

# Party Organizations and the Dynamics of Autocratic Rule: Co-optation, Repression, and Regime Change

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*To Günseli and Sinem.*

## **Abstract**

This dissertation is about political parties in autocracies. The recent institutionalist turn in comparative authoritarianism has renewed attention to the role of political parties by highlighting the strategic value of these institutions for autocratic leaders. Scholars suggest that political parties in autocracies enable autocrats to credibly commit to sharing power with or channeling state benefits to political elites and the masses, thereby helping autocrats to mitigate potential elite and mass dissent. Yet, research largely overlooks the issue that not all political parties have organizational features that can help autocrats achieve these objectives. Despite important advancements in the literature, scholars of autocracy have so far paid insufficient attention to the variation in explicit organizational features of political parties. By introducing the most comprehensive data set on party organizations covering more than 600 parties from 134 autocracies between 1970 and 2019, this dissertation addresses this gap. In individual articles, I theorize that the variation in party organizational features shapes autocrats' incentives and abilities to co-opt support, violently repress opponents, and institute democratizing reforms to maintain themselves in power. Taken together, individual articles demonstrate the importance of focusing on the organizational features of parties to fully understand how parties shape substantial political outcomes in autocracies.

## Svensk sammanfattning

Denna avhandling handlar om politiska partier i autokratier. Svängen mot institutionalism som skett under senare år inom jämförande auktoritärism har förnyat intresset för politiska partier och vilken strategisk roll dessa spelar för autokratiska ledare. Tidigare forskning pekar på att politiska partier i autokratier gör det möjligt för autokrater att trovärdigt förbinda sig att dela makten med, eller kanalisera statliga fördelar till, politiska eliter och folket, och att därigenom hjälpa autokrater att minska missnöje bland både eliter och folket. Tidigare forskning har dock i stort sett bortsett från det faktum att inte alla politiska partier har organisatoriska förutsättningar som kan hjälpa autokrater att uppnå dessa mål. Viktiga framsteg i litteraturen till trots har forskare inom autokratiområdet hittills ägnat otillräcklig uppmärksamhet åt variation i politiska partiernas organisatoriska struktur. Genom att introducera det mesta omfattande dataset om partiorganisationer, som täcker mer än 600 partier från 134 autokratier mellan 1970 och 2019, syftar avhandlingen till att fylla denna kunskapslucka. De enskilda artiklarna bygger på teorin om att variationen i partiernas organisatoriska drag formar autokraternas incitament och förmåga att adjungera stöd, att våldsamt förtrycka motståndare och att inrätta demokratiserande reformer för att behålla makten. Sammantaget visar artiklarna vikten av att fokusera på partiernas organisatoriska drag för att till fullo förstå hur partier påverkar substantiella politiska resultat i autokratier.

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Istanbul, April 2022

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# 1 Introduction

While not new to the history of authoritarianism, political parties, the central institutions of representative democracy, have now become an integral part of contemporary authoritarian regimes. Single-party autocracies that proscribe opposition parties' participation in elections (e.g., Tanzania before 1995 or Vietnam today) constituted the dominant form of autocracy from the aftermath of World War II until the 1990s. Today, most autocracies also allow for multiple parties to contest elections (e.g., Cambodia or Zimbabwe). Party-less autocracies like contemporary Saudi Arabia, Swaziland, or Uruguay under the military regime (1973-1984) have become increasingly rare. The proliferation of parties in autocratic settings has sparked an engaging research agenda on their causes and consequences. Unlike earlier studies, recent works hold that parties in autocratic regimes are more than mere window dressing institutions, having important consequences for substantial political outcomes. Research shows that autocracies with parties are more durable (Brownlee, 2007; Geddes, 2003; Magaloni, 2008); more likely to be replaced by democracies (Brownlee, 2009; Wright & Escribà-Folch, 2012); engage in fewer armed conflicts (Fjelde, 2010); enjoy higher economic growth (Gehlbach & Keefer, 2011); and provide more public goods than those without (Gandhi, 2008; Miller, 2015).

This dissertation contributes to the growing body of literature on the ways in which parties shape political outcomes in autocracies. Specifically, it investigates the consequences of party organizations for two well-known autocratic survival strategies (i.e., co-optation and repression) and one relatively less well-understood strategy: the implementation of substantial democratic reforms by autocrats and their allies to improve their prospects for clinging to power. Taken together, individual articles of the dissertation address the following overarching question: *How and to what extent do organizational features of both ruling and opposition parties affect autocratic survival strategies?*

The recent neo-institutionalist turn in the study of autocracy has renewed attention to the functions of political parties in autocracies by highlighting the strategic value of these institutions for autocratic leaders. Research suggests that political parties in autocracies enable autocrats to credibly commit to sharing power with or channeling state benefits to

political elites and the masses, thereby helping autocrats to mitigate potential elite and mass dissent (Boix & Svolik, 2013; Brownlee, 2007; Gandhi, 2008; Magaloni, 2008; Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010; Reuter, 2017). Yet, the conventional wisdom predominating in the neo-institutionalist literature largely assumes that both ruling and opposition parties have organizational attributes enabling them to function in ways that help autocrats maintain support from regime insiders and outsiders (i.e., ordinary citizens and opposition elites). For example, the literature generally assumes that all ruling parties have necessary organizational qualities that enable autocrats to credibly share power with or distribute rents to elites or the masses.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the literature typically treats opposition parties as organizationally weak entities that operate primarily as institutions that help autocrats credibly distribute rents to opposition elites and constituencies they represent.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, this dissertation demonstrates that both ruling and opposition parties vary substantially in key organizational features, and as a result, they do not always allow autocrats to co-opt elites and the masses. The dissertation shows that this has important consequences for how and to what extent parties contribute to autocratic stability and survival.

This dissertation is the first to demonstrate and exploit substantial variation in organizational characteristics of both ruling and opposition parties across autocratic regimes. The primary thesis of this study is that the variation in party organizational features such as decision-making structures, internal cohesion, and organizational extensiveness is key to understanding autocrats' incentives and abilities to co-opt support, repress opponents, or make substantial democratic concessions to appease dissidents as a strategy of survival.

The first article (Düpont, Kavasoglu, Lührmann, & Reuter, 2022) of the dissertation presents the V-Party data set and validates new measures that relate to parties' decision-making structures, internal cohesion, and grassroots organizations. The article follows Adcock and Collier's (2001) three-pronged validation approach, looking at content, criterion, and construct validity, to showcase and emphasize the potential of V-Party.

After validating V-Party indicators, Article 2-4 theorize and empirically demonstrate

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<sup>1</sup>Levitsky and Way (2010), Morse (2018), and Meng (2021) are notable exceptions.

<sup>2</sup>The literature on opposition party organizations in autocracies is still in its infancy. There are only a handful of works on organizational features of opposition parties in autocracies (e.g., Buckles, 2019; Greene, 2007; LeBas, 2014; Wegner, 2011).

how ruling and opposition party organizational features shape autocratic survival strategies. Article 2 (Kavasoglu, 2021) investigates why some opposition parties are successfully co-opted by autocrats but not others. I argue that opposition parties' organizational characteristics and their ideological positioning in an autocratic party system should significantly alter the strategic calculus of autocrats and opposition party elites in deciding whether or not to cooperate. Specifically, my argument suggests that organizationally extensive opposition parties and those that devolve internal decision-making authority from the party leadership to lower cadres are less likely to be co-opted, especially when they are ideologically distant from ruling elites. Empirical evidence corroborates this theory and sheds further light on the conditions under which opposition parties can facilitate or undermine the co-optation of opposition elites by autocrats.

Article 3 explains how ruling party organizational features shape autocrats' incentives and abilities to violently repress (potential) opponents to remain in power. Scholars have found that repression is more likely in the absence of power-sharing institutions such as ruling parties that are capable of constraining autocrats and co-opting support (Davenport, 2007b). Article 3 expands on this finding by specifying which organizational features of ruling parties reduce autocrats' use of repression. The article argues that where ruling parties have institutionalized collective-decision making structures and are endowed with extensive grassroots organizations, autocrats should rely less on repression to remain in power, because a) under such parties, autocrats should face greater constraints that raise the cost of repression and b) they should experience fewer instances of elite and mass dissent that necessitate repression. In addition, the article theorizes about the interactive effect of these two ruling party organizational features, suggesting that low levels of institutionalization combined with extensive grassroots structures should be associated with more repression. Article 3 provides empirical evidence in support of these theoretical expectations.

Article 4 (Kavasoglu, 2022) explains how parties shape prospects for democratization. An extensive set of contributions argue that strong ruling party organizations promote autocratic regime durability (e.g., Brownlee, 2007; Geddes, 2003; Levitsky & Way, 2010). Yet, we know little about how ruling parties shape the likelihood of a transition to democracy given a regime breakdown. Proceeding from existing insights suggesting that autocrats often choose

to democratize from a position of strength rather than weakness (Albertus & Menaldo, 2018; Riedl, Slater, Wong, & Ziblatt, 2020), Article 4 theorizes that ruling party strength is both a regime-stabilizing force and a democratizing force. Although strong ruling parties generally stabilize regimes, in the context of regime change, they tend to function as catalysts for the implementation of substantial democratizing reforms by autocrats in a top-down fashion to preempt opponents. This study augments recent work by Riedl et al. (2020) by theorizing about which features of ruling party organizations can help autocrats and factions among regime insiders to coordinate their efforts in leading democratization without descending into internal struggles or acquiescing to pressures from outsiders. The key point is that autocrats tend to be more willing and capable of making democratic concessions if they can rely on a strong ruling party organization that reduces the costs of embracing democracy for them and their accomplices. Article 4 lends further support to this expectation by providing the first quantitative evidence in favor of potentially democratizing effects of strong ruling parties.

The following sections situate the articles within the literature, introduce key concepts of the dissertation, summarize each article's theoretical arguments and findings, and provide an overview of the V-Party indicators that I utilize in individual articles. The chapter also aims to bring individual articles together by explaining how the dependent variables of each article are interconnected.

## 2 The Strategic Value of Parties for Autocrats

A key argument that has emerged in the literature is that parties play a critical role in promoting the survival of autocratic leaders and stability of their rule, primarily by helping them to co-opt elites and masses. This section reviews this literature.<sup>3</sup> I highlight that the existing research on parties in autocracies largely overlooks the organizational features of parties fundamental to explain whether and how parties help autocrats survive in power. In addressing this gap, the individual articles of the dissertation jointly establish that the overlooked variation in party organizational features has important consequences for auto-

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<sup>3</sup>The functions of parties highlighted in this review such as mass mobilization also apply to parties in democracies, but my review here is limited to the roles played by parties in autocratic contexts.

crats' strategic incentives and abilities to co-opt support, repress dissidents, or implement democratizing reforms to remain in power.

## 2.1 Regime threats, parties, and autocratic survival

The ultimate desire of all autocrats is to stay in power. To achieve this aim, autocrats need to maintain the support of powerful elites.<sup>4</sup> These elites typically play a central role in initiating the autocratic regime and placing the autocrat in power—as soldiers, economic elites, or members of a political party (Geddes, Wright, & Frantz, 2018; Svoblik, 2012). For autocrats, ensuring the support of powerful elites is important because these groups generally have access to resources and networks that can be effectively utilized to push for a leadership change (Haber, 2006; Roessler, 2011; Svoblik, 2012). Indeed, the majority of autocratic leaders fall because of coups organized by insider elites (Geddes et al., 2018; Svoblik, 2012). At the same time, autocrats also need to contain potential threats from outsiders (i.e., opposition elites, ordinary citizens) to prevent anti-regime collective action in society: the failure to do so can make them vulnerable to mass protests, civil wars, or opposition election victories (Bunce & Wolchik, 2011; Kim & Kroeger, 2019; Roessler, 2011; Schedler, 2013). Hence, mitigating potential threats from both within the regime and within society at large is vital for autocratic survival.

Autocrats can repress societal forces by restricting civil liberties such as freedom of speech, or assembly, raising costs of collective action on the part of opponents, or they can use security forces to violently crackdown on the masses (Davenport, 2007a). To prevent threats from regime insiders, they can use tactics such as targeting threatening elites through purges, imprisonments, or executions (Svoblik, 2012, p. 59; Geddes et al., 2018, p. 68; Bokobza, Krishnarajan, Nyrup, Sakstrup, & Aaskoven, 2021). While research finds that, on average, repression lowers the likelihood of a leader's overthrow (Escribà-Folch, 2013), scholars also show that it can be a costly strategy on the part of autocrats. Repression can incite mass rebellions (Moore, 1998) or elite defections resulting in coups (Bove & Rivera, 2015). It can also provoke international sanctions against the regime (Way & Levitsky, 2006), and reduce

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<sup>4</sup>Throughout the dissertation, I use powerful elites, regime insiders/insider elites, regime elites interchangeably.

economic productivity (Nafziger & Auvinen, 2002), limiting the regime's revenue streams and the extent of rents autocrats can extract from society. Furthermore, the use of repression usually requires autocrats to allocate sufficient power to the security services, which can eventually undermine their hold on power (Svolik, 2012; Wintrobe, 1998). Repression may work well for autocrats on the brink of overthrow, but it is rarely a long-term solution.

