Democratic Erosion Event Dataset and Autocratic Consolidation Event Dataset

Codebook v.7 – Fall 2025

DEC | DEMOCRATIC EROSION CONSORTIUM

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1 Explanatory Notes

1.1 What's New in Version 7 of the Dataset?

Our event data is derived from two narrative sources: country case studies produced by 1) students participating in a semester-long course as part of the Democratic Erosion Consortium, and 2) Freedom House country reports. Furthermore, the date range now captures erosion-related events between 2000 and 2023. More countries are now included, due in part to the expansion of the date range. With 23,421 observations, DEED v7 includes a significant increase in the number of events captured per country thanks to the coding of Freedom House country reports for the first time. To produce v7, we coded every Freedom House annual report from 2000 to 2024, which we combined with the existing student case study dataset (v6). DEED v6 included 5,985 unique erosion events, building on the 5,522 events in DEED v5, the 977 events incorporated in DEED v4, the 1,763 events incorporated in DEED v3, and the 823 events presented in DEED v2.

During the summer of 2025, we completed an extensive data validation exercise on both the existing student case study-base dataset (v6) as well as the newly coded observations from Freedom House. Coders were trained to evaluate each observation to identify and correct for insufficient or missing information, incorrect information and miscategorizations. They also corrected and added our new 'actor' and 'target' variables. Coders also identified events that were duplicates, which would have occurred if a student case study and Freedom House report identified the same event. DEED V7 represents the culmination of that process, in which every observation has been reviewed and corrected if necessary, and all duplicate events consolidated into one observation.

1.2 Variable Information

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

- **Question:** The question that the variable attempts to measure.
- **Clarification:** Definition of key terms, clarification of scope-conditions, contexts, and any other features needed to understand the question (if any).
- **Responses:** Numeric, Percentage, Text, Date, Countries, or specific response categories.
- **Answer-Types:**

- *Multiple-choice*: Where a coder can select only one answer.
- *Multiple-selection:* Where a coder can select more than one answer.

1.3 Suggested Citation

Democratic Erosion Event Dataset:

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1.4 Coders of Data

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

1.5 Inclusion of Countries in the Dataset

Earlier versions of the dataset were limited to countries that were undergoing democratic backsliding, though we have now eliminated that criteria meaning the data includes both authoritarian and democratic countries. DEED v7 includes 152 countries, each of which includes coding from the full time range of Freedom House reports (2000 to 2023).

2 Dataset Indicators

This section lists variables contained in DEED v7.

2.1 Coder (Coder_ID)

- **Question:** Who coded the erosion-related event?
- **Clarification:** The list of coders for each version of the dataset is found in Section 1.4. For this variable, each coder is assigned an anonymous identification number.
- **Responses:** Numeric.
- **Answer-Types:** Multiple-choice.

2.2 Country (Country)

- **Question:** In which country did the erosion-related event occur?

- **Clarification:** 152 countries are included in DEED v7.
- **Responses:** Countries.
- **Answer-Types:** Multiple-choice.

2.3 ISO Country Code (ISO)

- **Clarification:** ISO codes are three letter unique identifiers for each country.
- **Responses:** ISO country codes.

2.4 Freedom House Year (FH_year)

- **Question:** What is the publication year of the Freedom House report used to source the event?
- **Clarification:** Only applies to events coded from Freedom House reports. Typically, events occurred in the year before the Freedom House publication date (i.e. a report from 2024 would include events that mostly occurred in 2023).
- **Responses:** Year
- **Answer-Types:** Multiple-selection.

2.5 Month (Month_1 & Month_2)

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

2.6 Year (Year_1 & Year_2)

- **Question:** In what year(s) did the event occur?

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

2.7 Type of Event (Type)

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

2.8 Event Category (Category)

- **Question:** What DEED event category does this event fall into?
- **Clarification:** Every event type (e.g. precursor) has multiple categories. More information is provided about these categories in Sections 3-6 of this codebook.
- **Responses:** Text.
- **Answer-Type:** Multiple-choice, response options are the Event Categories.

2.9 Event Description (EventDescription)

- **Question:** What is the qualitative description of the event?
- **Clarification:** This category provides a qualitative description of the erosion event.
- **Responses:** Text.

2.10 Actor

- **Question:** What actor (or actor type) is responsible for planning, implementing or pushing forward the erosion or resistance event?
- **Clarification:** Possible actors are listed in Section 7 of this codebook. They are divided into the following groups: Central Level; State/Local Level; Civil Society; and External Actors.
- **Responses:** Text.
- **Answer-Type:** Multiple-choice

2.11 Target

- **Question:** What actor (or actor type) is the target of the erosion or resistance event?
- **Clarification:** Possible actors are listed in Section 7 of this codebook. They are divided into the following groups: Central Level; State/Local Level; Civil Society; and External Actors.
- **Responses:** Text.
- **Answer-Type:** Multiple-choice.

2.12 Source Type (SourceType)

- **Question:** What type of source was used to verify this event?
- **Clarification:** For Freedom House reports, coders were instructed to seek out extra information where necessary to accurately code the event. For student case study reports, our coders sought to verify every event with a source. This variable describes the type of source used (e.g., news article, academic article, think tank report, etc.).
- **Responses:** Text.

2.13 Source (Source)

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

2.14 Unique Event Identifier (Event_Number)

- **Clarification:** Each event was given a unique identifier based on ISO country code, month, year, and whether the event was coded from Freedom House reports or student case studies.
- **Responses:** Text.

2.15 V-Dem's Regimes of the World (RoW) Variable (v2x_regime)

- **Clarification:** Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) produces a Regimes of the World variable for every country-year (v2x_regime). Possible values are 0 (Closed Autocracy), 1 (Electoral Autocracy), 2 (Electoral Democracy) or 3 (Liberal Democracy). For additional information, see: https://v-dem.net/data/the-v-dem-dataset/
- **Responses:** 0, 1, 2 or 3.

2.16 Region (e_regionpol_6C)

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

DEC Analytic Framework for Categorizing Democratic Erosion Events

DEED classifies events into four types: events that often precede democratic erosion (precursors); those that constitute erosion itself (symptoms); those that counteract erosion once it has already begun (resistance); and for autocratic countries, events that undermine the stability of an autocratic regime (destabilizing).

Within these four event types, we also categorize events as relating to vertical accountability, meaning between the government and citizens, or horizontal accountability, meaning between different government agencies and officials.

3 Precursor Categorization

3.1 Threats to Horizontal Accountability

3.1.1 Delegitimizing or Weakening the Judiciary

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

Category Distinction:

- Coders often confuse this category with *Reduction in Judicial Independence (Symptom)*. The distinction between the two is whether the action is rhetorical or institutional. *Delegitimizing or weakening the judiciary* refers to verbal attacks,

threats, or political disavowals directed at the courts, which do not actually result in structural changes. *Reduction in judicial independence* involves structural changes such as court packing or reforms that compromise impartiality.
- This category is also often confused with *Rhetorical Attacks against Democracy or Accountability Institutions (Precursor)*. Here the distinction is whether the target is specifically the judiciary. *Rhetorical attacks against democracy* are broader, targeting democracy or other institutions in general rather than the judiciary specifically.

Examples:

- In 2011, Prime Minister Sali Berisha of Albania argued against the judiciary's decision to detain police accused of killing protesters. The court struggled against his attempts to hide evidence and discredit the prosecution, and were only able to detain the men after severe international backlash against Berisha.
- Brazil, August 2021. President Jair Bolsonaro reacted to a Supreme Court investigation of his conduct by threatening to respond outside the limits of the constitution. He requested that the Senate impeach Justice Alexandre de Moraes of the Supreme Court after de Moraes launched multiple investigations into him.
- US, June 2017. President Trump took to social media to speak out against court rulings that struck down his Muslim Ban/Travel Ban executive order as unconstitutional; his messages attacked the legitimacy of the courts as an institution.

3.1.2 Delegitimizing or Weakening the Legislature

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

Executives who undermine democracies may rhetorically attack or delegitimize the legislature in an attempt to expand their own power (Levitsky and Way 2002). A would-be authoritarian benefits from eroding trust and support for the legislature, so that the executive and their office may become the primary or sole legitimate governing institution (Linz 1990). Frequently, as a precursor to erosion, an executive publicly denounces the legislature for inefficiency or unresponsiveness to public concerns, or attacks on opposition parties or coalitions, especially if an opposition party controls the legislature.

Category Distinction:

- This category is often confused with **Reduction in Legislative Oversight (Symptom).** The distinction lies in the mechanism. *Delegitimizing or weakening the legislature*

refers to rhetorical attacks or public actions that undermine the institution's credibility without formally altering its powers. By contrast, *reduction in legislative oversight* involves institutional or constitutional changes that directly remove or restrict the legislature's checking role.
- It is also sometimes confused with **Rhetorical Attacks against Democracy or Accountability Institutions (Precursor).** The distinction here is scope. *Delegitimizing or weakening the legislature* applies when the rhetoric is specifically directed at the legislature or opposition parties within it. *Rhetorical attacks against democracy* apply when the speech targets democracy or accountability institutions in a broader sense, not the legislature in particular.

Examples:

- After the Mauritanian Senate blocked President Aziz's proposed amendment to abolish the Senate and merge the civil and Islamic courts, Aziz secured passage of the amendment in a legally dubious public referendum.
- Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski ejected opposition lawmakers and journalists from the parliament chamber, then proceeded to pass the government's budget for the next year without dissent or press coverage.
- President Guterres of Timor-Leste dissolved parliament when the opposition coalition blocked the Fretilin party agenda and prevented budgets from passing.
- President Andry Rajoelina of Madagascar sought to abolish the Senate and reassign legislative powers by issuing a constitutional referendum. The High Constitutional Court ultimately blocked the referendum, citing procedural flaws.

3.1.3 Delegitimizing or Weakening Subnational Units

In federalist political systems, a certain degree of power and autonomy is allocated to subnational units, namely states or provinces. These powers, such as local direct democracy tools like referenda, subnational judiciaries, or discretion in applying certain laws and regulations, can be used to provide a check on the central government. When the central government of a country rhetorically attacks or delegitimizes, or attempts to weaken the power of these subnational units, it can be a precursor to erosion.

Category Distinction:

- This category is often confused with **Reducing Autonomy of Subnational Units (Symptom).** The distinction is in the form of action. *Delegitimizing or weakening subnational units* refers to rhetorical attacks or informal political maneuvers that

undermine the credibility or effectiveness of states or provinces. *Reducing autonomy of subnational units* refers to formal constitutional or legal changes that explicitly curtail their powers.
- It is also sometimes confused with **Rhetorical Attacks against Democracy or Accountability Institutions (Precursor).** The distinction here is scope. *Delegitimizing or weakening subnational units* applies when the rhetoric or weakening is targeted specifically at states, provinces, or local governments. *Rhetorical attacks against democracy* involve broader delegitimization of democratic principles or multiple accountability institutions.

Examples:

- In 2016, Matteo Renzi, the former Prime Minister of Italy, suggested a series of Constitutional reforms that included stripping the nation's regional governments of its decision-making powers, which he argued would strengthen executive power and be beneficial for tackling economic issues.
- In 2008, Maduro's government in Venezuela transferred nearly all the powers of Anthony Ledezma, an opposition politician elected Mayor of Caracas, including control of police and schools, to a newly created government entity.

3.1.4 Manipulation of Civil Service or Integrity Institutions

An ideal type of civil service in a democracy is thought to be insulated from political contests, insofar as civil servants are not elected directly by the people. Bureaucracies, however, can and do safeguard democracy. Huq and Ginsburg (2018) note that an effective civil service can restrict state officials from misusing state power for private or electoral gains and can mobilize and represent groups otherwise shut out of politics.

Authoritarian tendencies can manifest in the executive manipulating the civil service to aggrandize power or weaken democracy generally. Broadly, a case of manipulation of the civil service occurs when an executive or incumbent party uses nonpartisan, bureaucratic institutions for political, electoral, or personal gain. Sometimes, this appears as suppression of speech or intimidation of bureaucrats. Conversely, the executive may buy support from elites and the public by overpopulating the civil service with their allies (Brancati 2014). This undermines electoral institutions, since opposition parties or groups cannot necessarily provide the same rewards. Moreover, filling the civil service with loyalists effectively removes another constraint on executive power. Integrity institutions, such as electoral commissions, central banks, audit offices, and anti-corruption agencies, are also an important part of this category because they are specifically tasked with overseeing

political actors and enforcing transparency, accountability, and legality in government action.

Category Distinction:

- This category is often confused with **Weakened Civil Service or Integrity Institutions (Symptom).** The distinction lies in scope and permanence. *Manipulation of the civil service* refers to less institutional means of influence, such as intimidation, co-optation, or replacing specific officials with allies. *Weakened civil service or integrity institutions* refers to structural or legal changes that place the bureaucracy or oversight institutions directly under executive control.

Examples:

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

3.1.5 Horizontal Corruption

Horizontal corruption occurs between government actors, encompassing abuses of public office for private gain or for the benefit of friends and allies. Generally, horizontal corruption involves less direct interaction with the citizenry. Horizontal corruption can include abuses of authority such as embezzlement, misallocation of funds, cronyism, nepotism, sale of party nominations, and tax evasion.

Horizontal corruption may affect the deliberative process of policymaking. This would include civil servants, executives, and legislators deciding on how an issue affects their own power or resources, rather than prioritizing public welfare (Bailey 2009). By distorting policy decisions, horizontal corruption thus decreases a government's responsiveness to its citizens. It can also reduce the ability of democratic institutions or other agencies to function properly, as corrupt executives appoint unqualified or ill-intentioned allies to high-ranking posts. Parties may also reward wealthy allies or donors with high-ranking

government positions or party nominations. Finally, when corruption involves members of agencies or institutions that are specifically tasked with oversight of the executive (i.e. the judiciary, legislature or independent oversight committees), it also reduces the likelihood that those individuals and agencies will serve as a check on executive power.

Category Distinction:

- This category is often confused with **Vertical Corruption.** The distinction lies in the actors involved. *Horizontal corruption* occurs between government officials or institutions, while *vertical corruption* occurs between a government actor and a private citizen or company.
- It is also sometimes confused with **Electoral Fraud and Voter Suppression.** The distinction here is purpose. *Horizontal corruption* may involve abuses of authority for private or political gain, but it is not directly tied to manipulating the outcome of an election. When corruption specifically seeks to alter electoral results, it fits better under *Electoral Fraud.*
- It may also be confused with **State Attempts at Democratization or to Prevent Backsliding**. The distinction here is between acts of corruption and the prosecution of corruption. The corrupt act itself (e.g., embezzlement, diversion of funds, crony appointments) should be coded as Horizontal Corruption, while prosecutions, arrests, or reforms aimed at punishing corruption should instead be coded as State Attempts at Democratization or to Prevent Backsliding.

Examples:

- The Mensalao scandal in Brazil involved clandestine payments to legislators by the PT party in return for support of certain policies.
- Former Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner was indicted on charges she ran a corruption scheme with a public works secretary who was arrested while trying to stash millions of dollars in a convent

3.1.6 Electoral Boycott

In response to what is perceived as an unfair election process, the opposition to the main political party or ruling regime may completely forgo participation in elections in anticipation of an unfavorable outcome due to unfair competition. The ruling party could potentially use electoral boycotts of this type to consolidate power and erode democracy, since the ruling party would be running unopposed. Additionally, this boycott could

present the ruling party with an opportunity to delegitimize the opposition party and diminish its public credibility.

