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Alternative patterns to electoral autocracy: recognizing diversity in contemporary autocratization processes

Claudio Balderacchi [a] and Luca Tomini [b]

[a]Department of Political Science and International Relations, Universidad del Norte, Barranquilla, Colombia; [b]Centre d'Etude de la Vie Politique - CEVIPOL, Université libre de Bruxelles, Bruxelles, Belgium

ABSTRACT

The establishment of electoral autocracy through gradual and "electoral" means by democratically elected leaders has recently emerged as one of the most researched phenomena in comparative politics. The literature and some of the most widely discussed cases suggest that this process typically takes place on the basis of majoritarian levels of popular support, often combined with an anti-establishment narrative. In this article, we show that this representation fails to capture the diversity characterizing these transitions and that general conclusions on these processes may have been influenced by the analysis of only a part of existing cases. Through the analysis of the universe of cases since 2000 and using V-Dem ERT and V-Party data, first we show that widely discussed cases are not representative of gradual transitions to electoral autocracy and describe the existence of alternative patterns to electoral autocracy, including an overlooked pattern that is opposite to the more discussed majoritarian-anti-establishment path. Then, we discuss and provide preliminary evidence of how different patterns to electoral autocracy can influence the types of strategies adopted by incumbents, and, as a consequence, the elaboration of potential countermeasures to contemporary attacks on democracy.

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Introduction

The recent debate on autocratization has emerged as a key area of study in comparative politics. Starting from the recognition of multiple processes of autocratization in different countries, scholars have increasingly paid attention to the phenomenon, contributing to its definition and investigating its implications. Defined in recent studies as a movement "towards autocracy"[1] or "away from democracy,"[2] autocratization is described by these authors as a process that may initiate in any political regime, occur in a gradual or sudden fashion, and that may, but not necessarily, produce a transition from a democratic to an autocratic regime when unfolding in a democracy.

Within this more general category, this article examines *gradual processes of autocratization that originate in a democracy and that eventually produce the establishment*

CONTACT Claudio Balderacchi balderacchic@gmail.com

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of electoral autocracy by the hands of an elected government. In particular, it addresses the not-yet-settled question of how these transitions occur. In addition to the obvious implications associated with the transformation of a democracy into an authoritarian regime, this specific form of autocratization, in which elected incumbents combine a variety of relatively subtle autocratic strategies including the distortion of the playing field and "executive aggrandizement,"[3] is particularly relevant due to the fact that most contemporary "episodes" of autocratization do start in a democracy and, when they do, they mostly occur gradually on the initiative of elected incumbents, often resulting in a democratic rupture.[4]

Because of its relevance, scholars have attempted to delineate the main characteristics of this gradual establishment of autocracy, converging over two typical features and contributing to the emergence of a "standard" or most discussed model of contemporary gradual democratic demise: incumbents' ability to foster significant popular support and the anti-establishment character of their political projects. Regarding the former, Levitsky and Loxton describe "plebiscitarian means" as the typical strategy of Latin American competitive authoritarianism.[5] Similarly, Gamboa refers to incumbents' popularity as the primary instrument and even as a necessary condition to erode and eventually remove democratic rule.[6] In the same vein, Bermeo underlines the role of strong electoral mandates and majoritarian support in gradual processes of democratic backsliding, noting that "Executive aggrandizement takes place precisely where a majority that supports it is already taking root. Strategic electoral manipulation takes place where incumbents already deem themselves capable of either securing or reinforcing majority support."[7] Not much differently, popular support and the majoritarian control of the parliament are viewed by Kneuer as key elements of processes of democratic erosion ultimately resulting in autocracy.[8] In line with the reference to the key role of majorities, strong electorate mandates, and the ability to win plebiscites, the standard route to electoral autocracy would then be *majoritarian*, one in which would-be autocrats dismantle and replace democracy through the ability to win and maintain majoritarian levels of popular support.

A second, core feature of gradual transitions to autocracy has been often considered to be the anti-establishment narrative embraced by autocrats. This narrative portrays traditional socio-political elites as primarily accountable for the state of the democratic regime, thus fostering resentment and disillusionment towards democracy. The most frequently cited and influential contemporary instances of gradual democratic decline are frequently linked to a narrative in which the democratic regime is depicted as corrupt, inefficient, and under the sway of a small, self-referential political elite. This anti-establishment narrative is at the core of autocratization processes in Venezuela, where it took a social and egalitarian connotation. It is also at the basis of the autocratization processes in Hungary, where it took instead a nationalist and conservative connotation, and in Turkey, with a specific religious and conservative character. Remarkably, anti-elitism is often viewed, though not unanimously, as a central element or even an equivalent of populism,[9] in turn a recurrent explanation of gradual transitions to electoral autocracy in the autocratization literature.[10] In short, besides its widely recognized majoritarian character, the contemporary gradual route to autocracy is often presented as also *anti-establishment*, one in which, on the basis of majoritarian levels of popular support, incumbent actors gradually dismantle democracy by attacking a supposedly corrupt, ineffective and even traitorous elite, on the basis of egalitarian, nativist, nationalist, or other identity-related claims.

We argue that these "majoritarian-anti-establishment" models appear incapable to capturing the diversity characterizing contemporary cases of gradual transitions from democracy to electoral autocracy. On the one hand, in spite of their "electoral" nature, to a significant extent, gradual transitions to electoral autocracy also occur with *minoritarian* levels of popular support. Government leaders such as Alejandro Giammattei in Guatemala, Nikola Gruevski in North Macedonia, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in the Philippines and several others could not count on majoritarian electoral victories during their "journey" to electoral autocracy. On the other hand, once the universe of cases is taken into account, the role of anti-establishment autocratizers in these transitions appears to have been overstated: gradual transitions to electoral autocracy often occur in continuity with the establishment, that is, without an anti-establishment narrative or party platform foreseeing a rupture with established elites. For example, the aforementioned Macapagal-Arroyo and Gruevski, Yanukovych in Ukraine or Ouattara in Ivory Coast did not base their progressive dismantlement of democracy on anti-establishment appeals. In some experiences, such as in the case of Giammattei in Guatemala and Macapagal-Arroyo in the Philippines, the absence of anti-establishment programmes even translated into an open defense of the interests of segments of established socio-economic and political elites.

In what is a reflection of these observations, we maintain that once the universe of cases is classified along the majoritarian/minoritarian and what we call the anti-establishment/continuist[11] dimension measuring autocratizers' anti-elitism, additional, empirically relevant, "models" of gradual democratic breakdown resulting from the intersection of these dimensions emerge, particularly the majoritarian-continuist and the minoritarian-continuist models. Largely ignored in the contemporary context, this last model – the minoritarian-continuist – is even opposite to the often discussed majoritarian-anti-establishment one.

Far from having a merely classificatory value, the identification of different patterns to electoral autocracy along these dimensions is highly meaningful given that, as discussed below, such differences can have important consequences of the strategies of the actors involved in the autocratization process and, as a result, on the early identification of autocratization trends and on the measures that may be needed to defend democracy.

