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Keeping the Democratic Façade: Contemporary Autocratization as a Game of Deception

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Keeping the Democratic Façade:

Contemporary Autocratization as a Game of Deception[*]

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Abstract

Less than thirty years after Fukuyama and others declared liberal democracy's eternal dominance, a third wave of autocratization is manifest. Gradual declines of democratic regime attributes characterize contemporary autocratization. Yet, we lack the appropriate conceptual and empirical tools to diagnose and compare such elusive processes. Addressing that gap, this paper provides the first comprehensive empirical overview of all autocratization episodes from 1900 to today based on data from the Varieties of Democracy Project (V-Dem). We demonstrate that a third wave of autocratization is indeed unfolding. It mainly affects democracies with gradual setbacks under a legal façade. While this is a cause for concern, the historical perspective presented in this paper shows that panic is not warranted: the current declines are relatively mild and the global share of democratic countries remains close to its all-time high. As it was premature to announce the "end of history" in 1992, it is premature to proclaim the "end of democracy" now.

Introduction

The decline of democratic regime attributes – autocratization – has emerged as a conspicuous global challenge. Democratic setbacks in countries as diverse as Brazil, Burundi, Hungary, Russia, Serbia, and Turkey have sparked a new generation of studies on autocratization.[1]

Two key issues are not yet settled in this reinvigorated field. First, scholars agree that contemporary democracies tend to erode gradually and under legal disguise (e.g. Bermeo 2016, Runciman 2018). Democratic breakdowns used to be rather sudden events – for instance military coups – and relatively easy to identify empirically (Linz 1978). Now, multi-party regimes slowly become less meaningful in practice (Lührmann et al. 2018) making it is increasingly difficult to pin-point the end of democracy. Yet, in face of this emerging consensus we lack the appropriate conceptual and empirical tools to systematically analyze such obscure processes.

The second key issue, partly a product of the first, is that analysts disagree about how momentous the current wave of autocratization is. Some draw parallels to the breakdown of democracies in the 1930s and the rise of anti-democratic demagogues (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2017, Snyder 2017). Others maintain that the world is still more democratic (Mechkova et al. 2017), developed (Runciman 2018) and emancipated (Norris 2017) than ever during the 20st century. How wide and deep does the current autocratization trend cut?

This paper addresses these gaps with a three-pronged strategy. First, it provides a definition autocratization as substantial de-facto decline of core institutional requirements for electoral democracy.[2] This notion is more encompassing than the frequently used term democratic backsliding, which suggests an involuntary reversal back to historical precedents.

Second, this paper offers a new type of operationalization that in a systematic fashion captures the conceptual meaning of autocratization as episodes of meaningful change based on data from the Varieties of Democracy Project (V-Dem). This new measure has three major advantages: It measures what we actually want to study; it is sensitive to changes in the de-facto implementation of democratic rules; and it is nuanced enough to also capture gradual autocratization processes and thus avoid biasing the sample towards fast-moving changes.

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[1] See for example Altman and Perez-Liñan 2017, Bermeo 2016, Cassini and Tomini 2018, Coppedge 2017, Diamond 2015, Haggard and Kaufmann 2016, Levitsky and Ziblatt 2017, Lührmann et al. 2018, Mounk 2018, Runciman 2018, Snyder 2017, Wagemann and Tomini 2017 and Waldner and Lust 2018.

[2] Our notion of democracy is based on Dahl's (1971, 1998) famous conceptualization of electoral democracy as 'polyarchy', namely clean elections, freedom of association, universal suffrage, an elected executive, as well as freedom of expression and alternative sources of information.

Third, this paper employs the new measure in a systematic study that adds a historical perspective on contemporary autocratization. The resultant findings are mixed. On the one hand, we are the first to show that a "third wave of autocratization" affecting an unprecedented high number of democracies is under way. This wave unfolds slow and piecemeal making it hard to evidence. Ruling elites shy away from sudden, drastic moves to autocracy and continue to mimic democratic institutions while gradually eroding their functions. This suggests we should heed the call of alarm issued by some scholars.

On the other hand, the evidence here also show that we still live in a democratic era with more than half of all countries qualifying as democratic. And, most episodes of contemporary autocratization are not only slower, but also much slighter than their historical cousins, as of yet. Thus, countries affected remain more democratic than their equivalents hit by earlier waves of autocratization.

Below, we first pursue a review of the literature followed by a reconceptualization of autocratization with accompanying operationalization, description of data, and coding procedures. The fourth section presents a series of descriptive analyses of the three waves of autocratization, followed by a section investigating types of democracy recessions. The final section introduces a new metric – the rate of autocratization – as an indicator for the pace of such processes. We conclude with a summary of the findings and avenues for future research.

I.   State of the Art at Present

Many have noted that the optimism spurred by the force of the third wave of democratization (Huntington 1992) was premature, including Fukuyama's (1992) relegation of the reverse process - autocratization – to the history books. A plethora of autocracies defied the trend (Svolik 2012) or made some half-hearted reforms while remaining in the grey zone between democracy and autocracy (Schedler 2013; Diamond 2002).

Yet, when assessments about "freedom in retreat" (Freedom House 2008) or "democratic rollback" (Diamond 2008) emerged, they were frequently challenged. At the time, global measures of democracy had merely plateaued and established democracies did not exhibit any serious problems (Merkel 2010, Levitsky and Way 2015). Now evidence is mounting that a global reversal is challenging a series of established democracies, including the United States who was downgraded by Freedom House in 2018. Substantial autocratization have been recorded over the last ten years in countries as diverse as Hungary, India, Russia, Turkey, and Venezuela (Lührmann et al. 2018). An increasingly bleak picture is emerging on the global state of democracy (Diamond

2015; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Kurlantzick 2013), even if some maintain that the achievements of the third wave of democratization are still visible (Mechkova et al. 2017).

In view of this, Waldner and Lust (2018: 14) conclude that "[t]he study of [democratic] backsliding is an important new research frontier". A series of new studies on autocratization seems to have generated an emerging consensus on one important insight: the process of autocratization seems to have changed. Bermeo (2016: 6) for example suggests a decline of the "most blatant forms of backsliding" – such as military coups and election day vote fraud. Conversely, more clandestine ways of autocratization – harassment of the opposition, subversion of horizontal accountability – are on the rise (Bermeo 2016:14; Diamond 2015). Svolik (2015) similarly argues that the risk of military coups has declined over time in new democracies, while the risk of autogolpes[3] remains. Mechkova et al. (2017) showed that in the recent period between 2006 and 2016 autocratization mainly maimed aspects such as media freedom and the space for civil society leaving the institutions of multiparty elections in place. Coppedge (2017) singled out the gradual concentration of power in the executive as a key contemporary pattern of autocratization – next to what he calls the more "classical" path of intensified repression. "Executive aggrandizement" is the term Bermeo (2016: 10) uses for this process.

While the literature thus agrees that the process of autocratization has changed; it does not yet offer a systematic way of measuring the new mode of autocratization. The new contributions build on case examples (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018), statistics on selected indicators of gradual autocratization – i.e., military coups and electoral fraud (Bermeo 2016), opinion polls (Mounk 2018) or on changes in quantitative measures over a set time period (Diamond 2015, Lührmann et al. 2018). Most existing comparative studies on the causes of autocratization (Svolik 2008, Bernhard et al. 2001, Ulfelder and Lustik 2007, Przeworski et al. 2000) as well as descriptive overviews (Merkel 2010, Erdmann 2011, Levitsky and Way 2015) are also biased in that they include only cases of complete breakdown of democracies. Such binary approaches not only fail to capture the often protracted, gradual and opaque processes of contemporary regime change (Luedders and Lust 2018), but also exclude important variations: autocratization in democracies that do not (yet?) lead to complete breakdown (e.g. Hungary) and reversals in electoral autocracies that never became democracies (e.g. Sudan).

This is important because the archetypical type of dramatic reversals to closed autocracy is becoming so rare – as are closed autocracies. While about half of all countries were closed

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[3] Autogolpes are "transitions to authoritarianism caused by the incumbent chief executive" (Przeworski et al. 2000: 21).

autocracies in 1980 but by 2017, they only make up 12 percent of regimes in the world.[4] Contemporary autocrats have mastered the art of subverting electoral standards without breaking their democratic façade completely (Schedler 2013; Levitsky and Way 2010). In effect, as of 2017 a majority of countries still qualify as democracies (56 percent) and the most common form of dictatorship (32 percent) are the electoral autocracies (Lührmann et al. 2018: 68). This contemporary dominance of multi-party electoral regimes made many analysts posit that democracy as a global norm after the end of the Cold War (Norris 2013; Hyde 2011) continues to shape expectations and behavior even of autocrats (Diamond 2018).

In this global context, it does not surprise that sudden reversals to authoritarianism have grown out of fashion, because they typically involve the abolishment multi-party elections in a coup. Such more visible forms of democratic norm violations carry high legitimacy cost (Schedler 2013). Obviously "stolen" elections have triggered mass protests leading up to the color revolutions (Bunce and Wolchik 2010, Thompson and Kuntz 2009). Likewise, the international community often sanctions political leaders who explicitly disrespect electoral results, and international aid is often conditioned on a country holding multi-party elections (Kim and Kroeger 2017). For instance, after the Gambian elections in 2016, president Jammeh's refusal to accepted defeat was quickly met with a military intervention from neighboring countries – forcing him into exile.[5] The same seem to apply for military coups – which might explain the sharp drop of coups in recent decades (Bermeo 2016).

More difficult to pinpoint as a clear violation of democratic standards, a transition to electoral authoritarianism provides fewer opportunities for domestic and international opposition. Electoral autocrats secure their competitive advantage through subtler tactic such as censoring and harassing the media, restricting civil society and political parties and undermining the autonomy of election management bodies. Aspiring autocrats have been shown to learn from each other (Hall and Ambrosio 2017) and are borrowing tactics perceived to be less risky than abolishing multi-party elections altogether.

Thus, both prior literature on autocratization as well as the global rise of multiparty elections make it plausible that the current wave of autocratization unfolds in a more clandestine and gradual fashion than its historical precedents.

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[4] Closed autocracies are typically defined in the literature as regimes where the chief executive is not subjected to *de jure* multiparty elections. Thus, this category includes monarchies, military regimes, as well as one-party states.
[5] See New York Times. 2017. 'As Gambia's Yahya Jammeh Entered Exile, Plane Stuffed with Riches Followed.' https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/23/world/africa/yahya-jammeh-gambia-exile.html (access 30 Mar 2018).

This leads to the next question: If autocratization occurs more gradual does this also reduce the magnitude of change? Bermeo (2016: 17) suggests it does. Others entertain more pessimism in books titled for instance "How democracy dies" (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2017) and "How democracy ends" (Runciman 2018). Yet, the recent literature on autocratization does not offer fine-grained, systematic empirical comparisons on this issue either.

Thus, we find important contributions and emerging propositions in the extant literature on contemporary autocratization. This paper seeks to fill three main gaps. First, a comprehensive conceptualization of autocratization with an accompanying operationalization with high validity is clearly needed to make future findings comparable. Second, we lack a comprehensive empirical analysis diagnosing contemporary autocratization in historical perspective: (i) its extent and which types of regimes are mostly affected compared to previous waves; (ii) the nature of how it is enacted by rulers in comparative perspective; and (iii) its pace and magnitude of change. This paper seeks to fill these gaps.

II. What Is, and Is Not, Autocratization?

Pace democratization, there are two seemingly opposed understandings of autocratization, similar to the debate about whether democratization should be understood as a difference in kind (countries moving across a qualitative threshold; see Przeworski et al., 2000), or in degree (gradual moves away from pure dictatorship; see Collier and Adcock 1999, Lindberg 2006, 24-27). We now face a similar *condo durum* with three commonly used terms for varying degrees of differences in kind, of moving away from democracy: backsliding, breakdown of democracy, and autocratization.[6]

We suggest that is preferable to conceptualize autocratization – the antipode of democratization – as a matter of degree that can occur both in democracies and autocracies. Democracies can lose democratic traits to varying degrees without fully, and long before breaking down. For instance, it is still an open question if Orbán's model of "illiberal democracy" in Hungary will transmute into authoritarianism. And non-democratic regimes can be placed on a long spectrum ranging from closed autocracies – such as North Korea or Eritrea – to electoral autocracies with varying degrees of closeness to democracy - such as Nigeria before the 2015

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[6] While these are the most commonly used terms, it is important to note that others exist as well such as "democratic erosion" (Coppedge 2017), "de-democratization" (Tilly 2003), "democratic recession" (Diamond 2015) or "closing space" (Carothers and Brechenmacher 2014). For a more extensive list of terms used in the debate see Cassani and Tomini (2018: 4).

elections. Thus, even most autocracies harbor some democratic regime traits to different degrees (e.g. somewhat competitive, but far from fully free and fair elections) and can lose them, such as the 1989 military coup in Sudan when Omar Al-Bashir replaced an electoral autocracy with one of Africa's worst closed dictatorships.