Few autocrats can survive by relying solely on repression. Given the risks of repression, most autocrats also seek to ensure support from powerful elites and larger segments of society. Even the most powerful or charismatic leaders need to secure the cooperation of political and economic elites, bureaucrats, and ordinary citizens to maintain order, implement policy decisions, and extract rents (Gandhi, 2008). As a result, autocrats frequently focus their efforts on co-opting key individuals and groups to reduce their reliance on the costly use of repression. In broad terms, co-optation entails the extension of political and material benefits—such as rents, access to positions of power, and policy concessions—to specific actors in exchange for their support and collaboration (Frantz & Kendall-Taylor, 2014; Gandhi, 2008).

Nevertheless, autocrats' ability to succeed in co-opting support may be limited due to commitment problems. Autocracies inherently lack an impartial, third-party authority that can enforce agreements among key actors, including the autocrat, ruling elites, and the masses (Svolik, 2012). Consequently, when an autocrat shares political and material benefits with potential opponents, there is no guarantee if his rivals will use these benefits to conspire against him. By co-opting political rivals, he may unintentionally make them more powerful and enable them to threaten his survival (Roessler, 2011). Moreover, an autocrat may promise to share power and resources with opponents in exchange for their collaboration but he may subsequently renege on that promise. Such commitment problems are pervasive in autocratic settings.

A prominent intuition developed by the recent scholarship is that autocratic institutions, in particular political parties, serve to alleviate commitment problems, thereby helping autocrats to survive in power.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, the recent neo-institutional accounts hold that

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<sup>5</sup>See Brancati (2014) and Gandhi and Lust-Okar (2009) for an overview of how autocratic legislatures and elections also play an important role in autocratic survival.

political parties are critical institutions that promote autocrats' ability to survive in power by enabling them to co-opt key actors (e.g., Boix & Svobik, 2013; Brownlee, 2007; Gandhi, 2008; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Geddes et al., 2018; Magaloni, 2008; Svobik, 2012). The next section overviews the research on ruling and opposition parties by paying special attention to how parties help autocrats to survive in power.

### **2.1.1 Ruling parties**

A key insight in the literature is that political parties facilitate the co-optation of regime elites by functioning as commitment devices. Boix and Svobik (2013, p. 301) argue that ruling parties help alleviate problems of credible commitment by providing a venue for institutionalized interaction between the autocrat and regime elites. They suggest that ruling parties facilitate transparency by providing an institutional forum for regular interaction between elites, which enables both regime elites and an autocrat to monitor each other's compliance with the power-sharing arrangement. Similarly, Magaloni (2008, p. 723) holds that autocrats can only encourage elites to invest in the regime if they can credibly promise them a sizable share of power over the long run. She suggests that autocrats make their promise credible by delegating their absolute authority over appointments to power positions to the ruling party. In doing so, "the autocrat credibly ties his hands to reward those who invest in the existing autocratic institutions by sharing power with them over the long run" (Magaloni, 2008, p. 723). Brownlee (2007) argues that ruling parties generate incentives for long-term loyalty by regulating individual ambitions within a set of explicit rules and norms. As Svobik (2012) notes "co-optation via [ruling] parties breeds an enduring rather than momentary stake in the regime's survival" (p. 164). Ruling parties provide elites with dependable access to spoils and career advancement in exchange for their persistent investments of time and resources to the party. In this way, ruling parties encourage sunk political investments by party members and thus induce greater loyalty to the regime (Svobik, 2012, ch. 6).

In addition to binding autocrats and powerful elites to a joint rule, the literature suggests that ruling parties also facilitate the co-optation of ordinary citizens. One important mechanism by which ruling parties co-opt masses is patronage distribution. Ruling parties provide

autocrats with an enhanced ability to channel state resources to citizens. They typically do so by helping autocrats and their allies in gathering information about the geographic distribution of regime supporters and by routinizing the allocation of benefits to supporters through networks of local branches and their monopoly over state institutions (Geddes et al., 2018; Greene, 2007; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Magaloni, 2006; Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010). By threatening to block their future access to benefits or snitching on those that refuse to support the party, party members can turn out ordinary citizens to demonstrations of support. The effective execution of such “a punishment regime” through party machinery creates further incentives for citizens to remain loyal to the regime or even become party members to gain privileged access to benefits (Magaloni, 2006).

However, not all ruling parties can co-opt elites and masses. Most existing works implicitly assume that all ruling parties have organizational features that enable autocrats and powerful elite factions to credibly commit to a joint rule. However, as Meng (2021) recently demonstrates not all ruling parties have organizational features making them capable of promoting power-sharing between autocrats and regime insiders. Some ruling parties such as The Popular Movement of the Revolution (MPR) under Mobutu Sese Soko in Congo or The Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM) under Paul Biya in Cameroon simply amplify the authority of their leaders, rather than to make their commitment to sharing power with ruling elites credible. Many ruling parties also lack extensive, functional grass-roots structures that can help autocrats co-opt support and maintain it in the long run. In such cases, ruling parties often function as an extension of state repressive apparatus rather than binding elites or citizens to the party (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Morse, 2018).

With few exceptions focusing on specific cases (e.g., Levitsky & Way, 2010; Morse, 2018), little has been done to investigate the variation in individual ruling parties’ organizational features fundamental to the co-optation of elites and masses. Thus, it is unclear how and to what extent ruling parties can help autocrats to survive in power. This dissertation seeks to fill this gap by accounting for the variation in explicit ruling party organizational features. Article 3 and 4 jointly demonstrate that where ruling parties lack organizational features that facilitate elite and mass co-optation, autocrats tend to rely more on repression as an alternative strategy of survival, and have fewer incentives and abilities to make democratic



concessions in the face of growing probability of regime change.

Before discussing my arguments in detail, the next section demonstrates that the literature on opposition parties in autocracies also has paid insufficient attention to variations in individual parties' organizational features. As a result, scholars often consider opposition parties as institutions that contribute to autocratic survival by enhancing autocrats' ability to control outsider elites and constituencies whom they represent.

### **2.1.2 Opposition parties**

Research has highlighted that commitment problems also hinder autocrats' ability to credibly promise outsiders that they will receive a steady stream of benefits into the future (Gandhi, 2008; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Lust, 2005). The conventional wisdom holds that autocrats use opposition parties to further solicit the cooperation of regime outsiders. Gandhi (2008), for example, argues that ruling parties may not suffice to co-opt a sufficient range of the opposition, so autocrats often allow outsiders to form opposition parties through which they can participate in partisan legislatures and voice their demands via formal channels instead of mobilizing on the streets. Gandhi and Przeworski (2007) note that "participation in the legislature absorbs [opposition party activity] into the institutional framework of the regime, according to the rules established by the ruler. Legalized opposition becomes domesticated opposition" (p. 1283). By granting opposition parties access to formal politics, autocrats present outsiders with an opportunity for advancing their careers within a stable system of patronage (Blaydes, 2010; Gandhi, 2008; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Lust, 2005). In return, opposition parties are expected to refrain from seriously challenging the regime (Lust, 2005).

Most neo-institutionalist accounts of autocracy, therefore, hold that opposition parties have a strategic value for autocrats as they primarily function as institutions of co-optation. According to this view, participation in formal politics presents notable benefits to opposition elites, including financial subsidies, access to parliamentary perks and state resources, and legal immunity for those who win legislative seats. But since these benefits are realized by demonstrating loyalty to the autocratic status quo, not by establishing mass-mobilizing party organizational structures, opposition elites have little incentives to invest in party

organizations and to challenge the regime (Albrecht, 2005; Lust, 2005). Accordingly, the result is organizationally weak parties serving opposition elites' aim to gain access to rents and patronage by collaborating with autocrats.

These are important insights on opposition parties, but they are drawn primarily from a relatively small set of cases. Many opposition parties are indeed weak. In many autocracies, limited economic liberalization and biased electoral institutions mean opposition elites have few opportunities to invest in party organizations and attract a mass following, which incentivizes them to collaborate with autocrats (Arriola, 2013; Greene, 2007; Levitsky & Way, 2010). Yet, opposition party elites sometimes refuse to align with autocrats and instead follow strategies that can overthrow them. Opposition parties sometimes expose electoral manipulation by refusing to participate in elections (Beaulieu, 2014; Lindberg, 2006), organize mass protest (Bunce & Wolchik, 2010; LeBas, 2014), or join their forces by building pre-electoral coalitions against incumbents (Arriola, 2013; Bunce & Wolchik, 2010; Howard & Roessler, 2006). Such observations demonstrate that opposition parties do not always contribute to autocratic survival by operating as institutions of co-optation. They may be motivated by patronage, but sometimes may prefer more direct control over patronage. In some instances, they may be motivated by democratizing their countries. Moreover, although it is true that many opposition parties are weak, studies examining individual opposition parties in a handful of autocratic countries highlight that there are important variations in opposition party organizational features (Bruhn, 2010; LeBas, 2014; Paget, 2019; Rigger, 2001; Wegner, 2011). Existing approaches that consider opposition parties as uniformly lacking mass-mobilizing structures or as personalized vehicles of opposition elites overlook the variation in opposition party organizational features, and thus cannot fully explain how and to what extent they function as regime-stabilizing institutions. This dissertation addresses this gap by taking a closer look into opposition party organizational features.

To sum up, the literature suggests that autocratic leaders use parties to protect themselves against potential threats from both within the regime and within society at large. Research holds that by enabling autocrats to credibly commit to sharing political and material benefits with elites and masses, parties promote autocrats' ability to co-opt support and survive in power. However, research has paid insufficient attention to the variation in explicit

organizational features of both ruling and opposition parties critical to understanding how and to what extent parties can help autocrats to maintain themselves in power.

### 3 Theoretical Framework

In this section, I present the dissertation's overall theoretical framework. I begin by conceptualizing the central components of party organizations, and how each component relates to one another. I then present specific arguments linking party organizations to autocrats' incentives and abilities to co-opt support, repress dissidents, and to implement substantial democratic reforms to survive in power.

#### 3.1 Conceptualizing the key features of party organizations

Party organizational features of theoretical interest are the party's centralization, institutionalization, cohesiveness among party elites, and organizational extensiveness. It is widely accepted that the nature of internal decision-making procedures has important implications for whether and how parties shape the behavior of party members. (Kitschelt, 1994; Müller & Strøm, 2003; Panebianco, 1988) One key aspect of intra-party decision-making is the balance of power between the party leadership and lower cadres. Party organizations vary in the degree to which decision-making authority over important aspects of party strategies (e.g., candidate recruitment, appointment decisions, allocation of financial resources) is concentrated in the hands of an individual party leader, a small circle of elites, or dispersed among various members organized at different layers within the organization (i.e., local and regional branches). Party organizations in which the authority is highly concentrated, party leaders enjoy a greater degree of autonomy and discretion over party strategies. In contrast, the devolution of power to other party members requires party leaders to seek the approval of various internal veto players before committing to a particular strategy. At one extreme, an individual party leader enjoys complete decision-making autonomy over party strategies—typically the autocrat in the case of ruling parties. One example of parties in which the decision-making power is highly concentrated in the hands of an individual leader is personalistic parties such as Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) that the countries'

president and the party leader Tayyip Erdogan rule in a near-monopolistic manner. At another extreme, large groups of party members such as local and regional party elites have the power to influence party strategies and to veto the central party leadership's decisions. In such parties, the party leader and other party elites organized at the central party office need to seek the approval of local and regional party elites over various party strategies. On the middle, there are parties such as Laos' ruling The Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) or National Action Party (PAN), the main opposition party in autocratic Mexico, in which a national party executive committee collectively decides on party strategies.

The second important feature of party organization is the degree of institutionalization, which refers to a process by which decision-making processes within the party increasingly follow a clear set of stable rules and norms beyond the influence of individual party leaders (Janda, 1980; Meng, 2021; Panebianco, 1988). Accordingly, institutionalization entails a transfer of authority from party leaders to the party organization in that the organization no longer operates as an instrument of its momentous leaders, but rather it develops the ability to exercise independent decision-making power insulated from the whims of individuals (Janda, 1980; Panebianco, 1988). When party institutionalization is low, internal decisions are made based on personal influence, typically the influence of the party leader, not based on regularized and formalized intra-party rules. In institutionalized parties, party leaders are "tamed by the iron cage of party rules" (Zeng, 2021, p. 4). Panebianco (1988) notes that "a highly institutionalized party drastically limits its internal actors' margins of maneuverability. The organization imposes itself upon the actors; it channels their strategies into specific and obligatory paths" (p. 58). Conversely, in weakly institutionalized parties, typically a strong party leader, who violates the organization's formal and informal rules, shapes how the party organization operates not the other way around (Harmel, Svasand, & Mjedle, 2018, p. 113).

Whereas institutionalization entails the creation and regularization of internal rules and procedures that depersonalize the ways in which the party organization is run (Meng, 2021), a party organization's move in the opposite direction involves the dismantling of formal rules and procedures guarding against the personalization of the party—a process I call de-institutionalization. In recent years, for example, a number of parties such as the Chinese

Communist Party (CPP) under the rule of Xi Jinping or Fidesz–Hungarian Civic Alliance under the rule of Viktor Orbán have become gradually less institutionalized as these leaders increasingly governed outside the intra-party rules, or modified the rules that have been in place for years to make their parties subservient to their personal ambitions.

