

DRG 2024 Annual Learning Forum

February 15-28, 2024

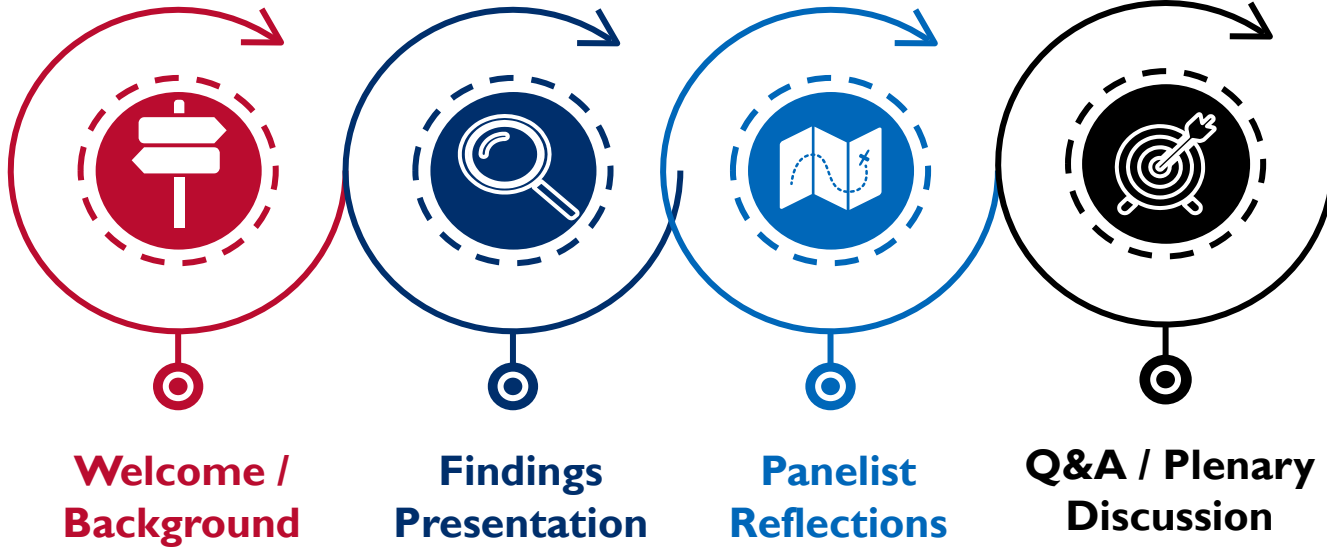


Findings

Session I: What do we
know about how to
support democratic
openings?

Thursday, February 15,
2024, 8:00 - 9:30 am
Eastern

AGENDA





Findings Track

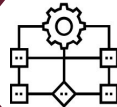
Session 1: What do we know about how to support democratic openings?, 2/15 at 8:00 - 9:30 am Eastern

Session 2: Interrogating Information Integrity: Insights on What Works, 2/20 at 9:30 - 11:00 am Eastern

Session 3: What we've learned about countering corruption: political will, transnational corruption, and behavioral change, 2/21, 9:00 - 10:30 am Eastern

Session 4: Advancing Gender-Inclusive Democracy: Assessing Barriers and Opportunities for Advancing Women's Leadership and Participation in Politics and Public Life, 2/22, 9:00 - 10:00 am Eastern

Session 5: Reinforcing Our Resilience: Insights on Supporting DRG Practitioner Mental Health, 2/27 9:00-10:00 am Eastern



Process Track

Salon 1: Just Learn What? Informing Future USAID DRG Learning Priorities, 2/15, 11:00am-12:00pm

Salon 2: Did we succeed? All you ever wanted to know but were afraid to ask about developing robust outcome indicators, 2/27 9:00 - 10:00 pm Eastern and 2/28, 9:00 -10:00 am Eastern

Salon 3: Leveraging Rigorous Outcome Performance Evaluations (ROPEs) - Tips, Tricks and Applications, 2/29 at 10:00 - 11:00 am Eastern

Past and Current Learning Priorities and Questions

DRGLINKS

About Resources Topics Events Training Q

DRG Learning Agenda

A dynamic collection of research questions that serve the DRG Center's and USAID Missions' analytical efforts



Background

2016-2017 DRG Learning Agenda



DRG LEARNING AGENDA OVERVIEW

The DRG Learning Agenda is a set of priority and strategic research questions that guide DRG programming, monitor academic research, program evaluations, and multi-method tests of effectiveness. The DRG Center created the agenda through a dynamic and iterative process, drawing on the expertise of DRG staff, the Center's external research community, and the degree to which the questions from the latest agenda were relevant to the Center's and USAID Missions' analytical efforts.

