

Compared Autocratization – Attacks on the Electoral Cycle (1990-2021)

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Abstract: The silent transition, without a coup d'état, from a democratic regime to an electoral autocracy implies considering that the elections in that country were distorted at some point. This paper presents the criteria adopted to empirically investigate the proposed phenomenon. It considers two paths toward electoral autocratization, democratic backsliding months before the election or electoral manipulation tactics during or after election day. The qualitative analysis of 35 cases of such transitions, identifying measures adopted by autocratizing leaders that affected the electoral cycle, composes the *Compared Autocratization – Attacks on the Electoral Cycle (1990-2021)* dataset and web application. Descriptive statistics on the categories of autocratization and the stages of the electoral cycle affected by the measures foster the discussion of patterns among the two groups.

Key-word: Autocratization; Electoral Integrity; Democratic Backsliding; Electoral Manipulation

1 Introduction

The silent transition, without a coup d'état, from a democratic regime to an electoral autocracy implies considering that the elections in that country were distorted at some point. Although this is a direct and objective statement, each of these elements is open to discussion regarding the criteria adopted to define and identify transition, coup d'état, and electoral autocracy. Furthermore, it is necessary to bring materiality to this transition, that is, to describe how these elections were distorted.

In this paper, I present the criteria adopted to empirically investigate the proposed phenomenon. I consider that there are two paths toward electoral autocratization: the leader either implements a process of democratic backsliding months before the election or engages in electoral manipulation tactics during or after election day. I demonstrate how I identify the universe of cases to which this work refers and also discuss the original data collection carried out for the construction of the *Compared Autocratization - Attacks on the Electoral Cycle (1990-2021)* dataset, which gathers information about the process of autocratization of 35 countries and the measures taken by the leader responsible for the transition that affected some stage of the electoral cycle. I then present some descriptive statistics in order to understand to what extent the two autocratization categories proposed here can be distinguished types of the phenomenon. But first, the following section presents the concepts and the problem that this work aims to address.

2 Theory and Problem

The phenomenon of democratic backsliding consists of multiple formal and informal incremental actions perpetrated by democratically elected leaders aiming to undermine the democratic institutional safeguards responsible for the separation of powers, civil rights and liberties, and the uncertainty of a fair electoral process (Bermeo, 2016; Haggard and Kaufman,

2021). It is by definition multifaceted and gradual, potentially aimed at undermining more than one fundamental aspect of democracy at the same time (Walder and Lust, 2018; Ginsburg and Huq, 2018; Cianetti and Hanley, 2021; Wunsh and Blanchard, 2022). This work highlights two minimal elements present in the descriptions of the phenomenon: (i) it consists of intentional action and (ii) generates harmful consequences for democracy (Haggard and Kaufman, 2021).

In this context, it is possible to identify a convergence between the literatures of democratic backsliding and electoral autocracy. As it involves attacks on the institutions that sustain democracy, democratic backsliding results in a loss of democratic qualities that can lead to regime transition. Without the total suppression of elections, a regime that autocratizes and continues to hold elections is known as electoral autocracy. In these, by definition, regular elections are held for executive and legislative offices, but these elections are not clean, competition among candidates is not fair, and the population is not free to choose their preferred option (Schedler, 2006, 2013; Geddes, 1999, 2018; Magaloni, 2007; Levitsky and Way, 2010, 2020; Kendall-Taylor and Frantz, 2014).

Electoral autocracy resembles (or emulates) a democracy in many formal aspects, such as tolerance for a multi-party system, more or less free media, the existence of a legislature, some freedom for civil society organizations, among others (Cox, 2009; Howard and Roessler, 2006; Gandhi and Przeworski, 2007; Gandhi and Lust-Okar, 2009; Kendall-Taylor and Frantz, 2014), clearly distinguishing itself from a closed autocracy in that it at least tolerates elements that allow for the narrative of a semblance of true democracy. However, these regimes are marked by a dual contestation, where political actors engage in both electoral competition and competition for the institutions that govern the game and organize the political system (Schedler, 2013). Individual civil liberties and rights are not guaranteed, pluralism is limited, and the opposition is often harassed (Linz, 1964; Schedler, 2006), making the distinction between electoral autocracy and democracy also clear, especially from the perspective of the implementation of laws and informal government practices.

Despite this, the study of transitions from democracies to electoral autocracies can be nebulous. The full and ideal functioning of a democracy sometimes fails to guarantee freedoms and individual rights to its citizens¹, the state often makes excessive use of force, including to suppress demonstrations², elected politicians go unpunished for committing crimes³. All these elements deviate from the democratic ideal but are more constant than they should be in democracies worldwide, including those considered of higher quality. For countries in the process of democratic backsliding, where situations like these can even become increasingly

¹ CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES OF BRAZIL. Brazil is the country that kills the most LGBTQIA+ population, May 24, 2022. In: <https://www2.camara.leg.br/atividade-legislativa/comissoes/comissoes-permanentes/clp/noticias/brasil-e-o-pais-que-mais-mata-populacao-lgbtqia-clp-aprova-seminario-sobre-o-tema>. Accessed on June 15, 2023.

² G1. Videos show how the PM repressed a peaceful protest in Recife with rubber bullets and tear gas, May 31, 2021. In: <https://g1.globo.com/pe/pernambuco/noticia/2021/05/31/videos-mostram-momento-em-que-pms-atiram-balas-de-borracha-e-gas-lacrimogeneo-contra-manifestantes-no-recife.ghtml>. Accessed on June 15, 2023.

³ UOL. Cunha has political rights restored by the court and will run for office, July 22, 2022. In: <https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2022/07/22/cunha-tem-direitos-politicos-devolvidos-pela-justica-e-vai-se-candidatar.htm>. Accessed on June 15, 2023.

commonplace, how does one know the exact moment of the transition? How does one determine if that regime has crossed the line that no longer allows it to be considered a democracy?

It is known that although democracy is multifaceted and complex, meaning different things to different people, there is a minimum defining element that distinguishes a democratic and an authoritarian regime, and this element is the holding of competitive and free elections for representative offices (Schumpeter, 1942; Przeworski, 2018). An election with fair competition among political parties and where citizens are free to choose their preferred candidates is the element that defines the democratic regime and distinguishes true democracies from imitations. Clean elections are, therefore, the cut-off mark between democracies and electoral autocracies (Haggard and Fauffman, 2021; Gamboa, 2022). This understanding is fundamental for the study of regime transitions in general and autocratization in particular.

Thus, it is possible to consider electoral autocracy as the likely end for those regimes that witness a process of democratic backsliding in which leaders are successful in their strategy to undermine the limitations on their power and to ensure that the population cannot freely choose their leader. Because democratic backsliding is a multifaceted phenomenon that can take different forms through different strategies, as real-world cases show, identifying clean elections as the cut-off mark between democracies and electoral autocracies allows us to observe the most important aspect when considering a transition from a democratic regime towards an autocracy that resembles a democracy in many aspects.

It is for this reason that this work focuses on what happens with elections during regime transition processes. It is crucial to understand how elections cease to be free, fair, and competitive, and become biased in favor of the incumbent and impossible to win by the opposition.

