Authoritarian Resilience in MENA Countries in the Era of Autocratization: a Comparative Area Study of Authoritarian Deepening

Resiliencia autoritaria en los países MENA en la era de la autocratización: un análisis comparativo de área sobre la profundización autoritaria

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Abstract

Building on studies on authoritarian resilience in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the article engages the current debate on global autocratization. It does so through the

definition, operationalization and empirical analysis of the concept of "authoritarian deepening" as a manifestation of contemporary authoritarianism. After framing theoretically and methodologically the study of authoritarian deepening, a Comparative Area Study—based on the most-different case study design—is conducted looking at countries from different regions that share similar trends of growing authoritarianism (Egypt, Cameroon, Cambodia, and Venezuela) to illustrate its characteristics. The article shows that authoritarian deepening is experienced by autocracies all over the world, although the MENA region is particularly affected. The comparative analysis of the four cases provides evidence that the process of authoritarian deepening has resulted in clear suppression of political competition, concentration of power in the executive, and even stricter control of rights and freedoms.

Keywords: Authoritarian deepening, Authoritarian resilience, Autocratization, Comparative Area Studies (CAS), Middle East and North Africa

Resumen

Basándose en los estudios sobre la resiliencia del autoritarismo en el Norte de África y Oriente Próximo África (MENA, por sus siglas en inglés), el artículo aborda el debate sobre el proceso de autocratización actual en el mundo. Lo hace a través de la definición, operacionalización y análisis empírico del concepto de "profundización autoritaria" como manifestación del autoritarismo contemporáneo. Tras enmarcar teórica y metodológicamente el estudio de la profundización autoritaria, se lleva a cabo un Estudio de Área Comparativo—basado en el diseño de sistemas más disimilares—en el que se analizan países de diferentes regiones que comparten tendencias similares de creciente autoritarismo (Egipto, Camerún, Camboya y Venezuela) para poner de relieve sus características. El artículo muestra que la profundización del autoritarismo la experimentan autocracias de todo el mundo, aunque la región MENA se ve especialmente afectada. El análisis comparativo de los cuatro casos demuestra que el proceso de profundización autoritaria se ha traducido en una clara supresión de la competencia política, la concentración de poder en el ejecutivo y un control aún más estricto de los derechos y las libertades.

Palabras clave: Profundización autoritaria, Resistencia autoritaria, Autocratización, Estudios Comparativos de Área (CAS), Norte de África y Oriente Próximo

Introduction

The lack of any prospects for the emergence of democracy in Arab countries during and after the third wave of democratization encouraged scholars to explain political developments there by moving away from democratization theory towards the "authoritarian persistence paradigm" (Bellin, 2004; Ghalioun, 2004; Droz-Vincent, 2004; Anderson, 2006; Hinnebusch, 2006). The outbreak of the Arab Uprisings in late 2010 cast doubts for a time about the validity of this approach, but they did not lead ultimately to the expected democratic *tsunami*

(Szmolka, 2017a). On the contrary, authoritarianism reasserted itself across the region and even Tunisia, the only country that had gone through a successful process of democratization, has reverted to authoritarianism following a constitutional coup in 2021 (Koehler, 2023). The authoritarian resilience of the Arab world and the specific policies Arab regimes put in place to survive are no longer exceptional in the context of the current "third wave of autocratization" across the globe (Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019). However, the scholarship on autocratization has tended to focus on authoritarian trends in democratic regimes—democratic backsliding (Bermeo, 2016)—rather than on the resilience of autocracies and the deepening of authoritarian practices in already authoritarian countries.

This article argues that the study of authoritarian deepening—a manifestation of the resilience of autocracies increasing their authoritarian features—can build a bridge between the literatures on MENA authoritarianism and comparative autocratization. First, the inclusion of authoritarian deepening offers a more complete picture of contemporary authoritarianism and autocratization. Second, the long-standing trajectory of studies on authoritarian persistence/resilience in Arab countries can provide useful insights on the current wave of autocratization. In turn, the scope of research on MENA politics—overwhelmingly based on in-depth case studies—could be broadened out and benefit from work in other areas of the world.

Our research therefore answers the following questions related to the concept, empirics, operationalization and comparison of authoritarian deepening. What is authoritarian deepening? Where and how does it manifest itself? How can it be analyzed from a cross-regional comparative perspective? Does authoritarian deepening share similar patterns around the world? Answering these questions, this article contributes to the current debate on autocratization by providing a definition of the concept of "authoritarian deepening" that can be operationalized for empirical research. It also addresses this issue in a comparative perspective by analyzing it through a cross-regional Comparative Area Study.

Theoretical Framework

The Paradigm of Authoritarian Persistence in MENA countries

The paradigm of authoritarian persistence sought to explain the characteristics, dynamics and factors underlying the durability of authoritarianism. One its most useful insights has been the adaptive ability of Arab authoritarianism (Albrecht and Schlumberger, 2004), whereby ruling elites are able to "upgrade" political systems to accommodate and manage changing political, economic, and social conditions, while maintaining the authoritarian core of the regime intact (Heydemann, 2007). Façade political liberalizations in the 1980s and 1990s were a substitute for democratization rather than a stage on the way to democracy, and it aimed at investing authoritarian regimes with renewed legitimacy and social support (Brynen, Korany and Noble, 1998; Hinnebusch, 2000; Brumberg, 2002).

Within this frame of "upgraded authoritarianism", scholars put forth different factors to explain the persistence of authoritarian rule, including Islam and Arab culture (Fish 2002); patrimonialism and neopatriarchy (Sharabi, 1988); rentierism (Beblawi and Luciani, 1987); state-led economic liberalization (King, 2007); regimes' coercive apparatus (Bellin, 2004); cooptation and division of political opposition (Lust-Okar, 2004); and the lack of autonomy from the state and weakness of civil society (Norton, 1995).

The 2011 Arab protests surprised specialists of the region and they recognized their own paradigm's crisis and the need to review some of the assumptions of authoritarian persistence (Teti and Gervasio, 2011; Bellin, 2012; Valbjørn, 2012; Pace and Cavatorta, 2012; Volpi, 2013; Hinnebusch, 2015; Valbjørn, 2015; Lynch, 2021). Nevertheless, given the ultimate outcome of the uprisings, the authoritarian persistence framework has been brought back (Heydemann and Leenders, 2013).

Several of the factors used to explain authoritarianism in the past are still present in post-Arab uprising studies—Islam, geopolitics, oil, regime's institutions, the military, and weak and/or authoritarian civil society (Kao and Lust, 2017). Indeed, the strength of the coercive apparatus remains one of the main explanations (Bellin, 2012; Brownlee, Masoud and Reynolds, 2015; Hill, 2019). Some new factors though have been introduced (Bank and Busse, 2021). For instance, the notions of "authoritarian learning" from the neighbors' failures (Heydemann and Leenders, 2011) or "authoritarian diffusion of repression" (Darwich, 2017) have provided regional dynamics with a central explanatory role. Digital dimensions as modes of political domination and control have also been added to the menu of instruments autocrats employ (Josua and Edel, 2021). Finally, issues such as sectarianism have gained greater attention in relation to how identity politics is instrumentalized by authoritarian regimes (Hashemi, 2016; Cheterian, 2017; Valbjørn, 2019). In short, scholars continue to pay attention to processes of authoritarian reconfiguration.

When it comes to methodology, case studies and intra-regional comparisons continue to dominate post-Arab uprisings research, although there are some exceptions (Jamal, 2012; Karakaya and Yildirim, 2013; Barbabela et al., 2021) and several MENA scholars call for more cross-regional studies to put to rest the alleged incompatibility of disciplinary-focused social sciences and area studies (Ahram 2018; Bank 2,018; Bank and Busse, 2021).

In sum, the study of authoritarianism in MENA countries has not undergone a radical shift since the Arab Uprisings. Rather, current scholarship simply revised former theoretical assumptions, themes, and levels of analysis. Additionally, research continues to rely on regional case studies, which prevents generalizations about what is a global phenomenon: authoritarianism. Nevertheless, insights from MENA research such as the autocrats' adaptive ability, their wide range of repressive tools (Topak et al., 2022), or the influence of regime characteristics on the manifestations of authoritarianism, may be useful in explaining authoritarian resilience beyond the region.

The Scholarly Debate on the Global Trend of Autocratization

Authoritarianism Goes Global is the title of a book by Diamond, Plattner and Walker edited in 2016, with several authors discussing the global advance of authoritarianism and the retreat of democracy. Since then, several others have reflected on what has been called the "third wave of autocratization" (Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019), "autocratization in post-Cold War" (Cassani and Tomini, 2019a, 2019b, 2020), or the "resurgence of authoritarianism" (Cassani and Tomini, 2019c). The debate on the contemporary process of autocratization joins the discussion on "democratic recession" (Diamond, 2015), "democratic crisis" (Schmitter, 2015), "democratic backsliding" (Bermeo, 2016; Waldner and Lust 2018) or "democratic erosion" (Kneuer, 2021; Laebens and Lührmann, 2021). However, this connection with democratic backsliding runs the risk of marginalizing what is a growing phenomenon across the globe, namely increasing authoritarianism in already authoritarian regimes.