The core message of this article is that, when considering the *gradual*, *complete* transformation of democracy into *electoral autocracy*, the studies on autocratization in recent years have been biased towards the analysis of specific paths to autocracy and that more attention should be paid to diversity and complexity in autocratization processes.[12] Due to minoritarian levels of popular support and/or the absence of an inspiring anti-establishment political narrative, transitions (not just democratic erosion) through alternative patterns such as the minoritarian-continuist one may appear particularly arduous and less feasible from the perspective of an autocrat engaged in the gradual establishment of autocracy through *electoral* means. However, these transitions do happen, and to a considerable extent. We maintain that opening the "black-box" of gradual democratic demises must be a priority to obtain an overall and more accurate picture of the variety of contemporary models of autocratization.

In the next sections, first, we assess the diffusion of different patterns to electoral autocracy resulting from the combination of the majoritarian/minoritarian and anti-establishment/continuist dimensions: the majoritarian-anti-establishment, the

minoritarian-continuist, the majoritarian-continuist, and the minoritarian-anti-establishment models. We draw on the V-Dem ERT[13] and V-Party datasets,[14] and show that diversity in contemporary gradual routes to electoral autocracy is largely overlooked. Then, we discuss how the incentives and constraints produced by each pattern can orient incumbents towards different strategies and, as a consequence, why it is important to recognize such diversity. Finally, to illustrate the differences highlighted through the V-Dem ERT and V-Party data and to provide some preliminary evidence of their impact on autocrats' strategies, we contrast cases from different patterns and describe incumbents' strategic choices. In the final section, we discuss the specific contributions of this article and consider new possible research avenues in the field of autocratization studies.

The theoretical and practical benefits resulting from the recognition and analysis of diversity in the universe of cases are multiple. *First*, it favours a more complete understanding of autocratization processes and avoid both the overlooking of important factors and the attribution of excessive importance to others. By doing so, it contributes to the visualization of dangers that could otherwise be ignored, thus helping in coping with autocratic projects. More generally, it cautions against overly simplified *universal* playbooks or sequencing of autocratization. *Second*, it provides the opportunity to consider the specific mechanisms and actions that autocrats adopt to establish electoral autocracy with limited popular support. *Third*, this article is also relevant to understand the relation between populism and autocratization, given the analysis of the role of autocratizers' anti-elitism in transitions to electoral autocracy. Related to this point, the analysis of transitions diverging from those involving popular leaders wielding anti-elite messages brings back the role of traditional political elites and of their close relation with segments of the socio-economic establishment in autocratization processes, often overlooked in the last few years due to the tendency to focus on the autocratizing role of anti-establishment actors and political outsiders. *Fourth*, it provides insights into the different types of contribution that political leaders can provide to the establishment of autocracy.

Overlooked diversity in cases of gradual democratic rupture?

Significant consensus seems to exist on the idea that contemporary autocratization, when it takes the form of a gradual, complete transition from democracy to electoral autocracy, tends to occur through the initiative of popular leaders, parties or movements. Influenced by key, influential cases such as Chávez's Venezuela, Erdogan's Turkey, and Orban's Hungary, according to dominant narratives highly popular leaders would dismantle democracy by taking advantage of decisive electoral wins and their popularity, in turn often associated with their anti-establishment narrative, the widespread resentment for traditional socio-economic powers, and a programme directed against the established political elites or the socio-economic or ideological status quo.

Yet, other contemporary, largely overlooked cases tell a different, sometimes opposite story. In several countries, elected government leaders did produce a gradual and subtle transition to electoral autocracy. However, they achieved their goals with minoritarian levels of popular support and/or without an anti-establishment narrative. We maintain that, once the universe of contemporary gradual democratic ruptures by elected governments is taken into account, empirical evidence points to a picture

that is, more complex and diverse than that outlined by the literature. To test our argument, in Table 1 and Figure 1 we consider gradual complete transitions to electoral autocracy since 2000 and distinguish them on the basis of the majoritarian/minoritarian and anti-establishment/continuist dimensions (cases in Figure 1 are indicated with the name of the country and the year of transition to electoral autocracy).

To select the universe of gradual transitions to electoral autocracy, we identify cases that transitioned from democracy to electoral autocracy while experiencing a process of autocratization that did not involve a coup d'état or a military intervention. To this goal, we draw on the V-Dem ERT dataset[15] and follow its episode approach thus identifying episodes of autocratization as "periods when a country undergoes sustained and substantial changes along a democracy-autocracy continuum."[16] First, we consider episodes of autocratization that occurred, wholly or in part, since 2000. After selecting these episodes on the basis of standard criteria suggested by the ERT framework[17] we further refine our case selection by excluding those episodes that, according to the V-Dem Regimes of the World index, (i) did not start in a democracy and that (ii) did not produce the transition to an electoral autocracy. Based on these two additional criteria, we therefore select only those cases that experienced an episode of autocratization that started in democracy and entailed a transition from democracy to electoral autocracy. We then excluded all episodes lasting one year or less (e.g. Sri-Lanka 2005–2006) and those including a coup d'état or a military intervention (e.g. Fiji 2000–2001 or Maldives 2012–2016, among others) since we focus solely on gradual processes of change led by elected political leaders. We obtained 18 cases of autocratization from democracy to electoral autocracy since 2000 (see Table 1).[18]

To measure and compare these cases across the majoritarian/minoritarian dimension, we consider the electoral results of chief executives' parties in the legislature before democratic rupture and code them as majoritarian if they obtained more than 50% of seats in the lower chamber. The percentage of seats won by chief executives' parties enables comparability between countries with presidential and

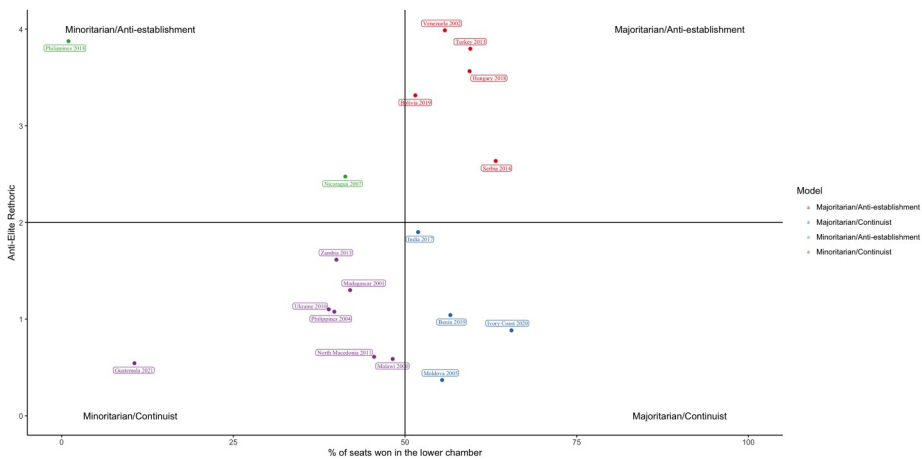

Figure 1. Models of autocratization. Based on the V-Party variables "v2paseatshare" and "v2paanteli_osp" (Lindberg et al. "*Varieties of Party Identity and Organization (V-Party) Dataset V2*").

Note: Each case is indicated with the name of the country and the year of the transition to electoral autocracy based on V-Dem Regimes of the World (v2x_regime) in Coppedge et al. "V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date] Dataset v13".

Table 1. Classification of cases.