The classic literature (e.g. Linz 1979) focuses on the *breakdown* of democracies even if some also identified gradual erosion of democracy in this earlier period (Przeworski et al. 2000). Sudden transitions dominated the moves away from democracy in the 1960s and 1970s making it a proper label for moves away from democracy at the time. However, the concept of "breakdown" is useful only for a subset of possible episodes of autocratization. First, it requires a crisp approach to the difference between democracy and dictatorship to enable the identification of the point of breakdown. That excludes studies of the protracted undermining of democratic institutions encapsulated by *autogolpe* and unfinished degeneration of qualities in democracies, as well as the waning away of partial democratic qualities in electoral authoritarian regimes. This is particularly problematic for the contemporary period when instances of *sudden* autocratization – coups d'état for instance – are rare.

Some scholars have suggested *democratic backsliding* to denote the diminishing of democratic traits. For example, Bermeo (2016: 5) defines backsliding as "state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain an existing democracy." Waldner and Lust (2018: 5.3) understand backsliding as a "deterioration of entails a deterioration of qualities associated with democratic governance, within *any* regime" (emphasis added). While we are sympathetic to Waldner and Lust's move away from an exclusive focus on democracies, we find the use of term *backsliding* problematic for three reasons: First, *democratic* backsliding implies a decline "in terms of" democracy and thus a conceptual extension beyond the democratic regime spectrum would border to conceptual stretching (Sartori 1970). From our point of view, an already autocratic country cannot undergo "democratic" backsliding into a deeper dictatorship. Second, the term suggests that regimes slide "back" to where they were before whereas in reality they may develop in a new direction, to a different form of authoritarianism for example (Runciman 2018: 3). Finally, "sliding" makes it sound like an involuntary, unconscious process, which does not do justice to conscious actions political actors take in order to change a regime. It simply invokes the wrong kind of notion about the process.

Third, we suggest that the overarching, or superior in Sartori's terms (1970), concept is *autocratization*. Semantically, it signals that we study the opposite of democratization, thus

describing "any move away from [full] democracy" (Lindberg 2009: 12).[7] As an overarching concept autocratization covers both sudden breakdowns of democracy *á la* Linz and gradual processes within and outside of democratic regimes where democratic traits decline - resulting in less democratic, or more autocratic, situations (Figure 1). This conceptualization enables us to study both the pace and the methods of bringing a regime closer to a closed dictatorship, while keeping the distinction between democratic recessions starting in democracies, democratic breakdowns, and further consolidation of already authoritarian regimes.

To provide comprehensive definition of autocratization processes, we use the term democratic recession to denote autocratization processes taking place in democracies, democratic breakdown to capture when a democracy turns into an autocracy, and autocratic consolidation as designation for gradual declines of democratic traits in already authoritarian situations.

Figure 1. **Autocratization as Democratization in Reverse**
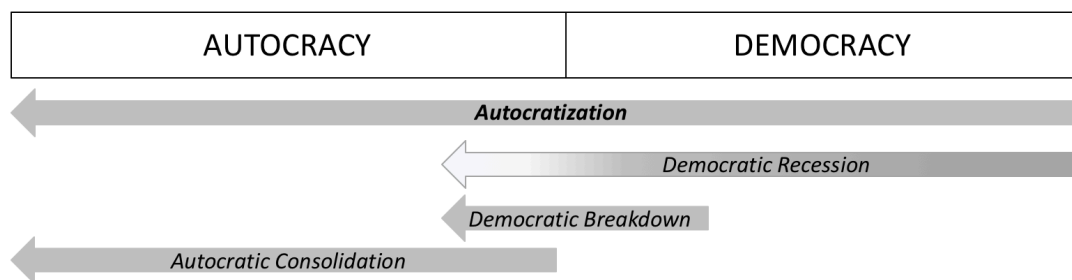
III. Operationalization and Data

Contemporary political science puts a heavy emphasis on identification of causal factors, and some distrust any analysis based on observational data. However, we cannot randomly assign either autocratization nor its potential causes to countries. Whether we like it or not, we must rely on observational data to depict, understand, and explain the current (worrying) trend of autocratization. Taking one step back, any causal analysis is predicated on an accurate description of the outcome: how do we know a autocratization process when we see it? What are the more useful ways to decipher the dynamics and depict patterns, so as to facilitate descriptive inferences?

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[7] Cassani and Tomini (2018) define autocratization *positively* as a "process of regime change towards autocracy that makes politics increasingly exclusive and monopolistic, and political power increasingly repressive and arbitrary." This definition differs from our approach to think about autocratization *negatively* - as a move away from democracy. We prefer our approach for two reasons. First, it is in-line with the common understanding of autocracy as non-democracy (e.g. Schedler 2013). Second, our approach allows us to understand autocratization and democratization as mutually exclusive, which allows us to operationalize them unambiguously.

While there is relatively satisfactory data on sudden breakdowns – for instance on military coups (Powell and Thyne 2011) and dichotomous measures focusing on transitions from democracy to autocracy recorded in extant datasets (e.g. Bernhard et al. 2001; Haggard and Kaufmann 2016), we have lacked sufficiently nuanced yet systematic cross-national, times-series data on various aspects of regimes to detail incremental autocratization processes.

This paper presents a novel approach identifying autocratization *episodes* – connected periods of time with a substantial decline in democratic regime traits. We use V-Dem's data (Coppedge et al. 2017a, v7.1) on 178 countries from 1900 to the end of 2016, or 17,604 country-years.[8] To identify autocratization episodes, we rely on the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI, *v2x_polyarchy*). The EDI captures to what extend regimes achieve the core institutional requirements in Dahl's (1971, 1998) famous conceptualization of electoral democracy as 'polyarchy' (Teorell et al. 2018). For present purposes, V-Dem's EDI has four key advantages. First, V-Dem data provides vast temporal and geographical coverage with data reaching back to 1900. Second, the EDI reflects how democratic a political regime is *de-facto* beyond the mere *de-jure* presence of political institutions. And, it has a strong theoretical foundation in regime attributes that Dahl has identified as core requirements for an electoral democracy.[9] Finally, as a continuous index of de-facto levels of democracy it is sensitive to gradual and slow-moving autocratization processes.

The EDI runs on a continuous scale from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating a more democratic dispensation. We operationalize *autocratization* as a substantial decline on the EDI (within one year or over a connected time period). A decline is *substantial* if it amounts to drop of 0.1 or more on the EDI. The choice of cut-off point on a continuous index is naturally arbitrary but a change of 10% seems a reasonable and intuitive choice for the following reasons. This relatively demanding cut-off point of 0.1 minimizes the risk of measurement error driving the results since it requires more of an agreement among V-Dem coders that declines occurred among the 40 components of the EDI to achieve this magnitude of difference on the EDI scale.[10] The

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[8] Approximately half of the indicators in the V-Dem dataset are based on factual information from official documents such as constitutions. The remainder consists of expert assessments on topics like the quality of elections and *de facto* compliance with constitutional standards. On such issues, typically five experts provide ratings for the country, thematic area and time period for which they are specialists (Coppedge et al 2017b).

[9] Lührmann et al. (2018) use V-Dem's Liberal Democracy Index to identify democratic declines. The advantage of this alternative strategy is that it provides an early warning tool because liberal aspects of democracy often are the first to erode (see Coppedge 2017). However, the aim of this paper is different. Namely, we want to provide a heuristic device, which facilitates the analysis of questions such as how liberal constraints influence the likelihood of autocratization. Therefore, we need to operationalize autocratization in a way that is parsimonious and does not include liberal aspects of democracy.

[10] V-Dem aggregates the expert assessments using Bayesian IRT model (Pemstein et al. 2017, Marquardt and Pemstein 2017). This model also provides an estimate of uncertainty reflecting mainly how much experts disagree. Almost all of the declines of 0.1 or more are visible even after considering this uncertainty estimate. The only exception are two episodes in Finland (1939-1940) and Niger (2013-2016), where the V-Dem data indicated a low level of certainty about

cut-off point should also be high enough to rule out inconsequential changes but low enough to capture substantial yet incremental changes that do not amount to a full breakdown. A typical example would be the series of declines in democratic qualities in Hungary from 2006 to 2016 adding up to drop of the EDI of 0.11. In appendix A4, we demonstrate the robustness of the main findings of this paper to a higher cut-off point.

Episodes of autocratization have a start and an end. We proceed in two steps to identify such episodes. First, we identify potential autocratization episodes, which are adverse regime change of any magnitude. Second, we exclude all minor episodes with an overall change of less than 10% of the EDI.

To identify all potential episodes, we devise a set of coding rules for start, continuation, and end points. A potential autocratization episode starts with a decline on the EDI of 0.01 points or more, from one year to the next. We chose this relatively low threshold in order to catch the very beginning of incremental autocratization episodes.[11] Second, the potential episode continues as long as there is a continued decline. We allow a potential episode to contain up to three years of stagnation (no further decline of 0.01 points on the EDI) in order to reflect the concept of slow-moving processes that can move in fits and starts with a careful autocrat at the helm. The potential autocratization period ends when there are no further declines on the EDI of 0.01 or more over four years, or if the EDI increases by 0.02 points or more during one of those years since the latter would indicate a potential democratization episode.[12]

Finally, we calculate the total magnitude of change from the year before the start of an episode to the end, and we only include as manifest autocratization episodes those which add up to a change of at least 0.1 on the EDI scale.[13] These coding rules ensure that periods of some fits and starts in what is often a protracted and messy process, are counted as one episode while at the same time minimizing the risk that measurement error plays a role in determining when an episode starts or finishes. Yet, Appendix A4 demonstrates that the main findings of this paper are robust to modifications of the coding rules.

To illustrate the validity of the coding rules, consider ongoing autocratization in Turkey. Our coding rules date the beginning of the shrinking of democratic space in Turkey to 2005 with

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the declines. However, we cross-checked both cases with qualitative references and are confident that the changes should be considered as autocratization episodes.

[11] Robustness checks with different thresholds yield similar results in regression analysis (see Appendix A4).

[12] A lower threshold of 0.01 for ending episodes would for instance lead to the contemporary episode in Russia to be limited to the years 2000-2011, even though already the prior years and the years after 2011 saw major cumulative declines (-.026 between 1994 and 1999 and -0.528 from 2011-2016). Our current rules capture this protracted process as spanning from 1994-2016.

[13] An alternative option would have been to use a rolling five-year average change on the EDI as for instance Coppedge (2017) has done. However, our strategy gives us a precise start or end point of more creeping processes.

a small decline of -0.019 in the V-Dem EDI; additional gradual declines in subsequent years and steep annual declines from 2013 onwards (see Figure D1 in the Appendix).[14] Changing the threshold for the start of autocratization episodes to -0.02 would have moved the starting year to 2011. The qualitative case literature evidence that the gradual autocratization in Turkey started in 2005, or even earlier. Essen and Gumuscu (2016: 1590) claim that the Freedom and Justice Party (AKP) started to use autocratic tactics such as intimating journalists immediately after its ascend to power in 2002. Others suggest that the Turkish government mainly pursued a democratic reform agenda in order to gain EU membership between 2002 to 2005 (Kubiek 2011). In 2005, this emphasis gradually started to change when the EU turned its focus from verbal commitments to the actual implementation of political reforms (Kubiek 2011: 918ff). Democratic reforms stalled and political rights violations intensified, such as the police brutality against a peaceful march on International Women's Day and the controversial trail against the writer Orhan Pamuk.[15] The decline of democratic traits reflected in critical EU reports in 2008 and 2009 (Kubiek 2011: 919). For many observers, the crack-down against civil society groups, media peaceful protesters in relationship to Istanbul's Gezi Park protests in 2013 was a clear indication that Turkey is on the pathway to autocracy (Essen and Gumuscu 2016; Bashirow and Lancaster 2018). Admittedly, it is difficult to precisely pin-point when autocratization started due to the gradual nature and opacity of the processes. However, much points to 2005 as the year when the negative developments started to supersede democratic process, lending support to our operationalization strategy based on V-Dem data.

For some analyses, one obviously needs a clear-cut distinction between democracies and autocracies. Following Lührmann et al. (2018), we define countries as *democracies* if they hold free and fair and de-facto multiparty elections, and achieve at least a minimal level of institutional guarantees captured by the EDI, with a theoretically driven operationalization.