Autocratization: What It is and How It is Measured

Based on data from the V-Dem institute, Lührmann and Lindberg (henceforth L&L) (2019) posited the existence of a "third wave of autocratization," which began in 1994 and spread across the world. They (2019, 1102) define an autocratization wave as "the time period during which the number of countries undergoing democratization declines while at the same time autocratization affects more and more countries." At first, they conceptualized "autocratization" as "substantial de-facto decline of core institutional requirements for electoral democracy" that can occur both in democracies and autocracies. Some scholars (Skaaning, 2020; Tomini, 2021) questioned L&L's work, arguing against the "wave" metaphor because autocratization had been operationalized and measured poorly.

When it comes to the empirical referents of autocratization, L&L (2019) initially identified three types of autocratization processes: democratic recession (autocratization processes taking place within democracies); democratic breakdown (when a democracy turns into an autocracy); and autocratic consolidation (gradual decline in democratic traits in already authoritarian regimes). In later contributions, the V-Dem team provided a more complete framework, distinguishing four types of regime transformations taking place along the democratic-autocratic continuum. On the one hand, they define autocratization as a decline of democratic attributes that may start either in democracies (democratic regression) or autocracies (autocratic regression). On the other hand, democratization would be any substantial and significant democratic improvement either in autocracies (liberalization) or democracies (democratic deepening) (Maertz et al., 2020). Their study of 680 episodes of regime transformation (ERT) from 1900 to 2019 comes to several interesting conclusions: ERT only produce a regime transition in a third of the cases; authoritarian regimes are generally less stable than democracies; and democratization is much more common than autocratization. Nevertheless, they reiterate that recent evidence shows the world is currently undergoing a wave of autocratization.

Regarding how to operationalize the concept of autocratization, L&L opt for a quantitative approach. They first used the V-Dem's Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) to identify episodes of autocratization, although other later contributions are built on the V-Dem's Liberal

Democracy Index (LDI), which provides a more demanding concept of what a democracy is. In both cases, V-Dem counts as an episode of autocratization a country experiencing a meaningful drop in the EDI/LDI in each period, even if this drop does not imply a variation in their categories of political regimes (liberal democracy, electoral democracy, electoral autocracy and closed autocracy).

Cassani and Tomini (henceforth C&T) also provide a comprehensive theoretical and analytical framework on autocratization (2019a; 2018; 2019b; 2019c; 2020). For them, autocratization represents a relatively marginal phenomenon during the 1990s with its pace of diffusion growing across the world since the early 2000s. They conceptualize autocratization through three institutional dimensions, namely political participation, public contestation, and executive limitation. Autocratization is defined as a "process of regime change towards autocracy that makes the exercise of political power more arbitrary and repressive and that restricts the space for public contestation and political participation in the process of government selection" (C&T 2019, 123). Contrary to L&L's approach to operationalizing autocratization based on a quantitative threshold, C&T argue that the concept of autocratization should only be applied to those processes of change that imply a transition from one regime to another towards autocracy. They identify six possible forms of autocratization, corresponding to all potential transitions among the categories of political regimes (liberal democracy, defective democracy, electoral autocracy and closed autocracy). In addition, they identify five ideal-typical and non-mutually exclusive ways in which contemporary processes of autocratization unfold: military intervention, electoral process manipulation, political rights violations, restrictions on civil liberties, and the weakening of horizontal accountability. In their comparative empirical analysis of 46 cases of autocratization between 1990 and 2015, C&T (2019) show that post-Cold War processes of autocratization tend to take different forms, unfold through multiple modes, and evolve in different ways. In another study of 38 autocratizations between 2000 and 2018, C&T (2020: 1539) did not identify any autocratization process in liberal democracies, a fact that they explain by "the presence of counter-powers such as the legislative and the judiciary along with other independent agencies that monitor the conduct of the government and that enforce the protection of citizen's civil and political liberties." Conversely, defective democracies are the category most affected by autocratization and they tend to become electoral autocracies.

Authoritarian Resilience and Authoritarian Deepening in Autocratization Studies

With a few exceptions, comparative studies on autocratization do not address the phenomenon of authoritarian resilience and authoritarian deepening. C&T (2019) include "authoritarian resilience" as one of the four main processes of regime change that advance the ongoing trend of "authoritarian resurgence", referring to it as a regime transformation carried out by the ruling elite or a faction of the ruling elite to hold on to power and preserve the authoritarian core of the regime, in response to an ongoing crisis or an attempt to anticipate and prevent a possible crisis. Resilience can be accomplished either through implementing façade liberalization or through authoritarian deepening, whereby resilience means becoming more authoritarian.

For her part, Sinkkonen (2021) argues that authoritarian deepening is a process of increasing either power concentration within the ruling elite or domestic repression or both; whereas authoritarian consolidation refers to the particular period of time that a new authoritarian elite needs to anchor its authoritarian rule and secure its position, in line with previous literature (Göbel, 2011; Ambrosio, 2014).

Conceptualizing Authoritarian Deepening

In this section, we provide a conceptual framework of authoritarian deepening, which integrates the literatures on authoritarian resilience in the MENA and comparative autocratization. The validity of this conceptualization will be tested in a cross-regional comparative analysis after the operationalization of the concept.

Firstly, we prefer the concept of "authoritarian deepening" to others such as "authoritarian recession," (V-Dem), "autocratic regression" (Maertz et al., 2020), or "authoritarian backsliding" (Dresden and Howard, 2016) since we consider that the term "deepening" reinforces the idea of the thickness of authoritarianism.

Secondly, we consider authoritarian deepening as an empirical referent of authoritarian resilience, in line with C&T (2019c) and Sinkkonen (2021). Although there is obviously continuity in the nature of the regime, resilience occurs through adaptation, evolution, and transformation. As the literature on MENA politics has shown, authoritarian resilience is a dynamic concept due to the strategies autocrats implement to remain in power. Such strategies are meant to adapt to changing social and political circumstances and can include both façade political liberalization (Heydemann, 2007) and its opposite: an increase in the authoritarian features of the political regime (Cavatorta, 2016).

Thirdly, authoritarian deepening takes place in authoritarian regimes. We distinguish between the concepts of authoritarian deepening—growing authoritarianism in autocracies—and democratic backsliding—democratic setbacks because of the weakening of the state institutions and/or civil liberties in democracies. Thus, we differ from the comparativists who have used the concept of democratic backsliding to describe diminishing democratic traits not only in democracies but also in autocracies (Waldner and Lust, 2018).

Fourthly, in line with Gatelier and Valeri (2012) we go beyond the focus on the repressive and coercive capacities of the authoritarian regime, and we distinguish three dimensions of the concept of authoritarian deepening in relation to political competition, government, and political rights and freedoms. There is no doubt however that, ultimately, repression or the threat of it are always present. In any case, we define authoritarian deepening as *the expansion of authoritarian traits of an already autocratic regime, imposing even more limits on political competition (restricting or banning opposition parties and movements, controlling or rigging elections); concentrating more power in the executive (abolishing or changing term limits, weakening and placing representative institutions at the service of the executive, eliminating horizontal accountability); and further limiting public rights and freedoms (suppressing civil society, media and bloggers).*

This definition of authoritarian deepening can be operationalized for empirical comparative research through the construction of dimensions, variables, and indicators. It is to this that we now turn.

Methodology for a Comparative Analysis of Authoritarian Deepening

The empirical analysis of authoritarian deepening is conducted through a Comparative Area Study (CAS).[1] The CAS has "the potential to maintain the integrity of regional knowledge while better relating the insights of area studies to the wider discipline of social science" (Ahram 2011, 70). In particular, we carry out a cross-regional comparison—based on the Most Dissimilar Systems Design (MDSD) —to detect similar patterns in a heterogeneous group of countries from different regions (Basedau and Köllner, 2007).[2] Therefore, in our research, we select four countries from different regions that have experienced authoritarian deepening (the dependent variable) in order to find similar characteristics in the development of this phenomenon (independent variables).

First, we identified episodes of authoritarian deepening using data provided by the Bertelsmann Political Transformation Index (BPTI), which ranges from 1 (the lowest value) to 10 (the highest value of democracy). We opted for the BPTI because it focuses on political change and employs a thick definition of democracy. In addition, the classification of a country as a democracy or autocracy is not based exclusively on its score. Rather, a political regime is considered as an autocracy when it fails to pass any of the seven threshold values on critical issues.[3] The BPTI classifies 137 countries into the categories of democracy in consolidation (DC), defective democracy (DD), highly defective democracy (HDD), moderate autocracy (MD), and hardline autocracy (HA).[4]

The period considered for identifying episodes of authoritarian deepening goes from January 2005 until January 2023 for two reasons. First, this is the timeframe within which the literature agrees that there has been an advance of authoritarianism globally. Second, the period covers the availability of BPTI's data, published every two years since 2006. The biannual reports reflect the situation of each country at the end of January of the previous year. In addition, the qualitative comparative analysis also covers recent developments up to the end of 2023. An episode of authoritarian deepening in current autocracies is identified when two criteria are met: there is a category change from a moderate to a hardline autocracy that persists for

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[1] Basedau & Köllner (2007: 11) distinguish three level of analysis in CAS studies: intra-regional (eg. MENA area), inter-regional (global studies), and cross-regional (case selection in different areas).

[2] The MDSD is a comparative method used to explain political phenomena by comparing very different cases. The logic behind this design is to find common patterns despite the presence of numerous differences between the cases under study, which share a similar outcome.

[3] Specifically: <6 points, and fair elections; <4 points, effective power to govern; <4 points, association/assembly rights; <4 points, freedom of expression; <4 points, separation of powers; <4 points, civil rights; <3 points, on the average value of the indicators of monopoly on the use of force and basic administration.