Institutionalization is highly related to the degree of centralization of decision-making power within parties as indicated by the high degree of correlation between the two concepts at the indicator level (see Article 1). But in theory, the two concepts represent different dimensions of decision-making procedures that do not necessarily cohere together. Weakly institutionalized parties are characterized by a high degree of personalization of the party, which is often accompanied by over-centralization where a party leader rules in a monopolistic fashion. Both dimensions are related to the concentration of decision-making power within parties, but institutionalization is also about the presence of the formal and informal rules that are regularly respected by the party elites, especially the party leader. For example, Cameroon’s president Paul Biya regularly overturns the rules enabling the CPDM’s local branches to nominate legislative candidates and handpicks a slate of candidates personally loyal to him (Morse, 2018). In weakly institutionalized parties, formal and informal rules are respected as long as they serve the interest of an individual party leader.

Institutionalization is important because party organizations in autocratic settings are vulnerable to predation by political leaders. Meng (2021) argues that institutionalization is a baseline minimal condition a ruling party must satisfy in order to be considered as a strong organization. Because the power in autocracies is concentrated in the hands of a small group of elites and often an autocrat, absent rules and procedures that bind those in power positions, ruling parties are subject to manipulation that renders them incapable of perpetuating their own existence independent of individual leaders (Meng, 2021). Weakly institutionalized ruling parties often fail to live up to the expectation that they will enable autocrats and regime insiders to commit to a joint rule. Instead of constraining autocrats, weakly institutionalized parties typically function as vehicles that amplify the personal power of autocrats. Similarly, weakly institutionalized opposition parties tend to operate as organizations that help rent-seeking elites to run for office or lobby autocratic incumbents for patronage, making organizational survival highly contingent on the ambitions of individual

leaders, often a single politician. A number of scholars attribute the inability of opposition parties to overthrow incumbent autocrats, despite regularly held elections, to weak party institutionalization (Bleck & Van de Walle, 2018). Weakly institutionalized opposition parties often fail to survive past an election, exacerbating coordination problems among opposition elites (Gandhi & Reuter, 2013).

The third critical feature of party organization is the degree of internal cohesion. Internal cohesion refers to the degree of solidarity and cooperation among party members with regard to the selection and implementation of a party organization's strategies. Parties are not unified actors. They tend to be composed of various factions that are formed based on varieties of different motives such as ideological or issue differences, social cleavages, or personal leadership struggles (Janda, 1980; Randall & Svåsand, 2002). A highly cohesive party organization is one in which various factions can hang together and act as a unified whole despite having different motives. Where cohesion is high, the party's legislators vote the party line, affiliated ministers or bureaucrats seek to implement the party's policies. Where cohesion is low, a party organization tends to have a hard time in coordinating and disciplining members to implement the party's selected strategies: factions and individuals pursue their own independent aims, with few incentives to follow the party line. At low levels of cohesion, parties become prone to internal conflict and to frequent defections of party members. In highly cohesive parties, internal rebellions and defections are rare even in the context of a crisis such as electoral defeat or when the top party leadership select policies that are not supported by some party factions (Levitsky & Way, 2010).

Institutionalized and collegial decision-making procedures generally enhance cohesion as they constrain actor behavior, and promote collective decisions over personal ambitions. Nevertheless, sources of cohesion vary. For example, norms and identities or a shared ideology generated during periods of ideologically-driven violent conflict and polarization tend to cultivate a high degree of solidarity among party members (Hanson, 2010; LeBas, 2014; Levitsky & Way, 2012). But parties can also be highly cohesive due to charismatic leadership (Panebianco, 1988), or due to a steady flow of patronage.

Finally, organizational extensiveness is another critical component of party organizations. Organizationally extensive parties are those that have a widespread network of local branches

across the national territory, a large activist base, and entrenched ties to social organizations such as business associations, religious entities (e.g., churches, mosques), or labor unions (Duverger, 1959; Janda, 1980; Kitschelt, 1994). In organizationally extensive parties, local party branches are spread across the national territory, reaching even to the most remote areas. These branches are staffed and remain active outside the election season, enabling party members to build and sustain linkages to citizens across localities. A party's extensive local-branch organizations enable party members to inform citizens about their policy or issue stances, build and sustain clientelistic linkages (Levitsky, 2003), and mobilize voters (Tavits, 2013). One example of an organizationally extensive party is Tanzania's ruling Party of the Revolution (CCM), which at some point had over 2 million members (Levitsky & Way, 2010). Some note that the party has established around 38 thousand active party cells—one cell per 10 houses—at the village level (Morse, 2018), boosting the party's ability to cultivate mass support. Its main opponent, The Party for Democracy and Progress (Chadema), has also invested heavily in its local-branch organizations since 2012. The party built around 17 thousand local branches with more than 500 thousand staff in every village and neighborhood across the country, making it one of the most organizationally extensive opposition parties in the autocratic world (Paget, 2019). In contrast, parties with limited organizations lack nationwide local-branch organizations and a large activist base. For example, The Uganda People's Congress's (UPC), an opposition party, local organizational presence varies substantially from district to district. Even in districts where the party has a local branch, observers describe these branches as “dormant” or “in dead silence” with a small activist base (Carbone, 2003, p. 495).

Extensive party organizations also have entrenched linkages to social organizations such as religious entities (e.g., churches, mosques, etc.), business associations, or labor unions. Where linkages are strong, social organizations help the party recruit activists and disseminate the party's messages to affiliated groups. Social organizations typically also fund party organizations, helping party elites to invest in party operations such as electoral campaigning or voter registry. Most parties with extensive organizations have been built on labor unions, social movements, or local church associations (Kalyvas, 1996; Kitschelt, 1989; LeBas, 2014; Van Dyck, 2017). Access to civil society organizations significantly helps orga-

nization building for opposition parties. In Zimbabwe, for example, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) heavily contributed to the operations of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the country's main opposition party. The union has helped the party to build a nationwide organizational structure, recruit members and attract votes from diverse constituencies (LeBas, 2014). Organizationally extensive ruling parties also have strong ties to social organizations. As one of the most organizationally extensive ruling parties in history, Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) has formed strong ties to the country's civil society organizations such as the National Teachers' Union, the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), or the Unions of Bureaucrats (FSTSE). As Langston (2017, p. 52) notes these unions "were the functional base of the [party] organization" and "formed the mass pillars of the PRI regime".

Parties develop these features to a different extent, which varies over time and across parties. A party organization's centralization, institutionalization, cohesiveness, and extensiveness do not necessarily vary together, but they are interrelated in the sense that they are fundamental for a party organization's overall strength. The strongest parties are those that centralize decision-making power at the national party executive rather than spreading it within the party organization or locating it in the hands of a party leader (Bizzarro et al., 2018). Strong parties are also highly institutionalized, cohesive, and extensive organizations. Absent these features it should be harder for parties to constrain and coordinate the behavior of party elites. My argument that all four conceptual attributes discussed in this section are key for parties' ability to coordinate collective action and constrain political behavior underpins specific theoretical arguments developed in the individual articles of the dissertation.



## 3.2 Linking party organizational features to autocratic survival strategies

This section introduces my arguments explaining how autocrats' incentives and abilities to co-opt opposition elites, deploy repression, and to implement democratizing reforms as a strategy of survival are shaped by party organizational features. Where relevant, I aim to discuss the theoretical implications of both ruling and opposition party organizations for the outcomes of interest, even if the underlying article has a narrow focus.

### 3.2.1 Political parties and the co-optation of opposition party elites

An influential body of research considers opposition parties as institutions that help opposition elites to compete for patronage, with no intentions to compete for real power (e.g., Albrecht, 2005; Lust, 2005). Although this is true for many opposition parties, not all opposition parties are co-opted. Sometimes autocrats' attempts at co-opting opposition parties fail as opposition elites refuse to be co-opted. What explains the co-optation of opposition party elites? Why are some opposition party elites co-opted but not others?

This dissertation provides a theoretical framework that considers opposition party co-optation as a three-level game: one between an incumbent autocrat and his supporters (i.e., regime insiders and voters), one between the regime and a particular opposition party, and another within the opposition party itself (i.e., the party leader, party members, and voters). I argue that ruling and opposition party organizational features shape behaviors of relevant actors at each level, thereby affecting if and when an opposition party will be co-opted.

Autocrats seek to mitigate the risk posed by outsiders by co-opting select opposition party elites. Research shows that the co-optation of select opposition parties exacerbates coordination problems among outsiders, thereby helping autocrats prevent the emergence of a unified opposition front (Arriola, DeVaro, & Meng, 2021; Resnick, 2014). That, in turn, boosts autocrats' ability to contain the threat of multiparty competition without relying too much on institutional manipulation or overt repression. Arriola et al. (2021) demonstrate that autocrats have a greater incentive to co-opt opposition elites when they are electorally weak, and the co-optation strategy indeed helps electorally weak incumbents to win elections.

Building on this logic, we should expect autocrats with weak ruling parties to have greater incentives to pursue the co-optation strategy to maintain power. Given that organizationally weak ruling parties are prone to elite defections and lack extensive organizations, they tend to be electorally more vulnerable than strong ruling parties, which should incentivize autocrats to co-opt opposition elites to compensate the ruling party's electoral weakness.

In addition, ruling party organizational features should also shape autocrats' *ability* to co-opt opposition party elites. Despite its benefits, co-optation of opposition elites risks upsetting regime insiders (Reuter & Szakonyi, 2019). Sharing spoils with opposition elites requires the reallocation of resources away from regime elites to opposition elites. When regime elites think opportunities to access spoils are jeopardized, they may attempt to prevent the autocrat from co-opting opposition elites. Yet regime elites' capacity to do so should in part depend on whether the ruling party organization's decision-making structures enable them to veto the autocrat's decisions. Specifically, the extent to which the ruling party has institutionalized collective decision-making structures should affect the ability of regime insiders to block the autocrat's attempt to co-opt opposition elites. In ruling parties with institutionalized collective decision-making structures, regime insiders have a greater ability to veto autocrats' decisions to co-opt opposition elites. Conversely, where decision-making power is heavily concentrated in the hands of the autocrat, regime insiders lack the power to veto the autocrat's decisions, which should give the autocrat flexibility to share spoils with opposition elites at will. Thus, autocrats should be less likely to pursue the strategy of co-opting opposition party elites under strong ruling parties that can constrain their decisions to reallocate resources away from regime insiders to the opposition.

While ruling party features are important, they cannot fully account for which opposition parties are more likely to be co-opted. To adequately explain whether an opposition party will be co-opted or not, it is also necessary to understand the strategic calculus of opposition party elites. My argument suggests opposition party organizational features affect opposition elites' decision over whether or not to accept co-optation offers by autocrats. I argue that opposition parties differ in their capacity to challenge the regime at the ballot box and on the streets via protest mobilization, as a function of party organizational extensiveness. It is easier for the leaders of organizationally extensive parties to challenge the regime and

survive in opposition despite incumbents' resource advantages, institutional manipulation, or repression. Party organizational extensiveness boosts opposition elites' ability to coordinate anti-regime collective action, which should, in turn, provide these elites with the potential to push for political concessions and achieve political power – without necessarily compromising their opposition to the regime, risk alienating their supporters or contributing to autocrats' hold on power. Thus, opposition elites under organizationally extensive parties should be less willing to accept co-optation offers by autocrats.

Because opposition elites with organizationally extensive parties are better able to challenge autocrats, they have greater potential to threaten regime stability. As a result, co-opting these elites are important for autocrats to maintain themselves in power. Nevertheless, it should be harder for autocrats to co-opt these parties because the leaders of such parties are likely to demand larger concessions from the regime. When opposition parties have a nationwide organizational infrastructure in the form of local branches or when they have ties to prominent social organizations, they are better able to penetrate into constituencies across the nation and mobilize their support base against autocrats. Such capabilities should encourage opposition party elites to demand more from incumbents in exchange for their collaboration, which makes it harder for both sides to reach an agreement.

Opposition party decision-making structures should also affect the likelihood that opposition elites and incumbents will strike a co-optation deal. My argument linking opposition party decision-making structures to elite co-optation builds on the coalition formation literature in democracies suggesting that decentralized decision-making procedures make it harder for party leaders to form coalitions (e.g., Bäck, 2008; Strøm, 1994). I argue that opposition party leaders with greater discretion over party strategies should be more likely to be co-opted than those who need the approval of various internal veto players to strike a deal with autocrats. Specifically, under institutionalized collective decision-making structures, opposition party leaders should have less flexibility in bargaining with autocrats since they are more constrained by lower party cadres. Hence, my theory predicts that the more an opposition party organization limits the decision-making power of the party leader, the less likely it will be co-opted by autocrats.

The key point is that autocrats' incentives and abilities to co-opt an opposition party is

likely to depend also on an opposition party's organizational features—not just on a ruling party's. By shaping autocrats' electoral vulnerability and their ability to co-opt opposition elites at will, ruling party features affect autocrats' decision to co-opt opposition elites. Yet opposition party organizational features also affect autocrats' ability to co-opt the leader of the targeted opposition party. Thus, the extent to which opposition parties enhance or undermine autocrats' ability to co-opt outsider elites and the constituencies whom they represent should be the function of opposition party organizational features.

### **3.2.2 Political parties and repression**

Previous works find that autocracies that permit opposition parties to participate in elections tend to engage in more repression (Aksoy, Carter, & Wright, 2012; Conrad, 2014; Rivera, 2017; Vreeland, 2008). These studies hold that opposition parties help outsiders overcome collective action problems in their efforts to unseat autocrats. As a result, they threaten autocrats' survival, which often provokes repression. Yet not all opposition party elites have incentives and capabilities to organize anti-regime collective action. As one of the central arguments of this dissertation suggests, parties vary in their capacity to facilitate collective action as a function of their organizational features. Opposition elites with organizationally extensive parties should be more capable of mobilizing against autocrats than those with less extensive organizations. As discussed in the previous section, all else being equal, such parties should also make opposition elites more likely to refuse to be co-opted, thereby limiting autocrats' ability to control the opposition via co-optation. Hence, it is possible for autocrats to have greater incentives to deploy repression when they are faced with organizationally extensive parties that threaten their hold on power.