IV. Diagnosing Autocratization from 1900 to 2016

Here we present the first ever comprehensive identification of the 202 autocratization episodes taking place in 108 countries from 1900 to 2016 (Table A1 in the Appendix) leaving only 67 states unaffected (Table A2 in the Appendix).[16] Seven countries experienced autocratization solely due

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[14] Between 2004 and 2012 the EDI drops from 0.69 to 0.57 (-0.11 over eight years) and in 2016 it reaches the low-point of 0.34 (-0.16 over four years since 2012).
[15] See Kubiek (2011: 918ff) and Human Rights Watch. 2006. https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2006/country-chapters/turkey.
[16] This count includes only countries still in existence in 2016.

to foreign invasion during the two World Wars.[17] Thus, 74 countries never autocratized in their history without being subjugated by a foreign power but this count includes 27 countries classified as autocracies in 2016 such as North Korea and Angola who seem to be caught in an "autocracy trap" and due to the "floor effect" never had much possibility to become worse. The remaining 47 "non-autocratizers" are classified as democracies in 2016. This group consists mainly of countries with a long democratic history, such as Sweden and Switzerland, or that democratized recently, such as Bhutan and Namibia.

Roughly two-thirds the autocratization episodes (*N*=140, 69 percent) took place in already authoritarian states. Noteworthy are the many (57) episodes of autocratization in Africa, most of which occurred in electoral autocracies where autocratization dissipated initial democratic gains. For instance, three autocratization episodes in Sudan (1958-1959; 1969; 1989-1990) followed military coups disposing presidents elected in less-than perfect elections.

About a third of all autocratization episodes (*N*=62) episodes started under a democratic dispensation. Almost all of the latter (*N*=53, 85 percent) led to the country turning into an autocracy. Only nine of the autocratization episodes affecting democracies have been deflected to preserve democracy. Yet, three of these nine episodes were ongoing in 2016 and the eventual outcome is unknown: Moldova, Poland, and Brazil. This should give us great pause about specter of the current third wave of autocratization. Very few episodes of autocratization starting in democracies have ever been stopped before countries become autocracies.

The third wave of autocratization is real and endangers more democracies.

Huntington famous identification of three democratization waves was accompanied by two reverse waves, the first from 1922 to 1942 and a second from 1960 to 1975 decimating the number of democracies (Huntington 1992). Our new measure of autocratization episodes picks up these two reverse waves and clearly shows that a third wave of autocratization is now manifest (Figure 2).[18] The thick black line represents the share of countries that were affected by autocratization each year. The green and blue-dashed lines indicate how many of these were democracies and autocracies, respectively when the episode began. There were 40 autocratization episodes starting

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[17] Albania, Romania, Belgium, Denmark, France, Netherlands and Norway.

[18] Some scholars (see Doorenspleet 2000) posit that the three -wave metaphor is an artefact of newly independent countries appearing in the sample. In the V-Dem data colonies are include as separate observations, thus such concerns apply to a lesser extent than for other datasets. Nevertheless, following Doorenspleet's suggestions we show that the three reverse waves are also manifest when basing the graphical analysis on the total number of observations and not on the share of countries (Figure AC.2; Appendix AC). Others distinguish between a third and fourth wave of democratization (Mc Faul 2002). However, the more common approach is the distinction in three waves of democratization, which we adhere to here.

before the end of World War II in the first wave; 99 episodes during the second reversed wave between 1946 and 1990 at the end of the Cold War; and the remaining 64 episodes started in the third wave. A breakdown of these episodes by region is found in Appendix B.

Figure 2. **The Three Waves of Autocratization**
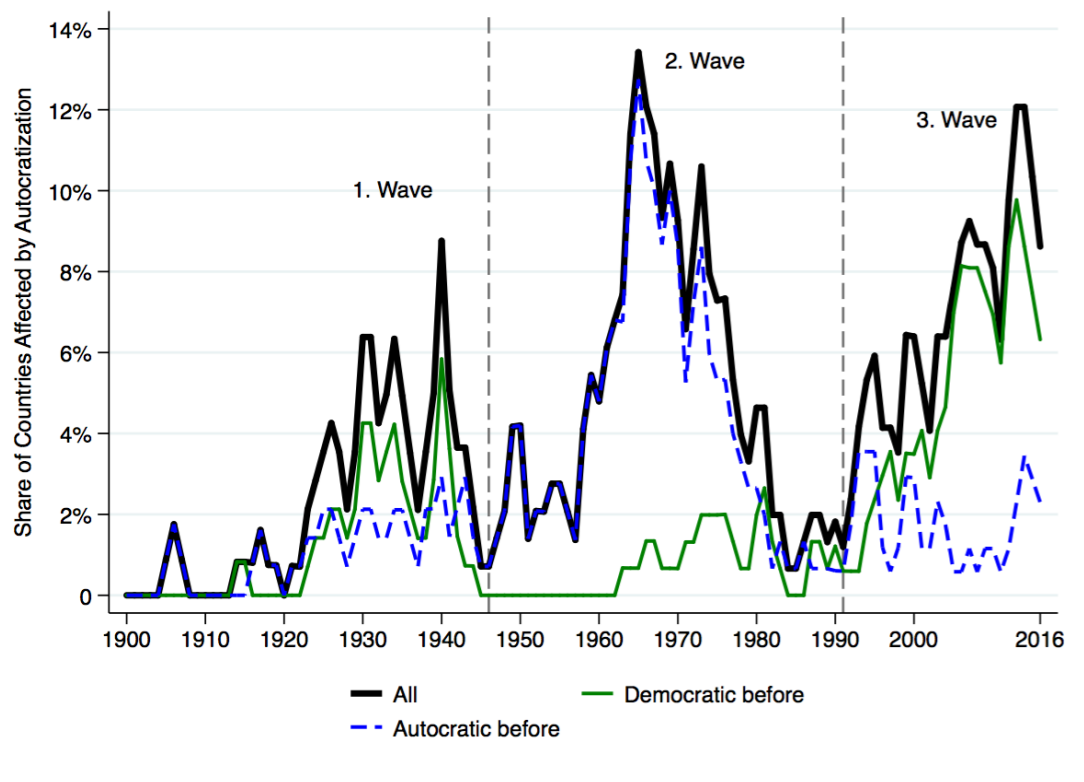
One observation immediately stands out from Figure 2. Whereas the first reversed wave affected both democracies and autocracies, and the second reversal period almost only autocracies, the current period is characterized by democratic recession: Almost all autocratization episodes affect democracies. This is the first time that systematic difference has been shown, and it presents a source of concern especially given the finding reported above that few such episodes stop short of decent into authoritarianism.

The present third wave of reversal may still be picking up. It is affecting 15 countries in 2016. Overall, post-communist Eastern European countries account for 16 mainly protracted, autocratization episodes in the third wave, showing a similarity to the second wave where gains in newly independent countries fading away – exemplified by the gradual autocratization processes in Russia, Hungary, and Poland.

Yet, another way of diagnosing the current trend is to look at the share of countries that are democracies, and how large a share of these that are affected by autocratization. That is what is presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4. **Global Share of Democracies and Democracies Affected by Autocratization, 1900-2016**
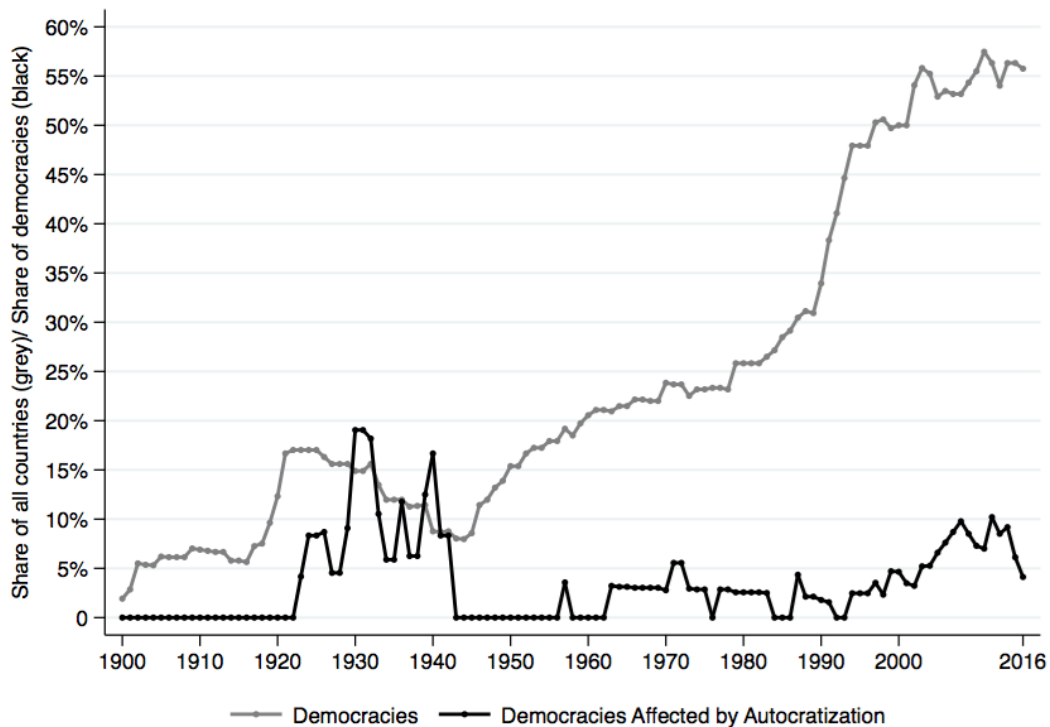
The share of democracies going through democratic recession has increased steadily since the Mid 1990s with a peak in 2012 but still affects not even 5 percent of democracies at present. This shows that the trend is, for now at least, less dramatic than some claim. The share of countries in the world that are democratic is also close to its highest ever. To some extent, the latter explains the former. The more democratic countries there are, the greater the likelihood that democracies suffer setbacks.

In sum, an important structural characteristic of the third wave of autocratization is unprecedented: It mainly affects democracies – and not electoral autocracies as the early waves - and this occurs while the global level of democracy is close to an all-time high with about 56 percent of the states in the world are democracies.

The third wave of democratic recession has a legal facade.

Arguably, the loss of democratic traits in regimes that were democratic before the start of the autocratization episode matters more for the state of democracy in the world than further deterioration in already autocratic regimes. In this and the next section, we analyze these 62 episodes of *democratic recessions* in more depth.

The literature suggests that incumbents behind the current processes of autocratization are using mostly legal means and that illegal power grabs have become less frequent. We test this proposition by distinguishing between four different types of autocratization strategies based on how explicitly they alter the power of the chief executive.[19] The results are reported in Figure 5. The analysis uses original data covering all autocratization episodes affecting democracies from 1900 to 2016, clustering around the three reversal waves.[20]

Figure 5. **Access to and Extension of Chief Executive Power during Democratic Recessions**
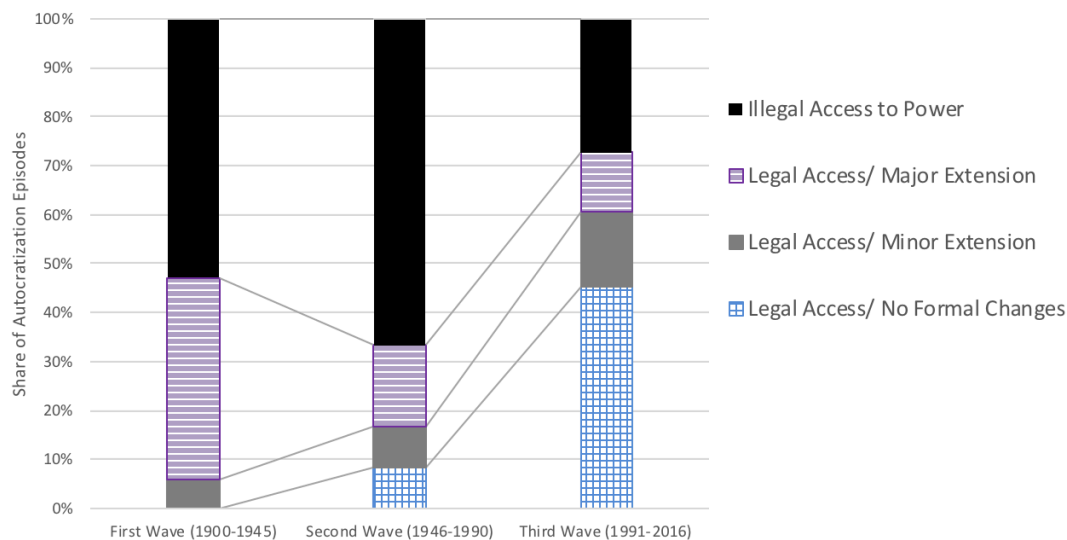
Note: 17 episodes are included in the first wave; 12 in the second wave and 33 in the third wave.

The first wave of reversals is almost completely dominated by the "classic" from of autocratization tactics of *illegal access to power* (53 percent of episodes), such as a military coup or foreign invasion, and by a *major extension of the chief executive's power* (41 percent). The latter includes "autogolpes" where the incumbent suddenly expands his power as for instance President Terra

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[19] The four mutually exhaustive and exclusive categories are: 0 "Illegal access to power"; 1 "Legal access to power and a major extension of the Chief Executive's power beyond the temporal or substantial scope previously envisioned in the legal framework such as the establishment of a new constitution, the application or threat of force"; 2 "Legal access to power, and a minor formal extension of the Chief Executive's power beyond the temporal or substantial scope previously envisioned in the legal framework, i.e. constitutional changes (such as extension of term limits or presidential powers) sanctioned by the constitutional court, the parliament or in a referendum; or a temporary application of emergency law at national level"; 3 "Legal access to power and no formal extension of the Chief Executive's power beyond the temporal or substantial scope previously envisioned in the legal framework".

