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Towards a unified approach to research on democratic backsliding

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ABSTRACT

A growing literature examines democratic backsliding, but there is little consensus on when, where, and why it occurs. Reviewing more than 100 recent articles and working papers, this research note argues that inattention to the measurement of backsliding and the underlying concept of democracy drives this disagreement. We propose three remedies. First, we outline several questions that help researchers navigate common measurement challenges. Second, we argue that conceptual confusion around backsliding is driven in large part by inconsistent definitions of democracy. We show how outlining a comprehensive concept of democracy enables researchers to better account for the diversity of instances of democratic backsliding. Our third contribution is drawing attention to a previously overlooked form of backsliding: when governments lose the effective power to govern or voters and elites increasingly disagree about truths and facts. The research note urges scholars to pay closer attention to the conceptualization and measurement of backsliding prior to empirical analysis.

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KEYWORDS backsliding; democracy; democratic erosion; democratic breakdown; conceptualization; measurement


1. Introduction

Democracy is increasingly under attack across the world. Last year, a record 2.6 billion citizens lived in countries experiencing autocratization.¹ Traditionally, democratic decline took the form of abrupt breakdown in countries with low or middling levels of economic development.² Recent instances follow a different pattern, however: they occur gradually and affect a wider array of countries, including those thought to have robust democratic institutions.³

In response to these developments, a growing literature studies “democratic backsliding.” Yet, there is little consensus about when, where, and why backsliding occurs. Scholars identify many potential causes, ranging from economic crisis⁴ to political polarization.⁵ While observers agree that Hungary, Poland, and the United States have recently experienced backsliding, the extent to which backsliding is happening

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in other countries remains contested. Reviewing over 100 working papers and recent articles on democratic backsliding published in 20 top political science journals,⁶ we find that this disagreement stems from inconsistencies in the measurement of democratic backsliding and the underlying conceptualization of democracy.

We propose three remedies. First, we outline several questions to tackle common measurement challenges. While most measurement decisions are defensible, we show that these choices dramatically impact what cases are identified as backsliding. We advise that researchers justify the implicit and explicit measurement decisions they make and explain how these decisions impact their analysis.

Second, we argue that some of these measurement challenges arise from conceptual confusion around the term “democratic backsliding.” We propose that researchers begin their analysis with a systematic conceptualization of backsliding rooted in a clear definition of democracy itself. We provide an example of one such concept that argues that democracy guarantees *freedom of choice*, *freedom from tyranny*, and *equality in freedom*. Accordingly, one definition of democratic backsliding that follows from this concept of democracy is that *democratic backsliding is any change of a political community’s formal or informal rules which reduces that community’s ability to guarantee the freedom of choice, freedom from tyranny, or equality in freedom*.

Third, while conventional models of democracy focus on elections and governmental constraints, we highlight a third arena of democratic politics: democratic governments must have effective power to govern and voters must have a shared understanding of facts. We believe the omission of this arena is one reason why scholars disagree about recent instances of democratic backsliding. We demonstrate the prevalence of this arena – which we term the *enable* arena – in existing scholarship and show that it is not directly captured in common measures of backsliding.

2. The challenges of measuring “backsliding”

We first present the choices researchers make when measuring democratic backsliding and demonstrate that these choices lead to much disagreement about which cases are identified as backsliding. When scholars do not justify their measurement choices, this disagreement causes confusion about the concept of democratic backsliding itself.

Our review highlights three sets of measurement challenges (Table 1). The first challenge arises from choosing an *indicator of democracy*. Common measures of backsliding are constructed from four data sources: the Polity Project,⁷ Freedom House’s *Freedom in the World* index,⁸ the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project,⁹ or the Bertelsmann Transformation Index.¹⁰ Decisions to use these datasets are certainly defensible. However, authors often do not justify *why* they use a given indicator of democracy. In many cases, it is unclear whether conceptual considerations guided indicator choice, or vice versa. This is problematic because these indicators differ in their conceptualization of democracy and, as a result, in the backsliding cases they identify.