ID Starting and ending of autocratization*	Country	Year of transition to electoral autocracy**	Seat share % (v2paseatshare)***	Anti-elite rhetoric (v2paanteli_osp)***	Party of the chief executive at the time of transition to electoral autocracy	Chief executive at the time of transition to electoral autocracy	Majoritarian	Anti-establishment	Model
BEN_2018_2020	Benin	2019	56.6	1.042	Alliance: Progressive Union	Patrice Talon	YES	NO	Majoritarian/ Continuist
BOL_2006_2020	Bolivia	2019	51.5	3.315	Movement for Socialism	Evo Morales	YES	YES	Majoritarian/ Anti-establishment
GTM_2018_2022	Guatemala	2021	10.6	0.544	Come on (Vamos)	Alejandro Giammattei	NO	NO	Minoritarian/ Continuist
HUN_2006_2022	Hungary	2018	59.4	3.565	Fidesz	Viktor Orbán	YES	YES	Majoritarian/ Anti-establishment
IND_2000_2022	India	2017	51.9	1.9	Indian People's Party	Narendra Modi	YES	NO	Majoritarian/ Continuist
CIV_2020_2022	Ivory Coast	2020	65.5	0.884	Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace	Alassane Ouattara	YES	NO	Majoritarian/ Continuist
MDG_1997_2002	Madagascar	2001	42	1.3	Association for the Rebirth of Madagascar	Didier Ratsiraka	NO	NO	Minoritarian/ Continuist
MWI_1999_2005	Malawi	2000	48.2	0.588	United Democratic Front	Elson Muluzi	NO	NO	Minoritarian/ Continuist
MDA_1998_2005	Moldova	2005	55.4	0.37	Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova	Vasile Tarlev	YES	NO	Majoritarian/ Continuist
NIC_2006_2022	Nicaragua	2007	41.3	2.475	Sandinista National Liberation Front	Daniel Ortega	NO	YES	Minoritarian/ Anti-establishment

MKD_2005_2012	North Macedonia	2011	45.5	0.61	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity	Nikola Gruevski	NO	NO	Minoritarian/ Continuist
PHL_2001_2005	Philippines1	2004	39.7	1.077	Lakas – Christian Muslim Democrats	Gloria Macapagal Arroyo	NO	NO	Minoritarian/ Continuist
PHL_2016_2022	Philippines2	2018	1****	3.876	Philippine Democratic Party-Power of the Nation	Rodrigo Duterte	NO	YES	Minoritarian/ Anti-establishment
SRB_2010_2022	Serbia	2014	63.2	2.636	Alliance: Aleksandar Vucic – The future in which we believe	Aleksandar Vucic	YES	YES	Majoritarian/ Anti-establishment
TUR_2005_2017	Turkey	2013	59.5	3.797	Justice and Development Party	Recep Erdogan	YES	YES	Majoritarian/ Anti-establishment
UKR_2010_2014	Ukraine	2010	38.9	1.101	Party of Regions	Viktor Yanukovich	NO	NO	Minoritarian/ Continuist
VEN_1998_2022	Venezuela	2002	55.8	3.988	Fifth Republic Movement	Hugo Chávez	YES	YES	Majoritarian/ Anti-establishment
ZMB_2010_2017	Zambia	2013	40	1.615	Patriotic Front	Michael Sata	NO	NO	Minoritarian/ Continuist

Note: * Edgell et al. Episodes of Regime Transformation Dataset (v13.0). ** Based on Regimes of the World (v2x_regime) in Coppedge et al. "V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date] Dataset v13." *** Lindberg et al. Varieties of Party Identity and Organization (V-Party) Dataset V2. **** Hicken, "The Political Party System."

parliamentary systems and it allows to measure the ability of incumbents to accumulate institutional power through popular support. Considering the percentage of votes would not fully capture such ability and would set a hardly reachable threshold for a case to be coded as majoritarian, with the risk of coding chief executives' parties able to win absolute parliamentary majorities as minoritarian. Accordingly, for each of the cases, drawing on the V-Party dataset,[19] we measure the majoritarian/minoritarian dimension with the V-Party variable "v2paseatshare," a variable measuring the percentage of seats won by political parties in the lower chamber. We consider the party of the chief executive under whom the rupture of democracy occurred and report its electoral result in the year coinciding with or − if a national legislative election was not held in that year − immediately preceding the transition year from democracy to electoral autocracy. We use the 50% seat share as a cutoff point to distinguish majoritarian from minoritarian cases. A possible alternative, more stringent criterion to code a case as majoritarian would require incumbent parties to win more than 50% of seats in *both* the lower and upper chambers for the few cases with a functioning, popularly elected upper chamber in our universe of cases. However, this could potentially reduce the number of majoritarian cases and, as a consequence, it would set a less demanding (or more favourable) test for our argument, which questions the diffusion and representativeness of majoritarian and especially majoritarian-anti-establishment models. By considering only the results in the lower chamber, we therefore set a harder test for our argument. Regardless, within our universe of cases, considering also the results in the upper chamber for the three cases with a functioning, popularly elected upper chamber would not change their coding given that the majoritarian or minoritarian results in the lower chamber were confirmed in the upper chamber.[20]

To measure autocratizers' anti-elitism, we consider the rhetoric of chief executives' parties before democratic rupture. In the same year and for the same party considered for the majoritarian-minoritarian dimension, we then measure the anti-establishment/continuist dimension with the V-Party variable "v2paanteli_osp" that, by measuring a party's level of anti-elite rhetoric, proves particularly suitable for our goals. This is a variable that measures the importance of anti-elitism in the party's rhetoric and that ranges from 0 to 4, where 0 corresponds to "not at all important" and 4 to "very important": the values of 0 and 1 indicate that this rhetoric is "not at all" or "not important" for the considered party, while the values of 2, 3 and 4 indicate that this rhetoric is "somewhat important," "important," or "very important," respectively.[21] We use the value of "2" ("somewhat important") as a cutoff point to distinguish continuist from anti-establishment cases.[22]

What emerges from Table 1 and Figure 1 conflicts with predominant narratives. *First*, in spite of the tendency of the literature to explain contemporary transitions to electoral autocracy through majoritarian-anti-establishment models, and to consider majoritarian levels of popular support as an almost indispensable condition, the gradual and successful rupture of democracy occurs, to a significant extent, also with minoritarian levels of popular support and/or without an explicitly anti-elite rhetoric, that is, through alternative models. Remarkably, the *minoritarian-continuist* model, opposite to majoritarian-anti-establishment cases and combining minoritarian levels of popular support *and* the absence of explicit anti-elitism, emerges as the most populated category (see lower-left quadrant in Figure 1). In spite of its considerable diffusion, this is, a pattern that has been largely ignored in the contemporary context, possibly due to the fact that is apparently less viable. The lower-right quadrant

of Figure 1 shows that transitions to electoral autocracy tend to occur also through the *majoritarian-continuist* path, that is with majoritarian levels of popular support but without an openly anti-establishment character. Finally, the *minoritarian-anti-establishment* pattern (see upper left quadrant) appears instead as an uncommon, relatively marginal path to electoral autocracy. This is not surprising. The gradual, "electoral" establishment of autocracy through the proposal of a programme in opposition to established elites may be highly problematic in the absence of majoritarian levels of popular support.

Second, related to the point above, unlike the large attention paid by scholars to popular, anti-establishment leaders, the upper-right quadrant shows that these cases are not very common within the universe of cases. In other words, the majoritarian-anti-establishment cases may be the most debated and examined cases, possibly due to their conceptual proximity with populism, but they are not numerically prevalent. This finding is important because these cases have arguably exerted significant influence in attempts to define how elected governments achieve to slowly transform democracy into autocracy (see, for example, Kneuer[23]), which in turn may also influence the analysis of how to resist attacks on democracy.

