

Autocratization resistance in Indonesia

The role of civil society in preventing the weakening of the KPK

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Abstract

On September 24, 2019, thousands of Indonesians mobilized in the streets of major urban areas in disagreement with the reforms directed at the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), Indonesia's only reliably independent law enforcement agency (Power & Warburton, 2020, p.9) Although experiencing severe signs of polarization, civil society presented itself as unified for one common goal. However, such efforts were not enough to "save the KPK", as the country's political arena is deeply embedded with the presence of elite pressure groups and middle-class-reformers whose interests influenced the outcome of the conflict. The case of Indonesia falls into a broader trend of democratic backslide being experienced by dozens of countries around the globe, which has inspired a new generation of studies on autocratization. This thesis aims to further contribute to this field of research by focusing on the role of civil society in resisting autocratization. The case study is approached with two questions: *How is the weakening of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) linked to autocratization in Indonesia?* And *What is the role of civil society in resisting the weakening of the KPK and autocratization in Indonesia?*

Theories on autocratization and civil society are explored, with direct attention to accountability mechanisms. The weakening of the KPK is approached as a case of weakened horizontal accountability while the inability of civil society to resist its weakening is addressed as a case of weakened diagonal accountability. Hence, the case study makes use of the weakening of accountability mechanisms as an explanation for autocratization in Indonesia.

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Abbreviations

ACA	Anti-Corruption Agency
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DPR	House of Representatives
DEEP	Democracy and Electoral Empowerment Partnership
ER	Extinction Rebellion
FPI	Islamic Defenders Front
HTI	Hizb ut-Tahrir
ICW	Indonesia Corruption Watch
KPK	Corruption Eradication Commission
KPU	General Elections Commission of Indonesia
MUI	Indonesian Ulama Council
NU	Nahdlatul Ulama
PDI-P	Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle
PKI	Communist Party of Indonesia
PKS	Prosperous Justice Party
PPP	United Development Party
SETARA	Institute for Democracy and Peace

1. Introduction

Indonesia has been praised for being a democratic success story standing out in a region highly affected by political turmoil (Power & Warburton, 2020). The end of Suharto's regime in 1998 marked the start of a transition period in which Indonesia assembled the bases of its current democratic regime. The circumstances leading up to this change were not favorable: a heavily politicized military repressing a pro-democracy civil society, deep-rooted corruption, ethnic and religious conflicts involving violent outcomes, and a growing financial crisis rapidly spreading over the region. Contrary to most expectations, the transition to democracy advanced well. It left behind 40 years of authoritarian rule and introduced remarkable reforms, which include: the separation of executive and military power, the establishment of free and competitive elections (the first ones taking place in 1999), the liberalization of the party system, and the insertion of legal and judicial reforms which permitted the propagation of independent media and the enlargement of space for civil society, amongst others (Setaiwan & Tomsa, 2022). To fight corruption, the set up for a new Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) began with the transition although the agency was not fully established until 2004 (Choi, 2011).

Being a nation where 90% of the population identifies as Muslim can entail a complicated interplay between religion and politics. Interestingly, Indonesia has been internationally baptized as a 'model Muslim democracy' (Grzywacz, 2020), an assumption that emphasizes the positive aspects while potentially overlooking the causes of some of the largest political (and religious) struggles of the past years. With 6 official religions, more than 1,000 ethnicities, and around 700 unique languages, Indonesia is one of the most diverse countries in the world. Its culture is diverse, but unfortunately, so is its economy: the four richest men in Indonesia accumulate more wealth than the poorest 100 million people, making it the sixth country with the greatest wealth inequality in the world (Gibson, 2017). In terms of politics, there are some other indicators that can tell us a bit more about the state of Indonesian democracy as of 2022-23: The V-Dem 2023 democracy report finds Indonesia to be one of the 42 countries autocratizing worldwide. This is a significant change, as in the 2022 report Indonesia's democratic score was decreasing but not in high enough numbers to identify a significant backslide. Its score in the Human Development Index (HDI) has been increasing since the creation of the index in 1990. In 2021, Indonesia was given the status of high development, with a score of 0.705. However,

since 2019, it has started to see a slight downward trend. Freedom House characterizes Indonesia as partly free, which is a downgrade from the period between 2006-2013 when it was considered free. Finally, in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) in 2022 it's ranked number 110 out of 180 countries. The score is 34/100, which seems like a small increase if compared to 2012 (32/100) but a worrying decrease if compared to 2019 (40/100). As a result, corruption perception in Indonesia is in an unfavorable position compared to some autocratic countries like Turkey or Thailand, which have slightly better scores.

