

Paper 3: Tearing Apart the Autocrat's Playbook: Drivers and Barriers to Anti-Backsliding Protest Success

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Abstract

Under what conditions can peaceful resistance provide a remedy for democratic backsliding? Global levels of democracy are back to 1989 levels and are still declining. Simultaneously, anti-backsliding movements are on the rise in autocratizing countries, and civil society is often highlighted as the last line of defense when institutions fail to prevent democratic decline. Examples from countries like South Korea and Ecuador show that these movements can sometimes successfully counter democratic backsliding, while in other cases such as Hungary and Tunisia the opposition failed to halt the decline and democracy broke down. To understand under what conditions mobilized actors can counter democratic backsliding, I build an original dataset on anti-backsliding protests in six countries that experienced an episode of democratic backsliding. The paper contributes to the growing literature on democratic backsliding and expands our knowledge on drivers and barriers to civil resistance success in democracies.

Thank you so much for reading this paper! This is an early draft of paper four in my PhD dissertation on pro-democracy mobilization. The data collection for the project has just started, and will be completed within autumn 2023. I thank the Department of Sociology and Political Science at NTNU for supporting the data collection with a Småforsk-grant.

To explain the varieties of contentious politics is also to explain a rare, contingent outcome of contentious politics: democracy

Charles Tilly

1 Introduction

After the world experienced a third wave of democratization that left global democracy levels at an all-time high in the early 2000s, an autocratic wave is plunging and pushing new democracies back into authoritarian tracks. Moreover, democracies once believed to be consolidated are experiencing democratic decline and some democracies have even broken down and reverted to electoral autocracies. In the current climate, pro-democratic actors are not just pushing for democratization, but battling anti-democratic forces both within and outside formal institutions. Scholars of democracy movements have previously studied the efficacy of mobilizing for democracy in the context of autocracies, and research suggests that civil resistance, defined as a method of conflict where actors apply nonviolent tactics such as strikes, protests, boycotts, demonstrations to achieve their goal (Chenoweth, 2021), is more effective in promoting democracy compared to no or other forms of resistance (Celestino & Gleditsch, 2013; Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Gleditsch et al., 2022; Pinckney, 2020; Pinckney et al., 2022). However, the research on protests against democratic backsliding suggests that while some movements successfully counter threats of democratic decline (Gamboa, 2022; Laebens & Lührmann, 2021; Rakner, 2021), others fail to prevent further backsliding (Gamboa, 2017; Lorch, 2021; Mietzner, 2021). The shift in democracy trends and the rise of pro-democracy movements in democracies which sometimes succeed and sometimes fail to protect democracy raises an important question: under what conditions can civil resistance counter democratic backsliding?

This paper aims to study the dynamics of anti-backsliding protest, and under what conditions mobilized actors are more likely to counter democratic backsliding. I define anti-backsliding protests as public displays of non-institutional political action such as protests, noncooperation, strikes, and demonstrations, directed at the government, where the protesters demand or display

support for action that has the potential to halt democratic decline. Examples of such movements include the Candlelight protests against former president Park Geun-hye in Korea, and the Tunisian National Salvation Front's protests against president Kais Saied after the constitutional changes allowing him to further control executive power. While existing research on pro-democratic movements have studied under what conditions such movements lead to democratization, there are few studies that systematically study the role of these movements in mobilizing in democracies against democratic backsliding; a gradual decline caused by elected officials within the political regime (Bermeo, 2016). Moreover, patterns of democratic backsliding do not necessarily mirror patterns of democratization (Bogaards, 2018), and the causes of democratic backsliding are not sufficient to explain when democratic backsliding leads to democratic breakdown (Gamboa, 2022). Consequently, we need to understand the role mobilized actors can play in the context of democratic decline.

I argue that anti-backsliding protests have the potential to halt democratic backsliding when they trigger horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms, but certain conditions make them more likely to do so. To trigger horizontal accountability, meaning action by the legislative and judicial branches of government, large and diverse protests with broad pro-democracy goals are more likely to signal that democracy is under threat and put pressure on the institutional checks and balances. To trigger vertical accountability, meaning shifting the popular vote against the incumbent party, I argue that spatial proximity to protest, less extreme demands, and participation by certain actors are conditions that make it more likely that people will vote against the incumbent party in the next election. To test the propositions, I collected an original dataset called the Democracy Protest Actors data (DEMOCRAT). The DEMOCRAT data is a protest-day dataset which maps the location, goals, and organizations participating in protests in six democracies during an episode of democratic backsliding. The outcome of the backsliding episode varies across the six cases. In two of the cases, South Korea (2007-2016) and Ecuador (2006-2016), the opposition managed to halt democratic backsliding and avoid democratic breakdown. In two other cases, Hungary (2009-2015) and Tunisia (2020-2022), the opposition did not manage to halt democratic backsliding before democracy broke down. In the final two cases, Brazil (2015-2022) and Poland

(2015-2022), the outcome is mixed; while democracy continues to decline, as of 2022 democracy has not broken down and recent electoral victories suggest that there is still hope for democracy in the two countries.

The paper is structured as follows. I start by defining democracy and democratic backsliding, before I review existing literature on anti-backsliding opposition strategies. Next, I draw on the literature on social movements, mass mobilization, and civil resistance to theorize under what conditions anti-backsliding movements could counter democratic backsliding. I then move on to data and methodology where I introduce the DEMOCRAT data, and present the results from the analyses. Finally, I summarize the findings and discuss the theory in light of the results.