A striking feature of the recent literature on democratic backsliding and the crisis of democracy is the predominance of the comparative politics perspective, which finds in actors, their choices, and behaviors the main explanations for the survival and transitions of political regimes. This work adds to this tradition as it seeks to understand the role of leaders in the process of distorting elections in their move towards autocratization of the regime. The common element that unites the approach centered on the agency of political actors is a rational choice interpretation of these agents for the maintenance or breaking of regimes, considering their interests, strategic calculations, behavior, and interaction. This approach can be traced, for example, in the pioneering studies on democracy breakdowns conducted by Linz (1978), the transition discussions by O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), the consolidation paradigm of Linz and Stepan (1999), Di Palma's (1990) work on building democracies, and even in Dahl's (1971) formulations on conditions for democratic transition. More recent examples are as vast as they are relevant to the field (Geddes, 1999; Przeworski, 2005; Boix and Svobik, 2013; Svobik, 2012; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán, 2013; Meng, 2020).

One of the reasons this approach is so widespread in explaining recent phenomena of threats and crises to democracy is its universal foundations for explaining phenomena that occur in distinct geographic regions; once specific local conditions are controlled for, the reasoning and concepts of game theory can be applied to any context. Furthermore, explanations stemming from

this prism have consolidated as reasonable explanations of reality and constitute an important part of the foundational basis of the literature on regime change. The literature on the phenomenon of democratic backsliding and democracy crisis largely relies on explanations that find in political actors the causes of the democratic backsliding, analyzing everything from their rhetoric and authoritarian behaviors to their actions in relation to the opposition and institutions, which would denote the phenomenon itself (Bermeo, 2016; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Luo and Przeworski, 2021). Alternative theories that deal with the demand for authoritarian politicians coming from public opinion, and that would therefore explain the election of these leaders in the first place, are often countered with the fact that it is the political elites who actually have the capacity to make decisions that will have consequences for the regime (Norris, 2017; Bartels, 2023).

The leader can alter the rules governing the election in different ways, whether changing the rules that govern the candidacies of parties and candidates, the rules that define the electoral system, the design of districts, or the formula that converts votes into legislative seats. The leader can change the way the Electoral Commission is composed, its budget, and the resources available for implementing the electoral cycle. It is also possible to control who can or cannot protest publicly, which media outlets can operate freely, and which opinions can or cannot be punished by the state. Ultimately, the leader may also adopt strategies of manipulation or electoral fraud on the day of the vote, with voters voting more than once using false identification, stuffing ballot boxes with extra votes, and deliberately counting and tabulating votes fraudulently, among other tactics.

Cheeseman and Klass (2018) state that techniques such as redistricting and voter suppression are more sophisticated techniques to ensure an electoral victory, from the perspective of those who apply them, compared to stuffing the ballot box, using fake IDs to vote, and coercing voters at polling stations, common tactics to be implemented on election day. It soon becomes apparent that these tactics depend on a network of officials and supporters willing to commit electoral crimes at different points in the country, which in itself already exposes the financial costs, mobilization, and persuasion of those involved. The risk of these is also high, since getting caught would make the blatant efforts to distort the election by the orchestrator of these schemes evident.

Thus, electoral frauds are the most risky and costly alternative to manipulate an election (Simpser, 2013), and, therefore, can be understood as the last resort, used by those who have not managed to efficiently distort the rules, the state apparatus, and repression in their favor in the months leading up to the election (Przeworski, 2018). As the leader aims to distort the elections with the intent of (a) winning it and (b) benefiting from the legitimacy that the election provides to their government, blatant manipulation techniques can backfire (Trantidis, 2021). Higashijima (2022) considers it a dictator's electoral dilemma to choose between the certainty of a major victory using a lot of manipulation and the benefits of an election with less manipulation, therefore, less guaranteed, but with more legitimacy.

Thus, the strategy of distorting the rules months before the day of the voting is understood as more sophisticated and, therefore, preferred by the leader. Yet, some leaders are not capable of

unbalancing the conditions of competition months before the election. Leaders who do not have the support of other actors, powers, or institutions that would assist them in the process of distorting the rules and the electoral competition. When these are still unwilling to give up a guaranteed victory or to embrace the uncertainty about the result that will emerge from the contest, they opt to use tactics of fraud on the day of the voting. In an effort to demonstrate how both processes unfold in real-life cases and try to understand important features of these, this work proposes an empirical exploration of autocratization cases trying to reveal how elections are distorted to the benefit of the leader.

3 Identifying regimes, transitions, and the universe of cases

The transition of political regimes and the very concept of electoral autocracy are central to this work. Moving to empirical cases, it becomes necessary to adopt indicators that reflect the conceptual affiliations adopted here. Fortunately, the political regime categorization from Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), one of the main international projects for the study and measurement of dimensions related to democracy, adopts similar criteria for identifying what distinguishes democracy from electoral autocracy. The Regimes of the World (RoW) categorization is based on the actual implementation (and not just the formal *de jure* design) of political institutions and democratic processes (Luhmann, Tannenber, and Lindberg, 2018). Considered by the responsible researchers a conservative categorization, it divides the world's regimes into four categories, listed here from the best and most democratic to the worst and least democratic: liberal democracy, electoral democracy, electoral autocracy, and closed autocracy. These four categories are conservative in the sense that they do not expand the subtypes of regimes into a multitude of possibilities within democracies (Collier and Levitsky, 1997) or autocracies (Geddes, Wright, and Franz, 2014), sticking to two types of democracies, those of better and worse quality, and two types of autocracies, those that mimic democracies and those that do not bother to do so.

It is evident that each categorization of political regimes has its focus and prioritizes one element or another in distinguishing possible categories. For example, the classic dichotomous distinction of Przeworski et al. (2000) for Democracies and Dictatorships (also known as DD) is based on four objective criteria related to elections and the role they play in the regime for identifying democracies: (i) the executive head is chosen by popular election or by a body that has been elected, (ii) a popularly elected legislature, (iii) the existence of more than one party contesting elections, and (iv) power alternation must have occurred. Failing to meet one of these elements, the regime is considered, in the DD categorization, as a dictatorship. Another example is the distinction of autocracies by Geddes, Wright, and Franz (2014), which is based on who, in that authoritarian regime, has control over the policies adopted, the security apparatus, and the selection of leaders. In this way, they consider the types: dominant party dictatorship, monarchy, military dictatorship, and personalist dictatorship. Other institutes produce their typologies, such as Freedom House, which focuses on the level of political rights and civil liberties to divide the

world's regimes into Free, Partly Free, and Not Free (Freedom House, 2022). Thus, depending on what interests the researcher, the classifications can be more or less suitable for working with.

In the RoW, it is important to emphasize that the distinction between electoral democracies and electoral autocracies is of primary interest. The authors responsible for this typology identify that the electoral autocracy is the type of regime where there is an election for the head of the Executive, but these do not meet Dahl's democratic standard of competition and participation (Luhmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg, 2018). On the other hand, an electoral democracy would not only hold elections but would achieve sufficient levels of democratic guarantees, such as freedom of association, suffrage, clean elections, elected executive, and freedom of speech. However, the main point of distinction between the two types is the process of holding leaders accountable (accountability), and this only exists when rulers fear being punished at the ballot box (Luhmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg, 2018). It is only when elections are indeed uncertain that the regime is considered democratic; conversely, when elections cannot be lost, when competition is biased and/or the popular will is not converted into electoral results, the regime is considered an electoral autocracy.

