do Contemporary Democratization Movements Result in an Authoritarian Backsliding?

I argue that there are three factors that determine the outcome of any democratization movement. These factors are ***regime type, the threat perceived from the democratization movement, and the military's involvement in politics***. Each factor has an impact on the likelihood of authoritarian backsliding.

Regime Type

Leaders, especially autocrats, want to stay in power because losing it may entail consequences such as exile, being brought to trial, or being killed (Escriba-Folch 2013). They tend to use repression when there is dissent because they estimate that its expected benefits exceed the costs—considering the benefit is staying in power (Davenport 2007). Building on this, I argue that the regime type has an influence on the outcome of a democratization movement that threatens autocrats or semi-autocrats.

Previous research on the correlation of political repression has found a negative linear relationship between democracy and repression. Increased levels of democracy are associated with decreased levels of repression. The reason why democracies are less repressive is the fact that democracies have greater degree of accountability of democratically elected leaders which limits their ability to use repression since citizens can vote those leaders out of office. Moreover,

the system of checks and balances in democratic states makes it difficult for leaders to use repression (Moore 2010). Even when there is dissent, democracies feel less threatened by these dissent activities because "[they] are generally more tolerant forms of government because they are less threatened" (Davenport 1995). Since democracies are less threatened by dissent than non-democracies, and since they are constrained by norms like accountability, their leaders' use of violence is less likely than non-democracies.

In contrast to democracies, autocracies are more repressive because they lack the repression-mitigating factors found in democracies. Autocrats are more likely to pursue repression because they are not held accountable for their actions like leaders in democracies are (Davenport 1995). In addition, the lack of checks and balances in autocracies allow autocrats to manipulate power and oppress opposition groups. However, some scholars argue that the likelihood of dissent in consolidated autocracies is low because consolidated autocracies have self-enforcing rules and institutions that prevent dissent and anti-regime movements in the first place (Hegre et al. 2001).

In mixed regimes, also known as anocracies—regimes that are neither fully democracies nor fully autocracies—are more repressive than both democracy and autocracies because they are more prone to violence and political instability than democracies and autocracies (Regan and Henderson 2002). As de Tocqueville pointed out, "revolutions do not always come when things are going from bad to worse… Usually the most dangerous time for a bad government is when in attempts to reform itself." (De Tocqueville 1866).

The relationship between the level of democracy and repression is reflected in an inverted U-curve (Hegre et al. 2001). Meaning that repression is more likely in mixed regimes than in those that are at extreme ends of the regime spectrum-like consolidated democracies and

consolidated autocracies. Dissent in mixed regimes is more likely than in other regimes because of the high willingness and high opportunity that exist in such regime. Since mixed regimes have some democratic characteristics like multiparty electoral elections, dissidents have higher opportunity to oppose the regime. But because such regimes have some characteristics of authoritarian regimes, like electoral manipulation, the willingness of the public to oppose the regime is also higher. The combination of high willingness and high opportunity increases the likelihood of dissent in mixed regimes, thus increasing the likelihood of repression. Consequently, I argue that authoritarian backsliding is more likely in regimes that are semi-democracies or semi-autocracies because dissent is more likely in these regimes, and because leaders of these regimes are more likely to meet dissent with repressive violence.

H2: Semi-democracies and semi-autocracies are more likely to experience authoritarian backsliding than either democracies or autocracies.

Since dissent in mixed regimes is met with repressive violence, the regime's rank declines on the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) which could be considered a further step towards autocracy because they limit civil society activity, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly.

<u>Size of the Threat</u>

Civil resistance has been a key way for civilians to leverage power to defend their rights. In this paper, I define civil resistance as the use of nonviolent, unconditional means to struggle against opponents who have a superior power. In authoritarian settings, when the public defies the authoritarian rule, the political leaders use repression to minimize the threat and retain power, though measures taken to limit political dissent and competition intensify.

Stephan and Chenoweth (2011) found that nonviolent dissent movements were 46 times more likely to change the regime if the military and police were to defect. Similarly, in a comparison of six nonviolent dissent movements, Nepstad (2011) found that defections and troop unreliability was a critical factor distinguishing successful and failed revolts.

According to Jimenez (2021), state repression has a curvilinear relationship with opposition coordination in electoral autocracies. When repression is low and high, opposition coordination will be informal or "clandestine". However, when repression is at intermediate levels, opposition parties will coordinate to dislodge authoritarian incumbents (Jimenez 2021) (Figure 1).

Autocrats' biggest fear is an organized and united opposition (Jimenez 2021). A regime's repressive behavior can be influenced by the internal threat it may encounter. When opposition is considered a <u>minimal threat</u> to the regime, leaders might choose to leave it alone because it is not perceived as anything that could threaten their power, while a crackdown and the reaction of the public might threaten their power. If the regime does not choose to repress the dissent, because the perceived threat is almost non-existent, authoritarian backsliding is less likely. Since the threat is perceived small and since the regime won't oppress it, there is no likelihood for authoritarian backsliding.

If the dissent is perceived as a <u>moderate threat</u>, a regime might choose to ignore it or suppress it. Many factors determine which way the regime will go, these factors include but are not limited to the regime type, the structural organization of the opposition groups, and the willingness of the military to repress protesters (which also depend on many factors I explain further in the case studies). The likelihood of authoritarian backsliding depends on the regime's reaction. If the regime ignores the moderate threat, then authoritarian backsliding is less likely.

However, if the regime chooses to oppress the opposition or the protest, then authoritarian backsliding is more likely because once violence is used, the leader will be more likely to use it in the future, and the more frequent the use of repression is, the bigger the decline in LDI and the higher the likelihood of authoritarian backsliding.

If the democratization or opposition movement is considered a <u>large threat</u>, a regime, especially a mixed regime, will be likely to oppress protesters and contain the threat to help enhance their survival. Since increased levels of threat are associated with increased levels of repression (Jimenez 2021), a democratization movement that is perceived as a large threat will be oppressed directly through the use of lethal force and torture, or indirectly through restricting civil liberties. Once a regime uses repression to contain threat it is more likely to use it in the future (Zanger 2000), thus, there is a higher likelihood of authoritarian backsliding.

H3: authoritarian backsliding is more likely when a democratization movement is considered a large threat to the regime

<u>Military's Involvement in Politics</u>

Political leaders rely upon the police and the military to retain power. Consequently, as Gene Sharp (2008) has pointed out, a regime's repressive capacity is contingent upon the loyalty of the troops. Yet, there has been cases where troops have shifted their support from a regime to the opposition. When this happens, the autocrat's protective apparatus disappears, or at the very least weakens significantly, and they're likely to lose power.

A politicized military is a military that has either much power in the government—meaning that the military makes some political decisions in the country—or that has ties to the political regime of the government. In the first case, where the military has the ability to make political decisions, any democratization movement can create a gap in the security, which

provides an opportunity for the military to stage a coup (Kemence 2013). When a military stage a coup, the result is a long-lasting and brutal authoritarianism (Lust and Waldner 2015). In this sense, a democratization movement can allow a coup to take a place, which results in a slide into authoritarianism causing an authoritarian backsliding.

In the latter case, where a military is tied to the regime, authoritarian backsliding is more likely because the military is less likely to defect from the regime. It has financial, promotion and maybe ethnic incentives to side with the regime, repress the protesters, and ensure that the regime does not encounter such a threat again. Once a military represses a movement, it cannot return to an equilibrium because once leaders use terror or violence to repress protesters, they are willing to use it again in the future (Zanger 2000). Consequently, the regime will slide back into authoritarianism as it keeps on oppressing civilians.

In her paper, *Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East,* Bellin argues that what distinguished the Middle East as an authoritarian region was not the absence of democratic prerequisites, but rather the presence of conditions that fostered robust authoritarianism, specifically, "the presence of an exceptionally muscular coercive apparatus endowed with both the capacity and will to repress democratic initiatives originating from society"—pointing to the military that had the willingness and ability to repress dissent and democratization movements (Bellin 2012). <u>Building on this</u>, I argue that the military's involvement in politics has an impact on the oppression of opposition movements. A military that is not involved in government politics is less likely to oppress opposition groups than a military that is involved. In other words, militaries that are politicized will be more likely to engage in repression than militaries that are not politicized because they have the self-interest to do so.

Two factors explain the military's willingness to support the regime: the institutional character of the military and the level of mass mobilization. The institutional character of the military defines the relationship between the military leaders and the regime elites. Recruitment and promotion might be based on performance, or on bonds of blood or sect or ethnicity. The level of mass mobilization is an important factor in determining whether the military will defect or not. According to Bellin (2012), if the level of the mass mobilization is small, then the likelihood of using lethal force against protesters is high because doing so won't be problematic. If the level of the mass mobilization is large, then the costs of repression will be higher since using lethal force against large number of number of civilians will come across as illegitimate slaughter or a catastrophe.

I build on this to argue that the military's decision to defect or not depends on the costs of repressing the protesters. If the cost of repressing the protesters is high—that if the military will be considered illegitimate—then the military will be more likely to defect from the regime and make the decision not to oppress the protesters. If the benefit of repressing the protesters is high—that is if they receive benefits from the regime for repressing the protesters—then the military will be less likely to defect and will oppress the protesters.

In regards of military involvement in politics, I hypothesize the following:

H4: authoritarian backsliding is more likely when the regime's military is politicized

Military leaders that are linked to regime elites through blood ties or sectarian or ethnic ties are less likely to defect. They are deeply invested in the survival of the regime and are less likely to disobey the regime because of its ties, thus, it has the incentive to shoot civilians and oppress demonstrators. An authoritarian backsliding is more likely in countries where the

military is linked to the regime. By contrast, where blood ties and ethnic ties are not present, the loyalty of the military to the regime is more difficult, thus military leaders might defect and choose not to oppress the dissent. When military leaders defect, they choose not to repress dissent, and thus, an authoritarian backsliding is less likely.

Methodology

In order to test the afore-mentioned hypotheses, I utilize a mixed-methods approach, which includes a large-N, quantitative analysis, as well as comparative case studies. I measure the first hypothesis using quantitative analysis, and measure the last three hypotheses through comparing the case studies.

There are two different methods to measure autocratization: either by degrees or by types. Democracy-autocracy scales such as the ones developed by Freedom House and Verities of Democracy (V-Dem) utilize the method of degrees. Freedom House, for example, has a 13-point discrete scale that ranges from 1 (best or free) to 7 (worst or not free). A change towards autocracy corresponds to $\Delta(t, t-1) \geq 0.5$ in a country's score. The V-Dem's Electoral Democracy index uses a 0-to-1 continuous scale. A change towards autocracy corresponds to $\Delta(t, t-1) \leq -0.001$ in a country's score.

As for the types methodology, Bertelsmann Transformation Index measures autocratization through noticing regime type movement along the regime spectrum. Based on a regime spectrum that includes liberal democracy, defective democracy, electoral autocracy, and closed autocracy, there have been six identified forms of autocratization. Autocratization includes transition from liberal democracy to defective democracy; from liberal democracy to electoral autocracy; from liberal democracy to closed autocracy; from defective democracy to electoral autocracy; from defective democracy to closed autocracy; from electoral autocracy to

closed autocracy (Cassani and Tomini 2019). The differences between these forms are based on the *quality* and *quantity* of the regime change. Quality implies a change from a democratic regime (either liberal or defective) to an autocratic regime (either electoral or closed). Quantity implies the extent of the change (either full autocratization or partial process of autocratization).

I utilize quantitative methods to measure autocratization by changes in degrees, and utilize qualitative methods to measure autocratization by regime types.

Quantitative Methods

This study uses a cross-national, annual time-series dataset that includes all countries that experienced a democratization episode (potential for a transition to democracy). The data span the time period of 1973 to 2017. The study examines the effect of oppression against opposition on regime change.

<u>Measuring Unit of Analysis (democratic episodes)</u>

I utilize the V-Dem data, which introduces 182 polities from 1900-2017. It uses the Electoral democracy Index (EDI) that measures the polyarchy concept. EDI is an index that ranges from zero to one, a higher value means more democratic setting. Autocratization is defined as a substantial decline of this electoral democracy index. It considers a ten percent decline (-0.1) as a substantial threshold to capture the substantial process that happens, but at the same time does not capture those where there is a lot of noise occurring (V-Dem 2018). In addition, a ten percent threshold is less arbitrary than nine percent or eleven percent.

An autocratization episode is the time period over which this substantial decline of ten percent on the electoral democracy index spans, and it has a start date and an end date. It starts when there is drop of more than 0.01 on the electoral democracy index, then it stops when there is an improvement more than 0.02 or there is no further drop in the electoral democracy index.

There are 217 autocratization episodes in the world since 1900: 142 are in autocracies and 75 are in democracies—60 out of the 75 democracies experienced a democratic breakdown. Democratization episodes do not include countries that are in autocracy trap—that is countries that never been democratic, like North Korea, nor countries that have been resilient against democratic backsliding like Sweden and Switzerland.