[4] The BTI excludes long-consolidated democracies, which is not problematic since our research focuses only on authoritarian regimes.

at least two reports and with a difference in scores greater than 0.3 during the period of decline; or, in the absence of an authoritarian regime category change, there is a significant decline in the BPTI score for two consecutive reports and the difference is greater than 0.5 points during this interval.

In this regard, the Bertelsmann Stiftung classifies 76 countries as moderate or hardline autocracies as of January 2023. Authoritarianism can be found across almost the entire MENA region (in 17 out of 18 countries), 31 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, 21 countries in Asia, and 7 Latin American countries (see Supplementary file). Out of the 76 autocracies, 28 have experienced a significant episode of deepening authoritarianism, mainly in the MENA and Sub-Saharan Africa. Specifically, authoritarian deepening involved a shift from moderate to hardline autocracy in 14 countries. In addition, authoritarianism grew in three moderate autocracies, although they remained in the same political regime category (Kuwait, Angola and Uganda). Not only there is authoritarian deepening in moderate autocracies, but 11 hardline autocracies have also become even more authoritarian (see Table 1 and Supplementary File).

Table 1. Episodes of authoritarian deepening

	AUTHORITARIAN DEEPENING PROCESSES		
	Transition from a moderate to a hard-line autocracy	**In moderate autocracies**	**In hard-line autocracies**
Middle East and North Africa	Egypt *(from 2016 report)*	Kuwait *(2014-2016 reports)*	Iran
	Bahrain		Libya *(from 2016 report)*
	Morocco		Oman *(from 2012 report)*
	Qatar *(2012-2018 reports)*		Syria *(from 2012 report)*
	Yemen *(from 2012 report)*		
Sub-Sahara Africa	Cameroon *(from 2016 report)*	Angola *(2014 to 2018 reports)*	Central Afr. Rep. *(2014-2016 reports)*
	Burundi *(from 2014 report)*	Uganda *(from 2020 report)*	Chad *(2008-2010; 2018- 2022 reports)*
	Ethiopia *(2014-2018 reports)*		Eritrea *(from 2012 to 2016 reports)*
	Guinea *(2008-2010 reports)*		South Soudan *(from 2016 to 2018 reports)*
			Sudan *(from 2012 to 2020 reports)*
Latin America	Venezuela *(from 2014 report)*		
	Nicaragua *(from 2020 report)*		
Asia	Cambodia *(from 2010 report)*		Afghanistan *(from 2010 to 2012 reports)*
	Kazakhstan *(2010-2016 reports)*		Tajikistan *(from 2016)*
	Belarus *(from 2020 report)*		

Table compiled by the authors.

Once the episodes of authoritarian resilience were identified, we selected the most paradigmatic cases of authoritarian deepening in each region of the world, assuming that the regime change from moderate autocracy to hardline autocracy is the most straightforward way to operationalize "effective processes of political change" (Cassani and Tomini, 2019a). When there are several moderate autocracies in the same region that have become hardline autocracies, we opted for the country that remains authoritarian throughout the research period and experienced a gradual process of authoritarian deepening until the last BS report or longer. Thus, we selected the cases of Egypt for the MENA, Cameroon for Sub-Saharan Africa, Venezuela for Latin America, and Cambodia for Asia.

Finally, the case studies are analyzed according to our definition of authoritarian deepening in relation to three dimensions: pluralism and political competition, government, and public rights and freedoms. Each dimension is examined using a variety of variables and indicators, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Dimensions and variables on the analysis of authoritarian deepening

Dimension	Variables	Sub-variables	Indicators/Categories (Sources)
Political competition	Political parties	Party system classification	Competitive/ Quasi-competitive/ Hegemonic/ Non-pluralist (Szmolka and G.del Moral 2019)
		Ruling party dominance	% seats in lower chamber (Inter-Parliamentary Union, IPU Parline)
		Political opposition	Main opposition parties/coalitions (parliamentary and extra-parliamentary)
			United/Fragmented opposition
			Attitude of the political regime towards opposition
			Attitude of opposition parties on their participation on formal politics
	Presidential and lower-chamber elections	Regularity of elections	Periodic (P)/ Early elections (E)/ Delayed (D)
		Electoral integrity	Perception Electoral Integrity Index 9.0 (Garnet, James and MacGregor 2023)
			Election Observation Reports
		Electoral participation	% Turnout (ElectionGuide, IFES)
Government	Form of government		Monarchy/ Republic
			Hyper-presidentialism/ Presidentialism/ Semi-presidentialism/ Parliamentarism/ Parliamentarism of presidential tendency
	Constitutional reforms	Content	Country's constitution (Comparative Constitution Project)
		Scope	Democratic/ Authoritarian (qualitative assessment based on literature)
	President	Term limit	Country's constitution (Comparative Constitution Project)
		Powers	Executive power index (Comparative Constitution Project)
	Parliament	Composition	Number of parliamentary parties
			Number of political parties >5% seats (IPU)
		Autonomy from the executive	Constitutional and *de facto* powers
	Judiciary	Autonomy from the executive	Election system
		Rule of Law	Rule of Law Index (World Justice Project)
Public rights and freedoms	Assembly		Legal framework
			Reports from human rights organizations
	Association		Legal framework
			Reports from human rights organizations
	Speech, press and digital		Legal framework
			Reporters Without Borders Index
			Freedom of the Net index

Table compiled by the authors.

A Comparative Area Study of Authoritarian Deepening

This section examines four countries from different regions—Egypt, Cameroon, Cambodia and Venezuela—as paradigmatic cases of authoritarian deepening. The purpose is two-fold: (i) to apply our conceptualization and operationalization of the phenomenon of authoritarian deepening; (ii) to find similar patterns in the way authoritarian deepening manifest itself.

Elimination of political competition and contestation

Authoritarian deepening means the elimination of political competition through a hegemonic party or coalition, the suppression of political opposition, and the control of elections.

Hegemonic party systems

Previous research has shown the role of hegemonic ruling parties in the durability of the authoritarian regimes, since they create incentives for long-term loyalty to the political regime and reduce elite dissent (Magaloni, 2008; Svolik, 2012), while helping the authoritarian regime to control citizens and mobilize popular support (Handlin, 2016). Cameroon, Cambodia and Venezuela share the pattern of an institutionalized hegemonic party with long-standing roots in state institutions and the regime's patronage networks, whereas in Egypt, there is no hegemonic party as such, but rather a broad coalition of parties and alleged independents supporting government policies in parliament.

In Egypt, mass protests against the Islamist government of Mohamed Morsi served as a pretext for the military to overthrow the elected president on July 3, 2013, putting an end to the democratic transition that began after 2011 Uprising.[5] The military sought institutional legitimacy firstly through the approval of a new constitution and presidential and parliamentary elections (Rougier and Lacroix, 2016). Following the 2015 elections for the House of Representatives (HR), the elected president Abdelfatah al-Sisi—the military commander-in-chief and minister of defense at the time of the coup—relied on a fragmented parliament composed mostly of independent candidates close to the regime (351 seats) and two parties that took respectively 65 and 53 out of 596 seats: the Free Egyptians Party and the Nation's Future Party (NFP), the latter a political party promoted by the military and the security apparatus (Steuer, 2020). The NFP became the most prominent party (317 seats) after the 2020 elections; the remaining seats went to non-affiliated candidates (117 seats) and 12 political parties, mostly NFP's partners in the National Unified List supporting president al-Sisi. Only a few parties are sometimes reluctant to join the parliamentary majority, such as the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, *Tagammu, Al-Adl* and the Reform and Development Party

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[5] The military remains the most decisive veto-player in the Egypt's politics. The military's power was even expanded through constitutional amendments in April 2019 (Droz-Vincent, 2015, 27). The military also continue to play a significant economic role, running businesses, producing goods, and managing infrastructure projects (Sayigh, 2019).

(24 seats together), which voted against the government budget in 2022 (Ahram, June 24, 2022).

In Cameroon and Cambodia, the hegemonic parties are the heirs of the former single parties. Since the second multi-party elections held in 1997, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) has won most seats in the National Assembly. In the 2020 elections, the CPDM won 152 seats, while six other political parties shared the remaining 28 seats. The Cambodian People's Party (CPP) has dominated all representative institutions since the first elections were held in 1998, following the coup led by the second-prime minister Hun Sen's (CPP) the year before, which buried the 1993 UN-sponsored democratization process. The 2003 and 2008 National Assembly elections resulted in landslide wins for the CPP, with a few opposition parties represented in the parliament. The CPP retained its parliamentary majority in the 2013 elections, although the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP)—founded in 2012 through the merger of two liberal opposition parties, the Sam Rainsy Party, and the Human Rights Party—took 55 of the 123 seats in the National Assembly. The CNRP's strong electoral performance was perceived as a threat to the regime, leading to its banning in 2017 (Loughlin 2021). As a result, the CPP took all the seats in the July 2018 National Assembly elections. In the 2023 elections to the National Assembly, the regime followed a similar strategy. After the opposition Candlelight Party—which included partisans of the banned CNRP—won 18 percent of councilors in the 2022 municipal elections, authorities disqualified the party from contesting the 2023 parliamentary elections and arrested several of its members (Al-Jazeera, May 25, 2023). Thus, the CPP won 120 parliamentary seats, while the royalist FUNCINPEC returned to parliament with the remaining 5 seats.

