

Autocracy: A Substantive Approach

Ashley Anderson¹, Jason Brownlee², and Killian Clarke³

¹Department of Political Science, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

²Department of Political Science, University of Texas, Austin

³Department of Political Science, Georgetown University

January 7, 2021

Abstract

What are the defining traits of autocracy? Leading works answer this question in negative terms: autocracies are non-democracies. We propose instead a *substantive* definition of autocracy, “politically exclusive rule”, which we believe better captures what scholars actually mean when they invoke the term. Between substantive autocracy and electoral democracy, lies a third category of regimes that do not exhibit the characteristics of either concept: “non-authoritarian non-democracies” or NANDs. This trichotomous conceptual framework has both theoretical and practical applications. Theoretically, it ensures that claims about the population of authoritarian regimes are ontologically coherent, and that we do not end up calling barely non-democratic regimes autocracies. Empirically, we anticipate that a substantial portion of country-years considered autocratic in most datasets are actually better categorized as NANDs. Consequently, scholarship on authoritarianism has likely overestimated the number of post-Cold War autocracies, making concerns about growing “autocratization” in the past decade less worrying than portrayed.

Introduction

The term “autocracy” conjures ominous images: political prisoners wasting away in dank cells; policemen with truncheons pummeling demonstrators; sun-glassed strongmen addressing cowed audiences.¹ Modern autocracies rank among the most brutal and repressive systems in world history. Archetypical autocrats such as Joseph Stalin, Rafael Trujillo, Adolf Hitler, Mao Zedong, Augusto Pinochet, and Saddam Hussein are notorious reminders of the horrors that unchecked authority can breed. Because autocracy is such an oppressive form of politics, scholars have rightly devoted considerable energy to understanding it, spawning a rich research agenda on its dynamics and effects (e.g. Brownlee 2007; Gandhi 2008; Geddes 1999; Geddes et al. 2018; Levitsky and Way 2010; Meng 2020; Svobik 2012).

Yet, the problem with extant research is that not all of the regimes examined in these studies are truly autocratic — while comparativists have traditionally *thought* of autocracy as distinct from, of regime, they have often *measured* a different concept: non-democracy. Most contemporary studies have operationalized autocracy in negative terms, using the absence of electoral contestation as a proxy for the presence of authoritarian power relations (Alvarez et al. 1996; Gandhi 2008; Geddes 1999; Geddes et al. 2018; Przeworski et al. 2000; Svobik 2012). This methodological choice has facilitated data collection but invites conceptual slippage, obscuring differences between authoritarian regimes and non-democracies and raising questions about major findings within the field. Indeed, we argue that the treatment of authoritarianism as a residual category — the absence of democracy — is problematic for research agendas that seek to understand the unique dynamics and characteristics of autocratic forms of governance. Moreover, reliance on a dichotomous classification of regimes frustrates efforts to analyze more contemporary variations of regime transition such as “democratic backsliding”, “autocratization” and “breakdown”.

To address these issues, we propose a substantive definition of autocracy, rooted in a set of positive criteria that specify what an authoritarian regime *is*, rather than what it is not. We define autocracy as *politically exclusive rule*. This definition entails two necessary conditions that capture

¹In this paper, we use the terms “autocracy”, “authoritarian regime”, and “dictatorship” interchangeably.

the essence of what makes a regime autocratic. First, a single group monopolizes control of the state. Second, there are no routinized mechanisms for other groups to share in executive power or to replace the ruling group. Our substantive definition is also distinctive for certain features that it *does not* include: type of ideology, mobilizational capacity, degree of legitimacy, extent of repression, or the degree of institutional constraints placed upon leaders. In our view, these are not distinguishing features that separate autocracies from other regimes (cf., Arendt 1951; Linz 1975). Rather, they are variables for scholars to interrogate among all types of regimes.

Advancing a substantive definition of autocracy provides a number of benefits to the study of authoritarianism and regime change. First and foremost, it ensures that the term “autocracy” denotes a class with ontological coherence. It has been observed that “[n]o scientific field can advance far if the participants do not share a common understanding of key terms in the field” (Ostrom 1986; 4). Consequently, specifying clear criterion for the definition and measurement of autocracy advances the field by enabling researchers to better match the concepts they have in their minds with the empirical evidence they are using to make causal claims. Moreover, since regime classifications often have important policy implications, clearer conceptualization can improve policy decisions and outcomes.

Second, delineating a substantive concept of autocracy facilitates knowledge accumulation on comparative democratization and regime change. The problems of democratic backsliding and breakdown have attracted substantial attention over the past decade (Waldner and Lust 2018; Bermeo 2016; Kaufman and Haggard 2019; Diamond 2019; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Przeworski 2019; Sunstein 2018; Svoboda 2020). However, the discourse around these phenomena has been muddled by a residual approach that allows no conceptual space between electoral democracy and authoritarianism (see Cornell et al. 2020; 30-32). By clarifying the bounds of autocracy, we explicitly create a third category of regimes that fills the space between authoritarianism and democracy. We call these regimes non-autocratic non-democracies, or NANDs. NANDs encompass and organize several existing concepts in the hybrid regimes literature, e.g., “competitive authoritarianism,” “semi-democracy.”

The main benefit of the NAND category is that it sets in relief the adjacent populations of substantive autocracies and electoral democracies, allowing us hone analyses of regime change. Clear distinctions among these groups permit more precise discussions about democratic erosion, backsliding, and breakdown without compelling researchers to treat every case that slips below the procedural standard of democracy (e.g., India under Narendra Modi, Hungary under Viktor Orbàn, the United States under Donald Trump) as if it were a full-blown autocracy. Thus, in contrast to a residual approach, the trichotomous approach advanced here provides a more nuanced classificatory scheme that allows researchers to detect a broader range of regime transitions: from backsliding to breakdown, and rupture to reform (Lueders and Lust 2018). In this sense, the benefits of a substantive definition of autocracy redound both to scholars of authoritarianism and students of democratic survival.

The remainder of the essay proceeds as follows. The next section traces the conceptual history of autocracy, distinguishing between the two main approaches: substantive and residual. After highlighting the conceptual and empirical weaknesses of a residual approach, we propose a novel definition of autocracy that focuses on a core set of attributes — politically exclusive rule — that scholars broadly agree are fundamental for understanding authoritarian regimes. Third and finally, we use these characteristics to distinguish autocracies from other forms of non-democratic regimes, via the concept of NANDs.

Substantive and Residual Understandings of Autocracy

The study of autocracy has flourished over the past sixty years thanks to the complexity of geopolitics and the elegance of new theoretical approaches. Spurred by the growth of independent states in the post-war period, the earliest works on authoritarianism including most prominently the work of Linz (1964), sought to identify a general class of regimes that was broader than the small set of “totalitarian” regimes that had drawn attention from earlier scholars (Arendt 1951; Freidrich and Brzezinski 1961). Best exemplified by Spain under Francisco Franco, Linz conceptualized

authoritarianism as political rule:

“with limited, not responsible, political pluralism, without elaborate and guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without extensive nor intensive political mobilization, except at some points in their development, and in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits” (Linz 1964; 255 , see also Linz 1975).