Yet, opposition party organizational features cannot adequately explain autocrats' use of repression. First, outsiders represent only one potential source of threat to autocrats' hold on power. Most autocrats lose power due to coups launched by regime insiders (Geddes et al., 2018; Svobik, 2012). Hence, to survive in power, autocrats also use repression targeting regime insiders. Since threats to political order often create incentives for repression (Davenport,

2007a),<sup>6</sup> to fully understand autocrats' use of repression, we should account for their ability to maintain support among regime insiders. Second, if autocrats have broad support within society, they can still maintain political order and thrive in multiparty elections with little need for repression. After all, for autocrats' who are able to co-opt mass support, multiparty competition does not pose much of a threat. Hence, autocrats' incentives to use repression should also depend on their ability to maintain loyalty of regime insiders and mass support. Finally, even if an autocrat wants to deploy repression, his ability to do so may be constrained by political institutions (Conrad, 2014).

Building on research on ruling parties, this dissertation develops an argument linking ruling party organizational features to autocrats' incentives and abilities to deploy repression. The literature highlights that ruling parties perform two key functions: they mediate elite conflict and mobilize mass support (as discussed in detail in Section 2.2.1) (Brownlee, 2007; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Magaloni, 2008; Svoboda, 2012). However, as the core premise of this dissertation holds, not all ruling parties have the capacity to achieve these objectives. My primary contention is that only ruling parties that are organizationally strong, i.e., those that have institutionalized collective decision-making structures together with cohesive and extensive organizations, can mediate elite conflict and mobilize mass support, and thus reduce autocrats' reliance on repression to remain in power.

The logic behind my argument linking ruling party organizational strength to autocrats' use of repression as a survival strategy is three-fold. For one, strong ruling parties encourage elite cooperation over rebellion and defection. By providing a forum for striking bargains—through intra-party rules that promote collective decision-making—strong ruling parties give elites the opportunity to express their grievances and adjust party policies if needed. Strong ruling parties also ensure that regime elites' access to spoils of office such as patronage resources and policy influence is secured by routinized intra-party rules that operate independent of the influence of the autocrat, generating collective security in the sense that regime elites' interests are protected by the party—without being subject to an autocrat's arbitrary decisions. Such ruling party features should lower the likelihood that an autocrat

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<sup>6</sup>The idea that governments use repression to counter dissent is so widely accepted that scholars refer it as “Law of Coercive Responsiveness” (Davenport, 2007a, p. 7)

implements policies that are opposed by regime elites, thereby reducing the potential for an elite rebellion that can ignite repressive responses by an autocrat.

Second, institutionalized collective-decision making structures that strong ruling parties wield enable regime elites to constrain autocrats' *ability* to opportunistically deploy repression to eliminate threatening rivals. When high-level collective decision-making bodies such as party executive committees regularize interactions between autocrats and regime elites, as in the case of strong ruling parties, regime elites are better able to monitor autocrats' compliance with the power-sharing arrangement and to sanction autocrats' opportunism (Boix & Svobik, 2013; Svobik, 2012). Absent strong ruling parties, the potential for elite dissent is higher and autocrats have a greater ability to preemptively deploy repression to eliminate rivals. Ruling party organizational strength should therefore be associated with reduced repression.

Third, ruling party organizational strength should also reduce autocrats' incentives to use repression by co-opting mass support and monitoring dissent. Strong ruling parties have extensive organizations with grassroots structures and mass mobilizing organs across the nation. These features provide autocrats with an enhanced ability to muster support among large segments of society, which should reduce the potential for mass dissent that would require repressive responses by autocrats. Extensive ruling party organizations also help autocrats to monitor potential dissidents within society (Geddes et al., 2018), which should in turn enable autocrats to take preemptive measures against dissidents, and selectively target them before they attract mass following. Thus, ruling parties can be so effective at preemptively controlling dissent that they can lessen autocrats' need to rely on widespread repression (Fjelde, 2010).

Slater (2003) notes that a ruling party's extensive organization – what he terms *infrastructural power* – can also boost an autocrat's ability to deploy repression against rivals if there are no effective constraints on the autocrat. An autocrat who manages to accumulate great personal control over an organizationally extensive ruling party faces few constraints and should therefore enjoy greater ability to employ repression. In such cases, regime elites do not enjoy the ability to sanction the autocrat's behavior as they do under parties with institutionalized collective decision-making structures. Importantly, such

leaders have the monopoly over appointments to the key party posts, which enables them to staff party grassroots organization with loyalists. Considering their fates as linked to the autocrat's, party cadres become more willing to repress opponents to keep the autocrat in power.<sup>7</sup> This reasoning highlights a potentially conditional relationship between party organizational extensiveness and repression. Ruling party organizational extensiveness can be negatively associated with repression when a ruling party has institutionalized collective decision-making procedures that can constrain an autocrat's use of repression. Yet, where such constraints are lacking, it can actually lead to increased repression. Based on this logic, in modeling autocrats' use of repression, the dissertation also accounts for the interactive relationship between party organizational features.

To sum up, a ruling party's ability to maintain support among regime elites and larger segments of society, together with its ability to constrain autocrats, should reduce autocrats' incentives and abilities to use repression as a survival strategy. Repression should therefore be especially more widespread where autocrats fail to co-opt support and face fewer intra-party constraints.

### **3.2.3 The process of democratization: Political parties and democratic concessions**

Dahl (1971, p. 16) prominently argued that when the costs of repression exceed the costs of toleration, autocrats are compelled to make democratic concessions. A number of factors can raise the costs of repressing the demands for democratic reforms on the part of autocrats. For example, pressures from international patrons (Levitsky & Way, 2010), defections of prominent regime insiders (Geddes, 1999; O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986), economic crises (Haggard & Kaufman, 1995; Teorell, 2010), a ruling party's waning popularity – often indicated by a noticeable decline in vote shares or voter turnout (Slater & Wong, 2013), the threat of mass uprisings (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006), or some combination of thereof can push incumbents to make democratic concessions.

Whatever the precipitating factor that opens up the possibility for democratization, the

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<sup>7</sup>Here I follow Frantz, Kendall-Taylor, Wright, and Xu (2020) logic linking personalization of state security apparatus to repression.

expectations of autocrats and broader regime insiders about their prospects for preserving their economic and political powers under a subsequent regime should affect how they respond to pressures for democratic reforms (Albertus & Menaldo, 2018; Geddes, 1999; Geddes et al., 2018). The key issue to consider is that the costs of tolerating democratic reforms, and thus exiting autocracy, vary across autocrats and across regime insiders, and that variation significantly influences whether they will be willing to implement democratizing reforms instead of clinging to the autocratic status quo (Geddes et al., 2018, ch. 8). For autocrats, democratization essentially means, at least to some degree, the loss of political power and control over economic assets. At worst, democratization can lead to imprisonment, persecution, and even the death of autocrats and their allies (Wright & Escribà-Folch, 2012). Autocrats and regime insiders are more likely to concede democratizing reforms if they conceive that reforms would not result in their political marginalization and confiscation of their economic assets (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006; Boix, 2003). Simply put, autocrats are likely to make substantial democratic concessions when they can expect “a life after autocracy” for themselves and ruling elites.

Building on this line of reasoning, Geddes (1999) compared the potential costs of exiting autocracy for autocrats across different autocratic regime types, demonstrating that military regimes often find it less costly to democratize than single-party or personalist regimes.<sup>8</sup> Given their control over the state’s repressive apparatus, military officers typically have the option to return to the barracks and avoid punishment after a transition to democracy. Subsequent works examined how specific autocratic institutions such as legislatures, an entrenched bureaucracy, and political parties can also reduce the risks of democratization on the part of autocrats and regime insiders (e.g. Albertus & Menaldo, 2018; Haggard & Kaufman, 2016; Riedl et al., 2020; Slater & Wong, 2013; Wright & Escribà-Folch, 2012; Ziblatt, 2017). Albertus and Menaldo (2018), for instance, argue that strong bureaucratic institutions and legislatures provide autocrats and their allies with the ability to shape the design of democratic institutions in their favor, making them less threatened by the prospects of

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<sup>8</sup>The regime typology proposed by Geddes (1999) is based on whether control over policy, leadership selection, and the security apparatus is in the hands of a ruling party (single-party dictatorships), the military (rule by the military institution), or a narrower group centered around an individual dictator (personalist dictatorships).



democratization and thus giving them fewer reasons to resist democratizing reforms when the likelihood of autocratic regime survival declines. In contrast, where autocrats and regime insiders lack such administrative and political infrastructures they have fewer incentives to concede democratic reforms. The key point is that strong bureaucracy and legislatures that generally promote autocratic regime durability can also incentivize autocrats to implement democratizing reforms because they enable them to protect their interests after the transition.

Proceeding from a similar line of reasoning, I focus on how ruling parties can affect autocrats' and regime insiders' incentives to implement democratizing reforms. Wright and Escribà-Folch (2012) argue that strong ruling parties can reduce the costs of democratization for autocrats. The possibility to win power even after democratization presents autocrats and regime insiders with an opportunity to shape the distribution of political power in a subsequent democracy. Accordingly, Wright and Escribà-Folch (2012) posit that when autocrats trust in the ruling party's ability to survive a democratic transition they have fewer incentives to resist democratic reforms. In a recent study, Riedl et al. (2020) make a similar argument that autocrats are more likely to implement democratizing reforms when they have high confidence in the ruling party's ability to win democratic elections (see also Miller, 2021b; Slater & Wong, 2013; Ziblatt, 2017). One key insight in Riedl et al. (2020) work is that ruling party strength may not only lessen autocrats' incentives to resist democratization, it can also motivate them to end the autocratic rule. As Slater and Wong (2013) note "the *raison d'être* of authoritarian ruling parties is to continue ruling, but not necessarily to remain authoritarian" (p. 717). Autocrats may consider that implementing democratic reforms can help them to remain in power. The key is that when ruling parties implement democratic reforms they can actually gain some benefits. For example, they can increase their support in constituencies that demand democratizing reforms, attract international aid and foreign investments, and by initiating democratic reforms they can gain the upper hand in the design of democratic institutions.

This dissertation provides further insights into how ruling party organizational features can create incentives and capabilities for autocrats to implement democratizing reforms. It builds on the same premise as the previous work that ruling parties can facilitate the imple-

mentation of democratizing reforms by autocrats in a top-down fashion to preempt political opposition. However, the argument I develop differs from existing studies in one important respect. Unlike previous research, I do not assume that autocrats and their allies hold homogeneous preferences toward democratization when the costs of sustaining the existing regime outweigh the costs associated with democratizing reforms. It is well-documented in the classic literature of transitions that democratization can aggravate divisions within the regime (Huntington, 1991; O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986; Przeworski, 1991). Although existing studies primarily focus on autocrats and regime insiders' incentives to pursue democratizing reforms as a function of the ruling party's electoral victory confidence, which as they argue stems from the party's organizational extensiveness, I additionally discuss ruling party organizational characteristics such as the institutionalization of collective decision-making procedures and intra-party cohesion that help autocrats and regime insiders in overcoming collective action problems that pervade regime transitions.

The reasoning here starts from the assumption that the trajectories of regime transitions are shaped by struggles between autocrats aiming to remain in power, outsiders attempting to oust incumbents, and regime insiders seeking to prevent outcomes that can threaten their interests. The interests of autocrats and regime insiders with respect to democratization can differ significantly. Some regime insiders may have greater commitments to the autocratic form of government, often referred to in the literature as hardliners/standpatters, whereas others that are typically labeled as softliners may see democratization to be in their best interests (Huntington, 1991; O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986).

When regime breakdown is on the horizon, attempts to cling to the status quo often end up in a forced ouster of autocrats, which typically leads to a greater odds of punishment for autocrats and their allies while reducing the possibility for them to influence the distribution of power in a subsequent regime (Wright & Escribà-Folch, 2012). However, where autocrats and regime insiders overcome collective action problems that pervade regime transitions they often transition to democracy without losing the power. Miller (2021a) counts that roughly two-thirds of ruling parties manage to hold on to power despite transitioning to democracy. Even when they eventually had to step down, by setting the terms of the process of democratization they leave their mark on political institutions that make it possible

for them to make a comeback in subsequent rounds of democratic elections (Grzymala-Busse, 2002; Riedl, 2014). However, where they fail to coordinate their efforts to guide democratization, outsiders usually take advantage and set the terms of the transition process, which makes it hard for outgoing autocratic elites to survive politically in a subsequent regime.

Despite the potential benefits of leading democratization and the significant costs of not doing so, not all autocrats have incentives and abilities to lead democratization. As my overall theoretical argument holds, whether autocrats' have incentives to select and abilities to execute a particular survival strategy—in this case democratic concessions—depend on party organizational features. Drawing on the current dissertation's conceptualization of party organizational features, I highlight the critical role that institutionalized collective decision-making structures play in helping autocrats and regime insiders to coordinate their actions to implement democratizing reforms. For one, institutionalized collective decision-making structures provide a forum in which autocrats can bargain and agree on comprehensive deals with regime insiders that can potentially disrupt the process from within. Collective decision-making procedures should allow softliners to strike deals that can credibly signal to hardliners that their interests will be protected. Second, institutionalized collective decision-making procedures provide party cadres with tools for monitoring each other's compliance with the terms of democratizing reforms as the regime transition unfolds and for imposing sanctions on those that deviate from the party line. Strong ruling parties should therefore be better able to facilitate internal regime coordination fundamental to managing democratizing reforms.

