

Major Takeaways from the First Half of the Lit Review

The literature reviewed so far can be divided in two categories depending on their research design. The first ones are in depth or small-N case studies based in the experiences of particular countries. The second set of readings are large-N statistical studies trying to understand the relationships between different variables and democratic breakdowns. It is interesting to note, that most of the large-N studies tend to use coups as their dependent variable which implies that the identified patterns help to explain complete regime changes rather than the erosion of democracy. Methodologically, these references tend to use either survival analysis or maximum likelihood models to make their points.

When looking at the small-N case studies, it is easier to identify early warning events that serve as indicators for future democratic breakdowns. The most prominent responses refer to the **cooptation** by the ruling party of independent organizations like the judiciary or the electoral institutions (Cianetti, Dawson, & Hanley, 2018). This could be understood as part of a process of **executive aggrandizement mechanisms** used by some individuals to maintain their power. Usually, this has been captured by the number of demands of private actors to International Organizations (Blauberger & Kelemen, 2017) or the elaboration of indices related to press freedom (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016).

Cooptation can also be seen in the inclusion of family or party members in private and public institutions close to the regime. Similarly, sometimes leaders co-opt civil society organizations either by defining their leadership or by restricting their actions. In Russia, some NGOs that depend on the state for funding have limited ability to face or demand the state for changes (Fröhlich, 2012). Moreover, there can be rules that inhibit cooperation and alliances between groups, the restriction of artistic expressions against the regime and the access limitations to the internet and other communication technologies (Baker et al., 2017).

The role of **crisis** -understood broadly- can lead to an erosion of democracy. Some large-N studies have found a correlation between economic shocks and the likelihood of a coup. Similarly, case studies have identified that sometimes executive leaders use crisis strategically to implement reforms that otherwise would have been impossible to promote. They open windows of opportunity to the promotion of legislation that restricts civil liberties or to capture parts of the electorate dissatisfied with the incumbent.

Polarization both at the civil society and at the legislative level have also been identified as explanatory variables. The case of Argentina in the first half of the XX century (Alemán & Saiegh, 2014) as well as the case of Correa's Ecuador serve as examples (de la Torre & Ortiz Lemos, 2016). In their recent book, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) identify that the actual polarization in the US Congress can lead to the erosion of democracy. Related to polarization, some of the case studies identify that in cases of executive aggrandizement the **de-legitimation of competition** is key. Executives tend to use pejorative terms and language against the opposition in the media (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Moreover, the arrest of political competitors or journalists are also used as tactics to deter opponents to speak up against the regime. Tepe (2005) indicates that there can be purges inside the ruling party for dissenters and the resignation of some less radical members.

Finally, according to Greskovits (2015), in Central and Eastern Europe the erosion of democracy have been associated with declining turnout in certain elections, dwindling party membership and increased volatility of voter preferences.

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