<u>Measuring the Dependent Variable (Regime Change)</u>

To code backsliding, I tend to measure regime change within every country. Therefore, my dependent variable is *Regime Change*. Scholars have used four indicators to study regime change: contestation, participation, political rights, and civil liberties (Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland 2010, Boix, Miller, and Rosato 2013, and Freedom House). To measure the dependent variable, regime change, I utilize two indicators from Freedom House: political rights and civil liberties. The advantage of this dataset is that it measures contestation and participation while measuring political rights.

To better ensure the robustness of the results, I use three variants of the dependent variable. The first is the political rights (PR) scale, which measures ten indicators that are grouped into three subcategories: electoral process, political pluralism and participation, and functioning of government. The second is civil liberties (CL) scale, which includes fifteen indicators that are grouped into four categories: freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, rule of law, and personal autonomy and individual rights. For these two measures, every country is assigned a value from one to seven for each year, with one representing the greatest degree of freedom and seven the smallest degree of freedom. The third is freedom status scale (FS), which determines the status of free, partly free, or not free and

assigns it to every country. I subtract the before score (PRB[6], CLB[7], Status B[8]) from the after

score (PRA[9], CLA[10], Status A[11]) to measure the change in each of political rights, civil liberties,

and freedom statuses. A zero score indicates no regime change, a negative score indicates a

transition towards democracy (democratization), and a positive score indicates a transition

towards autocracy (autocratization).

Measuring the Independent Variable (Repression)

To measure the independent variable, regime's oppression of opposition, I employ the

Political Terror Scale (PTS) (Table 1). This scale measures state-sanctioned killings, torture,

disappearances, and opposition imprisonment. It was created and extended by Gibney, Cornett,

Wood, Haschke, Arnon and other colleagues, and it is published by Amnesty International

(referred to it as A), the U.S. State Department (S), and the Human Rights Watch (H). Each of

these three publishers codes and publishes their scores separately. As a result, I decided to

compute an average score of the Amnesty International score (A) and the U.S. State Department

score (S) and drop Human Rights Watch score (H) since it is not as available as the other two

scores. This average score, which was computed based on the data for the first year of each

democratic episode, will be referred to as Political Terror Scale Amnesty, U.S. Department score

(PTSas) or as Political Terror Score (PTS) as a shortcut.

The advantage of this scale is that it measures state-violence only, it does not measure

violence carried out by non-state actors. This is important as I intend to measure the oppression

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[6] PRB: Political Rights Before
[7] CLB: Civil Liberties Before
[8] Status B: Status Before
[9] PRA: Political Rights After
[10] CLA: Civil Liberties After
[11] Status A: Status After

exercised by the regime itself, not by other actors. Each democratization episode is assigned a

Political Terror Scale (PTS) score (Table 1). A higher score indicates more oppression.

Table 1.   **The Political Terror Scale (PTS)**

Level 1	Countries that are under a secure rule of law, where people are not imprisoned for their views, torture is rare or exceptional, and political murders are extremely rare.
Level 2	Countries where there is a limited amount of imprisonment for nonviolent political activity. However, few people are affected. Torture and beatings are exceptional, and political murders are rare.
Level 3	Countries where there is extensive political imprisonment. Execution or other political murders and brutality may be common, and unlimited detention, with or without a trial, for political views is accepted.
Level 4	Countries where civil and political rights violations have expanded to large numbers of the population. Murders, disappearances, and torture are a common part of life. Terror on this level affects those who are interested in politics or ideas.
Level 5	Countries where terror has expanded to the whole population. The leaders of these societies place no limits on the means of thoroughness with which they pursue personal or ideological goals.

The Control Variables

      The literature on regime change has shown that, besides the use of lethal force, several

other factors have been found to be correlated with regime change. The selected control variables

in this study include the state's fragility and the recurrence of democratization episodes. The

state's fragility has four values ranging from one (no fragility) to four (high fragility). The values

are taken from *Conflict, Governance, and State Fragility Global Report,* from Center for

Systematic Peace. The recurrence of democratization movements is coded with two values:

(zero) and (one). A zero value indicates no recurrence, and a one value indicates that the democratization episode occurred more than one time—there was a recurrence since 1912. The data was collected from the Verities of Democracy Institute (V-Dem) report.

Summary of Results

To test my first hypothesis, I display the results in Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4. Every table uses PTS to measure a dependent variable. The three dependent variables I will measure are Political Rights (PR) (Table 2), Civil Liberties (CL) (Table 3), and Freedom Statuses (FS) (Table 4). Every table has two models, one with controls and one without.

Across both columns in Table 2 the linear regression analysis provides strong support for my argument. Each of the model specifications indicates that increased oppression against opposition is significantly more likely to substitute autocracy. Higher values of PTS are correlated with higher scores of political rights, which means that higher oppression leads to fewer rights enjoyed by the public.

The results from Table 3 provide a stronger support for my argument, indicating a stronger impact of PTS on CL than on PL. Repressive leaders choose restricting freedom of expression and personal autonomy rather than restricting electoral processes and other political rights. Similar to Mechkova et al. (2017) argument, I argue that contemporary authoritarian backsliding has been in the form of restricting civil liberties more than restricting political rights. Table 4 shows that the use of oppression is positively correlated with the regime change towards autocracy, however, the relationship between PTS and FS is not as strong as the one between PTS and CL. MoThe models provide strong and consistent support for the argument; however, they need to be controlled for variables like state's fragility, and democratization recurrence. The

results from the control variables in the regression provide consistent support for previous research. The higher state fragility, the higher the PR, CL, and FS scores are.

The indicators that are mainly declining include the freedom of expression, like media freedom, and freedom of association. Leaders, especially autocrats, target these aspects of democracy first because these are freedoms that can be substantially constrained overnight. What have remained the same of the democratic aspects are suffrage and elections. These factors are things that are very slow moving and that cannot be substantially abolished overnight. Targeting freedom of expression is a form of attacking the very core of democracy because without freedom of speech and the media, voters cannot make an informed decision. Authoritarian states target those who might undermine their narrative or their image by spreading criticisms.

When autocratization begins to unfold, media and academic freedoms, and civil society are typically repressed first. Alongside that, ruling leaders polarize the society through disinformation campaigns, disrespect political opponents, and undermine the quality of elections. All of this results in declines in LDI score, and thus authoritarian backsliding.

Qualitative Case Studies

Since the two variables I am studying, repression and authoritarian backsliding, are notoriously difficult to measure through quantitative methods only, I also carry out comparative case studies in order to better understand the causal relationship between the independent variables (regime type, threat size, and military involvement in politics) and the dependent variable (authoritarian backsliding). Through the case studies, I am able to examine individual cases in detail and understand how some outcomes, like authoritarian backsliding, operate under certain conditions. In such a way, I can identify what conditions present in a case lead to authoritarian backsliding and what conditions do not. Thus, I focus on the role of case studies to

test my theoretical claims on authoritarian backsliding. More specifically, I use these case studies to test hypotheses H2, H3, and H4.

To illustrate the factors that shape the outcome of democratization movements, I briefly examine democratization episodes in eight countries from different regions: Tunisia, Egypt, Venezuela, Colombia, Poland, Hungary, Thailand, and Cambodia. I chose these cases by employing Polity IV's "democratization episodes" and selecting a small number of cases with a divergent outcome. I also chose these cases because they share some commonalities that allow me to control for the influence of other factors. More specifically, I selected cases that democratized or initially showed signs of democratization during the third and fourth waves of democratization. I chose case studies with varied regime types, some like Poland and Colombia are democratic and others like Egypt and Tunisia that were authoritarian. Additionally, I chose cases where political rulers had held power for similar periods of time. In Egypt, Hosni Mubarak was in power for about 30 years and in Tunisia, Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali served for 24 years. I also chose cases, like Poland and Colombia, were the political leaders hold power for short terms—like four or five years. Finally, based on the Fund for Peace state failure risk report, the chosen cases received broadly similar ratings regarding the level of state legitimacy—although some cases are better than others.

The cases I chose represent different forms of democratization and autocratization. They are from four regions that have been affected the most by autocratization in the past three decades, the MENA region, Latin America, the post-communist space, and Asia. Tunisia is a case of transition from electoral autocracy to defective democracy. Egypt is a case of transition from electoral autocracy to closed autocracy. Venezuela is a case of transition from defective democracy to closed autocracy. Colombia is a case of transition from defective democracy to

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liberal democracy. Poland and Hungary are cases of transition from liberal democracy to defective democracy. Thailand is a case of transition from defective democracy to closed autocracy. And Cambodia is case of transition from electoral democracy to electoral autocracy.

Although these similarities and differences make the chosen cases appropriate for comparison, I acknowledge the limitations of this research design. Due to the restricted number of cases, I am unable to test my ideas or generalize them to a broader set of cases. My hope is that other researchers will rigorously test my insights against a wider array of movements in order to confirm, refine, or challenge my premises. However, by combining them with findings from my large-N, cross-national analysis, I feel comfortable drawing some preliminary conclusions.

Case Study 1: Tunisia

Tunisia is one of a unique case because it is the only democratized Arab country in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA). In 1957 the Constitutional Assembly abolished the Tunisia monarchy and established a republic, then a presidential system was established in 1959. Habib Bourguiba, the founder and the leader of the New Constitution Party, was elected as the country's first prime minister and then the first president of the country in 1959. Since its independence in 1957, Tunisia has had five presidents: Habib Bourguiba (1957-1987), Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali (1987-2011), Moncef Marzouki (2011-2014), Beji Caid Essebsi (2014-2019), and Kais Saied (2019- present). In this section, I analyze Tunisia's regime from 1957-2014—its regime type, how it treated opposition groups, and its relationship with the military—then I test how these factors impacted the outcome of the democratization movement that occurred during the Arab Spring in 2011.

Tunisia's Regime Type and Transitions

Tunisia's regime was considered an authoritarian with an electoral system. Its system was considered a mass-party system, or a multi-party system—meaning that multiple political parties have the capacity to gain control of government offices, whether separately or in coalition. However, the president exercises a broad range of powers, including but not limited to the authority to enact laws by decree when the legislature is not in session, appoint all civil officials, and serves as the supreme commander of the armed forces (Marks 2013). The judiciary is formally independent, but in fact it is strongly influenced by the executive branch.

Presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali instrumentalized religious rhetoric to consolidate power, quell criticism, and control opposition. Despite the regime's multi-party nature, political parties, other than the ruling party, were prohibited from 1963 to 1981 and remained highly restricted until Tunisia's revolution in 2011 (Rivera 2016). The Tunisian government's support for human rights and religious beliefs tended to fluctuate due to shifting political objectives and threats (Brooks 2013). President Bourguiba had long viewed religious-based political movements as a threat to a modern Tunisian state and had actively sought to restrict their political space—opposition groups like *al-ittijah al-Islami* (the Islamic tendency Movement; known by its French acronym as MTI) were targeted, their gatherings were banned, and hundreds of their members were imprisoned (Brooks 2013). His successor, Ben Ali, clamped down on religious and opposition political parties as well. One of the opposition parties—*An-Nahda* political party—was considered a terrorist organization and its members were forced into exile. The executive authority was further increased in 2002 when a national referendum granted former presidents lifelong judicial immunity. Opponents refused the referendum as they viewed it as a way to solely allow President Ben Ali to stay in power for life (Rivera 2016).

The Arab Spring Protests in 2010 and the Perceived Threat

In December 2010, tens of thousands of angry people assembled on Habib Bourguiba Avenue to demand an end to Ben Ali's regime following the self-immolation of a young street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, who set himself alight on the street after he was harassed by police officers for not having a permit to work (Alimi and Meyer 2011). Bouazizi's frustration at his inability to maintain a livelihood portrays to the nation's dire economic condition, the regime's corruption, the high unemployment, and the political repression at the time.

Ben Ali's regime considered the protests against him a threat, so it relied on security forces, the police, as well as the army to contain the protests. Ben Ali based his power on a strong police apparatus, reaching 120,000 policemen (Anderson 2011). The Tunisian police and Ben Ali's personal forces opened fire on the demonstrators, however, the army deployed its forces without intervening actively, meaning that the troops were present at the demonstrations, but did not intervene or crackdown on the protesters. In fact, newspapers in Tunisia notified that the army had a surprisingly sympathetic relationship with street protesters and actively helped them (Schraeder and Redissi 2011). Although Ben Ali's regime used the police and other security agencies to control the protesters, they were not successful to contain the protests because they were not as militarized as the military.

After the head of Tunisia's army, General Rachid Ammar, refused to crack down on the protesters, President Ben Ali fled the country on 14 January 2011. Tunisia's democratization movements toppled the tyrant and ousted a longtime autocrat from power, ending an authoritarian era. After Ben Ali's flee, Tunisia began a democratic transition; the Constitutional Council held an election in 2011 in which Beji Caid Essebsi was elected as the President. The elections were deemed to be free and fair and citizens now enjoy unprecedented political rights and civil liberties (Freedom House 2012).