High levels of intra-party cohesion should also play an important role in ensuring cooperation between autocrats and regime insiders. Where cohesion is low ruling parties become vulnerable to intra-party power struggles and elite defections that can significantly hinder autocrats' ability to control the transition process. Several studies, for example, demonstrate that defections from ruling parties often make autocrats susceptible to threats from outsiders (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Van de Walle, 2006). Low levels of elite cohesion can also result in the forced ouster of autocrats by regime insiders who are opposed to democratic reforms. Under ruling party organization with low levels of cohesiveness, even if the autocrat has

incentives to implement democratizing reforms, he should be less capable of controlling the reform process. For example, in 1991 Zambia's Kaunda under United National Independence Party (UNIP) instituted multiparty elections thinking he would win. But a number of top ruling elites defected to join the coalition led by opposition leader Chiluba (Haggard, Teo, & Kaufman, 2016). Kaunda wanted to make democratizing reforms to survive in power by appeasing opponents, but UNIP was not a cohesive organization that provided him with the ability to execute that strategy. He eventually failed to control the process and was overthrown by the opposition (Haggard et al., 2016).

Thus, my argument suggests that it is not enough for a ruling party to have an extensive organization for autocrats to implement democratizing reforms without losing their control over the reform process. A ruling party organization should also have features that facilitate elite coordination. When institutionalized collective decision-making procedures and cohesion are coupled with organizational extensiveness, autocrats and regime insiders should be even more capable of overcoming obstacles to their coordination, and thus they should be in a better position to lead democratization. Absent such organizational features party organizations are too weak to incentivize autocrats to make substantial democratic concessions even when their hold on to power appears doubtful. Even if they choose to make democratic concessions, they should be less capable of implementing democratizing reforms without falling prey to internal struggles or acquiescing to pressures from outsiders.

### **3.3 Summary of the argument**

In sum, my overall theoretical framework holds that the variation in parties' decision-making structures, internal cohesion, and organizationally extensiveness affect autocrats' incentives and abilities to co-opt support, repress opponents, or make substantial democratic concessions to appease dissidents as a strategy of survival.

## **4 Research Design**

This section provides a general discussion on the universe of cases that falls within the scope of this dissertation. It also introduces the V-Party's party organizational measures that aim

to capture conceptual attributes I outlined in Section 3.1 and compares the new measures with existing ones. Given that individual articles of the dissertation have different dependent variables, I leave the more detailed discussion of the research design and methods employed in each article to Section 5, where I summarize individual articles.

## 4.1 Defining the sample of autocracies

A political regime can be defined as the set of formal and informal rules governing the selection of political leaders and of policies (Djuve, Knutsen, & Wig, 2020; Geddes, Wright, & Frantz, 2014). These rules affect the way in which autocratic leaders enter and exit office, as well as how policies are typically selected. A political regime can either be democratic or autocratic. Thus, to define the sample of autocracies, it is important to identify a set of criteria that distinguishes between autocratic and democratic regimes. For my analyses in this dissertation, I consider a regime as autocratic if an executive achieves power through undemocratic means—understood as means other than free and fair elections in which the majority of the adult population was eligible to vote; or if an executive achieves power through democratic means but changed the rules so that the subsequent elections are not free and fair.<sup>9</sup> For the coding of autocratic regimes, throughout the dissertation, I use the dichotomous measure of regime type<sup>10</sup> developed by Boix, Miller, and Rosato (2013)

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<sup>9</sup>For the purposes of this dissertation it is necessary and sufficient to identify a set of prerequisites that are absolutely required for a regime to be considered as democratic at a *minimum*. The definition I employ here taps on to two core dimensions of democracy, i.e., fairness and competitiveness of elections and inclusiveness (who is eligible to participate), famously discussed by Dahl (1971). Additional attributes such as civil liberties or judicial independence are necessary to ensure democracy in its *ideal* form (Dahl, 1971), but the question of what attributes are necessary for an *ideal* democracy is different than the question of what attributes are necessary for a regime to be qualified as democratic at a *minimum*. To identify the universe of cases relevant for the purposes of this dissertation, it is necessary to establish a threshold at which a country fails to fulfill the minimum criteria for democracy.

<sup>10</sup>There is a large body of research debating as to whether continuous measures of democracy are preferable over dichotomous. I do not take a stance on this debate since the choice of measures depends on the necessities of the research at hand. For example, Article 4 studies autocratic regime breakdowns and transitions to democracy, which necessitates distinguishing between democracy and autocracy in qualitative terms, instead of quantitative terms.

(BMR).<sup>11</sup> BMR considers a country as autocratic if any of the following criteria is violated: (1) The executive is directly or indirectly elected in popular elections; (2) the legislature (or the executive if elected directly) is chosen in free and fair elections where voters are given multiple options on ballots and incumbents do not abuse state authority to eliminate the chance of opposition victory; (3) the majority of adult men or women population has the right to vote.

Given the aim is to understand the consequences of party organizational characteristics for various outcomes, the scope of the dissertation is limited to autocracies with political parties. Figure 4 illustrates historical changes in the proportion of autocracies with political parties. It shows that political parties are extremely common in autocratic settings. From 1945 to 2008, autocracies maintained at least one party 84 percent of the time (see the line labeled as any parties in Figure 4) (Cheibub et al., 2010), including autocracies which feature party competition but do not have a ruling party (e.g., contemporary Morocco and Belarus). Figure 4 also demonstrates that, between 1940 and 2015, ruling parties are observed for around 0.67 percent of the total country-year observations. The steep increase in the proportion of autocracies with ruling parties immediately after the World War II, a period corresponding to the imposition of communist parties by the Soviet Union to many Eastern European countries, is especially noticeable. The figure also highlights the proliferation of ruling party autocracies that allow for opposition parties to compete for the national executive since the end of the Cold War. Such regimes are generally referred in the literature as electoral autocracies (e.g., Russia since 1999, Zimbabwe since 1990) (see Schedler, 2013).

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<sup>11</sup>There are several other widely used data sets that can be used to identify autocracies. Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland (2010) (CGV) and Geddes et al. (2014) (GWF) provide the most widely used dichotomous measures. However, CGV provides data only until 2008, while GWF ends in 2010. Wahman, Teorell, and Hadenius (2013) (WTH) and Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg (2018) (ROW) provide alternative measures. However, WTH builds a dichotomous measure of democracy using an arbitrarily chosen threshold value on a continuous measure of democracy. ROW is especially unique given its extensive time coverage and since it is based on the V-Dem data set, which is widely considered as the best data on democracy. Nevertheless, among other coding rules, it also uses an arbitrarily chosen threshold value on the V-Dem electoral democracy index (EDI). For these reasons, in this dissertation, I use the dichotomous measure of democracy developed by BMR.

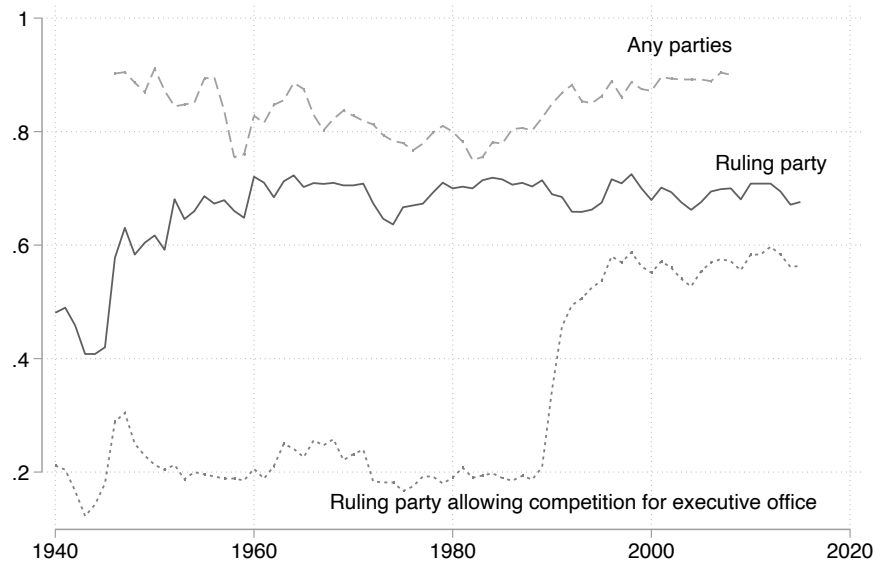


Figure 1: The proportion of autocratic countries with political parties, 1940 – 2015.

*Note:* The figure is created using data from Miller (2020). Any parties: Includes countries such as Morocco or Belarus where there is no official ruling party but multiple parties exist. Ruling party: Country-years with a party that is either the supreme ruling power or is used as a significant vehicle of power by the regime (Miller, 2020, p. 762). Regimes with ruling parties allowing competition for executive office are electoral autocracies.

## 4.2 New data on party organizational features

One of the major contributions of this dissertation is a new data set on party organizations. The dissertation introduces new measures of party organizational attributes, which I collected in collaboration with the V-Party team (Lührmann et al., 2020). Article 1 (Düpont et al., 2022) provides a detailed description of party organizational features I use in individual articles. It also examines each indicators' content, criterion, and construct validity. Here, I provide some additional information, and further showcase the validity and the usefulness of V-Party indicators, especially in the context of autocracies.

V-Party provides data on organizational attributes virtually for all parties that have sat in autocratic parliaments. The full sample of the dissertation includes expert assessments of 179 ruling parties and 586 opposition parties from 134 autocratic countries between 1970 and 2019. The data set includes measures that relate to the key party organizational features of theoretical interest to the dissertation. For party centralization, I use a measure that gauges the internal balance of power between different organizational levels over the

selection of party candidates for national legislative elections. Low values on this indicator indicate a party leader can decide on candidate nominations unilaterally, while high levels indicate all party members have a say on nominations.<sup>12</sup> To measure party institutionalization, I use an indicator of party personalization, which captures the degree to which a party organization is subservient to the personal whims of a single individual. An increase on this indicator demonstrates a growing concentration of power in the hands of a single individual. In addition, V-Party includes a measure of elite cohesion within parties specifically designed to capture the degree of agreement among party elites toward party strategies such as policy stances, leadership selection, and more generally the distribution of resources among party members. The response categories for the elite cohesion item change from no visible disagreement among party elites to a level of disagreement leading to defections of prominent party elites. Finally, V-Party includes three items related to the concept of party organizational extensiveness: (1) geographic breadth of party local-branch organizations, (2) the depth of grassroots organization at the local level (e.g., whether a party's activists or personnel has a widespread active presence across localities), and (3) the strength of ties to social organizations (e.g., religious organizations, business associations, labor unions). Table 1 presents the exact wording of the survey items presented to expert coders who originally respond to questions on ordinal five-point scales. A Bayesian item response model is used to convert expert responses from ordinal scores into interval scores that capture the values of the observed latent phenomenon (Pemstein et al., 2020).

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<sup>12</sup>While at extremely high values this indicator indicates that all registered voters decide on which candidates will run for the party in national legislative elections, the data suggests that such parties do not exist in autocracies.



Table 1: V-Party survey questions.

| Party organizational feature        | Survey question  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Internal decision-making structures | <p><b>Party Centralization: Candidate nomination (Proxy measure):</b><br/>Which of the following options best describes the process by which the party decides on candidates for the national legislative elections?<br/>Response categories:<br/>0: The party leader unilaterally decides on which candidates will run for the party in national legislative elections.<br/>1: The national party leadership (i.e., an executive committee) collectively decides which candidates will run for the party in national legislative elections.<br/>2: Delegates of local/regional organizations decide which candidates will run for the party in national legislative elections.<br/>3: All party members decide on which candidates will run for the party in national legislative elections in primaries/caucuses.<br/>4: All registered voters decide on which candidates will run for the party in national legislative elections in primaries/caucuses.</p> <p><b>Party Institutionalization:</b><br/>To what extent is this party a vehicle for the personal will and priorities of one individual leader?<br/>Response categories:<br/>0: The party is not focused on the personal will and priorities of one individual leader.<br/>1: The party is occasionally focused on the personal will and priorities of one individual party leader.<br/>2: The party is somewhat focused on the personal will and priorities of one individual party leader.<br/>3: The party is mainly focused on the personal will and priorities of one individual party leader.<br/>4: The party is solely focused on the personal will and priorities of one individual party leader.</p>   |
| Cohesion                            | <p>To what extent do the elites in this party display disagreement over party strategies?<br/>Response categories:<br/>0: Party elites display almost complete disagreement over party strategies and many party elites have left the party.<br/>1: Party elites display a high level of visible disagreement over party strategies, and some of them have left the party.<br/>2: Party elites display some visible disagreement over party strategies, but none of them have left the party.<br/>3: Party elites display negligible visible disagreement over party strategies.<br/>4: Party elites display virtually no visible disagreement over party strategies.</p>  |
| Organizational extensiveness        | <p><b>Local party branches:</b><br/>Does this party maintain permanent offices that operate outside of election campaigns at the local or municipal-level?<br/>Response categories:<br/>0: The party does not have permanent local offices.<br/>1: The party has permanent local offices in a few municipalities.<br/>2: The party has permanent local offices in some municipalities.<br/>3: The party has permanent local offices in most municipalities.<br/>4: The party has permanent local offices in all or almost all municipalities.</p> <p><b>Active community presence:</b><br/>To what degree are party activists and personnel permanently active in local communities?<br/>Response categories:<br/>0: There is negligible permanent presence of party activists and personnel in local communities.<br/>1: There is minor permanent presence of party activists and personnel in local communities.<br/>2: There is noticeable permanent presence of party activists and personnel in local communities.<br/>3: There is significant permanent presence of party activists and personnel in local communities.<br/>4: There is widespread permanent presence of party activists and personnel in local communities.</p> <p><b>Affiliate organizations:</b><br/>To what extent does this party maintain ties to prominent social organizations?<br/>Response categories:<br/>0: The party does not maintain ties to any prominent social organization.<br/>1: The party maintains weak ties to prominent social organizations.<br/>2: The party maintains moderate ties to prominent social organizations.<br/>3: The party maintains strong ties to prominent social organizations.<br/>4: The party controls prominent social organizations.</p> |

Ruling parties hold a cherished place in the contemporary study of autocracy. Although they feature prominently in many studies of authoritarianism, until recently, there has been no data on the internal organizational characteristics of ruling parties measured at the party level. Most studies attempt to measure ruling party strength using indicators such as regime types (Wright & Escribà-Folch, 2012), party origins (Geddes et al., 2018; Miller, 2020), party age (Gehlbach & Keefer, 2011), or a ruling party’s legislative seat share (Svolik, 2012), which are often poor proxies for conceptual attributes scholars aim to capture. V-Party helps to address this shortcoming by presenting time-varying indicators of organizational attributes at the party level.