[20] The coding process proceeded in three steps: First, we used V-Dem data to identify whether or not the appointment of the Head of the Executive involved force (v2expaths/v2expathhg; Coppedge et al. 2017b). Second, taking into account this information, a research assistant coded the four sub-categories based on standard references such as Nohlen (2010) and Lentz (1999) as well as case specific literature. Third, we verified the coding choices in particular with regards to borderline cases. Table A1 in the appendix shows the categorization of individual episodes. Detailed case narratives including sources are available on request.

did in Uruguay in 1933. Even Hitler came to power using legal means and then drastically expanded his power with the "Ermächtigungsgesetz" (Enabling Act) in 1933.

In the second wave of autocratization the *illegal access* peaked with the many military coups in Latin America and Europe, and this tactic accounted for two-thirds of all autocratization episodes in this wave of reversals. Incumbent changing the accustomed legal order only in *minor* ways – for instance through extending their term limits was used only twice in the first and second waves. A completely new tactic also emerges in this second wave: *Legal access to power without making any major, formal changes* to the office of the chief executive, but still infringing on democratic norms and practices to pull the regime towards autocracy. It only happened once in the second reversal wave (Dominican Republic; 1987-1990) but was then a significant precursor to what was to come.

The current period of autocratization is unique in that the new modal tactic is *legal access and no formal change* of how much power the chief executive has or how long he is allowed to stay in office. This type accounts for 41 percent in the third reversal wave with prominent cases of such gradual deterioration in Hungary and Poland. Furthermore, several incumbents changed the formal scope of their office only in *minor* ways (used in six episodes so far during the ongoing wave of autocratization, for example in Russia and Turkey). Such incremental tactics are harder to detect, and now together account for a majority, or 63 percent, of the episodes compared to only 17 percent in the second and 6 percent in the first reversal waves. Aspiring autocrats have clearly found a new set of tools to stay in power, and that news has spread.

The third wave of democratic recessions is gradual

In terms of pace, we can, again for the first time, show that 75 percent of all autocratization episodes across the entire time period were relatively short, taking five years or less. Only 10 percent are highly protracted with a duration of eight years or more, with the record of 23 years in Russia from 1994 to 2016.

We have developed another new metric to measure the rate of autocratization in a more informative way than just the number of years: *maximum annual depletion rate*. This metric captures how fast democratic traits decline during an autocratization episode in terms of changes from one year to the other on the V-Dem EDI. Using the maximum allows us to distinguish between episodes where a period of gradual declines combines with a sudden decline in democratic traits, and stretches that consist of gradual declines only. The advantage of maximum depletion rate is that a high value indicates that the episode encompassed a sudden and radical change where as a low value indicates an autocratization process that was incremental throughout. For ease of interpretation, we report maximum depletion rate values as a percentage of 1 (the highest possible

score on EDI). Thus, if the maximum change in the EDI from one year to the next during an autocratization episode was -0.1, the corresponding autocratization rate is 10 percent.

For instance, the autocratization episode in Germany from 1923 to 1935 started with ten years of gradual declines during the Weimar Republic - amounting to a 7% change on the EDI. Yet, the main characteristic of this episode was Hitler's accession to power in 1933 and subsequent sudden breakdown of the democratic system in 1934. This is reflected by a high maximum depletion rate of 27%. Conversely, chapters such as Turkey from 2005 to 2016 and Russia from 1994 to 2016, involve *only* gradual changes – reflected by relatively low depletion rates of 7% (Turkey) and 9% (Russia). Alternative measures of pace such as the average depletion rate, the annual depletion rate and the decay rate, do not fully capture the difference between these two patterns. However, we include those as robustness tests to the subsequent empirical analysis (see detailed discussion in Appendix C and E).

Figure D.2 in Appendix D shows a box plot comparing democratic recessions during the three reversal waves using this new metric. The median autocratization rate was at 30 percent during the first two waves and dropped to 10 percent in the third wave.[21] At the bottom end of the scale with a 3.4 percent maximum depletion rate we find with the extremely gradual autocratization process in Sri Lanka from 1977 to 1983, followed by Hungary's spell from 2006 to 2016 at 3.7 percent. The most sudden breakdowns occurred after the German invasion during World War II in the Netherlands (47 percent) and the Czech Republic (46 percent).

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[21] It is important to note that the decline of the autocratization rate is not just a mere function of the shift to quasi-legal forms of autocratization reported in the prior section: Autocratization has become more gradual across all types of autocratization - even if the autocratizer comes to power illegally or majorly extents his power (see Figure D3 in Appendix D).

Figure 6. Global Trend Autocratization Rate during Democratic Recessions and Share of Democracies

Note: The autocratization rate captures how fast the V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index declines at the peak of the autocratization episode in terms of changes from one year to the other. High values indicate sudden autocratization and low values more gradual. The x-axis of the figure shows the year where the peak of the autocratization rate occurred during the episode.

Over time the rate of autocratization in democracies has dropped significantly (r=-0.67; red, dashed line on Figure 6) over time. At the same time, the global share of democracies increased remarkably – to hover around 56 percent after the turn of the century (black line). The global share of democracies is negatively correlated with the autocratization rate at a statistically significant level. This relationship holds even when controlling for important confounders such as GDP, time since transition, level of democracy and foreign occupation as well as the types of democratic recession reported in the prior section. Based on these regression analyses (results omitted here, see Appendix C), the rate of autocratization among democracies is estimated to drop from 32 percent when few countries were democratic (15 percent; e.g. in the early 1930s) to 14 percent at the peak of the third wave when half of the world's countries were democratic. This finding is robust to alternative specifications of the autocratization rate (Appendix C) as well as of the autocratization episodes (Appendix E).

However, since we have to rely on observational data and a relatively small number of cases (62), we need to acknowledge these empirical tests as tentative findings. Nevertheless – as

discussed in the literature review - there are reasonable intuitions for why a global rise of democracy should be expected to have a dampening effect on the rate of autocratization.

This development results opposite expectations for the further prospects of democracy. On the one hand, autocratization has become more obscure and therefore one can suspect less likely to produce triggers for mobilization of pro-democratic forces. On the other hand, autocratization has also become less severe – at least on average. Figure 7 illustrates how the effect of autocratization on the level of democracy in affected countries has changed over time. The y-axis shows the total EDI drop during an autocratization episode and the x-axis the EDI score at the final year of autocratization. Before 1990, autocratization typically resulted in the dramatic transitions to closed autocracy with a median EDI score of 0.15 at the end of the episode. During the third wave of autocratization, the median democracy level remains much higher with a score of 0.43 on the EDI. Also, the median total decline of democratic attributes during the third wave (-0.20) is less than half of the decline during the first (-0.49) and second wave (-0.44).

Figure 7. **The Consequences of Autocratization on the Level of Democracy**
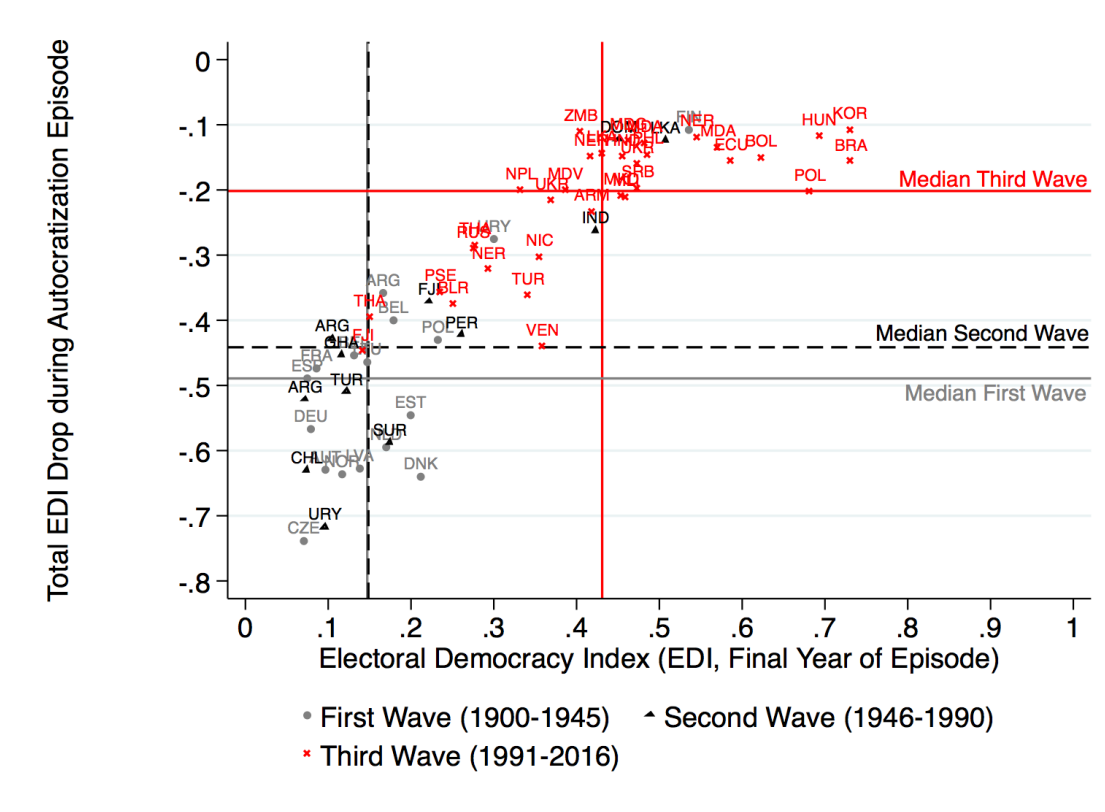
Conclusion: The Third Wave of Autocratization

This paper presents the first systematic empirical analysis of contemporary autocratization in historical perspective. The paper, first, contributes with a new method to identify not only sudden but also gradual autocratization episodes, providing a comprehensive empirical overview of adverse regime change from 1900 to today across the democracy-autocracy spectrum.

Second, we provide evidence that contemporary declines of democracy amount to a third wave of autocratization. A key finding is that the present reverse wave – starting after 1990 - mainly affects democracies, unlike prior waves. What is especially worrying about this trend is that historically, very few autocratization episodes starting in democracies has been stopped short of turning countries into autocracies.

Furthermore, we present a series of descriptive tests corroborating key claims found in the extent literature but not tested before on systematic evidence: Contemporary autocratizers mainly use legal and gradual strategies to undermine democracies. Based on original data, we show that about 72 percent of all contemporary democratic recessions – autocratization episodes starting in democracies – are led by incumbents who came to power legally and typically by democratic elections. Conversely, during the first and second reverse wave most democratic recessions included an illegal power grab, such as a military coup. Whereas autocratizers during the first and second wave took clearly recognizable moves such as issuing a new non-democratic constitution or dissolved the legislature, 40 percent of contemporary autocratizers do not change the formal rules. Thus, also the way incumbents undermine democracy has become more informal and clandestine.

Finally, we devise a new metric – the autocratization rate – capturing how fast regimes lose their democratic quality from one year to the other measured as a percentage change of the highest possible value of V-Dem's EDI. We can then show that autocratization has become much more gradual than before. Its maximum rate declined from a median of about 30 percent in the first wave to about 10 percent in the third wave. This trend is strongly correlated with the changes in the global share of democratic regimes. As democracy spread around the global in the 1990s and 2000s, autocratization became more gradual. While this trend stands up to regression analysis with the inclusion of confounders, we are careful not to draw too strong inferences from that empirical test, since we are relying on observational data and a relatively small number of cases.

By now, most regimes – even autocracies - hold some form of multiparty elections. Sudden and illegal moves to autocracy tend to provoke national and international opposition. The tests we present suggest that contemporary autocratizers have learned their lesson and thus now proceed

in a much slower and much less noticeable way than their historical predecessors. Thus, while democracy has undoubtedly come under threat, its normative power still seems to force aspiring autocrats to play a game of deception.

Consequently, states hit by the third wave of autocratization remain much more democratic than their historical cousins. On the one hand, this gives hope that the current wave of autocratization might be milder than the first and second waves. On the other hand, the third wave may still be picking up. It has affected 15 countries in 2016 and more are on the threshold. For these countries, two scenarios are plausible: Because autocratization is more gradual, democratic actors may remain strong enough to mobilize resistance. This happened for instance in South Korea in 2017, when mass protests forced parliament to impeach the president, which stopped the ongoing autocratization episode (Shin and Moon 2017: 130). Conversely, initial small steps towards autocracy brought other countries – such as Turkey, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Russia – on a slippery slope deep into the authoritarian regime spectrum. Future research needs to investigate what distinguishes these two scenarios and how autocratization can be stopped and reversed. Yet, one conclusion is clear: As it was premature to announce the "end of history" in 1992, it is premature to proclaim the "end of democracy" now.