1.1 What is democratic backsliding?

To study the dynamics of anti-backsliding opposition strategies in democracies, we must start by defining two key concepts: democracy and democratic backsliding. In scholarly research, classical definitions of democracy vary from minimalist definitions which defines democracy as a system of competition for power where individuals elect their representatives (Przeworski, 1999; Schumpeter, 2010), to whether the ideal of such a system is realized through extensive suffrage, associational freedom, clean elections, and freedom of speech (Dahl, 1971; Diamond, 2008) to more extensive definitions. I adopt a liberal definition of democracy where in addition to the ideal of electoral democracy, I also include constitutionally protected civil rights and liberties, an independent judiciary and rule of law (Coppedge et al., 2016). This extensive definition of democracy allows me to capture dimensions of democracy that serve as accountability mechanisms for the government with the potential to check aspiring autocrats (Laebens & Lührmann, 2021).

We tend to consider democracies as consolidated when they reach a democratic equilibrium where democracy becomes "the only game in town" (Lambach et al., 2020). Building on the work by Lambach et al. (2020) on the mode of democratic transition and democratic stability, democratic consolidation can be seen as an outcome of the strategic interaction between the government, the opposition, the security forces, and the citizens. When countries regress, these systems of democratic equilibrium have been disturbed and shifted in the direction of a new state; democratic

backsliding. The causes of this can originate from within and outside existing political institutions, and the duration of the cause of decline varies (Gerschewski, 2021).

Several previously consolidated democracies experienced a substantial deterioration in the quality of elections and/or the protection of civil rights and liberties (Bermeo, 2016; Diamond, 2021; Haggard & Kaufman, 2021; Lührmann et al., 2020)¹. The nature of democratic backsliding has changed from open-ended coups to more covert forms of subversion (Bermeo, 2016; Waldner & Lust, 2018) driven primarily by elected officials within political institutions (Diamond, 2021). In the strategic interaction between the government, the opposition, the security forces, and the citizens, political elites have undermined democracy from within, often under a legal façade (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). Following Haggard and Kaufman (2021), I define democratic backsliding as "the incremental erosion of institutions, rules, and norms that results from the actions of duly elected governments" (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021, p. 27). When democracies break down due to incumbent-driven erosion, Gamboa (2022, p. 28) calls this process of regime transition democratic erosion. Following my definition of democratic backsliding, it is a phenomenon that takes place in democracies. Decline in democratic governance in autocracies is not captured by this definition, and neither is the breakdown of democracies caused by factors outside political institutions such as a popular revolution and civil war, foreign intervention, or interstate conflict.

As I adopt a multi-faceted definition of democracy a decline in non-electoral dimensions of democracy caused by the incumbent should also be classified as democratic backsliding in addition to a deterioration in competitiveness of elections. Examples of this include how the governments in Poland and Hungary increased their influence over the judiciary which undermined its independence. Left unchecked, continued decline in civil rights and liberties and other accountability mechanisms have the potential to make democratic elections less free and fair and ultimately result

¹While most research on democratic backsliding concludes that global levels of democracy are declining, there has recently been some pushback on how prominent the threat of democratic backsliding really is. In a recent working paper by Little and Meng (2023), the authors argue that if we solely look at objective rather than subjective indicators for democracy there is little evidence for a global decline in democracy. Others suggest that norm erosion, institutional gridlock and woes are not a sign of a country reverting to dictatorship, and that wealthy electoral democracies are likely to survive challenges to the institutional status quo (Brownlee & Miao, 2022). This paper disagrees with the conclusions reached by Little and Meng (2023) and Brownlee and Miao (2022) for two reasons. By looking at objective indicators that capture only the electoral core of democracy to assess the prevalence of democratic backsliding, we are unable to study challenges as they arise when states do not regress on criteria like electoral contestation or participation but minority rights, freedom of speech, and freedom of association (Varshney, 2022).

in the breakdown of democratic institutions. Democratic backsliding as defined in this paper can thus be understood as a process which starts when the government or actors within it challenges the institutional² status quo. However, the outcome of this challenge is uncertain, and the dynamics between the government, opposition, security apparatus, and citizens determine what the new equilibrium will be (Cleary & Öztürk, 2022). The contingent decisions of opposition actors can greatly influence if a democracy will continue to backslide, break down, or if the country returns to the democratic status quo.

Democratic backsliding does not happen in a vacuum. Precisely because the process takes time, and at early stages of decline the institutional framework remains intact, opposition actors have an opportunity to prevent further backsliding and democratic breakdown. The causes of democratic backsliding do not explain the outcomes of anti-backsliding resistance (Gamboa, 2022), and strategic decisions by the opposition can have a significant effect on outcomes (Cleary & Öztürk, 2022). In this paper, I zoom in on the anti-backsliding actors and the contingent choices they make to explain why some democracies successfully fend off aspiring autocrats while others break down. In the next section, I survey the existing literature on anti-backsliding opposition with a particular focus on civil resistance.