Finally, in Venezuela, the Fifth Republic Movement (*Movimiento V República*, MVR) created in 1997 to support the candidacy of Hugo Chávez in the 1998 presidential elections remains, with a new name, a pillar of the current hegemonic authoritarian regime (Velasco et al. 2021). The MVR won the 2000 legislative elections, grabbing 91 out of 165 seats and performing even better in 2005 with 161 out of 167 seats. In 2008, the MVR was replaced by the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (*Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela,* PSUV), a merger of several left-wing movements Chávez promoted. The new party won 96 out of 167 seats in the 2010 parliamentary elections. Stronger electoral integrity during the 2015 elections allowed the opposition coalition Democratic Unity Roundtable (*Mesa de Unidad Democrática*, MUD) to secure a two-third majority in the National Assembly. However, the regime replaced it, urging a compliant Supreme Court to declare the 2015 National Assembly to be "in contempt" and calling for the election of a constituent national assembly in 2017, putting a final nail in the coffin of Venezuela democracy (Lopez Maya, 2024). The latter was completely controlled by the PSUV and other *Chavista* parties and assumed legislative responsibilities, operating in parallel with the National Assembly. The constituent assembly was dissolved when a new parliament consisting almost entirely of members of the PSUV (253 out of 277 seats) and other pro-Maduro parties was elected in December 2020.

Suppression of the political opposition

Autocrats resort to strategies of repression and cooptation of opposition organizations perceived as a threat to the political regime (Levitsky and Way, 2010). In contrast to electoral/ moderate autocracies, where the regime allows some opposition parties into the political

system to "tame" them, hardline autocracies in our study have engaged in blatant repression, banning political parties, and arresting some of their leaders and members.

In Egypt, opposition parties have been forbidden or their activities severely restricted after the 2013 military coup. Among them the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Freedom and Justice Party, was banned and the whole movements declared a terrorist organization. The regime tolerates small parties, but authorities suppress any attempt at genuine political dissent. As case in point, dozens of politicians and activists who tried to launch an electoral coalition (Coalition for Hope) to compete in the 2020 parliamentary elections were arrested and charged with plotting against the state (HRW 2021). It follows that several opposition parties boycott formal politics and prioritize activism in informal political spaces in collaboration with civil society (Dunne and Hamzawy, 2017). President al-Sisi called for a National Dialogue with a few select opposition groups in May 2022, although it did not kick off until a year later and was shortly thereafter interrupted. Political analysts agree that the National Dialogue was aimed at coopting the opposition and improving Egypt's external image (Ziada, 2023).

The Cambodian government suppresses opposition parties. In 2017, the Supreme Court dissolved the CNRP, convicted its leaders, and banned a hundred of the party representatives from political life for five years. A new opposition party was founded as a result, the Candlelight Party, which was prevented from contesting the July 2023 elections, and several of its members were arrested.

In Cameroon, opposition parties remain divided between participation and boycott. The main opposition parties are the Cameroon Renaissance Movement, which boycotted the 2020 parliamentary elections, and two parliamentary parties, the Social Democratic Front (5 seats), which has its strongest support in the Anglophone part of the country and the Cameroon Democratic Union (4 seats), rooted in the home region of the deceased party leader Ndam Njoya, who ran in four presidential elections. Opposition figures and activists suffer from frequent harassment, intimidation, and arrests (FH, 2023).

In Venezuela, opposition parties are numerous and vary in terms of ideology and political agendas and are equally divided between participation in formal politics and boycott (Latouche, 2019). The regime cracks down heavily on the opposition and the arbitrary detention of opposition party leaders, including members of parliament, in violation of their immunity from prosecution, is common. In addition to repression, the regime manipulates intra-party relationships. For instance, the Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ) suspended the leaders of several parties like Democratic Action and Popular Will and replaced them with coopted party members. More recently, in August 2023, the TSJ intervened in the Communist party, appointing a new ad-hoc board to lead it. Despite this unfavorable situation, there have been some successful opposition alliances, notably the MUD formed in 2008, which won the 2015 legislative elections. The MUD was banned in 2018 and, as a result, the Democratic Unitary Platform and Free Venezuela Broad Front were created.[6] The regime approached the

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[6] The authorities rehabilitated the MUD in 2021 to allow the coalition to contest the local and regional elections of that year.

opposition through several rounds of negotiations, but, thus far, they did not lead to a democratic path for Venezuela.

Manipulation of the electoral process

Multi-party elections are essential for autocrats in their attempts to legitimize the political system. Nevertheless, elections are subject to an extensive menu of manipulation (Schedler, 2002), ranging from blatant electoral fraud (e.g. ballot-box stuffing and vote-buying) to more subtle practices such as inaccurate voter registration lists, obstacles to candidate registration, unequal access to campaign finance and media, "fake" election monitors, and lack of transparency in ballot counting, among others (Magaloni, 2010).

In the hardline autocracies under scrutiny here, elections are characterized by low or very low levels of electoral integrity. To begin with, the scheduling of elections has often been hostage to political manoeuvring on the part of the regime rather than following constitutional provisions, except for the Cambodian parliamentary elections. In Egypt, the call for presidential elections in 2014 and parliamentary in 2015 follows the roadmap drawn up by the military after the 2013 coup, although the order in which these elections were held was reversed (Rougier and Lacroix, 2016). The last Egyptian elections took place at the periodicity stipulated in the new 2014 constitution, with presidential elections held in 2018 and parliamentary in 2020. In Cameroon, the seven-year presidential term was respected in 2011 and 2018. In contrast, the last two parliamentary elections were postponed in 2012—for the preparation of a new electoral register and the introduction of a biometric electoral card— and in 2018—due to the political crisis triggered by the 2017 declaration of independence of Anglophone separatists—to finally take place in 2013 and 2020. Nevertheless, senatorial and presidential elections were held in 2018, while the election to the National Assembly was not conducted until 2020, together with municipal elections. These postponements are a way of de-mobilising voters (Eyenga, 2024). Lastly, Venezuela held periodical parliamentary elections until the victory of opposition parties in 2015. Maduro then maneuvered to replace the National Assembly, first with a constituent assembly in 2017 and later with the election to a new loyalist national assembly in December 2020. Nicolás Maduro had been appointed as president after the early presidential election that followed Chavez's death in 2013. Maduro was re-elected for a second six-year term in May 2018, a few months before the due end of his term.

As regards the way elections are conducted, the Perception Electoral Integrity Index (PEI) shows a low or very low level of electoral integrity, which has worsened over time, in the four countries. Likewise, international electoral observers report major irregularities in the elections, such as vote-buying, anomalies in ballot-counting, the bias of the electoral bodies, abuse of state resources in favor of the ruling party, unequal access to the media, disqualifications of opposition candidates or pressure to withdraw, arrest and/or harassment of opposition candidates and their followers.[7] Moreover, in the particular case of Cameroon,

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[7] See, for instance, reports on Kazakh elections by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); on Egypt's 2014 presidential elections by the EU Observation mission and Democracy International; on Venezuela's 2006 presidential elections by the Carter Center/Democracy International and Election Observation and Democracy Support (EODS), and, on Cambodia's 2008 parliamentary elections by EODS.

the 2018 elections (senatorial and presidential) and 2020 (National Assembly and local) were held in a situation of insecurity and violence in the Anglophone regions (Keutcheu, 2021).

Lastly, elections are intended to legitimize the authoritarian rulers providing large majorities for incumbents, with questionable percentages over 90 percent in Egypt and 70 percent in Cameroon. In Venezuela, Chávez was reelected with 67.84 percent of the vote in 2018 after banning the main opposition candidates.[8] In addition to inflating electoral success, actual support can be questioned due to the low voter turnout, especially in Egypt, where official turnout is below 30 percent in parliamentary elections. Venezuela's elections following the 2017 institutional crisis also saw record-low turnout, both in the 2018 presidential (45.74 percent) and the 2020 parliamentary elections (30.46 percent). In Cameroon, the scenario of violence and insecurity in the 2018 legislative elections and the 2020 presidential elections resulted in a significant decline in voter turnout, respectively 45.74 and 43 percent. Turnout is higher in Cambodia, although the 82.89 percent figure in the 2018 parliamentary elections is highly questionable.

Concentration of power in the executive and absence of checks and balances

The process of authoritarian deepening entails a furthering of the powers held by the executive and the absence of effective checks and balances, due to the executive's control over the legislative and judicial branches.

Extensive executive powers

The prime minister of Cambodia and the presidents of Egypt, Cameroon, and Venezuela possess wide-ranging powers, leading to a parliamentary system dominated by prime minister in Cambodia and hyper-presidential systems—despite the existence of the figure of a prime minister—in the other countries. In addition, incumbents have launched constitutional amendments to extend presidential terms or remove term limits to remain in power or, in the case of Cambodia, to impose the chosen successor.

Unlike other authoritarian monarchical regimes, the role of the king in Cambodia is purely symbolic. The prime minister Hun Sen has been the most powerful political figure in the country since he was appointed to the role in 1985. He managed to retain power—as second-prime minister—after reaching an agreement with the royalist FUNCINPEC party, winner of the 1993 parliamentary elections. Hun Sen overthrew the first-prime minister Norodom Ranariddh in a 1997 coup and has since monopolized power until his resignation in 2023. Constitutional amendments in 2022 paved the way for Hun Sen's "dynastic succession" to his second-eldest son, clarifying the procedures for replacing a prime minister upon resignation or death, and allowing the ruling party to select a prime minister without parliamentary

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[8] After Chávez's death, Maduro secured a narrow victory (50.62 percent) over opposition candidate Henrique Capriles in the 2013 presidential elections.

approval.[9] Previously, the CPP's central committee unanimously had nominated Hun Sen's son, General Hun Manet, to be the party's candidate for prime minister for when Hun Sen would leave office (Lawrence, 2022). Following the 2023 July parliamentary elections, Hun Sen resigned, and Hun Manet was appointed prime minister.

