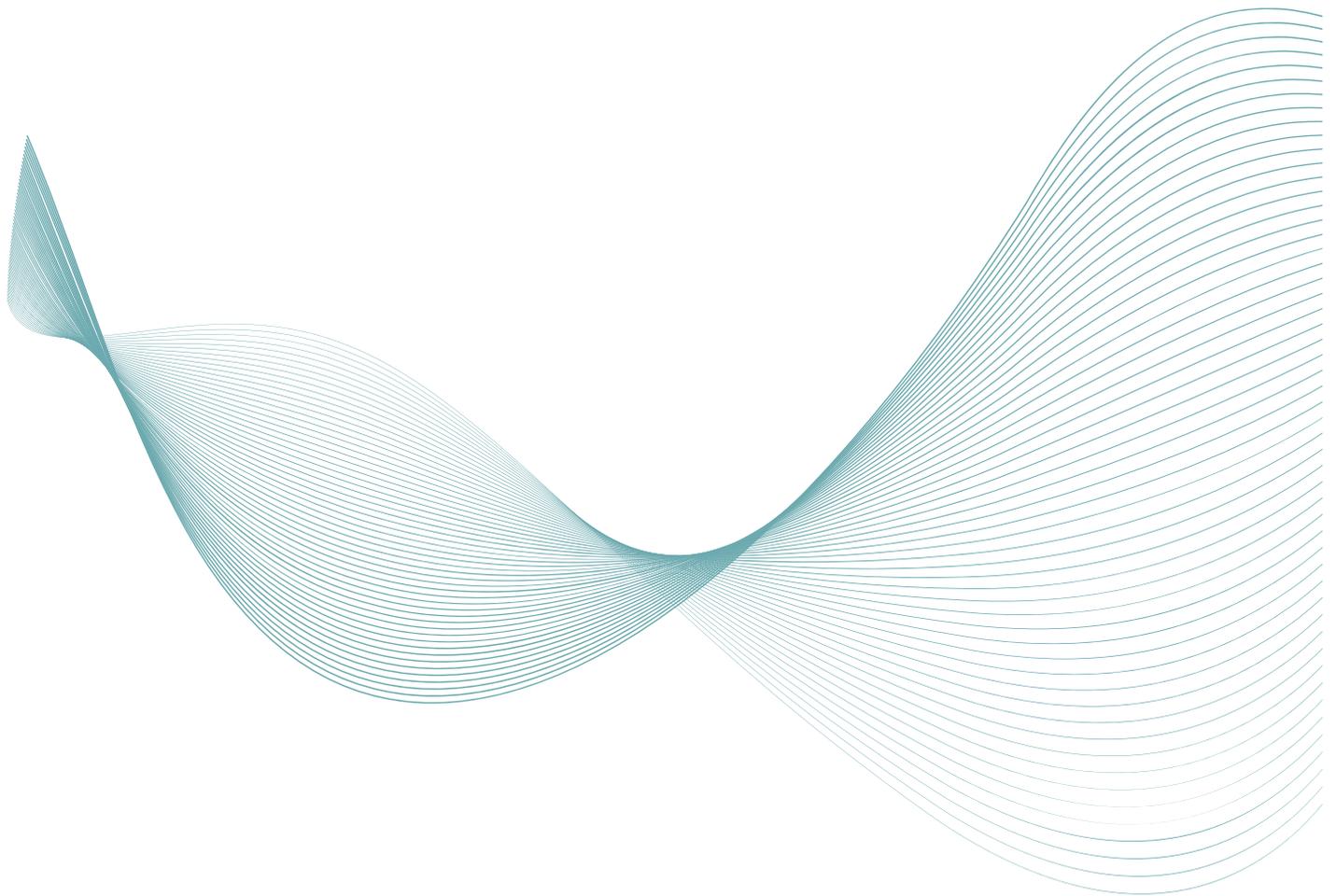

Democracy and Autocracy

Vol. 23(2) December 2025
“Democratic Resilience”



*Democracy and Autocracy Section
American Political Science Association*

Published by the Center for Emerging Democracies (@umichDemocracy), University of Michigan

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Editors' Introduction

Rob Mickey, University of Michigan; Dan Slater, University of Michigan

Signing Off

This newsletter on “Democratic Resilience” is the sixteenth and final issue of *Democracy & Autocracy* that we will be publishing from the Center for Emerging Democracies (@umichDemocracy) at the University of Michigan. The six years we have served as co-editors have seen the continuation and even acceleration of global democracy's downward arc. We began our term by asking “Is Democracy Promotion Dead?” in our inaugural issue. One can detect at least a hint of optimism in even asking the question. We conclude our editorial term by inquiring not how new democracies might come about but how existing democracies might simply survive. This aptly captures how much the world of democracy—and our expectations for democracies—have downgraded throughout the 2020s.

We agreed to assume this editorship back in 2019 with two main commitments in mind. First, we wanted to give *Democracy & Autocracy* a strong thematic focus, with each issue dedicated to a single important question in the study of (and real world of) political regimes. One way we have achieved this is by publishing issues centered on a recently published edited volume in the Emerging Democracies series at University of Michigan Press (on four occasions). Second, we wanted to provide a platform for junior scholars and their work. The most important way we have achieved this is by introducing an “Author Exchange” feature at the end of every issue, in which two (almost always junior, first-time authors) not only review each others' books but often pen a shared reflection to conclude the issue. We have also invited junior scholars to serve as special issue editors or co-editors for eleven of our sixteen newsletters, with University of Michigan graduate students guest editing three issues and Emerging Democracies postdoctoral fellows editing another eight. We want to offer a special round of thanks to these guest editors, as well as to Derek Groom and Adam Fefer at @umichDemocracy for serving so brilliantly and steadfastly as *Democracy & Autocracy's* managing editors.

It is our hope and conviction that each of these issues stands on its own as a contribution to knowledge on democracy and autocracy, and will stand the test of time. Anyone interested in the theme of any issue should find useful insights for many years to come. For ease of reference, the full catalog of prior Michigan-produced *Democracy & Autocracy* issues with active links is below:

[Immigration, Authoritarianism, and Democracy](#) (Rebecca Wai)

[Unequal Democracies](#) (Vincent Mauro)

[Making Sense of the Arab State](#) (Loay Alarab)

[Polarization and the Past](#) (Jennifer McCoy)

[The Troubling State of India's Democracy](#) (Anindita Adhikari and Nandini Dey)

[Why do Democracies Develop and Decline?](#) (Michael Coppedge and Katherine Bersch)

[Capitalism and Democracy, Revisited](#) (Brendan McElroy)

[Challenging Autocracy and Impunity in Central America](#) (Luciana Chamorro and Kai Thaler)

[Authoritarian Power in the Global Economy](#) (Anne Pitcher and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira)

[Lobbying the Autocrat](#) (Sasha de Vogel)

[The International Aftermath of the Arab Spring](#) (Jean Lachapelle)

[Constraining Presidents](#) (Allen Hicken)

[Democratic Survival in the Muslim World](#) (Hanisah Abdullah Sani and Pauline Jones)

[Economic Shocks and Authoritarian Stability](#) (Natalia Forrat)

[Is Democracy Promotion Dead?](#) (Matthew Cebul)

A downside of our thematic approach is that our deliveries have not always been timely. This final issue has taken an especially long time to produce, but we feel the final product is worth the wait.

This Issue: Democratic Resilience

Our final issue originated in a pair of conferences organized in May and June 2025 at Vanderbilt University and the Brookings Institution. We began with the Brookings gathering, which brought together policy and academic thinkers and yielded [the following report](#) on democratic resilience.

We then organized an academic mini-conference on the same theme in Nashville co-conceived by Vanderbilt's Center for Global Democracy (led by Noam Lupu), Cornell's Center on Global Democracy (under Rachel

Beatty Riedl), and Michigan's Center for Emerging Democracies. We issued a call for papers on the theme "Democracy: From Erosion to Resilience," and received over 150 submissions. A full day was dedicated to discussing the nine papers that were selected and presented.

Two of those excellent papers are summarized below in this issue's thematic essays. First, Jennifer Cyr and coauthors address the important differences between democratic resilience in the global North and the global South. Democracies in these two parts of the world are quite different and the threats they therefore face differ starkly as well, Cyr et. al. argue. Second, Berk Esen and coauthors address the role of locally entrenched opposition parties in resisting democratic backsliding, drawing on the historical case of Fujimori's Peru in the 1990s to apply its lessons to contemporary Venezuela and Turkey. Spatial resistance, Esen et. al. argue, is a vital element in democratic resilience.