Indonesia has never reached the state of liberal democracy (V-Dem, 2023), but it definitely had a steady and growing democratic status in the first decade after the regime change. The regime has been given different labels: a "patronage democracy" (Aspinall, 2019); an "electoral democracy" (V-Dem, 2023); an "illiberal democracy" (Bourchier, 2014); or a "flawed democracy" (EIU, 2022), amongst others. These terms are all variations emphasizing different matters but with a common ground: Indonesia is not a liberal democracy. Not only that, but all hopes of it reaching a higher democratic quality are now fading, as it has become clear –with the help of qualitative and quantitative studies– that the country is autocratizing. Polarization, populism, the radicalization of Islam, oligarchy, shrinking space for human rights and civil liberties... these are key terms that are headlining the discussions about Indonesia nowadays (Setaiwan & Tomsa, 2022; Power & Warburton, 2020; Mietzner, 2021). In an attempt to contribute to the discussion, the next paragraphs describe the case in which this thesis will be zooming in, which portrays some of the most relevant factors comprising the process of autocratization. Moreover, a step back is taken to relate the case to broader and global trends to illustrate the need and motivation to explore this topic further.

On the 23rd of September 2019, thousands of students and civilians mobilized in the streets of major Indonesian cities forming the largest protest since 1998. At that time, protests contributed to the ease into democracy, where the demands can be summarized in one key term: *reformasi* (reform). Twenty years later, the picture looks significantly different. *#ReformasiDikorupsi* was the headline in 2019, meaning that the reform had been corrupted (Mudhoffir, 2022). The reason that these protests first arose is attributed to the passing of several bills. Notably, the anti-graft law relating to the competencies held by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK). Additionally, there were other bills being

passed that make this conflict multidisciplinary, including the protection of some minority groups (criminal code bill and anti-sexual violence bill) and related to issues on natural resources (land, mineral, and coal bill). Although the specific bills might have been the trigger of the protests, they became an opportunity to express dissent and make underlying political and democratic concerns visible. Broadly, one of the main reasons for mobilization was that general population demands were not being taken under serious consideration by the government (Aspinall, 2020).

The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK, Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi) created in 2004, has been known for being one of the most trusted political agencies in Indonesia (Hicken, 2020). Moreover, as mentioned above, the KPK was created to address corruption, which was considered one of the main pillars that reformasi had to address. After a few years of functioning, it came to be referred to as Indonesia's "only credibly independent law enforcement agency" (Power & Warburton, 2020, p. 9). However, following the 2019 reforms, this perception is not as clear. The KPK has been visibly weakened, which can be seen as a hollowing out of horizontal accountability (Mudhoffir, 2022). In other words, the independence of the KPK has been taken away (Power, 2020). One of the reforms is the introduction of a supervisory board that is now in charge of approving some of the actions taken by the KPK such as wiretapping of interviews or the ability to pursue a certain case (Mudhoffir, 2022). Although this supervisory board could be seen as a way to increase credibility by making the process more accountable, there are some controversial figures appointed in the board that involve members of other institutions such as advisors to the chief of police or figures linked to ex-president Suharto (ibid., 2022, p. 15). Another of the reforms obliged all workers in the agency to take a civil servant test to have the KPK incorporated into the state apparatus by 2021 (u4, 2021), which resulted in the dismissal of 57 employees. This became highly controversial as most agreed that the test was not measuring the employee's abilities but rather getting rid of those involved with the "Taliban", which were rumors that had been spread widely by middle-class reformers (Mudhoffir, 2022). Although their argument was that they were helping the KPK by removing extremists from the agency, scholars and the media agree that the real reason was to remove those investigators who were pursuing high-profile cases of Indonesian elites (Mietzner, 2018; Mudhoffir, 2022). Additionally, this case also depicts an example of identity politics, where the conflictive polarization between Islamists and pluralists is only becoming larger (Warburton, 2020).