Geddes et al. (2018) (GWF) make a recent contribution that helps researchers better capture some key ruling party organizational features. An important difference between the V-Party and the GWF data is that the former is based on expert-coded assessments, while the latter relies on the authors’ systematization of information in case studies, biographies, and news reports. Moreover, V-Party is coded at party-level but GWF is coded at regime-level, which makes it hard to match GWF scores with a specific party—especially when there are multiple ruling parties during the life span of a regime (e.g., Kazakhstan under Nazarbayev or Venezuela under Chavez). In addition, unlike the GWF measures, the V-Party measures are continuous. Here, I compare items from both data sets that aim to capture conceptually similar attributes. My purpose is not to establish the supremacy of one data set over another but to demonstrate that the items align well. I also aim to highlight some additional benefits that V-Party can present to researchers.

Figure 5 compares V-Party’s personalization measure, what I refer to as party institutionalization, with that of GWF. GWF provides a binary variable denoting whether the ruling party executive is simply a rubber stamp for the autocrat or if it has some policy independence. On the V-Party item, reversed from its original scale, higher values indicate more institutionalization. The figure on the left shows that parties coded as “not rubberstamp” in GWF also have higher values on the V-Party item, with a substantially higher median ruling party institutionalization score compared with party executive committees coded as “rubberstamp”. Yet, the data distribution demonstrates a substantial within-category variation that cannot be fully captured by a binary indicator.

Moreover, the GWF data presents an indicator measuring whether a ruling party has local-level branch organizations linking party militants to ordinary citizens.<sup>13</sup> In the figure on the right, the X-axis presents values of an additive index combining the standardized versions of V-Party items capturing the geographic breadth of party local branches and the depth of grassroots organization at the local level. Again, the two measures align well: ruling parties coded as having extensive local-branch organizations score significantly higher on the V-Party’s continuous measure, with a substantially higher median score than those that are considered to have limited branch organizations in the GWF data.

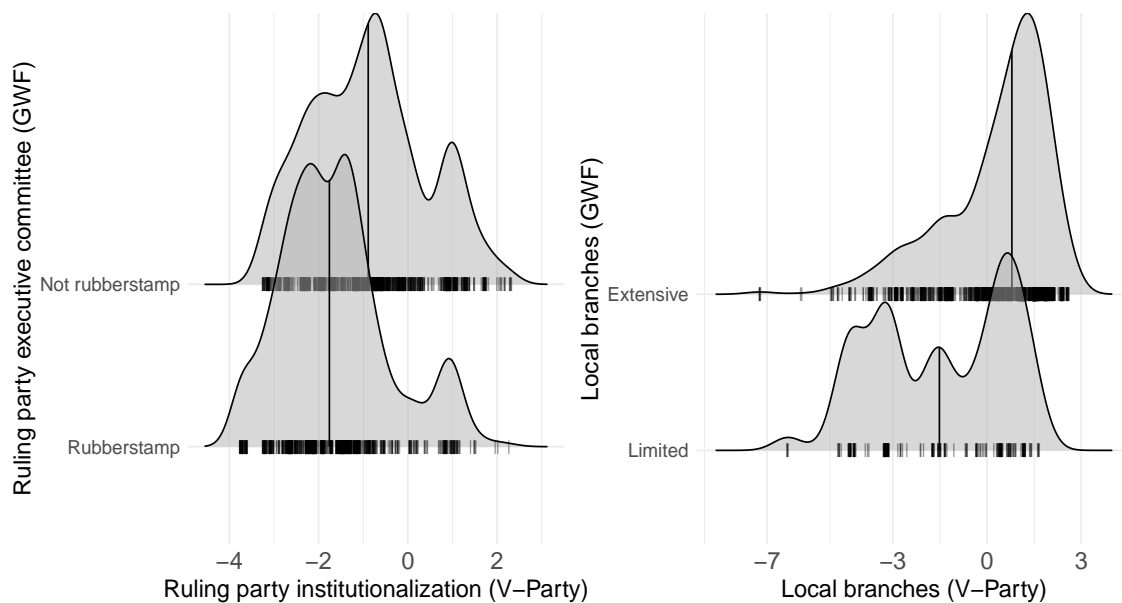


Figure 2: Comparison of the V-Party items with the GWF items.

*Note:* Vertical lines indicate median values. The rug marks represent individual observations.

Using V-Party indicators, scholars can measure the concept of ruling party strength that holds an important place in the literature. To further showcase the utility of V-Party indicators, Figure 6 compares the measure of ruling party strength developed in and used in

<sup>13</sup>Perhaps one controversial issue with the GWF data is that, according to their coding instructions, the evidence of local elections is indicative of a ruling party with extensive local-level branch organizations.

Article 4,<sup>14</sup> with autocratic regime type data (Geddes et al., 2014), which are widely used by scholars to proxy ruling party strength (e.g., Wright & Escribà-Folch, 2012). Previous studies suggest that personalistic and military regimes tend to have weaker parties than party-based regimes (e.g., Geddes, 2003; Wright & Escribà-Folch, 2012). In line with that expectation, Figure 6 shows that the median ruling party strength in party-based regimes (0.90) is higher than the median ruling party strength in both personalistic (0.06) and military regimes (−0.08). However, the figure also illustrates that regime-type data obscures potentially relevant information about ruling party strength. There is significant within-regime type variation in ruling party strength, which is often overlooked by the studies relying on regime-type data. Moreover, there is also a significant overlap in ruling party strength across regime types. Figure 6 indicates that not all party-based regimes have strong ruling parties, which is in line with Meng’s (2021) recent critique of the use of regime type measures as a proxy for party strength. Similarly, not all ruling parties in personalist regimes are uniformly weak, as some are even as strong as the typical ruling party in party-based regimes. Hence, previous studies that rely on regime type data to proxy party strength make some bold assumptions about the underlying distribution of party strength. As Figure 6 demonstrates, such assumptions are misleading.

Figure 6 also compares Article 4’s ruling party strength measure with the data on party origins (Miller, 2020). Recent scholarship increasingly use party origins to proxy ruling party strength. For example, in a recent study, Geddes et al. (2018) distinguish between parties that are created by the sitting autocratic leaders and parties that were organized either to

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<sup>14</sup>There are two points that need to be highlighted. First, the ruling party strength measure is an additive index combining the standardized versions of the items pertaining to party institutionalization, cohesiveness, and three indicators related to party organizational extensiveness (see Table 1). This way of aggregation of the items allows for partial substitutability between indicators (i.e., a low score on one indicator can *partially* be compensated by high scores on another), and thus it is in line with the theoretical discussion presented in Section 3.2. that different aspects of ruling party strength may have some independent effects on the outcomes of interest. Second, I do not include the candidate nomination variable because according to my conceptualization of party organizational strength (see p. 19), the positive and negative poles of this variable denote party organizational weakness. To reiterate, in terms of party centralization, I consider a party organization as strong if it centralizes decision-making power at the party executive committee, rather than dispersing it among party members such as local party bosses or locating it in the hands of an autocrat. However, it should be noted that the correlation between the indicators of party institutionalization and candidate nomination is quite substantial. When the party institutionalization variable is reversed so that higher values represent less concentration of power in the hands of an autocrat the correlation between the two variables is about 0.50.

lead a revolutionary struggle or to participate in elections before the seizure of power by the existing autocratic regime. They argue that parties that initially grew out of competitive elections and those that led a revolutionary struggle or an independence movement tend to develop stronger organizations than those that are created after an autocratic seizure of power (see also Levitsky & Way, 2012). Geddes et al. (2018) present evidence that autocratic regimes with parties that are created by sitting autocrats after they came to power are less likely to survive in the face of economic crises. Miller (2020) finds that revolutionary parties are relatively less likely to breakdown, but he does not find enough evidence that parties created by the sitting dictators face a higher odds of collapse. Miller (2020) additionally demonstrates that communist parties, including those that are imposed on Eastern European countries by the Soviet Union, are less prone to collapse than others.

Figure 6 examines ruling party strength over five different party origins. It demonstrates that Communist parties (median = 1.58) are remarkably stronger than parties with other founding party origins. In line with the previous studies' argument, Figure 6 shows that parties created by the sitting autocrats (i.e., Dictator-Created) tend to be weaker than others (median = 0.55, e.g. Peru's Cambio 90 (founded in 1990)). However, although revolutionary parties (median = 0.81, e.g., Mozambique's Liberation Front of Mozambique (founded in 1962)) are significantly stronger than dictator-created parties, they are not substantially stronger than other parties. Figure 6 collapses parties that are founded by non-executive elites to compete in politics (e.g., Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (founded in 1929)), as well as those that are initially organized as pro-independence organizations, into a single category (i.e., Other). The median value for these parties is quite high with 0.95. Overall, this dissertation's party strength measure captures theoretically relevant differences in the strength of pre-seizure and post-seizure parties. Most importantly, however, it also captures the full-scale variation in party strength that indicators of party origins by themselves cannot take into account.

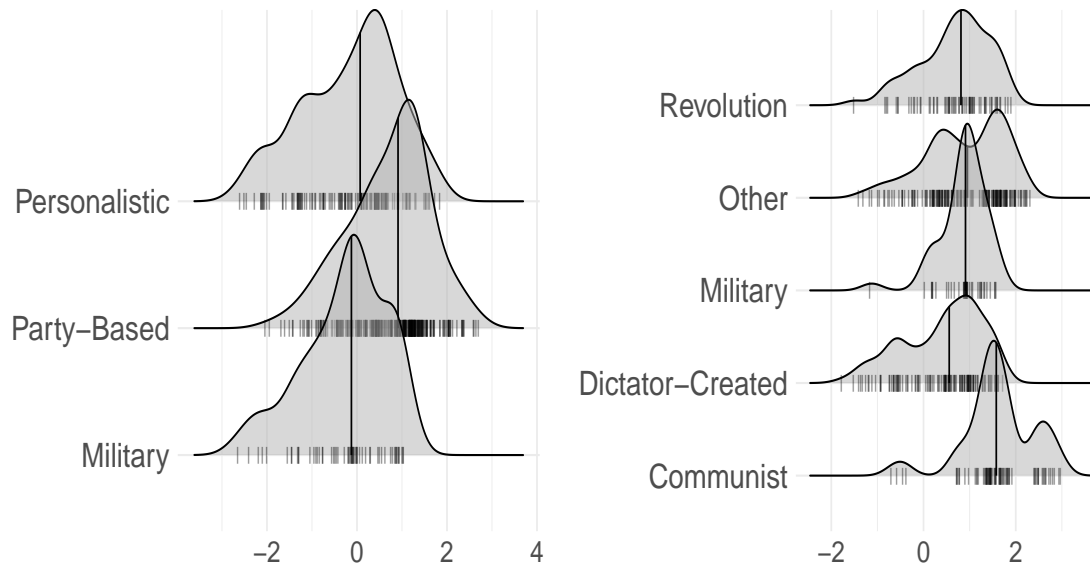


Figure 3: Ruling party strength by the GWF regime typology (left) and party origins (Miller, 2020) (right). *Note:* Other: Includes ruling parties that are founded by non-executive elites to compete in politics as well as parties that are initially organized as pro-independence organizations. Dictator-Created: Ruling parties founded by the sitting autocrats after they came into power. Military: Parties founded by a military. Communist: Organized as Communist with international involvement from the Communist International (Miller, 2020). Vertical lines indicate median values. The rug marks represent individual observations.

In sum, comparisons of the V-Party indicators with existing data on autocratic ruling parties illustrate the utility of the new measures of party organizational features. Unfortunately, there is no comparable data that would allow me to compare V-Party items with alternative measures in the context of opposition parties. But the above exercise and Article 1 jointly demonstrate that the new indicators represent an important step toward capturing substantial variation in internal characteristics of political parties in autocracies, which remains largely understudied in the literature. Having discussed V-Party as the main data source of the dissertation, the next section briefly summarizes individual articles.