To illustrate, consider four common measures of backsliding: (1) any negative change on the Polity scale,¹¹ (2) any positive change on the Freedom in the World Index,¹² (3) negative changes by at least 0.05 on V-Dem’s polyarchy index,¹³ or (4) negative changes by at least 0.5 on BTI’s democracy score.¹⁴ These measures identify different cases of backsliding. For instance, Freedom House and V-Dem identify

Table 1. Challenges in the measurement of democratic backsliding.

Challenges	Questions to ask about measure of backsliding
<i>Choice of indicator</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which indicator of democracy is used? - What is the underlying definition of democracy? - Is there congruence between theory, concept, and indicator?
<i>Magnitude of change</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How is it distinct from the “push-and-pull” of democratic politics? - How is it distinct from democratic breakdown? - Is it capturing quantitative or qualitative changes in the level of democracy? - Can the same numeric changes reflect different qualitative changes?
<i>Time horizon</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is it capturing year-to-year changes or changes over multiple years? - If year-to-year: Can it identify small changes? - If multiple years: Can it distinguish between one vs. multiple instances of backsliding? - How does it identify onset?

multiple episodes of backsliding in Hungary in recent years, but Polity does not. Similarly, Freedom House finds that Argentina experienced backsliding in 1992, 1998, and 2001, none of which are captured by Polity or V-Dem. Even when there is general agreement that a country is experiencing backsliding, the timing it occurs is coded inconsistently across data sources. For example, Polity codes that the U.S. experienced backsliding in 2016, while Freedom House and V-Dem say it was in 2017.

The disagreement about backsliding is pervasive. [Figure 1](#) reports the share of country-years between 1990 and 2018 for which pairs of the four indicators identify an instance of backsliding. Since backsliding occurs infrequently, most country-years are coded as “not backsliding” by both indicators (grey). However, the



Figure 1. Agreement between four core indicators of backsliding.

Notes: For each pair of indicators, this figure reports the share of country-years (1990–2018) for which neither, one, or both indicators suggest that backsliding occurred. Darker shades reflect a higher share of country-years in a particular cell.

proportion of country-years coded as backsliding by only one indicator exceeds that of country-years for which both indicators agree. For example, 94% of country-years have not experienced backsliding according to both Polity and V-Dem. Of the remaining 6% of country-years, only 1% has experienced backsliding according to both, while the indicators disagree in 5% of cases. Of course, we cannot know for certain which countries are experiencing backsliding. One way to overcome this inferential challenge is to generate scholarly consensus. Yet, as [Figure 1](#) demonstrates, this consensus does not exist. Existing measures of backsliding identify only a subset of cases. This prevents us from drawing generalizable conclusions about the causes of backsliding.

The second challenge is determining the *magnitude of change* that qualifies as backsliding. Some scholars consider any negative change. Others use a larger threshold, such as decreases in a country's Polity score of at least 2 or 3 points.¹⁵ Still others identify backsliding using categorical changes in regime type, such as movements from "democracy" to "anocracy" or "autocracy"¹⁶ or from "free" to "partly free" or "not free."¹⁷ We do not view one approach as superior to another. However, these thresholds pose trade-offs. Emphasizing fine-grained changes makes it hard to distinguish backsliding from the normal "push and pull" of democratic politics. One political party may temporarily increase its power through legitimate means. Such actions only become problematic over time as temporary power asymmetries become permanent. On the other hand, emphasizing larger changes can make scholars blind to incremental democratic decline which, accumulated over time, can have substantive effects.¹⁸

Using cutoffs along conventional indicators of democracy also makes it hard to disentangle underlying institutional processes. Since democracy indicators aggregate across multiple dimensions, any single numeric decrease in a democracy indicator may capture different backsliding actions. Packing the courts or tilting the electoral playing field may both justify the same decrease in democracy, but they reflect different underlying institutional processes. This problem is exacerbated when the threshold used to measure backsliding is larger in magnitude. While a 1-point decrease on the Polity scale reflects a limited number of possible backsliding actions, the number of combinations of backsliding actions increases exponentially as larger decreases are considered. One potential remedy is to disaggregate indicators of democracy into sub-components.

