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Overview

A political regime refers to the set of rules that determine who has access to political power, who may elect the government, and under what conditions and restrictions political authority is exercised (Kailitz 2013, Skaaning 2006, Reich 2002).

While this definition may sound abstract, the nature of political regimes has profound real-world consequences. Human rights protections, foreign policy behavior, economic development, and regime durability are all closely tied to regime type. Russia's recent war of aggression against Ukraine, for instance, highlights that autocratic forms of rule are not only a threat to domestic populations but also a grave danger to international peace and security.

Historically, many cross-national datasets categorized political systems simply along a democracy–autocracy dichotomy. Only since the seminal work of Barbara Geddes and others has there been a systematic effort to distinguish among different types of autocratic regimes. This line of research emphasized that autocracies vary fundamentally in how they legitimate political authority, organize institutions, and structure mechanisms of rule.

The Varieties of Political Regimes (Va-PoReg) dataset builds upon this tradition. It takes seriously the fundamental differences between autocratic regime types, focusing particularly on the nature of regime legitimation and the institutional configuration of authority. Va-PoReg systematically classifies both democratic and autocratic regimes based on distinct patterns of political legitimation and power organization.

By contrast, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project — although one of the most sophisticated and comprehensive datasets available — conceptualizes political regimes differently. V-Dem primarily classifies regimes based on their distance from the ideal of liberal democracy, distinguishing among liberal democracies, electoral democracies, electoral autocracies, and closed autocracies. Its focus lies on degrees of democratization and democratic erosion.

Given these distinct conceptual foundations, Va-PoReg and V-Dem must be seen as complementary rather than substitutive. Each offers valuable but different perspectives: V-Dem excels in tracking democratic quality and its decline, while Va-PoReg focuses on classifying regimes according to their underlying forms of legitimation and governance structures across the full regime spectrum.

Va-PoReg provides one of the most comprehensive datasets on political regimes in terms of country-years, covering independent states as well as colonial and occupation regimes from 1900 to 2024.

Among major datasets, only V-Dem offers a similarly systematic coverage of earlier historical periods on a global scale. However, Va-PoReg places a distinctive emphasis on differentiating among autocratic regimes and on coding regimes that existed under conditions of colonial rule, foreign occupation, or limited sovereignty.

The classification of regime types in Va-PoReg is primarily guided by the nature of regime legitimation, supplemented by close examination of structural features of political authority. For the theoretical foundations regarding the central role of regime legitimation in regime classification, see Kailitz (2013). The conceptual framework and detailed coding rules applied in Va-PoReg have been further developed and expanded based on this foundation.

Funding

The development and continuous updating of Va-PoReg is funded from 2022 to 2025 by the Free State of Saxony, based on a decision of the Saxon State Parliament. The project is hosted at the **Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies** at **TU Dresden**. The financial support enables the systematic expansion of the dataset, the refinement of coding procedures, and the maintenance of comprehensive country reports to ensure the highest standards of academic quality, transparency, and replicability.

The funding body plays no role in the conceptual design, data collection, coding decisions, or interpretation of results. All research activities are conducted independently, adhering strictly to the principles of academic freedom and scientific integrity.

Coverage of Va-PoReg

The dataset encompasses all political entities that have undergone periods of state sovereignty or at least a semi-sovereign status from 1900 to 2024. Therefore, it includes states that have navigated various historical trajectories, including episodes of colonization, occupation, or being incorporated into other sovereign entities, exemplified by instances like Lithuania or Ukraine during their affiliation with the Soviet Union. This inclusive approach to dataset composition affords a more holistic perspective on the trajectory of nations and their respective populations, transcending the confinements of exclusive consideration for independent states.

Our dataset includes dozens of cases like, for instance, Newfoundland, Sikkim or Tibet, which are not covered by any dataset on political regimes up to now.

However, the incorporation of territories within the jurisdiction of other states introduces a layer of complexity that sometimes muddles rather than clarifies inquiries pertaining to comparative analyses of political regimes. Consequently, we present different variants of Va-PoReg for different purposes. We strongly recommend that researchers select the regime variable variant that aligns most effectively with the objectives of their research endeavors.

Regime Categories: Conceptualization and Operationalization

Va-PoReg distinguishes political regimes according to a standard classification and an alternative classification. The standard classification differentiates political regimes more finely, while the alternative classification closely merges some related types for certain research purposes. The regime categories are listed below:

Standard Classification (VaPoReg_s):

- 10 Liberal Democracy
- 20 Defective Democracy
- 30 Electoral Oligarchy
- 40 Non-Electoral Transitional Regime
- 50 Electoral Hybrid Regime
- 60 Electoral Autocracy
- 70 Electoral Oligarchical Autocracy
- 80 Constitutional Monarchy
- 90 Autocratic Monarchy
- 100 One-Party Autocracy
- 110 Right-Wing Autocracy
- 120 Communist Ideocracy
- 130 Islamist Ideocracy
- 140 Military Autocracy

150 Personalist Autocracy
 160 Direct Rule Colonial Regime
 170 Indirect Rule Colonial Regime
 180 Direct Rule Occupation Regime
 190 Indirect Rule Occupation Regime
 200 No Central Authority
 210 Part of Other Country

Alternative Classification (VaPoReg_a):

15 Democracy
 30 Electoral Oligarchy
 40 Non-Electoral Transitional Regime
 50 Electoral Hybrid Regime
 65 Electoral Autocracy
 85 Ruling Monarchy
 100 One-Party Autocracy
 110 Right-Wing Autocracy
 120 Communist Ideocracy
 130 Islamist Ideocracy
 140 Military Autocracy
 150 Personalist Autocracy
 165 Colonial Regime
 185 Occupation Regime
 200 No Central Authority

The regime categories form the foundation of the Va-PoReg dataset. Each category is defined conceptually and operationalized based on specific, observable criteria.

In the following section, we provide the conceptual definitions and the coding rules that guide the classification of political entities into these regime types. For each type, we outline the central features, the patterns of legitimation, and the empirical indicators that inform the coding. Special attention is given to borderline cases, which are consistently resolved based on the overarching coding principles of Va-PoReg, with detailed justifications provided in the country reports.

All coding decisions are based on the regime type that is in place on July 1st of each year. Transitions occurring after this date are recorded separately through start and end variables but do not affect the coding for the calendar year.

Democracy

Conceptualization: The title of the "first modern democracy" is often attributed to the United States, following the establishment of its Constitution in 1787 and the subsequent ratification of the Bill of Rights in 1791. These events indeed marked a significant shift toward a government based on democratic principles, including representative government and the separation of powers. The "Federalist Papers," written by key members of the political elite of the nascent United States, justified democracy by highlighting the importance of multiparty elections, liberty, and executive constraints (Hamilton/Madison/Jay 1987). In this sense, free and fair elections are not only an institutional feature of democracy but also the procedural legitimization of rulers to rule and legislators to legislate.

However, voting rights in the early United States were generally limited to white male property owners, excluding a large portion of the population. In true democracies, universal suffrage is imperative. It mandates that all adult citizens, irrespective of gender, socioeconomic status, wealth, or literacy levels, possess unequivocal rights to vote, stand for election, and engage comprehensively in the political process.

Evaluating a regime's democratic credentials necessitates an examination that extends beyond the quality of the electoral process to encompass various essential governance dimensions. A regime can only be categorized as fully democratic in the absence of significant deficiencies in the institutional constraints placed upon the executive branch, as well as in the domains of political and civil liberties. Effective governance in a democracy is characterized by robust checks and balances among the branches of government, ensuring no single branch predominates. This includes an independent judiciary with the authority to scrutinize and challenge executive decisions, legislative bodies vested with authentic power and oversight capabilities over the executive, and the establishment of explicit legal boundaries delineating executive powers.

In the competitive arena of politics, it is essential that elections are conducted in a manner that is free, fair, and competitive, devoid of any substantial impediments. This entails the ability of multiple political parties or candidates to contest elections and harbor a genuine prospect of

attaining power. The recurrent electoral success of a singular party, provided the elections are conducted freely, fairly, and competitively, does not in itself compromise the democratic integrity of the regime.

Moreover, a democracy is characterized by the absence of significant barriers to political participation. This includes a free media and an unencumbered civil society, both of which should be capable of critiquing the government without fear of retribution. Universal suffrage and the protection of political and civil liberties are fundamental to the conceptualization of democracy, ensuring that all citizens have an equal stake and voice in the governance of their country.

Operationalization: A country is classified as democratic if it holds direct, multi-party legislative elections and its executive is democratically legitimized, either through direct popular elections or via majority formation in the legislature.

To distinguish democracies from *electoral hybrid regimes* and *electoral autocracies*, we apply four key dimensions: suffrage (participation), electoral competition, civil liberties, and institutional constraints on the executive. The minimal criteria for democracy are defined within our framework under the category of *defective democracy*, while emphasizing that regimes in this category significantly deviate from the democratic ideal. In our standard classification, democracies are also categorized as either liberal or defective. Our dataset includes a standard version that distinguishes between these two types and an alternative version that groups both under a single "democracy" category. In the standard regime duration variable (*duration_VaPoReg_s*), a shift between defective and liberal democracy is coded as a new regime. In the alternative version (*duration_VaPoReg_a*), such transitions are treated as a continuation of democracy rather than a regime change. In our standard classification, democracies are distinguished as either *liberal* or *defective* (Merkel 2004, Bogaards 2009). This differentiation aligns with broader democratic theory, where *liberal democracies* fully uphold electoral competition, civil liberties, and institutional constraints, while *defective democracies* exhibit substantial governance deficits that hinder the full realization of democratic principles. Researchers should select the regime duration variable that best aligns with their analytical needs.

Liberal Democracy

Conceptualization: Liberal democracy is conceptualized as a regime type that not only meets minimal procedural standards of electoral democracy but also ensures the substantive realization of civil and political rights through institutionalized checks and balances. Drawing on theories of embedded democracy (Merkel 2004), this model integrates electoral competition with the protection of individual liberties and the rule of law. Liberal democracies are characterized by effective constraints on executive power, judicial independence, and a vibrant civil society, ensuring that democratic procedures are accompanied by substantive freedoms and pluralism. This conceptualization aligns with normative democratic theory, where democracy is more than a mechanism for selecting rulers—it is a form of rule underpinned by autonomy, equality, and legal-institutional safeguards.