## 5 Articles in brief

In this section, I briefly summarize individual articles, where I provide a more detailed discussion of the research design and methods within each article.

### 5.1 Article 1: A global perspective on party organizations. Validating the Varieties of Party Identity and Organization Dataset (V-Party)

The first article in the dissertation (Düpont et al., 2022)<sup>15</sup> is concerned with validating the V-Party’s organizational variables. The article assesses the content, the criterion, and the construct validity of party organizational variables. To further showcase the uniqueness of the V-Party’s scope and coverage, this article also covers parties from democratic countries.

In terms of the content validity, the article examines the extent to which the indicators accurately captures the organizational evolution of six selected parties (i.e., the German Greens (Germany), Fidesz (Hungary), the Justice and Development Party (Turkey), the Workers Party (Brazil), Institutional Revolutionary Party (Mexico), and the Liberal Democratic Party (Japan). The analysis demonstrates that the V-Party indicators accurately capture changes in party organizational features as described in relevant case studies.

With regards to the criterion validity, the article compares the V-Party indicators with existing prominent expert-coded data sets such as Janda (1980), Kitschelt (2014) and Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2012) that provide comparable measures. Although the surveys differ regarding the wording of questions, response categories, and time period covered, the V-Party data still align well with extant data on party organizational characteristics.

To evaluate the construct validity of the V-Party items, the article examines the association between party organizational features and the breakdown of political parties on a sample of 1515 parties from 150 countries with multiparty elections (excluding closed autocracies) between 1970 and 2019. The unit of analysis is party-election-year. The purpose of this exercise is to test how well the V-Party indicators help explain well-established causal hypotheses linking party organizational features and party breakdown. The dependent vari-

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<sup>15</sup>Published in *Electoral Studies*.

able is party breakdown denoting whether a party's vote share permanently falls below 5 percent after a given national legislative election. We do not consider a party as broken down if it temporarily falls below our threshold of 5 percent of legislative votes. Hierarchical logit models with varying intercepts by party and country produce estimates that are in line with the well-established theories of party breakdown, thereby providing positive evidence for the indicators' validity. Specifically, the results show that party organizational extensiveness, internal cohesion, and the devolution of decision-making authority from party leadership to lower cadres are significantly and negatively associated with the likelihood of party breakdown.

In sum, together with Section 4.2 in this chapter, the article demonstrates that the V-Party indicators perform well in terms of validity. V-Party provides a new and rich source of valid data to re-assess and expand existing knowledge on party organizations for the first time from a global perspective.

## **5.2 Article 2: Opposition party organizational features, ideological orientations, and elite co-optation in electoral autocracies**

The second article in the dissertation (Kavasoglu, 2021)<sup>16</sup>, provides an answer to the following question: Why are some opposition parties co-opted but not others? My main argument suggests that organizationally extensive parties and those that devolve internal decision-making authority from party leadership to lower cadres are less likely to be co-opted. In this article, I also expand this argument and further theorize that these effects should be even stronger when the ideological distance between an opposition party and a ruling party increases.

I test the following five hypotheses: 1) Greater party organizational extensiveness is associated with a lower likelihood that an opposition party will be co-opted by the regime; 2) Greater dispersion of intra-party decision-making authority is associated with a lower likelihood that a party will be co-opted by the regime; 3) Greater ideological distance between an opposition party and a ruling party is associated with a lower likelihood that an

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<sup>16</sup>This article is published in *Democratization*.



opposition party will be co-opted; 4) The greater the ideological distance between an opposition party and a ruling party, the stronger the negative association between opposition party organizational extensiveness and the likelihood of co-optation; 5) The greater the ideological distance between an opposition party and a ruling party, the stronger the negative association between the dispersion of internal decision-making authority and the likelihood of co-optation.

I test these hypotheses on a sample of 316 parties from 63 electoral autocracies – defined here as autocratic regimes that hold formally competitive elections for the national executive and the legislature. I restrict the analysis to electoral autocracies because closed autocracies rarely permit “genuine” opposition parties to contest in elections. The data set includes repeated observations of major opposition parties ( $> 5\%$  of vote share) across 251 legislative election cycles, which results in a sample size of 586 party-election year observations between 1970 and 2019. The unit of analysis is a party-election year nested in an electoral autocracy.

I build an original measure of opposition party co-optation to operationalize the dependent variable. To measure co-optation, I rely on information from the V-Party expert survey, the Political Handbook of the World Series (1975 - 2019), and the WhoGov Dataset (Nyrup & Bramwell, 2020). In constructing the dependent variable, I identify a set of observable criteria that indicates whether an opposition party collaborates with autocratic regime elites across electoral, legislative, and executive arenas. Specifically, I code a party as co-opted if 1) it joins a pre-electoral coalition led by an autocratic incumbent; 2) if a party member accepts a cabinet position after the election (this excludes cases where a party member accepts a cabinet position and subsequently resigns from the party or gets expelled by the party leadership); 3) if a party informally supports the incumbent’s election bid; 4) and/or most of the policy initiatives of the autocratic government. I construct a dichotomous variable indicating whether a party is co-opted in a given parliamentary term, which recognizes the fact that the four coding criteria are not necessarily mutually exclusive. I code a party as co-opted at a party-election-year if any of the four conditions hold in subsequent years until the next party-election-year. In total, the data set includes 233 events of co-optation.<sup>17</sup> To my knowledge, this is the first study predicting opposition party co-optation using such

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<sup>17</sup>The full list of events of co-optation is provided in the Appendix for Article 2.

detailed information at the party level.

The main independent variables are organizational extensiveness, party centralization, and institutionalization. Given that centralization and institutionalization is highly correlated and clearly load on to the same dimension in a factor analysis (see Article 1), the two indicators are standardized and summed together to build the composite measure of the dispersion of internal decision-making authority within parties. I do not have strong theoretical expectations regarding the potential relationship between elite cohesion and co-optation. For example, high levels of cohesion may make it easier for a party leader to reach an agreement with autocrats and ensure that other party members support the deal. Nevertheless, low levels of cohesion may also boost a party leader's ability to strike a co-optation agreement with autocrats, because at low levels of cohesion party members should be less likely to coordinate their efforts to veto a co-optation deal.

To capture the ideological distance between an opposition party and a ruling party, I utilize two indicators from the V-Party expert survey. The first indicator relates to parties' overall ideological stance on economic issues and captures their position on the left-right scale. The second indicator of ideological positions measures the competition over the question of regime change by capturing the extent to which the leadership of a party is committed to democratic principles such as free and fair multiparty elections, freedom of speech, media, assembly, and association. This is of course not a perfect measure of capturing party positions over the question of regime change, since it may underestimate the distance between an opposition party and a ruling party if the former is not supportive of the democratic form of government. Using these two indicators, I calculated the absolute distance between parties with respect to their positions on economic issues and regime change.

I estimate a series of hierarchical logistic models to estimate the relationship between party organizational features and the likelihood of co-optation. Given that the data set includes repeated measures of parties over elections nested within countries, I fit random intercepts logit models, which allows for intercepts to vary by party and country, so that the within-group residuals become conditionally independent and identically distributed. I also control for several variables such as party identity (i.e., ethnic/regional or religious party), the number of times a party was co-opted in the past to account for latent factors that can

make parties previously co-opted by the incumbent regime systematically different from non-coopted parties, as well as various country-level factors such as level of democracy, economic development, and the availability of natural resources.

In line with my expectations, I find that higher degrees of opposition party organizational extensiveness and dispersion of intra-party decision-making authority are negatively associated with the likelihood of co-optation, especially when the ideological distance between an opposition party and a ruling party increases.

### 5.3 Article 3: Ruling parties and repression in autocracies

The third article<sup>18</sup> in the dissertation investigates the link between ruling party organizational features and repression. In the article, I examine three hypotheses. The first hypothesis suggests that ruling party de-institutionalization is positively associated with repression. The second hypothesis predicts greater ruling party organizational extensiveness to be negatively associated with repression. Finally, the third hypothesis is related to the interactive relationship between ruling party institutionalization and organizational extensiveness. It expects ruling party de-institutionalization to have a greater negative association with repression at higher levels of ruling party organizational extensiveness.

To test these hypotheses, I use time-series cross-sectional data covering 148 autocratic ruling parties over the years 1970 and 2015. The unit of analysis in this article is party-year in a given autocracy. I capture repression, the dependent variable of the study, using a measure from Fariss (2014), which is based on estimates of a latent scale of respect for human rights that accounts for the overtime changes in standards of accountability in human rights norms and reporting. The resulting human rights protection scores combine information from a number of prominent data sets that have been employed in the repression research, capturing physical integrity rights violations such as torture, extrajudicial killings, disappearances, genocides, and politicides, among others. As a robustness test, I also run a model using the physical violence index from the Varieties of Democracy Dataset (V-Dem) (Coppedge et al., 2020), which measures the extent to which a government respects the physical integrity rights of individuals.

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<sup>18</sup>This article is not submitted to a journal.

In empirical analyses I fit a series of linear models with varying intercepts by party, regime, and country. To get unbiased estimates, together with a number of control variables, I include party-level means of time-varying explanatory variables to account for time-invariant unobserved characteristics of ruling parties such as their founding origins or the manner in which they seized the power. Often referred to as Mundlak transformation, the unit means of time-varying covariates help pick up the correlation between the unobserved unit effects and the covariates (Bell & Jones, 2015; Mundlak, 1978). This ensures that only variation over a ruling party's baseline will be taken into account.

In line with theoretical expectations, the findings suggest that de-institutionalization is negatively associated with repression, and this relationship becomes even stronger at higher levels of ruling party organization extensiveness. There is also strong evidence that ruling party organizational extensiveness is negatively associated with repression. A series of robustness tests indicate that the results are not driven by the observed and unobserved party or regime characteristics, are not confined to within-party variation, specific time-period or regions.

This article also assesses my claim that autocrats under institutionalized and extensiveness ruling parties should have lower incentives to deploy repression because such organizational qualities enable autocrats to mitigate elite conflict and mass dissent that often necessitate repressive responses on the part of the autocrats. To assess whether these suggested mechanisms are valid, I estimate two models with measures capturing elite conflict and mass dissent as dependent variables. The first models estimate the effects of ruling party organizational features on the probability of a coup – both civilian and military coups, including attempted coups – as measured in Powell and Thyne (2011) and on the number of anti-government protests that have occurred in a given year as recorded by Banks (2010). I find that ruling party de-institutionalization is associated with the increased likelihood of a coup and an increase in the number of anti-government protests in a given year, but the former association is not statistically significant at conventional levels. While I can only speculate about the reasons behind the null effect, it is possible that ruling party institutionalization reduces repression not so much because it mitigates elite conflict and thus lowers autocrats' incentives to *respond* to elite dissent with repression, but because it constraints

autocrats' ability to *preemptively* repress (potential) rivals before manifestations of dissent. Nevertheless, I find that greater ruling party organizational extensiveness is statistically significantly associated with both the reduced likelihood of a coup and a decrease in the number of anti-government protests. This is in line with the notion that party organizational extensiveness should reduce the risk of mass dissent. One interpretation for the finding that party organizational extensiveness reduces the likelihood of coup events is that regime elites may have fewer incentives to launch a coup if an autocrat can mobilize mass support. As Magaloni (2006) notes elite unity requires mass support, and the absence of mass support boosts dissident elites' chances to attain power by mobilizing citizens against an autocrat. My findings are in line with this expectation.

Overall, Article 3 makes at least three contributions to the literature. First, it provides a theoretical framework linking how the variation in explicit ruling party organizational features shapes repression in autocracies. Second, the article presents empirical analyses that reveal how ruling party features both individually and interactively affect repression. Third, to my knowledge, the article provides the first empirical analyses linking changes in ruling party organizational features to coups and anti-government demonstrations in autocratic settings.

#### **5.4 Article 4: Autocratic ruling parties during regime transitions: Investigating the democratizing effects of strong ruling parties**

The fourth article in the dissertation (Kavasoglu, 2022)<sup>19</sup> provides an answer to the following question: Why and when do ruling parties facilitate the implementation of substantial democratizing reforms by incumbent autocrats and their allies? Building on the previous research, I develop the hypothesis that greater ruling party strength increases the likelihood of incumbent-led democratization (conditional on regime change).

I examine the relationship between party strength and incumbent-led democratization on a sample of 161 autocratic ruling parties between 1970 and 2015. The unit of analysis is the party-year. To construct the dependent variable, I proceed in two steps. First, using data

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<sup>19</sup>This article is published in *Party Politics*.

from Miller (2020), I identify regime changes, which involve the ruling party's loss of power to a new autocracy (i.e., a transfer of power to a new autocratic ruling party or a non-party autocracy) and democratization (as indicated in Boix et al. (2013)). Second, I use data from Djuve et al. (2020) to identify democratic transitions that were preceded by substantial democratizing reforms initiated and implemented mainly by an incumbent autocratic regime (i.e., incumbent-led democratization). In several occasions, Boix et al. (2013) and Djuve et al. (2020) disagree about whether a regime transition took place or not. For these cases, I rely on secondary resources, including but not limited to the book by Haggard and Kaufman (2016), to code the modes of regime change. The full sample includes a total of 96 regime changes of which 25 are incumbent-led democratic transitions. The remaining 71 regime changes correspond to transitions primarily enforced by dissidents within the regime or outsider opposition groups (e.g., military coups, mass protests, civil war, foreign interventions, or substantial democratization resulting from an unexpected election loss). I provide the list of incumbent-led democratic transitions in the accompanying Appendix to Article 3.