We conclude our concluding issue with a symposium on Laura Gamboa's 2022 Cambridge book, *Resisting Backsliding: Opposition Strategies against the Erosion of Democracy*. We chose to organize a symposium instead of an Author Exchange for the first time in this final issue because Gamboa's book stands apart for its agenda-setting position in the growing literature on democratic erosion. Rachel Beatty Riedl (Cornell), Giovanni Capoccia (Oxford), and Raul Madrid (UT-Austin) offer trenchant commentaries for Gamboa's consideration, and for our own.

Democratic Resilience in the World: Why Distinguishing North from South Matters¹

Jennifer Cyr, *Universidad Torcuato Di Tella*; **Matías Bianchi**, *Asuntos del Sur*; **Paula Clerici**, *Universidad Torcuato Di Tella* – CONICET

Scholars of democratic resilience face a complex reality. First, democracies are in decline across the globe. Since 1900, only 23% of democracies survived autocratization once it began (Boese et al. 2021, 18). Additionally, many of the actors who might halt democratic decline via the enforcement of accountability mechanisms—political parties, the media, civil society—have either been weakened or were already weak. It is therefore increasingly difficult to weaken autocratizing incumbents (Laebens & Luhrmann 2021). Finally, countries like the United States, which had long seemed irreversibly democratic, are reversing course. Meanwhile, other countries in regions like Latin America remain democratic against incredibly high structural odds.

We show that, in fact, democracies are changing in systematically different ways across the globe. This has implications for how we think about, conceptualize, and, ultimately, understand democratic resilience. We make our claim by, first, distinguishing between Global South and Global North countries. An ongoing research agenda shows clear economic, social, and political differences between these two groups of countries. Yet our understanding of resilience has largely neglected this distinction. We then show that democracies are categorically different in these two global spheres, as are the types of threats that they face. A valid conceptualization of democratic resilience, we conclude, must be capable of taking into account these distinctions.

Democracy in the Global North versus the Global South

One useful, if not unproblematic,² approach to distinguishing democracies is based on the Global North (GN) and the Global South (GS) (see, e.g., Müller 2020). This North–South distinction has been used by policymakers and scholars alike. At least initially, usage of the terms represented an effort to push back against

1. This research was made possible thanks to the generous financial support of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

2. The North–South distinction does not fully eliminate legacies of Eurocentrism (Castro T. and Alburez–Gutierrez 2022). Additionally, it may obscure meaningful differences for the group of countries that do not fit neatly in the GN or the GS (Müller 2020).

the notion that countries might be on a universal developmental trajectory (Dados and Connell 2012, Müller 2020, 735).

In fact, the North–South distinction highlights substantive structural differences between two sets of countries. For example, most GS countries have been colonized while most GN countries have not (Odeh 2010, see also Mahoney 2010). While an imperfect distinction (the United States was a British colony), generalized, later-stage patterns of colonization in the GS have had a role in cementing “large inequalities in living standards, life expectancy, and access to resources” (Dados & Connell 2012, 13). Inequality, in particular, is likely to increase the probability of backsliding, because it raises the costs of redistribution for political and economic elites (Houle 2009).

The timing of democratization also differs across spheres. Many GS democracies emerged before or alongside industrialization processes that, in the GN, largely preceded the mass expansion of the vote. As a consequence, landholding and other economic elites who traditionally opposed democracy remained powerful political actors in GS transition processes. Their efforts against opening up the political system “severely compromised” the democracies that emerged (Heller 2022, 467–9). Many GS countries adopted democracy with only weakly consolidated states and inefficient and overly politicized institutions. Questions of stateness itself—a prerequisite of high-quality democracies (Linz & Stepan 1996)—remained at least partially unanswered.

All told, the quality of democracy in the GS has historically been much lower, on average, than that of the GN. These results are neither empirically nor theoretically surprising. Aspects of democratic quality co-vary together. Indeed, they tend to be “so densely interactive and overlapping that it is sometimes difficult to know where one [democratic] dimension ends and another begins” (Diamond and Morlino 2004, 29). For historical and structural reasons, GN democracies tend to be more robust (Bednar 2021) than those in the GS.

In all, real differences exist between democracy in these two parts of the world. It is therefore curious that most of our theoretical or conceptual treatments of democratic resilience do not tackle this—or any—distinction head on (but see Matlosa 2023).

Threats to Democracy in the Global North versus the Global South

Challenges to democracy also differ in the two regions examined here. We know that democracies increasingly face new types of threats (Ziblatt and Levitsky 2019, 3). Rather than overt, public events, like coups or outright electoral fraud, many new threats are slow-moving and much less obvious. We can think here of executive encroachment or the growing use of digital platforms to

manipulate public opinion, spread disinformation, and promote authoritarian echo chambers (Da Empoli 2019).

These new threats have impacted countries across the globe (Ziblatt and Levitsky 2019). Nevertheless, it is also the case that more historical, overt challenges are still a problem in certain parts of the GS. There have been fewer coups in the world, on balance, since after 2000 (Cebotari et al. 2024, 3). Against this trend, however, one part of the world—Sub-Saharan Africa—remains vulnerable to coup threats. The early 2020s have seen a spike in the number of attempted coups, including in Chad, Central African Republic, Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Sudan.

Another overt threat to democracy is the infiltration of organized crime in government, especially at the subnational level. This challenge is especially potent where political institutions are weak and the state is unwilling or unable to enforce the rule of law across a territory (Moncada 2022)—that is, many countries in the GS. Indeed, when it comes to the embeddedness of criminals into the state, GN countries from Western Europe and North America score, on average, much lower than those in other regions. The former has an embeddedness score of 4.04 (on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 denotes the lowest amount of embeddedness). The latter’s average score is 6.66 (Global OCI 2023).

All told, threats to democracy in the GN appear to have transformed over the past nearly three decades. In the GS, by contrast, they have diversified. Below, we examine why these systematic differences are fundamental to our understanding of democratic resilience.

These Differences Matter for Democratic Resilience

Thus far, we have shown that the quality of democracy and democratic threats systematically differ in the GS versus the GN. There are at least two implications of this for our understanding of democratic resilience.

First, in the GN, we should expect regimes to be less vulnerable to challenges to democracy, thanks in part to their higher level of democracy and overall institutional robustness (Bednar 2021), which imbues them with higher reserves of “democratic stock” to respond to an impending threat (Boese, et al. 2023, 17). GN democracies should, in other words, exhibit greater “onset resilience,” or the capacity to prevent democratic challenges from having an impact on the regime (Boese, et al. 2023). Early evidence suggests this might be the case. Croissant and Lott (2024, Table 3, p. 19) demonstrate that Western Europe and North America have a much higher capacity for resilience than all other regions. They score particularly high on the institutional dimension of resilience capacity, that is,

“democratic stock, executive constraints, and rule of law” (Croissant and Lott 2024, 20).

Second, we should expect that recovery from a challenge that erodes democracy will look different in the GN versus the GS. This is due both to the nature of the democratic regime and the threat types that differentially affect the regions. Qualitative work on democratic recovery in different countries is only just beginning, and therefore we cannot yet speak to systematic differences regarding the process by which rebounds occur in the GN versus the GS. However, it is possible to examine descriptive data on the frequency of rebounds in both regions.

For example, the Varieties of Democracy project offers a novel dataset on “democratic turnarounds” across the globe from 1900 to 2022. Democratic turnarounds occur when a period of “autocratization is closely followed by and inherently linked to subsequent democratization” (Nord, et al. 2024, 9). A democratic turnaround occurs when a country’s Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) level drops a significant amount before rising again. A turnaround can be L-shaped, where a country ends up being less democratic than before the attack. It can also be J-shaped, where the level of democracy improves after an attack. The most common type of turnaround is U-shaped—where a country begins and ends the turnaround at roughly the same level of democracy (Nord, et al. 2025).

Several texts have begun to use these data to analyze the extent and nature of democratic turnarounds, including, for example, how few of these have actually endured in the 21st century (Bianchi, et al., 2025). Here, we leverage data from an additional V-Dem dataset (the Episodes of Regime Transformation [ERT] dataset) to focus on the number of democratic recoveries of any kind (i.e., L-, U-, or J-turn) that have occurred in the GN versus the GS after an episode of autocratization (EA), or a period of substantial and sustained decline in a country’s level of democracy (Edgell, et al. 2020). These data allow us to understand if and when countries in each region tend to experience democratic recovery following a period of democratic backsliding.