Although civil society (CS) was not able to “save the KPK” (Setiawan & Tomsa, 2022) in 2019, there is a bright side here – support for democracy is still high, as illustrated by these same protests, which brought together different sectors of society to fight with a common vision. This is not always the case in Indonesia, where civil society is believed to be fragmented and disorganized (*ibid.*, 2022). A strong civil society is acknowledged as a relevant actor in both starting and continuing a transition from authoritarian to democratic governance (Antlöv et al., 2010, p. 419). Although there is no simple correlation between civil society and democracy, or civil society and regime change, it has become clear that civil society in Indonesia has influenced political change in different ways throughout different periods. However, the amount of credit that can be attributed to civil society varies in different degrees. There are authors naming civil society as one of the most important catalysts to political change throughout the major regime changes that Indonesia has experienced since independence (Aspinall, 2004). Others are arguing that civil society has not had a major role in Indonesian politics since 1965 and that in 1998, regime change cannot only be attributed to civil society but rather to a combination of events and actors (Mudhoffir, 2022).

The government’s dismantling of the KPK is far from being an isolated incident that directly affects the quality of democracy. There are numerous practices being put in place that might not mean much if they are explored independently. However, by adding all the pieces of the puzzle together, it is evident that democratic values and institutions are being gradually undermined (Nuraniyah, 2020). Thus, it can be argued that it comprises a gradual process of democratic erosion. Indonesia is not an isolated example. It fits into a broader context of what scholars are calling a “third wave of autocratization” (Lindberg and Lührmann, 2019). What makes this wave particularly interesting and different from the two previous autocratization waves is that it’s affecting primarily democracies (*ibid.*, 2019). Another main characteristic is the graduality of these changes: autocratization seems to be happening step-by-step, which could positively mean that it is easier to stop or that it could happen so undercover that changes to stop it might not be made on time.

Although autocratization and the field of transformative politics have gained attention over the last years –especially from the perspectives of political science, comparative politics, and area studies– human geographers have not particularly paid

attention to democratic institutions and regime transitions (Stokke, 2018, p. 2). In turn, this opens an opportunity to contribute to the research of a growing established field from a human geography perspective. Even though autocratization as a process is being widely discussed, there are some sub-branches in the field that require further exploration. Specifically, there is still little scholarship about resistance against autocratization, including the main actors taking part and the strategies they use (Tomini et al., 2022).

What explains autocratization in Indonesia? Which areas of democratic life are suffering the most consequences? Is there any resistance to this decline and if so, where is it coming from? These are major questions that are continuously trying to be answered by Indonesian experts. Acknowledging that these are broad and comprehensive questions, this thesis wants to make a modest contribution to the debate by focusing on the specific case of the KPK and exploring how the findings can be connected to major research questions. Stemming from these events and thoughts, two research questions are aimed to be answered in this master thesis:

- (1) How is the weakening of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) linked to autocratization in Indonesia?
- (2) What is the role of civil society in resisting the weakening of the KPK and autocratization in Indonesia?

These questions are formulated in a way that allows the comprehensive exploration of how the hollowing out of the KPK illustrates trends of autocratization and civic resistance to political change. Autocratization in Indonesia is understood as a gradual process, where it is as important to consider the forces driving it as much as those resisting it. Specifically, this thesis focuses on the resister side, by exploring civil society's ability to play that role.

A qualitative case study approached with semi-structured interviews has been chosen as the methodology. Fieldwork with a duration of 5 weeks was conducted in Jakarta, which included semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Combined with textual data, the analysis is grounded in primary and secondary sources.

This thesis follows a conventional flow where relevant analyses accompany theory. First, the theoretical framework reviews concepts and discussions in two main areas: theories of autocratization and theories on civil society. Second, the methods chapter discusses aspects such as choice of methodology, collection, and coding of data, interview questions, and ethical limitations. Third, two sections on empirical analysis will follow, each aiming to discuss one of the research questions. The first part addresses the signs of autocratization in Indonesia, the importance of the KPK to the well-functioning of its democracy, and the way its weakening has affected – and continues to affect– institutional accountability. The second part visits the different roles and contributions civil society has taken in resisting the weakening of the KPK and autocratization. Finally, a conclusion is drawn in relation to the questions posed in the introduction.

Briefly, this thesis concludes that 1) the case of the KPK reflects autocratization in Indonesia because it is a case of weakened horizontal accountability and 2) that civil society resistance to the weakening of the KPK has been unsatisfactory because of internal issues and weakened diagonal accountability.