Operationalization: To operationalize universal suffrage, it is essential to ensure that all adult citizens, regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, wealth, or literacy, have the unequivocal right to vote, run for office, and participate in the political process. This involves assessing legal frameworks to confirm no restrictions on voter eligibility and analyzing voter turnout to ensure inclusiveness. Additionally, the practical implementation of these rights must be evaluated to verify that all citizens can exercise them freely and equally. According to our conceptualization, elections in a democracy also have to be free, fair and clean. Constraints on the executive by the legislature and the judiciary have to be (almost) comprehensive. To assess whether the elections were free and fair and if political and civil rights, particularly freedom of opinion and assembly, are guaranteed, we utilize data from FH, LIED, Polity and V-Dem, academic literature and reports from international election observers. In addition, we check if the ruler is effectively constrained by the legislature. For this, we use mainly data from the Polity indicator for executive constraints and in addition from the V-Dem indicators for legislative and judicial constraints on the executive, as well as assessments from academic literature.

Defective Democracy

Conceptualization: Defective democracy refers to regimes that preserve the institutional framework of democracy, such as elections and representative institutions, while exhibiting substantial shortcomings in one or more of its core dimensions. Originating from the concept of embedded democracy, this category acknowledges the existence of defective forms within the democratic spectrum. Defective democracies maintain democratic institutions but fall short in practice due to restrictions on suffrage, civil liberties, or institutional accountability. These deficits may result from state repression, elite domination, or systemic institutional weaknesses, which undermine the effective functioning of democratic governance without altogether

dismantling its formal structure. Building on historical perspectives where universal suffrage was a key threshold for democratization (Coppedge/Alvarez/Maldonado 2008: 3, Dahl 1971, Powell 1982: 3), our classification considers democracies defective when they impose significant suffrage restrictions, such as disenfranchisement based on gender or literacy tests.

Operationalization: The distinction between liberal and defective democracies hinges on the extent to which electoral participation is genuinely inclusive and representative of the entire population. A nation is designated as a defective democracy when it exhibits substantial suffrage restrictions. This encompasses scenarios lacking female suffrage or employing mechanisms like literacy tests to limit electoral participation. This delineation is rooted in historical perspectives where male universal suffrage constituted a fundamental milestone towards democratization (Coppedge/Alvarez/Maldonado 2008: 3, Dahl 1971, Powell 1982: 3). While this is true, this milestone was only halfway to full democracy. Moreover, a regime's classification as a defective democracy also reflects substantial deficiencies in institutional constraints on the executive branch and/or in the sphere of political and civil liberties. Notably, this includes scenarios where checks and balances are undermined, judicial independence is compromised, legislative oversight is curtailed or unduly influenced by the executive, and executive powers exceed established legal boundaries, albeit not to the degree observed in an electoral hybrid regime. Defective democracies are regimes where elections are generally free and competitive, but substantial deficits in governance hinder the full realization of democratic principles. These regimes feature significant limitations in institutional accountability, civil liberties, and political participation, despite retaining fundamental democratic structures. Political opposition exists and operates, but systemic challenges – such as restricted media access, targeted state interference, or inadequate judicial independence – impede the fairness of competition.

While civil society and the media maintain some degree of freedom, these freedoms are under constant pressure through censorship, harassment, or regulatory constraints. Institutional checks and balances, such as the judiciary and legislature, are present but weakened by executive overreach or politicization. Governance deficits may include corruption, inefficiency, or the centralization of power, which further undermine democratic quality.

For classification purposes, defective democracies align with regimes categorized by Freedom House as “partially free” but within the rather free range in our interpretation. A key example is India under the Modi government, where elections remain competitive and institutions formally intact, yet significant centralization of power, restrictions on civil liberties, and biased treatment of opposition and minority groups weaken democratic governance. While elections

are not systematically manipulated, concerns over media independence, judicial impartiality, and the treatment of dissent highlight the deficits characteristic of defective democracies.

Electoral Hybrid Regime

Conceptualization: Electoral hybrid regimes blend democratic and autocratic elements, falling between defective democracies and electoral autocracies (Levitsky/Way 2002, Levitsky/Way 2010). While opposition parties can participate in elections, significant barriers to fairness exist. These include biased media, restricted civil liberties, and systemic obstacles favoring incumbents. Defects in at least one of the following areas—suffrage, election freedom and fairness, political liberties, or constraints on the executive—are so severe that the regime cannot be classified as a democracy. Despite notable governance deficits, such as weak institutional checks on executive power and uneven rule of law, electoral hybrid regimes retain some pluralism and allow limited political participation. Opposition parties can challenge the government, though their chances of success are constrained by an uneven playing field.

Operationalization: Elections in electoral hybrid regimes are competitive but marked by fairness deficits. These include unequal access to media, manipulation of electoral commissions, voter intimidation, and financial or administrative obstacles for opposition candidates. Elections must involve multiple parties or candidates, but systemic advantages for incumbents undermine the level playing field. Regarding this criterion we use qualitative observations as well as quantitative indicators, namely V-Dem’s CEI and EF&FI. Electoral hybrid regimes maintain some degree of political pluralism and civil liberties. Opposition parties are allowed to operate, but their activities are hindered by restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and association. Biased media coverage, harassment of political opponents, and limitations on civil society are prevalent, though not absolute.

Our methodology is primarily qualitative, yet it is bolstered by quantitative evidence drawn from supplementary datasets to corroborate our assertions. For the purposes of categorization, we adopt a revised version of Freedom House’s nomenclature, identifying electoral hybrid regimes as “rather not free” cases. Furthermore, the classification of a regime as an electoral hybrid regime might be due to the existence of military veto power, which represents a substantial, albeit non-executive, constraint on the autonomy of democratically elected officials.

Electoral Oligarchy

Conceptualization: The main characteristic of an electoral oligarchy is that elections to a parliament exist, but participation in these processes is restricted to a small, select portion of the population. An electoral oligarchy often justifies itself through several self-legitimizing narratives that aim to rationalize the restriction of political participation to a select few. One common justification is the argument of competence and stability. These regimes often claim that only a small, educated, and property-owning segment of the population has the necessary knowledge and vested interest in maintaining stable governance. They argue that broader participation could lead to instability, chaos, or the election of populist leaders who might undermine the nation's economic and political order. Some regimes in this category claim that restrictive suffrage is a temporary measure necessary for national development. They argue that once certain developmental milestones are achieved, such as economic stability or a higher literacy rate, the franchise can be extended. This creates a façade of progressiveness while effectively postponing democratic reforms indefinitely. Examples of electoral oligarchies are pre-democratic regimes in South America where the vast majority of the population was excluded based de facto on social status through instruments like literacy tests. The use of literacy as a criterion for voting rights has significant political and social implications when only a rather small proportion of the population is literate. The use of literacy tests often mirrored and reinforced existing social and racial inequalities. Indigenous populations and people of African descent, who historically had less access to education due to systemic discrimination, were more likely to be disenfranchised by these requirements. In several countries, the right to vote was tied to property ownership or a certain level of income. This meant that only wealthier individuals, typically from the upper classes, could participate in elections, thereby excluding the lower-income and working-class populations. In our qualitative analyses we look here for severe restrictions on the suffrage. However, regarding the freedom and fairness of the elections, political liberties and executive constraints these regimes are on the constitutional and not the autocratic side of the spectrum.

Operationalization: The key element here is the limitation on who is allowed to participate in the democratic process. The franchise, or the right to vote, is limited to a small minority of the population. A regime is also placed into this category if indirect elections are held in which the electors are only elected by a fraction of the population. A regime is not classified in this category if at least universal male suffrage is guaranteed in elections. As a strong quantitative indicator for an electoral oligarchy, we use Vanhanen's measure of participation. If the

percentage of the population participating in an election is less than 15 percent, we consider this a cut-off point for an electoral oligarchy. However, the observation of actual voting restrictions during the election is crucial. This excludes cases where voter participation fell below the 15% threshold due to factors such as a voting boycott, emphasizing that the presence of observable voting restrictions is essential for this classification.

Examples:

Non-Electoral Transitional Regime

Conceptualization: A non-electoral transitional regime, also referred to as a provisional government, is characterized by its formation without relying on electoral processes. Such a regime can be established by multiple parties, a single party, or non-party actors, including civil society groups or coalitions. The defining feature of a non-electoral transitional regime is the absence of electoral legitimacy; it does not derive its authority from popular elections. Unlike military autocracies, which typically arise from military coups and are often led by military personnel, non-electoral transitional regimes are not inherently linked to military takeover. Instead, they may emerge in contexts such as political crises, revolutions, or in the aftermath of an authoritarian regime's collapse, where immediate electoral processes are not feasible or have been disrupted. The legitimacy of non-electoral transitional regimes is often rooted in their perceived necessity or suitability for a specific period of transition. They are usually considered temporary arrangements intended to guide a country towards a more stable and democratic governance structure. This legitimacy can be bolstered by factors such as broad-based participation in the regime's formation, commitment to eventual democratization, and efforts to address urgent national issues. International recognition and support can also play a crucial role in legitimizing these regimes. However, the lack of electoral mandate means that their legitimacy may be questioned, and they often face the challenge of establishing credibility and authority in the eyes of the populace and the international community. Such regimes are often falsely subsumed under democracy if they transit in the regime is legitimized by preparing popular elections. However, a democracy only starts with free and fair elections. This distinct regime type is often overlooked in the literature on political regimes (one of the rare exceptions is Shain/Linz/Berat 1995). The precondition for classification in this category is the breakdown of the old regime. However, instead of a single party or military junta ruling the country, a transitional body governs with the stated intention of doing so only temporarily.

Example: Somalia serves as one of the few contemporary examples of non-electoral transitional regimes. Following the civil war, a roadmap for transitioning to democracy was established, which legitimizes a government routinely elected not by the people, but through negotiations between regional clans within the country.