While this initial definition lacked parsimony, in subsequent empirical work, the concept took on greater analytical precision. Authoritarianism denoted a firmly oligarchic system where masses and interest groups depended on support from the ruling clique rather than operating independently (Purcell 1973a; 30, see also Tullock 1987 and Wintrobe 1998).

Comparative inquiries throughout the 1970s further clarified this terrain, specifying which regimes qualified as genuinely autocratic and which did not (Huntington and Moore 1970; O’Donnell 1973; Purcell 1973b: 1975). Much of this scholarship focused on exemplary cases of one-party and no-party rule, especially in Latin America, with its recent experience of military juntas. Yet even as comparativists identified new variants of authoritarianism (e.g., O’Donnell’s “bureaucratic authoritarianism”), they took pains to justify why, or whether, that label fit the regime in question (see Collier 1979). Hence, the foundation of research on authoritarianism rested on a substantive conceptualization based on shared traits (i.e. positive inclusion criteria) that distinguished autocracy from other forms of rule (e.g. democracy, semi-democracy).

In the 1990s, this substantive approach to conceptualizing autocracy faded from view, as a global effort to study democracy and dictatorship took shape. Inspired by the fall of despotic regimes across the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe, a countervailing trend shifted the focus of autocracy research to its inverse: the prospects authoritarian regimes to democratize.

Leading this effort, Michael Alvarez and coauthors (1996) produced a seminal dataset that divided the world into democracies and non-democracies, the latter being conceptually and operationally equated with authoritarian regimes. Across 140 countries during a four-decade span (1950-1990), they sought to “classify political regimes observed in each country during each year

either as democracies or as dictatorships” (1996; 4), using as their core criterion “electoral contestation,” defined as *ex ante* uncertainty and the reasonable prospect of alternation of executive power among multiple political factions.

Yet, whereas Alvarez et al. spent considerable effort to justify this criterion for the measurement of democracy, they eschewed an equivalent substantive definition for autocracy:

“We treat dictatorship simply as a residual category, perhaps better denominated as ‘not democracy.’ Our procedure is to establish rules that disqualify a particular regime as democratic, without worrying about the nature of the regimes eliminated in this manner” (Alvarez et al. 1996; 6-7 , emphasis added).

Given the contemporary preoccupation with democratization at the time, the analytic argument for these decisions was compelling. For scholars interested in the likelihood of democratic transition, treating authoritarianism as non-democracy likely expedited data collection without meaningfully impeding inference.

However, for the study of authoritarianism, this conceptual shift distanced autocracy from its origins as substantive category (characterized by the presence of some politically restrictive features) to a residual one (marked by the absence of democratic features). Thus, what was once understood as a coherent class of regimes with a common set of properties became what Sartori (1991) would call a “pseudo-class” of heterogeneous cases, including some genuine autocracies and some regimes that, though non-democratic, did not much resemble true authoritarianism.

Later scholarship *did* seek to develop a specific research agenda on authoritarianism; however, these studies did not resurrect Linz’s substantive definition or approach. In the main, they followed Alvarez et al. in maintaining the equivalence of autocracy with non-democracy. A broader reading of the contemporary literature on authoritarianism reveals that the residual approach has become standard in most cross national studies (e.g., Brooker 2014; 1; Brownlee 2007; 25-27; Frantz 2018; 6; Gandhi 2008; 7-8; Magaloni 2006; 33). For example, Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland retained “the dichotomous classification of regimes as democracy and dictatorship” without making “any change in the rules” developed by their predecessors for distinguishing between the

two (Cheibub et al. 2010; 83). Similarly, Boix, Miller, and Rosato derive their measure of autocracy from well-known standards of democratic governance, i.e. “meaningful electoral competition” and the extension of suffrage beyond a limited elite (Boix et al. 2013; 1524). Svobik follows suit, defining dictatorship as “a country that fails to elect its legislature and executive in free and competitive elections” (Svobik 2012; 17). Finally, the highly influential study of Geddes, Wright and Frantz defines the term *ex negativo*: “The absence of fair, reasonably competitive elections through which citizens choose those who make policies on their behalf defines autocracy or dictatorship” (Geddes et al. 2018; 1n1).

The ultimate consequence of this conceptual shift is that the recent literature on authoritarianism has tended to code as “autocracies” large spans of country-years that the earlier generation of scholars, with their careful debates about the substantive criteria of authoritarian rule, would have probably classified as other regimes. Geddes (1999) acknowledges this issue in her earlier work: “The consequence of this [election-based] rule is that a few cases that are sometimes considered democratic, notably Botswana, Senegal, Malaysia, and Taiwan, are classified as [authoritarian] single-party regimes here” (18).

However, this recognition has not prompted a conceptual reframing of authoritarianism in line with a substantive definition. Instead, several scholars have attempted to clarify the terrain of “authoritarianism” by placing greater focus on the diversity of non-democratic regimes (Cheibub et al. 2010; Geddes 1999; Geddes et al. 2014; Levitsky and Way 2010; Schedler 2013). Such work has led to a proliferation of terms used to differentiate among non-democracies: “hybrid,” “competitive authoritarian,” “electoral autocracy,” “single-party dominant,” etc. Yet for all that these sub-categories have added in nuance and clarity for the study of regimes, they have not, in the end, altered the general practice in the scholarship of lumping all of these non-democratic regimes under the common heading of authoritarianism. Thus, “at the core is still a vacuum” (Brownlee 2010; 47), as the literature on authoritarianism is still lacking a strong substantive conceptualization of what autocracy *is*.