Table 1 provides some telling information about the percentage of turnarounds in the world both before and after the third wave of autocratization (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019) began in 1994. As should be expected, there have been more EA in both regions with the onset of the third wave of autocratization (18 in the GN and 36 in the GS). Additionally, Global South countries have experienced more episodes of autocratization, supporting the finding that GN countries have higher onset resilience (Boese, et al. 2023).

Perhaps more surprisingly, the percentage of countries that experience some kind of rebound after the EA changes rather dramatically before and after 1994 in the Global North, but not in the Global South. Whereas

Table 1. Percentage of Democratic Rebounds* following an Episode of Autocratization (EA) in the Global North (GN) vs. the Global South (GS)**

	Before 1994						1994-2024					
	EA	U-turn	J-turn	L-turn	Total	% rebounds	EA	U-turn	J-turn	L-turn	Total	% rebounds
GN	10	2	2	2	6	60	18	5	0	0	5	27.8
GS	8	1	2	0	3	37.5	36	10	0	3	13	36.1

*A democratic rebound occurs when a country recovers at least some level of democracy after experiencing an episode of autocratization.

** An episode of autocratization is “a period of substantial and sustained decreases on V-Dem’s Electoral Democracy Index (EDI). The default parameters require that such a period begin with an initial -0.01 decrease on the EDI and a total decrease of at least -0.10 throughout the episode. An autocratization episode ends the final year of a negative change less than or equal to the initial decrease (e.g. -0.01), prior to experiencing an annual increase, cumulative increase, or stasis period. These are defined in the defaults as +0.03, +0.10, and 5 years respectively” (Edgell, et al. 2020, 18).

Source: Author’s compilation, based on Nord, et al., 2024 (Table A1. V-Dem Democratic Turnaround Dataset) and the Episodes of Regime Transformation (ERT) dataset 15.0, 2015.

60% of EA in the GN experienced some kind of recovery prior to 1994, only 27.8% did afterwards. In GS, by contrast, the recovery percentage before and after 1994 is essentially the same (37.5 vs. 36.1). Global North countries appear to have a harder time recovering from democratic decline in the 21st century.

What can explain this finding? As we have seen above, the 3rd wave of autocratization reflects “more vexing forms” of autocratization (Bermeo 2016). They are slower and harder to see and therefore combat in real time. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2019), to be sure, warned us off this possibility. No democracy is immune to these new democratic challenges.

However, different democracies will have to address these threats in very distinct institutional and structural contexts. Additionally, the range of potential threats will be much greater in the Global South. Resiliency, in the face of such contextual diversity, most certainly will manifest in unique ways, thanks to distinct resources and assorted actors.

An Agenda for Democratic Resilience

Overall, democracy in the GN appears more robust (Bednar 2021) than in the GS—hence, its greater ability to thwart authoritarian threats before they occur

(Boese, et al. 2021). Nevertheless, few democracies have been wholly impervious to autocratization. It is incumbent, we argue, to understand how democratic threats emerge and play out in different contexts, where democracy levels and democratic challenges vary. We have thus far put forth several testable claims that a more context-oriented agenda on democratic resilience should take into account. Let us offer one more by way of conclusion.

We can imagine that piecemeal threats—again, a more recent problem that is global in scope—will nevertheless manifest differently in a more robust institutional context, such as those in the GN. It may be that a more robust institutional architecture, while less vulnerable to the onset of these threats, can actually be more permanently transformed by them if successfully implemented. Ironically, this is due to the very robustness of those institutions. Once successfully transformed, their robustness may prevent future attempts at reversal. In less robust contexts, democratic threats may be more frequent, while their lasting impact may be less clear. Many GS countries rely upon informal and/or highly politicized institutions to govern. Consequently, “pro-democratic” agents may

have more ways to prevent permanent damage from encroachment.

This kind of analysis is partially supported by the patterns of democratic turnaround examined above. GN countries are less vulnerable (and therefore more robust) to democratic backsliding. In the GS, challenges have been more frequent over the entire V-Dem dataset (1900–2022), but so too has recovery. Future work could interact threat type with democratic change over time to see how much more impervious the GN is to democratic threats. It may also examine those cases where turnaround is less dramatic and, consequently, attacks on democracy are more long-lasting. If our intuitions are correct, we should see two things. First, the Global South will exhibit more volatile recovery patterns. Second, enduring turnarounds will be difficult to achieve in both regions (Bianchi et al. 2025), but the theoretical reasons for this will vary.

Moving forward, our understanding of democratic resilience must be attentive to differences across the globe. Distinguishing between the Global North and South highlights how historical legacies, institutional configurations, and threat environments shape both vulnerability and recovery. Future research should further explore these contextual dynamics—and, of course, distinct subregional dynamics within the GN and the GS—to understand how different combinations of institutional robustness and redundancy affect the capacity of democracies to withstand and reverse autocratization. A theory of democratic resilience that ignores these systematic differences risks overlooking the very conditions that make resilience possible or impossible across the globe.

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Roots and Routes of Resistance: Local Oppositions and the Spatial Limits of Authoritarian Control

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Electoral autocrats rarely seize power all at once (Bermeo 2016). Authoritarian control often advances unevenly—across regions, institutions, and time. However, the conventional wisdom about authoritarian politics focuses primarily on national-level dynamics: how autocrats capture courts, silence media, manipulate elections, or persecute opponents (Levitsky & Way 2010, Scheppele 2018, Croissant & Tomini 2024). While these processes are undeniably important, they tell only part of the story. What happens at the local level—in cities, provinces, and regions—can significantly shape the trajectory of autocratization and democratic resistance (Gilley 2010). Some local arenas in fact become enduring centers of contestation and resistance, others fluctuate between opposition and regime control, and still others remain firmly in the autocrat's camp.

In Venezuela and Turkey, for instance, ruling parties dominate national politics, but opposition forces have still managed to win and govern in major states, provinces, and cities (Esen & Gumuscu 2019, Jimenez 2023, Alemdaroglu et al. 2025). While both Hugo Chávez and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have tightened their grip over time, their regimes are still seeking to consolidate power, and the persistence of opposition strongholds at the local level complicates the image of uncontested autocracy. In other electoral authoritarian regimes like Hungary, Slovenia, Poland, and Serbia, opposition parties continue to win local contests in metropolitan provinces despite losing at the national level (Kovarek & Littvay 2022, Buzogany & Spori 2024).

The spatial variation in opposition strength across and within these cases over time thus reveals an overlooked dimension of electoral authoritarianism. Recognizing this unevenness reshapes how we understand authoritarian control as well as how it might collapse. This unevenness matters not just for scholars, but for pro-democracy movements, whose survival and strategies often hinge on these pockets of resistance.

Peru under Alberto Fujimori (1990–2000) provides a compelling case for examining these dynamics. Fujimori's regime evolved from a democratically-elected government into what scholars call competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky & Way 2010, Cameron 1998). Yet throughout this period, Peru maintained competitive local elections, creating hundreds of spaces

where opposition forces could potentially establish and maintain democratic footholds, even as national institutions succumbed to authoritarian control. Peru's large number of provinces and districts therefore offer an arena to understand how opposition resistance at the local level operates under conditions of increasing national authoritarianism.

Our analysis of Peru's municipal elections from 1993 to 2002 reveals patterns that help explain broader questions about democratic resistance under electoral autocracy. We find that opposition forces maintained a significant local presence throughout the Fujimori era, never controlling less than 13% of districts and consistently capturing 30–45% of the popular vote.¹ More strikingly, certain territories emerged as persistent strongholds of resistance, with urban centers like Lima becoming platforms where opposition leaders could build credibility, expand organizational capacity, and signal regime vulnerability.

These findings contribute to our understanding of democratic resistance by highlighting how resistance operates across multiple levels simultaneously. While we do not claim that local dynamics alone determine regime outcomes, they represent a crucial piece of the puzzle that has been largely overlooked in studies of authoritarianism. Where resistance emerges, how it develops, and why it endures in some places but not others provides key insights into both autocratization and democratic resistance.