Third, the fact that (see the upper-left and upper-right quadrants) only around one-third of successful transitions to electoral autocracy are characterized by medium to high levels of anti-elitism may suggest that populism is possibly less central than expected in cases of gradual democratic rupture. Populism has been notoriously defined in different ways but, as noted by Schedler,[24] scholars have often viewed anti-elitism as its central feature or even as its equivalent. Indeed, anti-elitism has been considered a necessary component in different, highly influential definitions of populism.[25] Accordingly, in spite of the large attention dedicated to populist leaders in the autocratization literature, populism may be unable to explain most cases of gradual democratic rupture.

Finally, regarding the relation between the majoritarian-minoritarian and anti-establishment-continuist dimensions, the lower-right quadrant of Figure 1 suggests that anti-establishment appeals are not the only strategy to foment popular support in "successful" journeys to electoral autocracy. Therefore, in addition to showing that largely discussed majoritarian-anti-establishment cases are not representative of contemporary gradual democratic breakdowns, and that neither popular support nor anti-elitism are virtually necessary conditions for the successful establishment of electoral autocracy, existing cases seem to indicate that autocrats able to establish an electoral autocracy may not need anti-establishment appeals to accumulate majoritarian popular support during their "successful" establishment of electoral autocracy.

In summary, the existence of a significant number of cases characterized by minoritarian levels of popular support and the less-than-expected central role of anti-elitism are especially notable. More generally, what emerges is that transitions to electoral autocracy tend to occur through different patterns: with majoritarian levels of popular support (sometimes combined with anti-establishment plans) or, given the marginality of the minoritarian-anti-establishment model, through the overlooked minoritarian-continuist pattern. As discussed in the next section, these differences, in themselves remarkable, are even more important because they can produce significant consequences of the strategies adopted by global autocrats, whose understanding, in turn, is also important to deal with authoritarianism. We examine these consequences in the next section.

Incentives and constraints in different patterns to electoral autocracy

In the previous section, we showed that gradual and successful transitions from democracy to electoral autocracy occur in a majoritarian fashion (in some cases accompanied by anti-establishment goals), but also through a largely overlooked pattern characterized by minoritarian levels of popular support and the absence of an explicitly anti-elite rhetoric. While relevant in themselves, these differences can also have important consequences of the strategies of the autocratizers. Specifically, due to the incentives and constraints that each pathway produces, certain strategies appear more likely in one pattern than in the other. These "consequences" concern (see Table 2): (1) the use of referendums; (2) electoral manipulations on the election day; (3) mobilization strategies; (4) adoption of a new constitution; and (5) power-sharing deals.[26] These strategies (discussed below) are *not* inevitably present in certain patterns and are *not* necessary or sufficient in a certain pattern for the "successful" removal of democracy. However, what emerges from our analysis is that, within the universe of completed transitions from democracy to electoral autocracy, in their "journey" to electoral autocracy, governments in different patterns are pushed to resort to different strategies, due to the different structure of incentives and constraints that each pattern produces.

Showing that the strategies adopted by incumbents depend on the models outlined in the previous sections is important because it questions increasingly recurrent attempts to identify universal playbooks or sequencing of autocratization. In particular, as discussed below, it suggests that the specific actions that autocrats adopt once in power may depend on available means (i.e. availability of popular support) and their ideology (i.e. presence or absence of anti-elitism). Notably, these strategies are related with the discussed models (majoritarian-anti-establishment, minoritarian-continuist, etc.) but they are not part of their constitutive elements: because of the reasons outlined in this section, they are more likely in some models than in others but, in some cases, they may occur where they are not expected and not occur where they are, for example, due to local specificities. Understanding that strategies tend to vary depending on autocrats' features and available means, in turn, is important to better understand how to resist autocratization and avoid one-fits-all recommendations based on the most discussed cases: for instance, dealing with relatively unpopular executives engaging in intense electoral fraud may require different resistance strategies than those derived from the analysis of popular, anti-establishment executives attempting to change the constitution.

Table 2. Strategies in patterns to electoral autocracy.

	Majoritarian-anti-establishment	Majoritarian-continuist	Minoritarian-continuist	Minoritarian-anti-establishment
Use of Referenda	High	Medium	Low	Low
Mobilizational strategy	High	Medium	Low	Medium
Power sharing deals	Low	Low	High	Medium/High
Adoption of a new constitution	High	Medium	Low	Low
Manipulations on the election day	Low	Low	High	High

Note: the table indicates the degree to which the incentive and constraint structure stemming from the constitutive dimensions of each pattern inclines the incumbent towards a particular strategy.

Regarding referendums, because of the limited levels of popular support, in minoritarian patterns they are less viable and therefore not a typical, key tool in the incumbent's authoritarian arsenal. Instead, when needed, they often represent key strategic instruments in majoritarian routes, particularly when the autocrat's stated goal is to supplant existing elites. To be sure, even for leaders counting on popular support, referendums are not without risks and may sometimes produce unexpected electoral defeats.

Similar to the incentives and constraints related to the use of referendums, though sometimes attempted, the adoption of a new constitution is not a viable option for incumbents without majoritarian levels of popular support and therefore is typically not part of their drive towards electoral autocracy. The adoption of a new constitution is instead more likely in the majoritarian-anti-establishment path where it is more feasible and also key to bring about a programme of radical renewal.

With respect to mobilization strategies, incumbents in the majoritarian-anti-establishment pattern are more likely to mobilize their supporters than their counterparts in other paths, due to majoritarian levels of popular support and an anti-establishment narrative capable of energizing their followers. The mobilization of followers is particularly relevant for a government confronting established elites.

Regarding the autocrat's strategies in the electoral arena, a consolidated finding is that contemporary autocrats typically refrain from overt fraud on the election day and, rather, opt for more nuanced pre-electoral manipulations.[27] However, because of the constraints associated with limited popular support, incumbents in minoritarian patterns have more incentives and therefore are more willing to resort to electoral fraud on the election day, even if this may prove riskier than more subtle manipulations taking place before the celebration of elections.

Finally, because of their inability to accumulate power through majoritarian support, incumbents in minoritarian paths intuitively need to rely on power-sharing deals and cooptation which, instead, are not needed in majoritarian patterns and may even prove incompatible with anti-establishment appeals where present. While the causal link between minoritarian levels of popular support and the use of pacts is not surprising, the dependence on (often opportunistic) deals in minoritarian paths underlines a considerable strategic difference with often discussed models that should be taken into account in the identification of more tailored resistance strategies.

Interestingly, in some aspects, the role and strategies of scarcely popular governing elites in the minoritarian-continuist pattern to electoral autocracy may be reminiscent of established elites in less recent "gray zone" hybrid regimes described by Carothers[28] around two decades ago as one of the outcomes of the "third wave". However, unlike those stagnating hybrid regimes resulting from processes of incomplete democratization, in the "minoritarian-continuist" path autocratic strategies are used to produce a transition from democracy to autocracy.