This marks an important distinction between the RoW categorizations and the DD, which, as mentioned, focuses on elections and the role they play in the regime. According to the four DD criteria for identifying democracies, a regime can have a democratic history with power alternation and continue holding elections for the Executive and Legislative, but its electoral competition conditions have degraded, biasing the competition in favor of the incumbent, most likely through a series of measures taken to achieve this end. In the DD criteria, there is no possibility of identifying an electoral autocracy that stems from a democratic regime. The RoW, in turn, perfectly meets this need, by considering in its definitions some annual continuous indicators that can vary over the years.

For this purpose, the RoW uses measurements from V-Dem itself to identify the elements that characterize each type of regime. Table 1 below presents these elements:

Table 1: RoW categories and criteria

RoW Categories	Criteria
Liberal Democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Meets the criteria for Electoral democracy <input type="checkbox"/> Scores above 0.8 on the V-Dem Liberal Component index (v2x_liberal) <input type="checkbox"/> Scores above 3 on transparent law enforcement (v2cltrnslw_osp) <input type="checkbox"/> Scores above 3 on access to justice for men (v2clacjstm_osp) and women (v2clacjstw_osp)
Electoral Democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Scores above 2 on the indicator for multi-party (v2elmulpar_osp) <input type="checkbox"/> Scores above 2 on the indicator for free and fair elections (v2elfrfair_osp) <input type="checkbox"/> Scores above 0.5 on the Electoral Democracy Index (v2x_polyarchy)
Electoral Autocracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Fails to meet one or more of the criteria of electoral democracies <input type="checkbox"/> Subject the chief executive and the legislature to de-jure multiparty elections as indicated by a score above 1 on the V-Dem multiparty elections indicator
Closed Autocracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> No multiparty elections for the legislature take place (v2xlg_elecrag == 0) or the chief executive is not elected in direct or indirect multiparty elections.

Source: Coppedge et al. (2022)

Table 1 allows us to consider that, once using indicators for the classification of regimes among categories, the RoW eventually runs into a common problem in this type of classification that refers to cases that are near the thresholds of the categories. Essentially, this problem relates to differentiating, in different types of regimes, countries that have very similar indicators, but which are, for example, on opposite sides of the regime thresholds. For example, country A has a 0.48 on the indicator, classifying it as a type X regime, while country B has a 0.52 on the same indicator, classifying it as a type Y regime. Are these countries really so different as to be in distinct regime categories?

In this specific work, as I use this categorization to identify political regime transition, this problem is even more relevant, since the concern becomes: should I consider that the regime has transitioned from one type to another by merely crossing a certain threshold of a continuous indicator?

Even though the RoW adopts different criteria for each definition, and not just a single continuous indicator, which reduces the dependency on a threshold crossing, it is possible to use a version of this typology that considers ambiguous cases in categories of lower limit and upper limit in the distinctions between each of the four original categories. This means considering that between electoral democracy and electoral autocracy, there are two new categories, lower-bound electoral democracy and upper-bound electoral autocracy, which are subcategories of the electoral democracy and electoral autocracy categories, respectively. These ambiguous cases are identified from the confidence interval of the indicators that are criteria for categorization. Thus, the lower-bound electoral democracy is a category for cases that meet the criteria of electoral democracy, but whose lower bound of the confidence intervals of indicators for free and fair elections, multiparty elections, or the Electoral Democracy Index overlap those of electoral autocracies. Similarly, the upper-bound electoral autocracy presents the same criteria as electoral autocracies, but has the upper limits of the confidence intervals for free and fair elections, multiparty elections, or the Electoral Democracy Index overlapping those of electoral democracies.

In this work, I use as the criterion to identify a transition from democracy to electoral autocracy the change, in any country, from the classification of lower-level electoral democracy ($v2x_regime_amb = 5$) to upper-level electoral autocracy ($v2x_regime_amb = 4$). This selection criterion is an instrument that is useful for identifying the phenomenon of interest, but it is not perfect, as hardly any other instrument would be. Thus, it is expected that the chosen instrument is useful for selecting the cases that will be investigated and that the investigation of cases selected by this instrument will be productive and enlightening for the interest of this work.

In the period of interest for this work, between the end of the Cold War (1990) and 2021, using version 12 of the V-Dem database, 59 cases of the aforementioned transition are identified. However, this is not yet the universe of cases of silent transitions. It is necessary to identify cases of coups d'état, where there was a clear institutional rupture, and therefore, consists of a different problem from what this work investigates.

For the identification of coups d'état, I turn to the Coup D'état Project database (Peyton et al., 2023), from the Cline Center, an institute affiliated with the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. This project defines coups d'état as “organized efforts to carry out a sudden and

irregular removal of the incumbent executive authority of a national government, or to replace the authority of the highest authority of one or more branches of government” (Peyton et al., 2023, p.3). Thus, this definition serves to distinguish silent transitions, without institutional rupture and within the rules of the game, from those transitions that are at the same time (i) planned, (ii) sudden, and (iii) irregular. Fifteen cases of coups d'état are then identified and excluded from the universe of cases based on the definition from the Coup D'état Project.

The remaining 44 cases were individually investigated, seeking to understand how the process of autocratization occurred in these countries. This case-by-case qualitative analysis followed some steps and criteria. Initially, the leader who held the position of head of the Executive (or government) in the year of the transition was identified. Then, it was determined that for each case, the period under analysis would be the tenure of this leader, from the first year in power until the year they left office (or until 2021 for leaders who remain in power).

With the cases and periods defined, a research assistant was responsible for identifying references and collecting data. This assistant was assigned mandatory readings on electoral integrity and case studies of democratic backsliding through electoral manipulation (Corrales, 2020; Schepelle, 2022; Batista and Lins, 2022). The assistant also underwent training on the stages of the electoral cycle (as defined by the Carter Center) and on the objectives of this project. His task was then twofold: for each case, he had to identify academic articles, newspaper articles, legislation, blog posts, or reports from observers or international organizations that discussed the process of autocratization of that country or the integrity and administration of elections there. From the identification and listing of this material, the assistant listed the measures that were taken by the leader that impacted some stages of the electoral cycle. The author reviewed all this compilation of information, reviewed the listed references and the listed measures carried out by the leader that affected the electoral cycle, modifying the final set of measures related to each case, so that any limitations of the final version of this compilation are the full responsibility of the author⁴.

In this qualitative stage of studying this universe, some cases stood out in terms of the difficulty of considering that they were starting from a condition of democracy before transitioning to electoral autocracy. At that moment, it seemed useful to add another criterion for case selection. Cases would be excluded from the universe if their democracy had not lasted at least two years. I understand that this exclusion is beneficial to the proposed analysis, as countries that are only temporarily, for a single year, democracies would possess particular characteristics of instability. These, at the time of the identified transition, can be considered more as autocracies that were democracies by accident, rather than democracies that collapsed. Thus, by this criterion, I exclude from my universe of cases the transitions of Montenegro (2006), North Macedonia (2000), Russia (1993), Turkmenistan (1991), and Kazakhstan (1991).

⁴ Even though the review of measures taken by the leader that have affected the electoral cycle was not necessarily systematic, the research was extensive and from varied sources considering the diversity of cases, so that, even though it is possible that some measure may have escaped our identification, for any of the cases, I consider it comprehensive enough to have identified what was most relevant to the electoral cycle of the 44 cases under study.