2 Previous research on anti-backsliding protests

There is a growing body of literature on how opposition actors can successfully counter democratic backsliding, and potential perils to mobilization. Mass protests against corruption pushed the parliament to impeach Park Geun-hye in South Korea, and contributed to Rafael Correa’s decision to not run for re-election despite having successfully removed constitutional checks on term limits in Ecuador (Laebens & Lührmann, 2021). In Indonesia in the early 2010s, civil society resistance against political elites driving democratic decline arrested democratic decline (Mietzner, 2021). In Malawi, the Forum for the Defence of the Constitution mobilized against attempts to change the constitution which would change access to executive power (Rakner, 2021), and the Y’en a

²When I refer to democratic institutions, I include both to the formal rules and informal constraints (North, 1991) that structure political interactions in democracies as as defined by my definition of democracy

marre youth movement in Senegal was particularly important in the successful mobilization of tens of thousands of people that protested former president Abdoulaye Wade's attempt to bypass constitutional checks on term limits (Wienkoop, 2022). In Taiwan in 2014, an estimated 500 000 people took to the streets to protest against government's decision to sign a service-trade agreement with mainland China, which critics argued would restrict democratic rights such as freedom of speech (Croissant & Kim, n.d.).

When civil society is allowed space to operate freely, it is possible to organize counter-mobilization against aspiring autocrats (Bermeo, 2016). Civil society can serve as an accountability for democratically elected politicians who try to subvert democracy (Lührmann, 2021). Laebens and Lührmann (2021) found that parliamentary and judicial oversight, pressures from civil society and the media, and competition between parties and within parties played a key role in stopping further democratic erosion in Benin, Ecuador and South Korea. In all three cases, pressure from civil society in the form of mass protests played a key role in checking the incumbent (Laebens & Lührmann, 2021).

However, there are several questions left open when it comes to anti-backsliding movements. Brancati (2014) find that pro-democracy campaigns are not significantly more likely to occur when democracy is on the decline, and we know little about who joins protests against democratic decline when they occur. Furthermore, when they do occur they are not always successful. Lorch (2021) argues that in weakly institutionalized democracies civil society organizations may fail to prevent democratic decline if they are easily captured by political elites. Moreover, a way for incumbents to remove institutional checks and balances on executive power is to subtly censor and harass media and restrict civil society (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2018), making it harder to coordinate successful mobilization. In Indonesia, incumbents have capitalized on polarization to justify increased illiberal measures which reduced resources available to civil society activists organizing protests (Mietzner, 2021).

Moreover, not all mobilization is good mobilization. Hellmeier and Bernhard (2022) contributes to the role of civil society in promoting democracy by distinguishing between pro-democracy and pro-autocracy campaigns. While their study echoes results in the existing literature on the positive

effect of pro-democratic mobilization on democracy, they also find that pro-autocratic mobilization has a negative impact on democracy (Hellmeier & Bernhard, 2022). In democracies, anti-democratic movements can legally mobilize due to constitutionally protected rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of speech. Moreover, politicians can shore up support through civic activism (Konya, 2021). Greskovits (2020) argue that this was the case in Hungary where Fidesz managed to build a strong coalition through extra parliamentary mobilization

Table 2. Electoral and protest mobilisation, issues provoking protests, and forms of protests (July 2002–April 2006).

	Number of events	% of total events (N = 4792)
Events of electoral mobilisation (elections and referenda)	415	8.7
Protest events	433	9.0
Issues provoking protests		
(a) Identity	339	7.1
(b) Socio-economic grievances	81	1.7
(c) Both identity and socio-economic grievances	13	0.2
Forms of protest		
(a) Petition, open letter, public statement	340	7.1
(b) Demonstration, rally, march	73	1.5
(c) Strike, boycott, blockade	9	0.2
(d) Multiple forms combined, or forms unknown	11	0.2

Source: author's calculation from the Database.

Figure 1: Analysis by Greskovits (2020, p. 254) using data from the Civic Circles Event Database

A couple studies have looked more closely at drivers and barriers that can explain why some anti-backsliding movements manage to prevent further democratic decline and even revert backsliding. When anti-backsliding movements become too "extreme", they are less likely to counter backsliding (Cleary & Öztürk, 2022; Gamboa, 2017). In a recent book on opposition strategies against democratic backsliding, Gamboa (2022) compares democratic erosion in Colombia and Venezuela and the strategies of the opposition. She argues that radical extra-institutional strategies make anti-backsliding opposition less likely to succeed because they a) increase the risk of repression or advancement of anti-democratic reform, and b) if the opposition succeeds to remove the incumbent, they do so while the incumbent still enjoys the legitimacy of an electoral victory (Gamboa, 2022, p. 42). In fact, Gamboa (2022) argues that even moderate extra-institutional strategies where the opposition can be potentially harmful for democracy because they so easily can be deemed illegal or become violent, which provides the government with "legitimate" reason to repress the opposition (Gamboa, 2022, p. 5). However, another recent study on opposition

strategies against democratic backsliding reaches a different conclusion about the importance of pro-democracy mobilizing. Wiebrecht et al. (2023) trace opposition strategies in eight "U-turn" cases; democracies which experienced severe democratic backsliding but were able to turn the curve around and revert to high levels of democracy. In seven of the cases, there was significant mass mobilization for democracy (Wiebrecht et al., 2023). However, the findings in the latter study should only be interpreted as potential causal factors for which we have yet to understand the substantive importance of.

Why mass mobilization seems important in some cases of democratic backsliding but not in others remains puzzling. In particular, we have yet to theorize and test the conditions that make mobilization for democracy likely to activate checks and balances on the government that are unique to democracies. Previous studies have mostly taken an aggregate approach to studying anti-backsliding movements, but such an approach can not study important features of collective action that potentially explain under what conditions accountability mechanisms are triggered. Building on the recent studies on opposition strategies against democratic backsliding and the literature on civil resistance and democracy, I theorize in the next section the mechanisms that can explain when anti-backsliding protest contributes to halt democratic decline with a particular focus on spatial dimensions of the protest, actor composition, and mobilization frames.