2. Theoretical Framework

The aim of this section is to engage in relevant theories of autocratization and civil society resistance. This discussion will allow for concepts to be operationalized for the empirical part of this thesis. Through a review of the theories and timely debates, there are some highlights worth mentioning in the following paragraphs. First, autocratization is seen as any (gradual) process driving away from democracy. The main causes come from the side of the executive power and the main ways of resistance can be fitted within three accountability sub-types (vertical, horizontal, and diagonal). Accountability mechanisms can be seen as two-fold: active (when they constrain the executive power); and passive (when they are weakened by the executive). Second, civil society is seen as a dynamic and heterogeneous space that uses its agency for different purposes. The section places CS in politics by going through the roles it can take and the ways it's constrained or weakened. There is also a section that discusses the importance of CS engagement in anti-corruption. At the end of the theory chapter, section 2.3 summarizes the theories and arguments put forward.

2.1. Theories of Autocratization

The first part focuses on theories of autocratization. It aims to discuss three questions, in relation to the first research question (*How is the weakening of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) linked to autocratization in Indonesia?*).

- ❖ What is autocratization and why does it matter?
- ❖ How is democracy undermined (what are the causes of autocratization)?
- ❖ How is autocratization resisted / what halts it?

To answer the first question (2.1.1), the two major conflicting definitions of autocratization are discussed, which are put forward by Lindberg and Lührmann (2021) / Cassani and Tomini (2020). In the second question (2.1.2), the causes of autocratization are identified. Finally, to answer the third question (2.1.3), accountability mechanisms will be discussed. Accountability is seen as heuristic and three-dimensional. It involves different actors whose agency can be played out in a variety of ways in time-space.

2.1.1. Why autocratization matters

In the 1990s, democracy became the predominant type of regime in the world (Diamond, 2021). However, as multiple authors have illustrated and as this section will try to address, this is no longer the norm. Three decades after Fukuyama's "end of history" (1989) and Huntington's "third wave of democratization" (1991), we are now starting to see the consequences of a worldwide overarching phenomenon affecting multiple regimes. This trend is now commonly referred to as autocratization, which in general terms can be seen as the reverse trend of democratization. Due to the extensiveness of this occurrence, some are conceptualizing it as a 'wave', namely as "the third wave of autocratization" (Lindberg and Lührmann, 2019). The third wave is based on data obtained from the V-Dem project, which aims to establish a common base to measure autocratization globally. The last report, published in March 2023 finds several interesting facts that help contextualize this research. On the one side, 72% of the world population is now living in autocracies, and 43% lives in countries that are autocratizing, which as of 2022 are 42 countries. On the other side, only 14 countries are democratizing, which brings us back to the levels in 1986. This means that the progress made in the last thirty years has been eradicated (V-Dem, 2023). These numbers are not only worrying to those who study regime dynamics and

more concretely autocratization, but to citizens around the world, as this is affecting the world order that we've been accustomed to. Liberal democracy is in crisis (Owen, 2022), and alternative types of regimes are spreading rapidly.

There have been numerous concepts trying to address the deterioration of democracies: democratic backslide, democratic erosion, democratic regression, autocratization... Although authors argue that there are some conceptual differences between them (Cassani and Tomini, 2020; Diamond, 2020; Lindberg and Lührmann, 2021) and it is acknowledged that these debates make the field more fruitful, this thesis will use them interchangeably with the aim to reduce conceptual confusion. However, there are some major debates that require a bit more attention, as the stance adopted makes a difference when exploring the case of Indonesia. The following paragraphs address the differences between definitions and clarify where this thesis will be positioned.

Autocratization can be understood in different ways. There are two main conflicting definitions. Lindberg and Lührmann (2019) see it as “the opposite of democratization” and “any process driving away from democracy”, whereas Cassani and Tomini (2020) view it as “regime changes towards autocracy”. The main difference is that the former sees the process as a continuum, without necessarily having a hop between regimes, while the latter requires a change of regime. *Table 1* illustrates the differences between these two main definitions. They classify regimes in different boxes. The former use the V-Dem categories: liberal democracy, electoral democracy, electoral autocracy, and closed autocracy. The latter also uses a fourfold classification, replacing electoral democracy with defective democracy. Although conceptually defective democracy focuses on a negative attribute while electoral democracy focuses on a positive one (if we assume that democracy is the goal), for empirical purposes, they are used in a similar manner and this thesis will not go into conceptual distinctions between the two. Additionally, the measurement of autocratization is also different. While Lindberg and Lührmann use the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI), Cassani and Tomini's analysis is mainly based on qualitative methods, although they do take the V-Dem data as a first step to conceptualize their research. They call it procedural conceptualization, meaning that regime changes are explored with the help of the institutional and political landscape in a country.