In Egypt, the adoption of a new constitution in January 2014 restored the wide powers of the presidency. The Egyptian president is the head of state, the head of the executive branch and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. The president appoints up to five per cent of the members of the House of Representatives and has the right to issue or object to laws. He also appoints the prime minister, and the ministers of justice, interior and defense. A constitutional reform in 2019 lengthened the presidential term from four to six years and, although the limit of two consecutive terms remains, a constitutional clause would allow al-Sisi to stay in power until 2030 (Szmolka, 2017b).

Cameroon's 1996 constitution confers extensive powers on the president, including the appointment of the prime minister, ministers, military senior officers, judges, governors, and other local officials. The president enacts laws and dissolves the National Assembly. The president also enjoys vaguely defined emergency powers, such as any measures considered necessary. A 2008 constitutional amendment helped Paul Biya, president since 1982, maintain his hold on power, eliminating term limits and granting immunity him for any act committed in an official capacity during his time in office (Enonchong, 2022).

In Venezuela, President Chávez promulgated the 1999 constitution, which gave the president greater powers, including the power to legislate on citizens' rights, promote military officers and oversee economic and financial affairs. The new constitution also extended the presidential term from five to six years and allowed the president to be re-elected for up to two terms. However, a 2009 constitutional amendment removed term limits and Chávez was reelected for a fourth term in 2012 (Alarcón and Hidalgo, 2023). After Chávez's death in March 2013, the vice-president Nicolás Maduro assumed the presidency before being officially appointed after the April 2013 presidential elections. His re-election in undemocratic circumstances in 2018 triggered a political crisis resulting in two parallel governments in Venezuela. On the one hand, the legitimate opposition-controlled National Assembly—elected in 2015—contested the presidential election and declared Maduro's presidency "ineffective." In accordance with constitutional provisions, Juan Guaidó, president of the National Assembly and leader of the main opposition party (Popular Will), assumed the interim presidency of Venezuela. Guaidó's government was recognized by about 50 countries, including most of the ones in Latin America, the United States and the European Union. On the other hand, Nicolás Maduro managed to retain *de facto* power in Venezuela, and his government received recognition from about 20 countries, including Cuba, China, Russia, Turkey, and Nicaragua. Guaido's inability to achieve democratic change caused the 2015 national assembly to vote to remove him as president and dissolve his parallel government, with the EU and other countries rescinding their recognition in December 2022.

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[9] The 2022 constitutional changes also affect the rules by which governments can be formed, limiting the prerogative to form coalition governments solely to the party that wins the largest number of seats in the National Assembly. Cambodia's constitution has been amended up to ten times since its adoption in 1993, including a major reform in 1999 and other minor amendments for procedural or political reasons. For example, a constitutional amendment banned anyone with a second (or third) nationality from holding the office of prime minister or chairing other high state institutions, targeting members of opposition parties.

Executive control over parliament and judiciary

In addition to the broad powers of the heads of the executive, authoritarian deepening manifests itself in the executive's control over the legislature and the judiciary, rendering it practically unaccountable.

The executive dominates parliament through hegemonic parties or coalitions, which provide the government with large majorities. Hence, the parliaments of the four countries are compliant bodies with no real capacity for legislative initiative. Although parliament has formally the power to impeach the president and/or pass a no-confidence vote against the government, the executive remains unaccountable due to the parliament's docile nature. In the case of Venezuela, when opposition parties secured a two-thirds majority in the elections to the National Assembly in 2015, Maduro maneuvered to replace the legitimate chamber, first with the election of a constituent assembly in 2017, which gave itself legislative powers; and later, with a new National Assembly voted in December 2020, whose members are almost exclusively regime supporters.

The executive also wields great influence over the judiciary through the appointment of key judges. In Egypt, the 2019 constitutional amendments increased the president's control over the judiciary, which had had long enjoyed a degree of independence. The president now has the authority to appoint the heads of the main judicial bodies. He chairs the Supreme Council for Judicial Bodies and Entities, charged of appointing the prosecutor-general and administering judges' promotions and transfers. In addition, judges' recruitment follows strict security practices, with the General Intelligence Directorate and the Administrative Prosecution Agency screening candidates on the basis of political convictions (BS, 2022). Likewise, in Cameroon, the president is responsible for judges' appointments, promotions, and disciplinary sanctions under the advice of the Higher Judicial Council, which is chaired and mostly appointed by him. He also appoints the members of the Constitutional Court (BS, 2022). Lastly, in Venezuela, the collusion of the judiciary with Chávez's executive has gone even further under Maduro (Alarcón and Hidalgo, 2023). The National Assembly has powers in the appointment of judges of the Supreme Court and other key judicial officers, which were strengthened by a 2022 legal reform. Most of the judicial appointments made in 2015 and 2022 were political motivated (FH 2022) and served Maduro well in his stand-off with the opposition over the legitimacy of the national assembly.

Consequently, the Rule of Law index shows a deterioration of the check and balance system in these countries over the last decade. Venezuela currently occupies the lowest position in the ranking, Cambodia second-to-last, and Egypt and Cameroon fifth and sixth from the bottom.

Shrinking political rights and freedoms

Authoritarian deepening also entails blatant repression and increasing restrictions on political rights and civil liberties. Although each country's constitution guarantees the freedoms of association, assembly, and speech, these freedoms are limited in practice by repressive laws.

Freedoms of assembly and association

Freedom of assembly is subject to tight restrictions. Authorities frequently prohibit or break up peaceful assemblies, detaining their participants for public order and security offences. Moreover, authorities often resort to violence to repress protests. Egypt's Law 107 issued in November 2013 grants security officials discretion to ban any protest or meeting of more than 10 people on very vague grounds, including meetings related to electoral campaigning (HRW 2013). Furthermore, the 2020 amendment to the emergency law has conferred the president the power to ban both private and public gatherings.[10] Security forces often violently disperse peaceful gatherings, even when not politically motivated. The protest camps in support of the deposed president Morsi were severely crushed, resulting in more than a thousand deaths (Elsharkawy, 2023). In Cameroon, in the wake of the fighting against Boko Haram, a 2014 anti-terrorism law was issued substantially restricting freedom of assembly and other civil rights and freedoms. The government's response to the 2016-2017 demonstrations demanding independence in the Anglophone areas led to an armed conflict, which is still ongoing. Additionally, the government repeatedly targets opposition gatherings. For instance, the leader and 350 supporters of the opposition party CRM were arrested after they intended to hold demonstrations in 2019. More than 500 political activists were also arrested in the 2020 protests against the government's decision to organize regional elections (HRW, 2022; BS, 2022).

In Cambodia, the Law on Peaceful Demonstrations passed in 2009 makes it easier to prohibit demonstrations and limits the number of protesters to 200 people. The security forces suppressed the 2013-2014 protests, held to denounce widespread frauds in the 2013 legislative elections, as well as the 2021 anti-government demonstrations (FH, 2022; BS, 2022). Politically motivated protests are more common in Venezuela than in the other countries, but no less the target of repression. The 2010 Law on Political Parties, Public Meetings, and Demonstrations for example grants authorities the power to order demonstrations or public meetings to be held in different locations and times on the grounds they may disrupt public order. Moreover, the use of force against demonstrators is often disproportionate and violent.

Restrictive legislation and governing practices also limit the right of association. Opposition figures, human rights activists, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are often subjected to interference, intimidation, and harassment, if not criminal prosecution. In Egypt, the 2019 amendment to the law on NGOs prohibits Egyptians from participating in civic activities without first registering their organization with the government. The law also constrains their activities even more broadly, bans groups from working with foreign

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[10] The state of emergency was reinstated in April 2017 and repeatedly renewed until October 2021.

organizations, and allows the government to freeze assets, impose fines or dissolve organizations for a wide range of vague violations (HRW 2019). In Cameroon, the 2020 law amending and supplementing the 1990 Association Law did not result in a significant improvement in the exercise of this right. The Minister of Territorial Administration may dissolve any association whose activities undermine public order or the security of the state. Thus, in January 2017 Cameroon's authorities banned two Anglophone advocacy groups for openly supporting secessionist claims (HRW, 2022; BTI, 2022). In Cambodia, the Law on Association and Non-Governmental Organizations issued in 2015 allows the Ministry of Interior to deregister associations and organizations. The majority of associations and interest groups are linked to the patronage system of the ruling party, and harassment and arrests of independent activists and NGOs workers are common, preventing the formation of a civic space of opposition (Loughlin, 2021). Opposition activists are regularly prosecuted; a mass trial opened for instance in January 2021 against 130 opposition activists, consisting mostly of former members and supporters of the CNRP, for allegedly plotting an attack against the government in 2019. In Venezuela, organizations must register with a body attached to the Venezuelan Ministry of Interior, Justice, and Peace. They also are required to disclose information on their domestic or foreign donors, and to list the foreign partner organizations with which they collaborate (IFHR, 2021).

Freedoms of speech and press

Unsurprisingly, press freedom is undermined too. The media sector is dominated by pro-government outlets, and the owners are businesspeople linked to the regime or, in the case of Egypt, tied to the military and intelligence services. Censorship and/or self-censorship prevail, especially among print media journalists. Critical journalists face harassment, arrests, criminal prosecution, or threat of license withdrawal. The authorities also exercise tight control over the internet and social media, blocking access to websites or social network providers, monitoring the content of social media, and prosecuting critical bloggers. In fact, both the Press Freedom Index and the Freedom of the Net Index show a decline in country scores over the entire study period.