In the next section, to preliminarily illustrate how differences between different patterns can produce significant strategic consequences in line with the analysis outlined above (see Table 2), we contrast existing cases and show that certain strategies tend to be more or less recurrent depending on their majoritarian/minoritarian and anti-establishment/continuist features. Our goal in the next section is not to conclusively prove the existence of an association between certain patterns (e.g. the minoritarian-continuist one) and strategies but, rather, explore and provide some preliminary evidence of the relevance and potential impact of the (overlooked) differences outlined in

Figure 1. By doing so, we aim to both promote further research on the topic and, as noted above, caution against increasingly recurrent attempts to identify a universal playbook (or model) of gradual transition to electoral autocracy.

Patterns and strategies in cases of gradual transition to electoral autocracy

The data presented in Figure 1 and Table 1 highlight important differences between contemporary cases of gradual democratic rupture. These differences are even more evident once these cases are examined more closely. A closer view is also useful to show how these differences can push incumbents to different strategies, in line with the framework outlined above.

Among minoritarian-continuist cases, in Guatemala Alejandro Giammattei was elected after winning only around 14% of votes in the first round of the 2019 presidential election while his party could only win slightly more than 10% of seats in Congress in the same year. Far from proposing a programme of radical renewal, he represented the latest and one of the most visible expressions of a discredited political establishment fending off the criminal investigations of national and international independent prosecutors. In North Macedonia, in spite of his relatively long stint in power, Gruevski's party (VMRO-DPMNE) was never able to win an absolute majority of seats. Similar to Guatemala, under Gruevski autocratization did not develop through anti-establishment programmes but, rather, through the perpetuation of systematic corruption and illicit activities by pragmatic political elites. In the Philippines, vice-president Macapagal-Arroyo first became president due to former President Estrada's corruption scandal and impeachment process and then struggled to win a highly contested presidential election in 2004 with around 40% of votes and a slight margin over his closest opponent. Her party Lakas-CMD could only obtain a relative majority of seats in the Congress and was a member of a broad electoral coalition. Unlike cases where the establishment was targeted by programmes of radical renewal, during the Macapagal-Arroyo era the elites intensified their "predatory" practices, under a government with a strong presence of members of the political establishment.[29] In Ukraine, under Yanukovych, autocratization and democratic rupture took place under a president who could not obtain an absolute majority of votes even in the second round of the 2010 presidential elections due to the "against all" option on the ballot and whose Party of Regions failed to win a majority of seats in the 2007 and 2012 parliamentary elections. In Madagascar, Didier Ratsiraka won the presidency in 1996 in the second round with only a slight margin over his opponent while his party failed to win a majority of seats in the National Assembly in 1998. The election of Ratsiraka represented the comeback of the leader who had dominated Madagascar's authoritarian regime for two decades and who had lost power only a few years earlier following the country's transition to democracy.

These features distinguish these cases from majoritarian and, particularly, majoritarian-anti-establishment cases, often represented as prototypical examples of contemporary forms of gradual democratic rupture. Among these cases, for example, in Venezuela, Chávez repeatedly won electoral contests decisively, including the 1998, 2000, and 2006 one round presidential elections with an absolute majority, and two referendums in 1999 to hold a constituent assembly and then adopt a new constitution. Although his party failed to win a majority of seats in the 1998 legislative elections, the

results of this election were overcome by the adoption of a new constitution via referendum and by the resulting new 2000 legislative elections in which Chávez's party won an absolute parliamentary majority. In Hungary's parliamentary system, since 2010 Orbán's Fidesz has repeatedly won two-thirds parliamentary supermajorities. In Turkey, in its path towards electoral autocracy, the AKP won absolute parliamentary majorities in the 2002 and 2007 legislative elections and was successful in the 2007, 2010, and 2017 constitutional referendums, while Erdogan triumphed in the 2014 presidential election with a majority of votes in the first round. In all of these countries, incumbents took advantage of their ability to win majorities and hyper-majorities to alter institutions and establish a firm grip on power, legitimizing their actions through an anti-establishment narrative. Though not characterized by openly anti-establishment appeals,[30] majoritarian routes to electoral autocracy took place also in countries such as Ivory Coast, India, and Benin.

As discussed above, by producing different incentives and constraints, the differences between these groups of countries tend in turn to favour the adoption of different strategies: while the use of referendums, mobilization strategies, and adoption of a new constitution seems more likely in majoritarian-anti-establishment and, to a lesser extent, majoritarian-continuist paths, strategies such as electoral manipulations on the election day appears more likely in the minoritarian-continuist pattern (see Table 2).

In line with our theoretical framework, without anti-establishment narratives and necessary levels of popular support, incumbents in minoritarian-continuist cases did not typically resort to or manage to take advantage of *referendums* or *popular mobilization*, which, on the contrary, was discouraged and repressed. Among anti-establishment-majoritarian cases, instead, in Venezuela, Chávez resorted to both participatory institutions[31] and several referendums to concentrate power and eventually establish an electoral autocracy while, in Turkey, Erdogan resorted to three referendums in 2007, 2010 and 2017 in his bid to change the country's institutional architecture. Similarly, in the minoritarian-continuist route, the adoption of a new constitution or its large revision were not typical elements of executives' strategies. New constitutions or extensive reforms were instead adopted in majoritarian-anti-establishment countries such as Hungary, Venezuela, and Turkey. Though not characterized by openly anti-establishment programmes, drawing on the ability to win wide majorities, also in Ivory Coast President Ouattara successfully promoted the adoption of a new constitution in 2016 through a referendum that was boycotted by the opposition. While generating suspicions of being an instrument to circumvent term limits,[32] the new constitution also arguably strengthened the powers of the President through the creation of a Senate whose members are appointed by one-third by the head of state.

Without the opportunity to accumulate power through majoritarian support, incumbents in minoritarian cases were forced to resort to pacts and power-sharing agreements, which were instead not central in majoritarian and majoritarian-anti-establishment patterns. In Guatemala, for example, in what has appeared as part of the common goal of undermining independent anti-corruption initiatives and investigations, the party of President Giammattei (VAMOS) collaborated with different parties, including political rivals, to apparently maintain control of key courts, as suggested by the resistance of a VAMOS-led congressional coalition to the Constitutional Court's attempt to contrast illegal attempts (known as Parallel Commissions

2020) to influence the selection of Supreme Court judges.[33] In North Macedonia, crucial in Gruevski's system of power was the alliance between his own party (VMRO-DPMNE) and the formerly rival Albanian ethnic party Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), in turn, based on the recognition of Western Macedonia and Albanian communities as spheres of influence of the DUI.[34] In Ukraine, after winning the presidency in 2010, Yanukovych relied on both pacts with other parties – the Lytvyn Bloc and the Communist Party – and cooptation of individual deputies of the opposition to gain control of the parliament, which then proved instrumental in the attempt to consolidate his power.[35] In Zambia, unable to win a majority of seats in the 2011 election, in the National Assembly the ruling Patriotic Front relied on "manufactured" majorities resulting from the cooptation of opposition legislators.[36]