3 Theory

Anti-backsliding protests ultimately seek to halt democratic decline, but democracy movements have a variety of goals and interests. In this paper, I focus on two particular pathways protests can stop the erosion of democracy by elected incumbents while acknowledging that protests can also have a positive impact on a wider array of outcomes that over time could also be important for curbing democratic decline such as feelings of political efficacy and cognitive liberation (McAdam et al., 2001; Wallace et al., 2014). I focus on the potential of protest to signal information that can be observed and contribute to a shift in behaviour of elite actors within the democratic institutions (horizontal accountability) and in the electorate (vertical accountability).

3.1 The Information Effect

Why and how can protest check aspiring autocrats? Pro-democratic actors in democracies can choose both institutional and extra-institutional strategies to achieve their goals. In this paper, I focus on how pro-democratic actors can signal their dissatisfaction with the political status quo through a visible form of political action; protest. Building on Kuran (1991)'s and Lohmann (1993)'s work on signalling models, I argue that anti-backsliding protest have the potential to counter democratic backsliding when it signals new information about widespread dissatisfaction over democratic backsliding. I label this the information effect. The information effect can influence the outcomes of protest in two ways. Firstly, protest can trigger horizontal accountability mechanisms within existing democratic institutions that have the potential to check the incumbent. Secondly, protest can signal new information to the electorate about democratic violations and potential for opposition against electoral autocrats which increases the salience of protecting democracy.

3.1.1 Activating horizontal accountability mechanisms

In all states, the regime relies on the support of a set of key supporters to stay in power (Bueno de Mesquita & Smith, 2011). In democracies, there are formalized constraints on governments with autocratic ambitions as both the legislative and the judicial branches of government have the power to check executive power. When protest occurs, we assume that political elites take a cue from the movement (Lohmann, 1993) to assess the potential costs of continued protest and either choose to continue to support the regime or defect (DeNardo, 2014). In democracies, protest can factor into the calculations of politicians regarding reelection. The regime and its supports may be willing to trade concessions for tranquility, and the opposition may shift their attention to the demands of the protesters (Walgrave & Vliegenthart, 2012).

However, in democracies where costs of mobilizing are relatively low compared to benefits we could expect people to protest often (Lichbach, 1995). In fact, unlike in autocracies, protests are almost routine action in most democracies and could be considered healthy feature of a vibrant civil society. For this reason, I argue that the mere presence of pro-democracy mobilization in the

context of democratic backsliding is not informative enough to activate horizontal accountability. Instead, I argue that certain features of protests are more likely to provide political elites with the types of cues they are looking for such as who the protesters are and what they want (Wouters & Walgrave, 2017, p. 376). Building on the work of Charles Tilly on the perceived worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment of protesters (WUNC) (Tilly, 2004), Wouters and Walgrave (2017) show that especially worthiness and numbers of protesters significantly alters elected representatives' opinion formation.

One potential feature of protests which could signal of movement worthiness, which would also increase sheer number of participants in the protest, is participation by a diverse number of types of organizations with a large mobilization potential. In research on civil resistance and democratization, socially diverse protests are considered to be more likely to lead to democratization because they provide the movement with resources, tactical diversity, and different sources of leverage it can apply to put pressure on the regime (Chenoweth, 2021; Dahlum, 2023). Diversity in this case is considered a good feature of protest because it increases the potential costs for the regime and forces it to change status quo. However, the argument I make here is not about how costly the protest becomes as more organizations join it. On the contrary, if protests are considered too costly, potentially illegal or violent it increases the probability that the movement will be repressed (Gamboa, 2022).

Rather, the argument is that when organizations formed for entirely different purposes create new pro-democratic coalitions to protest the actions of the incumbent it signals new information about the importance of democracy protection. When protests are organizationally diverse, and the frames they use to mobilize are not considered extreme, it should increase the likelihood of triggering checks and balances within the judiciary and the political opposition. The added numbers of organizations increases the likelihood that they will be reported on in media and enter the political discourse. Moreover, organizations such as political parties, trade unions, student organizations, women's organizations, religious organizations, and civil society organizations, have different and at times opposing preferences for policies. A diverse protest composition signals that a large group of society has a strong preference for democracy protection, and that democracy

protection is a topic that is appealing to a large share of voters. The latter should be especially informative for politicians in the parliament who have an incentive to promote political action that is favourable to the electorate. Following this, I present my first hypothesis:

H_1 : Organizationally diverse protests with moderate goals are more likely to trigger horizontal accountability mechanisms

3.1.2 Mobilizing the electorate

However, while protest has the potential to activate horizontal accountability mechanisms such as political opposition parties and the judiciary, it can also activate a vertical accountability mechanism: the electorate (Laebens & Lührmann, 2021). Protests are not only observed by the regime and its political contenders. Even in the case of large protests, the majority of the population does not participate, but rather observe the dynamics unfolding between the protesters and the regime. In democracies, the individual voter observes the protest and then chooses to abstain from voting, to vote for the incumbent, or to support the opposition. Protests have the potential to shift the discourse and move the median masses toward an alignment with the movement's goals (Wasow, 2020). A shift in attitudes towards the government can shift voting patterns. Gillion and Soule (2018) find that protests in the US that express liberal issues lead to a greater share of vote for Democrats in the two-party vote, while protests on conservative issues lead to a higher share of the votes for Republicans.