DRG Center Research by Theme

PARTICIPATION & INCLUSION

- Restrictive environments
- Youth participation
- Women's participation
- Social movements
- Electoral systems

TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY

- External vs. internal
- Decentralization
- Civil service
- E-governance
- Gender-based

HUMAN RIGHTS

- Information
- Human rights
- National human rights institutions
- Cross-border

DRG INTEGRATION

- Participatory and Accountable
- National
- Cross-border
- Scale of impact

DEMOCRATIC CHANGE

- Theories of change
- Paths away from authoritarianism
- Transitions from conflict

DRG LEARNING THEME: Human Rights

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DRG Center Learning Agenda Focus

Information Campaigns

In what ways are human rights awareness campaigns successful and what are their unintended negative consequences?

- The success of information campaigns and new media
- In addition to traditional media, on government's dissemination
- In some cases, the campaigns have the capacity to do harm

Key Documents: "Misinformation: Design and Implications for Human Rights Campaigns"

Human Rights Defenders

What types of support to human rights defenders and human rights organizations most improve their capacity to protect and promote human rights?

- Among the most prominent, is domestic external assistance (D&E) or strategies
- Selecting partners with whom to work
- Human rights defenders who handle their internal issues can that the domestic and eyes of domestic constituencies

Key Documents: "Struggle from Below", "Mitigating Supporting Civil Society"

What factors and dynamics foster – and build resilience to – the proliferation of disinformation, misinformation, and/or malinformation?

The Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance's (DRG) 2021-2023 learning agenda seeks to answer key learning questions, including this question on misinformation. More information on the DRG Learning Agenda can be found here. In this case, a team of researchers, including Robert A. Blair, Jessica Gosselin, Brandon Nyhan, Laura Pater, Pablo Pappas, and Charlene J. Stanfield, conducted an extensive literature review and synthesized evidence from 176 interventions in 155 unique studies conducted in both the Global North and the Global South.

Information Ecosystem

This evidence review focuses on the factors that contribute to the spread of misinformation and how to build resilience against it. While there is extensive research on misinformation in the Global North, the literature on the Global South is still in its early stages. The review identified interventions targeting consumers and producers of misinformation and to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of these interventions. The interventions were categorized into four main groups: informational, educational, socio-psychological, and institutional.

Key Findings

FALSE Debunking and inoculation work. These information interventions are the strongest evidence base – more than 110 studies – and are the most effective at reducing false beliefs immediately after exposure. Evidence on media literacy, the leading educational intervention of these studies focus on the Global North and South.

TRUE Evidence on media literacy, the leading educational intervention of these studies focus on the Global North and South.

TRUE Social norms interventions appear most effective among socio-psychological interventions.

TRUE Institutional interventions have the greatest potential for evidence from either the Global North or South.

What are the most effective interventions focused on public backsliding and/or support greater democratization?

The Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance's (DRG) 2021-2023 learning agenda seeks to answer key learning questions, including this question on democratic backsliding. More information on the DRG Learning Agenda can be found here. In this case, a team of researchers, including Paul Frison, Jennifer McCoy, Rachel Beatty Reid, Kenneth Roberts, and Maria Carter, conducted an extensive literature review on democratic backsliding and case studies of 15 countries that have experienced a process of democratic backsliding since 2000, with analysis of the opportunities for opening democratic spaces in these contexts.

Opening Up Democratic Spaces

The erosion of democratic governance in many countries in recent decades has sparked debate among scholars and policymakers. This literature review examines the nature and sources of "democratic backsliding" and proposes strategies to protect democratic norms and institutions from autocratic forces. Unlike abrupt forms of democratic breakdown, contemporary backsliding is characterized by gradual erosion, with elected officials playing a central role in subverting democracy from within. Backsliding is observable in both high and low-income countries and is often linked to political polarization and the rise of populist leaders.

Countries varied in democratic resilience and the success of autocratic incumbents in suppressing opposition parties, media, and civil society organizations. Backsliding typically unfolded incrementally through interactions between incumbents and opponents, with very few cases starting with military coups.