The main independent variable is ruling party strength, as operationalized in Section 3.2. In the main empirical tests, I employ the index of ruling party strength, but I also examine whether the results are specifically driven by the individual index components. To empirically model the relationship between ruling party strength and the likelihood of incumbent-led democratic transition, I estimate selection models. Specifically, I estimate Heckman-style selection models in which the first stage (selection equation) models the likelihood of an autocracy experiencing a regime change, and the second stage (outcome equation) estimates the likelihood that a regime change will be in the form of incumbent-led democratization. I chose selection models because unobserved factors such as the strategic motivations of incumbents are likely to influence outcomes in both equations. Selection models allow me to estimate the two equations simultaneously while separating the unobserved component affecting the outcomes of interest (i.e., regime change and mode of regime transition) from the errors. The model specifically estimates and incorporates that component into the second stage equation.

For the selection equation, I estimate a probit model in which the dependent variable is a dummy that indicates a regime change. In the outcome equation, I run a probit model

where the estimated average response function of incumbent-led democratization is conditioned on the selection equation. Hence, the outcome equation estimates the likely pathway to a subsequent regime for the cases in which a regime change has occurred. In the outcome equation, the dependent variable is a dummy indicating an event of incumbent-led democratization. In estimating the models, I control for duration dependence and employ country-clustered standard errors to account for the panel structure and heteroskedasticity. Heckman-style selection models are hard to converge when estimated with unit fixed effects. To ensure that the time-invariant unit-specific factors do not confound the observed relationship, I include a battery of control variables. Most importantly, I control for ruling parties' founding origins to guard against the possibility that factors influencing the development of party organizational features, in the long run, do not confound the estimates of ruling party strength. Doing so, I aim to address the so-called Pepinsky (2014) critique that suggests most studies on autocratic institutions overlook the possibility that factors that lead to the adoption of certain institutions in autocracies can also drive the substantial outcomes that researchers attempt to explain. To ensure that the observed association is not the product of endogeneity due to reverse causality, I run an instrumental variable regression where I use mean regional levels of ruling party strength as an instrument for ruling party strength in a country. This follows from Bizzarro et al. (2018) who argue that political institutions are the product of diffusion in that countries are more likely to adopt particular institutions if their neighbors also adopt them. This should be a valid instrument because the strength of a ruling party is highly correlated with the strength of other ruling parties from the same politico-geographic region. Moreover, it is unlikely for regional levels of party strength to directly influence the likelihood of incumbent-led democratization in a country.

The results provide evidence in favor of rejecting the null of no effect. Overall, the results support the proposition that strong ruling parties should increase autocrats' incentives and abilities to implement democratizing reforms to preempt political opposition during regime transitions. In other words, the findings show that incumbent-led democratic transition is the most likely pathway to regime change in autocracies with relatively strong ruling parties. The results also provide the first quantitative evidence that ruling party strength is associated with a lower likelihood of regime breakdown. In sum, the findings support the claim that

ruling party strength can function both as a regime-stabilizing force and a democratizing force.

Building and expanding on the work of Riedl et al. (2020), the article contributes by demonstrating how additional ruling party organizational features such as party institutionalization can help explain the implementation of substantial democratizing reforms by incumbent autocrats. The article also contributes to the research on the role of ruling parties and regime change. To my knowledge, this study is the first to examine how time-varying ruling party organizational affect the likelihood of autocratic regime breakdown and democratization.



Table 2: Summary of articles.

| Article | Research Question  | Dependent Variable  | Main Independent Variables  | Argument  |
|---------|--|---|---|---|
| 1       | How can we best measure organizational features of parties around the world?                     | -   | -   | -   |
| 2       | How do opposition parties' organizational features affect their likelihood of being co-opted?    | Opposition party co-optation  | Opposition party organizational extensiveness, centralization, and institutionalization | Autocrats' ability to co-opt a particular opposition party is shaped by the opposition party's organizational characteristics. Organizationally extensive opposition parties, and those that devolve decision-making authority from the party leadership to lower cadres are less likely to be co-opted, especially when they are ideologically distant from the autocratic ruling party. |
| 3       | How do ruling parties' organizational features increase (decrease) autocrats' use of repression? | Repression  | Ruling party organizational extensiveness and institutionalization                      | Ruling party organizational extensiveness and institutionalization reduces repression.<br>Weak ruling party institutionalization combined with high organizational extensiveness increases repression.  |
| 4       | Why and when do ruling parties' organizational features facilitate democratization?              | Implementation of substantial democratizing reforms by autocratic incumbents (i.e. incumbent-led democratization) | Ruling party organizational extensiveness, cohesion, institutionalization               | Organizationally extensive, institutionalized, and cohesive ruling parties increase autocrats' abilities and incentives to implement democratizing reforms during regime transitions to preempt political opposition.   |

## 6 Conclusions

While scholarly consensus holds that political parties are key institutions in stabilizing autocratic regimes, current scholarship has not effectively conceptualized the variation in organizational features of parties and satisfyingly related that variation to autocrats' incentives and abilities to co-opt support, repress opponents, and to make democratic concessions. Research suggests that parties are key institutions in helping autocrats to credibly commit to sharing power with and channeling state benefits to elites and ordinary citizens. Yet, studies largely overlook whether parties have the necessary organizational features required to fulfill these objectives. Instead, most studies focus on the mere presence or absence of political parties in an autocratic system to explain how parties shape the ways in which autocracies operate, and how they affect political outcomes. Most neo-institutionalist accounts assume that all ruling parties have organizational qualities that can bind autocrats and regime elites to a joint rule and all have mass-mobilizing structures that can enable autocrats to mobilize mass support. Similarly, opposition parties are often portrayed as organizationally weak entities lacking incentives and capabilities to challenge autocrats' hold on power. On the contrary, the articles of the dissertation jointly demonstrate that ruling and opposition party organizational features vary substantially both across parties and over time. The image of all ruling parties as equally strong and all opposition parties as uniformly weak patronage-seeking organizations is not accurate. As I demonstrate in this dissertation, this has important implications for our understanding of how parties shape political outcomes in autocracies.

The individual articles of the dissertation collectively contribute to the overall thesis that both ruling and opposition party organizational features shape autocrats' incentives and abilities to co-opt or repress elites and masses and to implement substantial democratizing reforms as a strategy of survival. Overall, findings demonstrate that the variation in parties' decision-making structures, internal cohesion, and organizational extensiveness significantly affects if and how parties contribute to autocratic stability and survival.

An important contribution of this dissertation is the new data on party organizations. Empirical contributions of the dissertation are based on novel time-varying party-level organizational indicators developed as part of the V-Party project. As this introductory chapter

and Article 1 demonstrate, V-Party indicators provide sufficient content, criterion, and construct validity. The indicators help capture substantial variation in parties' decision-making structures, internal cohesiveness, and grassroots organizations that have been largely neglected by prior works due to the lack of data.

By utilizing V-Party indicators to account for differences in explicit party organizational features, the dissertation reveals some important patterns. In the context of opposition parties, Article 2 shows that whether an opposition party will be co-opted by an autocratic regime is shaped by opposition party organizational characteristics. Rather than assuming all opposition party elites are willing to collaborate with autocrats in exchange for various material and political benefits, Article 2 argues that opposition party elites' decisions should depend on opposition party organizational features. I theorize and empirically demonstrate that organizationally extensive opposition parties and those with institutionalized collective decision-making structures are less likely to be co-opted by autocrats, especially when they are ideologically distant from autocrats. The findings indicate that opposition party organizational features and ideological positions matters for autocrats' ability to co-opt opposition elites – regardless of the availability of patronage resources that autocrats can distribute to opposition elites, or the extent of repression autocrats use to discourage opposition elites from resisting co-optation.

The dissertation also provides insights into the link between ruling parties and regime stability. Articles 3 and 4 jointly show that ruling parties differ in their ability to mitigate intra-elite conflict and mass dissent as a function of their organizational features. Article 3 provides the first empirical analyses linking time-varying ruling party organizational features to the likelihood of coups and to the frequency of mass protest. The findings indicate that autocrats under weakly institutionalized and less extensive organizations ruling parties are less capable of preventing intra-elite conflict as indicated by the increased likelihood of a coup. Moreover, they are more likely to face anti-government mass protests, indicating that they are less able to co-opt mass support compared to autocrats under institutionalized and extensive ruling party organizations. Similarly, Article 4 provides the first Large-N quantitative evidence that ruling party organizational features are significantly associated with the probability of regime breakdown. Strong ruling parties i.e. those that have institutionalized

collective decision-making structures, high levels of elite cohesion, and extensive organizations are less likely to break down than those that incorporate these attributes to a lesser extent. Moreover, the findings in Article 4 demonstrate that regime breakdowns in the context of strong ruling parties are more likely to occur under the control of sitting autocrats. The results show that autocrats with strong ruling parties are less likely to be forcibly ousted by regime insiders and outsiders, which is in line with the findings in Article 3 showing that these leaders are less prone to coups and mass protests. Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of adopting a more nuanced approach to ruling party organizations. Even among regimes that are often considered as party-based, there is significant variation in ruling party organizational features: ruling parties in these regimes are not uniformly strong, and some are even weaker than those in other types of regimes. Importantly, party organizational features often change through the lives of ruling parties, and as Articles 3 and 4 show, that has important implications for autocratic regime stability.

The dissertation also contributes to our understanding of how ruling parties shape autocrats' use of repression to maintain themselves in power. Article 3 argues that because autocrats with weakly institutionalized and less extensive ruling party organizations face greater threats to their hold on power and enjoy higher discretionary power, they should have greater incentives and abilities to deploy violent repression. The results of this article support this claim: Autocrats under such parties use more violent repression to maintain themselves in power than their counterparts under more institutionalized and extensive ruling party organizations. The results also indicate that weakly institutionalized ruling parties with extensive party organizations are especially repressive. Accordingly, when the enhanced capacity to deploy repression – thanks to extensive ruling party organization – is combined with high levels of discretionary power, i.e., low levels of party institutionalization repression becomes more prevalent.

The findings in this dissertation have important implications for future research on political parties and regime change in autocracies. An important lesson is that existing research has suffered from a limited understanding of the substantive content of parties, which has crucial ramifications for our understanding of the oft-cited regime stabilizing role of parties. Notwithstanding a handful of recent studies (e.g., Levitsky & Way, 2012), previous

works tend to make general claims about the regime stabilizing role of ruling parties based on a few exceptionally strong ruling parties such as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) or Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU). But a careful look into explicit organizational features of ruling parties demonstrates that ruling parties differ substantially in their ability to contribute to regime stability (see also Meng, 2021). On this background, future studies should pay more attention to ruling party organizational features such as their decision-making structures and grassroots organizations in explanations of regime stability. This dissertation provides a more nuanced investigation of ruling parties' ability to mitigate threats from regime insiders and outsiders by analyzing how party organizational features affect the likelihood of coups and the extent of mass protests autocratic regimes face. It also examines the link between ruling parties' organizational features and regime outcomes. By looking deeper into internal features of ruling parties, future research should also analyze a number of other effects scholars have attributed to ruling parties, such as civil war onset (Fjelde, 2010; Keefer, 2008) and economic growth (Gehlbach & Keefer, 2011, 2012).

The findings in this dissertation also have implications for research tying opposition parties to regime change. Despite lack of access to financial resources, repression, or the risk of exclusion from formal politics, opposition parties do build extensive and institutionalized organizations. As I show in this dissertation, such opposition parties are especially likely to resist autocrats' attempts at co-opting them. Resisting co-optation is the first step for opposition parties to effectively compete against autocrats and push for a regime change. Autocrats worldwide have managed to remain in power despite having to regularly compete in multiparty elections, in part because they were successful in co-opting opposition parties (Arriola et al., 2021). Thus, to better understand why some autocratic elections result in electoral turnover while others do not, future research should pay more attention to opposition party organizational features shaping autocrats' ability to co-opt opposition elites.

A number of countries as different as Hungary, Turkey, Venezuela, and Russia are currently experiencing autocratization as incumbent governments are gradually undermining core institutional requirements of electoral democracy (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). The co-optation of opposition parties such as the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) in Turkey has played a major role in enabling incumbents to undermine democratic institutions. It is likely

that without the alliance established with MHP, the ruling Justice and Development Party would have failed to maintain its parliamentary majority and to win the 2017 constitutional referendum with a razor-thin vote margin. Thus, this dissertation's emphasis on opposition party organizational features may also help explain autocratization. From a broader perspective, my findings suggest that electoral regimes may be more prone to autocratization when ruling parties compete against opposition parties lacking institutionalized collective decision-making structures and extensive grassroots organizations. In many young democracies where institutional safeguards of democracy is underdeveloped, opposition parties often emerge as the key actors to monitor and constrain ruling party behavior (Grzymala-Busse, 2007). When opposition parties forge an alliance with ruling parties instead of pushing for electoral turnover, autocrats may enjoy greater ability to undermine democratic institutions. The potential link between opposition party organizational features and autocratization may be a promising topic for future research.

To sum up, this dissertation contributes to the study of political parties in autocracies. We know much less about political parties in autocracies than we do in democracies. I hope that this dissertation will further our understanding of how parties organize in autocracies, how they constrain and enable political behavior, and ultimately how they affect substantial political outcomes such as regime stability and democratization.

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