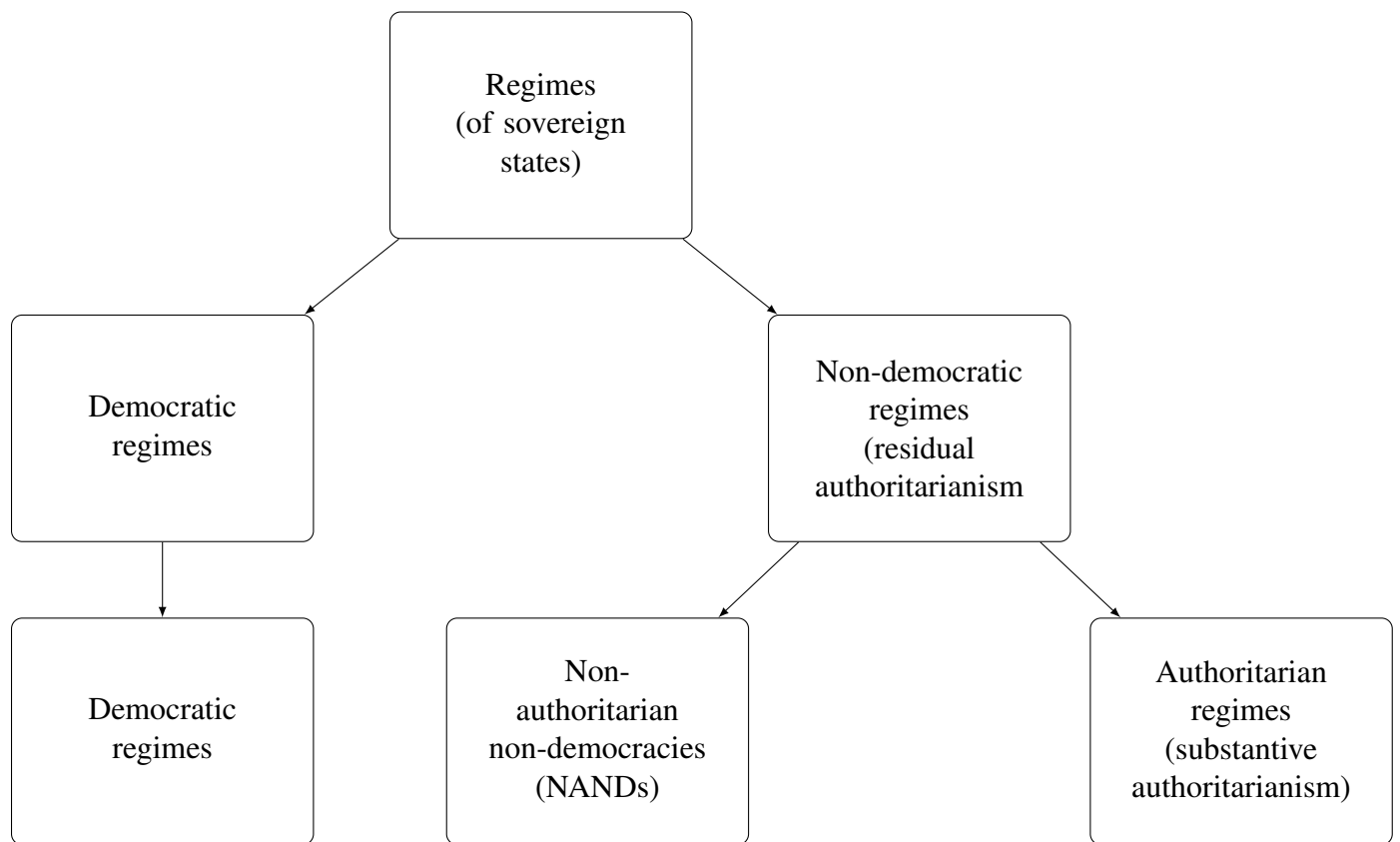
One can retell the story of how the authoritarianism literature has evolved with the concept

ladder pictured in Figure 1.² The past generation of authoritarianism studies has shifted upward along this concept ladder, from a more differentiated (substantive) concept of authoritarianism (e.g., Linz 1964) to the broader residual concept of non-democracy (e.g., Alvarez et al. 1996).

As with any conceptual shift, this upward ascent has come with some trade-offs. The approach to authoritarianism as non-democracy facilitated cross-national comparisons helped organize a previously fragmented literature. At the same time, the change may have had countervailing implications on substantive studies of autocracies and regime change. For example, if one is principally interested in explaining why a democracy loses essential qualities, such as the holding of free and fair elections, then a simple contrast between democracy and non-democracy may suffice. If, however, one is interested in understanding the dynamics of a coherent class of regimes that are commonly understood as autocratic — a goal that we believe remains a driving concern of this research community — then the field needs to identify what those regimes share in common, and not simply what they all lack. The remainder of this paper draws out the benefits of a substantive approach and introduces our intervening NAND category.

²For more on concept ladders, and general strategies for conceptualization in the social sciences see: Sartori 1970 and Collier and Levitsky 1997

Figure 1: Concept Ladder of Regime Types: Residual vs. Substantive Authoritarianism



The Case for a Substantive Approach

The rationale for studying autocracy as a substantive phenomenon is rooted in widespread understandings of authoritarianism and the epistemology of both authoritarianism and democratization.

First, there is a commonsense understanding that there are certain regimes whose lack of accountability and concentration of power render them a class apart. Unrivaled authority has long been considered a critical political problem, in large part because of the brutal and oppressive practices that it can breed. This concern has echoed through the recent literature on authoritarianism; nearly all of the leading works focus on the issue of unrestricted power and narrow ruling cliques. For example, Geddes, Wright and Frantz note that “in autocracies, a small number of regime insiders, usually acting in private under informal rules, hammer out key decisions about leadership and policy directions even in regimes with stable, well-developed formal institutions” (2018; 65). Likewise, Svobik observes: “At the heart of the problem of authoritarian control is the conflict between a small authoritarian elite in power and the much larger population excluded from power” (2012; 123-124).

Earlier works on authoritarian rule share this concern, describing autocracy as a system where the people do not rule, but *are ruled* (see Linz 1975; Purcell 1973a; Tullock 1987; Wintrobe 1998). Thus, returning to a substantive definition of authoritarianism can help advance the field by better aligning its concepts with the problems of authoritarianism that scholars say they want to apprehend. If we wish to understand the causes and implications of exclusionary power arrangements, it is necessary to have a concept that accurately groups together all the regimes that share this particular characteristic — and weeds out those that do not.

The second reason for a substantive approach stems from the first: besides refining our conceptual definitions, we want to accurately explain variation within the autocratic population and across this population and beyond it. Presently, the negative conceptualization of current autocracy measures prevents the drawing of a clear boundary between authoritarianism and hybrid regimes, frustrating such elementary tasks as case classification. As an example, consider the case of Zambia.

Since independence in 1964, the country has held ten multi-party elections, resulting in six peaceful transfers of power among presidents. Yet, political scientists have struggled to classify Zambia as a clear “authoritarian” case. Using data through 2009, Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland classify Zambia as an autocracy since 1964, whereas Geddes, Wright and Frantz, categorize it as a democracy from 1965-1967, and then again from 1992-1996. The Polity index displays similar volatility: Zambia ascended above the democracy benchmark (6+) in 1991, then fell to anocracy (-5 to 5) from 1996-2007, before becoming a democracy again in 2007. This example highlights the fragmentation that results from a residual approach, posing obstacles for hypothesis testing and causal inference. Stated differently, it is difficult to evaluate causal claims based on diverse (and often contradictory) classifications of authoritarian regimes. Further, the same literature that utilizes the residual approach repeatedly implies that it seeks a more focused type of inference.

Narrowing the aperture of analysis to those cases that display common, empirical characteristics of autocracies can minimize the risk of causal heterogeneity across distinct political settings and improve the validity of social science claims. Indeed, although many works operationalize authoritarianism as a residual category (i.e. non-democracy), their discussions of actual manifestations of autocracy often refer to a much narrower and coherent subset of regimes. Leading works on autocracy typically invoke examples of history’s most brutal dictatorships: Uganda under Idi Amin, Iraq under Saddam Hussein, the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin, the Philippines under Ferdinand Marcos, Chile under Augusto Pinochet, the Dominican Republic under Rafael Trujillo (see Gandhi 2008; Geddes et al. 2018; Grietens 2016; Svobik 2012; Weeks 2014). These paradigmatic cases did not earn their notoriety because of occasional electoral malfeasance or limited franchise. To the contrary, they excluded alternative political currents and concentrated power to such an extreme degree as to render them distinct from the broader population of non-democracies. Advancing a substantive definition of autocracy that focuses on these features can improve our inferences by matching our concepts with the empirical evidence we are using to analyze autocracy and make causal claims.