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APPENDICES:

A Third Wave of Autocratization Is Here: What Is New About It?

APPENDIX A: Autocratization Episodes

Table A.1 Autocratization Episodes Starting in Democracies

Country	Begin	End	EDI before	EDI end	Rate	Access to and Extension of Chief Executive Power
FIRST WAVE						
Argentina	1930	1931	0.52	0.17	28.89	Legal Access/Major Extension
Austria	1930	1935	0.73	0.10	33.33	Legal Access/Major Extension
Belgium	1914	1915	0.58	0.18	26.73	Illegal Access to Power
Belgium	1940	1941	0.59	0.13	32.28	Illegal Access to Power
Czech Republic	1930	1940	0.81	0.07	46.28	Illegal Access to Power
Denmark	1940	1944	0.85	0.21	31.14	Illegal Access to Power
Estonia	1929	1936	0.75	0.20	25.18	Legal Access/Major Extension
Finland	1939	1940	0.64	0.54	8.77	Legal Access/Minor Extension
France	1939	1941	0.56	0.09	30.00	Legal Access/Major Extension
Germany	1923	1934	0.65	0.08	26.92	Legal Access/Major Extension
Latvia	1934	1935	0.77	0.14	45.30	Legal Access/Major Extension
Lithuania	1924	1927	0.61	0.15	39.99	Illegal Access to Power
Netherlands	1940	1941	0.76	0.17	46.60	Illegal Access to Power
Norway	1940	1942	0.75	0.12	37.84	Illegal Access to Power
Poland	1926	1931	0.66	0.23	32.00	Illegal Access to Power
Spain	1936	1940	0.56	0.07	17.11	Illegal Access to Power
Uruguay	1933	1934	0.58	0.30	19.24	Legal Access/Major Extension
SECOND WAVE						
Argentina	1966	1967	0.53	0.11	25.28	Illegal Access to Power
Argentina	1975	1977	0.59	0.07	30.65	Illegal Access to Power
Chile	1973	1974	0.71	0.07	33.98	Illegal Access to Power
Dom. Rep.	1987	1990	0.57	0.45	10.78	Legal Access/No Formal Extension
Fiji	1987	1988	0.59	0.22	28.16	Illegal Access to Power
Ghana	1981	1982	0.57	0.12	34.94	Illegal Access to Power
India	1971	1976	0.69	0.42	15.83	Legal Access/Minor Extension
Peru	1990	1995	0.68	0.26	29.90	Legal Access/Major Extension
Sri Lanka	1977	1983	0.63	0.51	3.42	Legal Access/Major Extension
Suriname	1980	1981	0.76	0.17	43.62	Illegal Access to Power
Turkey	1980	1981	0.63	0.12	34.83	Illegal Access to Power
Uruguay	1963	1976	0.81	0.10	23.15	Illegal Access to Power
THIRD WAVE						
Armenia	1994	1997	0.65	0.42	14.27	Legal Access/Minor Extension
Belarus	1995	2001	0.63	0.25	9.31	Legal Access/Minor Extension
Bolivia	2006	2014	0.77	0.62	4.13	Legal Access/Major Extension
Brazil	2012	2016	0.89	0.73	12.88	Legal Access/No Formal Extension
Ecuador	2008	2009	0.74	0.59	9.86	Legal Access/Major Extension
Fiji	2006	2009	0.59	0.14	31.21	Illegal Access to Power
Honduras	2005	2010	0.61	0.46	11.98	Illegal Access to Power
Hungary	2006	2015	0.81	0.69	3.73	Legal Access/No Formal Extension
Macedonia	2005	2013	0.66	0.45	6.04	Legal Access/No Formal Extension
Madagascar	1996	2001	0.59	0.46	7.60	Legal Access/No Formal Extension
Maldives	2012	2016	0.59	0.39	8.76	Legal Access/No Formal Extension
Mali	2012	2013	0.67	0.46	15.84	Illegal Access to Power
Moldova	2001	2005	0.61	0.48	6.90	Legal Access/No Formal Extension
Moldova	2012	2016	0.71	0.57	6.19	Legal Access/No Formal Extension
Nepal	2012	2013	0.53	0.33	18.63	Illegal Access to Power
Nicaragua	2003	2016	0.66	0.36	7.96	Legal Access/Minor Extension
Country	Begin	End	EDI before	EDI end	Rate	Access to and Extension of Chief Executive Power
Niger	1996	1997	0.57	0.42	12.93	Illegal Access to Power
Niger	2005	2010	0.62	0.29	21.57	Illegal Access to Power

Niger	2013	2016	0.67	0.55	10.02	Legal Access/No Formal Extension
Palestine	2005	2008	0.59	0.24	16.65	Legal Access/Major Extension
Philippines	1999	2007	0.63	0.49	5.66	Illegal Access to Power
Poland	2013	2016	0.89	0.68	16.23	Legal Access/No Formal Extension
Russia	1994	2016	0.57	0.28	8.60	Legal Access/Minor Extension
Serbia	2009	2016	0.67	0.47	6.71	Legal Access/No Formal Extension
South Korea	2007	2014	0.84	0.73	3.30	Legal Access/No Formal Extension
Sri Lanka	2004	2008	0.57	0.43	6.87	Legal Access/No Formal Extension
Thailand	2003	2006	0.56	0.28	25.29	Illegal Access to Power
Thailand	2013	2015	0.55	0.15	18.57	Illegal Access to Power
Turkey	2005	2016	0.70	0.34	6.62	Legal Access/Minor Extension
Ukraine	1997	2004	0.59	0.37	10.43	Legal Access/No Formal Extension
Ukraine	2010	2012	0.63	0.47	9.11	Legal Access/No Formal Extension
Venezuela	1999	2016	0.80	0.36	11.92	Legal Access/Major Extension
Zambia	2014	2016	0.52	0.41	10.39	Legal Access/No Formal Extension

Note: The Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) ranges from 0 (not democratic) to 1 (fully democratic). The autocratization rate captures the maximum EDI depletion during an autocratization episode as a percentage of its highest value (1). High values indicate a sudden autocratization episode and low values a gradual one.

Table A.1.2 Autocratization Episodes Starting in Autocracies

Country	Begin	End	EDI before	EDI end
FIRST WAVE				
Albania	1938	1940	0.21	0.05
Argentina	1943	1944	0.31	0.10
Bolivia	1932	1935	0.19	0.08
Brazil	1930	1931	0.23	0.10
Bulgaria	1934	1935	0.21	0.10
Chile	1925	1926	0.30	0.18
Costa Rica	1917	1918	0.34	0.21
Cuba	1906	1907	0.32	0.20
Cuba	1929	1934	0.31	0.19
Dom. Rep.	1916	1917	0.28	0.13
Dom. Rep.	1930	1931	0.29	0.13
Ecuador	1936	1936	0.26	0.16
Greece	1935	1937	0.39	0.05
Honduras	1905	1906	0.19	0.09
Hungary	1919	1919	0.26	0.13
Hungary	1940	1945	0.35	0.18
Italy	1921	1929	0.38	0.06
Myanmar	1942	1943	0.24	0.11
Philippines	1938	1943	0.27	0.08
Portugal	1925	1927	0.26	0.05
Romania	1938	1940	0.22	0.12
Spain	1923	1924	0.24	0.07
SECOND WAVE				
Afghanistan	1974	1978	0.19	0.09
Algeria	1966	1966	0.20	0.09
Argentina	1950	1956	0.42	0.16
Bangladesh	1974	1976	0.45	0.14
Country	Begin	End	EDI before	EDI end
Bangladesh	1982	1983	0.43	0.20
Benin	1965	1966	0.34	0.18
Benin	1970	1973	0.28	0.10
Bolivia	1958	1965	0.30	0.14
Bolivia	1980	1981	0.25	0.11
Brazil	1962	1965	0.44	0.15
Burkina Faso	1966	1967	0.43	0.19
Burundi	1965	1967	0.22	0.10
Burundi	1988	1988	0.22	0.10
CAR	1962	1966	0.27	0.09
Cambodia	1970	1971	0.30	0.14
Cambodia	1973	1980	0.24	0.08
Chad	1972	1976	0.21	0.09
China	1949	1950	0.20	0.08
Colombia	1948	1950	0.28	0.16
Comoros	1975	1975	0.26	0.13
Congo	1962	1968	0.34	0.09
Cuba	1952	1953	0.44	0.19
Cuba	1959	1961	0.27	0.09
Czech Republic	1950	1950	0.20	0.08
DRC	1965	1970	0.31	0.09
Dom. Rep.	1964	1964	0.44	0.17
Ecuador	1963	1964	0.39	0.14
Ecuador	1970	1973	0.38	0.15
Egypt	1952	1954	0.27	0.06
Equatorial Guinea	1969	1973	0.25	0.04
Ghana	1961	1967	0.38	0.16
Ghana	1972	1973	0.38	0.12

Country	Begin	End	EDI before	EDI end
Greece	1966	1968	0.44	0.08
Guatemala	1954	1956	0.40	0.10
Guyana	1967	1981	0.47	0.26
Honduras	1955	1955	0.28	0.15
Honduras	1972	1973	0.30	0.15
Hungary	1947	1950	0.28	0.13
Indonesia	1957	1961	0.61	0.16
Iraq	1958	1963	0.23	0.08
Kuwait	1976	1977	0.28	0.09
Kuwait	1986	1987	0.27	0.08
Laos	1959	1965	0.33	0.18
Laos	1975	1976	0.24	0.07
Lesotho	1969	1969	0.37	0.19
Liberia	1980	1981	0.24	0.10
Libya	1969	1970	0.22	0.08
Madagascar	1973	1973	0.26	0.15
Malawi	1965	1965	0.29	0.09
Malaysia	1964	1970	0.33	0.15
Mali	1964	1969	0.26	0.11
Mauritania	1979	1979	0.20	0.10
Myanmar	1962	1963	0.46	0.08
Nepal	1960	1961	0.26	0.11
Niger	1974	1975	0.21	0.10
Nigeria	1983	1984	0.41	0.20
Pakistan	1978	1979	0.29	0.11
Panama	1946	1947	0.32	0.18
Panama	1964	1969	0.41	0.09
Country	Begin	End	EDI before	EDI end
Peru	1948	1949	0.33	0.10
Peru	1968	1969	0.44	0.10
Philippines	1969	1973	0.43	0.08
Vietnam	1964	1965	0.32	0.16
Rwanda	1973	1974	0.27	0.10
Seychelles	1977	1978	0.35	0.10
Sierra Leone	1967	1968	0.42	0.19
Somalia	1969	1970	0.37	0.08
South Korea	1961	1962	0.32	0.16
South Korea	1972	1972	0.31	0.14
Sudan	1958	1959	0.29	0.09
Sudan	1969	1969	0.25	0.10
Sudan	1989	1990	0.39	0.09
Swaziland	1973	1974	0.21	0.10
Syria	1949	1951	0.34	0.15
Syria	1958	1959	0.33	0.09
Syria	1963	1970	0.28	0.08
Tanzania	1965	1967	0.33	0.22
Thailand	1976	1977	0.29	0.12
Togo	1961	1962	0.29	0.19
Togo	1964	1968	0.27	0.09
Turkey	1954	1960	0.45	0.24
Uganda	1964	1972	0.42	0.09
Uganda	1985	1986	0.25	0.13
Venezuela	1949	1949	0.46	0.11
Zambia	1968	1974	0.32	0.21
Zanzibar	1964	1965	0	2

THIRD WAVE

Country	Begin	End	EDI before	EDI end
Algeria	1992	1993	0.41	0.18
Azerbaijan	1993	1995	0.40	0.26
Bangladesh	2007	2007	0.54	0.23
Bangladesh	2014	2016	0.50	0.37

Country				
Burundi	1994	1996	0.41	0.20
Burundi	2006	2016	0.46	0.19
CAR	2003	2004	0.35	0.21
Comoros	1999	2000	0.49	0.23
Congo	1993	1998	0.48	0.18
Croatia	2016	2016	0.82	0.71
Egypt	2013	2015	0.37	0.18
Fiji	2000	2000	0.61	0.33
Gambia	1993	1995	0.50	0.12
Guinea-Bissau	2003	2003	0.47	0.28
Guinea-Bissau	2012	2013	0.50	0.24
Haiti	1992	1992	0.38	0.21
Haiti	2000	2005	0.44	0.24
Lesotho	1995	1995	0.62	0.31
Lesotho	1999	1999	0.58	0.32
Liberia	2004	2004	0.39	0.25
Libya	2014	2014	0.53	0.29
Macedonia	1999	1999	0.62	0.50
Madagascar	2009	2010	0.50	0.23
Nepal	1999	2003	0.42	0.22
Pakistan	1999	2000	0.44	0.22
Rwanda	1994	1995	0.31	0.11
Country	Begin	End	EDI before	EDI end
Sierra Leone	1998	1998	0.46	0.24
Tajikistan	1992	1994	0.36	0.18
Thailand	1991	1991	0.39	0.24
Thailand	1993	1993	0.38	0.24
Ukraine	2014	2015	0.50	0.35
Yemen	2013	2016	0.40	0.13