The third challenge is how to define the *time horizon* over which backsliding occurs. The convention is to measure backsliding at the annual level. Alternatively, some scholars measure backsliding over longer periods of time, such as 5 or 10 years. For instance, Kaufman and Haggard¹⁹ ask whether there has been a decline in a country's democracy score from its most recent peak. This approach, however, makes it challenging to identify the precise onset of backsliding.

Many of these considerations are not new. However, researchers' measurement decisions are often not explicitly justified. Our review revealed that scholars tend to make three measurement decisions. First, they select one of four democracy indicators (Polity, Freedom House, V-Dem, or BTI). Then, they select both the magnitude of the change needed to identify backsliding and the time horizon over which that change occurs. The latter two decisions result in seven possible measurements of backsliding for each of the four democracy indicators: any change in democracy over a 1-year period, any change over a 5-year period, larger changes over a 1-year period, larger changes over a 5-year period, a categorical change²⁰ in the past year, any change

from the maximum democracy score in the decade, or larger changes from the maximum democracy score in the last decade. Combining these decisions results in 28 potential indicators of backsliding (see appendix).²¹

The countries in [Figure 2](#) are shaded according to the proportion of the 28 indicators that identify the country as experiencing backsliding in 2018 (henceforth: “agreement”). Excluding all countries with zero agreement (i.e. no backsliding occurred), agreement is low, with a mean of 20.2%. There is substantial agreement that countries such as Hungary (60.7%), Nicaragua (67.9%), or Poland (42.9%) experienced backsliding. But the extent to which backsliding occurred in Chile (7.1%), Germany (4.8%), or South Korea (7.1%) is contested. Such “less obvious” cases may be of greatest interest to scholars seeking early warning signs of backsliding, but measurement inconsistencies show we are ill-equipped to identify them. Agreement remains low – a mean of 45.3% – even when using only the four common measures of backsliding from [Figure 1](#). In other words, *even the most commonly used indicators of backsliding are more likely to disagree about whether backsliding occurred in a given case.*

Since most scholars are interested in *democratic* backsliding rather than in backsliding in general, we next look at agreement by regime type. [Figure 3](#) shows there is even *less* agreement between measures of backsliding for democracies than autocracies or intermediate regimes.²¹ *We are less able to identify backsliding in advanced democracies that have experienced some of the most worrisome recent episodes of backsliding.*

3. Conceptual issues with democratic backsliding

The difficulties in identifying backsliding are partly rooted in how researchers conceptualize “democracy” itself. Our review found many studies that did not define democracy prior to analysing episodes of democratic backsliding. This is problematic because

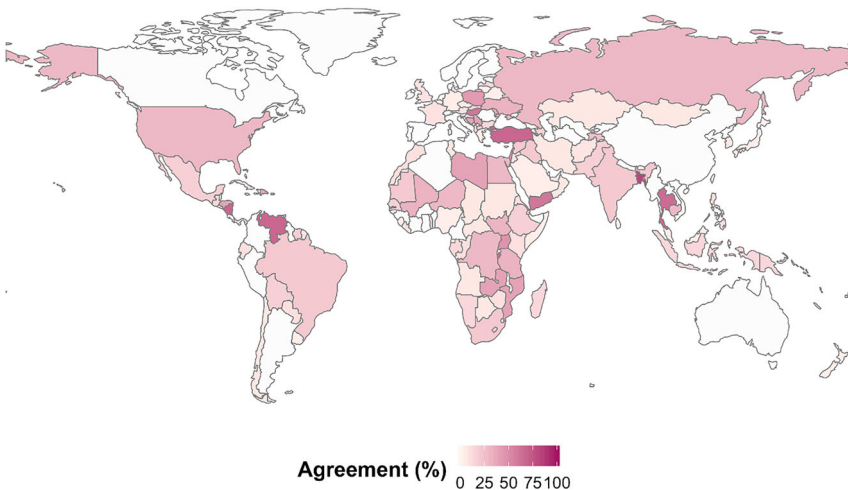


Figure 2. Distribution of agreement.