Category Distinction:

- This category is often confused with **Rejecting Election Results.** The distinction lies in timing. *Electoral boycotts* occur **before or during an election**, when opposition groups refuse to participate at all. *Rejecting election results* occurs **after the election has taken place**, when actors refuse to recognize the outcome.

Examples:

- In Bangladesh's 2014 elections, the opposition party Bangladesh National Party (BNP) refused to participate in elections and actively attempted to suppress voter turnout. This occurred after the ruling Awami League did not consent to allow a caretaker government to oversee the elections. The BNP boycott and voter suppression movement was intended to force new elections under more favorable circumstances.
- In Mali in 2016, Members of several opposition parties boycotted the 2016 elections, citing concerns about electoral fraud.

3.1.7 Opposition Alliance Hedging

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

Category Distinction:

- This category is often confused with **Co-optation of the Opposition.** The distinction lies in permanence. *Opposition alliance hedging* involves short-lived tactical partnerships that dissolve once the executive's immediate objective is achieved. *Co-optation* involves incorporating opposition actors more permanently into the ruling coalition, often through patronage, appointments, or shared governance.

- It is also sometimes confused with **Coalitions or Elite Pacts.** The distinction here is stability. *Opposition alliance hedging* refers to unstable, transactional alignments designed for narrow goals. *Coalition-building* refers to stable alliances that allow different actors to govern or legislate together over a longer term.

Examples:

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

3.1.8 Rejecting Election Results

In democracies, rejecting, or suggesting the likely rejection of election results, allows executives and ruling parties to bypass both the will of the people and the checks and balances system, and thereby to retain more power for themselves. If opposition candidates or the citizenry reject the results, it is often an indicator that there are not strong democratic institutions within the country. Rejecting election results generally signals perceived or actual electoral fraud, both of which are harmful, and erode trust in democracy. In either case, the rejection of election results by either the ruling coalition or the opposition could lead to democratic erosion.

Category Distinction:

- This category is often confused with **Electoral Boycott.** The distinction lies in timing. *Rejecting election results* occurs **after an election has concluded**, when actors refuse to accept the outcome. *Electoral boycott* occurs **before or during an election**, when opposition groups refuse to participate altogether.

Examples:

- The Bolivian 2019 general election results, which re-elected the incumbent President Evo Morales to office, were met with widespread protests and a rejection of the election results by the opposition.
- The 2016 Gambia election saw the incumbent president Yahya Jammeh reject election results that ended his rule and called for another election. This ultimately led to a major Gambian constitutional crisis, as Jammeh deployed military forces in

the capital, and created a long standoff with other West African states and the domestic opposition until his eventual exile.
- In Mexico's 2006 presidential election, opposition candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador rejected the official results that narrowly declared Felipe Calderón the winner. López Obrador led legal challenges and set up protest camps in Mexico City, declaring himself the legitimate president. However, international observers and Mexico's Federal Electoral Tribunal found no evidence of fraud and confirmed the election result as valid, undermining the legitimacy of his claims.

3.2 Threats to Vertical Accountability

3.2.1 Co-optation of the Opposition

Political competition between parties and a meaningful political opposition support democratic elections and democracy more broadly. The mere existence of opposition parties is insufficient, as they must be able to meaningfully compete for votes and potentially win power from the incumbent. This may be impossible if the regime has co-opted the opposition, thereby allowing an incumbent regime to appear democratic while making their own electoral victory more likely (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).

What does co-optation of the opposition look like in practice? Co-optation occurs when the ruling party strategically incorporates members of, or entire, opposing political parties into their own political structure. This consolidation can, for example, stop rival coalitions from forming and challenging the regime, silence dissent in exchange for patronage, and shift votes from smaller opposing parties to the incumbent. While overt repression of the opposition is outwardly undemocratic, co-optation allows regimes to continue to hold seemingly free and competitive elections, concurrent to the weakening of opposition parties and the strengthening of the regime.

Category Distinction:

- This category is often confused with **Repression of the Opposition.** The distinction lies in method. *Co-optation of the opposition* weakens opponents through patronage, incorporation, and incentives, while *repression of the opposition* relies on coercion, harassment, or legal restrictions.
- It is also sometimes confused with **Opposition Alliance Hedging.** The distinction lies in duration and intent. *Co-optation of the opposition* involves bringing opposition actors into the ruling party's structure more permanently. *Opposition alliance*

hedging refers to temporary, tactical alliances formed and then abandoned by the executive once a short-term goal is met.

Examples:

- In Namibia, the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) brought on the former head of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), a figure they had historically criticized, to gain local support in a region where the SWAPO had historically performed poorly.
- In Ukraine in 2012, Yanukovych passed a law allowing individual members of parliament to defect from their parties and join the governing coalition even though they had been voted into parliament based on their party affiliation.

3.2.2 Malapportionment

One person, one vote is a foundational principle of democracy that necessitates that all citizens have their preferences weighed equally (Dahl 1972). Malapportionment refers to a discrepancy between shares of seats in a legislature and the populations of districts represented by those seats (Samuels and Snyder 2002). This can lead to outcomes where a party or candidate does not receive a majority of votes yet receives a majority of seats or wins election. This undermines each citizen's ability to have their preferences considered equally by the government.

Gerrymandering is an example of this kind of manipulation, as incumbent parties can redraw electoral boundaries to favor the election of their party's candidates. Gerrymandering and malapportionment decrease democratic responsiveness by offering incumbents easier re-election and making them less beholden to their constituents (Norris and Gromping 2017).

Category Distinction:

- This category is often confused with **Electoral Fraud and Voter Suppression.** The distinction lies in method. *Malapportionment* involves distortions in how votes are translated into seats, usually through legal or institutional means. *Electoral fraud* manipulates vote counts or procedures directly, while *voter suppression* reduces participation by making it harder for specific groups to vote.
- It is also sometimes confused with **Systemic Reduction in Election Freedom and Fairness.** The distinction is scope. *Malapportionment* targets representation and seat distribution specifically, while *systemic reduction in election freedom and fairness* covers a broader set of actions that undermine the overall democratic

quality of elections, such as restricting opposition campaigning or controlling media access.

Examples:

- Moldova added a law which transitioned their proportional-representation electoral system into a mixed system, in which half of legislators would be elected by individual constituencies but the other half chosen via a national vote. By institutionalizing a national winner-take-all system for half of the seats in Parliament, Moldova increased the margins of plurality for the two largest parties in the country, further decreasing the ability of smaller parties and interests to have a formal elected role in government.
- The Tanzanian constitution was amended to allow candidates to win by a plurality of votes instead of a majority. Due to the high number of opposition parties in Tanzania diluting the vote, this rule has enabled the dominant party to consistently win the majority of the seats.

3.2.3 Electoral Fraud and Voter Suppression

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

Electoral fraud entails serious bias in the administration of elections. Such fraud includes forging voter ID cards, deleting names from voter lists, stuffing or burning ballot boxes, expelling voters from polling stations, and padding the vote totals of favored parties and candidates, among others (Schedler 2002). Voter suppression refers to tactics that prevent citizens from casting their votes or make participation more difficult, often targeting the opposition or marginalized groups. Both electoral fraud and voter suppression undermine the ability of citizens to form an effective anti-regime voice at the ballot box.

Category Distinction:

- This category is often confused with **Malapportionment.** The distinction is in mechanism. *Electoral fraud and voter suppression* involve manipulation of the election process itself (who can vote, how votes are counted). *Malapportionment* distorts how votes are translated into seats through districting or representation rules, usually set in advance.
- It is also sometimes confused with **Systemic Reduction in Election Freedom and Fairness.** The distinction is scale. *Electoral fraud and voter suppression* are coded

when manipulation occurs in sporadic, decentralized, or uncoordinated ways. *Systemic reduction in election freedom and fairness* applies when the entire electoral process is made structurally unfree and unfair, often through widespread or coordinated institutional design.

- **It may also be confused with Horizontal Corruption or Vertical Corruption.** The distinction lies in intent. *Horizontal corruption* involves abuses of office among government officials, and *vertical corruption* involves exchanges between officials and citizens or private actors. When the purpose of corruption is to directly affect voting, participation, or results, the event should be coded as *Electoral Fraud and Voter Suppression* rather than as general corruption.

Examples:

- The 2009 elections in El Salvador the Supreme Electoral Tribunal included 85,000 deceased voters in the registry and released the registry prior to the publication of updated census data.
- During the 2010 parliamentary elections in Kosovo, over 40% of the votes cast had to be recounted, over 500 officials were indicted for committing fraud, and widespread vote buying attempts occurred in ethnic Albanian and Serbian municipalities.
- In Cuba, state sanctioned Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) have certain functions that could lend themselves as a tool of voter suppression. CDRs maintain the Registry Book of Addresses which reports which citizens in that jurisdiction are eligible to vote. CDR National Coordinators have served on the Council of State and PCC Central Committee.

3.2.4 Electoral Violence

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

Electoral violence takes many forms, including pro-state militias targeting the supporters of opposition parties; states using security forces to repress dissidents and intimidate the electorate; political parties building armed wings; and insurgents attacking voters and candidates, among others (Schedler 2002). Electoral violence does not always manifest as election-day attacks on voters near polling stations (though this is an all-too-common occurrence, especially in sub-Saharan African elections). Schedler notes that sustained or

common electoral violence can fundamentally change political practices by stifling the democratic voice among citizens, who lack coercive capability themselves. This trend paves the way for autocratic consolidation by the incumbent party.

Category Distinction:

- This category is often confused with **Systemic Electoral Violence.** The distinction lies in scope. *Electoral violence* as a precursor refers to sporadic or one-off incidents. *Systemic electoral violence* refers to widespread, coordinated, or orchestrated use of violence to shape electoral outcomes.

- It is also sometimes confused with **Repression of the Opposition.** The distinction is context. *Electoral violence* occurs specifically in relation to elections and voting, while *repression of the opposition* includes broader coercion, harassment, or intimidation that is not tied directly to an electoral process.

Examples:

- In 2007, the home of the chairwoman of a municipal electoral committee in Bulgaria was set on fire.
- In Mexico in 2013, Ricardo Reyes Zamudio, candidate for mayor of San Dimas, Durango, was kidnapped in the morning while en route to a funeral. His body was found hours later in a rural area called El Sauz with multiple gunshot wounds.
- In Georgia in 2016, a car bomb targeted an opposition deputy, Givi Targamadze, a few days before the election.

3.2.5 Increasing Control over Civil Society

An open and robust civil society helps citizens defend democracy. Participation in civil society organizations can provide political information, develop civic virtues, serve as a medium for broad political discourse, and equalize representation—all of which enables effective resistance, social coordination, and democratic legitimization (Fung 2003). When civil society comes under threat, so does this litany of benefits.

This category captures the less-institutionalized threats to civil society that tend to impede its full and free operation, rather than efforts to directly repress civic organizations. Events indicating an increased control of civil society include requiring organizations to report all funding sources (especially foreign sources); mandating registration, certification, or re-certification with the government; and increased regulation of the freedom of

association. These types of events expand government control over what should ideally be independent organizations.

Category Distinction:

- This category is often confused with **Curtailed Civil Liberties.** The distinction lies in severity. *Increasing control over civil society* refers to regulatory, legal, or administrative measures that restrict space without outright bans. *Curtailed civil liberties* include harsher repression, such as banning organizations, mass arrests of activists, or eliminating freedom of association.

- It is also sometimes confused with **Co-optation of the Opposition** or **Repression of the Opposition.** The distinction here is scope. *Increasing control over civil society* applies when the state targets civic organizations broadly, not just political opposition groups. When restrictions or incorporation efforts are aimed specifically at opposition actors, they are coded under those categories instead.

Examples:

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

3.2.6 State-Conducted Violence or Abuse

This category includes instances where a government uses violence or abusive tactics against its citizens for political or judicial objectives. These events include violent suppression of protests by police/military, police brutality, extrajudicial killings of suspected or actual criminals, and the use of thugs/gangs/terror groups by state actors.

Dahl writes that a functioning democracy requires citizens to form and express preferences, and later scholars deemed protests a key tool of dissent that checks the government by disrupting daily order (Krastev 2014). When police forces brutally or

violently repress protests, it not only hampers that particular protest's ability to create change but also creates a climate of self-censorship where would-be protesters are less likely to take to the streets.

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

Category Distinction:

- This category is often confused with **Electoral Violence.** The distinction lies in context and actor. *State-conducted violence or abuse* is carried out by the state or with its direct support and occurs in broader political or judicial contexts. *Electoral violence* may be perpetrated by state or non-state actors, but it is tied specifically to influencing electoral participation or outcomes.
- It is also sometimes confused with **Repression of the Opposition.** The distinction is scope. *State-conducted violence or abuse* includes state violence against protesters, suspected criminals, or the general public, while *repression of the opposition* focuses on coercion directed at organized opposition groups or political challengers.
- It can also be confused with **Curtailed Civil Liberties.** The distinction lies in method. *State-conducted violence or abuse* involves the use of physical force, coercion, or brutality. *Curtailed civil liberties* refers to legal or administrative restrictions on freedoms such as speech, assembly, or association without necessarily involving physical violence.

Examples:

- The Spanish central government directed authorities to stop the 2017 independence referendum in Catalonia, leading to the assault of voters and the use of rubber bullets.
- In 2013, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey violently responded to mass protests during the Gezi Park movement, killing five protestors and injuring more than 9,000.
- Mexican soldiers killed 22 people in 2014 after entering a warehouse during a military operation. Human rights investigations concluded that about 12 to 15 of the

victims were unarmed or had surrendered when they were killed, contradicting the army's initial claim that all deaths occurred in a firefight.

3.2.7 Ethno-Religious Tensions

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

Category Distinction:

- This category is often confused with **Discrimination against Minorities.** The distinction lies in scope and form. *Ethno-religious tensions* involve rhetoric or actions that heighten fear and deepen divides along ethnic or religious lines, often as part of a political strategy. *Discrimination against minorities* refers to institutionalized policies or practices that explicitly deny equal rights or opportunities to minority groups.
- It is also sometimes confused with **Systematic Violence against Minorities or Ethnic Cleansing.** The distinction lies in severity. *Ethno-religious tensions* capture the use of identity-based scapegoating and divisive rhetoric that fuel hostility, but without necessarily reaching the threshold of mass violence. *Systematic violence or ethnic cleansing* involves organized campaigns of persecution, displacement, or extermination.

Examples:

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

3.2.8 Overstayed Welcome

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

Category Distinction:

- This category is often confused with **Relaxation of Term Limits.** The distinction lies in legality. *Overstayed welcome* refers to executives who remain in power by postponing elections, invoking emergency circumstances, or disregarding informal promises to step down. *Relaxation of term limits* refers to formal, de jure changes that legally extend the time an executive can serve, such as constitutional amendments or legal reforms.