The historical Peruvian experience, along with similar patterns we observe in contemporary Turkey and Venezuela, suggests that local governments can serve as crucial reservoirs of democratic resilience, providing platforms for the development of opposition leadership, policy experimentation, and organizational maintenance that may prove critical for democratic resilience.

Beyond National Politics: A Theory of Spatial Resistance

The dominant narrative about authoritarian consolidation assumes that once autocrats secure national power, control extends downward through clientelistic distribution, the co-optation of local elites, and repression (Hassan et al. 2022). Local elections, in this view, either reinforce regime control or function as symbolic outlets for dissent in electorally insignificant territories. This top-down perspective, while capturing important dynamics, misses how local politics often operates according to its own logic, creating

¹ "Opposition forces" refers to local and national parties that explicitly positioned themselves against the Fujimori regime. Our classification distinguishes these from neutral parties that maintained no clear stance toward the government.

opportunities for democratic resistance even under consolidated authoritarian rule.

We propose two interconnected mechanisms—*territorial resistance* and *containment failure*—to help explain why authoritarian dominance does not extend uniformly across a territory as well as how democratic resistance emerges and persists at the subnational level.

The first mechanism highlights that authoritarian dominance at the national level does not automatically translate into concomitant control over subnational arenas. Territorial resistance may serve as a barrier against full authoritarian consolidation and can even become a durable feature of electoral authoritarianism. National hegemony can coexist with local pluralism or opposition control in its strongholds over the long term, because subnational politics are structured by their own dynamics, including historical trajectories, local networks, candidate performance, and distinct bases of political competition. Seeing territorial resistance as constitutive rather than anomalous challenges linear accounts of authoritarian consolidation that assume local politics inevitably fall in line with national rule. It also explains the persistence of opposition strongholds and pluralistic enclaves in authoritarian systems. These enclaves may not immediately threaten regime survival as expected (Gilley 2010), but they create durable meaningful spaces of contestation, alternative governance models, and potential platforms for long-term political change (Lucardi 2016, Farole 2021, McLellan 2022, Demir 2025, Szakonyi 2025).

We distinguish between democratic resistance and institutional resilience. Democratic resistance refers to the active agency of opposition actors contesting authoritarian control through electoral participation and local governance. Institutional resilience describes the capacity of local democratic institutions—electoral systems, municipal governments, civic organizations—to maintain autonomy and functionality under authoritarian pressure. These institutions operate in tandem: institutional resilience creates the platforms that enable democratic resistance.

The success of authoritarian strategies of spatial containment depends critically on these institutional environments. Spatial containment seeks to fragment and localize opposition activity, but its effectiveness varies with the degree of resilience available at the subnational level. Where local governments and bureaucracies have been purged or packed with loyalists, containment can isolate opposition actors and limit their capacity to resist. Where local institutions have survived prior authoritarian power grabs, however, opportunities for democratic resistance remain, allowing oppositions to mobilize locally.

Authoritarian incumbents often attempt to manage territorial resistance through the spatial containment of local opposition. Rather than seeking to eradicate all challengers at the local level, incumbents selectively tolerate opposition control in predictable strongholds, while also preventing its expansion into swing regions or regime bastions. Allowing the opposition to govern in historically anti-regime areas can help incumbents defuse inter-party conflict, maintain democratic legitimacy, and concentrate resources where regime control matters most. This strategy often allows autocrats to maintain a façade of electoral pluralism while confining meaningful contestation to politically manageable boundaries.

Spatial containment is both an ambition and strategy of authoritarian control, but it does not always guarantee success. Opposition actors can sometimes overcome those barriers, especially if they coordinate around joint candidates and break with candidates who enjoy popular appeal beyond the core base of their parties. This often happens where political and social heterogeneity create structural limits to authoritarian control. Urban-rural divides, ethnic and religious diversity, and varying economic conditions all shape local political preferences in ways that authoritarian governments cannot easily override. When spatial containment fails, opposition forces can leverage local success to build credibility, resources, and organizational capacity that enhance their competitiveness, even beyond their traditional strongholds (Buzogány & Spori 2024).

The Peruvian Laboratory: Local Resistance Under Fujimori

Alberto Fujimori's presidency (1990–2000) evolved from democratic government into competitive authoritarianism, complete with a 1992 self-coup, captured judiciary, and controlled media. Yet Peru maintained regular local elections across 196 provinces and over 1,600 districts throughout this period of authoritarian consolidation.

The scale of potential democratic resistance was significant: these subnational governments presided over millions of citizens and substantial public resources, offering platforms where opposition forces could maintain democratic footholds even as national institutions were neutralized. Fujimori's personalistic appeal—regularly exceeding 70% public approval—created a crucial dilemma: his electoral vehicles functioned as “empty vessels” without organizational infrastructure, limiting his capacity to translate national popularity into systematic local control.

Our analysis of municipal elections from 1993–2002 reveals that territorial resistance served as a persistent

rather than transitory feature under Fujimori. Despite his national dominance, opposition forces maintained a remarkable local presence: they never controlled less than 13% of districts and consistently captured 30–45% of the popular vote. Even at the regime's 1998 peak—when Fujimori-allied forces controlled 39% of provinces—opposition parties simultaneously held 21% of provinces while capturing 43% of the national vote.

This divergence between national authoritarianism and local pluralism was most striking in major urban centers. Lima province maintained 45–50% opposition control across all elections, even during the 1995 downturn when anti-Fujimori forces fell to just 13% of districts nationally. The pattern held across coastal cities like Arequipa, Callao, and Tacna, which sustained opposition presence throughout the Fujimori period. In this way, territorial heterogeneity created structural barriers to uniform regime control.

The 2002 post-Fujimori elections revealed the brittle nature of authoritarian local control: pro-regime control virtually disappeared (0.2% of districts) while opposition forces rebounded to 35%—nearly matching 1993 levels. This rapid reversion confirmed that much regime control depended on national backing rather than deep local political roots, illustrating territorial resistance's durability.

The evolution of Lima's mayoralty illustrates spatial containment strategies as well as their ultimate failure. Initially, the regime appeared to tolerate opposition presence in the capital as a manageable outlet for dissent. Lima's size and political sophistication made it a predictable opposition stronghold that could be contained while the regime consolidated control elsewhere.

However, opposition victories transformed Lima from a space of symbolic resistance into a genuine threat. Alberto Andrade's 1995 defeat of Fujimori's chosen candidate (by a margin of 53% to 47%) signaled the opposition's capacity, as it won Peru's most important political territory. The regime's response drew on classic spatial containment tactics: rather than accept opposition governance, Fujimori systematically undermined municipal autonomy.

Between 1995–1996, eighteen decrees eliminated mayors' authority over business licenses, urban planning, and public transportation. Decree 776 restructured municipal funding, causing an 80% drop in Lima's revenue. The central government assumed direct control over traffic management and street vendor regulation.

Yet spatial containment ultimately failed. Andrade's decisive 1998 reelection (when he won 59% of votes) positioned him as a credible national challenger, demonstrating how local platforms could transcend regime-imposed boundaries. More tellingly, the success of "Somos Lima" inspired opposition movements across the country to adopt similar branding and strategies, with "Somos [city name]" variants emerging in multiple provinces and districts. This horizontal diffusion of opposition organizing models illustrated precisely the kind of spillover effect that spatial containment strategies seek to prevent. The opposition's ability to maintain and expand urban control—despite systematic resource manipulation by the regime—revealed the limits of authoritarian spatial strategies when confronting local opposition capacity and territorial heterogeneity.

Crucially, no province qualified as a consistent pro-Fujimori stronghold, reflecting the regime's shallow local penetration despite its national dominance. This asymmetry between opposition persistence and regime fragility at the local level illustrates how territorial resistance can preserve democratic alternatives even under consolidated authoritarianism, creating potential platforms for eventual democratic recovery.

Global Patterns: Lessons from Turkey and Venezuela

The spatial dynamics of resistance observed in Peru are not unique but reflect broader patterns visible across different national contexts. Contemporary cases in Turkey and Venezuela demonstrate how the mechanisms of territorial resistance and containment failure operate across diverse political and cultural settings.

Turkey, which has been ruled by Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) since 2002, provides interesting parallels to the Peruvian case. Despite the AKP's dominance of national politics and systematic erosion of democratic institutions throughout this period (Esen and Gumuscu 2016), opposition parties have retained control of municipalities in their strongholds and gradually turned several major metropolitan provinces into electorally contested spaces. Accordingly, the secular-left Republican People's Party (CHP) dominated the municipalities in economically developed coastal provinces such as Izmir, Mersin, and Antalya, while the pro-Kurdish movement retained strong local control in most of the Kurdish-majority provinces. Even at the height of the AKP's rule, opposition parties maintained and even strengthened their electoral presence in these provinces.