Tunisia's Military Involvement

It is important to understand that the army of Tunisia was characterized by its professionalism and depoliticization, meaning that army was separate from the executive branch. Neither the executive branch had an influence on the army, nor the army had an influence on the politics of the country or economy. Both presidents Ben Ali and his predecessor—Bourguiba, opposed the integration of the army into the political arena and they limited the political power of the Tunisian army for fear of a military coup (Anderson 2011). Tunisia's military expenditures were very low compared to other countries (1.5% of GDP), and the number of officers had decreased until the Tunisian army became the smallest army in North Africa (IISS, 2010). These features of the Tunisian army were the reason the military sought to support the democratizers by refusing to open fire on them and demanded Ben Ali and his family to leave the country.

In addition, the Tunisian army forces were overall free of corruption and were a highly professional force that did not interfere with political issues, which is another reason that reveals the hesitation to restore to lethal force (Lutterbeck 2013). Bellin (2014) argues that the Tunisian army chose not to repress protesters because it poses a serious threat to their image and prestige (Bellin 2014).

Based on one of my hypotheses, *the more involved the military is in politics, the higher the likelihood of authoritarian backsliding,* Tunisia's military interests were different than the regime's interests because they were highly institutionalized to serve the public's interest. Their support for the public, not the regime, was the reason Tunisia did not slide backward into authoritarianism.

Why didn't Tunisia's army deploy its troops to keep Ben Ali's regime in power? And what determines the army's decision to protect the regime? Bellin (2014) suggests that the degree of institutionalization[12] is a potential factor of regime change triggered by the army's decision. An institutionalized military identify itself as an entity completely separated from the central political power, and is based on meritocracy and performance bounced by a clear set of rules. It is committed to defend national interest overall instead of a specific group's interests—in this case: the regime leaders' interests. Bellin argues that the more institutionalized the military is, the more likely it will disconnect from the political elites' interests.

<u>Democratization in Tunisia</u>

As in 2020's "State of the World" article, Tunisia is the most prominent case of a successful transition to democracy over the past decade. It is the only Arab country in the MENA region that democratized after the uprisings that erupted in 2010 and 2011. Despite deep tensions between Islamists and secularists, Tunisia adopted a new Constitution in January of 2014, paving the way for largely free and fair elections in 2014 and 2019. It is one of the countries that advanced democratically over the last ten years due to the relatively free and fair held elections and the stronger civil societies (Figure 7) and (Figure 8). Tunisia's political rights rating improved from 7 to 3, its civil liberties rating improved from 5 to 4, and its status improved from Not Free to Partly Free due to the free and fair elections held by the Constitutional Council. There has been an increase in freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and religious expression, all of which followed the ouster of longtime president Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali (Freedom House, 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012).

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[12] Bellin defines institutionalization as the degree to which the coercive apparatus is organized along Weberian bureaucratic principles rather than patrimonial ones.

Recently though, Tunisia's status declined from Free to Partly Free because President Kais Saied unilaterally dismissed and replaced the elected government, indefinitely suspended the parliament, and imposed harsh restrictions on civil liberties to suppress opposition to his action (Freedom House 2022).

<u>Discussion of Tunisia's case</u>

Upon reviewing Tunisia's case, the regime was authoritarian, the democratization movements' threat was perceived large by the regime's leaders, yet democratization was successful and authoritarian backsliding did not occur. This could be attributed to the fact that the military was separate from the regime—its interests were different than the regime's interests. Tunisia's army was committed to support the interests of the will of its people and it chose to disengage with the regime and join the opposition.

Returning to the evaluation of the quantitative conclusion, the low level of the violence repression used to counter the democratization movements resulted in a failed authoritarian backsliding. This is largely because the military chose to defect from the regime and stand by the public side. If the military chose to side with the regime and crack down hard on the protesters, an authoritarian backsliding would have become possible.

On the impact of the three factors on the outcome of the democratization movements, the case of Tunisia shows support to the fourth hypothesis—that the less politicized the military is, the less the likelihood of authoritarian backsliding.

Case Study 2: Egypt

Like Tunisia, Egypt is in the MENA region, was a monarchy but established a presidential system, has an authoritarian regime, and had experienced the Arab Spring. Since its independence from the British in 1922, Egypt has had six presidents; Mohamed Naguib (from

1953 to 1956), Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956-1970), Anwar Assadat (1970-1981), Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011), Mohamed Morsi (2012-2013), and Abdel Fattah El-Sisi (2014-Present). In this section, I will focus on the reign periods of Hosni Mubarak and Abdel Fattah El Sisi, the democratization movements that occurred during the Arab Spring, and the factors that influenced the outcomes of the movement.

Egypt's regime type during Mubarak's reign period

Egypt has been a one-party state in which the dominant political party is the National Democratic Party (NDP). Executive recruitment has been conducted internally within the ruling National Democratic Party; however, these elections are marked by charges of media bias, alleged election violations, and boycotts by opposition parties.

The executive branch had (and still has) the power to appoint military judges, thus military tribunals lack independence. Verdicts were based on the testimony of security officers and informers, and were reviewed only by a body of military judges and the president. According to HRW, charges in military courts can included, but were not limited to property damage, insulting the army, and general vandalism.

Opposition Groups

During Mubarak's reign, there were two main opposition parties: the *Muslim Brotherhood*—the main religious opposition party, and *Al-Wafd*—the main secular opposition party. Both parties were subject to political harassment and intimidation, in addition to systematic and widespread restrictions on their ability to mobilize their followers and speak freely. Overall, political participation was (and still is) restricted because of NDP's repression and target of both secular and religious opponents. During the 1990s, the authorities jailed thousands of suspected opponents without charge and cracked down on dissent. There were

many demonstrations that called for Mubarak to step down, however, they were met with repressive violence from the authorities. Mubarak's regime continued to suppress opposition groups by banning them from participating in elections and prohibiting the formation of religious political parties. Moreover, Mubarak's regime was criticized for the regular use of torture and other forms of brutality against political detainees.

The Arab Spring Protests in 2011 and the Perceived Threat

Shortly after the Tunisian president Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali was deposed, demonstrators occupied Tahrir Square against Mubarak and the NDP to protest deteriorating economic conditions, police brutality, corruption, political repression, and called for the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak. Initially, Mubarak's regime responded with brutal force, deployed police, hired thugs to assault protesters, shut down the internet to prevent organizers from communicating with each other or with the rest of the world, and controlled the media. However, the military of Egypt was siding with the movement as soldiers refused to shoot at civil resisters (Nepstad 2011). The protesters continued protesting and demanding a regime change until February of 2011, when Mubarak stepped down and fled Egypt.

After Mubarak's ouster, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) promised a transition to civilian rule. However, SCAF postponed elections and sought to reserve significant power and autonomy for itself. Protests kept on rising to demand a transition to civilian rule and the end of military rule. The military leadership was denounced for using live ammunition and excessive force to oppress protesters. One of the infamous events during 2011 was known as the Maspero, where 28 civilians were killed as they were protesting in front of a state television building in Cairo over the burning of a Coptic Christian church. Moreover, they faced criticism

for human rights abuses—for example, in 2011 two military vehicles ran over and killed 10 protesters.

Freedom of the press improved slightly after Mubarak's ouster in 2011. However, corruption remained pervasive in the government. Egypt was ranked 112 out of 183 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index. Police brutality continued even after Mubarak's ouster. Detainees were tortured by the military and police through the use of electrical shocks and beating during interrogations. More than 12,000 civilians were tried by military courts under the SCAF in 2011, and at least 2,182 were sentenced to death since then (HRW 2019).

Egypt's Military Involvement during Mubarak's Reign

As I have mentioned, the Egyptian armed forces side with civil resisters instead of supporting Mubarak. Why was that the case? As Nepsted (2013) explains, the leaders of the Egyptian armed forces had some financial concerns regarding Mubarak's appointed successor, his son Gamal. What follows is a more in-depth explanation of the military's decision.

The Egyptian military was not linked to Mubarak and his family by blood or ethnicity (Bellin 2014). However, over the course of Mubarak's reign period, the Egyptian military acquired valuable real estate and numerous industries. Mubarak had allowed the military to acquire such businesses to keep them loyal (Hashim 2011). As Tadros (2012) wrote, "the military [had], over decades, created an industrial complex that is well oiled and well-funded. In over 35 factories and companies it [produced] everything from flat screen televisions and pasta to refrigerators and cars. It [owned] restaurants and football grounds…it [was] not just manufactured goods: the military [provided] services, managing petrol stations for example" (Tadros 2012).

The leaders of the Egyptian military had interests in protecting Mubarak's regime because the military would have prospered with Mubarak in power. However, they chose to side with civil protesters, forcing Mubarak out because if he was to stay in power, he would have handed the presidential office to his appointed successor, his son Gamal, who "had plans to implement privatization policies that would dismantle the military's business holding" (Nepsted 2013). Thus, the military decided to side with the civilians and force Mubarak out for strong economic incentives.

In addition, according to Hashim (2011), the Egyptian military's decision was influenced by the US response to the democratization movements. The United States had provided the Egyptian's military with $1.3 billion in aid on an annual basis (Yousef 2011). As Hashim (2011) wrote, "[the Egyptian military's] arms relationship with the United States[had] provided the Egyptian armed forces with some of the most sophistacted weaponry in the world." When the Obama administration called on Mubarak to resign, the leaders of the Egyptian military did not want to defy Obama's administration in order to maintain its relationship with it. If the military remained loyal to Mubarak's regime, it would have incurred additional financial losses.

<u>Post Arab Spring</u>

In the aftermath of Mubarak's ouster, Mohamed Morsi was ascended to Egypt's presidency on June 30, 2012. He came to power after a narrow margin victory, making him the first president of the nation to be elected by people. Morsi and his supporters, the Muslim Brotherhood, had a strategy of cooperation with the military (Shehata 2012). They supported the determination of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). They legitimized the military's interference in writing the new constitution and in its crack down on civilian protesters

(Shehata 2012). A year later, a wave of demonstrations led the Egyptian military overthrew President Morsi on July 3, 2013.

According to Maghraoui (2014), Morsi and the Brotherhood's alliance and cooperation with the military had negative consequences. The alliance allowed for some remnants of the old regime to claim a role and exert influence. They were allowed to deliver basic social services and enforce law, which has resulted in sabotaging the new government. For example, for weeks policemen in charge of traffic control mysteriously disappeared from the streets, which created a chaotic situation. Then the police magically reappeared to direct traffic the day after the military coup (El Sharnoubi 2012). During his reign period, Egypt experienced growing security problems and worsening social conditions. He was accused of mishandling the economy and failing to deliver on his promises, which had led to millions of people taking to the streets calling on Morsi to step down.

The Military Coup

After spending only a year at office, and in June of 2013, anti-government protests started taking place while thousands of other filled the streets in support of President Morsi. On July 3, 2013, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, a member of SCAF—the interim authority that was in charge of the transition after Mubarak's ouster—staged a military coup. With the political elites' backing of the military takeover, El-Sisi was able overthrow and detain President Morsi. El-Sisi then become the fourth military officer to rule Egypt (Maghraoui 2014).

Egypt has witnessed unprecedented levels of repression since the return to power of its military elite in July 2013. On August 15, 2013, the Egyptian military attacked Morsi's supporters using tear gas, rubber-coated steel bullets and live ammunition, killing over 1,000 people in just ten hours—that is now known as the Rabaa massacre (Al-Jazeera 2013). President

Abel Fattah El-Sisi has been known for his increasingly authoritarian manner of governing. Political opposition is nonexistent, expression of dissent can draw criminal prosecution and imprisonment, and civil liberties are tightly restricted.

<u>Discussion of Egypt's case</u>

Both Tunisia and Egypt had authoritarian regimes prior to the Arab Spring; both movements were driven by democratic ideals including the rule of law, the desire to end corruption, respect for human rights, free elections, and political representation; in both countries, the regimes perceived the democratization movements as a large threat; and both countries toppled the tyrants in part because their military forces sided with the protesters. However, the outcome was a democratization in Tunisia and an authoritarian backsliding in Egypt. What explains this difference in outcome?

The answer is the interference of the military in the politics. The Tunisian military was not involved in the politics of the country like the Egyptian's military. In fact, the interference of the Egyptian military in the politics casted a looming shadow over the movements and the nation's long-sought dream for a civilian democracy. Although the Egyptian military forces sided with the protesters against Mubarak at the beginning, they tended to use repression against the protesters after the oust of Mubarak. If the military was not involved in the politics of the country—that is, if Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) was not in power after Mubarak's ouster, a military would not have been possible.

Morsi's alliance with the military set a bad precedent for future civil-military relations. It is because of SCAF's power and Morsi's alliance with the military that a military coup was possible. What happened in Egypt was a promissory coup, a coup that occurs when an elected government is ousted, and a public promise is made to hold elections. As discussed in the

literature review, a backsliding initiated by military men results in long-lasting and brutal

dictatorships (Lust and Waldner 2015). This explains why Egypt experienced an authoritarian

backsliding whereas Tunisia did not.

Reviewing both cases provide support to my fourth hypothesis: *the more involved the*

military is in politics, the higher the likelihood of authoritarian backsliding.