Notes: This map reports the distribution of agreement among the backsliding indicators in 2018. Darker shades of purple mean higher agreement. White means that no indicator coded backsliding (i.e. 0% agreement).

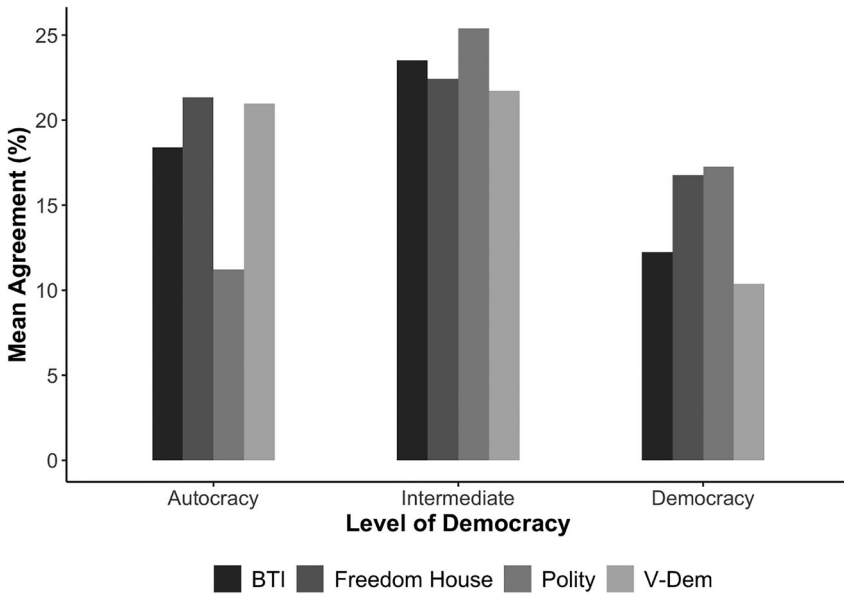


Figure 3. Agreement by level of democracy.

Notes. This figure reports mean agreement across all indicators of backsliding in 2018, separately countries with low, intermediate, and high levels of democracy (measured in 2017).

various definitions of democracy draw attention to different forms of democratic backsliding. For instance, procedural definitions of democracy that focus on electoral processes²² and political participation²³ emphasize backsliding during elections but do not consider the erosion of informal norms. By contrast, definitions of democracy that emphasize the role of political culture and civil society²⁴ focus attention on cases of backsliding where public support for democratic institutions is eroding²⁵ but not on backsliding driven by political elites.

We recommend researchers begin their analysis with a thorough conceptualization of democracy. To clarify, the existence of many definitions of democracy²⁶ is beneficial for political science. What is often missing, however, is a justification for why a researcher selected a particular definition, and consideration of how this selection affects their sample. To illustrate, this section introduces a concept of democracy and derives a definition of backsliding from that concept. Our objective is not to advance one definition of democracy or backsliding, but to show how beginning with a comprehensive definition of democracy enables researchers to identify the diversity of pathways through which backsliding occurs.

Recent work by Munck offers a starting point for our discussion.²⁷ His synthesis of the literature concludes that political freedom – i.e. self-determination – lies at the core of most modern understandings of democracy.²⁸ Like Munck, we use *freedom* as a “primitive concept,” that is, a concept used to define other concepts. We propose that democratic governance is about achieving three freedoms. First, the *freedom of choice*: democracies allow citizens to decide their preferred policies and representatives. Second, *freedom from tyranny*: democracy’s institutional safeguards protect against a tyranny of the majority or oligarchic rule. Third, *equality in freedom*: all

citizens and groups of citizens have the same claims to these freedoms. We therefore define *democratic backsliding* as: any change of a political community's formal or informal rules which reduces that community's ability to guarantee the freedom of choice, freedom from tyranny, or equality in freedom to citizens and groups of citizens.