Electoral Autocracy

Conceptualization: Unlike democracies, electoral autocracies lack a positive, coherent basis for legitimation. Many justify their approach by either rejecting the notion that liberty and executive constraints promote societal wellbeing, or by claiming that certain imperatives, typically security concerns, preclude the provision of these liberties. Perhaps the most elaborate justification of an electoral autocracy, “communitarianism” (Chua 1995, Chua 2004), comes from Lee Kuan Yew, the former prime minister of Singapore. He states that in a communitarian society “the interests of society take precedence over that of the individual” (cited by Bell 1997: 7). However, quite often there are only vague or no explicit official justifications as to why the regime does not fulfil the procedural legitimation of a liberal democracy. The specific legitimization of electoral autocracies lies in the semblance of democratic processes. By holding elections, even if they are not free and fair, electoral autocracies create an appearance of legitimacy and popular support. This semblance serves to mask the undemocratic nature of the regime both domestically and internationally. The presence of multiple parties and candidates, even in a constrained electoral environment, provides a façade of pluralism and choice, further contributing to the regime's perceived legitimacy. However, the true nature of these regimes is revealed in the lack of genuine electoral competition and the absence of effective legislative oversight or constraints on the ruler’s power. Cases like Uzbekistan after 1990, where de facto only progovernment parties exist, are borderline cases between a one-party autocracy and an electoral autocracy. However, based on a classification by the legitimation of a regime these cases are classified here as electoral autocracies.

Operationalization: A regime is considered an electoral autocracy if it conducts (direct or indirect) popular multi-party/multi-candidate executive elections and direct popular legislative elections. However, a crucial characteristic of electoral autocracies is that these elections are not genuinely free and fair. Additionally, the ruler in an electoral autocracy is not effectively constrained by the legislature, reflecting a significant limitation in the checks and balances typically found in democratic systems. A regime remains classified as an electoral autocracy even if a former opposition party wins elections, provided the elections are not free and fair

and/or the new ruler remains unconstrained by the legislature post-election. Furthermore, a regime can retain its classification as an electoral autocracy if it originally gained power through the specified types of elections, even if subsequent elections are overdue, as long as it didn't transition into a different regime type (see on this regime type e.g. Schedler 2006). In differentiating an electoral oligarchy from an electoral autocracy based on participation, the presence of universal male suffrage is the key criterion. We employ Tatu Vanhanen's participation measure, ensuring that the average voter turnout in cases of electoral autocracy exceeds 15% of the population.

Examples: A prominent case is Mexico under the dominance of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), where elections were regular and opposition parties formally existed, yet the ruling party systematically manipulated electoral outcomes and controlled state institutions to maintain its grip on power. Similarly, contemporary Russia under Vladimir Putin exhibits key features of an electoral autocracy: while elections take place and multiple parties appear on the ballot, genuine competition is undermined through media control, legal restrictions on opposition candidates, and widespread electoral manipulation.

This regime category is included only in the standard version of our classification. In the alternative version, these cases are subsumed under the broader category of electoral autocracy.

Electoral Oligarchical Autocracies

Conceptualization: Different from electoral oligarchies these regimes are not on the constitutional side of the political spectrum regarding freedom and fairness of elections, political liberties and constraints on the executive. Hence, these regimes are in a broader sense a subgroup of electoral autocracies. However, different from other electoral autocracies and electoral hybrid regimes suffrage is highly restricted. The criteria are the same as for electoral oligarchies. One clearly autocratic justification for such restrictions is the assertion of cultural or racial superiority. In regimes like Apartheid South Africa, the exclusion of certain racial groups from the electoral process was often defended by claims of racial hierarchies, suggesting that only the dominant racial group was capable of making rational, informed decisions for the country. This rationale was deeply rooted in racist ideologies and was used to maintain the social and economic privileges of the ruling minority. The ruling white minority government propagated the idea that different racial groups were fundamentally different and should be kept separate to preserve cultural integrity.

Operationalization: A regime is classified as an electoral oligarchical autocracy if it fulfills the definitional criteria of an electoral autocracy while also imposing severe restrictions on suffrage that qualify it as an oligarchy. As electoral autocracies, these regimes hold multi-party or multi-candidate executive elections (direct or indirect) and direct legislative elections. However, these elections are neither free nor fair, political and civil liberties are significantly curtailed, and the executive operates without effective institutional constraints.

Specifically, such regimes lack independent judicial and legislative bodies capable of checking executive authority. The legislature, if functional at all, does not exercise meaningful oversight, and the judiciary is often politicized or subject to executive interference. Political opposition exists only in a constrained or symbolic form, and civil liberties such as freedom of expression, assembly, and association are heavily restricted. The media is not free and independent, and civil society operates under constant pressure or surveillance. These conditions ensure that electoral competition remains superficial, with the outcome typically favoring the ruling elite.

In addition to these features, electoral oligarchical autocracies are marked by highly exclusionary suffrage. These regimes deny universal male suffrage, either formally (e.g., legal disenfranchisement of specific racial or social groups) or de facto (e.g., through property qualifications, literacy tests, or hereditary restrictions). We also include cases where indirect elections are held but the body of electors is itself highly exclusive—selected through traditional, familial, or otherwise restricted mechanisms.

For quantitative validation, we apply Tatu Vanhanen's and/or V-Dems participation indices. A regime is classified in this category if the average voter participation falls below 15% of the total population, provided that this low level results from structural suffrage restrictions rather than boycotts or electoral apathy.

Examples: Restricted indirect elections are predominantly observed in limited scenarios, encompassing instances where the process of elector selection was the result of highly unclear circumstances, exemplified by countries like Pakistan or Haiti.

Ruling Monarchy

Conceptualization: A ruling monarchy is a form of government where a monarch, such as a king or queen, holds supreme authority, often embodying the state's continuity and identity (see e.g. Spellman 2004, Thieme 2017). Hence, a political regime is classified as a ruling monarchy if the head of state holds a monarchical title, such as King/Queen, Emperor/Empress, Shah,

Tsar or Emir/Amir. The position of the monarch is typically inherited, often following a familial line, like a dynasty. There are symbols (crowns, scepters, thrones) associated with monarchy. If there is a constitution or legal framework of the country the monarch is recognized as the head of state.

Operationalization: The simple criterion that the ruler has a monarchic title usually is sufficient to effectively differentiate ruling monarchies from other regimes, including cases where former monarchs continue to hold power in a different capacity. For example, Mohammed Dhaud in Afghanistan, Seretse Khama in Botswana, Norodom Sihanouk in Cambodia, Souvanna Phouma in Laos, and Edward Mutesa in Uganda are instances where former kings or monarchs transitioned to non-monarchical roles, such as elected officials. These regimes are not considered ruling monarchies due to the change in the nature of their leadership. However, there are a few historical examples where there is a ruler with a self-proclaimed monarch that we have classified as personalist autocracies. A notable example is Jean-Bédél Bokassa, self-proclaimed Emperor Bokassa I of the Central African Republic. Despite his imperial title, Bokassa's regime is classified as a personalist autocracy because he declared himself emperor without traditional monarchical foundations. In contrast, Iran under Reza Shah Pahlavi is categorized as a ruling monarchy. Although Reza Shah originated from a non-aristocratic background, he was formally installed as a monarch, and the regime operated as a monarchy from its inception. The second criterion for a ruling monarchy is the monarch's actual political power, beyond mere ceremonial functions. Parliamentary monarchies, where the monarch does not exercise real governmental power (as seen in contemporary Denmark), are classified as monarchies but not as ruling monarchies. As outlined above we use the suffix [Monarchical] to identify monarchies that do not fall into the category of constitutional or absolute monarchy due to the lack of governmental power of the monarch.

In our standard classification, ruling monarchies are divided into two types: absolute and constitutional monarchies. This distinction is crucial in our standard classification, which differentiate between these types of monarchies (Kailitz 2009). In our dataset we also have an alternative version of our classification where the two types of monarchies are lumped together as ruling monarchies. In the standard regime duration variable (`duration_VaPoReg_s`) a change from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy and vice versa is coded as a new regime. In the alternative variant (`duration_VaPoReg_a`) transitions from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy and vice versa are interpreted not as a change of regime, but as a continuation of the

ruling monarchy, as long as the dynasty and thus the ruling group do not change. Researchers are advised to use the variant of the regime duration variable that best suits their needs.

Autocratic Monarchy

Conceptualization: Under the category of autocratic monarchy we subsume monarchies where the monarch holds supreme authority, often hereditary, without checks and balances from an elected body. The legitimacy of absolute monarchies traditionally stems from a combination of historical precedent, religious or divine justification, and the idea of a continuous lineage of royal sovereignty. Autocratic monarchs usually claim to have a divine right to rule, asserting that their authority is sanctioned by a higher power, which in turn forms the basis of their political legitimacy. In an autocratic monarchy, the power of the monarch is not considerably limited by a parliament or the judiciary. Political liberties are completely or almost absent.

Operationalization: An autocratic monarchy is characterized by the concentration of executive power in the hands of the monarch, with the absence of effective institutional constraints and severe restrictions on civil and political liberties. While some such regimes may feature a parliament, its role is typically symbolic, lacking real authority to check executive power. Importantly, autocratic rule in these systems can also be exercised through a prime minister appointed by the monarch, who wields substantial authority on behalf of the ruler. In these cases, the prime minister functions as an extension of monarchical control rather than as an independent executive constrained by democratic institutions. The defining feature remains the absence of meaningful constraints on executive authority, whether exercised directly by the monarch or through an appointed head of government. An autocratic monarchy is characterized either by the absence of a popularly elected parliament or the presence of a parliament that lacks the authority to significantly constrain the monarch's power. In such systems, the monarch holds absolute control over the state and government, with the ability to rule by decree, enact laws, and impose punishments without effective legislative oversight.

Example: Saudi Arabia represents a clear case of autocratic monarchy. The king holds ultimate executive, legislative, and judicial authority, ruling by royal decree without meaningful constraints from a parliament or judiciary. While the country has a Consultative Council (*Majlis ash-Shura*), it is appointed by the monarch and lacks legislative power. Political parties are banned, and civil liberties are severely restricted. The regime's legitimation is based on a combination of dynastic tradition and religious authority rooted in Wahhabi Islam, reinforcing

the notion of a divinely sanctioned monarchy. The absence of competitive elections and institutional checks firmly positions Saudi Arabia within the category of autocratic monarchy.

Constitutional Monarchy

Conceptualization: While the monarch retains considerable authority, the parliament holds significant power, and elected representatives play a role in political decision-making. One example is the Kingdom of Jordan, where King Abdullah II has considerable authority, but universal suffrage and a bicameral parliamentary system are constitutionally guaranteed.

Operationalization: Constitutional monarchies function within the constraints of a constitution and have a popularly elected parliament and a parliament that at least moderately constraints the executive. In addition to the parliament the judiciary at least moderately constraints the executive. Political liberties cannot be absent according to our criteria. Hence, the regime blends elements of democracy and autocracy.