Table A.2 Countries never Experiencing an Autocratization Episode

DEMOCRACIES IN 2016		AUTOCRACIES IN 2016	
Country	EDI 2016	Country	EDI 2016
Australia	0.88	Angola	0.32
Barbados	0.71	Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.34
Bhutan	0.54	Cameroon	0.36
Botswana	0.68	Djibouti	0.28
Canada	0.87	Eritrea	0.08
Cape Verde	0.84	Ethiopia	0.25
Cyprus	0.81	Gabon	0.43
El Salvador	0.66	Guinea	0.44
Georgia	0.76	Iran	0.23
Iceland	0.84	Jordan	0.27
Ireland	0.84	Kazakhstan	0.26
Israel	0.73	Montenegro	0.46
Ivory Coast	0.58	Morocco	0.31
Jamaica	0.82	Mozambique	0.48
Japan	0.78	North Korea	0.09
Kenya	0.53	Oman	0.19
Kosovo	0.51	Palestine/Gaza	0.14
Kyrgyzstan	0.51	Papua New Guinea	0.49
Lebanon	0.54	Qatar	0.09
Mauritius	0.79	Saudi Arabia	0.02
Mexico	0.67	Singapore	0.45
Mongolia	0.68	Somaliland	0.47
Namibia	0.75	South Sudan	0.18
New Zealand	0.86	Turkmenistan	0.15
Paraguay	0.62	Uzbekistan	0.20
Senegal	0.72	Vietnam	0.25
Slovakia	0.80	Zimbabwe	0.32
Slovenia	0.86		
Solomon Islands	0.63		
South Africa	0.73		
Sweden	0.90		
Switzerland	0.88		
São Tomé and Príncipe	0.70		
Taiwan	0.80		
Timor-Leste	0.68		
Trinidad and Tobago	0.73		
Tunisia	0.75		
United Kingdom	0.87		
United States	0.85		
Vanuatu	0.68		

APPENDIX B. Regional Breakdown of Autocratization Episodes

Figure B.1 shows the proportion of countries affected by each wave by region. The first wave of autocratization diminished much - but not all - of the advances from the first wave of democratization in Europe, Central Asia and Latin America. In Asia-Pacific, Africa, and the MENA region there was not much of democratic progress to reverse at that point. The first wave of reversals also affected democratic and autocratic countries to almost the same degree.

Figure B.1 **Regional Distribution of Autocratization Episodes**
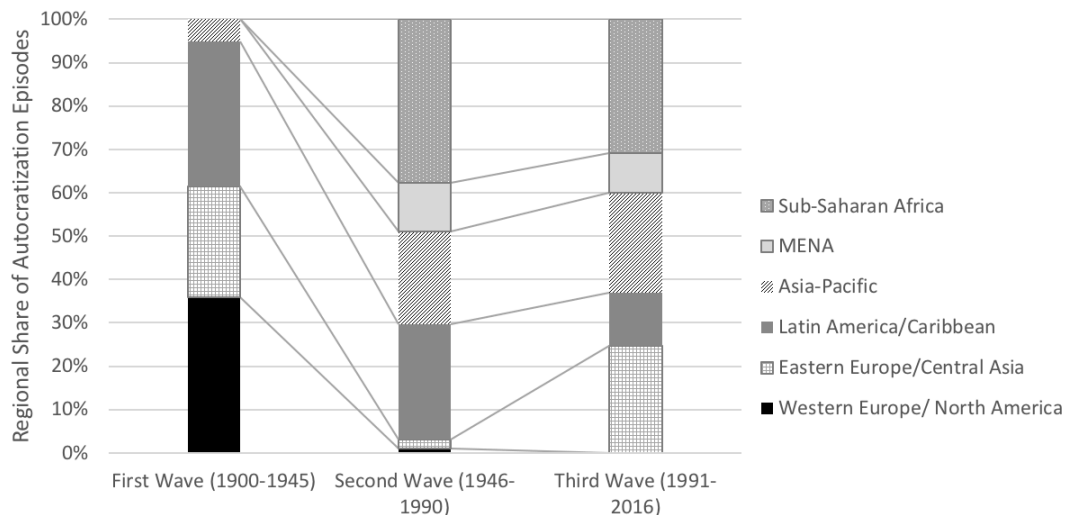
The 1960s' and 70s' second wave of autocratization mainly affected countries in Africa and Asia-Pacific that were electoral autocracies. The few democracies that were swept away during the second wave were mainly Latin American countries suffering from military coups, such as Argentina (1966, 1976) and Chile (1973), but also India in 1975. In India, Prime Minister Indria Gandhi's *autogolpe* commenced a two-year interruption of the democratic regime due to extensive use of emergency powers including the suspension of elections. Western Europe and North America (apart from the military coup in Greece in 1967) as well as Eastern Europe and Central Asia were less affected by the second wave. Western countries remained democracies whereas the Eastern Europe and much of Central Asia remained subdued to the Soviet empire.

APPENDIX C: Regression analysis

Data

The unit of analysis is an autocratization episode as identified above. The dependent variable is the autocratization rate on a scale from 0 to 100% (see Part IV and Table A1.1). An autocratization rate of 10% corresponds to an EDI drop of 0.1 points at the peak of the episode. Gradual episodes have a low autocratization rate and sudden episodes a high one.

The key independent variable is the global share of democracies – as a percentage of all countries - to capture the global spread of democracy. We control for the number of years since transition to democracy, because it seems likely that autocratization is faster in younger democracies. For instance, Svolik (2015) showed that as democracies grow older the risk of sudden military coups decreases whereas the risk of – potentially more protracted autogolpes remains the same. We also control for the level of the Electoral Democracy Index in the year before the peak of the episode, because if the prior level democracy is higher, there is a greater potential for the rate of autocratization to be high. In prior literature, economic development has been linked to autocratization (e.g. Przeworski et al. 2000). Therefore, we add control variables for GDP/per capita (log, t-1, Faris et al. based on Madison). Furthermore, we control for the time trend. We expect autocratization to be more gradual the longer an episode unfolds as sudden reversals typically occur at the beginning of an episode. Thus, we control for the duration of an episode. Similarly, instances of foreign occupation are likely to be associated with sudden breakdowns, which is why we include a dummy variable for whether a foreign power appoints the Head of the Executive based on V-Dem data (Coppedge et al. 2017a).

***Table C1.* Summary statistics**

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Autocratization rate	62	19.65	12.41	3.30	46.60
Global share of democracies (t-1)	62	36.92	18.75	6.67	56.32
Electoral Democracy Index (V-Dem; t-1)	62	0.59	0.12	0.34	0.86
Number of years since democratic transition	62	5.45	10.47	0.00	42.00
GDP/capita (log, t-1)	61	8.01	0.80	6.13	9.88
Time trend	62	1982.34	32.18	1914	2016
Duration of episode	62	3.53	2.80	1.00	12.00
Foreign occupation	62	0.10	0.30	0.00	1.00

Results

We estimate five linear regression models with the autocratization rate as dependent variable (Table A2.2). Model 1 focuses on the key independent variables. As expected, the autocratization rate decreases at a statistically significant level with an increasing global share of democracy. These findings hold when adding controls for potential alternative hypotheses in Models 3-5: *level of Electoral Democracy (t-1), time trend, number of years since democratic transition, GDP/capita and duration of the episode.*

Table C2. **Correlates of the Autocratization Rate**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Global share of democracies (t-1)	-0.468*** (0.0604)	-0.425*** (0.0561)	-0.589** (0.189)	-0.578** (0.195)
Electoral Democracy Index (V-Dem; t-1)		28.33** (9.988)	29.98** (10.36)	27.12* (12.73)
Number of years since democratic transition		-0.479*** (0.118)	-0.507*** (0.121)	-0.491*** (0.130)
GDP/capita (log, t-1)			1.029 (1.348)	1.000 (1.374)
Time trend			0.103 (0.111)	0.105 (0.113)
Duration of episode				-0.114 (0.405)
Foreign occupation				1.467 (4.496)
Constant	36.94*** (2.497)	21.35*** (5.907)	-186.8 (215.7)	-187.6 (219.9)
N	62	62	61	61
adj. *R²*	0.492	0.595	0.595	0.581
BIC	452.5	444.5	444.6	452.6

Standard errors in parentheses; $^+ p < 0.10$, $^* p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $^{***} p < 0.001$

Robustness

Main findings hold when the dependent variable – the pace of autocratization - is calculated using different metrics (Table A2.3): The average depletion per episode duration (Model 5); the annual depletion during all episode years (Model 6) as well as the decay rate[22] (Model 7), which takes into account from which level the EDI decline started and for how many year the episode had lasted thus far. Whereas the results for the main independent variable (global share of democracy) are similar, the regression coefficient for the level of democracy in the prior year flips the sign in all three models (statistically significant in Model 6 and 7). For the annual depletion rate this might reflect that in countries with a higher EDI score, autocratization episodes are typically more protracted and thus more years with relatively small changes and high EDI scores are included in

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[22] $(\frac{EDI_t}{EDI_{before}})^{1/n}$; where t is a year during an autocratization episode and n the number of years since the start of the episode.

the analysis. The decay rate corrects for the fact that higher declines are more likely the higher the baseline level is, which might explain the change in the sign. Further research on the relationship between prior levels of democracy and pace and likelihood of autocratization is needed. Furthermore, the main findings hold when autocratization episodes are specified differently (Appendix A4).

Table C3. **Correlates of Alternative Metrics Capturing the Pace of Autocratization**

	Model 5 DV: Depletion	Average	Model 6 DV: Annual Depletion	Model 7 DV: Decay Rate
Global share of democracies (t-1)	-0.480*** (0.136)		-0.526*** (0.0814)	-0.00810*** (0.00103)
Electoral Democracy Index (V-Dem; t-1)	-5.187 (6.695)		-24.94*** (3.505)	-0.322*** (0.0443)
Number of years since democratic transition	-0.168+ (0.0970)		-0.195*** (0.0444)	-0.00295*** (0.000561)
GDP/capita (log, t-1)	2.001* (0.826)		1.589** (0.508)	0.0347*** (0.00642)
Time trend	0.215** (0.0767)		0.205*** (0.0460)	0.00365*** (0.000582)
Duration of episode	-0.999*** (0.178)		-0.420*** (0.116)	-0.0156*** (0.00146)
Foreign occupation	2.394 (2.539)		15.89*** (2.241)	0.153*** (0.0283)
_cons	-405.9** (148.9)		-371.5*** (89.04)	-6.830*** (1.126)
N	61		344	344
adj. R^2	0.637		0.548	0.568
BIC	397.5		2377.8	-629.3

Standard errors in parentheses
+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