The illustrative cases discussed above find further confirmation in Figures 2(a,b) and 3. Data from the Comparative Constitutional Project,[37] which we updated for the period 2020–2022, in Figure 2(a) shows the occurrence of constitutional amendments and adoptions of new constitutions in the selected cases during the autocratization period[38] unfolding under the ruling forces in power at the time of the transition from democracy to electoral autocracy. The adoption of a new constitution appears a recurrent strategy in the majoritarian-anti-establishment pattern of autocratization, where most countries adopted a new constitution, whilst other patterns seem to rely on constitutional amendments (whose nature or extent is not indicated by these data) or no constitutional changes at all. Relatedly, Figure 2(b) shows the occurrence of mandatory constitutional referendums and plebiscites across these cases[39] in the same period: a similar difference can be seen in the extensive use of these tools in the majoritarian-anti-establishment model of autocratization compared to the other models. Figure 3 shows instead the extent of mass mobilization for autocracy in the selected cases. This V-Dem indicator[40] measures the mobilization in favour of the incumbent, autocratizer government. More positive values indicate the occurrence of more and larger pro-autocracy mobilization events whilst more negative values indicate the presence of fewer and smaller events or even their absence. These data confirm

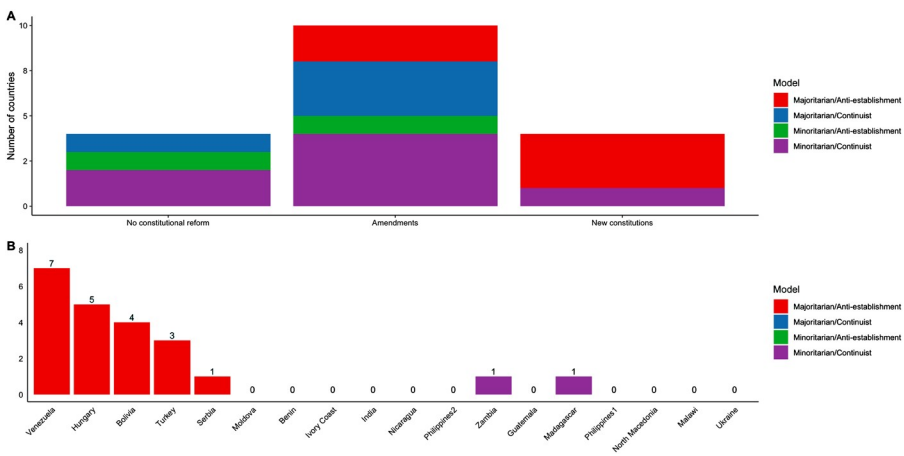

Figure 2. (a) Constitutional reforms and amendments. Based on Elkins et al. "Chronology of Constitutional Events". (b) Plebiscites and referendums – occurrence. Based on the V-Dem variables "v2ddyror" and "v2ddyrpl" (Coppedge et al. "V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date] Dataset v13").

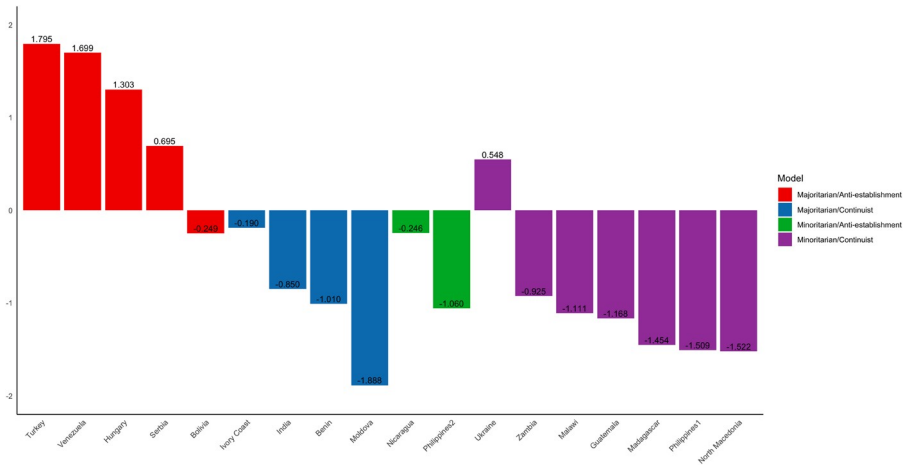

Figure 3. Mass mobilization for autocracy. Based on the V-Dem variables "v2caautmob" (Coppedge et al. "V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date] Dataset v13").

the prevalence of pro-autocracy mobilization in the majoritarian-anti-establishment model of autocratization.

Regarding the electoral arena, governments in the minoritarian paths have appeared to resort extensively to electoral fraud on the election day. For example, in the Philippines, the 2004 presidential election is widely remembered for the "Hello Garci" scandal concerning alleged electoral fraud. In a recorded conversation, President Arroyo and Election Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano allegedly referred to pro-Arroyo electoral frauds, in a scandal questioning the independence of the Comelec (the Philippines' Commission on Elections, whose members were appointed by the President) in the elections management. In somehow similar events, in North Macedonia, under the government of Nikola Gruevski and of the VMRO-DPMNE, electoral fraud in the 2014 election was apparently exposed by a major wiretap scandal,[41] including the use of forged identity documents and the inclusion of foreign nationals among voters.[42] In Ukraine, in a context already affected by the exclusion of key opposition figures, statistical evidence seems to indicate that electoral fraud, particularly ballot stuffing, did take place in the 2012 parliamentary elections to the benefit of Yanukovych's Party of Regions.[43] Certainly, instances of electoral fraud on the election day may occur also in majoritarian cases but, as arguably illustrated by cases such as Chávez's Venezuela, Hungary, and Turkey, they tend to be less needed and therefore less frequent and extensive. Moreover, when they occur, they tend to take place *after* the consolidation of electoral autocracy, due to autocratic deepening or drops in popular support. Figure 4 corroborates the previous qualitative findings through data about vote buying and irregularities (e.g. ballot stuffing, manipulations of votes, etc.) during elections,[44] showing how electoral fraud on the election day tends to be higher in minoritarian (be they anti-establishment or continuist) models of autocratization. More negative values of this index show greater evidence of vote buying and irregularities.

To be sure, as reminded above, in some cases incumbents may diverge from the strategies expected by our theoretical framework, due to specificities of different

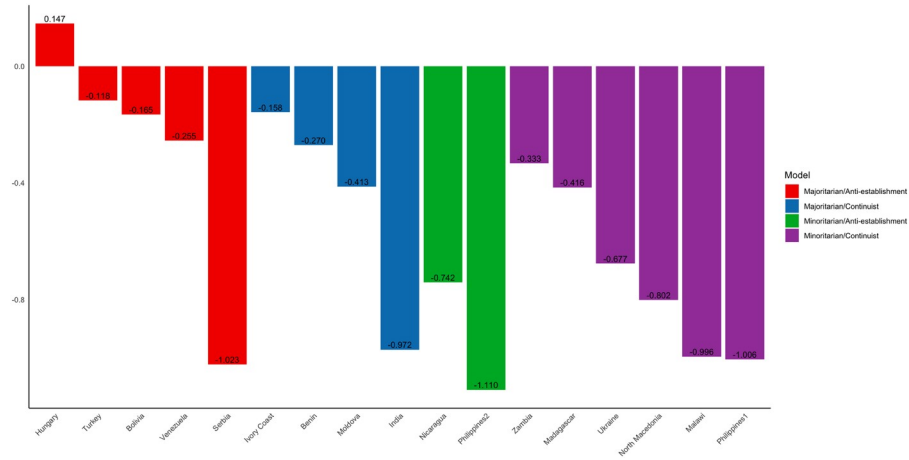

Figure 4. Vote buying and other voting irregularities. Based on the average of the V-Dem variables "v2elvotbuy" and "v2elirreg" (Coppedge et al. "V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date] Dataset v13").

nature. In Madagascar (a minoritarian-continuist case), for example, in line with our framework, accusations of electoral fraud against President Ratsiraka were central in the aftermath of the 2001 elections but, unlike our expectations, the autocratization episode also included a constitutional referendum increasing the president's powers.[45] However, when the universe of cases is taken into consideration, the differences along the majoritarian/minoritarian and anti-establishment/continuist dimensions appear to matter, pushing autocratizing incumbents to different types of strategies.