To guarantee these freedoms, democracies rely on three arenas of politics (Figure 4). The first two arenas feature prominently in existing concepts of democracy: democratic institutions both empower citizens to *elect* representatives and *constrain* those representatives to ensure they do not abuse their political powers.

Backsliding in the *elect* arena – which lies at the core of Schumpeter's minimalist concept of democracy²⁹ and Dahl's work on polyarchy³⁰ – involves actions taken to systematically undermine the free, fair, or contested nature of democratic elections. *Free* elections are jeopardized when citizens are formally or informally disenfranchised, as exemplified in the United States through the systematic closure of polling places.³¹ Backsliding impacts the *fairness* of elections when domestic or foreign interference affects the electoral process, such as during the 2012 presidential campaign in South Korea, when agents from the Korean National Intelligence Service (NIS) flooded Twitter with messages supporting incumbent Park Geun-hye.³² Finally, backsliding affects the *contested* nature of elections when reforms such as Hungary's recent partisan gerrymandering make elections less competitive.³³

The *constrain* arena is undermined by actions that prevent government branches from restraining one another or reduce society's ability to hold officials accountable. Often, this proceeds through “executive aggrandizement,” whereby an executive expands their political power.³⁴ The Hungarian government's recent attempts to stack the courts with loyalists,³⁵ for example, constitutes an infringement on *intra-*

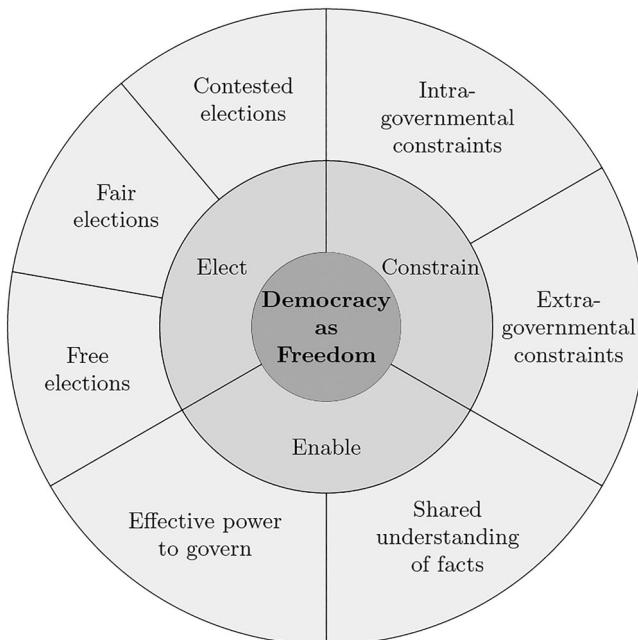


Figure 4. Concept of democracy.

governmental constraints. Backsliding also occurs when *extra-governmental constraints* on political power are weakened, such as the Polish government's recent attempts to take over foreign-owned media outlets and stack state-owned television with pro-government staff.³⁶

Recently, backsliding has also occurred through polarization, the spread of misinformation and the weakening of central government authority. We propose that a third arena – *enable* – is needed to describe such instances of backsliding. It operationalizes *equality in freedom* and considers the extent to which democratic institutions allow political representatives to implement their decisions effectively across the country.

The *enable* arena has two dimensions. The first recognizes that democracy requires democratically elected officials to have the *effective power to govern*:³⁷ there must be no policy areas that are under the control of non-elected actors. Democratic principles are violated if wealthy individuals or corporations have disproportionate political influence³⁸ or there is not sufficient civilian oversight of the military.³⁹ In addition, there must be no sub-national “authoritarian enclaves.”⁴⁰ For example, the rising political influence of drug-trafficking organizations in parts of Mexico erodes democracy because their control of the local judiciary, police, and politicians undermines democratic freedoms.⁴¹

The second dimension is the establishment of a *shared understanding of facts* among citizens and representatives. An erosion of shared understanding of facts can severely undermine rational-critical public discourse, considered by some political theorists to be a pillar of deliberative democracy.⁴² Moreover, when contestation about basic facts replaces the political “marketplace of ideas,” it reduces citizens’ ability to make informed political decisions. The recent spread of “fake news” undermines this principle because it reflects and furthers political polarization.⁴³ Polarization increases popular support for democratic erosion by making the intimidation of political “enemies” more acceptable.⁴⁴ Since facts are necessary to make informed political decisions and “fake news” creates uneven access to them, this violates the *equality in freedom* principle.