Opportunities for democratic opening are present throughout different forms and degrees of backsliding. Democratic recovery is often facilitated by opposition coalitions, and popular protests. Early identification of backsliding, media coverage, civil society mobilization, and popular protests. Early identification of backsliding, media coverage, civil society mobilization, and popular protests. Early identification of backsliding, media coverage, civil society mobilization, and popular protests.

Institutional checks and balances, preserving independent media, and mobilizing citizens through democratic means.

Past and Current DRG Learning Agenda Insights

Key Findings

While context matters in designing a toolkit to autocrats, sites of successful resilience with strategies are detailed below:



Electorate: Depolarization, responsible media consumption, democracy, civil society, and freedom of expression.



Civil Society: Pushing back against further polarization through accountability through legal democratic actions, and freedom of expression.



Political Parties: Seeking "enclaves," building pro-democratic electoral coalitions, and previously excluded voters.



Key Findings



Debunking and inoculation work. These information interventions have the strongest evidence base — more than effective at, e.g., reducing false beliefs of these studies **focus on the Global North**.



Evidence on **media literacy**, the leading the Global North and South.



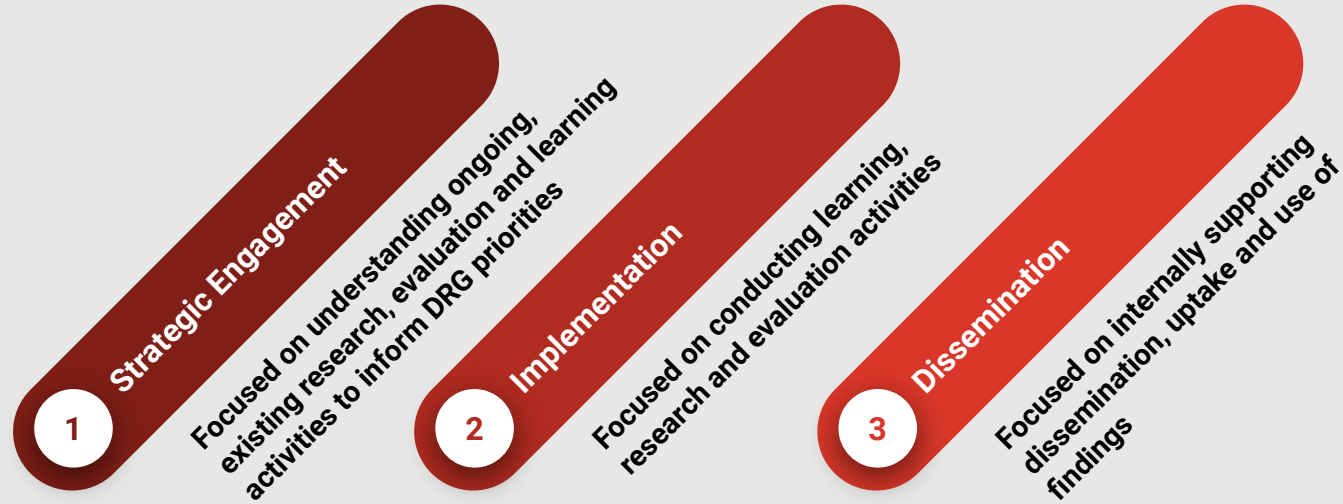
Social norms interventions appear sociopsychological interventions.



Institutional interventions have the greatest **evidence** from either the Global North or South.

Intervention	Impact	Feasibility	Scalability	Durability
Inoculation	High	Medium	Low	Low
Debunking	High	Medium	Low	High
Credibility labels/tags	Medium	Medium	Low	Low
Contextual labels/tags	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Media literacy	Low	Medium	High	Low
Accuracy prompts	Medium	High	High	Low
Frictions/reflection	Medium	High	High	Medium
Social norms	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium
Platform alterations	High	Low	High	Medium
Politician messaging	High	Low	Medium	High
Journalist training	High	Medium	Low	Medium

2024-26 DRG Learning Agenda



Track	Findings	Process
Type	What / How Works?	Improve Evidence Use
Definition	Understand the what, and how, of effective DRG programming	Improve DRG learning and evidence support

Speakers



Rachel Beatty Riedl, Director of Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, John S. Knight Professor of International Studies, Cornell University



Kenneth M. Roberts, Richard J. Schwartz Professor of Government, Cornell University



Paul Friesen, Postdoctoral Associate, Cornell University



Milan Vaishnav, Director and Senior Fellow, South Asia Program, Carnegie Endowment