Case Study 3: Venezuela

Venezuela was considered a case of democratic exceptionalism in Latin America because

of the economic stability made possible by the petroleum industry and the increasing social

movements in favor of deepening a democracy. However, after Chavez took power in 1998,

Venezuela's LDI score declined drastically (State of the World Report 2022). Both Chavez and

Maduro undermined the democracy in Venezuela and aided in the consolidation of its

authoritarianism. According to Jimenez (2021), Venezuela is a country that has transitioned from

low to intermediate to high repression between 1999-2018. Thus, Venezuela is the perfect case to

examine authoritarian backsliding since it has experienced both democratic backsliding and

authoritarian consolidation, and repression levels there have increased.

<u>The Presidency of Hugo Chavez</u>

For over thirty years starting in 1958, Venezuelan politics was defined by the peaceful

rotation of power between the two main political parties: the Christian Democratic Party

(COPEI) and the Democratic Action Party (AD). However, there were two unsuccessful military

coup attempts that led to turmoil changes in the regime—one of the coup attempts was in 1993

and was led by Hugo Chavez who later became the president of Venezuela in 1998.

In 1999, the new administration drafted a new constitution, which allowed to dissolve the

legislative and increased executive authority and control over the central bank, **the military**, and

the legislature (Polity IV 2010). Executive authority was further increased in 2000 when national referendum authorized the president to suspend union leaders, thus **eliminating potentially dangerous opponents** (Polity IV 2010). This led to tensions between Chavez's political party and opposition parties that triggered a mass protest in 2002 which resulted in a violent confrontation and the deaths of 12 anti-government protesters (Jimenez 2021). In addition, according to Freedom House (2010), oil workers, teachers, and steel workers had all mounted mass strikes and demonstrations against Chavez's government in 2000 and 2001. Opposition attempts in 2003 and 2004 to force Chavez to resign were unsuccessful (Polity IV 2010).

In 2005, legislative elections supporters of President Chavez won all 167 seats in the National Assembly after five of the main opposition parties boycotted the electoral process (Jimenez 2021). In 2007, Chavez and the National Assembly added thirty-six changes to the constitution, the main changes included, but were not limited to, allowing the re-election of the president; increasing the presidential term from six to seven years; introducing changes to the country's administrative structure; ending the autonomy of the central bank; and placing the president in charge of administering the country's international reserves (Miller 2010).

In 2008's elections, Chavez's opposition won control of five states, including the two most populous states, and the mayoral office of Caracas. Due to this loss, Chavez's government charged his main opposition leaders, Manuel Rosales, with corruption and misappropriation of funds (Polity IV 2010). In 2009, a public referendum was held that approved constitutional changes that further concentrated power in the presidency and removed term limits on public office (Polity IV 2010).

Venezuela's democratic institutions have deteriorated since 1999, but conditions have grown sharply worse in recent years due to harsher crackdowns on the opposition and the ruling party relying on widely condemned elections to control all government branches (Romero 2020).

<u>Dissent and the Perceived Threat</u>

The process of civil resistance against authoritarian rule during the Chavez regime and its successor in Venezuela was initiated as early as 1999. Opposition parties in Venezuela created the alliance *Mesa de la Unidad Democratica* (MUD) to challenge Hugo Chavez and then Nicolas Maduro (Jimenez 2021).

Dissent in Venezuela took different forms: in 2007, for example, there were massive demonstrations in defense of freedom of information and freedom of expression initiated by students after the closing of the television network RCTV (formerly Radio Caracas Television) (Puyosa 2019). The movement was crucial to prevent President Chavez from achieving the approval of the constitutional reform that would have established the new Bolivarian military doctrine that allowed a third mandate of President Chavez (Puyosa 2019). However, the movement was contained in 2009 and a third mandate of President Chavez was passed.

In 2014, another major student movement was mobilized to reject violence perpetrated by pro-government militias against university campuses (Masullo 2017). The demonstrations began to wane at the end of that year after the government killed more than 40 demonstrator and arrested over 100 people (Puyosa 2015). As Puyoa (2015) wrote, "while disperse popular demonstrations continued to occur during 2015 and 2016, street mobilization had lost steam as a result of government repression and the lack of echo in opposition political parties."

<u>Repression</u>

The use of violent and non-violent repression varied during Hugo Chavez (1999-2013) and Nicolas Maduro's (2013-present) governments (Figure 2). Under Chavez's rule, when democracy began to erode, repression was low (Corrales 2015). Then, between 2006-2015, repression levels increased to intermediate levels by attacking the press and opponents and controlling most state institutions (Kornblith 2013). Under Maduro's rule, repression reached high levels as opposition formation became clandestine (Jimenez 2021). As a result, the MUD does no longer exist and formal opposition coordination across parties has become difficult since 2019 (Jimenez 2021).

<u>Military Involvement</u>

Both the military and the judiciary were largely independent until 2005. Then, between 2006-2015, the judiciary, military and National Assembly were largely but not completely under the government's control (Hawkins 2015). However, from 2014 onwards, the military became politicized and used to persecute, imprison, stigmatize, or torture political dissidents (OHCHR 2019 and 2020).

Unlike Chavez, Maduro was willing to use arm forces and extensive violence to prevent any uprising or dissent and control its opponents (Romero 2020). His loss of popular support in 2015 elections, Maduro effectively shut down the parliament, installed a National Constituent Assembly (NCA) to draft a new constitution, and increased political persecution of opposition groups (Brewer 2018 and Romero 2020). Maduro's authorities have closed off virtually all channels for political dissent, restricting civil liberties and prosecuting perceived opponents without regard for due process. In addition, the country's severe humanitarian crisis has left millions struggling to meet basic needs, and driven mass migration (OHCHR 2019).

<u>Discussion of Venezuela's case</u>

Venezuela's case proved that higher rates of repression are correlated with higher likelihood of authoritarian backsliding. Both Chavez and Maduro resorted to repressive violence to suppress opposition. They also used electoral manipulation in regional elections, targeted punishment of subnational authorities, and creation of parallel subnational political-administrative bodies to undermine democracy and aid in the consolidation of authoritarianism in the 2010s.

During the presidency of Hugo Chavez, the government sought to win elections under relatively free conditions but pursued highly partisan attacks on opposition governors and mayors, limiting their autonomy and authority, while centralizing power. Then, as Nicolas Maduro government faced threats to its hegemony at the ballot box, electoral manipulation gave way to outright fraud (Polga-Hecimovich 2022).

In the case of Venezuela, the qualitative analysis observed that democratic regimes can experience authoritarian backsliding. In fact, the freedoms given to the executive branch allowed him to make constitutional changes, which in turn enabled him to manipulate the judiciary branch and the military, restrict civil liberties, and turn Venezuela to a one-party regime through preventing opposition groups from participating in the elections.

The anti-Chavez protests paved the way to Chavez to suppress civil liberties, which shifted the regime from a liberal democracy to a defective democracy. During Maduro's rule, the use of lethal force, imprisonment of opposition groups, as well as restricting media's freedom shifted the country from a defective democracy to an electoral autocracy. Moreover, controlling the military shifted the regime from electoral democracy to closed democracy because the military was able to deter opposition creation.

Venezuela's case supports three of the four hypotheses: it experienced authoritarian backsliding due to increased levels of repression and politicized military. This case failed to provide support to the second hypothesis, which is related to the regime type. The likelihood of authoritarian backsliding is not linked to the regime type. Liberal democracies, as well as electoral autocracies can have the same likelihood of authoritarian backsliding.

Case Study 4: Colombia

Despite the authoritarian experiences of its neighbors, Colombia has a long history of electoral democracy. Though its democracy is celebrated as one of the oldest and longest standing in Latin America, it is one with a history of widespread violence, undemocratic practices and serious human right abuses. Colombia had many times periods that challenged the democratic transition of the country, these periods are *La Violencia* (1948-1958), the Rojas Pinilla Dictatorship (1953-1958), and the establishment of the National Front (1958-1974). Each of these time periods negatively affected the democratization of the country.

Aside from a period of military dictatorships from 1953-1958, Colombia has been dominated by two large political parties, the Conservative political party and the Liberal party.

Events that Impacted the Democratization of Colombia

Colombia's government has been run by a civilian president elected by universal suffrage every four years, with a civilian rule and authority over the nation's armed forces. Despite its electoral democracy nature, Colombia has experienced some challenges to its democracy and authoritarian backsliding during some time periods. These challenges include:

La Violencia (1948-1958)

La Violencia was a wave of destructive and violent riots in rural areas that escalated to a civil war. It lasted for eighteen years and claimed over 200,000 lives between 1948 and 1958. It

was caused because of the refusal of successive governments to accede to the people's demands for socioeconomic change. *La Violencia* was characterized by the partisan political rivalry and rural banditry (Bushnell 1993).

In an attempt to curtail the mounting violence, at then Conservative president of Colombia—Gomez curtailed civil liberties, struck down independent labor unions, held congressional elections without opposition, censored the press, and controlled the courts. Gomez directed his repression in particular against the Liberal opposition. The number of deaths reported reached 1,000 per month. As a result to his violence and abuse of power, Gomez lost support, and the armed forces—who opposed Gomez—deposed him and staged a coup d'état that was led by Rojas Pinilla as they saw that action the only way to end violence (Bushnell 1993).

In summary, despite the **electoral democratic system** of Colombia, the president of Colombia met dissent during the La Violencia with repressive violence. He viewed the dissent as a **large threat** that had to be curtailed, thus he used his authority to repress the opposition party and retain power. However, due to Colombia's depoliticized **military** (Bushnell 1993), the armed forces were able to depose him and instill a military government. In conclusion, because the dissent and the riots in rural areas were met with repressive violence, they led to a coup. In the following chapter I explain how the coup d'état resulted in an authoritarian backsliding.

The Rojas Pinilla Dictatorship (1953-1958)

The initial response to the coup was supportive and widespread. Pinilla's main goal was to end the violence in Colombia. To that end, he offered amnesty to opponents who would lay down their arms, supported press freedom, and released political prisoners. Pinilla attempted to respond to demand for social reform, meet the needs of the most pressing needs of the poor, attempted to provide jobs for the masses of urban unemployed, and he courted the military by

raising salaries in order to recruit political support (Bushnell 1993). However, due to the poor

administration capabilities, these reform programs were met with little success (Bushnell 1993).

Support for the Rojas Pinilla regime faded within the first year. Toward the end of 1953,

rural violence was renewed, and Rojas Pinilla undertook strict measures to counter it. As

Bushnell (1993) wrote, "following a substantial increase in police and military budgets, the

government assumed a dictatorial and demagogic character. The government reversed its initial

social reform measures and **relied instead on repression**. It tightened press censorship and

closed a number of the country's leading newspapers, both Liberal and Conservative. Under a

new law, anyone who spoke disrespectfully of the president could be jailed or fined. Many were

killed or wounded at the so called Bull Ring Massacre in February 1956 for failing to cheer

Rojas Pinilla sufficiently. The administration became increasingly corrupt, and graft in

government circles was rampant" (Bushnell 1993).

Efforts of the regime to suppress the widespread violence degenerated into more brutal

regime in order to keep the Pinilla in power. According to V-Dem's report, Colombia

experienced a failed democratization episode during that period (Figure 3). In other words, due

to the repressive nature of Pinilla's dictatorship, Colombia experienced an authoritarian

backsliding.

The National Front (1958-1974)

Between 1958-1974, the Conservative party and the Liberal party resorted to create a

two-party agreement, in which they would rotate periods of rule and prohibit other political

forces from contesting elections as a solution to their problems related to institutions and state

weakness—a period that became known as the "National Front" period (Tarazona 2015). This

agreement contributed to the emergence of new obstacles for the democracy of Colombia as it resulted in the exclusion of opposition political actors.

Colombia is a case of what Hartlyn (1993) had described as *constitutionalism*—a political phenomenon is which the two dominant political parties make coalitions that facilitates the transition towards a democratic system, but restrict democracy itself in some certain way, in this case, the restriction was in preventing the formation of political parties other than the Conservative party and the Liberal party.

According to V-Dem (2018), the exclusionary nature of the formed government coalition (National Front) prompted a backlash. V-Dem coded the National Front period as a failed democratization episode to reflect that the conciliation between the parties did not ultimately produce democracy.

Successful Democratization Episode in Colombia

In 1991, Colombia experienced a short, but successful episode that began and ended in the same year. The successful democratization episode resulted in a new constitution that included provisions for religious freedom and guaranteed indigenous rights (V-Dem 2018). According to Polity IV (2010), Colombia became an electoral democracy in that year.

In contrast to its neighbor—Venezuela, the 1991 constitution of Colombia restricted the executive authority. It removed the president's authority to appoint regional governors, limited the presidential tenure to a single 4-year term, gave Congress veto powers over cabinet nominees and limited the president's state of emergency powers (Polity IV 2010).

Discussion

Similar to Venezuela, Colombia failed to provide support to the second hypothesis— authoritarian backsliding is more likely is semi-democracies and semi-autocracies than in

democracies and autocracies. It provides evidence that authoritarian backsliding is more related

to the powers of the executive branch than to the regime type itself. What made an authoritarian

backsliding possible in Venezuela but not in Colombia (in the 1990s) was the difference of the

executive authority. These two cases show that the more powerful the executive branch is, the

higher the likelihood of authoritarian backsliding.