In Egypt, the constitution itself authorizes censorship of the media during times of war or social mobilization. The 2018 Media Regulation Law also permits censorship without judicial approval and provides for prison sentences for journalists who "incite violence." According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Egypt is one of the countries with the most journalists jailed because of their work (CPJ, 2023). Regarding freedom on the Internet, the same law requires any blogger or individual with 5,000 or more followers on social media platforms to register with the state. Additionally, the 2018 Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law allows authorities to block any website considered to be a threat to national security. All this legislation has been used to detain journalists, bloggers and social media users, as well as block hundreds of news and human rights websites without judicial orders for their comments criticizing the ruling elite (HRW, 2021; HRW, 2023).

Although Cameroon has one of the richest media landscapes in Africa in terms of number of newspapers, radio stations and television channels, producing independent and critical reporting is very challenging (RSF, 2023). The National Communication Council, a media

regulatory body whose members are appointed by presidential decree, frequently bans newspapers and sanctions journalists for reporting on censored issues and spreading allegedly false information. The 2014 anti-terrorism law has been used to prosecute journalists and limit coverage of government activities during the fight against Boko Haram in northern Cameroon, the ongoing Anglophone crisis, and anti-government protests. Additionally, the government regularly disrupts internet services in Anglophone regions.

In Cambodia, several private print and broadcast outlets rely on the ruling party (CPP) (Loughlin, 2021). The criminal code introduced in 2010 is used to prosecute critical journalists, politicians and other critics in defamation and libel cases. The government has cracked down on independent media, such as the closure of the independent Cambodia Daily in 2017 and the forced change of ownership of the *Phnom Penh Post* to a Malaysian investor linked to Hun Sen in 2018. Recently, the government revoked the licenses of three digital media outlets after they published stories on government corruption (FH, 2023). Lastly, a Committee for Journalism Ethics, mostly staffed with government officials, was created in 2021 to monitor the ethical conduct of journalists and media outlets and report to the Information Ministry (FH, 2023).

Finally, although most of the Venezuelan media are privately owned, only a few independent print media and radio stations survive. Maduro's regime maintains a broad state-owned communications infrastructure as a tool for political and ideological propaganda (FH, 2022). The 2004 Law on Social Responsibility on Radio and Television—electronic media were added in 2010—exercises control over media content that could "entice felonies", "create social distress", or "question the legitimate constituted authority." Lastly, the regime oversees the internet through the National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL), restricting or disrupting access to websites or social network providers (BS, 2022).

Conclusions

In bridging the literatures on authoritarian resilience in MENA countries and autocratization in comparative politics, the article focused on the dimensions of authoritarian deepening as an empirical referent of authoritarian resilience. The current debate between autocratization, democratic backsliding and, more recently, democratic resilience (Levitsky and Way, 2023) should not obscure the fact that several authoritarian regimes have become even more authoritarian. Although such regimes had in the past survived through some sort of liberalization through an upgrade of their authoritarian nature, they are increasingly deepening their authoritarianism through both old and new authoritarian practices ranging from the resurrection of hegemonic parties to the use of violence against the opposition to the employment of new technologies to monitor dissent. Although authoritarian deepening is often associated with the autocracies in the Middle East and Africa, it has become a global feature, and the MENA literature can contribute to explain why and how this has occurred.

In addition to provide a definition of the concept of "authoritarian deepening" that contributes to autocratization studies, our research provides evidence that the patterns of authoritarian deepening are not dissimilar across regions and that authoritarian practices

unfold less subtly than in the past, with the progressive elimination of political competition, greater concentration of power in the executive (Baturo et al., 2024), and the degradation of public rights and civil freedoms.

When it comes to political competition, hegemonic parties or coalitions play a significant role in authoritarian deepening, harking back to the times of single parties used as a transmission belt for the ruling elites to the population and for recruitment/cooptation into it. In this respect, façade tolerance and pluralism have also receded, with regimes employing greater blatant repression, disqualifying opposition candidates, banning opposition parties, and arresting their leaders and members. With it, there has also been a return to an extensive manipulation of the electoral processes, resulting in a low or very low quality of the elections.

Although autocrats had never really relinquished their executive powers, authoritarian deepening is manifested through the increasing concentration of extensive powers in the head of the executive. Incumbents more brazenly resort to constitutional amendments to remain in power or, in the case of Cambodia, to secure a "dynastic succession" in the office of prime minister. Presidents of the three republics studied and Cambodia's prime minister exercise control over all branches of government, with no effective system of checks and balance. The legislature does not put any constraint to the laws initiated by the executive, nor does it exercise any oversight, since there is no genuine opposition. The appointment of judges close to the political regime also results in a pliant judiciary, leading to the outlawing of opposition parties, the sentencing of political opponents, or the issuance of partisan rulings.

Finally, authoritarian deepening sees increasing restrictions on political rights and civil liberties. Although each country's constitution theoretically guarantees freedom of association, assembly, and speech, in practice these freedoms are limited by repressive laws. Authorities frequently prohibit or break up peaceful assemblies, detaining their participants for public order and security offences. Moreover, the use of force against demonstrators is often disproportionate and violent. Opposition figures, human rights activists and NGOs are often subjected to interference, intimidation, and harassment, if not criminal prosecution. Lastly, press freedom is undermined by a dominant pro-government media sector, censorship and/or self-censorship, and harassment and criminal prosecution of critical journalists. The authorities also exercise tight control over the internet and social media, blocking access to websites or social network providers, monitoring the content of social media, and prosecuting activist bloggers.

There are at least two important implications for all of this. First, Carothers' twenty-year old (2002) insight about the end of the transition paradigm has been confirmed. Despite the discussions around democratic resilience, democracies and quasi-democracies do not seem to be progressing and in fact even democratic countries are experiencing a loss of both domestic and international legitimacy amid growing social inequalities undermining the political system (Hopkin, 2020) at home and considerable disregard for democratic liberal values abroad. This degradation of democratic institutions together with processes of authoritarian deepening suggest a slow, but increasingly visible convergence of how countries are being governed (Cavatorta, 2010), as repressive practices become similar—although to different degrees—and political institutions seem unable to deal with the unconstitutional

methods of increasingly personalistic regimes (Baturo et al., 2024). Second, authoritarian deepening—as well as democratic backsliding—are not unchallenged. Although our empirical evidence shows that deepening is taking place, we have also outlined that several of the measures autocratic regimes put in place are necessary because there is considerable opposition to them in civil society, in some state institutions, in the media and other institutions such unions or universities. There is therefore the necessity to examine also actors, strategies, and conditions for resisting autocratization and triggering democratic change in seemingly unfavorable scenarios such as hardline autocracies.

Table 3. Comparative Analysis of the Processes of Authoritarian Deepening

	Egypt	Cameroon	Venezuela	Cambodia
Form of government	Republic Hyper-presidential system	Republic Hyper-presidential system	Republic Hyper-presidential system	Monarchy Parliamentary system with dominance of the Prime Minister
Main political actor	President Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011) Acting President (SCAF) Mohamed Hussein Tantawi (2011-2012) President Morsi (2012-2013) Acting President Adly Mansour (2013-2014) President Abdelfataf al-Sisi (2014-in office)	President Paul Biya (1982-in office)	President Hugo Chávez (1999-2013) President Nicolás Maduro (2013-in office)	Prime Minister Hun Sen (1985-2023) Hun Manet (2023-in office)
Presidency term	Two consecutive 6-year term (since 2019)	Seven-year term (no limit)	Six-year term (unlimited since 2009)	-
Constitutional processes	Interim constitution: 2011 New constitutions: 2012 (suspended); 2014 (in force) Constitutional reform: 2019	(Constitution of 1972 in force) Constitutional amendments: 2008	(Constitution of 1999 in force) Constitutional amendments: 2009	(Constitution of 1993 in force) Constitutional amendments; 2006; 2008; 2014, 2018; 2021; 2022
Party-system Classification Ruling party (% seats)	Hegemonic Nation's Future Party (53% seats)	Hegemonic Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (84.4%)	Hegemonic United Socialist Party of Venezuela (91.34)	Hegemonic Cambodian People's Party (96 %)
Political opposition Political regime attitude towards opposition Unity of opposition Main opposition parties	Repression Opposition fragmented Coalitions: the Civic Democratic Movement (Reform and Development Party; the Popular Socialist Alliance Party; Al-Destur Party; Al-Adl Party; the Egyptian Social Democratic Party; al-Karama Party; Masr El-Horreya Party; Bread and Freedom Party; Others parties: Strong Egypt; Socialist People's Alliance; Conservative Party; National Conciliation Party	Repression Fragmented Cameroon Renaissance Movement; Social Democratic Front; Cameroon Democratic Union	Repression; cooptation; manipulation Fragmented Parties: Popular Will; Democratic Action; Justice First; A New Era Coalitions: Democratic Unity Roundtable; Democratic Unitary Platform; Free Venezuela Broad Front; Democratic Alliance	Repression Fragmented Cambodia National Rescue Party; Candlelight Party; Grassroots Democratic Party; Khmer Will Party; Cambodia Reform Party; Cambodia National Heart Party

Presidential elections (year)