While the opposition was allowed to govern in historically anti-regime areas, AKP sought to prevent

its rise in pro-government and swing provinces. Such spatial containment allowed AKP to govern most metropolitan provinces and local governments in the Anatolian heartland, as opposition voters did not constitute a majority of the electorate in these areas. Building upon its strongholds, the CHP gradually managed to break these barriers, winning in cities representing over half of Turkey's population in the 2019 and 2024 local elections, including previously-AKP controlled provinces like Istanbul, Ankara, Adana, and Bursa (Alemdaroglu et al. 2025, Esen & Gumuscu 2019). These results occurred even as Erdoğan maintained firm control over the state apparatus, judiciary, and media. It was a pivotal moment for the opposition, which went beyond its traditional strongholds by forming an electoral alliance with a nationality party and the pro-Kurdish movement (Selçuk & Hekimci 2020, Abrami et al. 2024).

Incumbent CHP mayors have sought to transform their municipalities into venues that offer public services, expand social assistance programs, and protect civic space. Accordingly, the delivery of good governance has catapulted some opposition figures such as Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu and Ankara Mayor Mansur Yavaş into national prominence, illustrating how local office can serve as a springboard for broader opposition leadership (Gilley 2010). The Erdoğan regime's response, which included the removal and arrest of elected mayors, implementation of bureaucratic hamstring tactics, and reduced fiscal transfers to opposition-controlled cities (Hintz and Ercan 2024, Celik 2025), mirrors Fujimori's spatial containment tactics against his rivals in Lima.

Venezuela under Chávez presents perhaps the most challenging environment for subnational resistance, with over two decades of increasingly authoritarian rule (Corrales 2023, Jiménez 2021). Yet opposition forces have maintained or regained control over several states and numerous municipalities, including former Chavista strongholds. Despite repression and systematic manipulation, opposition forces that ran with a joint candidate have at times managed to win or regain control over several states as well as numerous municipalities, including several former Chavista bastions.

This outcome reflects local political dynamics that go beyond national partisan loyalties and the broader regime-opposition divide. States like Miranda and Zulia have alternated between opposition and government control across multiple electoral cycles. The regime's response to shifting local dynamics has been increasingly repressive, including the imprisonment of opposition mayors, creation of parallel governance structures, and systematic withholding of constitutional transfers to opposition-controlled territories. Local opposition governments have contributed to the

groundwork for broader democratic resistance. Governors and mayors have used their (limited) autonomy not only to deliver some services, but also to preserve or mobilize organizational networks that have proven important during national electoral contests.

Strategic Opportunities for Opposition Movements

Opposition parties operating under electoral authoritarianism should view local elections as strategic opportunities rather than consolation prizes. Instead of focusing primarily on national-level contestation, our findings suggest that democratic resistance at the subnational level represents a crucial and often overlooked complement to efforts to reverse autocratization.

The experiences of oppositions in Peru, Venezuela, and Turkey illustrate how maintaining local presence during periods of authoritarian consolidation can provide crucial organizational benefits: candidate recruitment, policy experimentation, resource access, and credibility-building, which are vital for national-level competition.

However, our findings also reveal the importance of electoral planning. Opposition forces that concentrate their limited resources in winnable territories while building organizational capacity for gradual expansion appear more successful than those that spread resources too widely. The persistent gap between vote share and control observed in Peru suggests that opposition movements must develop better mechanisms for coordinating and strategic targeting.

Local governance success requires balancing two potentially conflicting dilemmas, namely delivering effective administration while maintaining a clear opposition identity. The Lima case shows both the potential and pitfalls of this balance; opposition mayors can build credibility through good governance but must navigate regime efforts to co-opt, marginalize, and even eliminate their achievements. As seen in the imprisonment of Ekrem İmamoğlu, successful opposition mayors who emerge as credible rivals to electoral autocrats may face severe legal and political pressure from the regime (Esen & Gumuscu 2025).

At the same time, the rapid reversion of local political control after Fujimori's collapse suggests that authoritarian consolidation may be more fragile than it appears. Oppositions should therefore maintain engagement with local democratic actors, even during periods of apparent regime hegemony, as these relationships may prove crucial during later democratic transitions.

The lesson for scholars is clear: democratic resilience operates across multiple levels simultaneously. While national institutions remain crucial, local governments serve as vital platforms where democratic practices, opposition leadership, and civic engagement can survive and potentially flourish, even under increasingly authoritarian conditions. Recognizing and supporting these subnational dimensions of democratic resistance may prove essential for long-term democratic recovery and consolidation.

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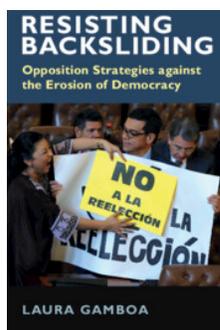
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Book Symposium: *Resisting Backsliding: Opposition Strategies Against the Erosion of Democracy*, by Laura Gamboa

By Laura Gamboa. Cambridge University Press, 2022. 320p. Paperback.

Review by Rachel Beatty Riedl, Cornell University



Laura Gamboa's *Resisting Backsliding* marks a critical and refreshing turn in the study of democratic erosion.

In a literature often dominated by analyses of how autocrats dismantle democracy, Gamboa shifts attention to the other side of the equation: how opposition actors resist and sometimes prevent such erosion. The result is a theoretically rich, empirically grounded, and intellectually

invigorating contribution that reshapes how we think about democratic resilience.

Rather than focusing solely on autocrats' strategies, Gamboa asks why some elected leaders succeed in eroding democracy while others fail. Her central argument unfolds in two stages: first, why voters elect potential autocrats; and second, how opposition forces respond once these figures take power. The book's innovation lies in the second question—what resources and repertoires oppositions wield, and how they deploy them to sustain democracy under threat.

Gamboa demonstrates that the endurance of democracy depends not only on institutional design or structural conditions but also on the agency and strategic choices of opposition actors. She distinguishes between institutional and extra-institutional strategies and shows that when opposition groups stay within democratic and legitimate channels—such as elections, legislatures, and courts—they are better able to sustain both domestic and international legitimacy. Such moderation, she argues, can shield democratic institutions from erosion and limit the incumbent's ability to consolidate autocracy.

A major theoretical contribution is Gamboa's emphasis on *time*. Both democratic erosion and democratic resistance are gradual processes. Gamboa's opposition actors adopt what might be called a "slow fight" approach: maintaining footholds, avoiding premature

confrontations, and “living to fight another day.” By resisting the temptation of short-term victories that could provoke harsher repression, they instead pursue incremental efforts that cumulatively constrain autocrats’ room to maneuver. This temporal perspective is key to her understanding of how democracies endure amid sustained pressures.

While Gamboa analytically separates the stages of an autocrat’s election and subsequent backsliding, one could imagine extending her logic backward in time: what strategies might pro-democracy forces adopt *before* an autocrat is elected? Can opposition actors identify and preempt non-democratic contenders early enough to avert democratic decline altogether? Is it possible to form effective blocks to authoritarian actors, and would this work for or against democratic practice and representation? These counterfactual questions push Gamboa’s framework toward a broader research agenda on preventive democratic resilience that remain to be explored.

Gamboa situates her argument within a comparative framework of weakly institutionalized party systems, fragile states, and struggling economies—the very conditions under which elected autocrats often emerge. Yet she argues that these structural factors alone cannot explain why some autocrats succeed while others do not. The answer lies in opposition behavior. Still, one might ask how these structural conditions interact with opposition choices. The interplay among state weakness, party fragmentation, and opposition strategy remains fertile ground for future research.

Gamboa conceptualizes regime outcomes dichotomously: either democracy survives, or it collapses into competitive authoritarianism. This clarity has analytic advantages, but it also raises measurement challenges. Opposition “success” might be better seen as a continuum. Even in competitive authoritarian regimes such as Hungary and Turkey, opposition parties and civil society leaders have at times constrained incumbents and maintained pockets of contestation. Conversely, in democracies that avoid full collapse, the quality of participation and rights may still erode. Recognizing these gradations could enrich our understanding of how opposition efforts shape the *degree* rather than the *existence* of democratic resilience.