Finally, the analytical benefits of a substantive approach to the study of authoritarianism

also redound to scholars beyond the field of authoritarian politics. Specifically, establishing clear boundaries between democracies, autocracies, and other forms of non-democratic regimes sheds new light on debates over “democratic breakdown”, “backsliding”, and the rise of a new “wave of autocratization” (Svolik 2008; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013; Bermeo 2016; Waldner and Lust 2018; Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). Traditionally, such terms have denoted a profound political transformation, from electoral democracy into a severe form of repressive authoritarianism. For example, when Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan surveyed democratic breakdowns they identified some of the most consequential turns towards dictatorship of the prior half-century: “[Benito Mussolini’s] March on Rome, the Mactergreifung [’seizure of power;] by [Adolph] Hitler, the Spanish civil war, Prague in February of 1948, [and] the coup against [Salvador] Allende” (Linz and Stepan 1978; 3). Likewise, Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt open their treatise on *How Democracies Die* invoking “Europe’s dark 1930s, Latin America’s repressive 1970s” (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; 1).

When political scientists equate non-democracy with authoritarianism, it can be difficult to understand what is at stake in discussions of “democratic breakdown”. Consider the case of an isolated sub-standard election. Technically, such an event can cause a country to fall below the minimal standard for electoral democracy. Yet a single stolen election does not necessarily inaugurate a new authoritarian order. It may constitute nothing more than a single-digit advantage at the polls for one party, which the opposition may curtail or surmount the next time that voters turn out. For example, in the Dominican Republic, Joaquín Balaguer’s attempt to manipulate the vote to steal a third consecutive term in office in 1994 was effectively thwarted by the opposition, who organized new elections and barred Balaguer from competing.

Are we to refer to such temporary drops in regular electoral contestation as a regime change from democracy to autocracy? Should political scientists be coding Balaguer’s short-lived power-grab as an authoritarian regime? A residual approach that equates authoritarianism with non-democracy would require us to. By contrast, a substantive conceptualization would distinguish such episodic electoral manipulation from endemic exclusion of political alternatives. In this sense,

adopting a substantive approach to authoritarianism allows meaningful conversations about democratic backsliding, and even democratic breakdown, in places like Viktor Orban’s Hungary, Jair Bolsonaro’s Brazil, Narendra Modi’s India, or Donald Trump’s United States without having to make the somewhat tenuous claim that a rupture in democracy constitutes full-blown autocracy.

For all of these reasons, we propose a return to a substantive conceptualization of authoritarianism. Our approach builds upon elements of Linz’s idiographic scholarship while sharing the broad analytic ambitions of Alvarez et al., Geddes et al., and their peers. The following section specifies the substantive definition of autocracy and explains why it provides an analytic service that other approaches do not. In later sections, we provide a new operationalization for this concept and discuss its potential impact on findings about autocracy.

A Substantive Definition of Autocracy

What Autocracy Is

Drawing upon Munck’s (1996) framework of political regimes, we define autocracy as *politically exclusive rule*.³ The term “autocracy” implies highly concentrated and unchecked power: in autocracies, all opponents, challengers, or political alternatives outside of the ruling group are excluded from executive decision-making and rule.⁴ This core characteristic has motivated much theorizing on authoritarianism (see the quotes from Geddes et al. and Svobik above). It is also the ultimate source of what many find most troubling about autocratic regimes, i.e., lack of accountability and arbitrary violence.

This definition has two inclusion criteria: rule and political exclusion. By *rule* we mean that a single leader or governing coalition must exercise consolidated control over the state and effectively monopolize force within most, if not all, of a nation’s territory. Thus, a state that has

³According to Munck (1996) a political regime is a system of informal and formal rules that determine who has access to political power and how decisions are made (also Fishman 1990; Lawson 1993; Slater and Fenner 2011; Geddes et al. 2014; Djoué et al. 2020).

⁴The “auto-” prefix in autocracy derives from the Greek “autos” which means “by oneself” or “of oneself.” The term therefore implies governing by oneself — or governing without including one’s rivals or challengers.

collapsed, is occupied by a foreign power, or that is riven by conflict between multiple rival factions is not an autocracy. Similarly, a country that is in a state of transition or flux, perhaps because it has recently experienced regime change and is governed by a transitional or interim government cannot be considered autocratic. In these cases, a single leader or group has not yet established their hold over the state and therefore the question of who wields power is unknown.

The second key criterion in our definition is political exclusion. By exclusion, we mean that the ruler or ruling faction has prevented all political challengers from accessing executive power or formally influencing executive decision-making. We concentrate our focus on the executive because this is the level at which the most influential political decisions are made: in most countries, it is the executive who is responsible for implementing policy, guiding the state, and exercising command over the armed forces. Thus it is not enough that that political competition exists within alternative branches of government (e.g. the legislature) if access to the executive is restricted to a single political faction. Autocracy is defined by the exclusion of rival groups from access to specifically executive power.

Additionally, the criterion of exclusion implies concentration of power within a limited body of elites. In the special case of monarchy, this body can comprise a single leader, but, more often, represents a coalition of elites who support a single leader and help him to remain in power, similar to a “ruling coalition” (Svolik 2012; 63) or “leadership group” (Geddes et al. 2014; 35). Traditionally, this group achieves political exclusion in two complementary ways. First, the rulers do not share power or policy-making responsibility with any rival group of political elites. Second, the rulers provide no mechanism or opportunities for rival groups of political elites to either fully or partly displace them and obtain power for themselves.

These two aspects of political exclusion make clear the situations in which a regime might fall outside the boundaries of autocracy. To begin, a regime in which there is executive power-sharing between two distinct groups would not count as authoritarian. Here, we emphasize that these two groups must be clear and separate political rivals, both exercising some element of executive power and vying with each other for ultimate control of the state. An example would be

a situation in which one group commands a hereditary throne and another group controls a robust parliament that wields elements of executive power, e.g., post-1688 constitutional monarchy in England. Where power-sharing arrangements exist *within* authoritarian coalitions, the case would continue to be considered authoritarian, e.g., the division of duties between the security forces and the Ba'ath Party in Syria.

Another situation that would not be considered autocratic would be one in which there are credible opportunities for rival political groups to fully or partly displace the ruling group from power. Note that this does not imply that political contests are free or fair. A regime might allow elections, but severely restrict who is able to participate in them — e.g., Apartheid South Africa or the United States before the Civil Rights Movement. Such a regime would fall below the minimal standards for democracy. However, because it does allow some political rivals to compete for power, it is not sufficiently restrictive to be considered autocratic.