Example: Bhutan since 2008 is a suitable example of a constitutional monarchy as defined here. While the king retains significant formal authority, including the power to appoint key officials and influence executive decisions, the elected parliament plays a substantial role in legislation and in constraining the executive. The 2008 constitution establishes a framework in which the monarchy coexists with competitive elections, institutional checks, and a separation of powers. The National Assembly is chosen through universal suffrage and exercises real influence over policymaking, and the judiciary is formally independent. Although the monarch retains a central role in the executive, power is no longer monopolized, and elected institutions are actively involved in governance.

One-Party Autocracy

Conceptualization: A country justifies itself as a one-party autocracy with a monist vision of popular sovereignty. This refers to a political philosophy where the state is seen as a singular, unified entity representing the will of the people without division or opposition. In this vision, the ruling party embodies the common interest of the entire population, rendering political pluralism and electoral competition unnecessary and even illegitimate. The justification for power in such a regime stems from the belief that the ruling party inherently understands and acts upon the collective will and good of the society, leading to a centralized and often autocratic governance structure. Based on this monist vision of popular sovereignty, which one might call

a “one-party ideology” (Zolberg 1985: 37-65), there are no (direct or indirect) popular multi-party/multi-candidate executive (s)elections. This monist vision is shared by one-party autocracies and ideocracies. However, different from ideocracies one-party autocracies do not justify themselves by a utopian ideology and do not strive to rule all aspects of societal and economical life.

Operationalization: In the subset of cases that do not fulfill the criteria of an ideocracy a regime is coded as a one-party autocracy if it is de jure a single party state. In addition to that, all regimes that do not allow any opposition parties are coded as de facto one-party regimes. For instance, during the elections in Syria in 1990 “opposition was not allowed and candidates were only permitted to run through parties associated with the National Progressive Front” (Hyde/Marinov 2011: 5). Arguably, this is a very thin line separating de facto one-party autocracies from electoral autocracies in which – de facto – all parties are pro-government like Uzbekistan after 1990.

Example: Zambia under the rule of the United National Independence Party (UNIP) from 1972 to 1991 constitutes a clear case of a one-party autocracy. Following the 1972 constitutional amendment that established a one-party state, UNIP was declared the sole legal political organization. Political pluralism was abolished, and the presidency as well as parliamentary seats could only be contested by candidates endorsed by the ruling party. The regime did not rely on a comprehensive utopian ideology, nor did it attempt to restructure all aspects of society; instead, it claimed to embody national unity and the will of the people through the party itself. Elections continued to be held, but without any opposition, they served merely as a mechanism to reaffirm the rule of the party and its leadership. This configuration aligns with the concept of monist popular sovereignty, where the ruling party is seen as the sole legitimate representative of the nation, and where the absence of multiparty competition is justified on the grounds of national cohesion and stability.

Ideocratic autocracy

Conceptualization: Ideocratic autocracies are regimes in which political authority is rooted in a totalizing ideological vision that seeks to fundamentally reshape society in line with an official doctrine. Their legitimation derives not from procedural mechanisms or hereditary succession, but from the claim to represent an absolute truth, whether secular or religious, defined as the common interest of the governing and the governed. The ideology provides both the rationale for power and the framework for policy, leaving little room for political pluralism or dissent.

Such regimes often subordinate all state institutions, including the legal system, education, and the media, to the ideological project. Opposition is not merely suppressed but delegitimized as a threat to the overarching historical or spiritual mission. The fusion of state and ideology frequently entails mass mobilization, indoctrination, and the suppression of alternative belief systems. Ideocratic autocracies may be revolutionary or religious in nature, but in all cases, the exercise of power is justified through a utopian and transformative vision of society. (Backes/Kailitz 2016). Ideocratic regimes claim that they fulfil the laws of nature, history or God and pave the way to a utopian future. What distinguishes ideocracies from all other political regime types is that the rulers not only claim to have a right to rule, but by virtue of their ideology also assert the right to control and reshape all aspects of society. Roughly speaking, the regime type ideocracy encompasses what Juan Linz's and Alfred Stepan's regime typology categorized as totalitarianism and post-totalitarianism (Linz/Stepan 1996, p. 39). Ideocracies can take the form of three subtypes: communist (USSR), fascist (Italy under Mussolini), and Islamist (Islamic Republic of Iran) (Backes/Kailitz 2016). However, it has to be noted that contrasting Hannah Arendt's approach, the utopian ideology is the key feature, while terror may be present or not (Arendt 1953).

Operationalization: The three forms of ideocracy should be treated as distinctive types of political regimes (Linz 2000). If, however, a researcher wishes to analyze ideocracies as an overarching regime type, corporatist right-wing regimes (which are not also fascist) should not be included in this category, as they clearly do not meet the outlined definitional characteristics of an ideocracy.

Communist Ideocracy

Conceptualization: The concrete ideological legitimation of a communist regime is that it takes the necessary measures to build a utopian classless communist society. In communist regimes, the "theory of history – not popular approval – constitute[s] the permanent core of communist claims to legitimacy" (Di Palma 1991: 50). Central to Marxist theory is the concept of class struggle, where society is divided into classes with opposing interests, primarily the proletariat (working class) and the bourgeoisie (capitalist class). The aim is to abolish class distinctions and create a classless society. Marxism-Leninism advocates for the establishment of a proletarian state through revolution. This state, or "dictatorship of the proletariat," is supposed to act in the interest of the working class and suppress the former ruling class. Communist ideologies manifest in diverse forms across different contexts, influenced by unique

historical, cultural, and political conditions (Kołakowski 1978). In communist regimes the economy is largely or entirely state-controlled, usually with significant central planning, as per communist principles. Usually, communist regimes are one-party regimes. In some cases, there are formally several parties, for example in the GDR. In these cases, the regime is nevertheless regarded as a de facto one-party regime because the other parties are merely satellites of the communist party that do not exercise any opposition or control. There are significant doubts about whether North Korea's ideology is truly Communist or Marxist-Leninist. The regime's emphasis on ethnic purity and extreme nationalism aligns more closely with far-right ideology, diverging from the internationalist principles of traditional communism.

Operationalization: The coding is straight forward. A regime is coded as a communist ideocracy if the ideology of the ruling elite – be it a party or the military – and, hence, the regime ideology is Marxist-Leninist. Hence, the presence or absence of a left-wing totalitarian ideology of the ruler and/or ruling party is decisive for the classification in this category.

Examples: The most populous communist examples of ideocracies are the USSR and China under the rule of the communist party. The variation of communist ideocracies ranges from Cambodia's agrarian socialism to China's integration of Maoist principles, the Soviet Union's Leninism, Yugoslavia's workers' self-management, and Albania's strict Stalinism. Each variant adapts Marxist-Leninist foundations to its specific circumstances, reflecting a wide spectrum of communist interpretations.

Right-wing (Fascist or Corporatist) Autocracy

This regime group consists of Fascist ideocracies and right-wing corporatist autocracies which are defined separately below. A regime is grouped in this category if it either fulfills the criteria of a Fascist ideocracy or a right-wing corporatist autocracy. Like fascism in Italy, a regime can fulfill the characteristics of both a fascist regime and a corporatist regime. In this case, the case is assigned to the "harder" subtype of fascism in square brackets in the classification. When considering right-wing autocracies led by extremist parties, it is important to note that their ideologies are generally less elaborate than those of communist regimes. In the case of right-wing corporatist autocracies, the ideology is often vague and does not meet the criteria of a totalitarian ideology.

Right-wing (Fascist) Autocracy:

Conceptualization: Fascist ideology is characterized by ultra-nationalism that seeks to create a centralized autocratic government headed by an autocratic leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and the forcible suppression of opposition (Payne 1980, Paxton 2005). It promotes the supremacy of the state or nation over the individual, glorifies violence and war as means to achieve national rejuvenation, and includes elements of racism and xenophobia. National-socialist ideology, as exemplified by the Nazi regime in Germany, incorporates many of these fascist elements but with a specific emphasis on racial purity and anti-Semitism. It advocates for the creation of a homogeneous, racially "pure" nation-state, through the exclusion, persecution, or extermination of minority groups. Both ideologies reject liberal democracy, socialism, and communism, viewing these as threats to national unity and strength.

Operationalization: A regime is coded as a Fascist ideocracy if the ideology of the ruling elite and, hence, the state ideology is Fascist or national-socialist. Given the outlined characteristics of a Fascist or national-socialist ideology, a regime can be classified as a Fascist or national-socialist if it adopts and enforces such ideological principles as the core of its governance and state policies.

Examples:

Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler (1933–1945) represents the most radical form of fascist autocracy. The regime was founded on a national-socialist ideology centered on extreme nationalism, racial purity, and authoritarian leadership. Political opposition was eliminated, and all institutions were subordinated to the Nazi party. State policies were aimed at creating a racially homogeneous nation through systematic exclusion and genocide, culminating in the Holocaust.

Fascist Italy under Benito Mussolini (1925–1943) also established a one-party state rooted in ultranationalism, anti-liberalism, and the glorification of violence. While less systematic than the Nazi regime, it suppressed opposition, rejected pluralism, and mobilized society through corporatist and propagandistic means. Both regimes exemplify fascist autocracy grounded in a right-wing, anti-democratic ideology.

Right-wing (Corporatist) Autocracy:

Conceptualization: Corporatism refers to the organization of society by corporate groups, such as agricultural, labor, military, scientific, or guild associations, based on their common interests. In a corporatist autocracy, these groups are often used as a means of control, with the state directing and incorporating them into its political structure, rather than allowing them to act as independent entities or as a channel for genuine democratic participation (Costa Pinto 2017).

The corporatist approach can be seen as a way to manage and control various sectors of society and the economy, maintaining stability and order under the autocratic rule. Right-wing autocratic corporatism constitutes a rather vague ideology. It does not fulfill the criteria of a totalitarian ideology. However, lest there be any misunderstanding, this in no way implies that a communist regime is per se more repressive than a right-wing corporatist autocracy. Compare, for example, Spain under Franco with the communist regime in the GDR. The classification relates exclusively to ideology. Regarding right-wing corporatist autocracies, the institutional setup varies.