APPENDIX D: Additional figures

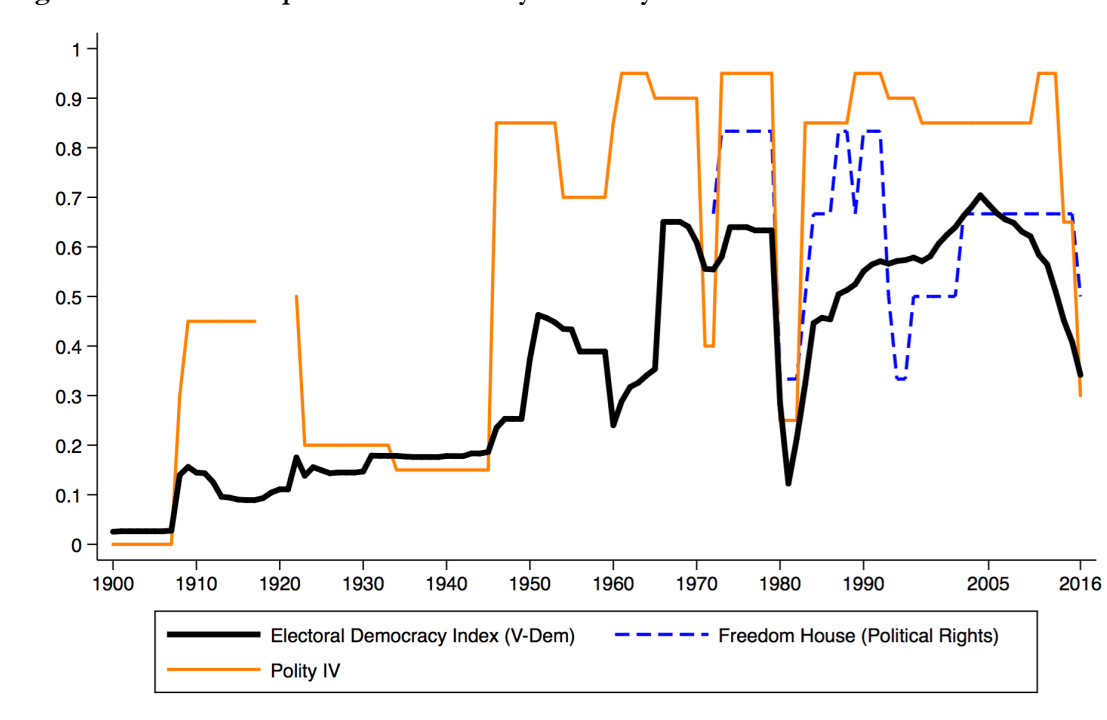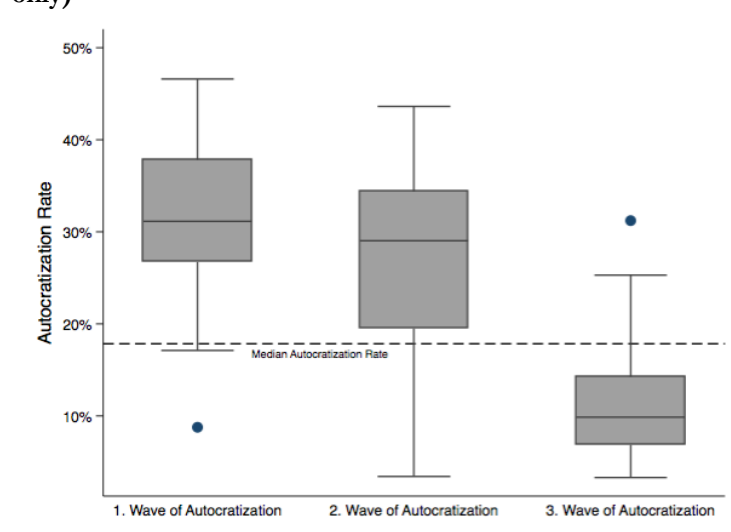*Figure D1.* **The Development of Democracy in Turkey from 1900-2016**

Figure D2. **Box Plot Autocratization Rate across the Waves of Autocratization (Democratic Recessions only)**

Note: The autocratization rate captures how fast the V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index declines from one year to the other at the peak of the autocratization episode. High values indicate sudden autocratization and low values more gradual. The first wave of autocratization includes episodes beginning between 1900 to 1945 (N=17); the second wave of autocratization from 1946 to 1990 (N=12) and the third wave from 1991 to 2016 (N=39).

Figure D3. Average Autocratization Rate by Wave and Type of Access to and Extension of Chief Executive Power (Democratic Recessions only)
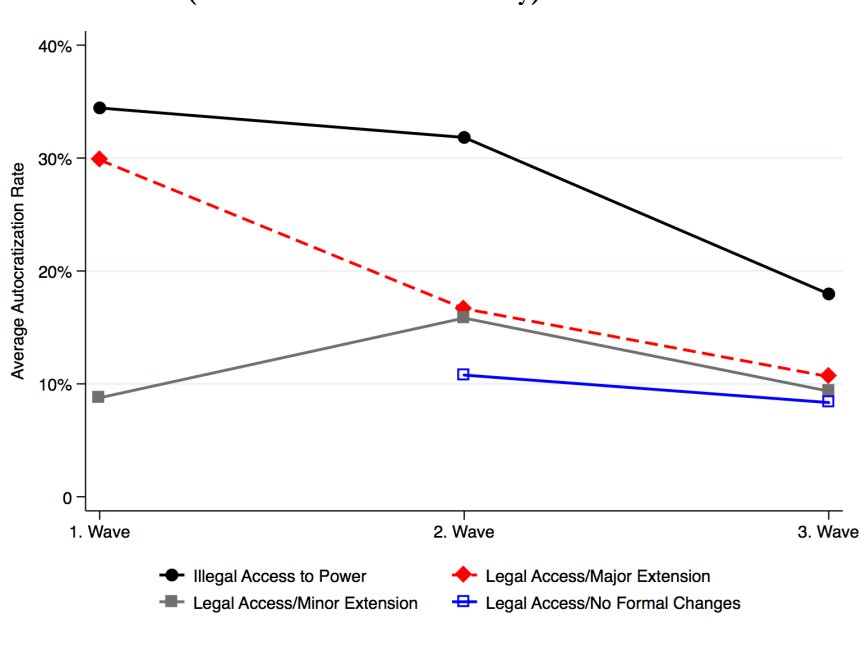
Note: 17 episodes are included in the first wave; 12 in the second wave and 33 in the third wave.

APPENDIX E: Robustness Tests with Alternative Episode Specifications

In the following, we test if the key findings of our paper are robust to alternative specifications of the autocratization episodes. In Appendix E.1 we report the findings for using a more conservative overall cut-off point for qualifying as autocratization episode – an overall decline of 0.12 on the EDI on the needs to be reached instead of 0.1 as in the main paper. E.2 reports the results allowing for four years of stagnation instead of three. E.3 we discuss the effects of using a higher threshold for the starting point of autocratization episodes (a decline of 0.02 instead of 0.01).

E.1 Higher threshold to qualify as autocratization episode (overall EDI decline of more than 0.12)

With 173 the number of autocratization episodes in this specification is lower than the 202 using the original specification (Table A.4.1.1). Figure A4.1.1 shows the three waves of autocratization as the original Figure 5 in a similar way – with the only exception that the peaks of the waves are less pronounced (e.g. only about 12% of countries affected at max in the second wave instead of almost 14% in the main specification). Also, the autocratization rate decreases in a similar way using this episode specification as the original one (A4.1.2). Overall, the correlation between time and the autocratization rate is with -0.69 slightly stronger as when using the original model specification. Similarly, the regression results reported in the main text hold with this model specification (Table A4.1.2).

Table E1.1: **Number of Autocratization Episodes by Wave and Type**

	Autocratic Before	Democratic Before	*Total*
First Wave	15	16	*31*
Second Wave	71	12	*83*
Third Wave	30	29	*59*
Total	*116*	*57*	**173**

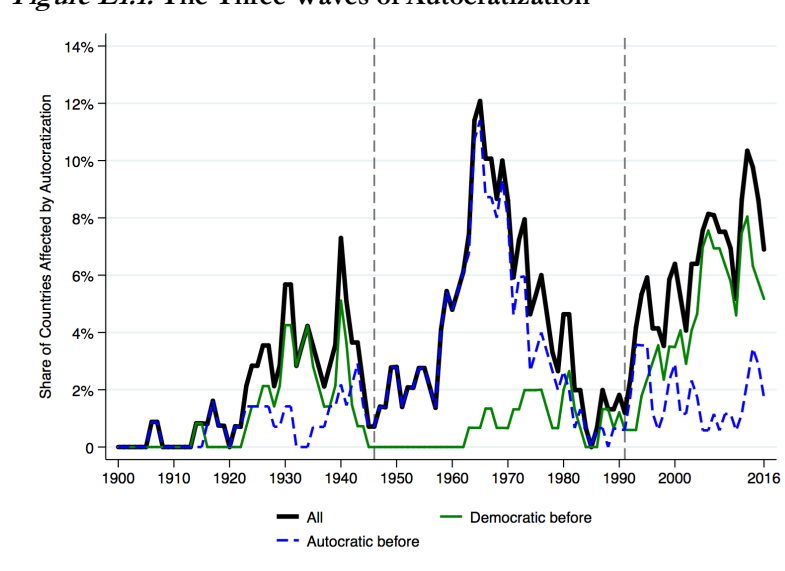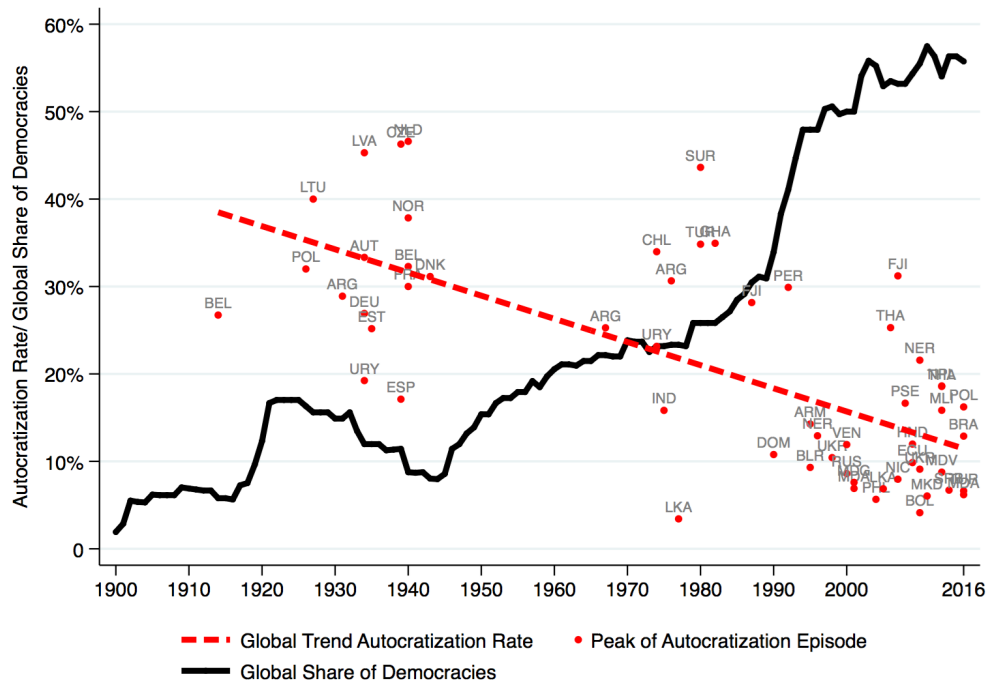***Figure E1.1:*** **The Three Waves of Autocratization**

Figure E1.2: Global Trend Autocratization Rate during Democratic Recessions and Share of Democracies

Note: The autocratization rate captures how fast the V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index declines at the peak of the autocratization episode in terms of changes from one year to the other. High values indicate sudden autocratization and low values more gradual. The x-axis of the figure shows the year where the peak of the autocratization rate occurred during the episode.

Table E1.2: **Correlates of the Autocratization Rate**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Global share of democracies (t-1)	-0.482***	-0.438***	-0.577**	-0.579**
	(0.0612)	(0.0585)	(0.183)	(0.189)
Electoral Democracy Index (V-Dem; t-1)		31.99**	34.37**	34.62*
		(10.16)	(10.37)	(13.04)
Number of years since democratic transition		-0.407**	-0.436***	-0.439**
		(0.122)	(0.124)	(0.132)
GDP/capita (log, t-1)			1.909	1.897
			(1.433)	(1.474)
Time trend			0.0939	0.0920
			(0.108)	(0.110)
Duration of episode				-0.0629
				(0.402)
Foreign occupation				-0.756
				(4.440)
_cons	38.13***	20.03**	-177.5	-173.5
	(2.481)	(6.070)	(209.3)	(214.1)
N	57	57	56	56
adj. *R²*	0.521	0.608	0.617	0.601
BIC	412.2	406.7	405.3	413.3

Standard errors in parentheses

$^{+} p < 0.10$, $^{*} p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $^{***} p < 0.001$

E.2: Allowing for four instead of three years of stagnation during an autocratization episode

With 199 the number of autocratization episodes in this specification is about the same as the 202 using the original specification (Table A.4.2.1). Figure A4.2.1 shows the three waves of autocratization as the original Figure 5 in a similar way – with the minor exception that the peaks of the waves are more pronounced (e.g. more than 14% of countries affected at max in the second wave instead of almost 14% in the main specification). Also, the autocratization rate decreases in a similar way using this episode specification as the original one (A4.2.2). Overall, the correlation between time and the autocratization rate is with -0.67 about the same as when using the original model specification. Similarly, the regression results reported in the main text hold with this model specification (Table A4.2.2).