Examples:

- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, President Joseph Kabila overstayed his constitutional mandate by two years, and elections were postponed twice before they were held and Kabila stepped down
- In Armenia, President Sargsyan led an effort to change the country from a semi-Presidential system to a parliamentary republic, led by a Prime Minister. He stated that he was not planning on running for any other political office after his term as President ended, but became Prime Minister, triggering massive protests.

3.2.9 Media Bias

A free press is essential to liberal democracy, increasing the accountability of elected officials, the transparency of the democratic process, and ensuring citizens have access to the information they need to engage fully in politics and oversight. Restrictions on the media can lead to less competitive elections and a reduction in the ability to check the executive (Hill and Lupu 2017). Media bias attempts to influence either the content of the media or the perception of the media itself without exercising the direct control implied by media oppression. Media bias can impact the dissemination of information which is essential for the public to hold the government accountable and to make informed decisions.

Category Distinction:

- This category is often confused with **Media Repression.** The distinction lies in degree of control. *Media bias* involves indirect influence or manipulation, such as partisan appointments, content shaping, or restricting access to information. *Media repression* involves direct censorship, closure of outlets, punishment of journalists, or violence against the Media.

Examples:

- In 2010, a loyalist to the South Korean government was appointed the network president of MBC, the country's second-largest television network, skewing MBC's coverage in favor of the administration.

- During the 2014 Bolivian Presidential elections, state-run Bolivia TV showed a soccer game instead of a debate between President Morales' opponents.
- The Ghanaian Parliament in 2015 required operators of electronic communications or broadcasting services to get approval from a government media commission for information broadcasts.

3.2.10 Co-optation of Citizens

Regimes can exert control over their citizens through either repression or co-optation of the masses (Svolik 2012). While many authoritarian regimes use repression to directly control citizens, other regimes distribute political or economic benefits in a way that will compel parts of the populace to cooperate with or at least acquiesce to continued rule.

Category Distinction:

- This category is often confused with **Repression of the Opposition.** The distinction lies in method. *Co-optation of citizens* uses benefits, incentives, or selective concessions to win public compliance. *Repression of the opposition* relies on coercion, harassment, or violence to weaken resistance.
- It is also sometimes confused with **Manipulation of the Civil Service or Integrity Institutions**. The distinction lies in the target. *Co-optation of citizens* directs material or symbolic benefits toward the general populace. *Manipulation of the civil service* involves altering bureaucratic or oversight institutions for political advantage.
- It may also overlap with **Increasing Control over Civil Society.** The distinction is in orientation. *Co-optation of citizens* is mass-oriented, distributing goods or

concessions to ordinary people. *Increasing control over civil society* targets organized groups and associations through regulation or oversight.

Examples:

- The 2003 Qatari constitution stipulates that the government will provide free education and free healthcare to all citizens. In effect, the state distributes its oil wealth to the citizenry in exchange for their acceptance of the political status quo. In 2020, the U.S. Treasury Department placed President Donald J. Trump's name on coronavirus stimulus checks under the CARES Act. The memo line of the checks read "President Donald J. Trump," a move that had not been done previously and prompted criticism that the administration was seeking to politicize relief efforts by branding them.
- In Mexico, the ruling party, PRI, distributed nearly 10 million flat-screen televisions to low-income households as part of the transition from analog to digital broadcasting. Watchdog groups denounced the program as clientelism because distribution coincided with the 2015 midterm elections and targeted key electoral districts.

3.2.11 No-Confidence Votes or Decreased Voter Turnout

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

Category Distinction:

- This category is sometimes confused with **Electoral Boycott.** The distinction is that *electoral boycott* refers to an organized, intentional withdrawal by opposition parties as a political strategy, while *decreased voter turnout* captures widespread citizen disengagement without coordinated elite action.
- It may also overlap with **Rejecting Election Results.** The difference is that *rejecting election results* involves explicit refusal to accept electoral outcomes, while

no-confidence votes or decreased turnout indicate erosion of legitimacy through lack of participation or formal institutional challenges.

Examples:

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

3.2.12 Rhetorical Attacks against Democracy or Accountability Institutions

Executives can engage in rhetorical attacks against democracy or institutions important to democratic accountability to undermine public trust in democracy, and/or to promote authoritarianism as an alternative, in order to undercut public opposition to erosion or authoritarianism. This category includes rhetorical attacks on democracy overall. Rhetorical attacks specifically targeting the legislature, the judiciary, or subnational units have their own specific Precursor categories (delegitimizing the legislature, judiciary, and subnational units).

Category Distinction:

- This category is distinct from **Delegitimizing or Weakening the Legislature, Delegitimizing or Weakening the Judiciary, and Delegitimizing or Weakening Subnational Units.** Those categories capture rhetorical or institutional attacks specifically targeting a single branch or level of government, while *Rhetorical Attacks against Democracy or Accountability Institutions* refers to broader attacks against democracy itself or against accountability institutions as a whole.
- It may also be confused with **Repression of the Opposition.** The difference is that *repression* involves direct coercion or punishment of opponents, while *rhetorical attacks* focus on shaping public perception and delegitimizing democracy in discourse.

Examples:

- In 2023, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador publicly criticized the National Institute for Transparency, Access to Information and Protection of Personal Data (INAI), calling it “useless” and “at the service of the elites.” He argued

that its budget and existence were unjustified as he pushed for reforms to dismantle the agency.
- Philippines strongman Rodrigo Duterte encouraged violence against journalists and referred to journalist Maria Ressa as “every inch a prostitute” for her anti-government coverages.

3.2.13 Democratic Facade

Nancy Bermeo describes a process in which executives utilize promises of greater democracy to foster legitimacy and strengthen their regime. Authoritarian regimes sometimes adopt “democratic” institutions that are devoid of actual power in response to demands for political competition. These democratic facades contribute to autocratic consolidation because they lend a degree of legitimacy to authoritarian rule.

Category Distinction:

- This category is distinct from **State Attempts at Democratization.** *Democratic facade* captures reforms that are largely cosmetic and fail to alter real power relations, while *state attempts at democratization* refers to reforms that involve substantive institutional change, even if those reforms fall short of their intended democratic outcomes.
- It may also be confused with **Creation of Parallel Structures.** The distinction is that *democratic facade* refers to cosmetic reforms that mimic democracy without real power transfer, while *creation of parallel structures* refers to building alternative, regime-controlled institutions that compete with or override existing democratic institutions.

Example:

- Qatar established a partially elected legislature called the Shura Council in response to demands for political liberalization. However, the assembly cannot pass any laws without the emir’s approval and cannot dismiss cabinet members without a two-third majority.
- Bahrain passed a new constitution, making it a constitutional monarchy with an elected parliament; however, much of the power remains vested in the King, and the government is mostly composed of members of the royal family.
- November 2006, Nicaragua. Multiple-term president Daniel Ortega ran on democratic ideals to gain votes, then abandoned them in practice, adapting more autocratic policies such as suppressing religious freedom.

- In Mexico in 2024, Congress approved a constitutional amendment mandating that all judges—including Supreme Court justices—be elected by popular vote. However, candidates for these judicial positions must be pre-selected by a ruling body formed under congressional control, where Morena and its allies hold supermajorities.

3.2.14 Lack of Legitimacy

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

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

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

Category Distinction:

- This category is sometimes confused with **No-Confidence Votes or Decreased Voter Turnout.** The distinction is that *lack of legitimacy* captures a broader societal perception that the state no longer represents or serves the public, while *no-confidence votes or decreased voter turnout* are specific institutional or behavioral manifestations of declining trust.
- It can also be confused with **Rejecting Election Results.** The difference is that *rejecting election results* refers to the dispute of a specific electoral outcome, while *lack of legitimacy* refers to a generalized perception that institutions themselves are failing or unfit.

- It may also overlap with **Party Weakness.** The distinction is that *lack of legitimacy* reflects a collapse of trust in governing institutions as a whole, while *party weakness* refers specifically to the inability of political parties to organize, compete, or represent citizens effectively.

Examples:

- In Thailand in 2012, Prime Minister Yingluck's rice subsidy program led to billion-dollar losses and large piles of unsold rice, causing resentment and distrust of the government among farmers.
- Viktor Yanukovych, a Russian-supported presidential candidate in Ukraine, won the election, despite opinion polls showing that opposition candidate Yushchenko was by far the most popular. Mass protests ensued, resulting in a new election.

3.2.15 Polarization

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

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

Category Distinction:

- This category is sometimes confused with **Ethno-Religious Tensions.** The distinction is that *polarization* captures broad, systemic divides that cut across the

political system, while *ethno-religious tensions* refer to specific targeting or scapegoating of particular ethnic or religious groups.

- It may also overlap with **Rhetorical Attacks against Democracy or Accountability Institutions.** The difference is that *polarization* describes division between groups and parties that undermines pluralism, while *rhetorical attacks* refer to discrediting democratic institutions as a whole.
- It can also be confused with **Extremist/Populist Parties.** The difference is that *polarization* refers to the deepening divide between parties and groups across the system, while *extremist/populist parties* refer to the emergence or rise of specific parties that employ anti-system or anti-elite rhetoric.

Examples:

- In 2018, the Islamabad High Court decided that Pakistani citizens had the right to know the religious affiliations of high-profile government officials, reinforcing already-inflamed social cleavages and sectarian tensions.
- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sought to turn out rightwing voters by asserting that leftist NGOs were busing Arab voters to the polls.
- In 2006, Mexican President Vicente Fox was physically blocked by opposition lawmakers from delivering his annual State of the Nation address. Fox was unable to reach the podium, prompting him to hand a copy of his speech to congressional officials at the entrance.

3.2.16 Extremist/Populist Parties

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

Category Distinction:

- This category is sometimes confused with **Polarization.** The distinction is that *polarization* refers to growing divides between parties or groups across society, while *extremist/populist parties* refer to the rise of specific parties or leaders who employ exclusionary populist rhetoric.
- It may also be confused with **Discrimination against Minorities.** The difference is that *discrimination against minorities* refers to specific policies or acts of exclusion, while *extremist/populist parties* refer to the ideological and organizational rise of movements or parties that justify such exclusion.
- It may overlap with **Rhetorical Attacks against Democracy or Accountability Institutions.** However, *rhetorical attacks* target institutions broadly, while *extremist/populist parties* reflect the formation or strengthening of a political actor whose existence and discourse undermine pluralism.

Examples:

- Established in 2001, the Law and Justice (PiS) party in Poland has become the largest party in Parliament. Running on nationalistic and anti-immigrant platforms, PiS has been rising in popularity since.
- In October of 2018, Jair Bolsonaro was elected the president of Brazil. With his history of threats to the opposition, the press, indigenous groups, LGBTQ people, and women, Bolsonaro capitalized on many Brazilians' frustration to gain power.
- The New People's Party (NPA) is an increasingly popular armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines. The number of NPA attacks went from 60 in 2016 to 260 in 2017 with the group killing or wounding 281 in 2018.

3.2.17 Party Weakness

In both presidential and parliamentary electoral systems, political parties have the ability to influence who does and does not gain power. Strong political parties can prevent individuals they see as too extreme or unfit to rule from gaining power within their own party through gatekeeping. This strategy can include expressing a public lack of support, using institutional checks, and leveraging their political clout (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). When a political party becomes too weak to gatekeep, perhaps due to internal fragmentation, outsiders who may create instability or introduce extreme ideas have a greater opportunity to gain power.

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

then, weak parties and weak party system institutionalization may ultimately lead to democratic backsliding.

Category Distinction:

- This category is sometimes confused with **Lack of Legitimacy.** The distinction is that *party weakness* refers specifically to the inability of political parties or coalitions to organize, gatekeep, or contest power effectively, while *lack of legitimacy* refers more broadly to public perception that governing institutions as a whole are unfit or failing.
- It may also be confused with **Extremist/Populist Parties.** The difference is that *party weakness* describes the decline of mainstream parties and coalitions, whereas *extremist/populist parties* refer to the rise of alternative movements or parties that exploit that weakness.

- It can also overlap with **Polarization.** The distinction is that *polarization* captures the deepening ideological divide between parties or groups, while *party weakness* captures institutional fragility or fragmentation within parties themselves.

Examples:

- In Serbia, the Democratic Opposition of Serbia was a large alliance of political parties which formed to oust the ruling Socialist Party. By the 2003 presidential election, the coalition had fragmented, and the individual parties proved to be too weak to effectively contest power, allowing for the election of Tomislav Nikolic of the Serbian Radical party.
- After failing to prevent the appointment of Jussi Halla-aho as the head of the Finns Party in 2017, the coalition of which the Finns Party was a member split due to the belief that Halla-aho was too extreme.
- Between 2017 and 2018, Mexico's mainstream parties PRI, PAN, and PRD lost their long-standing dominance across federal and state institutions. In the 2018 elections, Morena and its coalition won the presidency and captured majorities in Congress, marking a seismic realignment of political power.

3.2.18 Vertical Corruption

Vertical corruption is corruption in the input procedures in democracy, or procedures and norms which are necessary for citizens to have their interests equally represented in, and

responded to, by government actors through democratic channels (Bailey ˙2009). In short, examples of vertical corruption include bribery of government officials or bureaucrats, extortion/blackmail, influence peddling, patronage networks, ties to organized crime groups, campaign finance abuse, and illegal lobbying. Horizontal corruption, in contrast, occurs between politicians within the government itself, typically reducing checks on executive power. It is a separate Precursor category.

Instances of vertical corruption reduce the willingness and ability of policymakers to listen to the preferences of the public and pass them on to decision and policy making bodies (Bratton 2012). When corruption is prevalent, political decisions are made in the pursuit of personal enrichment, rather than the fulfillment of the preferences of the people. If bribery is seen as a normal "cost of doing business," then corruption, rather than taxation, becomes the economic link between the citizens and their government. This causes elected officials and bureaucrats to be less responsive to the needs and requests of the citizenry without bribery (Bratton 2012).

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

Category Distinction:

- This category is distinct from **Horizontal Corruption.** *Vertical corruption* involves exchanges between state actors and citizens or private actors, while *horizontal corruption* occurs among politicians and insiders within government.
- It may also overlap with **Electoral Fraud and Voter Suppression.** *Electoral fraud* refers to direct manipulation of voting processes and outcomes, while *vertical corruption* refers to illicit exchanges such as bribery, patronage, or clientelism.
- It can also be confused with **Manipulation of the Civil Service or Integrity Institutions.** *Manipulation of the civil service* refers to executives reshaping or intimidating bureaucracies and oversight bodies, while *vertical corruption* refers to corrupt transactions that undermine democratic responsiveness.
- It may also be confused with **State Attempts at Democratization or to Prevent Backsliding**. The distinction here is between acts of corruption and their prosecution. The corrupt act itself (e.g., bribery, patronage, illicit lobbying) should be coded as Vertical Corruption, while prosecutions, arrests, or reforms aimed at

punishing corruption should instead be coded as State Attempts at Democratization or to Prevent Backsliding

Examples:

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

3.2.19 Civil War/Revolution

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

Category Distinction:

- This category is sometimes confused with **State-Conducted Violence or Abuse.** The distinction is that *civil war/revolution* refers to large-scale internal conflict between organized factions or a popular uprising, while *state-conducted violence or abuse* refers to the state using violence directly against civilians or opposition groups without a broader civil conflict.
- It may also be confused with **Systematic Violence against Minorities or Ethnic Cleansing.** The difference is that *civil war/revolution* is driven by political contestation or regime change efforts, while *systematic violence against minorities* refers to targeted campaigns against specific ethnic or religious groups.