Colombia's case during *LaViolnca* and Pirilla Dictatorship provide support to the other

hypotheses---authoritarian backsliding is more likely when opposition is met with repressive

violence and when the military is politicized.

Case Study 5: Poland

 Poland is an interesting case because it has moved backwards along the democracy

spectrum from democracy to a democracy of a lesser quality. According to an index compiled by

Verities of Democracy (V-Dem) in 2020, Poland has moved further towards autocracy than any

other country in the world over the last decade with a 34 percentage-point decline, making it

second to lowest European country with LDI score (V-Dem 2020). Studying Poland helps

understand how regimes slide along the regime spectrum from liberal democracies to electoral

democracies.

Poland's Regime Type and Transition

Although Poland was considered a communist country until 1989, Varieties of

Democracy (V-Dem) classified it as a liberal democracy in 2010, but then classified it as an

electoral democracy in 2020. According to Bernhard 2021, the age of democratic backsliding in

Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) dates to the onset of the global financial crisis and the great

recession in 2007-2009. The decline in the quality of democracy in Poland has been led by its

leader (and his PiS party) who had won a democratic election. Figure (5) shows how Poland had

rapidly democratized after the end of the Soviet Union. The figure also makes clear the deterioration of democracy in Poland (V-Dem 2019).

The Law and Justice (PiS) political party "has origins that lie with the democratic opposition under communism." (Benhard 2021). Meaning that the party was originally a democratic party that opposed communism. PiS is the main party of the Polish center-right (Bernhard 2021). Its liberal and centrist competitors are Freedom Union (UW) and Civic Platform (PO). Until recently, PiS fared worse than UW and PO.

In early elections in 2007 PiS lost to their more moderate, liberal competitors, the Civic Platform (PO). PO ruled from 2008-2015 and was the first party to win two consecutive parliamentary elections in Poland (Bernhard and Kubik 2014).

PiS won an absolute majority in 2015. Since then, PiS sought to undermine the rule of law to the extent that "it can work outside the limits of constitutionalism" (Sadurski 2018). According to Kovacs and Scheppele (2018), PiS took measures to reduce the independence of the lower-court judges, limited the freedom of assembly, and restricted media freeom (Kovacs and Scheppele 2018). Figure (5) plots the V-Dem Institute's level of liberal democracy for both Poland and Hungary. It shows how between 2009 and 2019, Poland's liberal democracy score declined by 0.33 (V-Dem 2021).

In Poland, the Law and Justice party (PiS) has attacked the judiciary and rule of law while implementing a conservative, nationalist project.

Rapid economic growth and other societal changes have benefited some segments of the population more than others, contributing to a deep divide between liberal, pro-European parties and those purporting to defend national interests and traditional Polish Catholic values. Since taking power in 2015, a coalition led by the populist, socially conservative Law and Justice (PiS)

party has enacted numerous measures that have increased political influence over state institutions and damaged Poland's democratic progress. Recent years have seen an increase in nationalist and discriminatory rhetoric.

<u>Democratization in Poland</u>

According to *State of the World 2020* report, Poland continues its downward decline on the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) after persistent assaults on the judiciary and restrictions on the media and the civil society (Figure 7). It has experienced a dramatic 34 percent-points decline on the LDI, most of which has occurred since 2015 (Figure 8).

Case Study 6: Hungary

Hungary is a typical case of democratic backsliding, with the deterioration of civil liberties dating back to 2010 when the right-wing government led by Viktor Orban and his Fidesz-MPP party came to power. According to V-Dem, Hungary has the lowest LDI score among European countries. Studying Hungary helps understand how regimes slide along the regime spectrum from electoral democracies to electoral autocracies.

<u>Hungary's Regime Type and Transition</u>

Similar to Poland, Hungary was considered a communist nation until 1989 (Bernhard 2021). Both Hungary and Poland were seen as regional leaders in building democracy since they initiated the process of democratization in Eastern Europe in 1989. They were even considered consolidated democracies and joined the European Union (Freedom House 2010).

Hungary's backsliding dates to Fidesz's winning a constitutional supermajority in 2010, which allowed him to enact institutional and policy changes that enabled him and his party to dominate politics (Kelmen 2017). He enacted changes to the constitution (Kelmen 2017), rule of law (Kelmen 2017), constitutional court-packing (Kelmen 2017), restricted media freedom

(Bajomi-Lazar 2017), restricted academic freedom (Enyedi 2018), eliminated checks on the executive branch (Korani 2015), and initiated attacks on civil society (Kover 2015). Figure (4) plots the V-Dem Institute's level of liberal democracy for both Poland and Hungary. It shows how between 2009 and 2019, Hungary's liberal democracy score declined by 0.36, which has pushed Hungary's regime into the "electoral authoritarianism" category in 2019 (V-Dem 2021).

Democratization in Hungary

Similar to Poland, and according to *State of the World 2020* report, Hungary also continues its downward decline on the LDI after persistent assaults on the judiciary and restrictions on the media and the civil society (Figure 7). Its ongoing autocratization is still conspicuous.

Conclusions

Upon reviewing both cases, the selectorate framework on repression of civil liberties and its result in an authoritarian backsliding offers substantial validity to the quantitative findings that leaders in countries undergoing autocratization repress civil liberties first. Autocrats target freedom of expression and freedom of association first because they are freedoms that can be substantially constrained overnight.

Both Hungary and Poland are cases of how autocratization unfolds in liberal democracies. The decay in freedom of the press, academia, civil society, and the increased spread of false information in these countries have limited civil society activity and freedom of expression, which can be considered as a further step towards autocracy. These two cases show that electoral democracies engage in attempts to censor the media, these attempts might be direct or indirect. Given the critical role of independent media as providers of information and during autocratization processes, democracies limiting media freedom is a worrying sign.

Democratic institutions in Hungary, engineered to promote governability rather than representation by favoring larger parties to a greater degree than in Poland, made it much easier to enact anti- democratic constitutional change (Bernhard 2021). Democratic backsliding in Hungary, as well as in Poland, was in the form of undermining political and civil societal institutions, effecting a gradual regime change, potentially culminating in stable authoritarianism.

Case Study 7: Thailand

Thailand is the only South-East Asian nation that was never colonized by Europeans[13]. It has been ruled under a constitutional monarch since 1932[14]. During the twentieth century, Thailand experienced nineteen coups or attempted coups (Chambers 2010) and many democratization episodes, many of which were unsuccessful (Polity IV 2018). According to Cassani and Tomini (2019), Thailand has transitioned from a defective democracy in the 1990s to a closed autocracy in the last few years due to increased repression and military domination.

Thailand is a unique case because it has been characterized with a long clash between two political paradigms: a civilian rule and a military rule with oversight from Thailand's monarchy. In this section, I examine Thailand's post-Cold War regime transitions, military coups, the civilian rules as well as military rules, and the monarchy's involvement in the politics of the country.

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[13] There's some debate to this depending on the definition of colonization. They selectively worked with Europeans and even ceded territory to avoid direct colonization. However, the economic connections and military benefits from outsiders (including Japan in the 1930s) could be considered indirect or informal empire.

[14] Under Phibun Songkhram, Thailand stopped functioning as a constitutional monarchy and became more of a military dictatorship with him as "Field Marshal".

It is worth mentioning that the major political parties of the country are People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD)—who claimed themselves as the guardians of the monarchy, the Thai Rak Thai (TRT), the People's Power Party (PPP), and the Pheu Thai Party (PTP)—which are in support of the civilian rule.

Thailand's Regime Type, Transitions, and Perceived Threat

As I have mentioned, Thailand has experienced nineteen attempted coups since 1932. Some of these coup attempts consolidated the rule of the military and several were unsuccessful. In addition to external factors, WWII, and independence movements, the many coups Thailand had experienced resulted in a consequence of military rule. It was not until 1973 that this consequence of military rule ended, and democratic processes were introduced (Cassani and Tomini 2019). The democratic experiment collapsed in 1976, however, the situation did not last long as another democracy began in 1977, only to be terminated again by another coup in 1991 (Ukrist 2008) (Figure 6)[15].

The first part of the 1990s were characterized by economic growth, political instability, and frequent changes of the government. In 1991, the army overthrew an elected (but also corrupted) government. Consequently, there were mass protests against the military junta in 1992 that became known as the Bloody May (Kaisan 2005). These protests were harshly repressed by the military, thus, the military junta lasted until 1994. Between 1994-1997, elections were held and Thailand returned to civilian rule, but under the supervision of the military. That transitional phase ended with a new democratic Constitution in 1997 that strengthened democratic

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[15] Red line denotes autocratization
  Green line denotes transition

institutions, reduced the influence of the armed forces in politics, strengthened political parties, and promoted the participation and representation of the ethnic minorities (Ukrist 2008).

Following 1997 financial crisis, a billionaire businessman, Thaksin Shinawatra, founded a new political party in 1998, the Thai Rak Thai (TRT, Thai Love Thai), which was able to attract the support of the businesses and promise investments in the disadvantaged regions (Cassani and Tomini 2019). Thaksin was a charismatic figure that won the 2001 elections and became the Prime Minister of the country.[16] The TRT became the dominant party in Thailand, it took control of important committees in the parliament and marginalized the Democratic party which used to be the dominant party between 1992 and 2001. Although Thaksin's regime was elected through elections and was considered legitimate, it was not in every sense democratic, since it was blighted by multiple forms of bad governance, including widespread corruption and human rights abuse (Panorama 2010)—Thaksin expanded his control over the government's institutions and promoted his allies and relative to positions of power (Freedom House 2003).

In 2005, Thaksin and his TRT party won majority of the seats in the parliament—377 seats, about 67 per cent of the parliament's seats at that time (The Times 2009)—thus they formed the first "single-party government in democratic Thailand" (Cassani and Tomini 2019). Thaksin's mounting political power and popularity upset the monarchy (Panorama 2010). In addition, discontent was rising due to decreasing pluralism, targeting opponents and independent agencies such as the National counter Corruption Commission, and the increasing number of documented cases of torture and lethal use (Cassani and Tomini 2019).

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[16] Thailand's 2001 general elections were considered fully free and fair elections by Freedom House (2002)

In 2006, Thaksin dissolved the parliament and called for new elections, which were boycotted by the three major opposition parties. TRT won the elections uncontested which led to mounting protests in Bangkok—the capital of the country. As a result, the military intervened and took control of the media and the state's institutions. Ironically enough, the coup was supported by large sectors of the population and obtained the king's approval (Chachavalpongpum 2014). The coup leaders accused the government and Thaksin of corruption, abuses of power, and threatening the democratic ideals of Thailand and the monarchy. The military junta ousted Thaksin, announced the dissolution of the Parliament and suspended the constitution (Ukrist 2008).

In 2007, a new constitution was approved via referendum and new democratic elections were held to replace TRT. The People's Power Party (PPP), inspired by the former Prime Minister Thaksin, won the elections resulting in increasing the polarization between the political party and its opponents—the military and the monarchy (Pongsudhirak 2008). The King's involvement in the politics and appointment of members in the Constitutional Court caused the political situation to progressively deteriorate.

In 2011, new free and fair elections were held in which the Phew Thai Party (PTP) won and obtained the absolute majority in the Parliament. The PTP was also a new incarnation of the party founded by Thaksin, so its victory increased the tensions between it and the judiciary, the military and the monarchy (Baker 2016).

The elections of 2014 sparked new protests following the Constitutional Court's decision to invalidate the vote. These protests turned violent, and as a consequence, the military once again decided to intervene, suspended the 2007 constitution and dissolved the parliament (Baker 2016). The coup was accompanied with a harsh repression of the protests and the suspension of

the freedoms of speech, association, and the press. Once again, a military junta—led by General Prayut Chan-o-cha, was established (Chachavalpongpum 2014).

Post 2006 and 2014 Military Coups

The two coups led to two divided groups of protesters in Thailand—the red-shirted protesters and the yellow-shirted protesters. The red-shirts began as supporters of deposed former Prime Minister Thaksin who was ousted by the military in 2006. The yellow-shirts are opponents to Thaksin and they were the force behind the streets protests that led to 2006 coup (Panorama 2010).

Members of the red-shirts are mainly rural workers from outside Bangkok, students, left-wing activists and businessmen. They are pro-democracy, allies to PTP and they demand free and fair elections. Yingluck Shinawatra, the sister of Thaksin, led the PTP party and the red-shirt protesters to a victory in 2011 elections and became Thailand's first woman Prime Minister (CNN 2012). The military launched a brutal crackdown against the red-shirted demonstrators, resulting in 91 people being killed and almost 2,000 injured (Panaroma 2010).

On the other hand, the yellow-shirts are described as royalists and ultra-nationalists that come mostly from the urban middle class. They support PAD and the monarchy and oppose former Prime Minister Thaksin and Prime Minister Yingluck. They accused both ministers of corruption and abuse of power (CNN 2012).

Thailand's Monarchy

Under the constitution, the king of Thailand is given very little power, but remains a figurehead and symbol of the Thai nation. However, he is given some powers and has a role in the workings of the government. According to the constitution, the king is head of the armed forces. Following the two coups of 2006 and 2014, more lese-majeste cases have been recorded.