These two dimensions may appear to be strange bedfellows. Yet, they reflect the same idea: when the government lacks the *effective power to govern*, even free, fair, and contested elections and well-defined executive constraints can no longer ensure freedom for all citizens. Some citizens may live in “authoritarian enclaves,” while the spread of “fake news” makes it harder for voters to access the information necessary to hold elected officials accountable. We use a more expanded definition of democracy that includes the *enable* arena to study democratic backsliding. This definition allows us to identify cases of unequal access to democratic governance in the same country as instances of democratic backsliding. However, we note that this concept of democracy may not be suited for other research questions, such as those concerning the relationship between democracy and effective governance.

In emphasizing the *enable* arena, we seek to overcome a mismatch between concept and measurement of democratic backsliding. Many researchers point to instances of eroding state capacity or online misinformation as instances of backsliding, but do not include these concepts in their definitions or measures. To illustrate, [Figure 5](#) reports the annual number of scholarly works from Google Scholar on democratic backsliding, and the share of these works that refer to the *elect*, *constrain*, and *enable* arenas.⁴⁵ While scholarly attention to democratic backsliding has increased, academic research referencing the *elect* or *constrain* arenas has remained relatively constant (about 75%). However, a significant share of scholarly works – about one-third – also references the *enable* arena. That is, while this arena is salient in extant

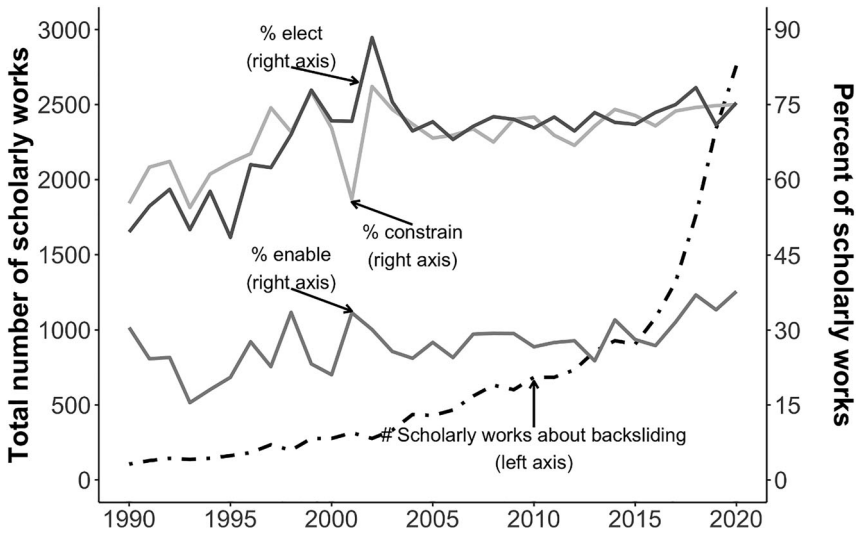


Figure 5. Scholarly works on backsliding.

Notes: This figure reports the total number or scholarly works on democratic backsliding (dashed line; right axis) and the share of works on backsliding that make reference to the three arenas of democratic politics (right axis). The data were collected through Google Scholar searches.

research, it has not received sufficient attention in existing conceptualizations or measurements of democratic backsliding.