- It may also overlap with **Non-state Violence.** The distinction is that *civil war/revolution* involves organized armed conflict aimed at regime change or control of state authority, while *non-state violence* refers to violent acts carried out by non-state actors that do not rise to the level of full-scale civil conflict.

Examples:

- In Cambodia, the post-Paris Peace Accords status quo led to the Khmer Rouge never disarming, permitting Hun Sen and Prince Ranariddh of FUNCINPEC to label domestic press who opposed actions as pro-Khmer Rouge outlets. Additionally, the imminent threat of the Khmer Rouge gave the CPP the cover to maintain their own security forces, which would later be used to throw FUNCINPEC out of power.
- The First Ivorian Civil War was fought in 2002 between northerners and southerners; northerners rebelled because they felt they were being treated as second-class citizens.

3.2.20 Increased Surveillance

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

Category Distinction:

- This category is sometimes confused with **Curtailed Civil Liberties.** The distinction is that *curtailed civil liberties* refers to broad restrictions on rights such as free speech, assembly, or association, while *increased surveillance* refers specifically to state monitoring of citizens' activities.
- It may also overlap with **State-Conducted Violence or Abuse.** The difference is that *state-conducted violence* involves coercion through physical force, while *increased surveillance* relies on monitoring and data collection to deter or target dissent.
- It can also be confused with **Media Bias or Media Repression.** *Media bias/repression* focuses on controlling or silencing information in the public sphere, while *increased surveillance* involves monitoring private communications and personal behavior.

Examples:

- 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic in China - Chinese officials used surveillance to respond to the Chinese whistleblower, Dr. Li Wenliang, who warned other medical officials of

COVID-19. Surveillance allowed Chinese officials to block and monitor private messages discussing the outbreak on private messaging platforms (i.e. WeChat).
- In 2019, Hungary was discovered to have purchased and used spyware to monitor over 200 targets, including journalists, human rights activists, and politicians.
- A 2017 report outlined how the Mexican government used sophisticated spyware—meant for criminal investigations—to electronically surveil journalists, human rights defenders, anticorruption activists, and lawyers.

3.3 Exogenous Risk Factors

3.3.1 Non-state Violence

The presence of non-state violence—organized crime, terrorist groups, gangs, and violent cartels, among others—is a precursor to democratic backsliding for two main reasons. First, the endemic existence of violent non-state actors indicates weak rule of law and may undermine citizen perception of democratic regime legitimacy. Second, non-state violence poses a threat insofar as candidates from populist, extremist, or authoritarian parties can rise to power, promising to eradicate the threat by any means necessary, including the erosion of democratic institutions (Norris 2017).

This event category is considered a destabilizing event type in autocracies, detailed in section 5.

Category Distinction:

- This category is sometimes confused with **Civil War/Revolution.** The distinction is that *civil war/revolution* refers to large-scale organized conflict aimed at regime change, while *non-state violence* refers to violent activity by non-state actors that does not rise to the level of full-scale war or revolution.
- It may also be confused with **State-Conducted Violence or Abuse.** The difference is that *state-conducted violence* involves coercion directly exercised by government forces, while *non-state violence* is initiated by actors outside the state.
- It can also overlap with **Systematic Violence against Minorities or Ethnic Cleansing.** *Systematic violence* involves targeted campaigns against specific identity groups, whereas *non-state violence* encompasses a broader range of actors and motivations, including criminal or insurgent activity.

Examples:

- In 2013, criminal gangs attacked multiple electrical substations and several gas stations in Mexico. The assaults knocked out power for more than 400,000 people across dozens of municipalities, including major disruptions to public lighting and water pumping systems in urban areas. The government attributed the attacks to the Knights Templar cartel as part of its campaign of retaliation amid increased anti-cartel crackdowns.
- Following the collapse of the Qaddafi regime, weapons from Libya streamed into Mali and ended up in the hands of Tuareg insurgents, resulting in heightened violence in the Northern regions of the country and the inability of the military to quell it.

3.3.2 Refugee Crisis

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

This event category is considered a destabilizing event type in autocracies, detailed in section 5.

Category Distinction:

- This category is sometimes confused with **Ethno-Religious Tensions.** The distinction is that *refugee crises* involve the arrival of displaced populations from outside the state, while *ethno-religious tensions* involve conflict and scapegoating within existing domestic identity groups.
- It may also overlap with **Discrimination against Minorities.** *Discrimination* refers to legal or social exclusion of established minority groups, whereas *refugee crises* create conditions for backlash against newly arrived populations.
- It can also be confused with **Curtailed Civil Liberties.** The difference is that *curtailed civil liberties* refers to restrictions on rights such as speech, protest, or due process, while *refugee crises* serve as a catalyst that can push governments or societies toward adopting such restrictions.

Example:

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

3.3.3 External Influence or Invasion

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

Countries can also politically align themselves with international actors (e.g., a larger, more authoritarian neighbor) that reduces local independence and may ultimately serve as a precursor to erosion. This happens in exchange for financial support or political favors from the more powerful country, with major destabilizing effects.

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

Category Distinction:

- This category is sometimes confused with **Pressure from Outside Actor.** The distinction is that external influence or invasion is a precursor to erosion where a foreign actor undermines sovereignty and contributes to democratic weakening, while pressure from an outside actor is a resistance event where foreign powers apply leverage to defend democracy or block erosion.
- It may also be confused with **Civil War/Revolution.** *Civil war/revolution* refers to internal conflicts driven by domestic actors, while *external influence or invasion* refers to foreign states or organizations shaping or destabilizing domestic politics.
- It can also overlap with **Non-state Violence.** *Non-state violence* refers to insurgent or criminal groups acting independently of states, while *external influence or invasion* refers to foreign state-backed intervention or manipulation.

Examples:

- In 2013, Ukrainian president Yanukovych made a deal with Russia, following a financial crisis, for 15 billion dollars and a cut to natural gas prices. This was seen as reducing the president's independence from Russian influence.
- Starting in 2010, media groups associated with the Chinese government began to purchase stakes in Taiwanese media outlets and air propaganda, influencing Taiwanese elections. In Mexico, the López Obrador administration initially adopted a more protective posture toward Central American migrants, promising humane treatment. However, in 2019, under pressure from the US Trump administration — which threatened to close its border and impose punitive tariffs — Mexico deployed the National Guard to detain migrants in the northern region, established immigration checkpoints along major highways, and conducted raids on migrant shelters.

3.3.4 External Shocks (Economic, Health, Natural Disasters)

Democracies are often most fragile in the face of economic shocks, crashes, or crises (Przeworski 1996). These shocks may include a dramatic drop in the price of a key export, a monetary crisis, or a global recession, among others.

If shocks persist, public frustration with the government response can lead to a perceived de-legitimization of democratic governance more broadly. Facing an economic crisis, the public may favor drastic measures that can be imposed only by (more) authoritarian governments (Huntington 1991). Such crises also tend to increase economic inequality, further heightening social tension and making democratic erosion even more likely (Huntington 1991).

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

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

Category Distinction:

- This category is sometimes confused with **Lack of Legitimacy.** The distinction is that *external shocks* are exogenous events (economic crashes, pandemics, natural disasters), while *lack of legitimacy* refers to endogenous failures of political institutions or governance.
- It may also be confused with **State-Conducted Violence or Abuse.** *External shocks* involve crises that create the *opportunity* for state repression, but the repression itself (e.g., violent crackdowns during COVID lockdowns) is coded under *state-conducted violence or abuse.*

Examples:

- The 2009 Eurozone Crisis caused an employment shock throughout the EU, though the UK was less affected due to use of the Pound. The UK then began to absorb unemployed individuals from the EU.
- De Beers diamond company lost control over the global diamond supply, causing the volatility of global diamond prices to increase, hurting Botswana's economy. In 2009, Ian Khama's first year as president, Botswana's GDP contracted by 7.8%, and GDP has continued to drop since.
- In 2005 hurricane Katrina devastated the U.S. Gulf Coast and overwhelmed New Orleans when levees failed, flooding about eighty percent of the city. The storm killed about one thousand five hundred people across the region and caused tens of

billions of dollars in damage, displacing hundreds of thousands of residents and triggering a long recovery effort.

- In March of 2020, President Museveni of Uganda announced a series of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including a ban on private and public transportation and most business, places of worship, the airport, and the country's borders. The government implemented these measures with considerable force, and were reported to beat, extort, shoot, and arrest people and opposition leaders who disobeyed.

3.3.5 Regional Unrest Spillover

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Civil War/Revolution.** The distinction is that *civil war/revolution* refers to conflict occurring *within* the country, whereas *regional unrest spillover* describes the influence of instability in *neighboring states* on domestic politics.
- It may also overlap with **Refugee Crisis.** While a refugee influx may result from regional conflict, *refugee crisis* specifically codes the demographic and social impact of mass migration, whereas *regional unrest spillover* focuses on the political reactions of governments to unrest in nearby states.
- It is sometimes confused with **External Influence or Invasion.** *External influence/invasion* refers to direct interference or domination by another state, whereas *regional unrest spillover* refers to indirect effects—where conflict next door prompts repression at home without direct foreign imposition.

Examples:

- After opposition campaigners in Georgia and Ukraine won power through peaceful revolution, the government of Azerbaijan systematically repressed the opposition through human rights abuses such as torture and police beatings as a means to prevent similar democratic gains in their own country.
- As the number of neighboring countries in civil war increased over a decade, Belorussian citizens reported proportionally increased human rights violations.
- In 2024, citing security threats stemming from the war in Ukraine and migration pressures from Belarus, Poland established a 60-kilometer exclusion zone along its eastern border. Within this zone, media and humanitarian workers were prohibited entry, curtailing civil liberties such as press freedom and the ability of NGOs to provide humanitarian assistance.

3.3.6 Border Disputes

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

Category Distinction

- This category may be confused with **Civil War/Revolution**, but civil wars and revolutions stem from internal domestic conflict, while border disputes involve states contesting territorial boundaries.
- This category may be confused with **Regional Unrest Spillover**, but regional unrest refers to instability transmitted from nearby conflicts, whereas border disputes concern direct disagreements over territorial demarcation.
- This category may be confused with **External Influence or Invasion**, but invasions and external influence involve broader interventions into domestic politics or sovereignty, while border disputes focus narrowly on contested land or boundary lines.

Examples:

- In the disputed Machias Seal Island / grey zone waters between Maine (U.S.) and New Brunswick (Canada), Canadian fishermen accused U.S. Border Patrol agents of

harassment in 2018, including boarding their boats to search for illegal immigrants in the contested waters.
- In 2010, Nicaragua began dredging parts of the San Juan River contested by Costa Rica, which responded with troop deployments and diplomatic escalation.

4 Symptom Categorization

4.1 Reduction in Horizontal Accountability

4.1.1 Reduction in Judicial Independence

We define judicial independence as when a judiciary operates as a neutral third party that impartially resolves conflict and is insulated from political actors (Shapiro 1981). Established judiciaries may prevent the executive from gaining undue power under the guise of a crisis, and can directly check the power of the executive, thus maintaining separation of powers (Gibler and Randazzo 2011). To lessen checks on their power, executives often try to subjugate the judiciary through various means including impeachment, co-optation, extortion, or bribery (Levitsky and Way 2002). When a judiciary's failure to be independent is institutionalized or codified, we code this event as a *reduction* in judicial independence.

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Delegitimizing or Weakening the Judiciary**. The distinction is that rhetorical attacks, disavowals of individual rulings, or circumvention of a single court decision fall under delegitimizing efforts (a precursor). In contrast, Reduction in Judicial Independence refers to institutional or codified changes such as court packing, manipulation of judicial tenure, or systematic rulings that favor the executive.

Examples:

- In 2017, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan appointed 14 of 19 Constitutional Court judges, changing the orientation and disposition of the body from secularist to favoring Erdogan's Justice and Development Party.

- In 2016, the Polish Law and Justice party lowered the mandatory retirement age for Supreme Court judges and the National Council of the Judiciary, resulting in the termination of 31 of 83 judges.

4.1.2 Reduction in Legislative Oversight

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Delegitimizing or Weakening the Legislature**. The distinction is that rhetorical attacks or denigration of the legislature are coded as delegitimizing efforts (a precursor). In contrast, Reduction in Legislative Oversight involves institutional or codified actions that formally undermine the legislature's ability to act as a check on the executive.

Examples:

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

4.1.3 Weakened Civil Service or Integrity Institutions

Both the civil service and integrity institutions can check executive power through nonviolent, deliberate resistance (Ingber 2018). However, there are instances where state agencies are placed directly under executive control or are restructured to reduce their influence. As Huq and Ginsberg discuss, when the executive takes control over the bureaucracy, it eliminates a potential check on their actions (Huq and Ginsburg 2018). Similarly, integrity institutions– like domestic independent institutions such as

Ombudsmen or Auditing Offices, or the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), or third-party electoral evaluators in Bangladesh–may serve as a check on executive power. Impeding or removing these l integrity institutions also qualifies as the institutional elimination of potential avenues for resistance, and this would be categorized as the "Weakened Civil Service or Integrity Institutions" symptom category.

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Manipulation of Civil Service or Integrity Institutions**, which involves fewer formal methods of control such as intimidation, patronage, or replacing individuals with loyalists. In contrast, Weakened Civil Service or Integrity Institutions refers to institutional or codified measures that bring entire bureaucracies or oversight agencies directly under executive authority, or restructure them to reduce independence.

- This category may also be confused with **Horizontal Corruption**, since patronage or favoritism may overlap. The distinction is that corruption centers on personal or allied enrichment, while Weakened Civil Service or Integrity Institutions focuses on reducing bureaucratic independence as a systemic means of removing constraints on executive power.

Examples:

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

4.1.4 Suspension of Laws or the Constitution

Declarations of states of emergency enable executives to gain new powers and circumvent democratic procedures. These moments of exception are often utilized by the executive to fulfill an undemocratic agenda. Under a state of emergency, the executive may establish a curfew or suspend the right to assembly. These types of emergency powers are easily manipulated to weaken opposition movements, undermine election processes, or otherwise incapacitate democratic machinery, aside from the fact that the effort itself is undemocratic. These cases of quick democratic collapse have been described as

"authoritarian reversions" (Huq and Ginsburg 2018). In some cases, the suspension of the rule of law might be a proportional response to a genuine emergency, such as the outbreak of a disease. The abuse of emergency powers is symptomatic of executive aggrandizement, thus institutionalizing the erosion of democracy (Freeman 2003).