Operationalization: A regime is coded in this category if the regime is guided by a right-wing autocratic corporatist ideology. Hence, the presence or absence of a right-wing authoritarian corporatist ideology of the ruler and/or ruling party in the above outlined way is decisive for the classification in this category.

Examples

Spain under Francisco Franco (1939–1975) represents a prototypical right-wing corporatist autocracy. The regime rejected both liberal democracy and totalitarian ideological mobilization, instead promoting a conservative, nationalist order grounded in Catholic traditionalism and corporatist structures. Political opposition was suppressed, while labor and professional organizations were integrated into state-controlled vertical syndicates, eliminating independent representation. The regime's legitimacy rested on notions of national unity, social harmony, and anti-communism rather than on a utopian vision.

Similarly, Portugal under António de Oliveira Salazar (1933–1968) institutionalized a corporatist autocracy through the *Estado Novo*. Salazar promoted an authoritarian vision of order, hierarchy, and national identity, embedding corporatist structures into the political system. Trade unions were banned, strikes outlawed, and all civil society organizations brought under state control. Despite the absence of a totalitarian ideology, both regimes relied on a right-wing corporatist framework to maintain autocratic rule and societal control (Schmitter 1975).

Islamist Ideocracy

Conceptualization: An Islamist ideocracy is a form of regime where the exercise of power is justified and guided by an Islamist ideology. This ideology, which combines religious and political elements, is considered the common interest of both the rulers and the ruled. The regime is characterized by its interpretation of Islamic principles and laws as the foundational basis for governing society, politics, and often personal life. The regime bases its legitimacy

and laws primarily on Islamic teachings and principles. There is a significant fusion of religious and state institutions, with religious leaders often playing pivotal roles in governance. The legal system is heavily based on Sharia, Islamic law, which dictates various aspects of public and private life. The regime enforces strict control over social and cultural practices, aligning them with its interpretation of Islamic teachings (Tibi 2007, Esposito 1998).

Operationalization: A regime is classified in this category if it is guided by an Islamist ideology. The decisive factor for this classification is the presence or absence of a right-wing authoritarian corporatist ideology within the ruler and/or ruling party, as outlined above.

Examples: Iran following the Islamic Revolution of 1979 is the paradigmatic case of an Islamist ideocracy. The regime derives its legitimacy from the principle of *Velayat-e Faqih* (Guardianship of the Jurist), which subordinates all state institutions to the authority of the Supreme Leader, a senior Shi'a cleric. Political power is exercised in accordance with Shi'a Islamic jurisprudence, and the legal system is deeply rooted in Sharia. Elected bodies exist but operate within strict ideological boundaries, and religious authorities wield decisive influence over legislation, judiciary, education, and media. The regime enforces conformity to Islamic norms in both public and private life, reflecting a comprehensive ideocratic project.

Similarly, Afghanistan under Taliban rule, first from 1996 to 2001, and again since 2021—constitutes a Sunni Islamist ideocracy. The Taliban regime rejects democratic institutions entirely and legitimizes its rule through a rigid interpretation of Deobandi Islam. All legislation and social regulation are derived from this interpretation of Sharia, and religious authorities dominate both executive and judicial functions. The regime imposes strict control over cultural life, gender relations, and education, aiming to restructure society according to its Islamist vision. Both cases demonstrate the fusion of state and religion in a totalizing ideological framework, characteristic of an Islamist ideocracy.

Military Autocracy

Conceptualization: Military autocracy is a form of government where political power is concentrated in the hands of the military. This regime type is characterized by the suspension of democratic processes and the imposition of martial law, often justified by the need to restore order and stability in times of crisis. The military leadership, typically composed of high-ranking officers, assumes control over the state apparatus and often marginalizes or eliminates civilian political participation (Finer 2002, Nordlinger 1977).

In military autocracies, the justification for assuming power and maintaining control is often rooted in the perceived incapacity of civilian governments to handle severe crises. The military presents itself as a rational and apolitical arbiter, capable of transcending partisan conflicts to safeguard national interests. These narrative positions the military as the sole institution capable of addressing existential threats, whether they are economic, social, or political.

However, the procedural justification of military regimes is notably vague and lacks consistency. Unlike constitutional democracies, which have clear and established processes for governance and accountability, military regimes often operate with broad and ill-defined mandates. This can be seen in the example of the Chilean Junta in 1978, which asserted its authority to implement “whatever regulations, norms, and instructions” it deemed necessary for the common good and national interest. This expansive and ambiguous justification allows military regimes to exercise unchecked power, often leading to the erosion of civil liberties and the suppression of political opposition.

The lack of a common procedural framework for military autocracies results in a governance style that is highly variable and dependent on the specific context and leadership of the regime. While the overarching narrative remains one of national salvation and crisis management, the methods and extent of military control can differ significantly between cases. This variability underscores the fundamentally arbitrary nature of military rule, where decisions are often made without transparency or accountability, based solely on the discretion of the ruling military elite. The vague justification of a military regime is that only the military – usually together with the bureaucracy – is able to save the nation as a rational apolitical arbiter of social conflict in a time of crisis; and the country is in a severe crisis. However, there is no common procedural justification of military regimes. A military regime claims that it is justified to lay down “whatever regulations, norms, and instructions” the military junta thinks fit “for the attainment of [its] objectives aimed at the common good and the maximum patriotic interest” (Chilean Junta 1978: 198).

Operationalization: A political regime for this subset of cases is coded as a military autocracy if the regime starts by a military coup and military officers form a military junta or a military officer serves as the ruler and is selected by the military (for more or less similar definitions of a military regime see Ezrow/Frantz 2011: 166, Geddes 1999: 124, Linz 2000: 172). If a junta chooses a civilian (who has not been elected by the population) as a figurehead president, like in Uruguay 1976, the regime is still coded as a military autocracy as long as a military junta de facto rules the country. However, preconditions for coding a regime as a military autocracy are that 1) it cannot be coded as a monarchy or an ideocracy; and 2) there are no popular multi-

party/multi-candidate elections for president. However, in a military autocracy like in a monarchy there might well be multi-party parliamentary elections. If there are elections for a president and a person with military background is elected the regime is not coded as a military autocracy.

Example: Chile under General Augusto Pinochet (1973–1990) exemplifies a military autocracy. After the coup of 11/09/1973, a junta of armed forces leaders suspended democratic institutions and assumed full control. Pinochet, as army chief, soon concentrated power in his hands. The regime justified its rule by invoking national crisis and portrayed the military as the only force capable of restoring order and defending the nation. Civil liberties were suppressed, opposition repressed, and political parties banned or tightly controlled. Although a new constitution was adopted in 1980, it entrenched military dominance rather than limiting it. The regime ruled largely by decree, without procedural constraints, illustrating the arbitrary nature of military autocracy.

Personalist Autocracy

Conceptualization: The ruler in a personalist autocracy often cultivates a personal image of charisma and leadership, positioning themselves as uniquely qualified to lead the nation. This charismatic authority can be bolstered by a narrative of personal sacrifice, exceptional competence, or a historical role in the country's liberation or founding. Personalist autocrats often exploit crises, whether real or manufactured, to justify their grip on power. They use emergencies such as wars, natural disasters, or economic collapses to argue that extraordinary measures and strong leadership are needed, thereby consolidating their authority. Personalist autocracy can best be defined negatively, as it is characterized by the absence of institutions that effectively constrain the ruler's power (e.g. Brooker 2008: 139, Jackson/Rosberg 1982: 8). The hallmark of a personalist autocracy is the concentration of nearly unlimited power in the hands of a single ruler. The ruler holds power for an indefinite period, potentially until death. Neither at the state level nor at any other level, such as a military junta or a regime party, is there any institutional, non-violent mechanism for removing the ruler and selecting a new leader which is a distinguishing characteristic.

Operationalization: The conditions requisite for the classification of a political regime as a personalist autocracy encompass the following criteria: the absence of institutional mechanisms that effectively constrain the ruler's power; the indefinite tenure of the ruler, often until death; the lack of institutional, non-violent mechanisms for the removal of the ruler; the non-institutionalized, often non-transparent selection of new leaders. A regime is never classified as

a personalist autocracy if there are popular multi-party or multi-candidate executive elections, whether through direct or indirect means. If there is a regime party there are no procedures of a selection or recall of the party leader, who is at the same time the ruler of the country. A regime is designated as a personalist autocracy when the ruler holds a term that extends for the duration of their life. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that while this condition is sufficient, it is not an obligatory prerequisite for the classification of a country as a personalist autocracy. In instances where legislative elections occur, as exemplified by Turkmenistan under the leadership of Saparmurat Niyazov, who declared himself president for life in 1999, the presence of such elections is inconsequential. However, if a country lacks both presidential and parliamentary elections, as observed during the rule of Hissene Habre in Chad, the regime is designated as a personalist autocracy, even if the president does not explicitly claim a lifelong presidency. Some personalist rulers may opt to permit the existence of a regime-affiliated party and orchestrate one-candidate plebiscites to bolster their assertion of legitimacy, a practice akin to that adopted by figures such as Hector Trujillo in the Dominican Republic or Mobutu Sese Seko in Congo-Zaire. Ways of establishing a personalist autocracy are a self-coup of an elected president, who dissolves the parliament and bans all parties possibly except his own. Another way of establishing a personalist autocracy is a coup by a gang of soldiers, like 1971 in Uganda (Idi Amin) or 1981 in Ghana (Jerry Rawling).

Examples: Uganda under Idi Amin and Ghana under Jerry Rawling.