Lese-majeste is defined by Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code, which states that insulting or threatening comments about the king, queen, their ancestors, and their descendants are punishable by 3-15 years in prison (Baker 2016).

As Panorama (2010) describes it, "[the monarchy and the military] have insisted on maintaining their own kind of democracy"—a democracy that sits the monarchy on top of the apex of the Thai political structure.

Military Involvement

Although the democratic situation in Thailand deteriorated as Thaksin abused state institutions to defend the economic interests of his family and allies, the strong political influence of the military was the reason Thailand experienced two episodes of autocratization in less than a decade. The 2014 coup led to a more permanent military regime and strengthened the power of the military over civil authorities along with royal authority (Cassani and Tomini 2019).

In addition, the space for political parties and the role of elected representatives have been reduced and many of the checks and balances to the executive and guarantees for civil rights have been abolished (Freedom House 2020). Moreover, elections have been promised several times over the recent years, but did not take place (Cassani and Tomini 2019). According to (Panorama 2010), the military forces "have frequently overturned election results in the past whenever they found them unacceptable and threatening to their power position, either through military coups, judicial intervention, or through the use of undemocratic non-state actors to bring down a supposedly ominous regime."

 Thailand's Freedom Status

Freedom House deemed Thailand as a Free country before its promissory coup in 2006, but it has since returned to dictatorship. The coup coalition that ousted the freely elected government of Thaksin Shinwatra made good on its promise to hold free elections (in December 2007) and even allowed Thaksin allies to regain power through the ballot box. But tolerance was short-lived. The military seized power again in May 2014, and, ominously, made no promise of elections at all.

According to Freedom House, Thailand exhibits shortcomings in terms of rule of law, regulatory quality, and corruption control. There is close collusion between non—state actors and state elites, state capacity is weak, and governance quality is low. The combination of democratic deterioration and frustration over the role of the monarchy in Thailand's governance has since triggered massive demonstrations. In response, the regime continues to employ authoritarian tactics, including arbitrary arrests, intimidation, and harassment of activists. Press freedom is constrained, due process is not guaranteed, and there is impunity for crimes committed against activists.

Discussion of Thailand's case

Thailand's case shows the role of democratization movements and protests in leading to authoritarian backsliding. Thai's military considered these protests as a chance to stage a coup. Yes, Thaksin's regime abused human rights, but the democratization movements that began in 2006 led to a coup, which is a step taken towards autocracy.

Thailand is considered an extreme case of constitutional breakdown. Thailand's parliamentary democracy was effectively transformed by the Thaksin government into an "elective dictatorship". This eventually led to the collapse of democracy in 2006. Since then, and

despite the free (but not fair) general elections in 2007, Thailand has seen a tragic deepening of political polarization and instability (Thitinan 2008).

Case Study 8: Cambodia

Cambodia is an interesting case because it the international community invested enormous amount of time, money, and effort into it in an attempt to create a modern liberal democracy after the end of its 20 years civil war. However, while it was on the way to democratize, it slid into authoritarianism, which makes it an interesting case to study authoritarian backsliding.

Cambodia's Regime Type and Transition

Cambodia's constitution identifies it as a constitutional monarchy. It endured hundreds of years of absolute monarchy, colonial rule, and authoritarian regimes of different persuasions. Its political system has been dominated by Prime Minister Hun Sen and the Cambodian People's (CPP) for more than three decades—since the first election of 1993.

Cambodia was under the rule of a brutal regime, the Khmer Rouge, which was led by a dictator—Pol Pot from 1975 to 1979. Khmer Rouge was a radical communist movement that came to power through a guerilla war (Brinkley 2011). It killed more than two million people and conducted bloody cross-border raids into Vietnam, which led Vietnam to launch an invasion of Cambodia in 1978. Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia lasted a decade and ousted the disastrous Khmer Rouge regime.

After being embroiled in a 20-years-long civil conflict, a series of agreements signed in Paris in 1991 brought an end violence and civil war in Cambodia. Those agreements authorized the United Nations enter the country, repatriate the refugees, conduct human rights awareness and civic education, and organize a national election. Moreover, the United Nations assisted in

developing a constitution that provided (and still provides) freedoms necessary to establish a

fully functioning liberal democracy (Panorama 2010). The United Nations helped create a

flourishing civil society in Cambodia through the presence of international peacekeepers, the

new peace agreements, and the recognition of fundamental freedoms in the new Constitution that

made some progress in Cambodia and protected human rights there (Malena et al. 2009).

In 1993, the first election in the country was held. According to Ashley (1998), voter

turnout approached 90 percent. Despite the incidents of violence, voter intimidation and

corruption took place across the country during the first elections, there was optimism about

achieving democratization in Cambodia (Ashley 1998). The FUNCINPEC party (ruled by

Norodom Ranariddh) was the top vote recipient with 45.5% vote, followed by the Cambodian

People's Party (CPP) ruled by Hun Sen. Following the elections, Hun Sen refused to relinquish

power with FUNCINPEC. Consequently, PCC and Hun Sen maintained control of the state

apparatus, including the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces, in spite of losing election. Hun Sen

threatened that there would be a return to civil conflict if they were unable to maintain power.

Consequently, Cambodia was ruled by two prime ministers—Hun Sen and Nordom Ranariddh

(Branigin 1993).

In 1997, a coup d'état took place in Cambodia as a result of the tensions between the two

parties—CPP and FUNCINPEC. Hun Sen ousted Nordom Ranariddh and ended the cohabitation

government installed after 1993 elections. In the aftermath of this coup, Hun Sen moved to

consolidate his power through actions of intimidation and torture (Freedom House 2010). The

coup was followed by elections in 1998, 2003, 2008, and 2013 in which Hun Sen managed to

stay in power, despite the fact that he failed to secure the two-thirds majority needed to form a

government. Hun Sen was able to strengthen his institutional powers because the National Assembly consisted of CPP supporters only (Polity IV 2010).

Dissent and the Perceived Threat

Cambodia's regime maintains its supposedly democratic procedures while actively suppressing the individual rights and freedoms that are necessary to create democratic governance in practice. According to Freedom House, restrictions on political opposition and lack of freedom of expression have both become worse in the last few years. Press freedom in Cambodia has gradually declined from Partly Free in 2008 to No Free in 2009, 2010, and 2011 respectively.

Hun Sen's government has focused on two techniques to retain power: suppressing political opposition, and restricting freedoms of expression and association.

Democratization in Cambodia

Democracy in Cambodia today continues to face a number of serious challenges. According to Freedom House, Cambodia performs weakly on most or all of governance indicators—especially freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. It was ranked 128th among 178 countries in the 2010 Press Freedom Index released by Reporters Without Borders.

While the country conducted semi-competitive elections in the past, the 2018 elections were held in a severely repressive environment. Since then, Hun Sen's government has maintained pressure on opposition party members, independent press outlets, and demonstrators with intimidation and violence.

Discussion of Cambodia's case

Cambodia now functions as an illiberal democracy because of the democratic written Constitution, the regular held elections, and the participation of a large majority of the

population. However, due to the government's failure to provide the rights and freedoms necessary for free and fair elections, and due to the fact that it is becoming a one-party state, Cambodia falls far short from satisfying the definition of democracy.

As (Panorama 2010) wrote, "Cambodia can either move towards the democratic ideal embedded in its Constitution or reject those remaining vestiges of democracy and completely embrace the one-party state model." However, the recent trends and violation of human rights indicate that the government may be drifting closer to a one-party state and further away from democracy.

General Conclusion

Existing research has paid increasing attention to how autocratization unfolds. However, despite significant progress, the existing research did not address whether and how democratization movements can influence state repressive behavior and lead to authoritarian backsliding. In this paper, I argued that democratization movements provide leaders in defective democracies, electoral autocracies, and autocracies with incentives to repress. Once oppression is utilized to contain a threat and retain power, the regime begins to experience a slide towards authoritarianism. I introduced three factors that impact the likelihood of authoritarian backsliding: regime type, threat perceived by the regime, and the military's involvement in politics. I hypothesized that authoritarian backsliding is more likely when a regime is a semi-democracy or a semi-autocracy, when it perceives a democratization movement as a large threat, and when the military is politicized.

The findings of this research paper speak to the different circumstances through which a democratization movement can lead to authoritarian backsliding. The findings from the quantitative and qualitative analysis show that democratization movements encourage regime

repression, which might lead to a coup, like in Egypt, Venezuela, Thailand, and Cambodia cases, or might lead to limiting civil society freedoms like in Poland and Hungary, or might lead to increasing the executive authority—which it its part lead to a one-party regime, like cases of Venezuela and *Le Violenca* in Colombia.

These consequences of a democratization movement (coup, limited civil liberties, or increased executive authority) lead to a decrease in the LDI score, which means a slide towards authoritarianism. The findings of this study are of significant policy relevance and can inform human rights policy. International promoters of democracy and human rights have associated the presence of organized protests with liberalization processes with favorable steps toward democracy. The findings here portray a more complex picture regarding where and when a protest may fail to produce liberalization. This knowledge can provide insights to international organizations seeking to promote democracy and human rights.

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Table 2: The Impact of Oppression of Opposition on Change in Political Rights

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Oppression of Opposition Movements	0.256*	0.224**	0.201**
	(0.114)	(0.123)	(0.067)
Fragility		0.047	0.264*
		(0.182)	(0.116)
Recurrence		0.116	0.021
		(0.304)	(0.193)
Political Right Score Before the beginning of the Movement			0.174**
			(0.056)
Constant	1.632*	1.833*	1.409*
	(0.034)	(0.57)	(0.375)
Number of observations	155	155	155

Dependent variable: Change in Political Rights
Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 3: The Impact of Oppression of Opposition on Change in Civil Liberties

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Oppression of Opposition Movements	0.236**	0.201**	0.231**
	(0.069)	(0.067)	(0.066)
Fragility		0.264*	0.134
		(0.116)	(0.12)
Recurrence		0.05	0.026
		(0.196)	(0.191)
Civil Liberties Score beginning of the Movement			0.400**
			(0.129)
Constant	2.908**	2.04*	1.528***
	(0.081)	(0.345)	(0.374)
Number of observations	155	155	155

Dependent variable: Change in Civil Liberties
Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 4: The Impact of Oppression of Opposition on Change in Freedom Status

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Oppression of Opposition Movements	0.124*	0.109*	0.184**
	(0.049)	(0.051)	(0.045)
Fragility		0.042	0.168*
		(0.076)	(0.067)
Recurrences		0.069	0.11
		(0.126)	(0.108)
Freedom Status Score before the beginning of the Movement			0.587**
			(0.078)
Constant	1.632*	0.694*	0.028
	(0.341)	(0.237)	(0.221)
Number of observations	155	155	155

Dependent variable: Change in Freedom Status
Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$
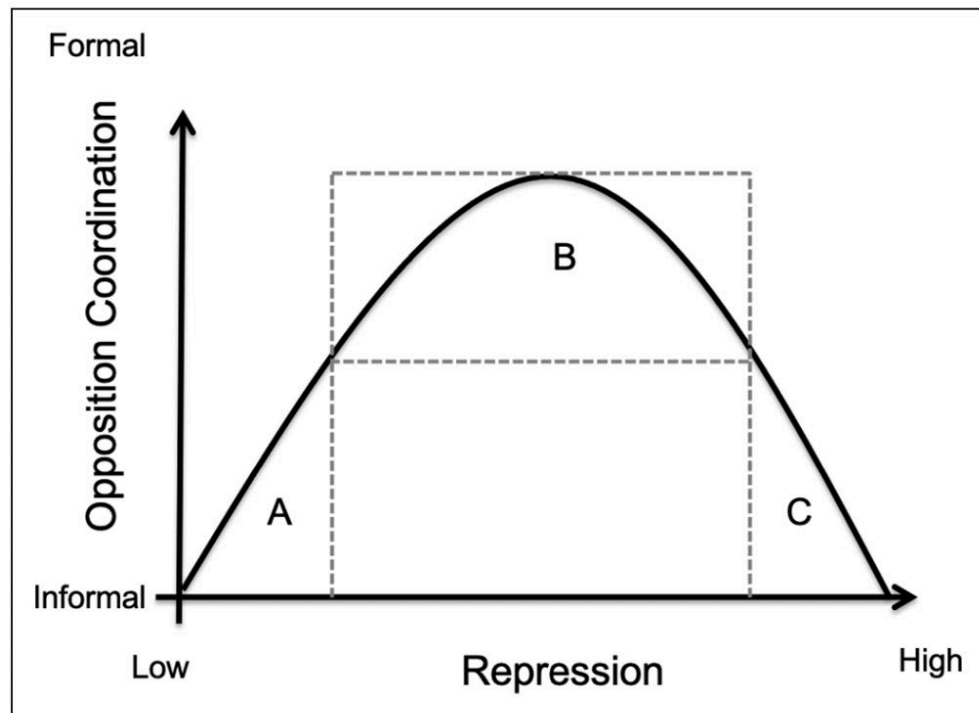
Figure (1): Relationship Between Repression and Opposition Coordination.