Periodicity / Electoral integrity, PEI (0-100) / Electoral turnout (%) / Vote for the winner candidate (%)	Egypt				Cameroon		Venezuela			
year	2005	2012	2014	2018	2011	2018	2006	2012	2013	2018
Periodicity	1st plur.	D	E	P	P	P	P	P	E	E
Electoral integrity, PEI (0-100)	*	*	40	35	*	34	*	54	33	27
Electoral turnout (%)	22.95	51.85	47.45	40.79	64.03	53.85	73.97	80.6	79.63	45.74
Vote for the winner candidate (%)	88.57	51.73	96.90	97.08	77.83	71.28	62.85	55.07	50.62	67.84

Low chamber elections (year)

Periodicity / Electoral integrity, PEI (0-100) / Electoral turnout	Egypt					Cameroon			Venezuela				Cambodia			
year	2005	2010	2011	2015	2020	2007	2013	2020	2005	2010	2015	2020	2008	2013	2018	2023
Periodicity	P	P	E	E	P	P	D	D	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Electoral integrity, PEI (0-100)	*	*	*	45	*	*	46	31	*	*	42	36	*	32	29	*
Electoral turnout	28.1	27.5	44.9	28.3	29	64.03	76.79	43.79	25.26	66.42	73.76	30.46	75.21	68.49	82.89	84.59

Parliament Number of Parliamentary Parties Political parties >5% seats Autonomy from the executive	Egypt	Cameroon	Venezuela	
	13 2 + independents Dependent	8 1 Dependent	National Assembly elected in 2020 7 1 Dependent	

Executive powers	6		7		6		7	
Executive power index, CCN (0-7)								
Judiciary system								
Autonomy from the executive	Depend		Depend		Dependent		Dependent	
Rule of law index (0-100)	ent		ent					
2015 (102 countries)		86		97	0.32	102	0.37	99
2016 (113 countries)	0.44	100	0.40	109	0.28	113	0.33	112
2017-2018 (113 countries)	0.37	110	0.37	109	0.29	113	0.32	112
2019 (126 countries)	0.36	121	0.37	120	0.28	126	0.32	125
2020 (128 countries)	0.36	125	0.38	124	0.27	128	0.33	127
2021 (139 countries)	0.36	136	0.36	135	0.27	139	0.32	138
2022 (140 countries)	0.35	135	0.35	134	0.26	140	0.31	139
	0.35		0.36					
Freedom of expression								
RSF index (0-100; 180 countries)								
2013	51.34	158	65.22	120	65.56	117	58.19	143
2015	49.83	158	60.37	133	59.39	137	59.01	139
2017	44.22	161	58.41	130	57.06	137	57.93	132
2019	43.53	163	56.68	131	50.90	148	54.01	143
2021	43.83	166	56.22	135	52.4	148	53.16	144
2023	33.37	166	45.58	138	36.99	159	42.02	147
Freedom of the Net (score/status)								
2011	46	Partly Free	*	*	54	Partly Free	*	*
2014	40	Partly Free			44	Partly Free	53	Partly Free
2017	32	Not free			37	Not free	48	Partly Free
2020	26	Not free			28	Not free	43	Partly Free
2022	27	Not free			30	Not free	43	Partly Free

Table compiled by the authors.

*No data

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SUPPLEMENTARY FILE
Table A.1. BTPI's scores and regime classification for MENA political regimes (2006-2022 reports)

	2024		2022		2020		2018		2016		2014		2012		2010		2008		2006	
	Score	Reg.	Score	Reg.	Score	Reg.	Score	Reg.	Score	Reg.	Score	Reg.	Score	Reg.	Score	Reg.	Score	Reg.	Score	Reg.
Middle East and North Africa																				
Algeria	4.60	MA	4.65	MA	4.70	MA	4.75	MA	4.80	MA	4.80	MA	4.30	MA	4.37	MA	4.27	MA	4.27	MA
Bahrain	3.22	HA	3.07	HA	3.00	HA	3.23	HA	3.48	HA	3.65	HA	4.35	MA	4.42	MA	4.63	MA	4.92	MA
Egypt	**3.42**	**HA**	**3.37**	**HA**	**3.50**	**HA**	**3.70**	**HA**	**3.93**	**HA**	**4.92**	**MA**	**4.08**	**MA**	**4.22**	**MA**	**4.40**	**MA**	**4.12**	**MA**
Iran	2.78	HA	2.88	HA	2.88	HA	2.92	HA	2.97	HA	3.13	HA	3.25	HA	3.45	HA	3.73	HA	3.75	HA
Iraq	4.40	MA	4.13	MA	3.97	HA	3.60	HA	3.45	HA	4.10	HDD	4.40	HDD	4.22	HDD	3.20	HA	2.68	HA
Jordan	4.03	MA	4.10	MA	4.32	MA	4.37	MA	4.03	MA	4.10	MA	3.92	HA	4.02	MA	3.98	HA	4.10	MA
Kuwait	4.53	MA	4.65	MA	4.70	MA	4.50	MA	4.38	MA	4.70	MA	4.95	MA	4.68	MA	4.08	MA	*	*
Lebanon	5.25	HDD	5.35	HDD	5.30	HDD	4.87	MA	5.70	HDD	6.00	DD	6.15	DD	6.25	DD	6.25	DD	5.60	HDD
Libya	2.05	HA	2.40	HA	2.45	HA	2.57	HA	2.38	HA	4.13	MA	3.10	HA	3.20	HA	2.98	HA	3.00	HA
Morocco	3.52	HA	3.58	HA	3.68	HA	3.80	HA	3.83	HA	4.00	MA	3.90	HA	4.05	MA	4.40	MA	4.48	MA
Oman	2.85	HA	2.95	HA	2.90	HA	3.00	HA	3.22	HA	3.32	HA	3.88	HA	3.98	HA	3.63	HA	*	*
Qatar	3.95	HA	3.90	HA	3.90	HA	3.73	HA	3.83	HA	4.00	MA	4.08	MA	4.20	MA	*	*	*	*
Saudi Arabia	2.73	HA	2.50	HA	2.45	HA	2.57	HA	2.52	HA	2.73	HA	2.77	HA	2.87	HA	2.72	HA	2.57	HA
Syria	1.75	HA	1.80	HA	1.80	HA	1.75	HA	1.70	HA	2.03	HA	3.18	HA	3.23	HA	2.60	HA	3.00	HA
Tunisia	4.98	MA	6.55	DD	6.55	DD	6.50	DD	6.30	DD	5.80	HDD	3.85	HA	3.78	HA	3.95	HA	3.83	HA
Turkey	4.23	MA	4.80	MA	4.92	MA	5.55	HDD	7.25	DD	7.55	DD	7.65	DD	7.65	DD	7.05	DD	7.05	DD
UAE	4.10	MA	4.10	MA	3.90	HA	4.00	MA	3.95	HA	3.95	HA	4.17	MA	4.15	MA	3.47	HA	3.20	HA
Yemen	1.57	HA	1.50	HA	1.50	HA	1.80	HA	2.82	HA	3.27	HA	3.70	HA	4.23	MA	3.90	HA	4.07	MA

Source: Elaborated by the authors, according to the BPTI

Table A.2. BTPI's scores and regime classification for autocracies at 2022 (2006-2022 reports)