Colonial Regime

Conceptualization: A colonial regime is a form of governance where a foreign power exerts almost complete control over a territory and its people with the intention of maintaining this control indefinitely. In contrast to an occupation regime of a foreign power, a colonial regime is designed to be permanent. The colonized territory does not possess sovereign status. Instead, it is governed by the colonial power, which makes all significant political, economic, and legal decisions. People living under direct colonial rule typically have limited political and civil rights. They are often subject to discriminatory laws and practices and have little say in the governance of their own land. This lack of representation and autonomy is a hallmark of colonial rule. Hence, the country is not sovereign. A primary feature of colonial regimes is the economic exploitation of the colonized territory for the benefit of the colonial power. This includes the extraction of resources, exploitation of labor, and control over trade and commerce. Sometimes the regime is officially referred to as a protectorate, although it is de facto a colonial

regime. We have explained the reasons for our classifications in the respective country reports. Conversely, however, under the formal term colony, as in the case of the settler colonies in Canada or Australia, for example, such far-reaching autonomy rights can develop from a certain point in time that our definition of a colony is no longer fulfilled. In the final phases of colonial regimes, such as e.g. in Barbados, several characteristics often emerged that marked the transition from colonial rule to independence. In the later stages of colonial rule, there was often a gradual increase in the autonomy granted to the local population. This could involve the establishment of local legislative bodies or greater involvement of indigenous leaders in governance. Colonial powers sometimes introduced political reforms aimed at preparing the colony for eventual independence. This could include the implementation of new constitutions, electoral reforms, and the establishment of political parties. Economic policies often shifted towards fostering greater self-sufficiency and reducing dependency on the colonial power. This might include investments in local industries, infrastructure development, and efforts to diversify the economy. There was often an increase in social and educational investments to prepare the local population for self-governance. This included expanding access to education, improving healthcare systems, and promoting social development programs. For instance, in the latter stages of the British Raj in India, there were legislative councils and local self-governing bodies, which provided some level of political engagement for Indians. In between the extremes of very repressive and liberal colonial regimes, many colonial regimes exhibited a blend of both authoritarian and liberal elements, fluctuating based on local conditions, resistance movements, and international pressures. This diversity in colonial governance highlights the complex and varied nature of colonialism, influencing the development trajectories of former colonies in different ways.

Operationalization: A regime is coded as colonial if a territory is controlled and governed by a foreign power. The key criteria for this classification include control and governance by the foreign power, the territory's lack of full sovereignty, significant economic exploitation by the foreign power, limited political and civil rights for the population, and the presence of discriminatory laws and practices. The regime might be referred to as a protectorate or colony, but the defining factor is the level of control and governance by the foreign power, not just the nomenclature. These criteria are used to determine whether a regime qualifies as colonial in our dataset.

Example: Algeria was a French colony from 1830 to 1962. The French government exercised extensive control over Algerian territory and its people, with significant economic exploitation and restrictions on the political and civil rights of Algerians.

Additional Remarks: To furnish an in-depth analysis of colonial regimes, our dataset incorporates the variable `governing_country`, which specifies the name of the nation exerting dominion over the colonial territory. Furthermore, the dataset encompasses the colonizer's regime type in the variables `VaPoReg_s_of_gc` and `VaPoReg_a_of_gc` highlighting the political regime of the colonizing country. The rationale behind including this variable lies in the hypothesis that the political nature of the colonizing entity markedly affects the attributes and governance approach of the colonial regime. Through the examination of these variables, scholars are positioned to uncover how the essence of the colonizing authority shapes the management and policy enactment within the colonial domain.

In our standard classification, we distinguish between two types of colonial regimes: direct rule and indirect rule. This distinction is not made in the alternative version of the classification.

Direct Rule Colonial Regime

Conceptualization: This term signifies colonies that were administered directly by officials from the colonial power, with little to no autonomy granted to the local population. These colonies had no elected parliament or self-governing institutions.

Operationalization: We classify a colonial regime in this category if there is no popularly elected parliament.

Indirect Rule Colonial Regime

Conceptualization: These colonies have a form of self-governance in which the local population elects representatives to a parliament. This body has some degree of legislative power, allowing for local input and decision-making on various internal matters.

Operationalization: We classify a colonial regime in this category if there is a parliament elected by the local population. A transition from a *Direct Rule Colonial Regime* to an *Indirect Rule Colonial Regime* is only coded if there is evidence of a substantial transfer of political authority to local institutions that include meaningful participation of the autochthonous (indigenous) population. Our minimum threshold for such a transition is the introduction of universal male suffrage for the indigenous population, or a functionally equivalent expansion of electoral rights that allows a significant portion of the autochthonous population to participate in the selection of legislative or executive bodies with actual political relevance. Elections that are held under highly restrictive franchise rules -especially those excluding the

majority of the indigenous population based on criteria such as ethnicity, literacy, property ownership, or legal status - do not suffice to mark a transition to indirect rule.

Occupation Regime

Conceptualization: An occupation regime is defined as a political and administrative system established when a foreign power, operating through its own occupation institutions rather than the existing national political regime, directs and integrates all activities through which domestic policy in the occupied territory is formulated and executed. An occupation regime is often justified on the grounds of ensuring security and stability, both for the occupying power and the occupied territory. The foreign power may claim that their presence is necessary to prevent violence, maintain order, or counteract perceived threats. The occupying power may argue that the occupation is essential to protect its strategic interests, such as securing resources, maintaining regional influence, or preventing the spread of hostile ideologies or movements. Occupation regimes can also be justified through international mandates or agreements, such as resolutions from international bodies (e.g., the United Nations) that authorize the occupation for peacekeeping or stabilization purposes. In an occupation regime, the occupying force typically establishes new administrative structures to govern the territory. These structures may encompass military governance, the appointment of military governors or administrators, and the establishment of new administrative units tailored to the occupation's needs. Occupation regimes are inherently complex and exhibit considerable variation, influenced by factors such as the specific circumstances of the occupation, the objectives of the occupying power, and the response of the local population to the occupation.

Operationalization: We use the following criteria. The regime is directed by a foreign power rather than a national political regime and the foreign power operates through occupation institutions that are distinct from existing national institutions. The foreign power integrates all activities related to the formulation and execution of domestic policy in the occupied territory and establishes administrative structures to govern the territory.

Example: An example would be Poland during World War II, which was first occupied by Germany and the Soviet Union, then solely by Germany, and finally by the Soviet Union again.

Additional Remarks: To provide a comprehensive understanding of occupation regimes, our dataset includes the variable `Governing Country`. This variable identifies the name of the country that is exercising control over the occupied territory. Additionally, the dataset features variables, `VaPoReg_s_of_gc` and `VaPoReg_a_of_gc`, which denote the political regime type of

the occupying country. The inclusion of this variable is predicated on the assumption that the regime type of the occupying power significantly impacts the characteristics and governance style of the occupation regime. By analyzing these variables, researchers can gain insights into how the nature of the occupying power influences the administration and policies implemented in the occupied territory.

The standard version of our classification differentiates between direct and indirect rule within occupation regimes, whereas the alternative version does not make this distinction.

Direct Rule Occupation Regime

Conceptualization: A direct rule occupation regime exists when the occupying power governs the territory primarily through its own administrative and coercive institutions, without meaningful delegation of authority to local actors. Political authority is centralized in the hands of the occupier, and the local population lacks effective channels of participation or representation. The regime is characterized by a high degree of external control and limited institutional autonomy within the occupied territory.

Operationalization: A regime is coded as a direct rule occupation regime when the occupying power retains full control over political decision-making, and any local institutions are either absent or operate without autonomous authority or broad-based representation. There is no significant electoral participation by the indigenous population, and key executive, legislative, or administrative positions are held or directly controlled by the occupying force. The presence of advisory councils or nominal local bodies does not alter this classification unless they exercise genuine political power.

Indirect Rule Occupation Regime

Conceptualization: An indirect rule occupation regime exists when the occupying power delegates a meaningful degree of political authority to local institutions, particularly a legislature with at least limited but real decision-making power. While the occupier retains ultimate sovereignty, governance is partially exercised through institutions that reflect the political agency of the indigenous population. This conceptualization parallels the definition used for *indirect rule colonial regimes* but applies specifically to the context of military or foreign occupation.

Operationalization: A regime is coded as an indirect rule occupation regime when a legislature is established that holds genuine, though possibly circumscribed, political authority and when

at least universal male suffrage for the indigenous population is in place for its selection. The participation of the indigenous population must go beyond tokenism and reflect actual representation in a functioning parliamentary body with some capacity to influence legislation or governance. The mere existence of advisory councils or administrative bodies without electoral legitimacy or real power does not suffice for this classification.

No Central Authority

Conceptualization: This category is reserved for a political situation where a territory lacks a unified, effective governing body that exercises central control at least over the capital and at least a third of the whole polity subsumed under this polity.

Operationalization: A country is coded in this category if the territory is divided into multiple regions, each controlled by different factions, warlords, militias, or local authorities, without a single overarching central authority. There is no central body to coordinate policies, laws, or administrative functions across the territory, leading to inconsistent and often conflicting governance practices. Central state institutions, such as a national government, judiciary, or legislature, either do not exist or are ineffective and lack authority over the entire territory. The territory experiences significant political instability and chaos, with frequent power struggles among different groups vying for control. There is no clearly identifiable central authority. The lack of a central authority creates a security vacuum, often leading to widespread violence, lawlessness, and humanitarian crises as different groups compete for dominance. These are extreme situations that usually occur during a civil war.

Examples: Somalia after multiple rebel groups ousted Siad Barre's regime from Mogadishu on 01/26/1991 or after the government of Mohammad Najibullah in Afghanistan was ousted by the Mujaheddin insurgency on 04/16/1992.

Part of Other Country

Conceptualization: Like “No Central Authority” “Part of Other Country” is not a category of political regimes. A region or territory falls into this category if it is politically and administratively integrated into another sovereign state.

Additional Remarks: The relevance of this category within a regime dataset may prompt inquiry. Our dataset only designates a territory as part of another country if, at any juncture from January 1, 1900, to July 1, 2024, it either attained independence or was a remote colony of another sovereign state. This specific category applies exclusively to the Va-PoReg_cr

variable (where "cr" denotes country reports), and is intentionally excluded from the regime variables `Va_PoReg_s` and `Va_PoReg_cr`. The justification for this is straightforward: scholarly research predominantly concentrates on nation-states as the fundamental unit of analysis. This methodology seeks to precisely assess the incidence of regime types, notably democracies, across all sovereign states, thus deeming the incorporation of territories under another state's sovereignty as non-essential for such analysis. However, the `Va-PoReg_cr` variable, with a distinct category for territories that are part of other countries, serves a divergent purpose. It is intended to compile a cohesive dataset for countries, documenting their historical trajectories. This encompasses acknowledging a territory's historical ties to another nation, exemplified by Lithuania's period within the Soviet Union. This variant extends further, elucidating the specific state of association (e.g., the Soviet Union) and the regime type in existence at that time (e.g., communist ideocracy). Such detailed information is available in the variables `Governing country`, `VaPoReg_s_of_gc`, and `VaPoReg_a_of_gc`. This comprehensive strategy furnishes a richer, more intricate historical context for each country's journey towards, as well as away from, sovereignty.