Source: Jimenez, *Maryhen. 2021.*
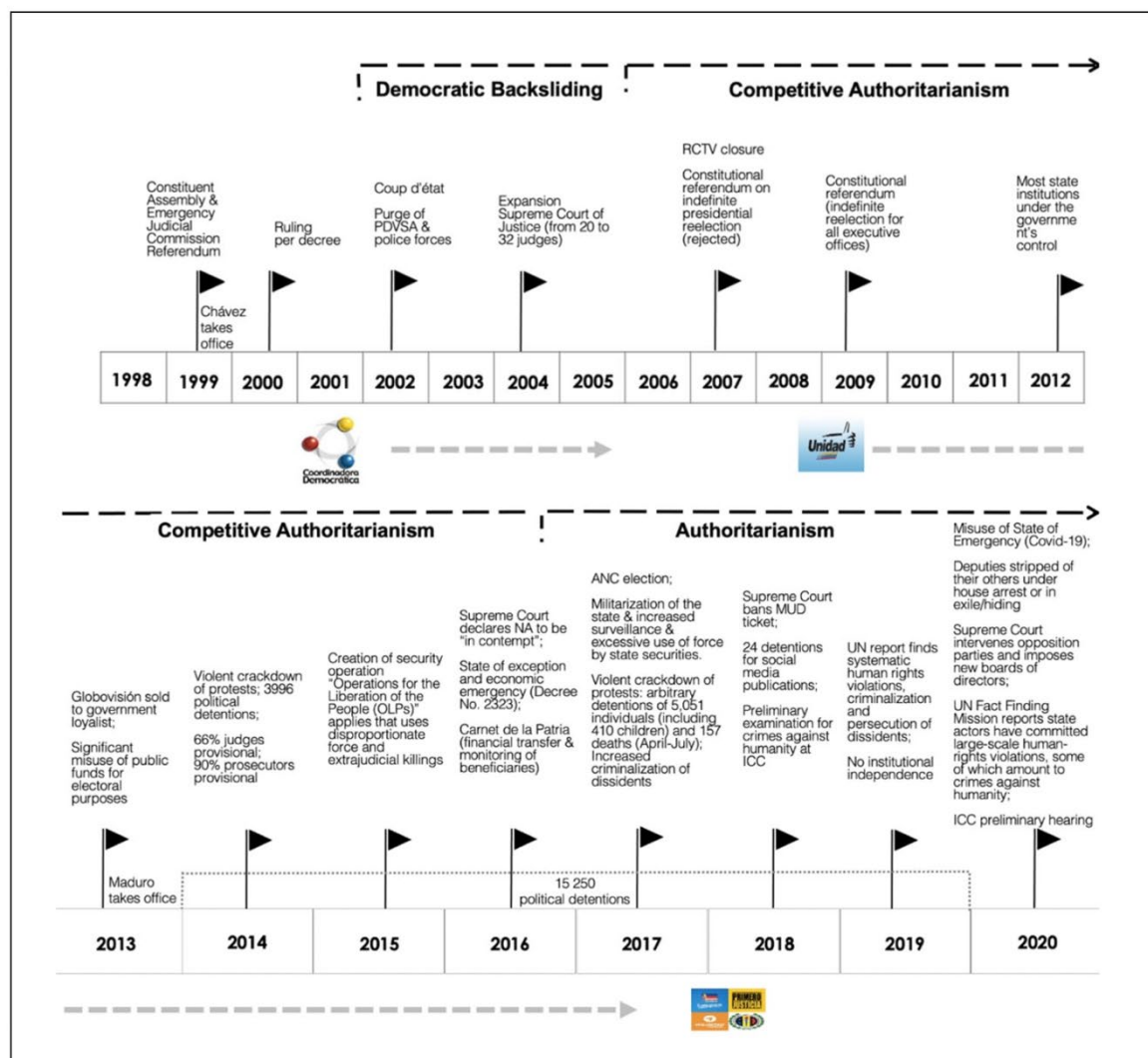
Figure (2): Key events and opposition coordination in Venezuela (1998-2020)
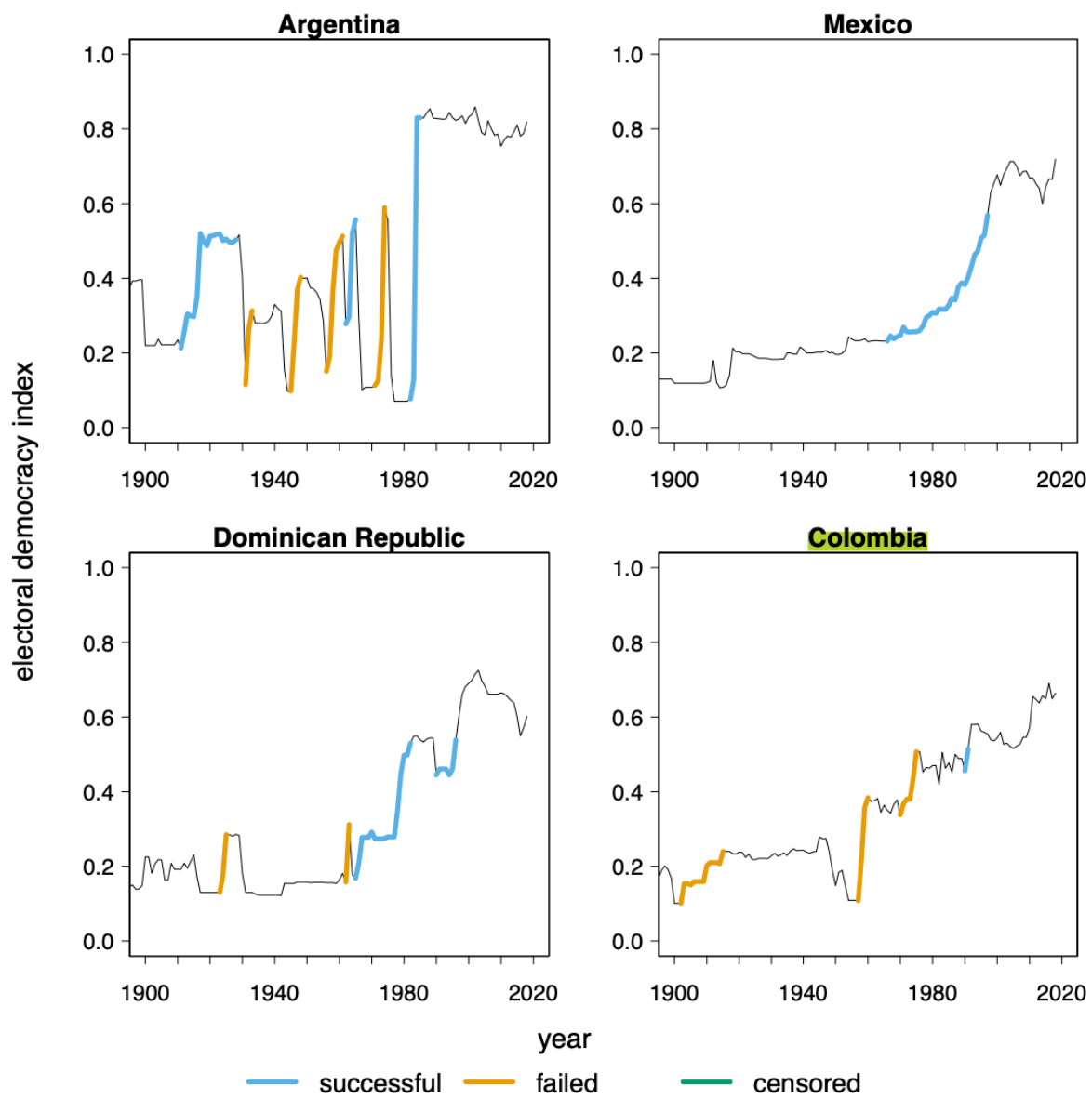
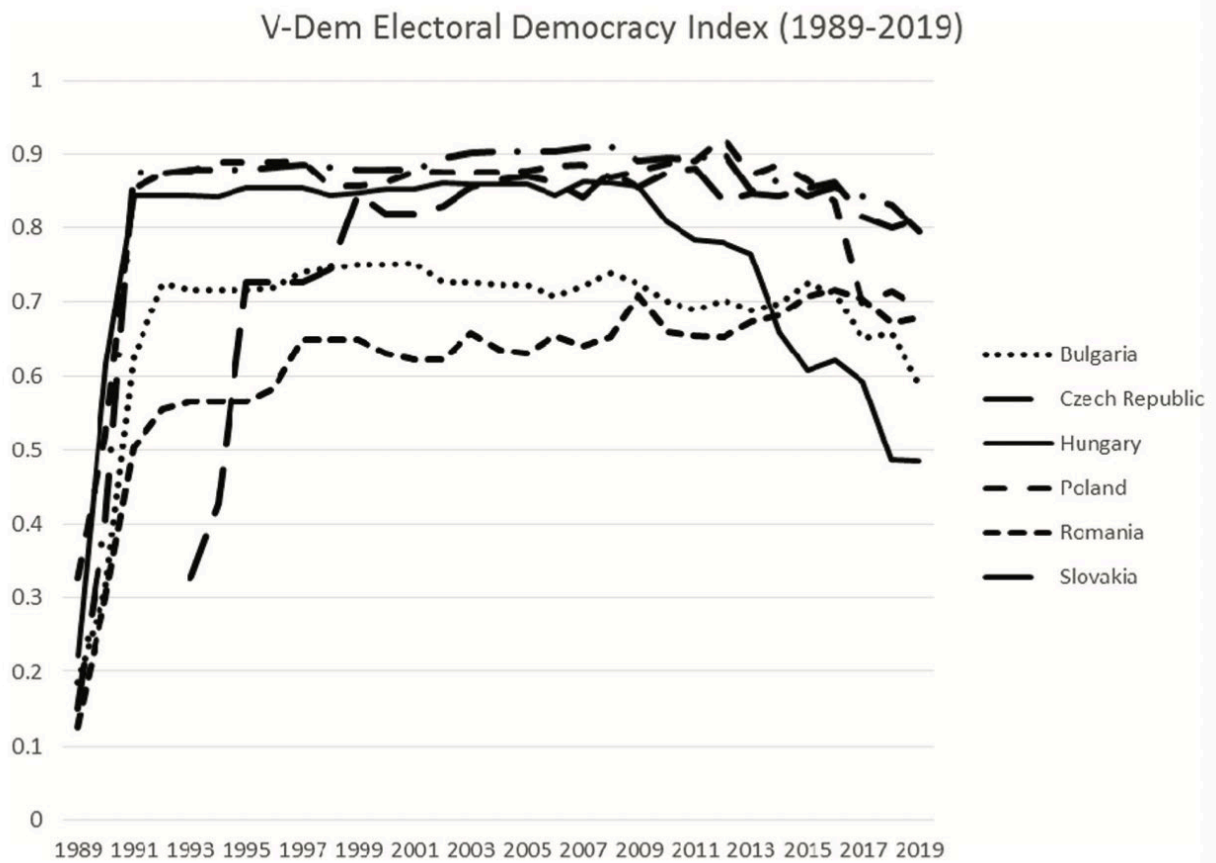Figure (3): Failed democratization episodes in Colombia.