Other cases were excluded because they involved transitions occurring in a period of specific instability that did not concern a democratically elected leader with authoritarian tendencies trying to expand their power and perpetuate themselves in office. Therefore, I exclude the transition in Libya (2014) due to the calamity situation resulting from the Civil War. I also exclude the transition in Nepal (2012) as it involved an interim government that remained in power after the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and handed over power after new elections in 2013. I exclude the transition in Lebanon (2018) due to the typical instability of that country after years of delayed elections due to the Syrian refugee crisis and deadlocks for the indirect election of the president by the parliament. And I exclude the transition in the Solomon Islands (2006) due to the intervention of foreign troops after civil unrest resulting from the selection of Snyder Rjnj as prime minister and bribery accusations involving Chinese business interests - Rjnj resigned eight days after taking office. These cases are mainly excluded because including them would not reveal insights into the conditions of electoral institutions, politics, or civil society in the process of autocratization.

With this, I arrive at the 35 cases that constitute the universe that will be analyzed in this work. Information about the leader in power at the time of the transition, the period under study, a summary of the country's transition, a list of consulted references, and a list of identified measures that impacted the electoral cycle can be checked in full in the *Compared Autocratization – Attacks on the Electoral Cycle (1990-2021)* dataset.

A web application made available online through the link (https://ianbatista.shinyapps.io/ComparedAutocratization_EIP/) was developed to facilitate navigation, search for information, and compare the cases and measures studied here. It is also a transparency tool for the classifications, the cases, and the measures identified, in addition to being educational material for the study of autocratization processes.

4 Autocratization categories

Classifications and typologies are crucial in the field of comparative politics. Thinking and organizing the cases under study into typologies is a strategy for organizing and analyzing data, creating structures that allow the identification of patterns, similarities, and differences among units (Przeworski and Teune, 1970; Lijphart, 1971). Although Lijphart (1971) understands that different criteria can base the construction of a typology and thus the differentiation of cases among different categories, Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003) argue that typologies should be built considering the causal mechanisms inherent to the political phenomena under study. In this way, the researcher can identify the key factors that shape political outcomes and develop and test more precise hypotheses. In other words, to adopt as a classification criterion cases that share similar causal mechanisms. Evidently, for this, the researcher must have a deep knowledge of the cases and have collected enough information to attest to the existing causal mechanism in each of them.

The in-depth qualitative analysis of the 35 cases worked on in this work follows the guidance of Przeworski and Teune (1970), Lijphart (1971), and Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003), that is, to organize and structure these cases into different categories based on what was

possible to identify as determinants for the autocratization of the political regime, which allows me to further investigate similarities and distinctions between different types of transitions.

From the analysis of each case of autocratization and the measures taken by these leaders that impacted the electoral cycle (discussed in the next section), it was possible to classify each case among the categories that interest me in this work: democratic backsliding and fraudulent election.

For the category of democratic backsliding, I include cases where the autocratization process was marked by strategies of institutional reforms and/or expansion of the executive power, both formally and informally, when rules are not changed but their use is for the exclusive benefit of the ruler, such as the appointment of allies to positions of control and oversight. The identification of measures that affected the electoral cycle contributes to a classification as democratic backsliding, but this criterion is not exclusive – there are cases without identified measures that affected the electoral cycle and that are classified as democratic backsliding (the cases of Moldova, 2005⁵; Philippines, 2018⁶; Montenegro, 2013⁷; and Albania, 2019⁸), because it is understood that other reforms, measures, and actions of the leader, which did not directly affect any stage of the electoral cycle, contributed to the autocratization of the regime.

A typical case of autocratization in this category is the example of Hungary under the leadership of Viktor Orbán (2010-Present). Prime Minister of the country since 2010, one of his first measures was to reform the judicial system, increasing government control over courts and undermining the autonomy of this Branch, through the enactment of a new Constitution in 2011 (Scheppele, 2022). This new charter is also considered conservative by restricting minority rights. Orbán has pursued the media since his first year in government (Mares and Young, 2019; Scheppele, 2022), redesigned electoral districts (Political Capital, 2012), changed rules on party coalitions (Scheppele, 2022; Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2022), on how votes are translated into seats (Scheppele, 2022; Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2022), and on the possibility of voter registration in districts where they do not live, which critics call "electoral tourism" (Pivarnyik, 2018; Scheppele, 2022). All these elements benefit Orbán and his party in such a way that they unbalance the conditions of electoral competition and allow him to continue in power election after election. The characteristics of executive power expansion and reforms that benefit the government, especially in terms of electoral competition, make Orbán's Hungary an ideal model for this form of autocratization.

⁵ The allegations of media censorship during Vladimir Voronin's first term, without a formal measure being taken for this purpose, and claims of using public resources to favor ruling parties and persecute the opposition, without these also occurring through concrete formal actions, make the case of Moldova be classified as Regression.

⁶ The case of autocratization in the Philippines by Rodrigo Duterte will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁷ Persecution of journalists, the use of public resources to employ party supporters, and control of the public media are some of the accusations against the government of Prime Minister Filip Vujanović.

⁸ The 2019 earthquake led to emergency measures and centralization of power in the hands of President Edi Rama, which resulted in the main opposition party, the Democratic Party (PD), boycotting that year's subnational elections. The PD and other opposition parties accused Rama's government of corruption and electoral manipulation, abandoning their parliamentary mandates and refusing to participate in the local elections.

For the category of fraudulent election, the first criterion was the year of the transition, whether it was an election year or not. In the case of an election year, the presence of international monitors claiming fraud on election day was a crucial element. Interestingly, leaders who implemented reforms and biased the electoral field months before rarely resorted to manipulation tactics on election day, as descriptive statistics will further confirm in this following section. This made it easier to identify whether monitors claimed fraud on the day of voting or if leaders had biased the field of competition beforehand, and thus fit the case into one category or another.

Malawi presents us with an ideal model of transition through fraudulent elections at two different opportunities. The country's first transition through fraudulent election occurred under the government of Bakili Muluzi (1994-2004). This government, marked by corruption and nepotism, was also known for persecuting and harassing journalists, although it did not shut down media outlets. In the 1999 elections, international observers reported irregularities such as vote-buying, lack of ballot papers, and missing voters in the registers in areas where the opposition had more support⁹. Additionally, the lack of transparency in the electoral administration raised concerns about the integrity of the votes and the possibility of manipulation of the results in favor of the ruling party (Sahle, 2001; Rubin, 2008). All these elements made this election beyond the reach of the opposition, in an unfair contest that revealed that at that time Malawi was not a democracy. In 2002, Muluzi attempted to amend the country's Constitution to run for a third term at the end of his second term, which was blocked by Parliament, but reveals the leader's interest in perpetuating his tenure¹⁰.

In 2019, the country transitioned back to electoral autocracy after frauds in the re-election of Peter Mutharika (2014-2020), another government marked by corruption, nepotism, and restrictions on press freedom through harassment and persecution. According to the Washington Post, international observers denounced problems "found in the filling out of result sheets, [...] allegations that ballot boxes were stuffed with pre-marked ballots, and that polling stations sent tampered result sheets - marked with correction fluid sold locally under the brand Tipp-Ex - to vote counting centers."¹¹ In February 2020, the Supreme Court of Malawi annulled the 2019 elections and called for new elections, citing irregularities and failures in the electoral process¹².

