

On Democratic Backsliding

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ABSTRACT


Democratic backsliding (meaning the state-led debilitation or elimination of the political institutions sustaining an existing democracy) has changed dramatically since the Cold War. Open-ended coups d'état, executive coups, and blatant election-day vote fraud are declining while promissory coups, executive aggrandizement and strategic electoral manipulation and harassment are increasing. Contemporary forms of backsliding are especially vexing because they are legitimated by the very institutions democracy promoters prioritize but, overall, backsliding today reflects democracy's advance and not its retreat. The current mix of backsliding is more easily reversible than the past mix and successor dictatorships are shorter-lived and less authoritarian.


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