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Reduction in Judicial Independence**, when courts validate or enable extraordinary emergency measures. The distinction is that Suspension of Laws or the Constitution involves executives directly bypassing or nullifying legal frameworks, while judicial independence concerns the judiciary's autonomy in interpreting and upholding the law.
- This category may also be confused with **Reduction in Legislative Oversight**, since emergency powers often sideline legislatures. The distinction is that Suspension of Laws or the Constitution focuses specifically on the formal or de facto nullification of legal or constitutional provisions, while legislative oversight refers more broadly to the legislature's ability to constrain the executive.
- This category may also be confused with **Revision of the Constitution**, which involves formal amendments or rewriting of constitutional provisions through legal procedures. The distinction is that Suspension of Laws or the Constitution refers to temporary or extra-legal nullifications of existing laws or constitutional rights, not their formal redefinition or amendment.

Examples:

- In 2022 in El Salvador, in response to a surge of gang violence, the legislature approved a state of emergency that augmented the powers of the executive, allowing President Nayib Bukele to suspend constitutional provisions like freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, and due process.
- In 2021, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Abiy, declared a state of emergency as Tigrayan forces considered advancing toward Addis Ababa. This afforded security officials broad powers of arrest and was used to eliminate media that was critical of Abiy and the conflict in Tigray, leading to the arrest of at least 14 journalists within a few weeks of the declaration. Abiy's crackdown on publications like the Addis Standard sent a chilling effect through Ethiopia's independent media and has seriously eroded respect toward freedom of speech within the country.

4.1.5 Revision of the Constitution

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Suspension of Laws or the Constitution**, since both involve executives circumventing the existing constitutional framework. The distinction is that Revision of the Constitution involves formal amendments or wholesale rewriting of constitutional provisions through legal or quasi-legal means, whereas Suspension of Laws or the Constitution involves temporary or extra-legal nullifications of rights or laws.
- This category may also be confused with **Relaxation of Term Limits**, since both often involve constitutional change. The distinction is that Relaxation of Term Limits refers specifically to amendments or legal reforms that extend the tenure of the executive, while Revision of the Constitution is broader and includes any changes that weaken checks and balances or consolidate executive authority.

Examples:

- In 2008, Evo Morales passed a new constitution in Bolivia via referendum. The new charter expanded presidential powers, allowed indefinite re-election under new rules, and enabled Morales to bypass traditional legislative checks.
- In 2011, Viktor Orban's Fidesz party rewrote the Constitution and adopted the new Fundamental Law as a replacement. The revision consolidated executive power by weakening the independence of the judiciary, curtailing checks from other branches, and entrenching Fidesz's dominance.

4.1.6 Reducing Autonomy of Subnational Units

Some degree of power and autonomy is allocated to subnational units in many federalist systems. In addition to other functions, this distribution of power allows such units to check the powers of the central government (do Vale 2017).

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Delegitimizing or Weakening Subnational Units**, which involves rhetorical attacks or discrediting subnational governments without altering their formal powers. In contrast, Reducing Autonomy of Subnational Units refers to institutional or codified actions that remove or restrict the legal and political authority of states, provinces, or regions.
- This category may also be confused with **Suspension of Laws or the Constitution**, since emergency powers can sometimes be used to justify overriding subnational autonomy. The distinction is that Reducing Autonomy of Subnational Units is not tied to emergency powers, but instead to structural or lasting centralization of authority.

Examples:

- In September 2004, Putin issued a decree further centralizing power and abolishing elections for regional leaders.
- After a referendum vote that the people of Catalonia signed to make the region independent, the Spanish Senate granted the Prime Minister the right to impose direct rule over Catalonia which led to the dissolution of the Catalonian government

4.1.7 Creation of Parallel Structures

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Revision of the Constitution**, since parallel institutions are sometimes formalized through constitutional change. The distinction is that Creation of Parallel Structures involves building alternative or duplicate institutions to bypass existing ones, whereas Revision of the Constitution focuses on formally altering the rules of the existing system.

- This category may also be confused with **Reduction in Legislative Oversight**, as parallel structures often weaken legislatures. The distinction is that Creation of Parallel Structures replaces or duplicates oversight institutions, while Reduction in Legislative Oversight diminishes the formal powers of the legislature itself.
- This category may further be confused with **Democratic Facade**, since both involve institutions that appear democratic but consolidate executive control. The difference is that Democratic Facade refers to hollow or symbolic democratic reforms, while Creation of Parallel Structures refers to new institutions that displace existing ones.

Examples:

- In 2022, Belarus held a constitutional referendum that approved the creation of the "All-Belarusian People's Assembly," a parallel legislature dominated by Lukashenko's supporters. The new body was granted sweeping powers that rivaled and diluted the role of the official parliament.
- In 2017, Venezuela's Constituent Assembly granted itself the power to write and pass legislation, essentially overwriting the National Assembly. Opposition leaders were not included in the list of candidates.
- In Turkey after the failed 2016 coup attempt, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan created new security and intelligence structures under the presidency, including a parallel council reporting directly to him, bypassing existing parliamentary and judicial oversight.

4.1.8 Purging of Elites

Geddes, Franz, and Wright state that executives offer their inner circle just enough power and resources to placate the demands of elites (Geddes Wright and Frantz 2018). Rulers rely on the elites that support them, though the elites also benefit from being aligned with power. Eliminating rivals or troublemakers from within the elites could be an effective tool of autocrat consolidation, creating uncertainty in the ranks of the inner circle and encouraging compliance among remaining members.

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Manipulation of the Civil Service or Integrity Institutions**, since both involve the removal or replacement of personnel. The distinction is that Purging of Elites targets high-ranking officials within the ruling circle, often to eliminate rivals or consolidate loyalty, whereas Manipulation of the

Civil Service or Integrity Institutions focuses on bureaucrats and oversight officials used as tools of governance rather than members of the political elite.
- This category may also be confused with **Weakened Civil Service or Integrity Institutions**, since both can result in state institutions being undermined. The distinction is that Weakened Civil Service or Integrity Institutions refers to institutional or codified measures reducing bureaucratic independence, while Purging of Elites is about politically motivated removals within the ruling elite.

Examples:

- After a coup attempt in 2016, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan charged senior officers with treason and purged tens of thousands of police and officers of the judiciary and civil service.
- In April 2011, President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso fired his ministers, dissolved the government, and appointed new ministers.

4.1.9 Coup or Regime Collapse

A coup, coup attempt, or other event threatening regime collapse suggests democratic erosion has occurred. Broadly, a coup itself is undemocratic because it is political change that occurs outside of the political rules for such change, rather than when political change occurs through an election). Successful coups, necessitating an abrupt shift in power, pose threats to democracy. When a democratic regime is ousted or collapses, there is often a sudden loss of democracy and reversion to authoritarianism (Huq and Ginsburg 2018). While coup d'etats in the typical sense have become less frequent, promissory coups, which instead frame the coup as a temporary but necessary step for an improved version of democracy, have become more frequent (Bermeo 2016). Promissory coups are conducive to backsliding in that they often falsely promise an eventual return to democracy and may thus be met with complacency.

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

"Coup or regime collapse" is coded as a destabilizing event for authoritarian regimes, since it could either undercut the regime's power or be used to justify consolidating authoritarian rule.

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Suspension of Laws or the Constitution**, since coups are often followed by emergency decrees or rule by exception. The distinction is that Coup or Regime Collapse refers to the initial seizure or breakdown of power outside legal channels, while Suspension of Laws or the Constitution refers to executives already in power nullifying existing frameworks.
- This category may also be confused with **Civil War or Revolution**, as both involve violent challenges to authority. The distinction is that Civil War or Revolution entails broader, sustained conflict often involving mass mobilization, while Coup or Regime Collapse typically involves sudden elite-driven or military-led seizures of power.

Examples:

- When newly elected President of Mauritania Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdhalli attempted to lessen military influence in government by removing four military leaders from high-level government positions, General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz launched a coup and overthrew the regime.
- In November 2008, following months of tension with the military, President of Guinea-Bissau João Bernardo Vieira was blamed for a bombing on military headquarters (which had killed a military general) and was subsequently assassinated by the military.
- In 2003 in Bolivia, a massive protest movement forced the newly elected president to resign after one year in office.

4.2 Reduction in Vertical Accountability

4.2.1 Repression of the Opposition

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

events in the precursor category “Co-optation of the Opposition” aim to more subtly curtail the influence of the opposition but without direct force or attacks.

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Co-optation of the Opposition**, which involves subtle incorporation or buying off opposition figures rather than outright repression. The key difference is that Repression of the Opposition entails coercion, force, or engineered disadvantage, while Co-optation of the Opposition involves offering benefits or positions to reduce resistance.
- This category may also be confused with **Purging of Elites**, as both involve limiting dissent within the political system. The distinction is that Purging of Elites targets individuals within the ruling coalition or elite circles, whereas Repression of the Opposition targets external opposition parties and candidates.

Examples:

- In 2014, South Korean President Park Geun-Hye filed a petition to the Constitutional Court to dissolve the Unified Progressive Party (UPP), accusing it of being pro-North Korea and plotting to overthrow the government. The court complied, disbanding one of the main opposition parties.
- In Venezuela, the Supreme Court upheld bans on opposition presidential candidate María Corina Machado, preventing her from running in the 2024 election for alleged past administrative infractions.

4.2.2 Systemic Reduction in Election Freedom and Fairness

Elections must be “fair and free” to qualify as democratic (Schedler 2002). The difference between electoral democracy and electoral authoritarianism is the “freedom, fairness, inclusiveness, and meaningfulness” of elections (Diamond 2002). Elections are considered free when there are few barriers to entry into politics, when candidates and supporters of different parties are free to campaign, and when voters do not experience substantial coercion in making choices in elections (Diamond 2002). Accordingly, per Levitsky and Way, political systems become electoral authoritarianism when there is “an uneven playing field” between the incumbent and the opposition. In most liberal democracies, however, the incumbent has certain structural advantages, such as greater access to the media, better fundraising, and government transportation and staff during the campaign. We therefore define a systemic reduction in election freedom or fairness as the institutionalization of an uneven playing field between the government and the opposition, thereby giving the incumbent an artificial electoral advantage.

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Electoral Fraud and Voter Suppression**, which refers to illegal manipulation of votes, falsification of results, or deliberate prevention of individuals from voting. In contrast, Systemic Reduction in Election Freedom and Fairness emphasizes structural and institutional distortions rather than direct tampering with ballots.
- This category may also be confused with **Electoral Violence** and **Systemic Electoral Violence**, which involve coercion or the use of physical force to influence elections. In contrast, Systemic Reduction in Election Freedom and Fairness relies on institutional manipulation rather than violence.

Examples:

- In the lead-up to the 2024 presidential election in Venezuela, the National Electoral Council (CNE) disqualified 16 opposition parties from nominating candidates, limiting electoral competition. After Nicolás Maduro’s victory was announced, the CNE refused to release detailed vote tallies by polling center, and the pro-government Supreme Tribunal of Justice validated the results despite widespread allegations of fraud.
- In Ethiopia’s 2015 general election, the ruling Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) won every seat in parliament. Opposition parties faced obstacles such as candidate disqualifications, restrictions on campaigning, censorship, and harassment, which systematically prevented a fair contest.

4.2.3 Systemic Electoral Violence

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

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Electoral Violence** (precursor). The key distinction is scale and regularity: Electoral Violence refers to isolated or sporadic events, while Systemic Electoral Violence is coordinated, repeated, and structural.
- This category may also be confused with **Repression of the Opposition**, which captures suppression of opposition beyond the electoral process. Systemic Electoral Violence specifically refers to electoral contexts.
- This category may also be confused with **Systemic Reduction in Election Freedom and Fairness**, which involves institutional manipulation of elections without the systematic use of violence.
- This category may also be confused with **State-Conducted Violence or Abuse**. The distinction is that Systemic Electoral Violence is tied to elections, whereas State-Conducted Violence or Abuse includes violence for broader political or judicial objectives outside the electoral arena.

Examples:

- Religious extremists drastically decreased voter turnout in northern Mali during the presidential election, with 20% of polling stations affected by violent disruptions.
- In Bangladesh in 2014, widespread election violence led to closures of polling places and many casualties, including at least 21 people killed on their way to the polls.
- In Mexico's 2021 midterm elections, widespread electoral violence occurred across multiple states, with over 100 candidates assassinated and dozens more threatened or attacked, creating a climate of fear and systematically discouraging opposition participation.

4.2.4 Curtailed Civil Liberties

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Repression of the Opposition**, but the distinction lies in scope. Curtailed Civil Liberties applies when restrictions extend broadly to citizens at large, while Repression of the Opposition focuses on targeted attacks against political competitors.
- This category may be confused with **State-Conducted Violence or Abuse**, but Curtailed Civil Liberties refers to institutionalized restrictions of rights and freedoms, while State-Conducted Violence or Abuse refers to physical coercion such as police brutality, extrajudicial killings, or violent repression.
- This category may be confused with **Increased Control over Civil Society**, which involves expanding state regulation and oversight of civic organizations. Curtailed Civil Liberties refers to broader systemic restrictions on civil and political rights that apply directly to citizens.
- This category may be confused with **Media Repression**, but the difference is that Curtailed Civil Liberties covers broad restrictions on freedoms of speech,

association, or movement, while Media Repression specifically targets the press and information channels.
- This category may be confused with **Increased Surveillance**, but Curtailed Civil Liberties involves formalized restrictions on freedoms, whereas Increased Surveillance refers to monitoring and data collection practices that undermine privacy and indirectly restrict liberties.
- This category may be confused with **Discrimination against Minorities**, but **Curtailed Civil Liberties** applies to systemic restrictions on rights that affect the general citizenry, while Discrimination against Minorities refers to targeted repression against specific identity groups.
- This category may be confused with **Militarization of Civilian Governance**, but Curtailed Civil Liberties refers to the erosion of rights and freedoms, while Militarization of Civilian Governance refers to the military assuming roles normally carried out by civilian institutions.

Examples:

- In 2016, the Basic Law for the Protection of Public Safety was enacted in Spain, resulting in fines levied for disrespecting the police, speaking critically of the government, and photographing police operations.
- In 2017, amid massive anti-government demonstrations, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro banned protests outright, declaring that anyone participating without government authorization would face prison sentences of up to 10 years.

4.2.5 Media Repression

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Media Bias**, but the key distinction is that media repression involves overt or coercive restrictions on journalists, outlets, or

content (such as jailing, censorship, or forced closure), while media bias refers to manipulation of media content or perception without direct repression.
- It may also be confused with **Curtailed Civil Liberties**, but curtailed liberties involve systemic denial of broad rights such as assembly, speech, or association, whereas media repression specifically targets press freedom.
- This category may also be confused with **Non-state Violence**, since non-state actors (such as criminal groups, gangs, or paramilitaries) sometimes repress journalists. However, when journalists or media outlets are targeted by non-state actors in ways that restrict press freedom, the event should still be coded as media repression.

Examples:

- In 2006, Mexican journalist Roberto Marcos García, a crime reporter and deputy editor for Testimonio in Veracruz, was run over by a stolen vehicle and then fatally shot near Alvarado. He had previously published exposes on the local drug trade and reportedly received death threats.
- In Colombia in 2019, New York Times Andes Bureau Chief Nicholas Casey was forced to leave Colombia following online harassment encouraged by lawmakers following his story on the military's order to double state violence.
- In Ethiopia in 2020, authorities shut down the independent newspaper *Addis Standard* and arrested several of its journalists on charges of "inciting unrest" following critical reporting on government responses to ethnic violence.
- In **2021**, Russian authorities detained several editors of the student journal **DOXA**, raided their offices, and placed their editors under severe restrictions while covering protests.