In both cases of Malawi's transition, it is interesting to note that while the leader implemented tactics of manipulation and fraud on election day, widely denounced by international observers, the country's institutions were not co-opted to the extent that the leader could expand

⁹ THE NEW HUMANITARIAN. Opposition parties boycott voter registration. August 30, 2000. Available at: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/report/2263/malawi-opposition-parties-boycott-voter-registration>. Accessed on September 1, 2023; WORLD SOCIALIST WEB SITE. Fraudulent elections in Malawi. July 2, 1999. Available at: <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/1999/07/malw-j02.html>. Accessed on September 1, 2023.

¹⁰ THE NEW HUMANITARIAN. No third term for Muluzi. July 5, 2002. Available at: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2002/07/05/no-third-term-muluzi>. Accessed on September 1, 2023.

¹¹ WASHINGTON POST. A Malawi court just ordered a do-over presidential election. Here's what you need to know. February 4, 2020. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/02/04/malawi-court-just-ordered-do-over-presidential-election-heres-what-you-need-know/>. Accessed on September 1, 2023.

¹² AL JAZEERA. Malawi Top Court Annuls Presidential Election Results. February 3, 2020. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/2/3/malawi-top-court-annuls-presidential-election-results>. Accessed on September 1, 2023.

his power and unbalance the conditions of competition beyond the manipulated election, as illustrated by the Parliament in 2002, blocking Muluzi's third term, and the Supreme Court in 2020 annulling Mutharika's fraudulent elections in 2019. Malawi is typically a case of autocratization by electoral fraud where the leader does not manage to take over the institutions in such a way that it distorts the conditions of electoral competition not just for the next election, but also for subsequent ones.

For cases with allegations of fraud on voting day, some measures observed impacted stages such as Voting Operation, Vote Counting, and Dispute Resolution, and these were further indicators for the categorizing of autocratization through Fraudulent Election. Other measures identified in these cases impacted other stages, such as Legal Framework and Electoral Systems, these theoretically more related to a process of Backsliding, but for all cases, an analysis was made to understand if these would be consequential enough to be responsible for the transition, or if the transition would have indeed occurred due to fraud on election day.

One can claim that the researcher had to make subjective judgments at times. To compensate for this element, I seek to compensate with transparency, making available not only the database but also its web application, which presents each case with a summary and the verdict of the classification into a type of autocratization or another, in a way that makes clear what in that case led to that classification. The online application, which facilitates comparison between cases, also aims to facilitate the exploration of these cases and compare them, so that it becomes clearer what grouped this set of cases into each of these categories.

Table 2 below seeks to define the criteria used in the categorization, allowing for reproducibility.

Table 2: Categories' classification criteria

Category	Criteria
Democratic Backsliding	When there is an indication (reforms, measures, concrete actions) of significantly altered contest conditions, even if there is subsequent electoral fraud, it will be coded as backsliding. A transition occurring in a non-election year is also revealing.
Fraudulent Election	Allegation of electoral fraud in a case without identified measures, or allegations of electoral fraud in cases where there are measures related to stages of voting day (Voting Operation, Vote Counting, Dispute Resolution), or, if related to other stages, do not denote significantly altered contest conditions.

Source: The author.

A brief discussion of some cases with less evident definitions may clarify the criteria used in classification. For example, the case of Bolivia's autocratization in 2019, at first glance, could be classified as either category. The period under study is the government of Evo Morales, who took office in 2006. During his tenure, three measures to extend the term limit are listed at different times, in 2009, 2013, and 2017, and an attack on the media in 2011 is also identified through “forced sale of some private establishments, the use of politicized tax audits, investigation of media owners, and the drafting of legislation that restricts freedom of expression” (Sanchez-Sibony, 2021, p. 139). The last of these term extensions is directly related to the autocratization outcome,

as after losing a referendum that would have allowed him to contest a fourth term, President Morales appealed to the Constitutional Court, which then authorized a potential new term as legal and constitutional.

Subsequently, the 2019 election was especially chaotic from the moment of vote counting and tabulation when, with about 80% of the ballots counted and in a scenario where a second round would be necessary, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) halted the release of the count. Twenty-four hours later, the TSE announced the final result, with Morales winning in the first round. This led to notable accusations of electoral fraud from the Organization of American States (OAS) observation mission, but the government and TSE claimed the accusations were unfounded. Researchers from MIT later found no evidence of fraud using forensic analysis techniques¹³. What followed was an escalation of violence across the country, initiated by civil society and security forces identified with the opposition, resulting in dozens of deaths. The violence culminated in public statements by the military considering intervention, which led to Evo Morales fleeing the country and the establishment of a provisional government led by the second vice-president of the Senate, Janine Añez.

The complexity of categorizing Bolivian autocratization into one of the categories arises from the presence of measures indicating the expansion of executive power (mainly, successive extensions of presidential term limits), disputable accusations of fraud, and subsequent violence caused by the electoral result, in a way that all these elements are somehow responsible for the consequent transition in 2019. In cases like this, where more than one categorization would be possible, the coding is done by identifying the original determining element for the regime transition, trying to find the trigger element in the chain of events that led to the regime transition. In the Bolivian case, I identify that Morales's tenure and power grabbing actions nudge the political actors to act in a non-democratic manner. Moreover, the accusations of fraud proved to be disputable after evidence was not presented, and statistical analyses revealed that the result presented by the TSE was theoretically possible.

Another illustrative case of the classification criteria for autocratization processes is that of the Philippines in 2018 under the mandate of Rodrigo Duterte, who took office in 2016 and remained in power until at least 2021. During this period, no measure impacting the electoral cycle was identified. However, Duterte's mandate is marked by a controversial policy of combating drugs and organized crime, which resulted in hundreds of deaths and human rights violations, earning him popularity. Duterte is also known for public comments attacking the LGBTQIA+ community, religious minorities, and the media, having suggested the killing of journalists and being responsible for cases of intimidation, although he did not take any practical measures that closed outlets or changed the media operating conditions in the country¹⁴. Institutionally, he

¹³ THE GUARDIAN. 'No evidence of fraud in Morales' poll victory', says US researchers, March 1, 2020. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/01/no-evidence-of-in-morales-poll-victory-say-us-researchers-bolivia>. Accessed on September 1, 2023.

¹⁴ REUTERS. **Philippines' Duterte denounced for defending killing of some journalists**, 1 de junho de 2016. Disponível em: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-politics-journalists/philippines-duterte-denounced-for-defending-killing-of-some-journalists-idUSKCN0YN3TK>. Acesso em: 29 de março de 2023.

governed this period with a congress dominated by supporters and a Supreme Court intimidated by the popularity of the leader. With inoperative control institutions, attacks on minorities, and a public security policy marked by human rights violations, the autocratization of the Philippines under Duterte is identified in 2018, a non-electoral year, without measures listed as direct attacks on the electoral cycle. Thus, I classify this case as democratic backsliding, having occurred through means other than directly modifying the rules of electoral contestation and conditions, but by implementing an atmosphere of intimidation and violence that diminishes the space for dissent and/or contestation of the government. The conditions of electoral contestation between government and opposition eventually became unbalanced, without Duterte directly targeting the electoral cycle.