The following two categories, protectorate and international mandate, are not included in the variables, `VaPoReg_s_of_gc`, and `VaPoReg_a_of_gc`. However, the formal status as protectorate and international mandate addresses often a state of semi-sovereignty. The categories protectorate and international mandate are addressed in the country reports and in dichotomous variables in the data set. In the regime classification based on the degree of sovereignty of the addressed countries the regime is either classified according to the internal regime type if the country is ruled by its own government, which is more or less sovereign regarding internal affairs. However, if a protectorate in name is de facto fully controlled by another state, it is classified as a colony. The same holds for international mandate. If the state under international mandate retains a degree of sovereignty, it is classified according to the regime type in the country. However, if the country is de facto fully controlled by a mandatory power the regime type is classified as a colony.

Protectorate

A protectorate is a state that is "protected" and partially controlled by another state. In a protectorate relationship, the protecting state has significant influence over the protected state's affairs. Nevertheless, the protected state retains a degree of sovereignty. The key difference

between a protectorate and a colony is the level of control that the controlling state has over the territory. In a protectorate, the protected state retains some measure of control over its own affairs, while in a colony, the controlling state has complete control. An example for a protectorate is Slovakia during World War II when the country declared independence from Czechoslovakia and became a client state of Nazi Germany.

International Mandate

An international mandate, in the context of the League of Nations or the United Nations, refers to a system of governance established by these international organizations to oversee and administer territories that were previously under the control of defeated or collapsed states. The mandate system emerged as a response to the dissolution of empires and the aftermath of World War I. It aimed to provide temporary supervision and guidance to territories that were deemed not yet ready for self-rule. The League of Nations established mandates primarily in the Middle East and Africa, while the United Nations continued this practice until the 1940s. Under an international mandate, the administering state (the mandatory power) was entrusted with the responsibility of preparing the mandated territory for eventual self-government. An example for an international Mandate is Palestine after World War I as it was given to Great Britain as a colonial protectorate in the Sanremo declaration by the League of Nations.

Sources for the Coding of Variables in the Va-PoReg Dataset

In developing our comprehensive dataset, we embarked on an ambitious journey akin to standing on the shoulders of giants, drawing inspiration from the monumental efforts of our predecessors. However, a more apt metaphor might be that of an industrious anthill, where countless tiny yet significant contributions have collectively formed a robust and intricate structure. Our dataset's coding is meticulously crafted, anchored in a thorough examination of both the research literature and a wealth of online resources about various countries.

We emphasize the utmost transparency in our coding process, ensuring that users can trace the rationale behind each coding decision. This is particularly crucial for understanding the nuances in borderline cases between different categories, all of which are meticulously documented in our regime narrative files. These three files are treasure troves of sources, encompassing all references that informed our coding.

We owe a special acknowledgment to a particular series of volumes on global elections organized by Dieter Nohlen (Nohlen/Krennerich/Thibaut 1999, Nohlen/Grotz/Hartmann 2001a, Nohlen/Grotz/Hartmann 2001b, Nohlen 2005a, Nohlen 2005b, Nohlen/Stöver 2010), which were instrumental in cross-verifying our data on legislative and executive elections. The ongoing digital updates of these volumes would significantly benefit future research. From May 1999 to March 2022 Psephos, Adam Carr's election archive, was the largest, most comprehensive and most up-to-date archive of electoral information in the world. It is a great loss for science that this archive is no longer being updated.¹ Interestingly, we found Wikipedia's election result data to be exceptionally reliable, meriting more recognition as a valid academic resource.

As can easily be seen in our comprehensive country reports, we have consulted extensively articles in Wikipedia and Encyclopædia Britannica.² Wikipedia has its own system of checks and balances, including a community of volunteer editors who monitor changes and correct errors. However, the quality can vary significantly from one article to another, depending on the vigilance of these volunteers. It should be noted that we have the basic rule that a fact should be confirmed by at least two sources. Therefore, Wikipedia in particular is never the only source on which the presentation is based. The Encyclopædia Britannica is renowned for its high-quality content and is often regarded as one of the most reliable and authoritative sources of general knowledge. The Encyclopædia Britannica, in its 15th edition, consists of 32 volumes. The text of the English Wikipedia alone is as of the end of July 2024 equivalent to 3.493 volumes of Encyclopædia Britannica.³ In view of this difference in quantity, Wikipedia addresses numerous topics in their own articles that are not covered in Encyclopædia Britannica, or only in passing.

Furthermore, we integrated insights from renowned sources like Freedom House, Polity, and the Bertelsmann Index country reports, enhancing our understanding of political regimes. Our dataset also benefits enormously from the datasets of many esteemed colleagues, particularly those focusing on political regimes. The incorporation of variables from datasets like Freedom

¹ <http://psephos.adam-carr.net/>

² <https://www.wikipedia.org/>; <https://www.britannica.com/>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Size_in_volumes

House, LIED, Polity IV, and V-Dem was instrumental in coding essential information. This integration, however, was not without challenges, as we occasionally encountered discrepancies between these datasets and the information gleaned from academic literature.

One of the standout features of our dataset is its historical depth. While data richness post-World War II is fairly common, datasets such as AF, Polity, LIED, and V-Dem are rare gems that provide insights into much earlier periods. This historical breadth was invaluable in enriching our research and enabling nuanced comparisons with our findings.

Variables in the Data Set

year

Calendar year, values 1900-2024

country_name

Name of the political entity: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Artsakh, Aruba, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bermuda, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, British Virgin Islands, Brunei, Bukhara, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Colony, Cape Verde, Cayman Islands, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo-Brazzaville, Congo-Kinshasa, Cook Islands, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Curaçao, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, East Timor, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Estonia, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Falkland Islands, Faroe Islands, Fiji, Finland, France, France, Vichy, French Guiana, French Polynesia, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Germany - East, Germany - West, Ghana, Gibraltar, Greece, Greenland, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Guam, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Hejaz, Honduras, Hong Kong, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Khiva, Kiribati, Korea, Korea - North, Korea - South, Kosovo, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macau, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Martinique, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mayotte, Mexico, Micronesia, Moldova, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Montserrat, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Natal, Nauru, Nepal, Netherlands, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Newfoundland, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Niue, North Macedonia, Northern Mariana Islands, Norway, Oman, Orange Free State, Ottoman Empire, Pakistan,

Palau, Palestine, Palestine - Gaza Strip, Palestine - West Bank, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Qatar, Réunion, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Saint Barthélemy, Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Martin, Saint Pierre and Miquelon, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Samoa - American, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Sikkim, Singapore, Sint Maarten, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Somaliland, South Africa, South Sudan, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Tanganyika, Tanzania, Thailand, Tibet, Togo, Tonga, Transvaal, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Turks and Caicos Islands, Tuvalu, U.S. Virgin Islands, Uganda, Ukraine, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Vietnam, Vietnam - North, Vietnam - South, Wallis and Futuna, Western Sahara, Yemen, Yemen - North, Yemen - South, Yugoslavia, Zambia, Zanzibar, Zimbabwe.

VaPoReg_code

This variable uniquely identifies all political entities in our dataset. The code is based on the country codes from the Correlates of War project and is supplemented with codes for all political entities, such as Sikkim or Tibet, which are included in our dataset but do not have a country code assigned by the Correlates of War project.

GeoNames_ID

The GeoNames_ID uniquely identifies geographical entities within the GeoNames database, covering a wide array of locations. This code assigns each geographical entity a unique numerical ID, ensuring precise geolocation. The ID reflects the hierarchical nature of geographical entities, ranging from continents and countries to cities and specific landmarks, and is associated with attributes such as the name, latitude, longitude, and administrative division of the location. The GeoNames_code facilitates accurate geolocation and seamless data integration across various datasets, promoting consistency and interoperability. By enabling the cross-referencing of geographical information, it enhances research and operational efficiency across diverse fields.

cow_code

The Correlates of War country code is a system that uniquely identifies countries within the Correlates of War (COW) project database. This coding system assigns a specific numerical

identifier to each country, facilitating the consistent and accurate identification of countries across various datasets and studies. The COW country code promotes standardized data collection and analysis, enhancing the comparability and interoperability of research in international relations and conflict studies.

VaPoReg_cr

VaPoReg_cr is identical to the standard version (VaPoReg_s) with an additional category for Part of other country. The abbreviation cr stands for country reports, as this additional category is consistently used in our country reports.

- 10 Liberal Democracy
- 20 Defective Democracy
- 30 Electoral Oligarchy
- 40 Non-Electoral Transitional Regime
- 50 Electoral Hybrid Regime
- 60 Electoral Autocracy
- 70 Electoral Oligarchical Autocracy
- 80 Constitutional Monarchy
- 90 Autocratic Monarchy
- 100 One-Party Autocracy
- 110 Right-Wing Autocracy
- 120 Communist Ideocracy
- 130 Islamist Ideocracy
- 140 Military Autocracy
- 150 Personalist Autocracy
- 160 Direct Rule Colonial Regime
- 170 Indirect Rule Colonial Regime
- 180 Direct Rule Occupation Regime
- 190 Indirect Rule Occupation Regime
- 200 No Central Authority
- 210 Part of Other Country

VaPoReg_s

This is the standard version of the political regime variable of Varieties of Political Regimes.

- 10 Liberal Democracy

- 20 Defective Democracy
- 30 Electoral Oligarchy
- 40 Non-Electoral Transitional Regime
- 50 Electoral Hybrid Regime
- 60 Electoral Autocracy
- 70 Electoral Oligarchical Autocracy
- 80 Constitutional Monarchy
- 90 Autocratic Monarchy
- 100 One-Party Autocracy
- 110 Right-Wing Autocracy
- 120 Communist Ideocracy
- 130 Islamist Ideocracy
- 140 Military Autocracy
- 150 Personalist Autocracy
- 160 Direct Rule Colonial Regime
- 170 Indirect Rule Colonial Regime
- 180 Direct Rule Occupation Regime
- 190 Indirect Rule Occupation Regime
- 200 No Central Authority

VaPoReg_a

This alternative version of the political regime variable from Varieties of Political Regimes merges liberal and defective democracy into one category and combines autocratic and constitutional monarchies into the ruling monarchy category. Direct and indirect rule colonial regimes are merged into the category colonial regime and direct rule and indirect rule occupation regimes into the category occupation regime. The category electoral oligarchical autocracy is in this version subsumed under a broader category of electoral autocracy.