Table E2.1: **Number of Autocratization Episodes by Wave and Type**

	Autocratic Before	Democratic Before	*Total*
First Wave	22	17	*39*
Second Wave	84	11	*95*
Third Wave	31	34	*65*
Total	*137*	*62*	**199**

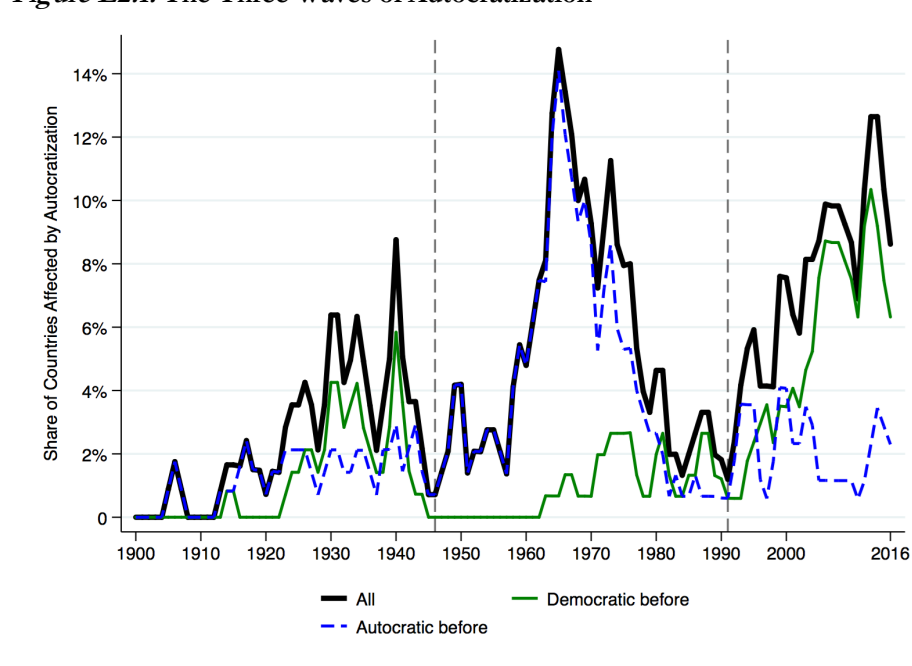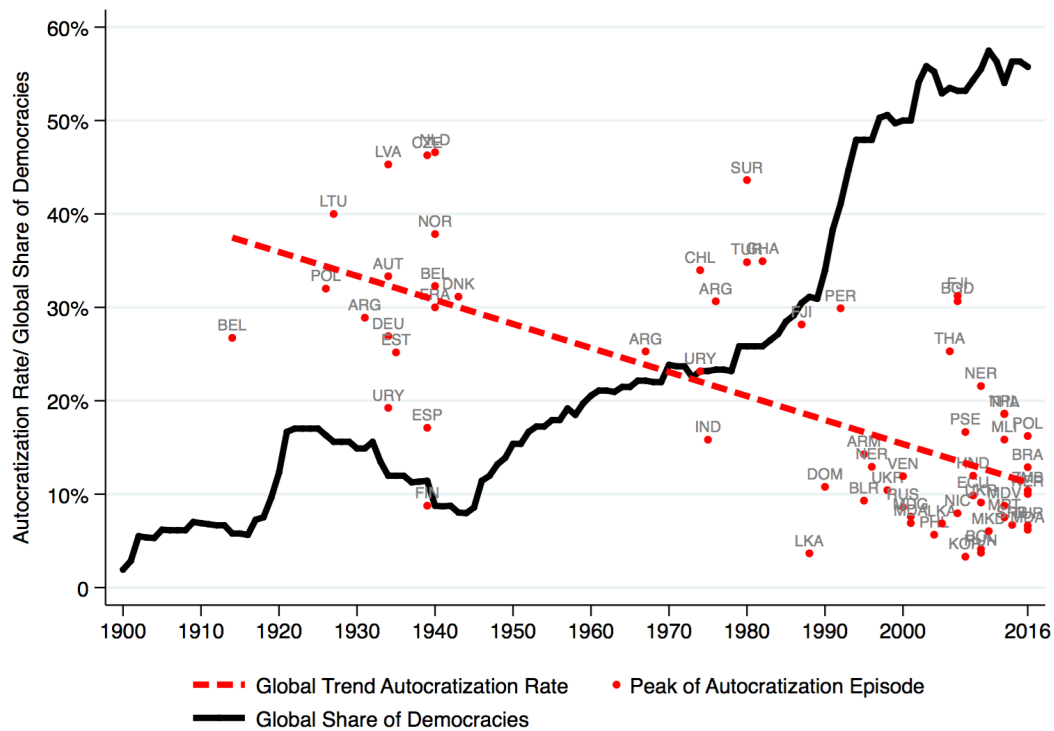***Figure E2.1:*** **The Three Waves of Autocratization**

Figure E2.2: **Global Trend Autocratization Rate during Democratic Recessions and Share of Democracies**

Note: The autocratization rate captures how fast the V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index declines at the peak of the autocratization episode in terms of changes from one year to the other. High values indicate sudden autocratization and low values more gradual. The x-axis of the figure shows the year where the peak of the autocratization rate occurred during the episode.

Table E2.2: Correlates of the Autocratization Rate

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Global share of democracies (t-1)	-0.466*** (0.0600)	-0.425*** (0.0588)	-0.532* (0.201)	-0.629** (0.203)
Electoral Democracy Index (V-Dem; t-1)		27.30* (10.55)	29.03* (10.99)	21.77+ (12.96)
Number of years since democratic transition		-0.420** (0.132)	-0.434** (0.137)	-0.406** (0.141)
GDP/capita (log, t-1)			0.441 (1.444)	0.139 (1.408)
Time trend			0.0650 (0.117)	0.133 (0.117)
Duration of episode				-0.357 (0.409)
Foreign occupation				1.998 (4.546)
_cons	37.15*** (2.516)	21.78*** (6.290)	-107.6 (226.4)	-231.5 (225.6)
N	64	64	63	61
adj. R^2	0.484	0.551	0.542	0.563
BIC	467.6	465.0	466.1	454.1

Standard errors in parentheses; $^+ p < 0.10$, $^* p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $^{***} p < 0.001$

E.3: Lower starting threshold for episodes - a decline of 0.02 instead of 0.01 on the EDI

With 195 the number of autocratization episodes in this specification is slightly lower than the 202 using the original specification (Table A.4.3.1). In particular, only 55 instead of 62 cases of democratic recession are identified with this specification – which makes sense as a higher starting threshold is likely to exclude some of the more gradual episodes typical for democratic contexts. Nevertheless, Figure A4.3.1 shows the three waves of autocratization in a similar way as the original Figure 5– with the exception that the peaks of the waves are less pronounced (e.g. less than 12% of countries affected at max in the second wave instead of almost 14% in the main specification). Also, the autocratization rate decreases in a similar way using this episode specification as the original one (A4.3.2). Overall, the correlation between time and the autocratization rate is with -0.67 about the same as when using the original model specification. Similarly, the regression results reported in the main text hold with this model specification (Table A4.3.2).

Table E3.1: **Number of Autocratization Episodes by Wave and Type**

	Autocratic Before	Democratic Before	*Total*
First Wave	20	17	*37*
Second Wave	82	11	*93*
Third Wave	38	27	*65*
Total	*140*	*55*	**195**

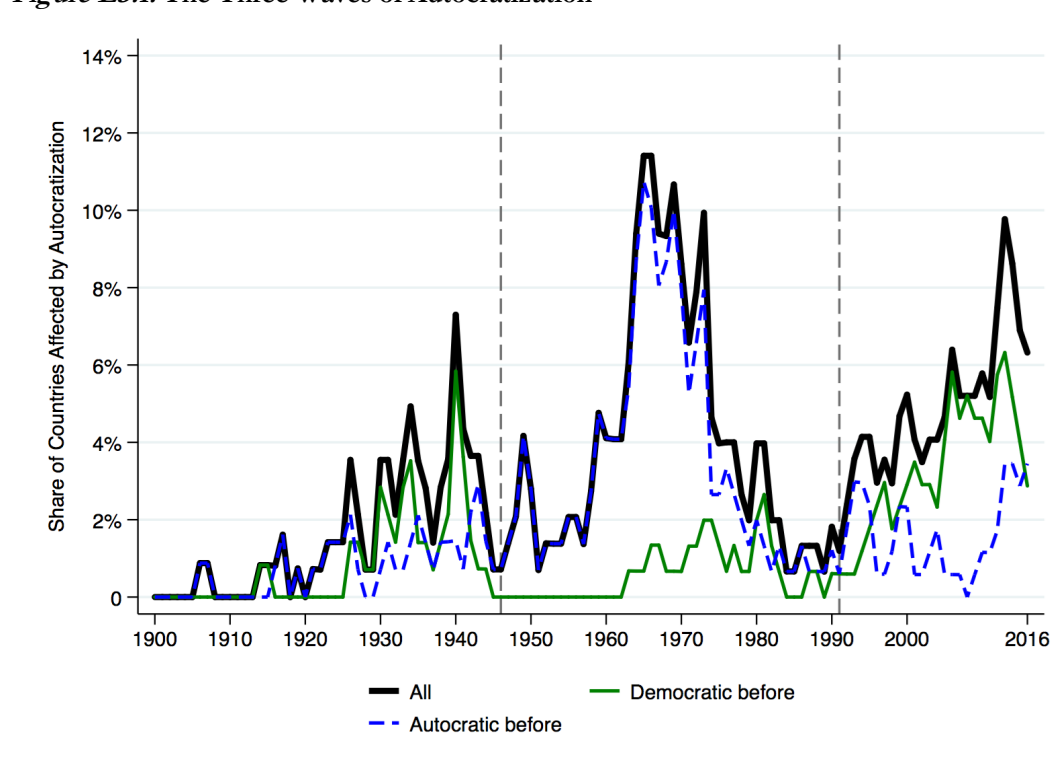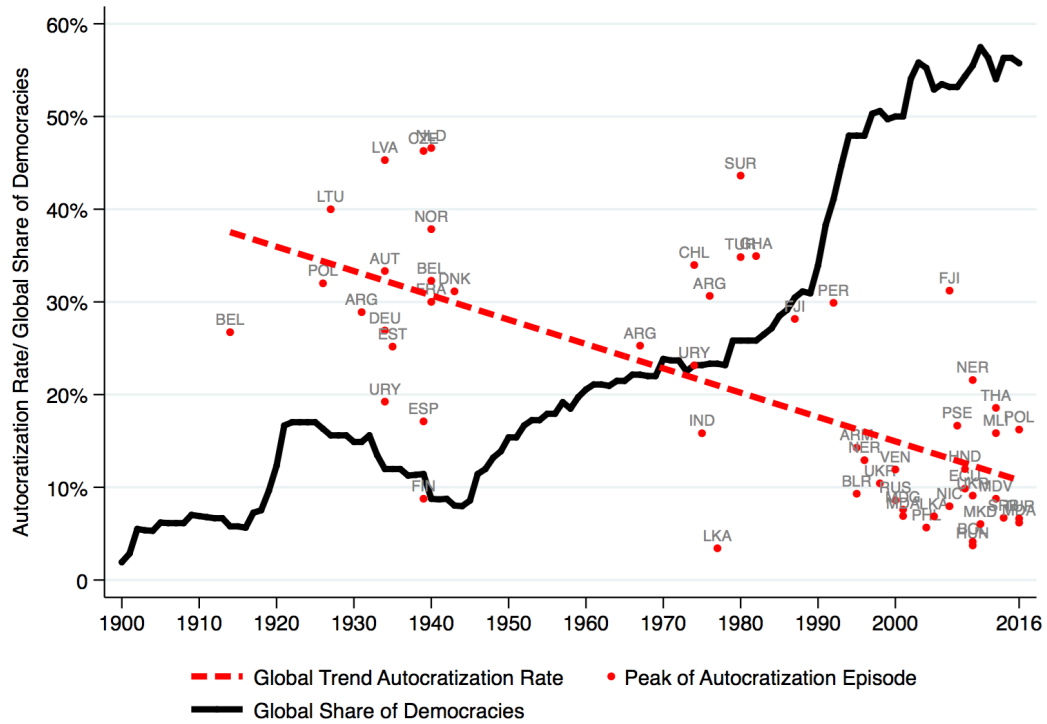*Figure E3.1:* **The Three Waves of Autocratization**

Figure E3.2: Global Trend Autocratization Rate during Democratic Recessions and Share of Democracies

Note: The autocratization rate captures how fast the V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index declines at the peak of the autocratization episode in terms of changes from one year to the other. High values indicate sudden autocratization and low values more gradual. The x-axis of the figure shows the year where the peak of the autocratization rate occurred during the episode.

Table E3.2: Correlates of the Autocratization Rate

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Global share of democracies (t-1)	-0.486*** (0.0645)	-0.436*** (0.0588)	-0.705*** (0.191)	-0.703*** (0.198)
Electoral Democracy Index (V-Dem; t-1)		30.91** (10.31)	33.58** (10.51)	33.11* (13.32)
Number of years since democratic transition		-0.493*** (0.121)	-0.531*** (0.123)	-0.531*** (0.131)
GDP/capita (log, t-1)			1.359 (1.431)	1.348 (1.468)
Time trend			0.169 (0.112)	0.168 (0.115)
Duration of episode				-0.0452 (0.409)
Foreign occupation				-0.0242 (4.470)
_cons	37.50*** (2.561)	20.41** (6.114)	-316.1 (217.6)	-314.7 (222.7)
N	55	55	54	54
adj. R^2	0.508	0.623	0.635	0.619
BIC	403.0	394.2	392.1	400.0

Standard errors in parentheses; [+] $p < 0.10$, [*] $p < 0.05$, [**] $p < 0.01$, [***] $p < 0.001$