A third and final illustrative case is the autocratization of Papua New Guinea in 2007, during the mandate of Michael Somare, who governed between 2002 and 2010. At the beginning of Somare's government, in 2003, a new electoral system was introduced, the Limited Preferential Voting (Instant-runoff voting), which replaced the first-past-the-post system in a by-election in the Abau district that year (Freedom House, 2005a). Electoral observers noted that the new system drastically reduced the number of spoiled ballots in that election, hailing the change as positive for the country's elections (Freedom House, 2005a). This is a change in the electoral system implemented during the government of a leader identified for autocratizing the country, and, therefore, is listed among the measures of the Somare government that impacted the electoral cycle. However, its consequences were not exactly harmful to electoral integrity in the country, according to experts. At the same time, the 2007 general elections that re-elected Somare were marked by fraud and loss of votes (Haley, 2013), as well as the questionable updating of the electoral roll before the elections when the number of voters dropped from 5.3 million to 3.9 million, after an effort to remove deceased voters but that led to reports of many living voters being removed from the registry. Moreover, observers also highlighted that nearly 4 million voters were registered to vote in a country of 6 million people. The absence of identified measures that impacted the electoral cycle in a way that favored the government means that this case is not classified as backsliding but rather autocratization through fraud practiced on election day, as reported by international observers (Freedom House, 2008a).

The illustration of these three cases that presented greater complexities for categorization allows for the conclusion of three other classification criteria. First, in the presence of multiple pieces of evidence that allowed the case to fit into more than one category of autocratization, the most determinant element for autocratization in that identified transition year should be considered for classification. Second, in the absence of identification of measures that directly affected the electoral cycle and with the transition identified in a non-electoral year (or absence of allegations of electoral fraud, when in an electoral year), attention turns to other measures that may not have directly impacted the electoral cycle but that have significantly affected the level of intimidation and civil liberties in the country, which would classify the case as a backsliding. Finally, in the process of categorizing the type of autocratization, the listed measures should always be evaluated in terms of impact and consequences for the ruler, considering the possibility of some measures

having a positive effect on the elections of that country, and not necessarily increasing the government's advantage over the opposition.

After classifying the 35 cases worked here, there are 25 cases of democratic backsliding and 10 cases of fraudulent election. Table 3 below presents how the cases are distributed among the categories, with the indication of the country and the year of the identified transition.

Table 3: Cases per category

Democratic Backsliding	Fraudulent Election
Estonia, 1992	Malawi, 2000
Namibia, 1994	Madagascar, 2001
Armenia, 1995	Bangladesh, 2002
Belarus, 1996	Philippines, 2004
Zambia, 1996	Sri Lanka, 2005
Ukraine, 1998	Papua New Guinea, 2007
Tanzania, 2000	Maldives, 2013
Moldova, 2005	Kenya, 2017
Nicaragua, 2007	Malawi, 2019
Niger, 2009	Gambia, 2020
Ukraine, 2010	
North Macedonia, 2011	
Montenegro, 2013	
Turkey, 2013	
Zambia, 2013	
Hungary, 2018	
Philippines, 2018	
Albania, 2019	
Benin, 2019	
Bolivia, 2019	
India, 2019	
Mali, 2019	
Ivory Coast, 2020	
El Salvador, 2021	
Nigeria, 2021	

Search: The author.

As the discussion has revealed so far, the categories of autocratization modes are not exclusive, with some cases presenting characteristics that would allow classification in more than one category. Although the criteria adopted here allow each category to be composed of cases more similar to each other than to cases in another category, I understand this is sufficient to investigate the differences between these modes of autocratization.

Some descriptive statistics reveal patterns found in the main categories. For example, the literature points to the importance of the reelection of leaders with few democratic commitments for the success of their democratic backsliding offensives that expand executive power and distort the conditions of electoral competition (Baturu, 2014; Brito et al., 2023). This would occur once reelection is a new signal of popular support, legitimizing not only the leader's discourse but also

the measures that were taken during the first term. In this sense, of the 35 cases of autocratization studied in this work, 15 leaders were reelected before the transition and 20 leaders transitioned the regime on their first term, the majority of these through the mode of democratic backsliding¹⁵, as Table 4 demonstrates. That being, the transition for these 35 cases in general does not appear to depend on reelection. However, considering those who transitioned through fraudulent elections, 80% did so on their first opportunity.

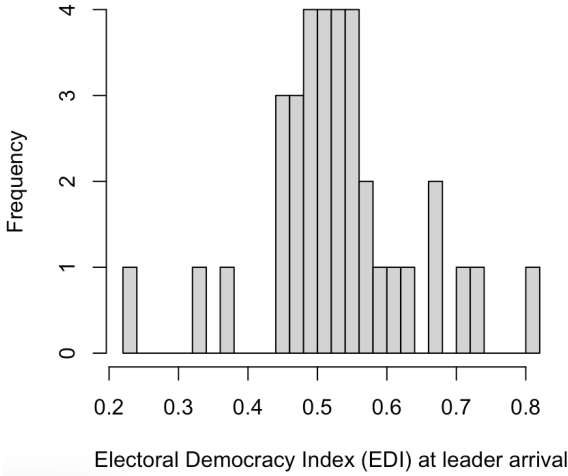
Table 4: Frequency of transition before and after reelection

	Transition on the first term	Transition after reelection
Democratic backsliding	12	13
Fraudulent Election	8	2

Source: The author.

The conditions of democratic quality prior to the arrival of these leaders are also relevant information. Figure 1 presents the histogram of the distribution of the frequency of values of the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) one year before the rise of the leaders responsible for the autocratization of these regimes. With an average of 0.53 and a median of 0.52, some outliers are noted at the extremes – Hungary is the outlier furthest to the right, with a score of 0.81 on the indicator before Viktor Orbán came to power, while Zambia is the outlier furthest to the left, with a score of 0.23 in 1990 before Chiluba arrived in 1991. The average value of the EDI before the arrival of the autocratizing leader by mode of transition reveals that cases of backsliding were slightly better democracies: an average of 0.54 for backsliding cases and 0.49 for rigged election cases.

Figure 1: Histogram of EDI before autocratizing leader came to power

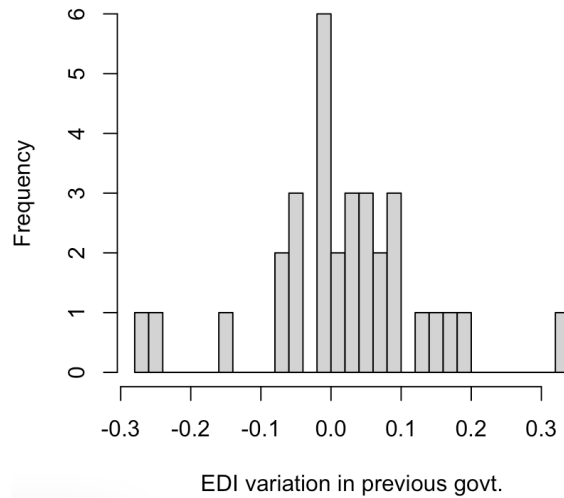


Source: The author, with data from V-Dem (Coppedge et al., 2021).

¹⁵ For cases of fraudulent election elections, for the purposes of this re-election statistic, I consider that the leader who rigs the elections of their re-election had not yet been re-elected when implementing these frauds.