4.2.6 Relaxation of Term Limits

Democratic erosion or autocratic consolidation often occurs through executive aggrandizement, the increased power and liberty of the executive to act as they please. One of the primary signs of executive aggrandizement is the extension, relaxation, or abolition of term limits placed on the executive or members of the executive's coalition (e.g. members of a legislative body). Executive term limits constrain the power of the executive, limit incumbency advantages, and promote competition and alternation in power (Maltz 2007). Successful attempts to extend term limits demonstrate a systematic entrenchment of executive dominance. Although technically eliminating term limits is a type of reform that would fit under the often related to the symptom categories of (Suspension of Laws or the Constitution or Constitutional Revision), we maintain it as a separate case because of

the relaxation of term limits remains qualitatively distinct due to its key role of eliminating term limits in executive aggrandizement (Baturo 2014).

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Overstayed Welcome**, but that category involves executives remaining in power despite informal or normative expectations to leave, often by postponing elections or citing emergency circumstances. In contrast, relaxation of term limits involves formal or legal changes to extend tenure.
- This category may also be confused with **Suspension of Laws or the Constitution**, but the distinction is that suspension involves temporary emergency powers, whereas relaxation of term limits is a permanent change to the rules of tenure.

- This category may also be confused with **Revision of the Constitution**, but constitutional revisions can involve a broad set of changes. Relaxation of term limits is distinct because it specifically removes restrictions on executive tenure, a central mechanism of democratic rotation.

Examples:

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

4.2.7 Forced/Coerced Exile

A strategy similar to state-sponsored violence, forced or coerced exile occurs when the government removes individuals who may serve as a resistance to their consolidation strategy or ongoing rule. Such exile can be done by the exile themself, with the exile fleeing potential future legal or physical violence, or forcibly imposed, with the exile being detained and then sent to a "neutral" third-party country. Such an arrangement can be temporary, with the individual only being removed for the period of time necessary to consolidate power or could be a permanent removal.

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Curtailed Civil Liberties**, but curtailed liberties involve the systemic denial of rights such as speech, assembly, or association across

society, whereas forced exile specifically removes targeted individuals from the country.
- This category may also be confused with **State-Conducted Violence or Abuse**, but exile involves displacement across borders rather than domestic violence or repression within the state.
- This category may also be confused with **Repression of the Opposition**, but repression covers a broader set of restrictions, while forced exile refers specifically to eliminating opposition through displacement.

Examples:

- In 2004, Chea Sim, the president of the Cambodian upper house and longtime CPP senior member, refused to sign an amendment that would permit the CPP-FUNCIPEC coalition to establish a government through a "package vote". Sim was then forcibly sent to Bangkok, ostensibly for medical treatment, and his deputy signed the amendment, permitting the government to proceed.
- In 2001, more than 2,000 Tanzanians fled as political refugees to Kenya in the aftermath of the violent crackdown against the protests by the government.

4.2.8 Discrimination against Minorities

Politicians may use discrimination against minorities to gain leverage within their party or to garner support from the population at large. Discrimination against minorities may also be a tool to repress opposition members if they come from minority groups. Autocrats and would-be autocrats may use substantial force to subdue minority voices and use aggressive tactics to repress the marginalized group. Specific tactics to repress minorities may include writing in laws or revising the constitution to curtail their rights, or advertently disallowing them from engaging in the labor force, civil institutions, or political life.

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Curtailed Civil Liberties**, but curtailed liberties involve broad restrictions applied across the general population, while discrimination against minorities specifically targets ethnic, religious, or social groups.
- This category may also be confused with **Ethno-Religious Tensions**, but that category involves political elites stoking or exploiting divisions for legitimacy, whereas discrimination against minorities refers to state or elite practices that directly restrict minority rights.

- This category may also be confused with **Systematic Violence against Minorities or Ethnic Cleansing**, but the distinction is in severity: systematic violence or cleansing involves sustained campaigns of physical violence or extermination, whereas discrimination may involve structural, legal, or political exclusion that falls short of outright violence.

Example:

- In Uganda, police and government officials continue to harass or restrict free expression by activists supporting LGBTQ+ rights. Police arrested three LGBTQ+ activists on June 4 at the 2008 HIV/AIDS Implementers meeting in Kampala after they peacefully protested the lack of official response to HIV/AIDS among community members. They were charged with criminal trespass and abused while in custody.
- In 2018, Former Deputy Prime Minister of Italy, Matteo Salvini, proposed a bill that would force "ethnic" shops to close by 9pm, describing them as a "gathering place for drunkards, pushers, and hell-raisers."
- In India in 2019, Prime Minister Modi and the Parliament enacted the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) which grants citizenship to all persecuted minorities from neighboring countries unless they are Muslim; the incident further solidifies the anti-Muslim attitudes of Prime Minister Modi and the leading Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

4.2.9 Systematic Violence against Minorities or Ethnic Cleansing

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Curtailed Civil Liberties**, but curtailed liberties involve broad restrictions on the rights of the population at large, while systematic violence against minorities specifically targets ethnic, religious, or social groups with coordinated campaigns of physical violence and persecution.

- This category may also be confused with **Discrimination against Minorities**, but discrimination generally involves legal, political, or structural exclusion, whereas systematic violence entails coordinated physical violence or mass removal.
- This category may also be confused with **Ethno-Religious Tensions**, but that category focuses on elites stoking divisions or tensions for legitimacy, while systematic violence refers to the execution of sustained campaigns of persecution.
- This category may also be confused with **State-Conducted Violence or Abuse**, but state-conducted violence usually targets protesters, activists, or political opponents, while systematic violence against minorities specifically targets ethnic, religious, or social groups in an organized way, often with the goal of eradication or expulsion.

Examples:

- The Uyghur concentration camps in China which function as re-education camps that target the Uyghur religious-ethnic minority in the Xinjiang region.
- Systemic discrimination and violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar have led to a refugee crisis of Rohingya fleeing Myanmar into neighboring countries.
- Sudanese government forces have consistently perpetrated violence against members of minority (non-Dinka) ethnic groups using starvation, gang rape, and the burning of local villages. In 2016, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) went as far as to say that these practices amount to ethnic cleansing.

4.2.10 Politicization of the Education System

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Curtailed Civil Liberties**, but while both involve restrictions on rights and freedoms, curtailed civil liberties affect society at large, whereas politicization of education specifically targets the educational sphere.

- This category may be confused with **Increasing Control over Civil Society**, but while that category refers to efforts to weaken or co-opt NGOs, associations, and independent civic organizations, politicization of education uniquely focuses on shaping schools, universities, and curricula.

Examples:

- In Belarus, President Alexander Lukashenko has increased control over the education system to ensure his continued political power, especially through the promotion of Russian language education and official use over Belarusian.
- A Pakistani court sentences a college teacher to 10 years in jail for a "blasphemous" lecture he delivered to students; his actions violated Pakistani laws against blasphemy.
- In 2021, the government passed a law banning non-state-approved educational activities, as well as cooperation with academics outside of Russia, in an effort to fight “negative foreign influence in the educational process” and "anti-Russian propaganda."
- Initially, the Jordanian government acted swiftly by raiding the Teachers Syndicate headquarters and arresting thirteen board members. This was coupled with a press and social media gag on the topic as well. While the government argues that the arrests were done due to financial malpractice within the union, the actions may have been taken to curb rising tension for a strike. Later that month after the arrest of key board members, the teachers’ union did go on strike with 100,000 people participating and shutting down schools for a month.
- The Chinese Ministry of Education has integrated “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” into curricula in Chinese textbooks in 2021. This serves to further Xi’s control over public opinion through a process akin to indoctrination of the youth.

4.2.11 State-controlled Media

State-owned media agencies are often staples of authoritarian regimes, and the use of those media to propagandize in favor of the authoritarian leader is a symptom of authoritarian consolidation as it further entrenches the powers of a leader in the minds of the country’s citizens. Authoritarians may use this to control public sentiment, redirect public outrage, or cover-up failures of the regime. As such, both the expansion of the state media apparatus (via media buyouts) and the promulgation of propaganda campaigns fall under the “state-controlled media” label.

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Media Bias**, but media bias refers to manipulation of editorial content without direct state ownership or control.
- This category may be confused with **Media Repression**, but media repression involves silencing or harassing independent outlets, not building or using state-controlled ones.

Examples:

- Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV) reports, including through a press conference, that election observers from respected international organization Transparency International found that the 2018 Presidential Election was free and fair; however, this was untrue, and Transparency International explicitly states that it had no election observation mission in Cameroon.
- The Russian state media framed the 2020 constitutional revisions as a patriotic move and intentionally highlighted less controversial amendments such as an increase to state funding while downplaying the crucial amendment to change the presidential term limit.
- Russian state-affiliated media promoted and justified the "special military operation" in Ukraine in conjunction with government suppression of independent media sources covering the invasion.
- As the COVID-19 pandemic reached Belarus, President Alexander Lukashenko promoted disinformation regarding the deadliness and the cure for the disease, including claims that vodka, sauna, and tractor rides helped ward off the disease.
- In May of 2021, Singapore Press Holdings, which publishes the nation's main newspaper and whose leaders are appointed by the State, announced that they would be transferring their media business to another company in light of financial losses. However, the government announced that they would continue providing financial support to the not-for-profit media arm, signaling their ongoing influence in the media industry.

4.2.12 Militarization of Civilian Governance

The use of the military for internal security, civilian policing, or administrative functions can signal a weakening of democratic norms and institutions. Democracies rely on a clear separation between civilian and military spheres. When this boundary is eroded, civilian institutions may lose autonomy, transparency, and accountability, while the military gains

disproportionate influence over governance, or the executive gains disproportionate discretion over the use of force.

This militarization may occur gradually, through legal reforms that expand military jurisdiction, appointments of military officials to civilian posts, or increasing reliance on armed forces for public security. Or it may occur abruptly, in response to crises. While such measures may be justified as necessary for stability or efficiency, at the same time, they reduce civilian oversight and normalize the presence of military power in public life.

Events in this category may include declarations assigning public security duties to the military, the creation of militarized police forces under defense ministries, or the expansion of the military as a political actor or symbol of national unity.

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Curtailed Civil Liberties**, since both involve restrictions on civilian freedoms. However, militarization refers specifically to the expanded role of the armed forces in governance, not the restriction of rights per se.
- This category may be confused with **Repression of the Opposition**, since militarization is often used against dissent. However, repression targets political opponents, while militarization describes a structural shift in governance toward military involvement.

Examples:

- In Mexico, a constitutional reform under President Andrés Manuel López Obrador in 2019 dissolved the Federal Police and transferred its functions to the newly created National Guard, a force led and staffed largely by military personnel, effectively militarizing public security tasks traditionally managed by civilians.
- In France, following the 2015–2016 terrorist attacks, the government deployed thousands of soldiers under “Operation Sentinelle” to patrol civilian areas such as train stations, schools, and religious sites.

4.2.13 Anti-Democratic Mobilization

While protests are often associated with civic resistance and demands for greater accountability, not all mass mobilizations serve democratic ends. In some cases, protests, rallies, or mass movements are organized to reject electoral outcomes, defend

authoritarian leaders, or call for the suppression of democratic institutions and processes. These events can actively undermine democracy by legitimizing anti-democratic rhetoric, pressuring institutions to overturn legitimate processes, or enabling violence against democratic actors.

Pro-erosion mobilizations are distinct from general civil unrest or revolutionary movements in that their explicit aim is to oppose democratic outcomes—such as free elections, judicial independence, or peaceful transfers of power—or to reinforce executive overreach and populist authoritarianism. These events may rely on misinformation or conspiracy theories and may be incited or endorsed by political elites.

When such protests are large, persistent, or violent, they can destabilize democratic norms, erode trust in institutions, and be used as justification for emergency powers, repression, or democratic rollback.

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **violent and non-violent protests**, which can also involve large-scale mobilization. However, unlike general protests that may push for policy changes, anti-democratic mobilization is specifically aimed at overturning democratic outcomes or reinforcing authoritarian rule.

Examples:

- In the United States, supporters of President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol to obstruct the certification of the 2020 presidential election results, falsely claiming electoral fraud. The attack resulted in multiple deaths, injuries, and a temporary disruption of the peaceful transfer of power.
- In 2012, following widespread protests against alleged fraud in Russia's parliamentary elections, the Kremlin organized and supported large pro-Putin rallies across major cities. These rallies, often referred to as "anti-Orange protests," portrayed opposition demonstrators as foreign-backed agents seeking to destabilize Russia. The mobilizations served to delegitimize pro-democracy protesters and bolster support for Putin ahead of the presidential election.

5 Destabilizing Events

Destabilizing events are those that undermine the stability of an autocratic regime. On the one hand, these events might lead to greater support for democratization, but on the other, they could lead regime leaders to adopt more repressive policies to restore stability. Hence, the result of destabilizing events can either be greater autocratic consolidation, democratization, or chronic instability depending on the context in which they take place. Therefore, they are placed in a different category than the clear precursors to democratic erosion that take place in non-authoritarian regimes.

In many cases, events of the same category would be a precursor when they take place in a democratic regime but would be destabilizing events if they occur in authoritarian regimes. There are also some cases, though, of destabilizing events with no parallel in democracies. The table below shows all of the destabilizing event categories with their corresponding precursor or symptom category, if applicable.

Event Category	Type in Democracies	Type in Autocracies
Elite Infighting	N/A	Destabilizing
Non-state Violence	Precursor	Destabilizing
Challenge from Extremist/Populist Factions	Precursor (Extremist/Populist Parties)	Destabilizing
Rejecting Election Results	Precursor	Destabilizing
Border Disputes	Precursor	Destabilizing
Coup or Regime Collapse	Symptom	Destabilizing
Civil War/Revolution	Precursor	Destabilizing
Refugee Crisis	Precursor	Destabilizing
External Influence or Invasion	Precursor	Destabilizing
External Shocks (Economics, Health, Natural Disasters)	Precursor	Destabilizing
Regional Unrest Spillover	Precursor	Destabilizing

5.1 Domestic Factors

5.1.1 Elite Infighting

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

consolidate power, but it is also possible for elite infighting to weaken the ruling coalition and open the door to a coup or a regime overthrow by political outsiders. Given the diversity of possible outcomes, elite infighting is a destabilizing event.

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **purging of elites**, where the executive intentionally eliminates rivals through imprisonment, dismissal, or violence. Unlike purging, elite infighting refers to ongoing conflict or competition among elites, which may or may not result in formal removal.

Examples:

- Egyptian President Mohamad overruled constitutional declarations made by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces that it had the power to veto any articles in the drafting of the constitution and transferred its executive and legislative authority onto himself.
- In Algeria in 2004, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika removes Ali Benflis from the prime minister position amidst a power struggle between the two as they have different views on the question of reform, and both seek the presidential candidacy of the National Liberation Front (FLN) party in the upcoming election.