By articulating their preferred definition of democratic backsliding, researchers will be better able to map the concept to measure. In the appendix, we provide examples of indicators that map on to different dimensions of democracy. We show that measures commonly used in quantitative analyses of democratic backsliding often do not capture the *enable* arena. For example, the Polity index emphasizes elements of the *elect* and *constrain* arenas with indicators for political participation, openness and competitiveness of executive recruitment, and executive constraints. Commonly used V-Dem indices like the electoral democracy index and the liberal democracy index similarly emphasize these two arenas.

These indicators are not exhaustive, nor can they resolve the measurement challenges identified in this note. However, they provide a useful starting point for researchers seeking a principled way to identify cases of backsliding in the relevant arena(s) of democratic backsliding. For instance, researchers interested in the *enable* arena may wish to draw on sub-components of the V-Dem and Polity indices or on alternative sources. These include indicators for government effectiveness and political stability,⁴⁶ bureaucratic quality,⁴⁷ or state capacity,⁴⁸ which could proxy *effective power to govern*. Measures of societal polarization and online media fractionalization from the Digital Society Project⁴⁹ could better capture a *shared understanding of facts*.

4. Discussion

Concerns about the erosion of democratic institutions across many countries are driving new research on democratic backsliding. However, disagreement about

when, where, and why backsliding occurs impedes scholarly progress. This note argues that existing research is hampered by insufficient precision regarding the conceptualization of democracy and measurement of backsliding. We do not aim to provide one single definition of democratic backsliding. Instead, we ask researchers to be explicit about the choices they make in empirical research.

We provide three recommendations for researchers. First, we recommend answering a set of guiding questions – about their indicator of democracy, the magnitude of change relevant to this indicator, and the relevant time horizon – when measuring backsliding. Second, we suggest a detailed concept of democratic backsliding rooted in a rigorous discussion of democracy itself. We urge scholars to justify their choices and provide examples of backsliding indicators suited to different arenas of democratic politics. Third, we ask researchers to consider instances of backsliding in an underappreciated arena of democratic politics: when leaders lose the effective power to govern or citizens lack a shared understanding of facts. We show that while this arena makes up a substantial portion of the literature, it is not directly captured in existing measures of democratic backsliding. Overall, this note joins others in proposing a comprehensive definition of democratic backsliding⁵⁰ and calling on scholars to pay more attention to questions of conceptualization and measurement.⁵¹ These steps will better equip us to identify early warning signs of democratic backsliding.

Notes

1. Hellmeier et al., “State of the World 2020: Autocratization Turns Viral.”
2. Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times: The Citizenry and the Breakdown of Democracy*.
3. Kaufman and Haggard, “Democratic Decline in the United States: What Can We Learn from Middle-Income Backsliding?”; Diamond, “Democratic Regression in Comparative Perspective: Scope, Methods, and Causes.”
4. Hunter and Power, “Bolsonaro and Brazil’s Illiberal Backlash.”
5. Svobik, “Polarization versus Democracy”; Haggard and Kaufman, *Backsliding: Democratic Regress in the Contemporary World*; Arbatli and Rosenberg, “United We Stand, Divided We Rule: How Political Polarization Erodes Democracy.”
6. See appendix for details.
7. Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers, *Polity V Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions*.
8. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World*.
9. Coppedge et al., *V-Dem Dataset – Version 10*.
10. Bertelsmann Foundation, *Bertelsmann Transformation Index*.
11. Mansfield and Pevehouse, “Democratization and International Organizations”; Huq and Ginsburg, “How to Lose a Constitutional Democracy,” von Borzykowski and Vabulas, “Credible Commitments? Explaining IGO Suspensions to Sanction Political Backsliding.”
12. Brownlee, “The Limited Reach of Authoritarian Powers”; Tomini and Wagemann, “Varieties of Contemporary Democratic Breakdown and Regression: A Comparative Analysis.”
13. Coppedge, “Eroding Regimes: What, Where, and When?”; Hellmeier et al., “State of the World 2020: Autocratization Turns Viral”; Meyerrose, “The Unintended Consequences of Democracy Promotion: International Organizations and Democratic Backsliding.”
14. Levitsky and Way, “The Myth of Democratic Recession”; Hess and Aidoo, “Democratic Backsliding in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Role of China’s Development Assistance.”
15. Von Borzykowski and Vabulas, “Credible Commitments? Explaining IGO Suspensions to Sanction Political Backsliding”; Alemán and Yang, “A Duration Analysis of Democratic Transitions and Authoritarian Backslides.”
16. Mansfield and Pevehouse, “Democratization and International Organizations.”
17. Tomini and Wagemann, “Varieties of Contemporary Democratic Breakdown and Regression: A Comparative Analysis.”