It is also possible to investigate the trend of variation of the EDI indicator in the mandate before that of these leaders, to understand to which extent the country was already on an autocratizing trajectory. Figure 2 presents the distribution, which has an average and median of 0.025, revealing a positive variation before the arrival of these leaders, albeit very small. When investigating the variation by mode of transition, backsliding cases presented an average variation of 0 in the previous government, while fraudulent election cases had an average variation of 0.08. Generally, it can be stated that, on average, these were not cases that were on an autocratizing trajectory considering variations of the EDI.

Figure 2: Histogram of EDI variation in the mandate prior to the autocratizing leader

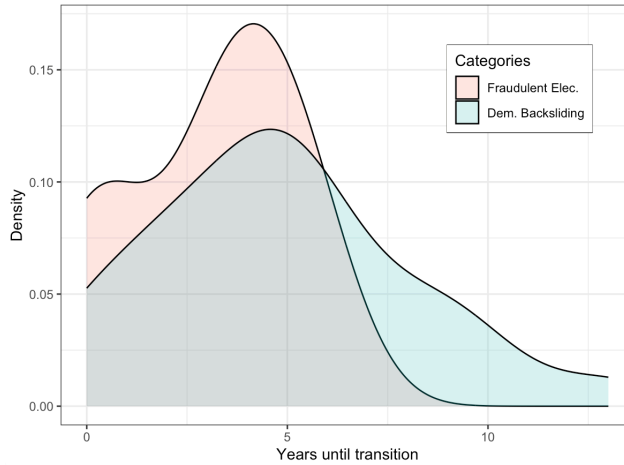


Source: The author, with data from V-Dem (Coppedge et al., 2021).

Through density graphs of the distribution of values of some variables among the two groups, we can better understand these categories. For example, Figure 3 presents the distribution of the time between the year the leader came to power and the year of the transition, which can be

put in other words as how long it took for the leader to autocratize the regime. Backsliding cases took, on average, longer to cross the line that divides democracy and electoral autocracy.

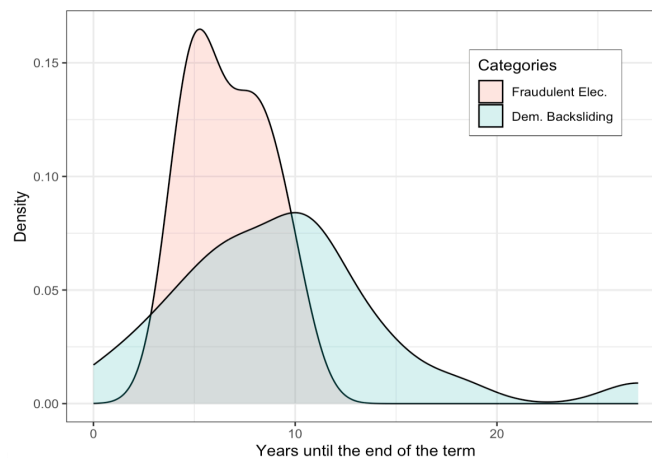
Figure 3: Density plot for the number of years until autocratization per autocratization category



Source: the author.

Another piece of information that can be visualized in a density graph is the duration of these leaders in power, measured by the difference between the year the leader left power and the year they arrived. Figure 4 shows that for the group of leaders who autocratized through democratic backsliding, the peak duration occurs around ten years, with a long tail to the right indicating cases that lasted longer than this. These cases usually last for longer than the fraudulent election ones, as none of these lasted longer than 13 years. It is important to state though that ongoing cases were not excluded from these statistics, which can eventually affect this data.

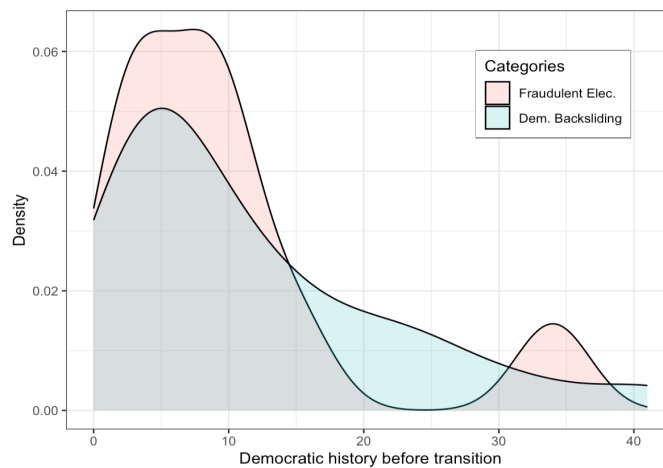
Figure 4: Density plot of the number of years until the end of the autocratizing leader's term per autocratization category



Source: the author.

The visualization of the density distribution of democratic history, measured as the number of years the country was continuously considered a democracy before the transition, illustrates that there are no significant differences between the groups in this aspect, as shown in Figure 5. The group of cases classified as fraudulent elections has a higher peak at around 10 years and another grouping of high-duration cases at around 35 years. The group of cases classified as democratic backsliding also has a higher peak before 10 years, with some cases with high duration, up to 40 years, and cases with duration between these two peaks.

Figure 5: Density plot of democratic history per autocratization category



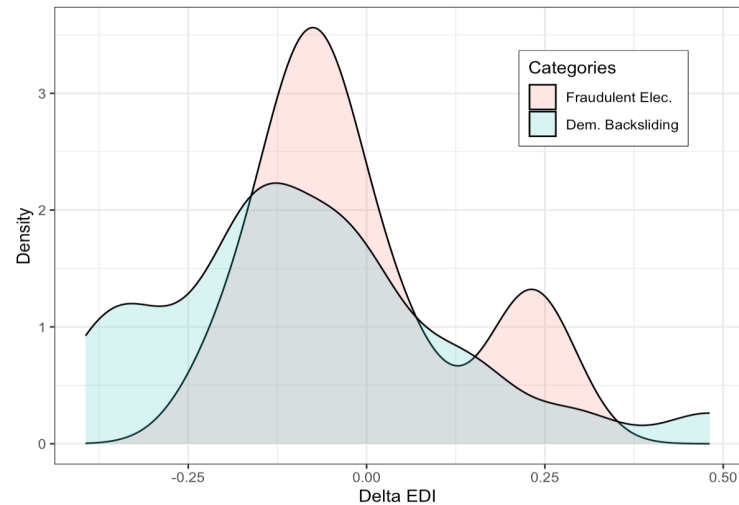
Source: the author.

Finally, it's possible to examine how the two categories compare in terms of the consequences of their transition process on the overall quality of democracy. Using V-Dem's Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) as a reference for the quality of democracy, I create a variable that represents the difference in this indicator at the end and the beginning of the period under study. I call this variable Delta EDI and interpret it as the consequence that this autocratizing leader had on the quality of the democratic regime while in power.

Figure 6 presents the variation in the quality of democracy during the terms of autocratizing leaders per category. Although the peaks for both groups are in negative values (indicating a worsening of this indicator for most cases), there are some curious instances of positive values. These positive values represent leaders whose democracy quality indicator was higher at the end of their term compared to the beginning. The explanation provided in this work for these positive outcomes is that the departure of these leaders coincides with the year a potentially more democratic leadership comes to power in their country, which could cause the democracy quality index to improve in that year. The group of autocratizing election cases has a secondary peak around an improvement of 0.25 in this indicator, while the group of democratic backsliding cases has a similarly sized secondary peak around -0.25. The average of this measure by group shows that autocratizing election cases have an average of -0.01 and democratic backsliding cases -0.08.