Similarly, a regime in which the opportunity to compete for executive power exists — albeit with serious flaws or on an uneven playing field — would not be sufficiently exclusive to be considered autocratic. For example, dominant party regimes (e.g., India under the Congress Party, Botswana under the BDP, Malaysia under the UMNO) are often coded as autocratic because they have not undergone sufficient alternation to be considered democracies. However, defining autocracy in terms of politically exclusive rule, these regimes are clearly not autocratic. Just because an opposition group is too weak to take advantage of an opportunity to displace the ruling coalition does not mean that the incumbent executive runs the state through political exclusion. Finally, the existence of flaws in the electoral process does not, in our view, automatically indicate the presence of an autocracy. Such a regime is autocratic only if the elections in question do not affect the executive (e.g., parliamentary elections in monarchies like Jordan or Morocco) or do not offer an opportunity for any meaningful competition, and are therefore a thin veil over *de facto* political exclusion (e.g., Egypt under Hosni Mubarak and Abdel Fattah al-Sisi).⁵

⁵Wedeen (2003) astutely points out that in certain regimes elections can actually serve as mechanisms for constituting absolute power. When elections are blatantly fraudulent and overtly rigged they not only signal a regime's domination over the political opposition, but also bolster that domination by flaunting the regime's ability to get away with the charade.

Critics of this criterion might argue that it is difficult to determine when exclusion is genuinely occurring. How do we know that an election has presented the opposition with a credible opportunity to attain power? How can we determine if meaningful power-sharing between rival groups is taking place? These are indeed important issues, but they are issues of operationalization not conceptualization. The fundamental task is to reach consensus on what characteristics define an authoritarian regime. Only then can we move on to thorny issues of operationalization. Although it may be appealing to derive concepts off of easy-to-implement operational criteria, such a move would place the empirical “cart” before the conceptual “horse.”⁶

The present definition of autocracy carries several strengths over prior treatments of the phenomenon. First, though it retains some elements of Linz’s original concept (e.g., the idea of limited pluralism), it is also clearer, simpler, and more tractable than Linz’s definition. It is therefore more suitable for the purposes of cross-national data collection and analysis, placing more modest information demands on coders. In this sense, the concept is what Sartori would call extensive (i.e., it covers many cases) without being overly intensive (i.e., demanding lots of judgments about characteristics) (1991; 254).

Moreover, our definition does not preclude further sub-categorization within the authoritarian regime type. For example, our substantive concept of autocracy encompasses all of the most widely recognized authoritarian sub-types: military regimes, monarchies, personalist regimes, single-party regimes. What matters is that the regime is controlled by a politically exclusive ruling group. Whether that exclusive ruling group is a royal family, a cabal of military officers, a personalist leader, or a single party is a separate distinction.

Perhaps most important, and echoing points made above, the definition aligns with how many people and scholars think about authoritarianism. Politically exclusive control and the monopolization of power by one person or one group appears to be central to how many scholars understand authoritarianism. In these works, the ugliest manifestations of authoritarian rule fre-

⁶This point echoes Sartori’s admonition that “[C]oncept formation stands prior to quantification” (1970; 1038) and that any systematic measurement of political phenomena should lag behind efforts to qualitatively describe and conceptualize it.

quently revolve around the problem of political exclusion or the cliquish nature of their elite. In this sense, we argue that the present definition actually captures a latent consensus in authoritarianism studies. Whereas the literature has typically defined autocracy as non-democracy, in practice, researchers appear to understand autocracy as politically exclusive rule by a concentrated group of elites.

What Does Not Define Authoritarianism

The definition of autocracy as political exclusive rule is intentionally parsimonious. We have deliberately set aside five potential criteria that students of authoritarianism might reasonably consider for a substantive definition: political participation, mobilizing ideology, responsiveness, executive institutions, repression. Each criterion merits attention.

First, in defining autocracy as politically exclusive rule, we stress the means of exercising and sustaining power, without reference to the role of ordinary citizens in the political process. In this sense, our definition is concerned more with limitation in the methods of political contestation — what Linz terms “limited political pluralism” — than with restrictions on political participation writ large. Indeed, many authoritarian regimes that hold uncompetitive elections allow all their citizens over a certain age to vote in those elections. Conversely, regimes that allow for multiple, differing political factions to compete but debar significant portions of the population from voting — as in the case of Switzerland before the national extension of the franchise to women — would not, by our criteria, be considered autocratic. While political participation is an important criterion for defining democracy (Dahl 1971), we do not believe that it defines autocracy.

Second, we do not define authoritarian regimes according to their ideologies or mobilizational capacity. This sets our definition apart from Linz’s, which emphasized authoritarianism’s lack of “guiding ideology” and “extensive nor intensive political mobilization” (Linz 1964; 255). Here, Linz was attempting to differentiate Latin America’s bureaucratic authoritarian regimes from fascist regimes like Mussolini’s Italy and Nazi Germany. But this effort ultimately resulted in an authoritarianism category that was too narrow and had too many criteria, impeding coherent clas-

sification of authoritarian regimes. Throughout history, autocracies have embraced and espoused a wide range of ideologies, with varying degrees of resonance and mobilizational power among everyday citizens. Though it may make sense during certain historical periods — e.g., the inter-war years — to distinguish between totalitarian and conservative authoritarian regimes (e.g., Weyland 2021), in general we believe that variables like mobilizational capacity and ideology are best thought of as characteristics that vary across the full universe of autocracies.

Third, we do not define authoritarianism according to the degree to which it responds to its citizens' demands (cf. Purcell 1975). Though we believe that many authoritarian regimes will be unresponsive to their citizens' wishes, we do not consider this characteristic to be emblematic of the category. Scholars of authoritarianism have recently raised serious questions about the claim that all authoritarian regimes are unresponsive to citizens' demands (Tsai 2007; Truex 2016). Though, as noted above, such regimes do lack institutionalized channels through which citizens can influence the most important government decisions, this does not mean that they do not sometimes recognize and respond to the wills of their publics. Indeed, a regime that is *entirely* deaf to the demands of all its citizens would probably not survive in power for very long.

Fourth, we do not define authoritarianism according to whether institutions exist to guide the decision-making processes of the executive. Our definition only focuses on whether there are institutions by which political outsiders and everyday citizens can change leadership or influence decisions. Within the ruling oligarchy there may or may not be institutions in place for decision-making. For example, some authoritarian regimes have elaborate rules governing leadership succession processes (e.g., leftist dictatorships run by politburos). Some have formal parliaments, councils, or committees for making decisions. Scholars of authoritarianism have pointed out that such institutions are often helpful for autocrats seeking to manage fractious ruling coalitions (Wintrobe 1990; Gandhi 2008; Wright 2008; Svobik 2012). But plenty of dictators, particularly personalist ones, also do without them. We therefore leave out of our definition the degree to which a ruling elite are constrained in their internal decision-making by institutions.

Finally, we do not define authoritarian regimes according to the amount of violence that

they deploy (cf. Frantz 2018; 105). We expect most autocrats to use violence, sometimes quite brutally. After all, excluding political opponents from power usually requires at least occasional resort to deadly force. But not all autocrats use violence all the time. If, over time, citizens or rival groups come to view their exclusion from power as natural, acceptable, or inevitable, these leaders may be able to maintain their exclusive rule with minimal use of violence (Gaventa 1980). We therefore leave violence as a variable to be interrogated across authoritarian regimes, rather than a boundary-defining trait that separates autocracies from other regime types.

A New Residual: Non-Authoritarian, Non-Democracies (NAND)

An important implication of replacing a residual definition of autocracy with our substantive one is that it produces a new conceptual category. This third population, flanked on one side by substantive autocracy and on the other by electoral democracy, encompasses those regimes that do not meet the criteria of the other main types. We term this new category non-autocratic non-democracies or NANDs. In NANDs power is not so concentrated or exclusive as to merit the classification “authoritarian”. At the same time, elections are not sufficiently contested that they qualify as democracies.