Gamboa’s treatment of extra-institutional repertoires—coups, boycotts, protests, and strikes—invites careful reflection. While she groups these as radical efforts to unseat incumbents prematurely, not all are equally destabilizing. Protests, for example, can reinforce institutional channels of democratic accountability rather than undermine them. In Malawi, mass mobilization against electoral manipulation bolstered judicial legitimacy and helped restore democratic competition. The challenge, as Gamboa acknowledges,

is empirical: distinguishing between protests that defend institutions and those that abandon them.

At the same time, the assumption that moderation necessarily limits repression warrants scrutiny. Autocrats may still weaponize legality to punish even moderate opposition, as Fiona Shen-Bayh’s work on courts in Africa and recent developments in Senegal illustrate. Opposition strategies may shape the *legitimacy* of crackdowns more than their *likelihood*. And the interaction between extra-institutional and institutional domains can shape the room for maneuver and pressures that institutional actors contend with.

Finally, Gamboa recognizes that “the opposition” is never monolithic. Its internal cohesion—how well it coordinates across parties and disciplines its more radical wings—matters for success. Understanding how opposition unity evolves through interaction with autocratic incumbents—in relation to structural contextual factors and agential decisions about strategy and collaboration—remains another promising direction for future research.

Resisting Backsliding offers a powerful corrective to one-sided narratives of democratic decay. By illuminating the opposition’s strategic toolkit—its resources, calculations, and long game—Gamboa opens a new frontier in the study of democratic resilience. Her argument is both sobering and hopeful: democracy survives not because institutions are invincible, but because actors learn, adapt, and persist in defending them. Pro-democracy strategies matter, and we have a lot to continue to learn from this current moment of democratic struggle.

Review by Raul Madrid, University of Texas

Resisting Backsliding is an important and compelling study of why some leaders have been able to systematically undermine democracy. The book argues that the strategies and goals of the opposition help determine whether democratic backsliding takes place. It explores these arguments through quantitative analyses as well as in-depth case studies of Colombia, Venezuela, Bolivia, Turkey, Poland, and Hungary.

As Gamboa notes, the political opposition may employ institutional strategies, seeking to defeat or hinder the executive through elections, the legislature, and the courts. Or they may choose to work outside of existing institutions by boycotting elections, promoting coups, and carrying out aggressive strikes and protests. Similarly, the political opposition may embrace moderate goals, such as seeking to block undemocratic reforms, or they may pursue more radical goals, such as aiming to get rid of executives before the end of their terms.

Resisting Backsliding makes the case that when the opposition uses extra-institutional strategies with radical goals, authoritarian leaders are likely to respond by prosecuting, jailing, and exiling opposition leaders, which tends to weaken the opposition's ability to resist democratic backsliding. By contrast, when opposition leaders opt for institutional strategies with moderate goals, they deprive authoritarian leaders of excuses to crack down on the opposition, which enables opposition leaders to continue to resist anti-democratic measures. Finally, when the opposition opts for either moderate extra-institutional strategies (e.g., using protests to try to block anti-democratic measures) or radical institutional strategies (e.g., seeking to impeach the executive), they may gain some short-term victories, but they often encourage repression in the long term.

Gamboa's arguments are important in part because they provide support for democracy promotion efforts, which have been under attack. Democracy is not doomed in poor countries or in the wrong regional neighborhoods, she suggests. The right strategies might just save, deepen, or even help establish democracy.

Her arguments also have significant implications for theories of democracy, because she shifts the focus away from structural factors—such as levels of development or inequality, political institutions, and geography—that have long dominated the democratization literature. *Resisting Backsliding* does not ignore structural factors. To the contrary, the quantitative analyses in Chapter 3 show that some structural factors, such as state capacity and party system institutionalization, are negatively correlated with the election of authoritarian-minded leaders. But these same variables are not correlated with the actual deterioration of democracy. Structural factors may give rise to authoritarian leaders, but they do not determine whether such leaders succeed.

Resisting Backsliding instead focuses on actors and agency, and it identifies opposition parties as key actors in the struggle for democracy. I am sympathetic to this argument since I have argued that opposition parties played a key role in the first wave of democratization in Latin America (Madrid 2025). Opposition parties have obvious incentives to promote democratization, and they sometimes have the capacity to achieve their aims.

The key, of course, is to determine under what circumstances opposition parties will succeed. *Resisting Backsliding* argues that opposition strategies make all the difference, but that begs the question of what determines these strategies. Are opposition strategies shaped by structural factors? Are the strategies endogenous to regime type?

It seems likely that structural factors, regime policies, and opposition strategies interact in complex ways.

First, opposition groups may be more likely to opt for moderate and institutional strategies in countries that have structural conditions that are propitious for democracy. For example, strong civil societies, educated populations, and linkages to the West may make it difficult for authoritarian regimes to repress opposition groups that contest elections or adopt other institutional strategies. By contrast, in less developed countries with fewer linkages to the West, institutional strategies may be shut down more easily.

Second, democratization is a multi-player game in which regime leaders will anticipate and respond to opposition strategies with actions designed to neutralize their effectiveness. Authoritarians can strategically deploy repression to foreclose institutional strategies and push opposition groups to adopt more radical approaches, which in turn serves to justify further repression.

Neither of these caveats take away from the book's significance. By highlighting the importance of opposition strategies and specifying what sorts of strategies are likely to be successful, *Resisting Backsliding* has laid out a valuable agenda for future research on democratic backsliding. It is up to all of us to build on this strong foundation.

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Review by Giovanni Capoccia, University of Oxford

Laura Gamboa's *Resisting Backsliding* has the merit of shifting the debate toward what until recently was the hidden face of democratic crises, namely the role of democrats themselves. Earlier analyses of backsliding focused on autocrats, their coalitions, or the structural conditions that enabled them. Yet no theorization of backsliding—or of democratic breakdown more generally—is complete without taking seriously the agency of pro-democracy forces and their role in shaping outcomes. Could democrats have blocked erosion or a full-blown crisis? If so, why did they fail to act? Were there moments when the process could have been reversed? Why were those openings not exploited? These questions are now central as liberal democracies around the world face sustained illiberal challenges.

Theorizing democratic agency is difficult, and much of our methodological toolkit is ill-suited to it. Still, it is essential—and Gamboa's book contributes to the task. The book also explores other dimensions of backsliding, but its main takeaway is that opposition strategies that

directly attack the legitimacy of an illiberal executive tend to be less effective than strategies that target specific policies and initiatives. Equally important, her comparative analysis highlights the synergies that can be forged among pro-democracy actors—opposition legislators, civil society organizations, courts—to resist backsliding. Other scholars can build on these insights in analyses of resistance against illiberal executives. Developing and deepening the analysis of counterstrategies against illiberalism, as well as establishing a shared conceptual vocabulary to generate cumulative knowledge, should be high on the research agenda.

In contributing to this symposium, I draw attention to an underexplored dimension of the process of resisting backsliding and countering illiberalism, namely its temporalities. Pro-democracy forces do not only confront illiberals when the latter occupy executive office—this is the scenario of resistance that is most commonly analyzed. In addition, they confront illiberals in the opposition, which typically affords democrats greater room to act and potentially better odds of success. As such, two further ideal-typical scenarios of confrontation with illiberals can be distinguished, each with a distinct logic (Capoccia 2024). First, before illiberals capture government, democrats must thwart their rise, limit their influence, and raise the political costs of holding extreme positions. This scenario is characterized by the logic of prevention. Second, when autocratizing executives are defeated at the ballot box, yet illiberal forces remain viable contenders, democrats must constrain them and prepare for trench warfare. This scenario is characterized by the logic of containment.

These three scenarios—prevention, containment and resistance—correspond to a range of strategies and synergies that democrats can adopt. The illiberal challenge is not going away, and democrats will be likely engaged in this confrontation for a long time. As countries cycle through different scenarios, our theories must make room to analyze the order of these changes and the strategic adaptations they require.