18. Gerschewski, "Erosion or Decay? Conceptualizing Causes and Mechanisms of Democratic Regression."
19. Kaufman and Haggard, "Democratic Decline in the United States: What Can We Learn from Middle-Income Backsliding?"; Haggard and Kaufman, *Backsliding: Democratic Regress in the Contemporary World*.
20. Some democracy indicators that use numeric values also assign categorical labels to those values. For example, Freedom in the World measures democracy on a 100-point scale and then assigns labels of "free," "partly free," and "not free" based on the overall score.
21. See appendix for coding rules. Table A3 shows that this conclusion holds when not collapsing V-Dem's and BTI's regime typology into autocracy-intermediate-democracy.
22. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*.
23. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*.
24. Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm."
25. Foa and Mounk, "The Signs of Deconsolidation."
26. Goertz, *Social Science Concepts: A User's Guide*.
27. Munck, "What Is Democracy? A Reconceptualization of the Quality of Democracy."
28. Kelsen, "Foundations of Democracy"; Przeworski, *Democracy and the Limits of Self-Government*.
29. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*.
30. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*.
31. Berman, "There are 868 Fewer Places to Vote in 2016 Because the Supreme Court Gutted the Voting Rights Act."
32. BBC News, "South Korea's Spy Agency Admits Trying to Influence 2012 Poll."
33. Peto, "What to Watch at Hungary's Elections."
34. Bermeo, "On Democratic Backsliding."
35. Sedelmeier, "Anchoring Democracy from Above? The European Union and Democratic Backsliding in Hungary and Romania after Accession."
36. Grzymala-Busse, "Global Populisms and Their Impact."
37. Merkel, "Embedded and Defective Democracies."
38. Youngs, "Democracy and the Multinationals."
39. Croissant et al., *Democratization and Civilian Control in Asia*.
40. Mickey, *Paths Out of Dixie: The Democratization of Authoritarian Enclaves in America's Deep South, 1944-1972*.
41. Schedler, "The Criminal Subversion of Mexican Democracy."
42. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*; Gutmann and Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?*
43. Graham and Svobik, "Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and Support for Democracy in the United States"; Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*.
44. Arbatli and Rosenberg, "United We Stand, Divided We Rule: How Political Polarization Erodes Democracy."
45. Measured as the number of search results by year for "democracy" AND "backsliding" AND corresponding terms for *elect* ("election" OR "vote" OR "voting" OR "voter"), *constrain* ("judiciary" OR "judicial" OR "legislature" OR "courts" OR "civil society"), or *enable* ("misinformation" OR "disinformation" OR "conspiracy" OR "polarization" OR "fake news" OR "state capacity").
46. The World Bank, "Worldwide Governance Indicators."
47. IRGC, "International Country Risk Guide (ICRG) Researchers Dataset."
48. Lee and Zhang, "Legibility and the International Foundations of State Capacity."
49. Mechkova et al., "Digital Society Project Dataset v3."
50. Bermeo, "On Democratic Backsliding"; Waldner and Lust, "Unwelcome Change: Coming to Terms with Democratic Backsliding."
51. Gerring et al., "Democracy and Human Development: Issues of Conceptualization and Measurement"; Lueders and Lust, "Multiple Measurements, Elusive Agreement, and Unstable Outcomes in the Study of Regime Change"; Munck and Verkuilen, "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: Evaluating Alternative Indices"; Skaaning, "Waves of Autocratization and Democratization: A Critical Note on Conceptualization and Measurement."

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