Murat Somer, Professor of Politics and International Relations at Özyeğin University, Istanbul



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Key Findings





Democratic Openings Research Overview: Available on USAID Website

- Literature Review
- Executive Summary Report
- 15 Case Study Reports
- Textual analysis of campaign messages for democratic backsliding and resistance
- Agent-based Modeling simulation of backsliding scenarios over time

Key Findings


While context matters in designing a toolkit to autocrats, sites of successful resilience with strategies are detailed below:


 **Electorate:** Depolarization and strengthening democratic support through responsible media consumption, positive social contacts, involvement in pro-democracy civil society, and local political engagement.


 **Civil Society:** Pushing back against anti-democratic leaders while minimizing further polarization through non-violent protest, alliance building, seeking accountability through legal channels, mass mobilization in response to anti-democratic actions, and focusing on valence issues and shared identities.


 **Political Parties:** Seeking redress and accountability through "democratic enclaves," building pro-democracy platforms in partnership with civil society, forming broad electoral coalitions, avoiding aggressive actions, and engaging previously excluded voters.

 **Media:** Protecting media freedoms and widespread access to information through reducing polarization, managing social media fragmentation, increasing publicly-funded media, media literacy efforts, and transparency from social media companies.

 **Judiciary:** Maintaining independence through a strong judicial support network, peer-controlled appointment processes, limiting new auxiliary court systems, and grounding judicial autonomy in the constitution.

 **Legislature:** Executive accountability through opposition control of legislative chambers, internal divides in the ruling party, mass public movements against the executive, and a history of institutional independence in the legislature.

 **Bureaucratic Agencies:** Providing a check on autocratic ambitions through professionalism, financial and administrative autonomy, procedural creativity, high performance for public support, and possibly outsourcing policy implementation.

 **Electoral System:** Systems that reduce polarization, extremism, and violence may help block or minimize backsliding. Majoritarian systems with single-round rules tend to be associated with a higher likelihood of backsliding due to increased polarization and violence.

Key Resources

Check out the Literature Review, the 15 case studies and summary report. The original research summary report and case studies cover case studies of 15 countries experiencing democratic backsliding since 2000, focusing on opportunities to restore democratic political violence.

See the full report for more information or contact: NORC at the University of Chicago | proteal@norc.umd.edu
DRG Evidence & Learning Team | ddr.drg@usaid.gov

Country	Backsliding Period	Total Decline	Episode Length	Current Status (2022)	Autocratic Leadership	Notes
Backsliding and Recovery						
Brazil	2013-2021	-0.28	10+	Juncture	2018-2022	
Ecuador	2005-2014	-0.21	10	Recovered (96%)	2006-2016	
Malawi	2011*		1	Recovered	2009-2012	
Moldova	2011-2018	-0.19	8	Recovered (127%)	2001-2008, 2014-2018	
South Korea	2003-2014	-0.17	11	Recovered (116%)	2007-2017	
Partial Backsliding						
India	2008-2020	-0.26	13+	Juncture	2014-	
Indonesia	2010-2021	-0.13	12+	Juncture	2014-	
Poland	2011-2021	-0.40	11+	Juncture	2015-	Upgrade in 2023
Severe Backsliding						
Benin	2017-2021	-0.32	5+	Juncture	2016-	Downgraded
Hungary	2007-	-0.44	16+	Backsliding	2010-	
Nicaragua	2002-	-0.35	21+	Backsliding	2006-	
Serbia	2008-2021	-0.29	15+	Juncture	2012-	
Tunisia	2017-	-0.42	6+	Backsliding	2019-	Downgraded
Turkey	2004-2017	-0.42	14	Autocratized (5%)	2002-	
Venezuela	1991-2014	-0.52	24	Autocratized (4%)	1998-	

State of Democratic Backsliding

A New Era of Democratic Challenges

- Countries regularly move towards and away from democracy (not just towards it)
 - Simultaneous democratic erosion and democratic buttressing or resistance across institutions & actors; unequally distributed
- Affluent and long-established democracies experience significant pressures and some backsliding (thought nearly impossible)
 - Backsliding in strong democracies is incremental and usually takes time
- The primary source of threat in this new era is within – “the winner’s dilemma”
- Institutions should be viewed as “ambivalent”, not static impact on democracy: can be captured and repurposed.