Importantly, the existence of diversity in gradual routes to autocracy does not undermine the generally supported idea that autocratization often occurs through incumbents' linear movements to autocracy, an idea for example supported by Kneuer and, instead, viewed by Cianetti and Hanley as potentially problematic.[46] Regardless of their position in the majoritarian/minoritarian and anti-establishment/continuist dimensions, the considered incumbents did accumulate political power or erode democratic institutions in a linear and progressive fashion. However, because aspiring autocrats adjust their strategy and behaviour on the basis of the context, goals, and available means, variation in the way autocrats accumulate power should be taken into account. The elements of linear sequences (e.g. pacts, referendums, electoral fraud, etc.) and their order may then vary depending on the presence or absence of certain conditions, particularly popular support or an anti-establishment narrative.

Conclusive remarks: contributions and new research avenues

The gradual replacement of democracy with electoral autocracy by the hands of an elected incumbent represents one of the most troubling manifestations of contemporary autocratization. However, the current understanding of such processes appears incomplete and largely influenced by what is, in fact, only a part of existing cases. Through the analysis of the universe of cases since 2000, we showed that the current debate fails to capture the diversity characterizing these transitions. We also explored

and provided some preliminary evidence of how these differences can in turn produce the adoption of different types of strategies, due to the different sets of incentives and constraints that they produce. More research is needed to examine the differences characterizing different patterns of electoral autocracy and, in particular, to further test the relation between specific patterns and types of strategies. However, we argue that recognizing alternative patterns to electoral autocracy is important and that the exploratory mission of this article serves the academic debate on autocratization in multiple ways.

First, recognizing diversity in gradual transitions from democracy to electoral autocracy can contribute to a more exhaustive understanding of this category of autocratization processes. This, in turn, contributes to a better understanding of how to deal with the erosion and demise of democracy. For example, the recognition and understanding of minoritarian-continuist cases can help foresee dangers to democratic stability that may be harder to identify than when, for example, a popular leader promises to rebuild the political system. Moreover, in what may be the subject of future research, if autocrats tend to resort to different strategies depending on the presence/absence of majoritarian levels of popular support and an anti-establishment worldview as suggested in this article, then resisting autocratization may require more tailored recommendations than those based on the analysis of the most discussed cases of gradual democratic breakdown.

Second, the analysis of overlooked minoritarian patterns draws our attention to the mechanisms that make the gradual, "electoral" establishment of autocracy with limited popular support possible. How do aspiring autocrats cope with the absence of popular support? What mechanisms do they use? Do these mechanisms evolve over time? While these questions should be further examined, some tentative considerations are in order. As noted above, intuitively, to compensate for limited popular support, incumbents may resort to political deals and compromises with alternative forces and even political rivals. This was the case, for example, of Giammattei in Guatemala, Gruevski in North Macedonia, or Yanukovych in Ukraine. These deals, virtually absent or much less central in the majoritarian-anti-establishment pattern, appear key and should be carefully examined. What factors favour their emergence? What are their typical features? Interestingly, this goes in the direction of those[47] encouraging scholars to consider the role of the opposition. Yet, unlike insightful studies that examine the role of the opposition as a key bastion against competitive authoritarian attempts,[48] such political deals underline how opposition actors can actually side with the aspiring autocrat and support autocratization. This, in turn, calls for the analysis of their motives and behaviour. Moreover, the use of blatant electoral fraud on the election day (instead of more nuanced, pre-electoral tactics of electoral manipulation) in certain minoritarian cases calls for the analysis of how autocrats cope internationally with the higher legitimacy costs that more overt manipulations inevitably generate.

Third, the analysis of less considered cases provides further important information on the role of elected leaders in successful attacks on democracy. In line with the dominance of analyses focusing on majoritarian and majoritarian-anti-establishment patterns, scholars have paid significant attention to the ability of elected leaders to use popular support and electoral means for autocratic goals. The fact that in minoritarian patterns autocratizers do not primarily rely on their ability to woo the masses provides the opportunity to consider less explored facets of would-be authoritarian leaderships, other than more commonly studied aspects such as the autocrat's persona, public

image, and relationship with followers. These include incumbents' ability to make political calculations, properly assess the political landscape, develop strategic alliances, and, more generally, cope with the absence of significant levels of popular support. The recognition of the differences distinguishing different patterns to electoral autocracy, therefore, contributes to a more complete definition of the profiles of modern autocrats.

Fourth, the analysis of minoritarian patterns provides the opportunity for a better understanding of the role of non-governmental actors in autocratization processes, an aspect that, according to authors such as Tomini, Cianetti and Hanley, and Balderacchi should be carefully examined.[49] Cases such as Guatemala and North Macedonia appear particularly useful to such a goal, showing how illicit organizations can sustain an autocratization process through their economic and/or coercive means, particularly when the lack of popular support urges would-be autocrats to look for allies. These organizations are a key threat to democracy and they usually contribute to the formation of articulated alliances whose understanding can greatly benefit autocratization studies.

Finally, a comprehensive and more balanced analysis of existing cases reaffirms the role of traditional political and socio-economic elites as agents of democratic demise that, due to the significant attention recently paid to anti-establishment political outsiders, may have not received sufficient attention in recent years. In the context of contemporary, "electoral" processes of democratic demise, influential contributions such as Levitsky and Loxton's[50] have often highlighted the danger posed by anti-establishment political outsiders while generally referring to traditional and experienced political actors as elements of institutional stability. However, in the minoritarian-continuist experiences examined in this article, traditional political elites reflecting the interests of segments of the socio-economic establishment were typically those that assaulted democracy. Interestingly, in their autocratic bid, they often took advantage of their consolidated relations with the establishment to win and strengthen their power, for example, to make political deals that proved key to overcome limited popular support. More attention should be paid to these actors, including their allies, and their goals.

Notes

1. Cassani and Tomini, "Reversing Regimes and Concepts."
2. Lührmann and Lindberg, "A Third Wave of Autocratization."
3. Bermeo, "On Democratic Backsliding."
4. Lührmann and Lindberg, "A Third Wave of Autocratization," 9, 11, 13.
5. Levitsky and Loxton, "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism," 109.
6. Gamboa, "Opposition at the Margins," 457, 459.
7. Bermeo, "On Democratic Backsliding," 14.
8. Kneuer, "Unravelling Democratic Erosion."
9. Schedler, "Again, What Is Populism?".
10. E.g. Castaldo, "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey"; Levitsky and Loxton, "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism."
11. We use the term "continuist" in accordance with the concept of *continuismo*, defined by the The Real Academia Española (Royal Spanish Academy), "Continuismo" as the "Tendency to extend a situation, a practice or a behavior, attempting to avoid possible changes." Authors' translation of "Tendencia a prolongar una situación, una práctica o un comportamiento, tratando de evitar posibles cambios." https://dle.rae.es/continuismo (accessed November 27,

2022). For similar applications of the term in the democratization literature, see, for example, Haggard and Kaufman, "The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions."