Figure (4): Democratic Backsliding in East Central Europe

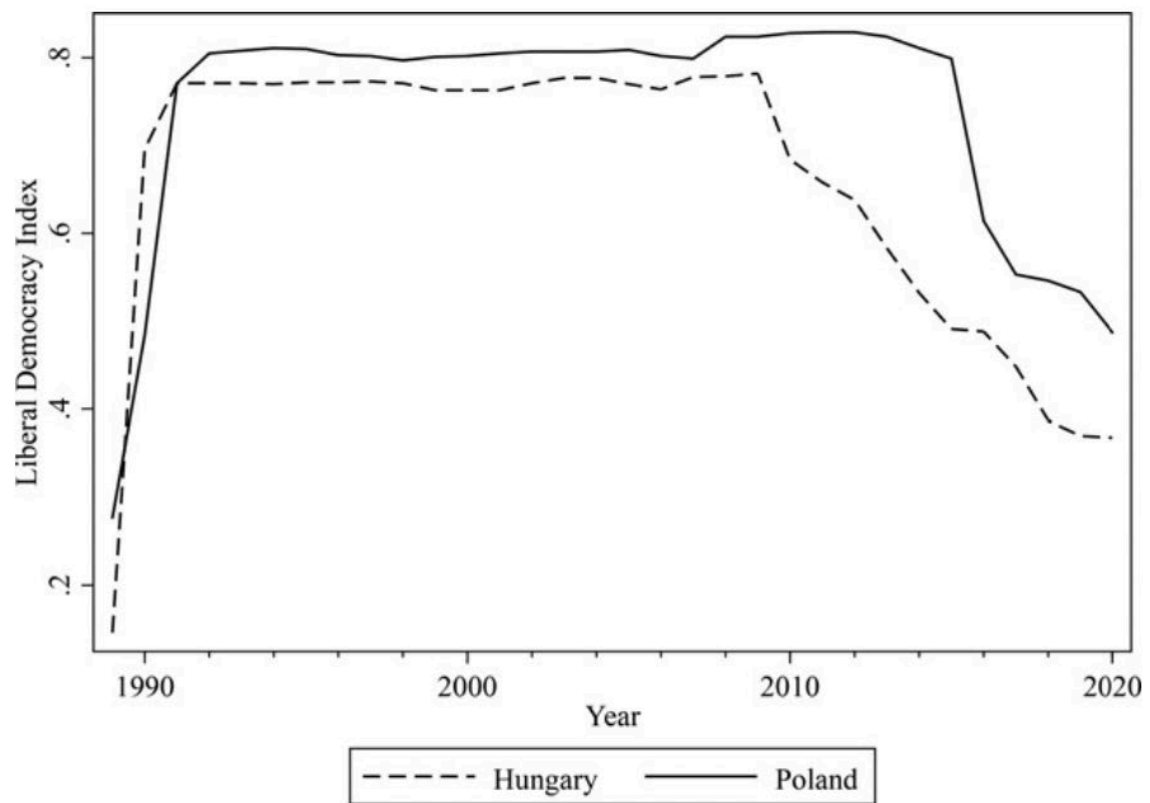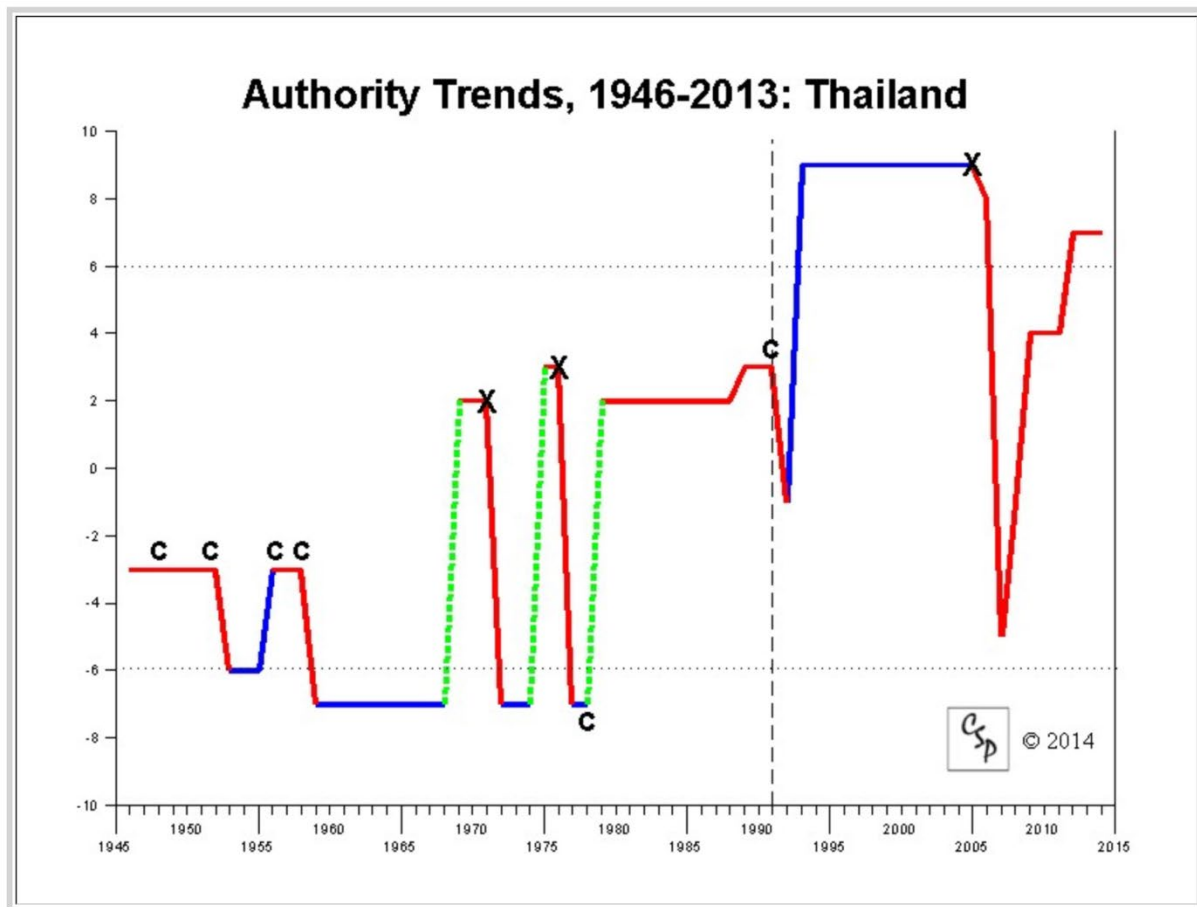Source: V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index (1989-2019)

Figure (5): National-Level Democratic Backsliding in Hungary and Poland (1989-2020)

Source: Varieties of Democracy

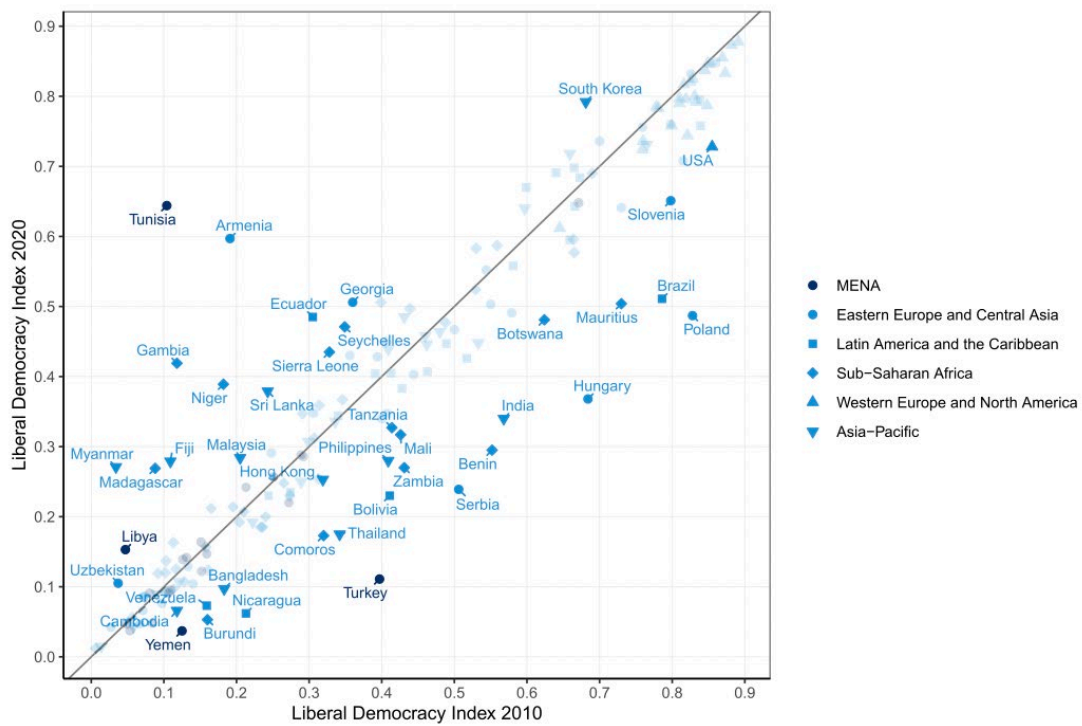Figure (6): Regime Transition Trends in Thailand

(source: Polity IV)

Figure (7): Countries with substantial and significant changes on the Liberal Democracy Index

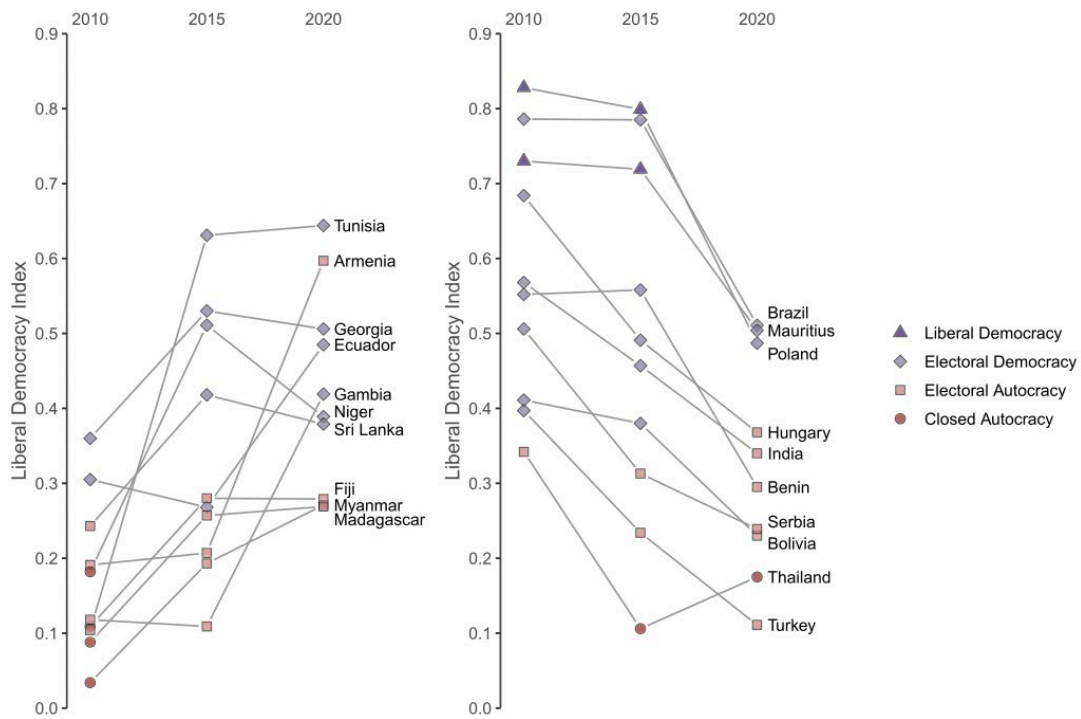(LDI), 2010-2020

Source: State of the World Report 2020

Figure (8): Top 10 advancers (left) and decliners (right), Liberal Democracy Index (2010, 2015, 2020)

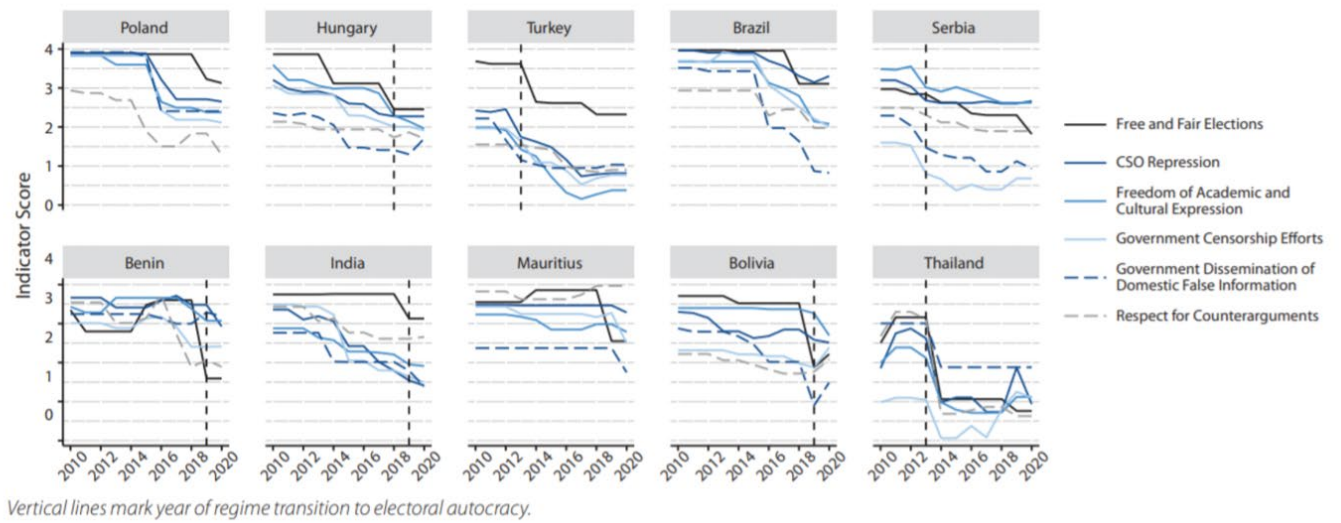Source: State of the World Report 2020

Figure (9): How autocratization unfolds, 2010-2020

Source: Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem 2020)

Autocratization Trend in the eight case studies (2010-2020)

Darker color indicates a larger shift towards autocratization

Source: GIS 215 class, created by Aseel Tork, 2022

Qualitative Analysis

Country	Democracy Level	Threat	Military Involved?	Authoritarian Backsliding?
Tunisia	Lower	Large	✗	✗
Egypt	Lower	Large	✓	✓
Venezuela	Higher	Large	✓	✓
Colombia	Higher	Large	✓	✗
Poland	Higher	Moderate	✗	✓
Hungary	Higher	Moderate	✗	✓
Thailand	Higher	Moderate	✓	✓
Cambodia	Lower	Large	✓	✓

This table summarizes the qualitive analysis.