Protests serve as *agenda seeding*, which is the process of which activists try to stage events that draw the attention of the media and put their cause on the agenda in an attempt to influence public opinion and politics (Wasow, 2020, p. 638). Protests allow the opposition to draw attention to violations against democratic norms and increase the salience of democracy protection. Democratic attitudes among voters tend to be fairly stable (Bartells, 2023), and in the context of democratic backsliding protests can reinforce the importance of democracy and induce dissonance for voters that support the incumbent.

There are several conditions that make it more likely that protest can signal new information

to the electorate. One condition is the spatial dimension of protest as the proximity to protest conditions the likelihood that the information will reach the intended audience. Anti-backsliding protests should be more likely to shift the preferences of the voter if they take place in close proximity to the voter. In a study on support for LGBT+ rights, Ayoub et al. (2021) find that support increased locally after Pride marches, but this effect was bounded and did not diffuse nationally to areas that did not experience marches. In another study on the effect of urban riots on electoral behaviour, Leon-Ablan and John (2022) found that physical proximity to riots increased electoral turnout. Wasow (2020) found that in the US in the 1960s, counties proximate to nonviolent protests saw a increase of 1.6-2.5% increase in vote share for the Democratic presidential candidate (Wasow, 2020). Just as protest has the potential to set the agenda for politicians observing it (Walgrave & Vliegenthart, 2012), it could also make democratic backsliding a more salient issue for voters if they observe it in their home community. Proximity to protest can increase the salience of the issue and the availability of information about democratic backsliding. I therefore argue that the proximity of protests could affect the vote share of the incumbent, and present the following hypothesis:

H_2 : Districts that experienced protest were more likely to see an increased vote share against the incumbent in the next election.

However, as Lohmann (1993) argues some actors will always oppose the current status quo, and in democracies there might be saturation effects considering the likelihood that merely observing a protest will change attitudes. It could be that the probability of attitude shifts is contingent on other features of the protest. In particular, in contexts of democratic decline where issues may be polarized (Graham & Svolik, 2020), a convincing signal that might shift preferences could be protests that transcend existing partitions in society. Several countries experiencing democratic decline also suffer high levels of affective polarization (Svolik, 2019). Voters with high levels of distrust towards political opponents are more motivated to distinguish themselves from their political opponents. A consequence of this dynamic is that they are more likely to adopt political positions that differ from their opponents and align with their preferred political party (Druckman

et al., 2021).

In a polarized context, protests that are comprised of a diverse set of actors which represent a variety of interests in society could send a strong signal to the electorate. Diverse protest coalitions increase the mobilization base for movements, and as argued earlier in the paper the sheer increase in number make them more difficult to dismiss (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011). Moreover, some scholars argue that one enabling factor for democratic backsliding is an erosion of the shared understanding of facts between citizens and representatives (Jee et al., 2021). In such a climate, a diverse coalition against the government can increase the probability that the protest observers will deem claims of threats to democracy as more legitimate, which in turn should make the government less favorable.

H_3 : Diverse protests are associated with a higher likelihood of electoral turnover

Finally, the tactics and demands of protesters can greatly influence how they are perceived by the electoral audience. More extreme protests reduce popular support for protest movements (Feinberg et al., 2020). Movements that rely on primarily nonviolent tactics have lower moral barriers for potential supporters (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011), and their demands are also likely to be framed differently by the media (Wasow, 2020) which can influence the electorate’s opinion formation. On the flipside, extreme protest action can alienate potential support. If protesters demand the deposition of a democratically elected government their goals can be perceived as delegitimate and extreme (Gamboa, 2022).

H_4 : More extreme protests are associated with decreased opposition vote share compared to no protest or moderate protests

4 Empirics

To study the dynamics of anti-backsliding protests and under what conditions protest is more likely to halt democratic backsliding, I rely on descriptive patterns and regression models leveraging an

original dataset³ on protest-days in six episodes of democratic backsliding. I trace protest dynamics in six countries that all experienced democratic backsliding, but vary on whether democracy broke down or not to examine if protest triggered accountability mechanisms.

4.1 Selection of country-cases

To identify potential cases of countries that experienced incumbent-led democratic backsliding but vary on whether democracy broke down or not, I rely on the Episodes of Regime Transitions dataset (Edgell et al., 2020). I first restrict the data to after 1995 as the ICEWS dataset from which I will draw events to code information of protest features during the backsliding episode does not provide data before that. Secondly, I filter the data to only include democratic countries as my definition of democratic backsliding is a phenomenon that takes place in democratic countries.

Secondly, I use the variable which identifies the year before and the consecutive years of an autocratization episode. Edgell et al. (2020) operationalize an autocratization episode as a "the first year of the autocratization episode, defined as the first year of a negative change equal or less than the start inclusion (e.g. -0.01) on the Electoral Democracy Index, followed by a period of sustained negative changes on the EDI" (Edgell et al., 2020, p. 18). The episode ends when there is no longer a sustained negative change on the EDI⁴. While this may seem like I am selecting on the dependent variable, the outcome of interest in this paper is whether democracy broke down. Using the ERT variable as a case identifier, countries may enter an episode of democratic backsliding, but the outcome of this episode is not always continued democratic backsliding or democratic breakdown.

I then use the electoral democracy variable by V-Dem (Teorell et al., 2016) to code information on how the identified episodes end; whether it ended because there was no further substantial decline in the EDI score, if democracy broke down as a consequence of the episode, or if democratic

³Note to reader: The data collection is ongoing and expected to be completed within autumn 2023, but unfortunately I do not have enough data to run any analyses yet. I have just started coding South Korea, and from June on a research assistant will join the coding efforts. So far, the estimated time for data collection completion given my own coding progress is 3 full months of manual coding. As we will be two people working on this, and the RA is employed for 2.5 months full-time, I am optimistic that we will get this done by early autumn and that I can start running analyses then. Below, I present my intended strategy for testing my hypotheses.