5.1.2 Non-state Violence

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

Category Distinction:

- This category is sometimes confused with **Civil War/Revolution.** The distinction is that *civil war/revolution* refers to large-scale organized conflict aimed at regime change, while *non-state violence* refers to violent activity by non-state actors that does not rise to the level of full-scale war or revolution.
- It may also be confused with **State-Conducted Violence or Abuse.** The difference is that *state-conducted violence* involves coercion directly exercised by government forces, while *non-state violence* is initiated by actors outside the state.

- It can also overlap with **Systematic Violence against Minorities or Ethnic Cleansing.** *Systematic violence* involves targeted campaigns against specific identity groups, whereas *non-state violence* encompasses a broader range of actors and motivations, including criminal or insurgent activity.

Examples:

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

5.1.3 Challenge from Extremist/Populist Factions

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

Category Distinction:

- This category is for **autocracies**, where extremist or populist factions destabilize the regime from outside or from below. The related **extremist/populist parties** category is for **democracies**, where such parties emerge within the political system as precursors to democratic erosion.

Examples:

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

5.1.4 Rejecting Election Results

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

Category Distinction:

- This category is often confused with **Electoral Boycott.** The distinction lies in timing. *Rejecting election results* occurs **after an election has concluded**, when actors refuse to accept the outcome. *Electoral boycott* occurs **before or during an election**, when opposition groups refuse to participate altogether.

Examples:

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

5.1.5 Coup or Regime Collapse

When a long-standing autocracy is toppled by discontented elites or the masses, it might create an opening for democratic transition. However, it may also be replaced by another autocratic regime that continues the repressive policies of the earlier regime under the pretext of restoring stability. Given the inherent uncertainty associated with regime change, it is classified as a destabilizing event. Events in this category would include both successful and failed coups, coup promissory coups (i.e., rationalized as a defense of democracy and framed as temporary), and whether it involved violence or not.

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Suspension of Laws or the Constitution**, since coups are often followed by emergency decrees or rule by exception. The distinction is that Coup or Regime Collapse refers to the initial seizure or breakdown of power outside legal channels, while Suspension of Laws or the Constitution refers to executives already in power nullifying existing frameworks.
- This category may also be confused with **Civil War or Revolution**, as both involve violent challenges to authority. The distinction is that Civil War or Revolution entails broader, sustained conflict often involving mass mobilization, while Coup or Regime Collapse typically involves sudden elite-driven or military-led seizures of power.

Examples:

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

5.1.6 Civil War/Revolution

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

Category Distinction:

- This category is sometimes confused with **State-Conducted Violence or Abuse.** The distinction is that *civil war/revolution* refers to large-scale internal conflict between organized factions or a popular uprising, while *state-conducted violence or abuse* refers to the state using violence directly against civilians or opposition groups without a broader civil conflict.
- It may also be confused with **Systematic Violence against Minorities or Ethnic Cleansing.** The difference is that *civil war/revolution* is driven by political contestation or regime change efforts, while *systematic violence against minorities* refers to targeted campaigns against specific ethnic or religious groups.

- It may also overlap with **Non-state Violence.** The distinction is that *civil war/revolution* involves organized armed conflict aimed at regime change or control of state authority, while *non-state violence* refers to violent acts carried out by non-state actors that do not rise to the level of full-scale civil conflict.

Examples:

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

5.2 Exogenous Factors

5.2.1 Refugee Crisis

The influx of refugees into a country does not itself pose a risk to a regime, but it may create conditions which inspire harsh reactionary movements that can threaten stability. Harsh reactionary movements destabilize the government, as the capacities of host countries come under increased strain (Mudde 2013). On the other hand, if there is widespread public anger about the presence of refugees, an authoritarian regime could tap into that anger and drum up domestic support by using rhetoric to scapegoat refugees or by instituting a heavy-handed response. Thus, a heavy influx of refugees into a single country can be considered a destabilizing event.

Category Distinction:

- This category is sometimes confused with **Ethno-Religious Tensions.** The distinction is that *refugee crises* involve the arrival of displaced populations from outside the state, while *ethno-religious tensions* involve conflict and scapegoating within existing domestic identity groups.
- It may also overlap with **Discrimination against Minorities.** *Discrimination* refers to legal or social exclusion of established minority groups, whereas *refugee crises* create conditions for backlash against newly arrived populations.
- It can also be confused with **Curtailed Civil Liberties.** The difference is that *curtailed civil liberties* refers to restrictions on rights such as speech, protest, or due process, while *refugee crises* serve as a catalyst that can push governments or societies toward adopting such restrictions.

Examples:

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

5.2.2 External Influence or Invasion

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

Countries can also politically align themselves with international actors (e.g., a larger, more authoritarian neighbor) that reduces local independence. This localized autocratic consolidation may happen in exchange for financial support or political favors from the more powerful country. In aligning with a foreign actor, some countries may deliver weapons or guns to support internal forces. Both the illicit and legal weapons trade can exacerbate domestic crises to destabilize existing conflicts.

Category Distinction:

- This category is sometimes confused with **Pressure from Outside Actor.** The distinction is that external influence or invasion is a precursor to erosion where a foreign actor undermines sovereignty and contributes to democratic weakening, while pressure from an outside actor is a resistance event where foreign powers apply leverage to defend democracy or block erosion.
- It may also be confused with **Civil War/Revolution.** *Civil war/revolution* refers to internal conflicts driven by domestic actors, while *external influence or invasion* refers to foreign states or organizations shaping or destabilizing domestic politics.
- It can also overlap with **Non-state Violence.** *Non-state violence* refers to insurgent or criminal groups acting independently of states, while *external influence or invasion* refers to foreign state-backed intervention or manipulation.

Examples:

- In 2013, Ukrainian president Yanukovych made a deal with Russia, following a financial crisis, for 15 billion dollars and a cut to natural gas prices. This was seen as reducing the president's independence from Russian influence.
- Saudi Arabia began its military operations in Yemen in support of the exiled Hadi government, which exacerbated the scale of violence in the Yemeni civil war.
- The United States invaded Iraq in 2003, which led to the toppling of Hussein's authoritarian regime, but also marshalled a period of chronic political instability.

5.2.3 External Shocks (Economics, Health, Natural Disasters)

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

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

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

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

Likewise, the effect of health shocks can be ambivalent. On the one hand, they may pave the way for an autocratic incumbent to take control over society in the name of preventing

the spread of diseases, which has the potential to undermine civil liberties and rights. But if the government fails to manage the risk, it could withdraw public support, leading to popular uprisings. In some cases, the regime challenges prevail, implying the potential for regime breakdown or political liberalization. Therefore, economic and health shocks, as well as natural disasters, are categorized as destabilizing events when they occur in non-democratic regimes.

Category Distinction:

- This category is sometimes confused with **Lack of Legitimacy.** The distinction is that *external shocks* are exogenous events (economic crashes, pandemics, natural disasters), while *lack of legitimacy* refers to endogenous failures of political institutions or governance.
- It may also be confused with **State-Conducted Violence or Abuse.** *External shocks* involve crises that create the *opportunity* for state repression, but the repression itself (e.g., violent crackdowns during COVID lockdowns) is coded under *state-conducted violence or abuse.*

Examples:

- In 2020, COVID-19 slows economic activity generally and hits Algeria's oil and natural gas exports, a key part of its economy, especially hard.
- In 2016 in Zimbabwe, a combination of high unemployment, currency shortages, and unpaid wages led to a severe economic collapse throughout the nation.

5.2.4 Regional Unrest Spillover

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Civil War/Revolution.** The distinction is that *civil war/revolution* refers to conflict occurring *within* the country, whereas *regional unrest spillover* describes the influence of instability in *neighboring states* on domestic politics.
- It may also overlap with **Refugee Crisis.** While a refugee influx may result from regional conflict, *refugee crisis* specifically codes the demographic and social impact of mass migration, whereas *regional unrest spillover* focuses on the political reactions of governments to unrest in nearby states.
- It is sometimes confused with **External Influence or Invasion.** *External influence/invasion* refers to direct interference or domination by another state, whereas *regional unrest spillover* refers to indirect effects—where conflict next door prompts repression at home without direct foreign imposition.

Examples:

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

5.2.5 Border Disputes

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Civil War/Revolution**, but civil wars and revolutions stem from internal domestic conflict, while border disputes involve states contesting territorial boundaries.
- This category may be confused with **Regional Unrest Spillover**, but regional unrest refers to instability transmitted from nearby conflicts, whereas border disputes concern direct disagreements over territorial demarcation.

- This category may be confused with **External Influence or Invasion**, but invasions and external influence involve broader interventions into domestic politics or sovereignty, while border disputes focus narrowly on contested land or boundary lines.

Examples:

- Russia placed unarmed troops within Abkhazia, a region in Georgia, in May of 2008, which led to violence between Russian and Georgian troops and a prolonged Russian bombing campaign.
- In 2020, Chinese officials made a new claim to territory in Bhutan's east; the claim appeared to be a coercive tactic connected to efforts to resolve a long-standing border dispute.

6 Resistance Categorization

6.1 Increase in Horizontal Accountability

6.1.1 Check on Executive by Judiciary

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

Even judiciaries that lack independence can also engage in acts of resistance. Helmke argues that under certain conditions of institutional insecurity, a lack of judicial independence can motivate strategic defection on the part of judges from the government, drawing from data on the Argentine Supreme Court (Helmke 2002).

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Delegitimizing or Weakening the Judiciary** and **Reduction in Judicial Independence**, but the difference is that those categories capture attacks on or erosion of the judiciary, whereas this category captures acts of resistance by the judiciary against the executive.

Examples:

- In 2014, the court system of Botswana overturned an attempt by President Ian Khama to elect a vice president via a show of hands vote, rather than by secret ballot.
- In 2009 in Honduras, the Court of Administrative Litigation prevented President Zelaya from calling an assembly to alter the constitution.
- In 2018, Poland's top Supreme Court justice, Malgorzata Gersdorf, refused to stay home after the government purged more than thirty judges by lowering their retirement age, instead going into the Supreme Court building to work.

6.1.2 Check on Executive by Legislature

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Delegitimizing or Weakening the Legislature** and **Reduction in Legislative Oversight**. The difference is that those categories involve attacks on or erosion of the legislature by the executive, whereas this category captures acts of resistance by the legislature against executive overreach.

Examples:

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

- In 2020, the Bolivian Parliament signed into law a bill demanding that elections be held within 90 days of May 1st after the President had initially delayed elections indefinitely due to COVID

6.1.3 Check on Central Power by Subnational Units

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

Of course, not all instances of uncooperative federalism or localism is a sign of resistance against democratic erosion. In fact, some may be politically contentious to code, and we note in the dataset those cases. A historical example of this can be found in the United States's Civil Rights movement, during which some states used the rhetoric of "states' rights" to maintain segregation.

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Reducing Autonomy of Subnational Units**. The distinction is that reducing autonomy refers to erosion caused by the central government, while this category captures acts of resistance by subnational units against central authority.

Examples:

- Several states in the U.S. resisted implementing portions of the Patriot Act that conflicted with constitutional rights (Montana, Connecticut, and others).
- In 2008, opposition-led departments in Bolivia (Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando, and Tarija) organized autonomy referendums in defiance of President Evo Morales's central government. These departmental votes sought greater control over local revenues and governance. Although the Morales administration declared the referendums illegal, the results showed strong local support for autonomy.

6.1.4 Check on Central Power by Civil Service

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

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Manipulation of Civil Service or Integrity Institutions** or **Weakened Civil Service or Integrity Institutions**. The distinction is that those categories capture erosion caused by the executive against the bureaucracy, while this category captures acts of resistance by the civil service against executive overreach.
- It may also be confused with **Increase in Organized Opposition**. The distinction is that civil service resistance involves state bureaucrats acting from within the government, whereas organized opposition refers to political actors or movements external to the bureaucracy.

Example:

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

6.1.5 Transition to a Democratic Constitution

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

The institutions designed and how a constitution is drafted have a greater effect on the prospect of democratic consolidation than the act of creating a constitution itself (Munck 1994). The most democratic and sustainable constitutions forged during transitions arise from wide coalition-building and broad-based citizen input (Eisenstadt et al 2015). Transition constitutions must seek to resolve conflict and tensions between the old guard and those advocating for a democratic transition. They must also develop electoral systems that reflect citizen preferences, establish transparent legal procedures, and build durable institutions (Lowenthal and Bitar 2017). Otherwise, constitutions that appear democratic may be drafted in such a way as to facilitate a power-grab by a select group. Such instrumentalization depends on the structure of the executive branch, the strength of constitutionally mandated checks, the provision of term limits, and other similar factors (Eisenstadt et al 2015, Lowenthal and Bitar 2017).

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Democratic Facade**. The distinction is that a transition to a democratic constitution entails a genuine, inclusive effort to establish democratic institutions, whereas a democratic facade involves the adoption of institutions that merely *appear* democratic but lack substantive power.
- It may also be confused with **Revision of the Constitution**, but the distinction is that constitutional transitions involve wholesale redrafting to enable or consolidate democracy, while revisions often entail targeted changes that can erode or entrench executive power

Example:

- Following the Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, both countries drafted new constitutions. Today, Egypt remains a hybrid regime, whereas Tunisia's democracy continues to strengthen, a phenomenon that many point to as a direct result of a more deliberative, inclusive constitution-drafting process in Tunisia.

- In Zimbabwe in 2013, in a nationwide referendum, voters approved a newly amended Constitution, which turned Zimbabwe into a presidential republic; The new constitution creates term limits to prevent another Presidency like that of Robert Mugabe.

6.2 Increase in Vertical Accountability

6.2.1 Transfer of Power from Authoritarian Leaders

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

Category Distinction

- This category may be confused with **Coup or Regime Collapse**, but the distinction is that a transfer of power involves a voluntary or at least formally legal concession by the authoritarian leader, while coups or collapses occur through coercion, force, or abrupt overthrow.
- It may also be confused with **Transition to a Democratic Constitution**, but the difference is that this category focuses s**pecifically on leadership transitions, whereas constitutional transitions involve institutional redesign as the central event.**

Example:

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

6.2.2 Coalitions or Elite Pacts

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

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Check on Central Power by Civil Service** since both involve institutional or elite resistance to executive overreach. The distinction is that coalitions involve formal agreements among political elites or parties, whereas civil service checks arise from bureaucratic or administrative defiance.
- It may also be confused with **Increase in Organized Opposition**, but that category refers to mass-based opposition movements (e.g., civil society and citizen mobilization), while coalitions or pacts are elite-driven agreements to stabilize or preserve democracy.

Examples

- In 2014, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and the People's Party (PP) signed an agreement to increase transparency in an attempt to lower corruption.
- In 2021, the two largest political parties in Romania, the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the National Liberal Party (PNL), formed an alliance to counter a growing right-wing party, Union of Moldova and Romania (AUR). PSD and PNL agreed to rotate the prime minister position for 18 months each and share cabinet posts through the 2024 elections.

6.2.3 Increase in Electoral Integrity

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

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Electoral Fraud and Voter Suppression AND Systemic Reduction in Election Freedom and Fairness**, since both involve election administration and access. The distinction is that while those categories capture erosion and the institutionalization of barriers, this category refers to reforms that expand, restore, or protect electoral integrity.
- It may also be confused with **Increase in Civil Liberties**, but that category refers more broadly to expansions of freedoms like speech, association, or assembly, whereas this one specifically refers to reforms of electoral processes and institutions.