We observe five major manifestations of NANDs: anarchies, foreign occupations, transitional regimes, competitive oligarchies, and competitive authoritarianism. All five of these regime types fall short of the procedural standards of democracy and, for that reason, have often been erroneously treated as autocracies in prior research.

Before elaborating the different types of NAND regimes, it is important to note that we are not the first to attempt to delineate the middling space between democracy and substantive authoritarianism. Previous scholarship has generated numerous concepts to describe this terrain — semi-democracy, competitive authoritarianism, anocracy, and the catch-all “hybrid regimes.” Yet none of these terms rests on a *substantive* definition of autocracy, nor do they encompass the full range of regimes that we attempt to demarcate.

For example, the terms “hybrid regimes” and “semi-democracy” describe regimes that have some, but not all, of the defining features of democracy. However, while these terms provide useful guidance for demarcating the boundary between democracy and non-democracy, they are less helpful in specifying boundaries on the other side of the spectrum — i.e., between autocratic and non-autocratic regimes. Similarly, Levitsky and Way’s (2010) concept of competitive authoritarianism provides neither a substantive definition of authoritarianism nor holistic coverage of the space between authoritarianism and democracy — it is only one of the five potential NAND regime types. Finally, the conceptually similar category of anocracy covers a broad array of regimes, including those with “mixed or incoherent” authority structures, but also those that are unstable, prone to violence and/or suffering from violence or civil war. However, because there are many combinations of traits that can place a country in the “anocratic” range, it is possible that some regimes with the core properties of substantive authoritarianism are being coded (correctly) as autocracies while comparable cases are being placed (erroneously) under anocracy. Thus, while this subtype marks an ostensible improvement from dichotomous classifications of democracy and non-democracy, it fails to comprehensively distinguish how regimes may be differently non-democratic.

With these distinctions in mind, we identify at least five different types of NAND regimes. The first three categories are classified as NAND due to the requirement for some leader or group to actually *rule* in order for a regime to be considered autocratic. Countries that exist in a state of civil war/anarchy, foreign occupation, or political transition are neither autocracies nor democracies. In these cases, the government has collapsed and no single group has consolidated control over most of the national territory. In the case of civil conflict/anarchy, power is too diffuse for the regime to be considered autocratic — rival groups, warlords, militias, or guerillas openly contest for control of the executive through armed combat. By contrast, in the case of foreign occupations and transitional governments (e.g. the US military presence in Iraq during 2003-2011), the government is explicitly impermanent and, therefore, the question of rule is open and in flux. In all of these cases, power is not sufficiently consolidated for the regime to practice political exclusion, thus they cannot be considered autocracies. However, because these regimes have also not held

“free and fair” elections for the executive, they do not meet the minimal criteria for democracy (Schmitter and Karl 1991).

Another NAND regime sub-type captures situations in which contestation exists between rival political groups but where there is not sufficient extension of the franchise for the regime to be considered democratic (e.g., 18th century England, Switzerland before 1971, the United States before 1965, Apartheid South Africa). These regimes have been described as competitive oligarchies by Dahl (1971) and clearly fall short of the minimal standards of “participation” to be classified as full democracies. However, they are not defined by political exclusion and therefore are not autocracies. Indeed, the common practice of classifying these regimes as autocratic (e.g. non-democracies) has confounded quantitative measures of regime type. Analysts either have to make dubious calls (like labeling the United States an autocracy until 1965) or establish coding rules that are difficult to square with widely-held definitions (like setting franchise thresholds for democracy at a small share of male citizens). Placing these regimes under the general heading of NAND allows us to more accurately qualify this regime type, while providing researchers the ability to make more reasonable coding decisions about autocracies and democracies.

A final category of NANDs comprises regimes where the exclusion of rival or opposition groups is not total, i.e., where some opportunities for contestation and competition exist, albeit on an uneven playing field. These would encompass both dominant party regimes — like the BDP in Botswana or UMNO in Malaysia described above — and Levitsky and Way’s (2010) “competitive authoritarian” regimes. In these regimes, we cannot claim that the opposition is fully excluded from power; indeed, as Levitsky and Way point out in their definition of competitive authoritarianism, democratic institutions (i.e., elections) in these regimes “are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power.” Additionally, even if incumbent rulers “are at a significant advantage vis-à-vis their opponents” (as in the case of dominant party regimes), the potential still exists for these opposition groups to win these elections and take executive power for themselves. The incumbents have therefore not fully excluded the opposition from potentially attaining executive power. Such regimes certainly are not fully democracies, but neither do they merit the designation autocracy.

Before we operationalize our substantive definition of authoritarianism, it is important to address one reasonable query in our approach: why, instead of dividing the space trichotomously into democracies, autocracies, and NANDs, do we not adopt a continuous classification? On this point, we echo earlier concerns (including from proponents of the residual approach to authoritarianism) regarding the relative deficiency of continuous measures over categorical divisions of regime type. Sartori considered democracy and dictatorship as “different in kind” with the first “attributing more-or-less power to the people, while dictatorships vary in the amount of discretionary power exercised by the dictator.” Accordingly, only reasonable way of placing them on a shared spectrum would be to identify some single dimension (“democratic-ness,” “autocratic-ness”) along which both regimes could be measured (Sartori 1975; 24). Similarly Cheibub, Jennifer Gandhi, and James Vreeland argue persuasively that conceptualizing regimes on a continuous scale would invite a farcical exercise in assessing degrees of democracy across highly repressive states:

“[I]f one believes that democracy can be measured over all regimes, one has to be prepared to argue that it makes sense to speak of positive levels of democracy in places like Bahrain, China in the 1970s, Chile under Pinochet or Brazil during the military dictatorship; that it makes sense to speak of a change from one value to another along these scales, even when the regime did not change; and, finally, that we can meaningfully interpret scores across countries” (Cheibub et al. 2010; 78).

We find these points compelling. Adopting a continuous approach to authoritarianism would take a step back from the progress that has been made in existing scholarship.

Of course, we acknowledge that a trichotomous approach does not solve all the challenges of classifying regimes — our NAND category, for example, approximates a new residual including various regime types. However, by demarcating the substantive boundaries of authoritarianism, as is typically done with democracies, and allowing the remaining heterogeneous regimes to stand apart as NANDs, we improve conceptual clarity and analytic precision for knowledge accumulation on autocratic regimes. At the same time, this approach does not preclude future exploration of the conceptual territory of NANDs.