Such an analysis of temporality goes beyond merely differentiating between scenarios. It also requires analyzing the trade-offs that democrats must navigate at different moments of their confrontation with illiberals. For example, as backsliding intensifies, pro-democracy actors may feel a greater urgency to coordinate and set aside long-standing differences. Yet that urgency often materializes just as the institutional space for action narrows: media capture constrains communication, legal changes hobble courts and electoral commissions, suffrage reforms favor incumbents, and harassment and restrictive legislation deter civil society mobilization. The result is a temporal dilemma: the stronger the incentive to cooperate, the smaller the opportunity set. Understanding the

strategic implications of this dilemma is essential. How does a heightened sense of urgency translate into actual coordination among opposition parties and civil society organizations? What mechanisms facilitate or hinder coalition-building under increasing repression? What roles do uncertainty and information play? What campaign strategies are most likely to be effective? And how do these questions apply to scenarios of prevention and containment?

A forthcoming volume (Capoccia 2024; Capoccia & Mares, forthcoming) tackles these issues by developing a framework for the temporal dynamics of countering illiberalism and a common vocabulary for the analysis of strategies and synergies typical of each scenario. Advancing this research agenda should be a priority for comparative politics in the coming years. On this path, Gamboa's book will remain a point of reference.

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Response from Laura Gamboa, University of Notre Dame

I am deeply grateful and honored for the generous and thought-provoking reviews written by Giovanni Capoccia, Rachel Beatty Riedl, and Raul Madrid. The questions and comments they pose are key to advancing our understanding of democratic resilience. Given space constraints, my response will focus on three topics: the sources of opposition strategies, the dynamic nature of democratic backsliding, and the timeline of autocratizing episodes.

All of the respondents highlight the need to explore the sources of opposition strategies. Human agency, Madrid and Riedl note, interacts with structural, institutional, and international factors such as state capacity, party system institutionalization, civil society strength, and linkages to the West. What strategies oppositions choose and whether these succeed will likely depend on contextual opportunities and resources. And indeed, agency is shaped by both domestic and international variables; the question, of course, is how and to what extent. While resources and opportunities do create incentives to use institutional or extra-institutional strategies and/or to aim for radical or moderate goals, they do not overdetermine these preferences. We have

seen oppositions use electoral strategies in closed authoritarian regimes (e.g., Venezuela 2024) and non-institutional strategies in backsliding democracies where the opposition had a legislative majority (e.g., Bolivia 2008).

As scholars we are often pre-disposed to assume that these structural and institutional variables have specific effects on the opposition's strategic choices. We suppose that oppositions in countries with more institutionalized party systems, stronger civil societies, and closer linkages to the West are more likely to resort to moderate institutional strategies—compared to oppositions in countries with inchoate party systems, weaker civil societies, and looser linkages to the West. Yet one wonders to what extent these intuitions are true in contexts of democratic erosion. Less institutionalized party systems, for example, can facilitate incumbent defections—especially in deeply polarized contexts (Gamboa 2020)—or create cracks in authoritarian coalitions (Meléndez-Sánchez & Perelló 2025) that facilitate congressional obstruction or electoral victories. Likewise, well-organized civil society organizations (CSOs) can engage with or support institutional strategies (e.g., the ACLU in the US). Others, however, might use their strength to thwart attempts to leverage institutional strategies (e.g., Venezuela between 2002-03).

Turning away from the more slow-moving structural and institutional conditions, Capoccia highlights the importance of temporality in shaping opposition tactical choices. In his view, oppositions are shaped by the dynamic scenarios they encounter during long processes of autocratization. The incentives and opportunities they face change over time, shaping the back and forth of democratic erosion. By focusing too much on the opposition, my book, ironically, ends up downplaying the executive and the tactics it uses to neutralize opposition actions. Repression, in particular, might enhance oppositions' incentives to cooperate, even while making it harder to do so. In my new book with Rachel Schwartz (forthcoming), we propose an analytic framework that better captures this process. Our findings challenge some of the assumptions we have made about autocrat-opposition interactions. We uncover, for example, that increased repression and more overt attacks on democracy can foster vertical cooperation (parties-CSOs) in weakly institutionalized party systems, but only in conditions of experienced and well-organized CSOs (consider Guatemala vs. Perú).

Riedl and Capoccia also question how we think about the success and failure of autocratizing episodes. Oppositions, Capoccia posits, not only confront would-be autocrats after they have attained office, but they can also help prevent illiberal leaders from coming to power in the first place and can contain them after electoral defeat. As Riedl suggests, it is essential to think about opposition “successes” as a continuum. These points

are well taken. My book is silent about opposition tactics before autocrats come to power as well as past regime breakdowns. This choice was a deliberate one, as I focus on the period between the democratic election of an autocrat and the survival or breakdown of democracy. I sought not only to fill in what I thought was an important gap but also to circumscribe the scope of my argument. For example, the connection between moderation and limited repression is, as Riedl suggests, bound to be weaker in authoritarian contexts rather than democratic ones.

The book's narrow temporal focus is also a consequence of the cases it explores. Reading Capoccia's comments, for example, I wondered how *prevention* and (to a lesser extent) *containment* might work differently in parliamentary and presidential systems. The scenarios he proposes and the different trade-offs they present are clearer in parliamentary systems where illiberalism is entirely partisan and unlikely to die after an electoral defeat. I wonder how we can think about similar stages for presidential systems where potential autocrats have been mostly outsiders competing on establishment/anti-establishment cleavages that other parties (united or not) struggle to campaign on (Handlin 2018). Neither Chávez nor Uribe would have been electorally defeated had the opposition presented a coordinated front. Coalition-building, which has been so important to defeat authoritarian parties in Europe, would have in fact proven detrimental to defeat these Latin American executives who have risen to power by indicting mainstream parties for “colluding against the people.”

As a whole, the reviews show the exciting state of this field. When I first conceived of this book, twelve years ago, democratic backsliding was thought of as unidirectional, timeless, and ultimately inevitable. The questions posed by the reviews suggest that this is no longer the case. Political scientists are producing new research to better theorize and understand processes of democratic backsliding as well as how to stop the forces of authoritarianism.

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Meet the Authors



Matías Bianchi is the director of Asuntos del Sur, a think-do tank focused on political innovations for improving democracies in the Global South. He is consultant for international organizations such as the UNDP, the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF) and the InterAmerican Development Bank, and ECLAC. He lectures at the University of Arizona (USA) and at Ditella (Argentina). His areas of research include politics in the digital age, collaborative governance and public innovation. He holds a PhD in Political Science (Sciences Po), MSc (University of Oxford), MPA (Sciences Po), and BA (University of Buenos Aires).



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José Incio is an Assistant Professor in the Social Sciences Department at Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. He earned his Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Pittsburgh. He specializes in quantitative methodology and the use of computational tools. Among his research interests are subnational politics, democratic backsliding, and

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Rachel Beatty Riedl is the Peggy J. Koenig '78 Director of the Center on Global Democracy in the Brooks School of Public Policy, and a Professor in the Brooks School and Department of Government at Cornell University. Her research expertise is on democracy and authoritarianism and regime transitions globally,

and particularly political parties, religion and governance across Africa. Her publications include *Authoritarian Origins of Democratic Party Systems in Africa* (CUP 2014) and *From Pews to Politics* (CUP 2019). Rachel recently co-edited *Global Challenges to Democracy: Comparative Perspectives on Backsliding, Autocracy, and Resilience* (CUP 2025).

Editorial Team

Executive and Guest Editors



Dan Slater specializes in the politics and history of enduring dictatorships and emerging democracies, with a regional focus on Southeast Asia. At the University of Michigan, he serves as the Director of the Center for Emerging Democracies and the James Orin Murfin Professor of Political Science. Previously, he served for 12 years on the faculty at the University of Chicago, where he was the Director of the Center for International Social Science Research, Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science, and associate member in the Department of Sociology.



Rob Mickey is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Michigan. His research focuses on U.S. politics in comparative and historical perspective. He is interested in the country's belated (as well as incomplete) democratization by the 1970s, its current democratic backsliding, and the place of racial conflict in each. He is now at work with David Waldner on a book-length study of America's Reconstruction in comparative perspective with other postwar efforts to construct democratic polities and diverse economies in societies dominated by labor-repressive agriculture. He is also exploring the historical legacies of mid-20th century urban racial conflict for America's contemporary policing with Jake Grumbach and Daniel Ziblatt.

Managing Editor



Adam Fefer is managing editor of the Democracy and Autocracy Newsletter. His research focuses on democracy, ethnic conflict, and power-sharing institutions, with a geographical focus on the Horn of Africa, South Asia, the US, and the Levant. Adam has a Ph.D. in Political Science from UC San Diego and a B.A. from UC Berkeley.