Examples:

- In December 2021 in Malaysia, constitutional amendments lowering the voting age to 18 and establishing automatic voter registration took effect (though the amendments had originally been approved by Parliament in 2019).
- In line with the provisions of the new 2010 constitution, the Kenyan government established the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission to guarantee that further elections are free and fair.

- In Honduras, the National Electoral Council guaranteed that at least 7,400 electoral observers would monitor the 2021 elections, which is nearly triple the number of observers that monitored the contested 2017 elections

6.2.4 Increase in Civic Capacity

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Increase in Civil Liberties**, but while that category refers to legal or constitutional protections for freedoms like speech, assembly, or association, this one refers specifically to institutional reforms or initiatives that expand avenues for citizen participation and civic engagement.
- It may also be confused with **Increase in Organized Opposition**, but that category focuses on opposition parties or political coalitions mobilizing to resist authoritarianism, whereas this one is about citizens and civil society organizations building capacity for sustained engagement in democratic governance.
- It may also be confused with **Nonviolent Protest**, but while that category covers spontaneous or organized demonstrations, this one emphasizes formal institutional changes that expand civic engagement beyond episodic protest.

Examples:

- In 2019 in Brazil, many researchers, activists, and members of participatory institutions formed the #OBrasilPrecisadeCoselho Campaign to protest Bolsonaro and his actions.
- In 2019 in Ghana, the Right to Information Act passed, allowing all information regarding the public sphere and governmental procedures to be accessible to all Ghanaian citizens.

6.2.5 Nonviolent Protest

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

Importantly, to be included in the dataset, protests need to be specifically linked with democracy, either because the protest is in reaction to an anti-democratic reform or to undemocratic actions like previous police repression of protesters. Protests against policies with which protestors disagree (i.e. against specific economic reforms) would not count as resistance against erosion and thus would not be included in the dataset.

Category Distinction

- This category may be confused with **Violent Protest**, but those involve physical clashes, riots, or armed confrontation, whereas this category requires explicitly nonviolent methods of resistance.
- It may also be confused with **Anti-Democratic Mobilization**, but those are mass movements aiming to undermine democracy (e.g., defending authoritarian leaders or rejecting election results), whereas nonviolent protest seeks to defend or expand democracy.
- It may also be confused with **Increase in Civic Capacity**, but that category refers to institutional reforms that expand citizen participation (like participatory budgeting), while this category refers to episodic collective mobilizations in defense of democracy.
- It may also be confused with **Increase in Organized Opposition**, but that category captures opposition parties or elites organizing to resist authoritarianism, while this category highlights citizen-led street-level mobilization.

Examples:

- In 2014, after the Regiment of Presidential Security (RPS) orchestrated a coup, mass protests forced it to apologize and reinstate the former Government of Burkina Faso.
- In Guatemala, citizens took to the streets to peacefully protest when the La Linea corruption scandal was uncovered by the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) and Attorney General Thelma Aldana.
- In 2017, 150 Serbian news outlets and advocacy groups organized a media blackout and warned of media censorship by the government.
- In Algeria in 2019, a massive wave of ongoing anti-government and pro-democracy protests known as the Hirak movement begins, initially focused on opposition to the sitting president seeking a fifth term

6.2.6 Violent Protest

Citizen-led protests against a regime may escalate and become violent. Krastev notes that, ideally, nonviolent protests and elections should give citizens an outlet outside of violence through which to voice their opposition or disapproval (Krastev 2014). However, protests resisting acts of democratic erosion or autocratic consolidation may turn violent, whether deliberately or as a declaration of desperation.

It is important to differentiate between violent acts of resistance *against* a government and violence that erupts between nonviolent protesters and state forces. A terrorist attack against a democratic government, for instance, would not be included in the category "violent protest," nor should police violence against protesters. "Violent protest" is used exclusively when the protesters themselves initiate or participate in violent acts.

As is the case with nonviolent protests, violent protests must have a specific link to democracy to be included in the dataset, meaning they are in response to anti-democratic reforms or actions. Violent protests against unpopular economic or social policies would not count as democratic resistance.

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Nonviolent Protest**, but those involve peaceful methods of contestation, while this category requires protesters themselves to engage in violent action.
- It may also be confused with **State-Conducted Violence or Abuse**, but those involve state officials repressing protesters, not protesters using violence.

- It may also be confused with **Anti-Democratic Mobilization**, but those are protests mobilized to undermine democracy (e.g., rejecting elections, supporting authoritarian leaders), whereas this category refers to violence aimed at resisting erosion.
- It may also be confused with **Increase in Civic Capacity**, but that involves institutional expansion of citizen participation, while this category focuses on episodic, violent mobilization in defense of democracy.

- It may also be confused with **Increase in Organized Opposition**, but that captures the role of **parties or elites**, not citizen-led protests.

Examples:

- In 2017, protesters in Asuncion, Paraguay entered the Congress building and set it on fire in response to a proposed bill to lift presidential term limits.
- In Bolivia in 2018, Following the election of President Evo Morales for a fourth term and claims of election fraud violent protests erupted in La Paz leaving two dead
- In 2011 in Senegal, President Abdoulaye Wade had wanted to reduce the proportion of votes needed to win a presidential election, and avoid a run-off, from more than 50% to 25%. He had also wanted to create an elected post of vice-president. The proposals sparked the most violent protests of Mr. Wade's rule, ultimately leading to the draft legislation being withdrawn.

6.2.7 Increase in Media Protection or Media Liberalization

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

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may also be confused with **Increase in Civil Liberties**, but that is a broader expansion of rights (speech, assembly, association) whereas this category focuses specifically on protections and liberalization of the media sector and journalists.
- This category may be confused with **Media Repression**, but that involves restricting or attacking the press, whereas this category refers to state actions that expand protections for media.
- It may also be confused with **State-Controlled Media**, which concerns governments using their own media outlets for propaganda, while this category focuses on liberalization and greater independence.

Examples:

- In 2001, The Croatian News Agency Act and Croatian Radio Television Act relinquished state control of the news media and established Hina, the publicly held Croatian News Agency, as an independent organization.
- In 2018 in Sierra Leone, newly elected President Maada Bio repealed criminal and sedition laws instituted by his predecessor in order to arrest critical journalists and politicians.

6.2.8 Increase in Organized Opposition

The existence of organized political opposition is a prerequisite for a functional democracy. Therefore, the emergence of organized opposition in closed autocracies with very little political competition, as well as the strengthening of opposition parties in eroding democracies should both be considered a sign of democratic resistance. If members of a ruling party defect or openly challenge the leader, that should also be included here.

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Check on Central Power by Civil Service**, but that category involves bureaucratic resistance, whereas this one requires political organization by opposition parties or actors.
- It may also be confused with **Increase in Civic Capacity**, but civic capacity refers to broad-based civil society engagement, not organized party opposition.

- It may also be confused with **Coalitions or Elite Pacts**, but those involve negotiated agreements among elites to share power, rather than opposition parties independently organizing against incumbents.

Examples:

- In Russia, RUDP Yabloko, a socially liberal political organization that was originally established to promote free markets and better relations with the West after the fall of the Soviet Union, became a political party in 2001 and won four seats in the State Duma in 2003.
- The leading opposition party in Zimbabwe, Citizens' Coalition for Change (CCC), won 19 out of 28 parliamentary seats in the March 2022 parliamentary by-elections.
- Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed legalized previously banned opposition parties in the wake of his accession to power and allowed them to compete in elections and hold power.
- The 2011 Egyptian Revolution was led by increasingly organized opposition groups that ultimately ousted President Hosni Mubarak from power which he had held for 30 years.
- To challenge President Alexander Lukashenko in the 2020 Belarusian elections, the opposition organized effectively and likely won the election if not for blatant electoral fraud on the part of Lukashenko.

6.2.9 Increase in Civil Liberties

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

Category Distinction:

- It may also be confused with **Increase in Media Protection or Media Liberalization**, but that category focuses specifically on protections for the press, while this category is broader and covers rights of association, expression, mobility, and equality.
- It may also be confused with **Increase in Civic Capacity**, but that category focuses on strengthening the ability of civic groups to organize collectively, whereas this one captures reforms that expand individual rights and freedoms.

- This category may be confused with **Curtailed Civil Liberties**, but that category involves the restriction or repression of rights, whereas this one refers to their expansion.

Examples:

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

6.3 Other

6.3.1 Pressure from Outside Actor

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

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **External Influence or Invasion**, but that category captures when foreign states intervene in ways that *reduce* local independence or stability, often enabling erosion. By contrast, Pressure from Outside Actor involves external influence applied *against* erosion or *for* democracy.
- It may also be confused with **Civil War/Revolution** or **Non-State Violence**, but those involve destabilizing pressures from armed actors, whereas this category refers to peaceful external pressure designed to improve democratic compliance.

Examples:

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

6.3.2 Exit of People or Capital Flight

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

Category Distinction:

- Finally, it may be confused with **Forced/Coerced Exile**, but that category refers to targeted exile of individuals (e.g., opposition leaders or elites) used deliberately by the regime. Exit of People or Capital Flight instead refers to mass or systemic exit by ordinary citizens or capital holders as a form of resistance pressure.
- This category may be confused with **Refugee Crisis**, but that category emphasizes the *strain on receiving countries* and how inflows may destabilize neighboring democracies. By contrast, Exit of People or Capital Flight focuses on the *act of departure from the repressive regime itself* as a form of resistance pressure.
- It may also be confused with **Civil War/Revolution**, since people also flee during armed conflict, but here the defining feature is exit driven by repression and erosion of democratic space, not general violence or war.

- It may also be confused with **Curtailed Civil Liberties**, since restrictions on freedoms often drive exit, but Exit of People or Capital Flight captures the act of leaving rather than the restriction itself.

Examples:

- More and more refugees began leaving Eritrea due to the repressive government and poverty of the country, reaching a peak in late 2014.
- In 2018, over 60,000 Nicaraguans fled the country over the course of one year as a result of ongoing political and social unrest.

6.3.3 State Attempts at Democratization or to Prevent Backsliding

Particular actions by the state may have the consequence of preventing democratic backsliding, though that may not be the expressed intent. This category should be used to classify actions taken by the state to deliberately prevent backsliding that do not fall under existing categories. This can include the creation of programs to resolve long standing ethnic, political, or social divides through the reversal of discriminatory statutes (e.g. legally mandated racial or ethnic segregation, or the legal distinction of citizens by caste) or through truth and reconciliation commissions. State attempts to prevent backsliding can also take the form of reversing previous policies that allowed for executive aggrandizement or weakened the autonomy of branches of government. When a state prosecutes corruption or holds current and former officials accountable, it can also represent an effort to prevent further backsliding.

Category Distinction:

- This category may be confused with **Increase in Civil Liberties**, but that category captures reforms that expand freedoms for citizens in the social and political sphere. State Attempts at Democratization is broader, including institutional reforms that reinforce checks and balances or reverse executive aggrandizement.
- It may also be confused with **Increase in Electoral Integrity**, but that category specifically captures reforms to elections, such as lowering barriers to vote or enhancing monitoring. State Attempts at Democratization includes non-electoral reforms as well, such as anti-corruption prosecutions or truth commissions.
- It may also be confused with **Increase in Media Protection or Media Liberalization**, which refers specifically to the protection of independent media. By contrast, State Attempts at Democratization encompasses reforms across a wider set of institutions.

- It may also be confused with **Increase in Civic Capacity**, which involves empowering civil society and grassroots organizations. State Attempts at Democratization differs in that it focuses on top-down reforms initiated by the state.
- It may also be confused with **Transition to a Democratic Constitution**, but that category applies only when a state creates a new democratic constitution. State Attempts at Democratization captures other reforms that strengthen democracy without fully rewriting the constitutional order.

Examples:

- Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed legalized previously banned opposition parties and released thousands of political prisoners, seemingly helping Ethiopia enter a new stage of democratization.
- Newly inaugurated Syrian President Bashar al-Assad released 600 political prisoners and closed the Mezze prison.
- In Malaysia's 2018 elections, the Barisan Nasional coalition lost power to Pakatan Harapan, ending UMNO's 61-year reign. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's new government embarked on a series of democratic reforms, including strengthening oversight bodies and curbing corruption.

7 Actors and Targets

7.1 Actor and Target (Examples)

Central Level

- Head of State (President, Prime Minister, King/Queen)
- Cabinet Member/s (Secretary of State, Minister of Finance)
- Federal elected official (Senator, Congresswoman)
- National legislature (Congress, Senate, House, Deputies, etc.)
- Opposition/Opposition Leaders
- The Police (Federal, local)
- The Armed Forces (Military, Navy, National Guard, etc.)
- The Judiciary
- The Government

- The Ruling Party
- Candidate for federal office (Presidential or legislative candidates)
- Former federal elected official (Former Presidents or Prime Ministers)
- Non-elected federal officials or staff (from agencies, political appointees, etc.)
- Highest court, or justice on highest court (Supreme Court justice)
- Appellate court, or judge on court (Judges or Magistrates)
- District or federal lower court, or judge on court (District Court)
- Watchdog (Electoral Institutes)

State/Local Level

- State/provincial elected official (Governors, state legislators)
- Local/city/town/county/municipal elected official (Mayors)
- State legislature (self-explanatory)
- Candidate for state/provincial office (Gubernatorial candidate)
- Candidate for local/city/town/county/municipal office (Municipal candidate)
- Former state/provincial elected official (Former governors)
- Former local/city/town/county/municipal elected official (Former mayors)
- State or local-level campaign (for a referendum, etc.)
- Non-elected state/provincial or local/city/town/county/municipal official or staff (Local cabinets and agencies)
- State/province high court, or judge on court (State Court)
- State/province/local lower court, or judge on court (Local Court)
- Local law-making body (self-explanatory)

Civil Society

- Social movement/protest group, or individual activists/movement's leader/s (BLM, Occupy Wall Street)
- Interest group/PAC/union (NRA)
- Universities (Colleges, Professors, Students, etc.)
- Citizens/voters/the public, not organized through interest or other group (Electorate)
- Non-elected public or cultural figure (media commentator, religious leader, actress)
- Media organizations (The New York Times, CNN, Fox News)
- Journalist (Individual or a collective)
- Social Media platforms (Meta, X, TikTok)
- Domestic NGOs (ACLU, Planned Parenthood)
- Businessman/businesswoman (or a collective)
- Domestic corporations (With primordial presence in the country you are coding)

- Civil society (organization, or a collective of them)
- Migrants/refugees (incoming, in transit, outgoing, or returning)
- Minority Group
- Union leader (UAW leader/s)
- Criminal organizations (Cartels, mafias)
- Domestic terrorist, or terrorist organization (KKK)
- Religious institutions (Catholic Church)

External Actors

- Foreign leader (Presidents, Prime Ministers, Kings/Queens)
- Foreign country (or a set of countries)
- International/intergovernmental organization (UN, World Bank, EU)
- Multinational corporations (Apple, Coca-Cola, Amazon, P&G)
- Foreign terrorist, or terrorist organization (Al Qaeda, ISIS)
- Other

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