Operationalizing Autocracy

Although the principal contribution of this article is conceptual, we wish to broach the challenge of how to apply substantive autocracy in practice. We suggest a two-step process for establishing whether a regime meets the criterion of politically exclusive rule. These steps are oriented toward weeding out both NANDs and democracies, such that all remaining regimes can be considered autocratic. The first step is to remove regimes where no single group actually rules — i.e., anarchies, foreign occupations, and transitional regimes. Operationally, this step is reasonably straightforward, as many existing datasets (e.g., Polity, GWF) have categories that capture these types of political arrangements.⁷

Next one needs to remove regimes that have sufficiently competitive executive elections such that that rule is not "politically exclusive." Regimes with fully competitive executive elections that are also open to full participation qualify as democracies (Schmitter and Karl 1991). Regimes with fully competitive executive elections that have serious franchise restrictions — less than the accepted minimums for genuine democracies — are competitive oligarchies, and should be classified as NANDs. Finally, one should designate competitive authoritarian regimes — ie. ones where executive elections are contested enough that they are "widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power" — as NAND regimes. Given that many of these regimes have, recently, held elections that have brought the opposition to power (Carothers 2018) they clearly fail to meet the minimum standards for exclusion required for autocracy.

The most challenging coding decision is determining the appropriate cut-off for electoral contestation — i.e., the dividing line between authoritarianism and competitive authoritarianism. We propose a coding rule of 80% vote share. When the incumbent regime wins 80% or more of the vote, then the regime should be considered autocratic. When the incumbent wins less than 80% of the vote share, and one or more opposition parties win at least 20%, then the regime is competitive authoritarian. We grant that the cut-off of 80% vote-share is somewhat arbitrary —

⁷For example, Polity contains the following categories: -66 (foreign interruption), -77 (interregnum or anarchy), and -88 (transition). We could consider all of the regimes coded this way to be NANDs.

and, yet, arbitrary but clear cut-offs are necessary for the categorical coding of cases.

Similar numerical cut-offs exist in the coding of democracy — for example, when a dataset establishes a level of franchise at which democracy supposedly exists. We grant that well-reasoned arguments could be made for setting our electoral cut-off higher (at 90%, say) or lower (at 70%, say), and we are open to such alternative proposals. We select 80% because we believe this represents the level at which elections no longer provide reasonable access to power, and therefore at which political exclusion can be said to exist. An incumbent that does not allow the opposition to win more than 20% of votes is not granting genuine opportunities for that opposition to challenge or displace him for the top executive position.

These coding rules allow us to weed out cases of non-autocracy, leaving a set of regimes with the common characteristic of political exclusion. These will be regimes in which one group has consolidated rule over its territory and that either do not hold executive elections at all or that hold elections in which the incumbent wins 80% or more of the vote.

One way to glean the impact of these rules on prevailing residual approaches is to note the types of cases that would be pushed out of the autocracy population. For purposes of illustration we note four: Mexico (1982-1999), Nicaragua (1984-1989), El Salvador (1979-1991), and Angola (1997-present). Using the 80% threshold for political exclusion, Mexico would stop being coded as an autocracy in 1982. Indeed, the election of Miguel de la Madrid is widely seen as the beginning of Mexico's decades-long process of political liberalization. While the PRI continued to win elections until 2000, the opening of elections to robust opposition — particularly in the affluent, urban areas of the north — qualifies Mexico regime as a “hybrid, part-free, part authoritarian” regime (Cornelius 1996; 25), equivalent to our concept of NAND. In a similar vein, although over a shorter period, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) regime in Nicaragua would stop being coded as autocratic in 1984, when incumbent president Daniel Ortega won a competitive and internationally certified election, and would become a NAND, until the opposition defeated him in 1990. Nearby El Salvador would be considered a NAND, rather than an autocracy, for the 1979-1992 period of internal war and political tumult. Finally, the situation in Angola, in which

a popular anti-colonial party has yet to lose the executive to the opposition would only be coded as an autocracy from 1975 through 1996, rather than for its entire independence period, because in 1997 the ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) began capturing less than 80% of the vote.

These examples suggest broader ramifications of our measure for cross-national statistical studies of autocracy. Given the regimes that are excised, we suspect that applying a substantive concept, as well as allowing a NAND middle ground, will substantially shape the conclusions scholars reach about the prevalence and persistence of autocratic rule. Although firm conclusions must await empirical work, we theorize that periods of party rule (driven by cases like the PRI and MPLA) will shorten. We also expect global trends of autocratization will become less pronounced, since many cases that are currently be counted as autocracies — especially in the post-Cold War period — will be now classified as NANDs.

Discussion

We close this introduction of substantive autocracy as politically exclusive rule by acknowledging and addressing two potential concerns about the proposed concept: redundancy and arbitrariness.

Scores of philosophers and social scientists have studied and thought intensively about modern autocracy. How novel is our proposed concept? Is our paper not simply reinventing the wheel or treading paths that preceding generations have already pursued? To these questions, we provide the following response. First, we concede that that there exists an implicit consensus about the definition of authoritarianism that scholars are already constructing. Our work, however, aims to make this consensus explicit by specifying a substantive definition of autocracy that can be easily operationalized and broadly applied. Prior scholars have either used a substantive approach on a case-by-case basis or have adopted a residual approach for cross-national econometric work. Our study thus breaks new ground by advancing substantive approach that can be applied at scale for current and historical cases.

If the present approach indeed offers a new direction, is it likely to be a fruitful one? After defining autocracy as politically exclusive rule we approached the challenging issue of operationalization through a series of parsimonious methods that may nonetheless be questioned as arbitrary. Why not set the electoral threshold at a two-thirds majority? Why not include acts of political repression, such as the assassination of opposition figures, as definitive of autocracy? Such questions merit discussion, but an attempt at measurement need not await its conclusion. The aspiration to create a perfect concept should not dissuade us from developing a good one. For novitiates in political science, our approach reinforces the commonplace refrain that quality research must match its measures to its concepts (King et al. 1994; Geddes 2003). Compared to the prevailing residual approach, “politically exclusive rule” and the 80% cutoff point are immediately useful for students concerned about autocracy as a substantive political problem.

Conclusion

While the study of autocracy has flourished in recent decades, quantitative approaches have invited conceptual stretching. This paper has argued for a substantive definition that captures the core concern of authoritarianism studies without sacrificing the empirical ambition of global analysis. We have conceptualized autocracy as politically exclusive rule, introduced an umbrella middle category of non-autocratic non-democracies, and offered one method of differentiating the broad space of “non-democracy.” Some initial thoughts on operationalization provide a way of applying this concept at scale. Such work can assess how much of the field’s knowledge about authoritarianism has rested on a residual approach and how much reflects a grasp of the substantively autocratic regimes that have motivated researchers and practitioners.