⁴note that while countries may continue to decline or democracy has broken down, episodes do not continue if there is no substantial negative change on the EDI.

backsliding had stopped and the EDI score had increased again. When all cases were coded in terms of the outcome of the episode, I had identified a set of cases where a) democracy had substantially declined, but then bounced back, b) the backsliding episode ended because democracy had substantially declined and then stabilized, c) some cases where democracy had broken down, and d) some cases where the episode is still ongoing as of 2022.

Finally, I coded the cause of democratic decline following my typology of democratic backsliding as an incumbent-driven phenomenon. While many of the identified cases qualified, I selected six cases that varied on my outcome of interest: democratic breakdown. South Korea (2007-2016) and Ecuador (2006-2016) represent the two successful cases where the opposition managed to halt democratic backsliding and avoid democratic breakdown. Hungary (2009-2015) and Tunisia (2020-2022) represent two cases of democratic breakdown. The final two cases, Brazil (2015-2022) and Poland (2015-2022), represent two mixed outcomes; while democracy continues to decline in both cases, democracy has not broken down and in both cases the incumbent party lost in the most recent election. Below, I visualize the change in democracy scores across the six cases since 1995 using the V-Dem's electoral democracy index (Teorell et al., 2016).

Figure 2: Electoral Democracy Scores 1995-2022

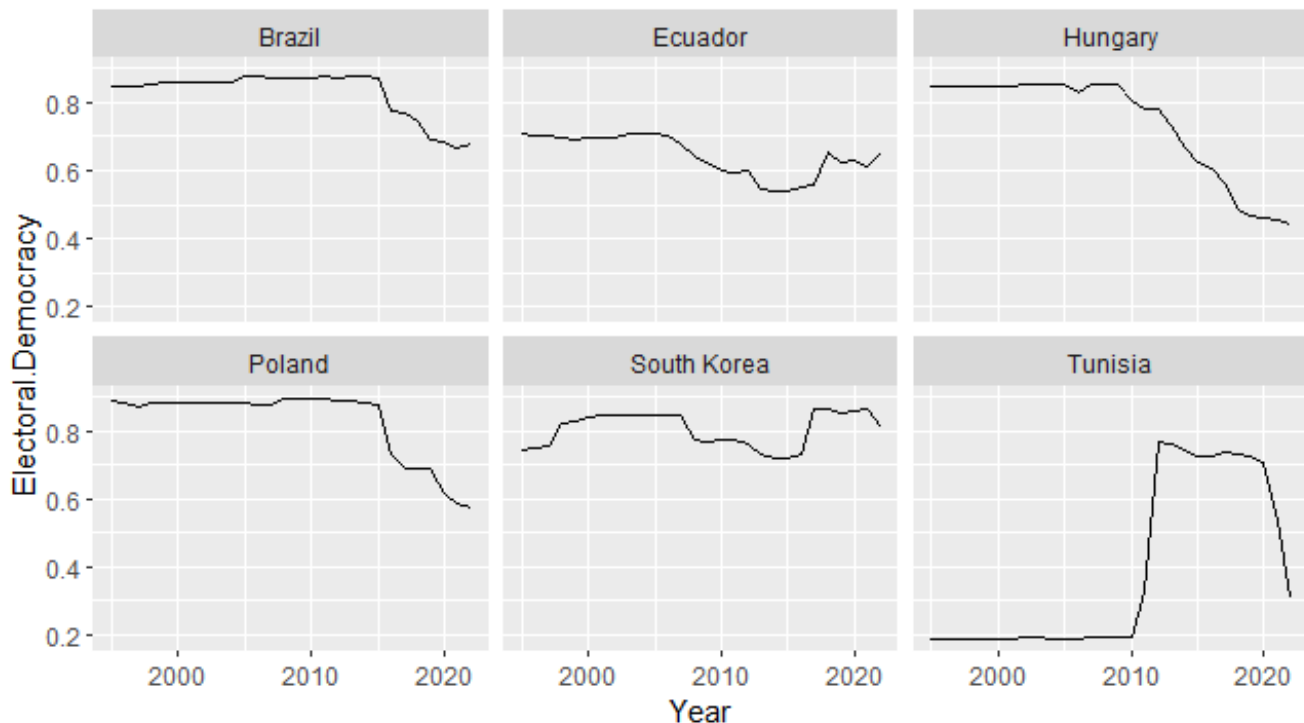


Table 1: Country-cases

Country	Backsliding episode	Incumbent-led backsliding	Democratic Breakdown	No. protest days
Tunisia	2020-2022	Yes	Yes	113
Ecuador	2006-2016	Yes	No	112
Brazil	2015-2022	Yes	No	370
South Korea	2007-2016	Yes	No	299
Hungary	2009-2015	Yes	Yes	108
Poland	2015-2022	Yes	No	113