12. See also Cianetti and Hanley, "The End of the Backsliding Paradigm"; and Tomini, "Don't Think of a Wave!".
13. Edgell et al., *Episodes of Regime Transformation Dataset (v13.0)*.
14. Lindberg et al., *Varieties of Party Identity and Organization (V-Party) Dataset V2*.
15. Edgell et al., *Episodes of Regime Transformation Dataset (v13.0)*.
16. Maerz et al., "Episodes of Regime Transformation," 4.
17. An episode is coded when the V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index experiences both an initial and total change equal or higher than 0.01 and 0.1, respectively. The episode is "ongoing as long as the EDI score (i) changes at least once every five consecutive years (tolerance), (ii) does not have a reverse annual change of 0.03 or greater (annual turn), and (iii) does not experience a cumulative reverse change of 0.10 over a five-year period (cumulative turn)," Maerz et al., "Episodes of Regime Transformation," 6.
18. The case of El Salvador under Bukele is not included because of data availability: specifically, the V-Party dataset, which we use to identify the pattern of our cases (see below), does not record data for Bukele's party New Ideas during the transition year (i.e. 2021) due to the dataset's time coverage (2019 is the last coded year), and New Ideas did not participate in previous legislative elections.
19. Lindberg et al., *Varieties of Party Identity and Organization (V-Party) Dataset V2*; Lindberg et al., "Codebook Varieties of Party Identity and Organization (V–Party) V2."
20. Of the 18 cases considered, 13 had a unicameral parliamentary structure in the year considered to measure the percentage of seats in the lower chamber ("v2lgbicam" variable in Coppedge et al., "V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date] Dataset v13"). Among the other cases, in India the upper chamber is not popularly elected while in Madagascar the Senate had not yet been created in 1998 in spite of constitutional provisions and was later composed in part by members elected through indirect elections, in part through presidential appointments (Senat de Madagascar, "Histoire du Sénat de Madagascar"). In the remaining cases (the two Philippine cases and Bolivia), the majoritarian or minoritarian character of these cases was also confirmed by the electoral results in the upper chamber (See COMELEC, "National and Local Elections – Senators"; ABS-CBN, "Halalan 2016"; Órgano Electoral Plurinacional, "Elecciones generales 2019").
21. Lindberg et al., "Codebook Varieties of Party Identity and Organization (V–Party) V2."
22. Regarding the transition to electoral autocracy under Duterte in the Philippines, the V-Party dataset does not code data for Duterte's party (Democratic Party – Power of the Nation) in 2016 (the year to be considered according to our criteria). We therefore reported the percentage of seats won during the 2016 election from a different source (Hicken, "The Political Party System") and used V-Party's anti-elitism data from the following election (i.e. 2019).
23. Kneuer, "Unravelling Democratic Erosion."
24. Schedler, "Again, What Is Populism?".
25. E.g. Levitsky and Loxton, "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism" and Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist."
26. As an example of the tendency of the literature to equate contemporary gradual democratic demises with only certain patterns, Kneuer (Kneuer, "Unravelling Democratic Erosion") considers the constitutive features of the majoritarian-anti-establishment pattern and what we describe as its likely strategic implications as standard elements of the "slow death" of democracy.
27. E.g. Bermeo, "On Democratic Backsliding."
28. Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm."
29. Quimpo, "The Philippines."
30. The non-explicitly anti-establishment platform of the ruling parties in these three countries is also confirmed by the V-Party variable "v2paanteli_osp" that measures a party's level of anti-elite rhetoric.
31. See Balderacchi, "Participatory Mechanisms."
32. See Freedom House, *Freedom in the World: Côte d'Ivoire*.
33. Coronado, "Sin tecnicismos."
34. Gjoni and Less, "Why Macedonia's Discredited Rulers Will Win Again."

35. Hall, "Learning from Past Experience."
36. Hinfelaar, Rakner, and van de Walle, "Zambia," 193.
37. Elkins, Ginsburg, and Melton, "Chronology of Constitutional Events."
38. Edgell et al., *Episodes of Regime Transformation Dataset (v13.0)*.
39. According to the V-Dem variables "Occurrence of obligatory referendum this year," "v2ddyror," which excludes all citizens-initiated referendum and codes only mandatory constitutional referendums, and the variable "Occurrence of plebiscite this year," "v2ddyrpl" which counts the number of government and/or legislature-initiated plebiscites (Coppedge et al., "V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date] Dataset v13" and "V-Dem Codebook v13").
40. The V-Dem variable Mobilization for autocracy "v2caautmob" (Coppedge et al., "V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date] Dataset v13" and "V-Dem Codebook v13") measures the frequency and size of "mass mobilization for pro-autocratic aims." It includes events that can be organized by non-state or state actors. This index has been computed by calculating the mean of this variable during the autocratization period (indicated by Edgell et al., *Episodes of Regime Transformation Dataset (v13.0)*) occurring under the ruling forces in power at the time of the transition from democracy to electoral autocracy.
41. See Freedom House, *Freedom in the World: Macedonia.*
42. Marusic, "Macedonia Tapes."
43. Gorodnichenko, Goriunov, and Mylovanov, "Fraud in the Ukrainian election?".
44. The index is an aggregated mean of two V-Dem indicators: "Election vote buying," ("v2elvotbuy"), measuring vote and turnout buying, and "Election other voting irregularities," ("v2elirreg"), indicating "other intentional irregularities by incumbent and/or opposition parties, and/or vote fraud" (Coppedge et al., "V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date] Dataset v13" and "V-Dem Codebook v13"). Together, they concern vote frauds during the election, thus excluding forms of pre-electoral manipulation. The data refer to the electoral years that have been used in Table 1 and Figure 1, with the only exceptions of India, Nicaragua, Serbia, Ukraine, and Zambia. For these cases we used, respectively, the electoral years 2019, 2011, 2016, 2012, and 2015, since these are the first elections where the party under whom democracy died was in control of the national executive. Guatemala is not included because data concerning this first election (held in 2023) are not available.
45. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World: Madagascar*.
46. Kneuer, "Unravelling Democratic Erosion"; Cianetti and Hanley, "The End of the Backsliding Paradigm."
47. Tomini, "Don't Think of a Wave!".
48. E.g. Gamboa, "Opposition at the Margins"; Somer, McCoy, and Tuncel, "Toward a New Transition Theory"; Tomini, Gibril, and Bochev, "Standing up against Autocratization across Political Regimes."
49. Tomini, "Don't Think of a Wave!"; Cianetti and Hanley, "The End of the Backsliding Paradigm"; Balderacchi, "Overlooked Forms of Non-democracy?".
50. Levitsky and Loxton, "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism."

Disclosure statement

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Notes on contributors

Claudio Balderacchi is a Postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the University of Florence. He previously served as faculty member in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at the Universidad del Norte, Colombia. His research interests include hybrid political regimes, regime change, and processes of autocratization and democratization.

Luca Tomini is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and FNRS Research Associate. His research focuses on the comparative analysis of autocratization and democratization and on mixed-method research design.

ORCID

Claudio Balderacchi http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1727-234X
Luca Tomini http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3392-6577

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