References

- Alvarez, M., J. Cheibub, F. Limongi, and A. Przeworski (1996). Classifying political regimes. *Studies in International Comparative Development* 31(2), 3–36.
- Arendt, H. (1951). *The Origins of Authoritarianism*. New York, NY: Schocken Books.
- Bermeo, N. (2016). On democratic backsliding. *Journal of Democracy* 27(1), 5–19.
- Boix, C., M. Miller, and S. Rosato (2013). A complete data set of political regimes, 1800-2007. *Comparative Political Studies* 46(12), 1523–1554.
- Brooker, P. (2014). *Non-Democratic Regimes: Theory, Government and Politics* (3rd ed.). Macmillan Press.
- Brownlee, J. (2007). *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Brownlee, J. (2010). Authoritarianism after 1989: From regime types to transnational processes. *Harvard International Review* 31(4), 44–49.
- Carothers, C. (2018). The surprising instability of competitive authoritarianism. *Journal of Democracy* 29(4), 129–135.
- Cheibub, J., J. Gandhi, and J. R. Vreeland (2010). Democracy and dictatorship revisited. *Public Choice* 143(67–101).
- Collier, D. (1979). Overview of the bureaucratic-authoritarian model. In C. David (Ed.), *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America*, pp. 19–33. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Collier, D. and S. Levitsky (1997). Democracy with adjectives: conceptual innovation in comparative research. *World Politics* 49(3), 430–451.
- Cornelius, W. A. (1996). *Mexican Politics in Transition: The Breakdown of a One-Party Dominant Regime*. San Diego, CA: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies.
- Cornell, A., J. Møller, and S.-E. Skaaning (2020). *Democratic Stability in an Age of Crisis: Reassessing the Interwar Period*. Oxford UK: Oxford University Press.
- Dahl, R. A. (1971). *Polyarchy: Participation and opposition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Diamond, L. (2019). *Ill winds: Saving democracy from Russian rage, Chinese ambition, and American complacency*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Djuve, V. L., C. H. Knutsen, and T. Wig (2020). Patterns of regime breakdown since the french revolution. *Comparative Political Studies* 53(6), 923–958.
- Fishman, R. M. (1990). Rethinking state and the regime: Southern europe’s transition to democracy. *World Politics: A Quarterly Journal of International Relations* 42(3), 422–440.

- Frantz, E. (2018). *Authoritarianism: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford UK: Oxford University Press.
- Freidrich, C. J. and Z. K. Brzezinski (1961). *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gandhi, J. (2008). *Political Institutions Under Dictatorship*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Gaventa, J. (1980). *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Geddes, B. (1999). What do we know about democratization after twenty years. *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, 115–144.
- Geddes, B. (2003). *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Geddes, B., J. Wright, and E. Frantz (2014). Autocratic breakdown and regime transitions: A new data set. *Perspectives on Politics* 12(2), 313–331.
- Geddes, B., J. G. Wright, J. Wright, and E. Frantz (2018). *How dictatorships work: Power, personalization, and collapse*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Grietens, S. C. (2016). *Dictators and their Secret Police: Coercive Institutions and State Violence*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Huntington, S. P. and C. H. Moore (Eds.) (1970). *Authoritarian Politics in Modern Society: The Dynamics of Established One-Party Systems*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.
- Kaufman, R. R. and S. Haggard (2019). Democratic decline in the united states: What can we learn from middle-income backsliding? *Perspectives on Politics* 17(2), 417–432.
- King, G., R. Keohane, and S. Verba (1994). *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton University Press.
- Lawson, S. (1993). Concept issues in the comparative study of regime change and democratization. *Comparative Politics* 25(2), 183–205.
- Levitsky, S. and L. Way (2010). *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Levitsky, S. and D. Ziblatt (2018). *How Democracies Die*. New York, NY: Crown.
- Linz, J. (1964). An authoritarian regime: Spain. In E. Allardt and Y. Littunen (Eds.), *Cleavages, Ideologies and Party System. Contributions to Comparative Political Sociology*, pp. 291–341. Helsinki: Westermarck Society, 1964.
- Linz, J. (1975). Totalitarianism and authoritarian regimes. In F. Greenstein and N. Polsby (Eds.), *Handbook of Political Science*, Volume 3 of *Macropolitical Theory*, pp. 175–411. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Press.

- Linz, J. J. and A. Stepan (Eds.) (1978). *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown, and Reequilibration*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University.
- Lueders, H. and E. Lust (2018). Multiple measurements, elusive agreement, and unstable outcomes in the study of regime change. *The Journal of Politics* 80(2), 736–741.
- Lührmann, A. and S. Lindberg (2019). A third wave of autocratization is here: what is new about it? *Democratization* 26(7), 1095–1113.
- Magaloni, B. (2006). *Voting for autocracy: Hegemonic party survival and its demise in Mexico*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Mainwaring, S. and A. Pérez-Liñán (2013). *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America: Emergence, Survival, and Fall*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Meng, A. (2020). *Constraining Dictatorship: From Personalized Rule to Institutionalized Regimes*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Donnell, G. (1973). *Modernization and bureaucratic-authoritarianism: studies in South American politics*. Berkeley, CA: Institute of International Studies, University of California.
- Ostrom, E. (1986). An agenda for the study of institutions. *Public Choice* 48.
- Przeworski, A. (2019). *Crises of democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Przeworski, A., M. Alvarez, J. Cheibub, and F. Limongi (2000). *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Purcell, S. K. (1973a). Authoritarianism. *Comparative Politics* 5(2), 301–312.
- Purcell, S. K. (1973b). Decision-making in an authoritarian regime: Theoretical implications from a Mexican case study. *World Politics* 26(1), 28–54.
- Purcell, S. K. (1975). *The Mexican Profit-Sharing Decision: Politics in an Authoritarian Regime*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Sartori, G. (1970). Concept misinformation in comparative politics. *American Political Science Review* 64, 1033–1053.
- Sartori, G. (1975). Tower of babel. In *Tower of Babel: On the Definition and Analysis of Concepts in the Social Sciences*. Pittsburgh: International Studies Association.
- Sartori, G. (1991). Comparing and miscomparing. *Journal of theoretical politics* 3(3), 243–257.
- Schedler, A. (2013). *Politics of Uncertainty: Sustaining and Subverting Electoral Authoritarianism*. Oxford UK: Oxford University Press.
- Schmitter, P. C. and T. L. Karl (1991). What democracy is... and is not. *Journal of Democracy* 2(3), 75–88.

- Slater, D. and S. Fenner (2011, Fall/Winter). State power and staying power: Infrastructural mechanisms and authoritarian durability. *Journal of International Affairs* 65(1), 15–29.
- Sunstein, C. R. (2018). *Can it Happen Here?: Authoritarianism in America*. New York: Harper-Collins.
- Svolik, M. (2008). Authoritarian reversals and democratic consolidation. *The American Political Science Review* 102(2), 153–168.
- Svolik, M. (2012). *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Svolik, M. (2020). When polarization trumps civic virtue: Partisan conflict and the subversion of democracy by incumbents. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 15(1), 3–31.
- Truex, R. (2016). *Making Autocracy Work: Representation and Responsiveness in Modern China*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Tsai, L. L. (2007). Solidary groups, informal accountability, and local public goods provision in rural china. *American Political Science Review* 10(2), 355–372.
- Tullock, G. (1987). *Autocracy*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Waldner, D. and E. Lust (2018). Unwelcome change: Coming to terms with democratic backsliding. *Annual Review of Political Science* 21, 93–113.
- Wedeen, L. (2003). *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Weeks, J. (2014). *Dictators at War and Peace*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Weyland, K. (2021). *Assault on Democracy: Communism, Fascism, and Authoritarianism During the Interwar Years*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Wintrobe, R. (1990). The tinpot and the totalitarian: An economic theory of dictatorship. *The American Political Science Review* 84(3), 849–872.
- Wintrobe, R. (1998). *The Political Economy of Dictatorship*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Wright, J. (2008). Do authoritarian institutions constrain? how legislatures affect economic growth and investment. *American Journal of Political Science* 52(2), 322–343.