5

4.2 The DEMOCRAT data

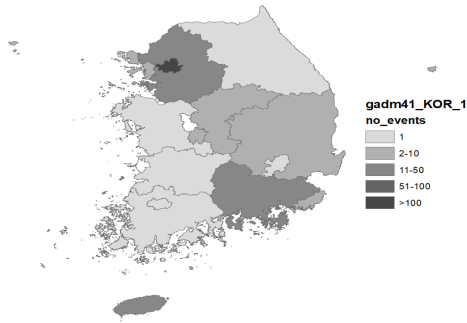
To study the dynamics of protest in South Korea, Ecuador, Tunisia, Hungary, Poland, and Brazil during the backsliding episodes, I introduce a new dataset on protests in six episodes of democratic backsliding called the Democracy Protest Actors dataset (DEMOCRAT), from which I present both descriptive patterns and regression models to test the hypotheses. The most commonly used datasets to study the efficacy of protests lack either a temporal or spatial scope that covers the current period of democratic decline, information on the goal of the protesters, data on the location of protest, or information on the composition of protest which I argue are key dimensions for studying the conditions under which civil resistance movements can counter democratic backsliding. Without the opportunity to disentangle temporal and spatial dimensions from the features of the protest itself, it is hard separate the different conditions that might explain patterns of protest efficacy. In the appendix I present an overview² on existing datasets where I map relevant features of the data. Of existing datasets, ICEWS and GDELT offer the most promising coverage of the types of events this paper aims to study; anti-backsliding protests in the current wave of autocratization. However, both datasets have a high noise-to-signal ratio and require further coding efforts to narrow the scope of observations to the protests of interest and to cover all features of protest relevant to test the theory presented above.

⁵Moreover, for each pairwise case that have the same outcome on the dependent variable, they vary on other important conditions for democracy and represent a pairwise most different system design. I will elaborate more on the case selection in my presentation.

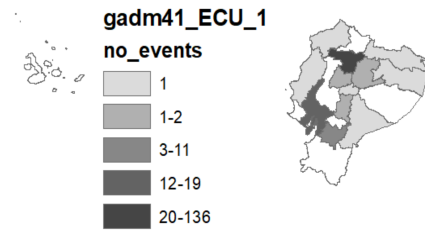
To test the hypotheses on voter behaviour post-exposure to anti-backsliding protest, the DEMOCRAT project samples protest events where protesters make claims against the government from ICEWS using information in the dataset on whether the event was a protest, protest target and the source of contention, as well as variables on event location and when the event occurred (Boschee et al., 2023). To collect information on the organizations that participated in the protest, what their goals were, and if the protest could be labelled as extreme, we conduct systematic searches to find and download newswires related to the protest using FACTIVA. These newswires were used to code types of democracy protests and actors participating in the event. The data are strings of text coded on a sentence level for two purposes. This ensures retraceability which provides an opportunity to check reliability and assess concept validity. After compilation, I have an event-level dataset with information on the composition of organizations that participated in the event, protest goal

Below are the raw number of protests plotted according to the province they took place in across the six cases [this is not restricted by protest goal].

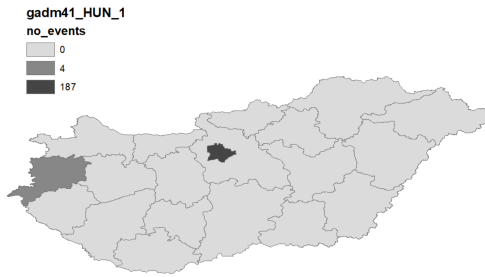
Figure 3: Protest-events during backsliding episode



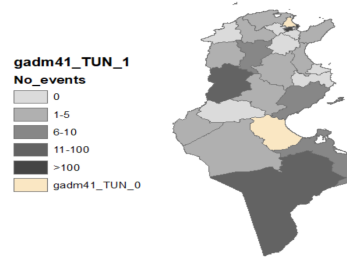
(a) Protests South Korea 2007-2016



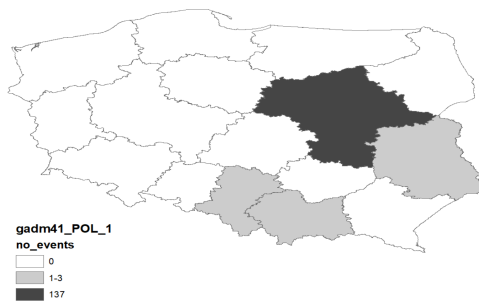
(b) Protests Ecuador 2006-2016



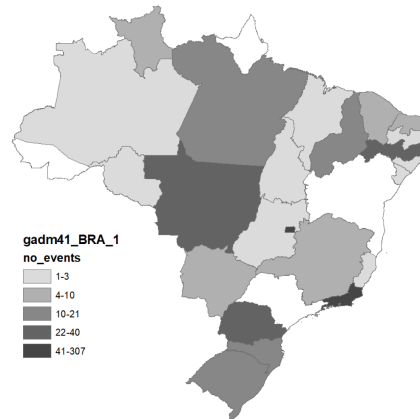
(c) Protests Hungary 2009-2015



(d) Protests Tunisia 2020-2022



(e) Protests Poland 2015-2022



(f) Protests Brazil 2015-2022

4.3 Dependent variables

To test if protest triggers horizontal accountability mechanisms, I am looking into the opportunity to source and combine information from ICEWS on appeals, demands, and statements of disapproval by actors in the parliament and the judiciary targeted at the incumbent party or its leaders. The unit of analysis for testing the accountability mechanism will be protest-week, so I will operationalize the dependent variable which takes the number 1 if there was an observation of any of the aforementioned actions within a protest-week.

I have not started collecting data on the dependent variable for the vertical accountability mechanism, but what I would need preferably is municipality/district-level data. Some data is available out there on national elections from the Constituency-Level Elections Archive (CLEA), the REIGN dataset, national election databases, NELDA, and vote share from the V-Party dataset etc, but would love to hear any suggestions you might have!