- 15 Democracy
- 30 Electoral Oligarchy
- 40 Non-Electoral Transitional Regime
- 50 Electoral Hybrid Regime
- 65 Electoral Autocracy
- 85 Ruling Monarchy
- 100 One-Party Autocracy

- 110 Right-Wing Autocracy
- 120 Communist Ideocracy
- 130 Islamist Ideocracy
- 140 Military Autocracy
- 150 Personalist Autocracy
- 165 Colonial Regime
- 185 Occupation Regime
- 200 No Central Authority

All codings for VaPoReg_s, VaPoReg_a, and VaPoReg_cr refer to the political regime as of July 1 each year.

governing_country

For the categories of colonial regime, occupation regime, and territories that are part of another country, this variable specifies the governing country of the political entity.

VaPoReg_s_of_gc

This variable classifies the regime type of the governing country for colonial regimes, occupation regimes, and territories under another country, according to the standard version of our regime classification (VaPoReg_s).

- 10 Liberal Democracy
- 20 Defective Democracy
- 30 Electoral Oligarchy
- 40 Non-Electoral Transitional Regime
- 50 Electoral Hybrid Regime
- 60 Electoral Autocracy
- 70 Electoral Oligarchical Autocracy
- 80 Constitutional Monarchy
- 90 Autocratic Monarchy
- 100 One-Party Autocracy
- 110 Right-Wing Autocracy
- 120 Communist Ideocracy
- 130 Islamist Ideocracy
- 140 Military Autocracy

- 150 Personalist Autocracy
- 160 Direct Rule Colonial Regime
- 170 Indirect Rule Colonial Regime
- 180 Direct Rule Occupation Regime
- 190 Indirect Rule Occupation Regime
- 200 No Central Authority

VaPoReg_a_of_gc

This variable categorizes the political regime of a governing country for colonial regimes, occupation regimes, and territories under foreign control, based on the alternative version of our regime classification (VaPoReg_a). In this alternative version, democracies and semi-democracies are grouped into a single category, while absolute and constitutional monarchies are combined into a unified "ruling monarchy" category.

- 15 Democracy
- 30 Electoral Oligarchy
- 40 Non-Electoral Transitional Regime
- 50 Electoral Hybrid Regime
- 65 Electoral Autocracy
- 85 Ruling Monarchy
- 100 One-Party Autocracy
- 110 Right-Wing Autocracy
- 120 Communist Ideocracy
- 130 Islamist Ideocracy
- 140 Military Autocracy
- 150 Personalist Autocracy
- 165 Colonial Regime
- 185 Occupation Regime
- 200 No Central Authority

VaPoReg_Monarchy

The variable differentiates between autocratic monarchies, constitutional monarchies, and ceremonial monarchies. All non-monarchical regimes are coded as republics. The regime type of the governing country of colonies and occupation regimes are coded according to the same scheme.

- 10 Autocratic Monarchy
- 20 Governed by Autocratic Monarchy
- 30 Constitutional Monarchy
- 40 Governed by Constitutional Monarchy
- 50 Ceremonial Monarchy
- 60 Governed by Ceremonial Monarchy
- 70 Republic
- 80 governed by Republic

un_continent

- 1 Africa
- 2 Americas
- 3 Asia
- 4 Europe
- 5 Oceania

un_region

- 1 Australia and New Zealand
- 2 Caribbean
- 3 Central America
- 4 Central Asia
- 5 Eastern Africa
- 6 Eastern Asia
- 7 Eastern Europe
- 8 Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia
- 9 Middle Africa
- 10 Northern Africa
- 11 Northern America
- 12 Northern Europe
- 13 South America
- 14 South-Eastern Asia
- 15 Southern Africa
- 16 Southern Asia
- 17 Southern Europe

18 Western Africa

19 Western Asia

20 Western Europe

start_ VaPoReg_s

The date on which the political regime type, according to the standard version of our political regime categorization, began.

end_ VaPoReg_s

The date on which the political regime type, as defined by the standard version of our political regime categorization, ended.

change_ VaPoReg_s

The variable identifies regime changes based on the standard version of our political regime categorization. It takes a value of one if a different regime is in place on July 1st compared to July 1st of the previous year.

duration_ VaPoReg_s

The number of years the political regime has lasted, as defined by the standard version of our political regime categorization, counting only if the regime was still in power on July 1st of each year.

start_ VaPoReg_a

The date on which the political regime type, according to the alternative version of our political regime categorization, began.

end_ VaPoReg_a

The date on which the political regime type, as defined by the alternative version of our political regime categorization, ended.

change_ VaPoReg_a

The variable identifies regime changes based on the standard version of our political regime categorization. It takes a value of one if a different regime is in place on July 1st compared to July 1st of the previous year.

duration_VaPoReg_a

The number of years the political regime has lasted, as defined by the alternative version of our political regime categorization, counting only if the regime was still in power on July 1st of each year.

e_v2xlg_legcon_labeled

The variable is adapted from V-Dem's e_v2xlg_legcon. It is an indicator for the capacity of the legislature and government agencies (e.g., comptroller general, general prosecutor, or ombudsman) to question, investigate, and exercise oversight over the executive. V-Dem's index ranges from 0-1. We used the 5C categorization provided by V-Dem for interpretation and assigned the following labels:

0.00: Absent

0.25: Limited

0.50: Moderate

0.75: Robust

1.00: Comprehensive

e_v2x_jucon_labeled

The variable is adapted from V-Dem's e_v2x_jucon. It is an indicator of the extent to which the executive respects the constitution and complies with court rulings, as well as to which the judiciary is able to act independently. V-Dem's index ranges from 0-1. We used the 5C categorization provided by V-Dem for interpretation and assigned the same labels as e_v2xlg_legcon:

0.00 Absent

0.25 Limited

0.50 Moderate

0.75 Robust

1.00 Comprehensive

fh_total

The variable is Freedom House's measure of freedom based on the combined measurement of political liberties civil rights in each country. Their measure ranges from 2-14 for which they provide the following interpretation:

2-5 free

6-8 partly free

9-14 not free

We prefer the following alternative interpretation. In this interpretation regarding electoral regimes free points into the direction of a liberal democracy, rather free into the direction of a defective democracy, rather not free into the direction of an electoral hybrid regime and not free into the direction of an electoral autocracy:

2-4 free

5-7 rather free

8-10 rather not free

11-14 not free

vdem_PCLI

The variable corresponds to V-Dem's Political Civil Liberties Index (PCLI) and measures the extent to which individuals and groups enjoy fundamental political and civil liberties on a scale from 0 (no liberties) to 1 (full protection of liberties). We used the 5C categorization provided by V-Dem for interpretation and assigned the following labels:

0.00 none

0.25 not really

0.50 ambiguous

0.75 somewhat

1.00 yes

vdem_EFFI

This variable corresponds to V-Dem's Election free and fair Index. By considering all aspects of the pre-election period, election day, and the post-election process, it assesses if national elections were free and fair. We assigned the following labels to the data based on V-Dem's categorization:

0 none

1 not really

2 ambiguous

3 somewhat

4 yes

vdem_CEI

The variable corresponds to V-Dem's Clean Election Index. It measures the extent to which elections are free and fair, based on indicators such as the absence of registration fraud, systematic irregularities, government intimidation of the opposition, vote buying, and election violence. We used the 5C categorization provided by V-Dem for interpretation and assigned the following labels:

0.00 none

0.25 not really

0.50 ambiguous

0.75 somewhat

1.00 yes

polity5_xconst

The variable from the Polity5 dataset measures the constraints on the executive, assessing the extent to which institutionalized checks limit executive authority. It ranges from 1 (unlimited executive power) to 7 (strong executive constraints, such as independent judiciary and legislative oversight).

1 Unlimited Authority: No formal restrictions on executive power, aside from irregular threats (e.g., coups). Evidence includes ignoring constitutional limits, dissolving or controlling the legislature, appointing and removing accountability groups at will, and ruling by decree. Temporary emergency powers that are relinquished afterward do not count.

2 Intermediate Category (Unlimited Authority to Slight Limitations)

3 Slight to Moderate Limitations: Some real but limited constraints exist. Evidence includes a legislature with some legislative power, blocked executive actions, failed attempts to extend executive power, independent judiciary, and cases where civilian executives defer to military demands.

4 Intermediate Category (Moderate to Substantial Limitations)

5 Substantial Limitations: The executive has more power than accountability groups but faces significant checks. Evidence includes legislative or party modifications to executive actions, funding refusals, independent administrative appointments, and restrictions on executive travel.

6 Intermediate Category (Substantial Limitations to Executive Parity)

7 Executive Parity or Subordination: Accountability groups have equal or greater authority than the executive. Evidence includes legislatures or councils initiating key legislation, executives

dependent on accountability group support (e.g., parliamentary systems), and chronic cabinet instability in multi-party democracies.

lied_executive_elections

The variable from the Lexical Index of Electoral Democracy (LIED) indicates whether the chief executive is elected directly or indirectly (i.e., selected by elected representatives) and considers whether the executive is accountable to an elected parliament when not directly elected.

1 present

0 absent

lied_legislative_elections

The variable from LIED indicates whether a legislative body, such as a parliament, enacts at least some laws and does not perform executive functions. The lower house (or unicameral chamber) of the legislature is at least partially elected, and the legislature remains operational.

1 present

0 absent.

lied_multiparty_legislative_elec

The variable from LIED indicates whether the lower house (or unicameral chamber) of the legislature is (at least in part) elected by voters who have more than one choice. Specifically, either (a) multiple parties, including opposition parties, are allowed to compete, or (b) candidates run without party labels but represent distinct political positions.

1 present

0 absent.

Data Maintenance and Updates

Va-PoReg is continuously updated on an annual basis. Each year, we update the dataset to reflect regime changes, state dissolutions, new state formations, and major shifts in sovereignty status through July 1st of the corresponding year. The primary aim of the updating process is to capture and classify all relevant changes in accordance with the conceptual framework and coding principles established in this codebook.

Beyond regime updates, Va-PoReg is systematically expanded to deepen its analytical scope. New variables are continuously developed to enhance the ability to capture the complexity and diversity of political regimes across historical periods and world regions. In addition, the information basis for existing variables is continuously refined to increase the precision, reliability, and validity of regime codings. All extensions and improvements are transparently documented in the updated versions of the codebook and the associated country reports.

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