Democratic Bright Spots from 2023

- Poland – electoral victory of democratic opposition
- Guatemala – electoral victory of democratic opposition
- Brazil – Electoral Court sanctioned Bolsonaro for his efforts to delegitimize the electoral process

Democratic Disappointments from 2023

- Nicaragua – Increasingly closed authoritarian regime
- Turkey – Electoral defeat of united opposition coalition
- El Salvador – New electoral mandate for backsliding incumbent
- Senegal – Election delayed, opposition candidates banned

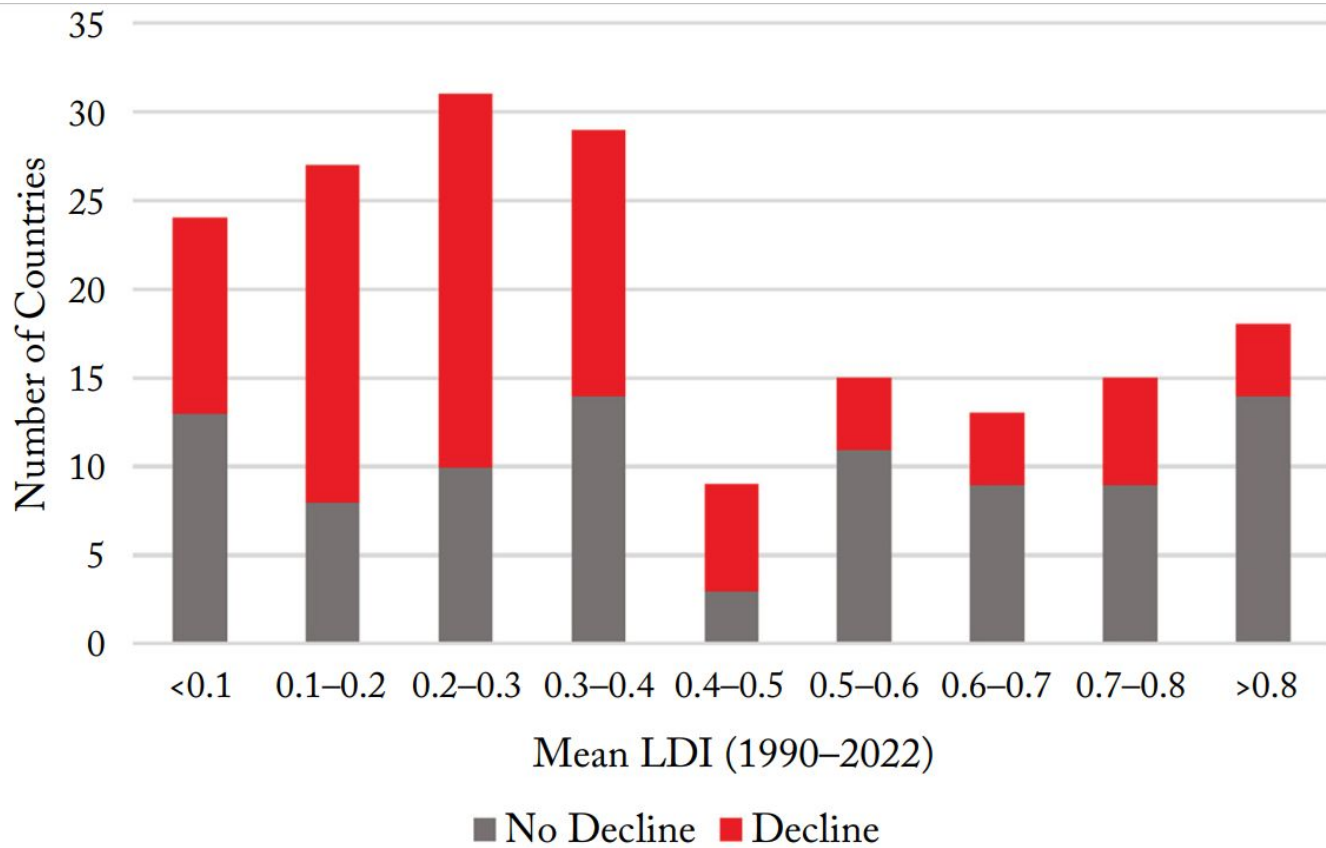
Identifying Backsliding

Measurement Debate

- “Our study surveys objective indicators of democracy...and finds little evidence of global democratic decline during the past decade. (Little and Meng, 2024)
- “Students of democracy must be on guard against an evidence-resistant “tyrannophobia” that treats every bumptious and overweening executive as the next Mussolini” (Brownlee and Miao, 2022)
- “There is no truly objective (i.e., free of human judgment) measure of democracy... we do not find any evidence suggesting that bad-vibes biases among V-Dem’s country experts drive the recent global democratic decline (Knutsen et al. 2024)
- “Several analyses provide reassurance that expert samples are an informative source to measure democratic performance.” (Bergeron-Boutin et al., 2024)
- “Little and Meng... are systematically missing the very type of variation that has most informed current warnings about backsliding.” (Miller, 2024)