About *Democracy and Autocracy*

Democracy and Autocracy is the official newsletter of the American Political Science Association's Democracy and Autocracy section (formerly known as the Comparative Democratization section). First known as *CompDem*, it has been published three times a year since 2003. In October 2010, the newsletter was renamed *APSA-CD* and expanded to include substantive articles on democracy, as well as news and notes on the latest developments in the field. In September 2018, it was renamed the *Annals of Comparative Democratization* to reflect the increasingly high academic content and recognition of the symposia.

Section News

From the [Journal of Democracy](#):

The *Journal of Democracy* is a leading forum for expert discussion of the biggest questions in democracy—all in a clear, accessible prose that makes our essays favorites for university settings. The following selection of *Journal* essays explore how immigration crises in recent years have tested the world's advanced democracies and fueled the rise of far-right populist parties. Plus a new debate on the causes of democratic backsliding and symposia on Syria after the fall of Assad and the "third wave" fifty years on.

M. Steven Fish, [The Power of Liberal Nationalism](#)

Democracy's defenders have failed to appreciate the power of nationalism. They must arm themselves with emotionally compelling narratives to counter illiberal foes of free government. When they do, they are championing a winning message.

Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, [Democracy's Surprising Resilience](#)

Despite worry of an authoritarian resurgence, the vast majority of "third wave" democracies are enduring. Democracy, buoyed by economic growth and urbanization, is outperforming most people's expectations and fears.

Rafaela Dancygier, [Liberal Democracy in an Age of Immigration](#)

Immigration threatens to erode liberalism, as far-right parties and migrant communities with illiberal views gain power. Mass publics have shouldered the blame. But should political elites be held responsible?

Sheri Berman, [Democracy and Diversity in Western Europe](#)

Immigration has changed the face of Western Europe. Yet mainstream political parties have largely ignored citizens' concerns about what immigration means for their societies, leaving them ripe for far-right populists to exploit.

Tariq Modood, [The Rise of Multicultural Nationalism](#)

Some liberals attribute the origins of our polarized political era to "identity politics." But multiculturalism need not provoke majoritarian anxieties—not if national identities can open ways for all citizens to be recognized and heard.

David Kaye, [Freedom of Expression's Crisis of Interpretation](#)

When an epidemic of Koran burnings swept Denmark and Sweden, the Danish government criminalized the practice. It is a misguided response that misses the opportunity to protect both minorities and the right to free speech.

Laura Jakli, [East-Central Europe: The Young and the Far Right](#)

Far-right parties in Europe's newer democracies have been working hard to appeal to younger citizens, and for good reason: Young people's shifting values make them a ripe target for the far right.

Milan W. Svobik, Elena Avramovska, Johanna Lutz, and Filip Milačić, [In Europe, Democracy Erodes from the Right](#)

When ordinary voters are given a choice between democracy and partisan loyalty, who will put democracy first? Frighteningly, Europe harbors a deep reservoir of authoritarian potential.

Anna Grzymala-Busse, [The Failure of Europe's Mainstream Parties](#)

Beyond the commonly cited economic and cultural anxieties afflicting many Europeans, a key factor enabling the rise of populism across Europe has been the failure of mainstream parties on both the left and the right to offer clear and credible policy alternatives.

What Are the Real Causes of Democratic Backsliding?

Thomas Carothers and Brendan Hartnett, [Misunderstanding Democratic Backsliding](#)

If democracies did a better job "delivering" for their citizens, so the thinking goes, people would not be so ready to embrace antidemocratic alternatives. Not so. This conventional wisdom about democratic backsliding is seldom true and often not accurate at all.

Francis Fukuyama, Chris Dann, and Beatriz Magaloni, [Delivering for Democracy: Why Results Matter](#)

Voters around the world are losing faith in democracy's ability to deliver and increasingly turning toward more authoritarian alternatives. To restore citizens' confidence, democracies must

show they can make progress without sacrificing accountability.

Thomas Carothers and Brendan Hartnett, [Beyond Performance: Why Leaders Still Matter](#)

Delivery matters, but so do leaders' actions. Why have so many, in both strong and weak economies, been pushing against democratic constraints on their power, and why have those constraints failed to contain them?

Will Syria Be Free?

Tarek Masoud, [Divining Syria's Future](#)

Everything we know about getting and keeping democracy suggests we should be, at best, cautious about the prospects for Syria's democratic future. But, as this collection of essays suggests, there are reasons for hope.

Lisa Wedeen, ["Forever Has Fallen": The End of Syria's Assad](#)

Syrians rejoiced when Bashar al-Assad's regime fell. After decades of dictatorship and civil war, Syrians must now rebuild their country while seeking justice for the victims of authoritarian rule.

Rana B. Khoury and Wendy Pearlman, [Why Syria's Civil Society Is the Key](#)

After the collapse of the Assad regime, Syria stands at a crossroads. Nothing is assured, but the country's civil society is its best hope for charting a democratic future.

Daniel Neep, [Rebuilding the State in Post-Assad Syria](#)

Despite a brutal thirteen-year civil war, Syrians are not building from scratch. In fact, Syria has a long and rich history of state-building to guide them.

Reconsidering the Third Wave

Dan Slater, [The Authoritarian Origins of the Third Wave](#)

The "third wave" of democracy started in 1974—or so the story goes. But the crests and crashes of waves of democracy and authoritarianism have been neglected. A close look can help us understand the current moment, when democracy appears to be in retreat.

Rachel Beatty Riedl, [Neoliberalism and the Third Wave](#)

Democracy across the world is being undermined by the very forces that once made it possible: the liberal economic order and political competition. The global concentration of wealth has made democratic governance less effective and stripped the people of their power.

Scott Mainwaring, [The Third Wave's Lessons for Democracy](#)

When the “third wave” reached Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s, it brought major advances for democracy. By the first decade of the current century, however, advances had given way to stasis and even erosion.

Thomas Richter (German Institute for Global and Area Studies) published the following article:

Smidt, H., Johansson, J., & Richter, T. (2025). [Civil society under attack: The consequences for horizontal accountability institutions](#). *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 60(1), 81–110.

Sean Yom (Temple University) published the following book:

Yom, S. (2025). *Jordan: Politics in An Accidental Crucible*. Oxford University Press.

Paula Clerici (Universidad Torcuato Di Tella) published the following articles:

Clerici, P., J. Cyr, J. Suárez-Cao & M. Bianchi (2025) [Crafting Policies Together: Citizen Preferences After Crisis](#). *Government and Opposition* 1–30.

Bonvecchi, A. & P. Clerici (2025) [Playing in the Forest While the Wolf is Not Around: Vote Switching and Positive Agenda Power in Federal Multiparty Systems](#). *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 1–19.

Natalie Letsa (University of South Carolina) published the following book:

Letsa, N.W. (2025). *The Autocratic Voter: Partisanship and Political Socialization under Dictatorship*. Cambridge University Press

Vladimir Gel'man (University of Helsinki) published the following book:

Gel'man, V. (2025). *Russia's Gamble: The Domestic Origins of Russia's Attack on Ukraine*. Polity Books.

Henry Hale (George Washington University) published the following articles:

Hale, H. E. (2025). [The Value of Values for Autocrats: Traditional Morality and Putin's 2020 Term-Limit Contravention](#). *Perspectives on Politics*, 1–16.

Hale, H. E., & Peshkopia, R. (2025). [Public Diplomacy–Dissonant Events and Country Favorability: Effects of Trump's Election in the Balkans](#). *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 21(4).

Julian Michel (Hong Kong Baptist University) was awarded the following prizes for his dissertation “The Subnational Roots of Democratic Stability”:

William Anderson Award for Best Dissertation in Federalism and Intergovernmental Relations, APSA

George C. Edwards III Dissertation Award for Best Dissertation in Presidency Research, APSA

Kellogg/Notre Dame Award for Best Paper in Comparative Politics, MPSA

Deil S. Wright Award for Best Paper in Federalism and Intergovernmental Relations, APSA

Michael Bernhard (University of Florida) and his coauthors won the following award for their paper “Traces of the Past: Regime Histories and Anti-Foreigner Violence in Post-Unification Germany”:

Best Paper Presented at the 2024 Annual Meeting Award of the European Politics Section of the American Political Science Association”

Sam Van Noort (Princeton University) published the following article:

Van Noort, S. (2024). [Industrialization and democracy](#). *World Politics*, 76(3), 457–498.