4.4 Independent variables

To capture the diversity of protest coalitions, I source information on the number of types of organizations participating in the event. I apply the number of types of organizations as a proxy for movement diversity.

To test how proximity of protest affect the outcomes I source data on location of the protest from ICEWS. For each observation, ICEWS provides the latitude and longitude for the event.

To code whether protests are more extreme, I will use my own variable on whether the protesters made maximalist claims defined as changes apart from electoral victories that if implemented would changes who had access to executive power.

5 Results

6 Discussion

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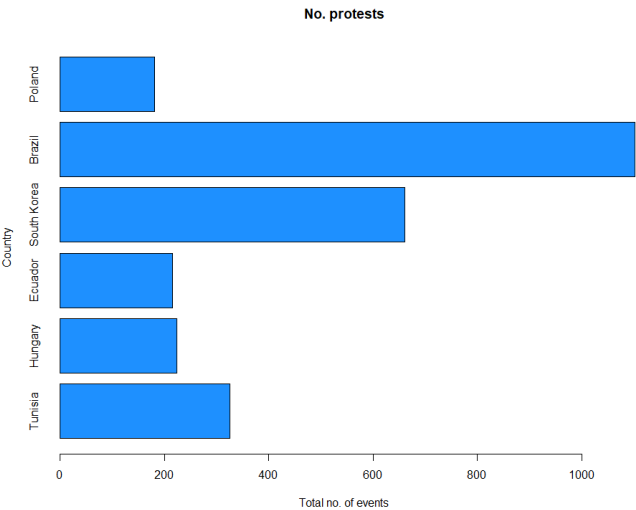
7 Appendix

7.1 Main existing datasets on protest events

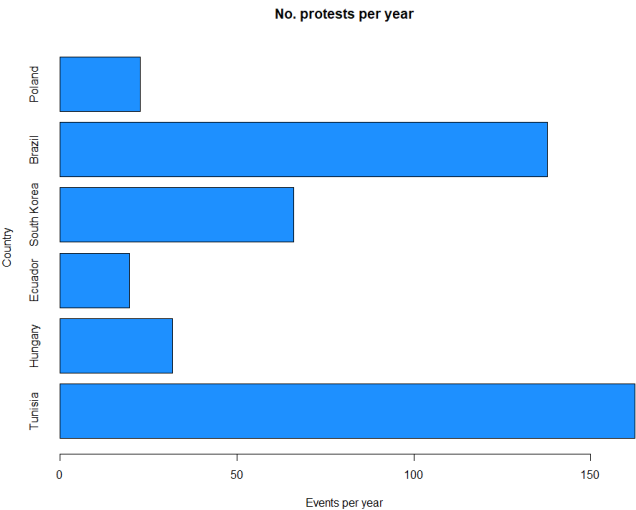
Table 2: Dataset overview

Name	Temporal coverage	Spatial Coverage	Unit of analysis	Inclusion criteria	Location	Target	Tactics	Actor	Size	Goal	Potential outcomes to measure movement success	Cover pro-democracy protest
NAVCO 1.3	1900-2019	All countries (almost)	Campaign	>1000 participants, At least 1 identified organization, Maximalist	Most disaggregated: Country	Yes	Yes	Some information	No	Yes	Success (0,1) Limited (0,1) Failure (0,1)	Medium
NAVCO 2.1	1945-2013	All countries (almost)	Campaign-year	>1000 participants, At least 1 identified organization, Maximalist	Most disaggregated: Country	Yes	Yes	Some information	Yes	Yes	Success (0,1) Progress (1-5)	Medium
NAVCO 3	1990-2012	26 countries	Country-day	>1000 participants, At least 1 identified organization, Maximalist	Most disaggregated: City name	Yes	Yes	Some information	Yes	Yes	Some on economic impact	Medium
SCAD	1990-2018	Africa and Latin America	Events	Unclear Reported protest: "public demonstration in which the participants do not engage in violence, though violence may be used against them".	Yes	Yes	Limited	Some information	Yes	Yes	No	Medium
ACLED	Vary for each country	All countries (almost)	Events	Can be directed against several entities Does not include self-harm, parliamentary action, public displays of flags or prayers unless accompanied by demonstration any protest event where the protest targets the government, and where it involves at least 50 people	Yes	Yes	By default, additional information provided	Some information	No	Issue note	Has a sub-event type called agreement, could be linked	Extensive
MMD	1990-2020	All countries (almost)	Protest-country-year	a public gathering of at least 25 people with an expressed political motivation either opposing or supporting a a) central, regional or local government, or b) other non-governmental institution where information on date and location was available	Most disaggregated: City name	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	State response	Limited
MMAD	2003-2019	Autocracies	Event report AND events		Yes	Yes, in text variable	Limited (ordinal viol variable)	Yes, in text variable	Yes, in text variable	Yes	No	Extensive
ICEWS	1995-2021	All countries (almost)	Events, with info on how to aggregate	CAMEO	Yes (but needs fixing)	Yes	No	Limited	No	No	No	Extreme
GDELT 2.0	2015-2022	All countries (almost)	Events, with info on how to aggregate	CAMEO	Yes	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
USD	1960-2014	All capitals and major urban centers	Events, month, year	Non-routine political activity or political violence directed against a political target	Yes	Yes, in text variable	Yes	Limited	Yes	Some information from issue note	No	Medium

7.2 Protest activity in the six cases



(a) Total no. protest events in backsliding episode



(b) Protest-events per year in backsliding episode

Figure 4: boxplots