Some Reminders

- “The literature on democratization has experienced radical mood swings in recent decades, from extreme optimism in the 1990s to extreme pessimism today.” (Levitsky and Way, 2024)
- “Objective indices may underestimate the extent of democratic erosion whereas subjective indices may overestimate it.” (Baron et al., 2024)



Attention to Key Coding Decisions

- What countries and periods should be considered?
- What democracy dataset(s) and indicator(s) should be used?
- Which countries are considered a “democracy”
- How much of a decline in democracy score is “backsliding”
- Are there events that disqualify cases from experiencing backsliding?

Polarization and Vulnerabilities

Polarization

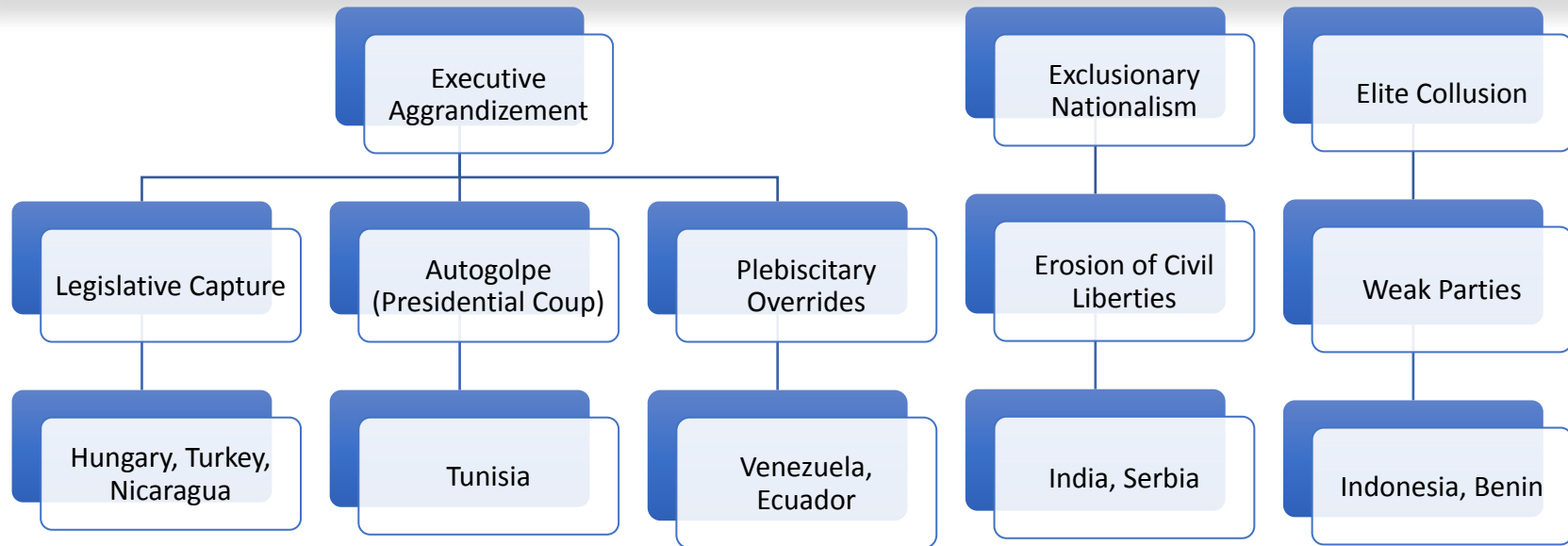
- Long-time democracies are not immune to polarization and populist pressures
- Populist leaders seek to polarize electorates, then take advantage of this polarization to lock in their supporters
- Polarization is both a *cause* and an *effect* of backsliding.