This is a descriptive suggestion that democratic backsliding cases cause greater damage to democratic qualities than fraudulent election cases.

Figure 6: Density plot of the Delta EDI per autocratization category



Source: the author.

The next section discusses the measures that were identified for each case and their classification in relation to the stages of the electoral cycle that were impacted by them.

5 Autocratization in practice

The measures that impacted the electoral cycle, identified in the 35 cases, were classified by the stage of the electoral cycle they affected, following the understanding of the electoral cycle presented by the Carter Center. This classification is not exclusive, meaning more than one stage could be classified for the same measure, as long as it fit the classification criteria for more than one stage. In total, 69 measures were identified and coded. The only stage of the cycle that did not have any measures identified is Voter Education.

The classification of a measure as having affected the Legal Framework applies to any measure indicating a modification of a rule governing elections. This is the most frequent stage, corresponding to 31 measures. This high frequency also arises from the fact that changes in rules that alter any other stage of the cycle are also classified as affecting the Legal Framework. The second most frequent is Candidacies and Campaigns, with 26 measures related to rules for registering candidacies, banning parties and candidates, campaign financing¹⁶, banning campaign events, public demonstrations or protests against the government, and rules that modify the limit of presidential terms, since the incumbent may be a candidate again.

¹⁶ Funding is further categorized as a separate stage of the cycle, to facilitate for those using the cycle based on the Electoral Integrity Project, but it is within the Candidacies and Campaigns stage of the cycle as adopted by the Carter Center.

Media is the third most frequent category, with 17 measures. For this category, only tangible measures and actions against the media were identified, such as the alteration of laws governing the operation and regulation of media in the country, changes in the financing system of media outlets, or their closure by government order. Administration has 6 occurrences and refers to measures involving the composition or scope of activity of the election management body. Electoral Systems and Districts, with 6 occurrences, specifically refers to changes in electoral systems, changes in the rules for converting votes into seats, changes in the composition of powers such as the expansion or reduction of parliamentary houses (thereby impacting the types of elective positions) and the redesign of electoral districts.

Vote Counting refers to problems identified at this stage of voting that have significantly determined the result and electoral integrity. Dispute Resolution is the category that gathers measures for challenging electoral results, here grouping cases of cancellation of results unfavorable to the government by the supreme court or formal modification of this possibility. The same applies to Voting Operation, also identified when it has compromised the election¹⁷. Finally, Voter Registration refers to changes in the rules of who can register to vote and how voters will be registered.

Table 5 presents the total frequency of each stage. It is important to remember that the same measure can be classified as having impacted more than one stage if it fits the criteria, and for this reason, the total sum of these frequencies is not 69, the total number of measures.

Table 5: Frequency of Measures per stage of the Electoral Cycle

Stage of the Electoral Cycle	Frequency
Legal Framework	31
Candidacy and Campaigning	26
Media	17
Administration	6
Electoral System and Districts	6
Vote Counting	4
Dispute Resolution	3
Voter Registration	3
Voting Operations	1

Source: the author.

The web application of the *Comparative Autocratization - Attacks on the Electoral Cycle (1990-2021)* dataset facilitates the visualization of all the measures coded in each stage of the electoral cycle. This visualization illustrates and exemplifies the measures we have discussed so far. Moreover, this comparison is useful and educational to observe how leaders who have autocratized their countries in different parts of the globe use measures that are more or less similar to each other.

¹⁷ The categories of Vote Counting and Voting Operation were identified and coded only for cases of transition occurring in an election year, so that these measures could potentially have directly interfered with the transition of that case.

Finally, it is also appropriate to present the frequency of each type of measure by category of autocratization, to investigate if there are patterns that relate measures and modes of transition. This description also helps to better understand the logic of different types of autocratization. Table 6 presents this information.

Table 6: Frequency of Measures per Stage of the cycle and per Autocratization type

Autocratization Category	Frequency of Measures per stage of the cycle	
Democratic Backsliding	Legal Framework	28
	Candidatures and Campaigning	26
	Media	16
	Administration	5
	Elec. System and Boundaries	4
	Voter Registration	2
	Vote counting	1
Fraudulent Election	Legal Framework	3
	Vote counting	3
	Dispute Resolution	3
	Elec. System and Boundaries	2
	Administration	1
	Media	1
	Voter Registration	1
	Voting Operations	1

Source: the author.

It is noted that measures targeting Legal Framework, Candidacies and Campaigns, Media, and Electoral Administration are more recurrent in the mode of autocratization through democratic backsliding and very rare in the mode of transition by fraudulent election. These elements may be too fundamental to be altered without clearly benefiting the government and distorting the conditions of the game before the voting day. Therefore, most cases with these stages affected were considered as autocratization through democratic backsliding.

Seeking statistically significant associations between modes of autocratization and identified measures, it is possible to conduct a Fisher's Exact Test, a statistical test used to determine if there is a significant association between two categorical variables similar to the chi-square test, but by calculating the exact distribution of probabilities rather than an approximation of the distribution. This method is particularly useful when the expected counts in a contingency table are small, i.e., when some of the cells in the table have low values. The measures that are

indicated as significantly associated with the modes by this test are the measures of Candidacies and Campaigns and a combination of measures related to election day and post-election (election operation, vote counting, and dispute resolution). Since Fisher's Exact Test does not indicate which categories are related to which measures, the visualization and interpretation of Table 7, which presents the frequencies of these measures by each category, are necessary.

Table 7 Frequency of measures per autocratization category (Statistically significant associations only)

		Cases w/o the measure	Cases w/ the measure
Candidatures and Campaigning (p-value: 0.0001)	Dem. Backsliding	7	18
	Fraudulent Elec.	10	0
E-day combined (Operations, count, dispute resolution (p-value: 0.0007))	Dem. Backsliding	24	1
	Fraudulent Elec.	4	6

Source: the author.

It is therefore possible to observe how cases of fraudulent elections do not present measures related to candidacies and campaigns, reinforcing the harmful nature of this type of measure to the integrity of the elections months before election day. It is also observed how the combined election-day measures are almost absent from cases of democratic backsliding, emphasizing that leaders often avoid fraud on election day especially when they have invested in tactics that distort the rules of the game months before. Therefore, it is noted that these two categories of measures, Candidacies and Campaigns, and election day combined, are characteristic of the modes of autocratization by democratic backsliding and by fraudulent election, respectively, so that the presence or absence of these measures for a given case are revealing of the mode of autocratization witnessed in that case.

6 Concluding remarks

In this paper I introduced the identification of silent transitions, without a coup d'état, from democracies to electoral autocracies, which selected my universe of cases under study. I presented the data collection and the qualitative analysis that was carried out for each of these cases, all available and presented in the *Compared Autocratization – Attacks on the Electoral Cycle (1990-2021)* dataset and its web application. I discussed the criteria for classifying cases into categories of autocratization and the criteria for classifying the measures that were identified and that affected some stage of the electoral cycle. Descriptive statistics were presented on the categories of autocratization and the stages of the electoral cycle that were affected by the measures, in order to discuss patterns among the groups.

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