	2024		2022		2020		2018		2016		2014		2012		2010		2008		2006	
	Score	Reg.	Score	Reg.	Score	Reg.	Score	Reg.	Score	Reg.	Score	Reg.	Score	Reg.	Score	Reg.	Score	Reg.	Score	Reg.
Sub-Sahara Africa																				
Angola	4.45	MA	4.60	MA	4.65	MA	4.20	MA	4.25	MA	4.55	MA	4.88	MA	4.87	MA	3.97	HA	3.38	HA
Benin	5.48	MA	5.48	MA	7.75	DD	7.85	DD	7.55	DD	7.55	DD	7.70	DD	7.70	DD	7.90	DD	7.60	DD
Burkina Faso	3.88	HA	5.85	HDD	6.20	DD	6.40	DD	4.73	MA	5.23	MA	5.17	MA	5.17	MA	6.25	DD	5.27	MA
Burundi	3.55	HA	3.55	HA	3.70	HA	3.80	HA	4.62	MA	4.72	MA	5.15	HDD	5.33	HDD	5.80	HDD	3.63	HA
Cameroon	**3.57**	**HA**	**3.62**	**HA**	**3.55**	**HA**	**3.92**	**HA**	**3.80**	**HA**	**4.08**	**MA**	**4.02**	**MA**	**4.02**	**MA**	**4.02**	**MA**	**4.08**	**MA**
Central Afr. Rep.	3.55	HA	3.40	HA	3.55	HA	3.60	HA	3.20	HA	3.32	HA	3.78	HA	3.58	HA	3.93	HA	3.22	HA
Chad	2.37	HA	3.00	HA	2.93	HA	3.45	HA	3.50	HA	3.45	HA	3.13	HA	2. 83	HA	2.83	CHA	3.53	HA
Congo, DR	3.67	HA	3.67	HA	3.52	HA	3.47	HA	3.40	HA	3.25	HA	3.60	HA	3.55	HA	3.72	HA	2.60	HA
Congo, Rep.	3.35	HA	3.35	HA	3.30	HA	3.25	HA	3.45	HA	3.67	HA	3.57	HA	3.53	HA	3.63	HA	*	*
Côte d'Ivoire	4.88	MA	4.83	MA	5.80	HDD	5.80	HDD	5.50	HDD	4.88	HDD	2.98	HA	3.20	HA	2.90	HA	2.85	HA
Djibuti	3.62	HA	3.67	HA	3.78	HA	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Equatorial Guinea	2.88	HA	2.77	HA	2.82	HA	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Eritrea	2.02	HA	2.12	HA	2.12	HA	2.12	HA	2.07	HA	2.08	HA	2.13	HA	2.68	HA	2.60	HA	3.22	HA
Eswatini	3.40	HA	3.48	HA	3.58	HA	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Ethiopia	3.72	HA	3.78	HA	4.00	MA	3.02	HA	3.23	HA	3.37	HA	3.68	HA	3.53	HA	4.17	MA	4.13	MA
Gabon	4.70	MA	4.65	MA	4.70	MA	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Guinea	4.37	MA	4.85	MA	5.95	HDD	6.05	DD	5.80	HDD	5.10	MA	5.63	HD	3.55	HA	3.98	HA	4,28	MA
Guinea-Bissau	5.15	MA	5.85	HDD	6.25	DD	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Madagascar	4.52	MA	4.57	MA	5.40	HDD	5.35	HDD	5.40	HDD	4.37	MA	4.45	MA	6.00	DD	7.45	DD	7.50	DD
Mali	3.40	MA	4.40	MA	5.80	HDD	5.95	HDD	5.85	HDD	4.25	MA	7.15	DD	7.15	DD	7.25	DD	7.35	DD
Mauritania	4.42	MA	4.42	MA	4.27	MA	4.22	MA	4.27	MA	4.40	MA	4.50	MA	3.63	HA	4.47	MA	*	*
Mozambique	4.13	MA	4.18	MA	4.48	MA	4.48	MA	5.60	HDD	6.10	DD	6.15	DD	6.35	DD	6.55	DD	6.95	DD
Nigeria	4.20	MA	4.25	MA	5.45	HDD	5,35	HDD	5.40	HDD	5.40	HDD	4.80	MA	4.77	MA	6-05	DD	6.05	DD
Rwanda	3.78	HA	3.83	HA	3.98	HA	3.88	HA	3.83	HA	3.95	HA	3.82	HA	4.03	MA	3.67	HA	4.27	MA
Somalia	1.68	HA	1.65	HA	1.48	HA	1.43	HA	1.50	HA	1.42	HA	1.27	HA	1.47	HA	1.43	HA	1.36	HA
Sudan	2.05	HA	3.02	HA	2.02	HA	2.23	HA	2.48	HA	2.45	HA	2.87	HA	3.02	HA	*	*	*	*
South Sudan	2.62	HA	2.67	HA	2.67	HA	2.62	HA	3.28	HA	3.73	HA	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Tanzania	4.90	MA	4.75	MA	6.05	DD	6.10	DD	6.15	DD	6.05	DD	6.30	DD	6.15	DD	6.85	DD	6.45	DD
Togo	4.87	MA	4.87	MA	4.87	MA	5.07	MA	4.80	MA	4.85	MA	5.00	MA	4.68	MA	3.90	HA	3.72	HA
Uganda	4.53	MA	4.85	MA	5.17	MA	5.43	MA	6.60	DD	6.90	DD	6.70	DD	6.85	DD	6.80	DD	5.30	MA
Zimbabwe	3.95	MA	4.10	MA	4.37	MA	3.83	HA	4.20	MA	4.38	MA	3.95	HA	3.95	HA	3.97	HA	3.97	HA

	2024		2022		2020		2018		2016		2014		2012		2010		2008		2006	
	Score (0-10)	Reg.	Score (0-10)	Reg.	Score (0-10)	Reg.	Score (0-10)	Reg.	Score (0-10)	Reg.	Score (0-10)	Reg.	Score (0-10)	Reg.	Score (0-10)	Reg.	Score (0-10)	Reg.	Score (0-10)	Reg.
Latin America and the Caribbean																				
Cuba	3.27	HA	3.53	HA	3.53	HA	3.58	HA	3.68	HA	3.62	HA	3.42	HA	3.47	HA	3.42	HA	3.37	HA
El Salvador	5.27	MA																		
Guatemala	3.90	MA	4.10	MA	4.05	MA	5.05	HDD	5.15	HDD	5.20	HDD	5.55	HDD	5.85	HDD	5.90	HDD	5.27	HDD
Haiti	2.48	HA	3.87	HA	4.22	MA	4.10	MA	3.75	HA	3.92	HA	3.67	HA	5.05	HDD	4.40	HDD	3.35	HA
Honduras	4.75	MA	4.42	MA	4.67	MA	5.80	HDD	6.55	DD	6.65	DD	6.40	DD	6.55	DD	6.65	DD	6.80	DD
Nicaragua	3.20	HA	3.65	HA	4.03	MA	4.92	MA	5.60	HDD	5.60	HDD	5.75	HDD	5.90	HDD	6.65	DD	6.65	DD
Venezuela	**3.08**	**HA**	**3.08**	**HA**	**3.08**	**HA**	**3.80**	**HA**	**4.02**	**MA**	**4.52**	**MA**	**4.40**	**MA**	**4.33**	**MA**	**4.78**	**MA**	**5.23**	**MA**
Post-Soviet Eurasia																				
Azerbaijan	3.58	HA	3.58	HA	3.43	HA	3.43	HA	3.48	HA	3.92	HA	4.02	MA	3.92	HA	3.80	HA	3.80	HA
Belarus	3.47	HA	3.97	HA	4.38	MA	4.33	MA	3.93	HA	3.93	HA	3.93	HA	4.08	MA	3.97	HA	3.93	HA
Kazakhstan	3.73	HA	3.78	HA	3.78	HA	3.80	HA	3.73	HA	3.85	HA	4.00	MA	4.17	MA	4.23	MA	4.18	MA
Kyrgyzstan	4.57	MA	5.55	HDD	6.10	DD	6.15	DD	5.95	HHD	5.80	HDD	5.43	HDD	4.35	MA	5.95	HDD	4.08	MA
Russia	3.43	MA	4.40	MA	4.50	MA	4.55	MA	4.40	MA	4.40	MA	5.35	HDD	5.25	HDD	5.35	HDD	5.70	HDD
Tajikistan	2.82	HA	2.92	HA	2.92	HA	2.98	HA	3.55	HA	3.60	HA	3.50	HA	3.67	HA	3.80	HA	3.45	HA
Turkmenistan	2.70	HA	2.70	HA	2.75	HA	2.85	HA	2.85	HA	2.78	HA	2.83	HA	2.78	HA	3.34	HA	2.58	HA
Uzbekistan	3.70	HA	3.73	HA	3.63	HA	3.17	HA	3.02	HA	2.85	HA	2.85	HA	2.90	HA	3.22	HA	3.13	HA
Asia																				
Afghanistan	1.87	HA	3.08	HA	3.28	HA	3.02	HA	3.02	HA	2.97	HA	2.75	HA	2.80	HA	3.42	HA	2.97	HA
Bangladesh	4.03	MA	4.25	MA	4.42	MA	4.62	MA	5.35	HDD	5.95	HDD	6.25	DD	6.05	DD	5.95	HDD	6.55	DD
Cambodia	**3.03**	**HA**	**3.08**	**HA**	**3.28**	**HA**	**3.57**	**HA**	**3.73**	**HA**	**3.77**	**HA**	**3.82**	**HA**	**4.10**	**MA**	**4.13**	**MA**	**4.00**	**MA**
China	3.18	HA	3.23	HA	3.33	HA	3.28	HA	3.28	HA	3.33	HA	3.32	HA	3.37	HA	3.15	HA	3.05	HA
Laos	3.08	HA	3.18	HA	2.97	HA	2.92	HA	2.90	HA	2.95	HA	2.83	HA	2.88	HA	2.78	HA	2.83	HA
Madagascar	4.52	MA	4.57	MA	5.40	HDD	5.35	HDD	5.40	HDD	4.37	MA	4.45	MA	6.00	DD	7.45	DD	7.50	DD
Myanmar	1.73	HA	3.15	HA	3.30	HA	3.50	HA	3.20	HA	3.00	HA	1.93	HA	1.72	HA	1.70	HA	1.65	HA
North Korea	2.55	HA	2.55	HA	2.65	HA	2.60	HA	2.60	HA	2.60	HA	2.60	HA	2.60	HA	2.65	HA	2.70	HA
Pakistan	3.65	HA	3.75	HA	3.75	HA	3.70	HA	3.70	HA	3.53	HA	3.43	HA	3.63	HA	3.65	HA	3.58	HA

Papua New Guinea	5.12	MA	6.10	DD	6.00	DD	6.30	DD	5.90	HDD	5.95	HDD	6.10	DD	6.35	DD	6.10	DD	6.00	DD
Singapore	5.47	MA	5.42	MA	5.32	MA	5.42	MA	5.37	MA	5.55	MA	5.32	MA	5.37	MA	5.37	MA	5-35	MA
Thailand	3.80	HA	3.85	HA	3.30	HA	3.25	HA	3.30	HA	5-05	HDD	4.73	MA	5.35	MA	4.92	MA	6.85	DD
Vietnam	3.63	HA	3.63	HA	3.57	HA	3.35	HA	3.52	HA	3.57	HA	3.50	HA	3.30	HA	3.15	HA	3.10	HA

Source: Elaborated by the authors, according to the BPTI

Notes: HDD, Highly Defected Democracy; DD, Defective Democracy; MA, Moderate Autocracy; HA, Hard-line autocracy

* No data for this year