Sources of Democratic Vulnerability

- Unresolved deficits of representation and socioeconomic or cultural inequities
- Performance crises: economic, security, corruption
- Majoritarian electoral systems that over represent the largest party
- Practices of elite collusion
- Hyper-presidentialism, with weak checks and balances
- Neutralization and control of media and information

Backsliding Pathways


Backsliding Pathways





Multiple pathways to Backsliding

- Dynamic Processes: partial backsliding tends to be an unstable equilibrium, so it can be reversed and lead to recovery, or deepen and lead to severe erosion and autocracy
 - No necessary preconditions make backsliding or particular outcomes inevitable (e.g., structural conditions, social cleavages, economic crises, and corruption scandals do not predetermine backsliding or its outcome)
 - This highlights the importance of Political Agency and Strategic Choice (i.e., opposition strategies can weigh heavily on processes and outcomes)
-



Multiple pathways to Recovery


(South Korea, Brazil, Malawi, Moldova, Ecuador, Poland)

A. Democratic opposition forces take advantage of weaknesses in the autocratic ruling bloc

-- especially if the incumbents do not sustain majoritarian electoral support (corruption scandals, economic crises)

-- or if they suffer internal factionalism and divisions (leadership succession can be a serious problem)

-- or lack full control over the courts and the media



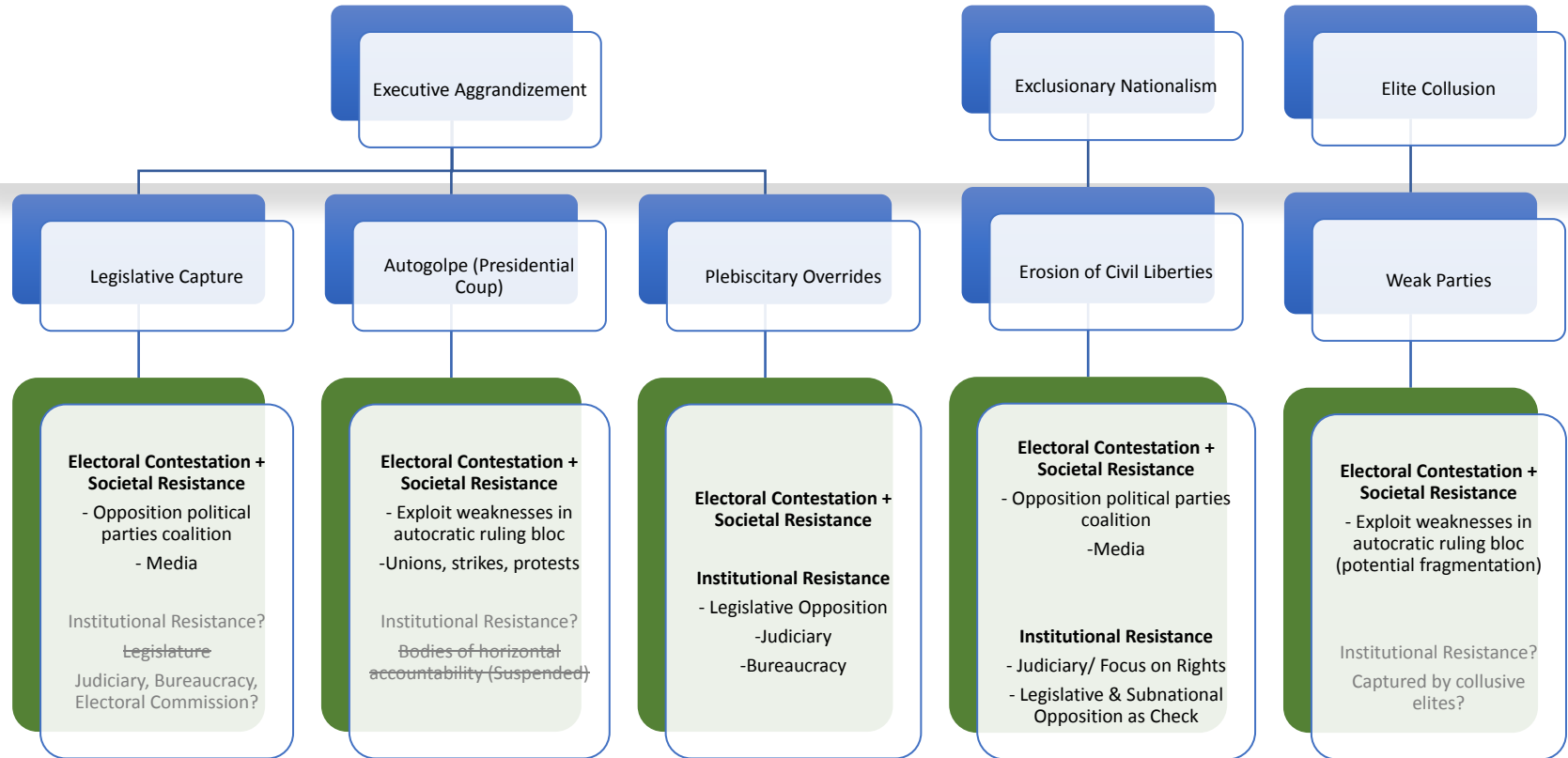
Multiple pathways to Recovery

(South Korea, Brazil, Malawi, Moldova, Ecuador, Poland)

B. Democratic opposition combines institutional and societal modes of resistance

- civil society and media monitoring of incumbents; sometimes peaceful social protest
 - strong emphasis on electoral contestation, mobilizing broad opposition coalitions; potential use of local opposition strongholds (municipal governments, etc.) as bastions of resistance to backsliding
 - challenge of creating a democracy vs autocracy “regime cleavage” that shifts the axis of polarization to crystalize the choice for voters, without “Othering” supporters of the incumbent
 - societal resistance often buttresses the independence and assertiveness of the courts, electoral institutions, the bureaucracy, etc. (i.e., makes them less likely to defer to the incumbent)
 - international support for civil society and independent institutions can be very important in some cases (Guatemala)
-

Resistance and Recovery: Available Opposition Strategies



Strategies of Democratic Resistance

Time in Backsliding Matters

- 10-year inflection point: all recoveries to date are before 10 years
- Early awareness is key: early provides more opportunities, but weaker incentives to respond. Hard to recognize that backsliding is happening or threatening.
- Moderate backsliding is indeterminate and unstable.
- Severe backsliding has consolidated executive power to the degree that impedes opposition success.

Institutional Sources of Resistance

- *Political Party Development* – opposition may be attacked during backsliding, but has to retain capacity to fully contest the next two elections.
- *Peaceful Protest* – reinvigorates civil society, draws international attention, creates legitimacy costs for regime
- *Investigative Media* – public must know about corruption and abuses
- *Activists Court* – professional norms and independence check executive aggrandizement
- *Local Elections* – opposition to compete and win to raise profile, and gain governing experience
- *Electoral Rules* – proportional representation should decrease polarization, and minimize rules that advantage the largest party

Less Successful and Counter-productive Strategies

- Coups or coup attempts
 - Tend to deepen political polarization, divide opposition forces into moderate and hardliners, and weaken the democratic credentials of at least some sectors of the opposition
- Election boycotts or withdrawals from democratic arenas
 - Tend to backfire. While boycotts are intended to delegitimize incumbents, that generally does not happen. Boycotts allow incumbents to further monopolize key institutional sites and lock out opposition
- Punitive or retaliatory investigations, harassment, or trials
 - Exacerbate polarization and raise doubts about commitment to fair and inclusive democratic competition.

Q & A

Conditions that Constrain Backsliding and Buttress Democratic Resiliency

- Greater proportionality in electoral systems
- Multiple institutional veto points to disperse power (bicameral legislatures, independent courts, dual executives, federalism and vibrant local governments, etc.)
- Internal factionalism or lack of cohesion within autocratic coalitions, plus the challenges of political succession
- Electoral opposition to autocratic concentrations of power; it is hard for autocrats to completely shut down electoral contestation

Silver Lining, but No Silver Bullet: The Uncertainty of Backsliding

- **Key Takeaway:** It is not easy for aspiring autocrats to fully dismantle democratic checks and balances in many societies, even if they damage or compromise them
 - Are cases of recovery (South Korea, Brazil, Malawi, Moldova, Ecuador– and perhaps now Poland and Guatemala?)
 - Also intermediate or hybrid cases of restrained backsliding (Indonesia, India, Poland)

The Study: Original Research on 15 Case Studies

Outcomes:	Recovery	Moderate Backsliding	Severe Backsliding
Cases:	Brazil Ecuador Malawi Moldova South Korea	Benin India Indonesia Poland Tunisia	Hungary Nicaragua Serbia Turkey Venezuela



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Panelist Reflections



Plenary Discussion



Wrap Up





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