	Lindberg & Lührmann (2019)	Cassani & Tomini (2020)
<i>Definition</i>	Any process away from democracy	Regime changes towards autocracy
<i>Process</i>	Gradual (continuum)	Regime transitions
<i>Analytical measure</i>	Episodes (EDI)	Procedural conceptualization
<i>Starting point</i>	Any regime type	Any regime type
<i>Methodology</i>	Quantitative and Qualitative	Qualitative
<i>Broader context</i>	Third wave	“Don’t think of it as a wave!”

Table 1. *Conflicting definitions of autocratization*

Lindberg and Lührmann use the concept of the third wave as a main analytical tool. However, this conceptualization has been highly contested by Skaaning (2020) and Tomini (2021) who disagree on its usefulness. One of Skaaning's (2020) main arguments is that democratization episodes were still outnumbering autocratization episodes and thus calling it a wave seems disproportionate. He also disagrees with the periodization used and argues that the third wave began much more recently than what Lindberg and Lührmann state, in 2013 (instead of 1994), which is when the number of ongoing cases of autocratization outnumbered the outgoing democratization ones. Similarly, Tomini (2021)'s main argument is that the concept of the wave has limited analytical power and discussions taking it as a crucial part of the analysis might lead to taking the research in an extraneous direction. Although their arguments are more extensive, these are just conceptual disagreements, and there is a need to bear in mind that the positive outcome of these discussions is that the field is getting attention.

According to Cassani and Tomini, if there is no jump in regime type, there is no autocratization. Although this can be beneficial, it can also be a disadvantage. Positively, only cases that transition from one regime to the other are considered and thus it might be less likely to identify false positives. However, it can also mean that some real cases are missed or diagnosed too late in the process. A gradual approach seems more useful, as it permits the identification of a higher number of cases, regardless of how serious or fast their transition is going (Lindberg and Lührmann, 2020). This can not only have academic benefits in terms of early predictability but also for autocratization resisters, whose

increased awareness can translate into more organized and efficient action (Tomini et al., 2022). For this reason, this thesis adopts Lindberg and Luhrmann's definition. Additionally, if we were to take Cassani and Tomini's definition, Indonesia would not be considered a case of autocratization. In the V-Dem score, Indonesia is identified as one of the 42 countries autocratizing (V-Dem, 2023), but it has not changed its regime type of electoral democracy (which it has held for the past 25 years).

2.1.2. Causes and drivers of autocratization.

This section visits identified causes of autocratization. The discussed concepts are executive aggrandizement, promissory coups, military intervention, electoral manipulation, repression of political and civic liberties, weakening of horizontal accountability, polarization, and populism. All of the mentioned above are in one way or another related to the executive power, as will be exemplified below.

When thinking of the actors that drive autocratization in the 21st century, the first image that comes to mind is probably the one of a powerful ruler who's come to power through somewhat democratic elections but has taken questionable use of this power (Bermeo, 2016). This usually receives the term *executive aggrandizement*, and it is defined as "the gradual concentration of power in the hands of the executive branch, and especially its leader, at the expense of other branches of government and of citizens' rights" (Laebens & Lührmann, 2021, p. 910). Executive aggrandizement is a large threat given that it happens way more smoothly and indirectly than coups. This aligns with the conceptualization of the third wave, which as described in the previous section, is happening gradually. This is different from how democracies deteriorated in the 20th century. The three most common ways of democratic breakdown before the cold war were open-ended coups, executive coups, and electoral frauds (Bermeo, 2016). Bermeo (2016) also argues that the type of coups that are driving the current era of autocratization are *promissory coups*. The drivers of these coups frame the elected government as a threat to democracy and make their way into power by promising to hold elections and restore democracy after they gain power. In some cases, this promise is completed while in other cases autocratization becomes worse. However, the number of cases that are promissory coups is way lower than those of executive aggrandizement. A third way of democratic backsliding involves the manipulation of the electoral environment (Hicken, 2020;

Bermeo, 2016). These strategies include hindering media access, taking action to keep opposition candidates out of the elections, changing electoral rules in their favor, harassing opponents, and vote-buying. These are usually done in a way that is not directly perceivable by the public and it is disguised by the use of political discourse (Hicken, 2020).

Cassani & Tomini (2020) identify 5 different modes as identifiable causes of autocratization. These are military intervention, electoral manipulation, political liberties, civil liberties, and horizontal accountability. Military intervention, where there is an active role by the army forces. This can take the form of a coup d'état or a less forceful manner (provoking elections); electoral manipulation encloses all actions related to the running of elections. Examples include vote buying, accessibility of polling stations, wrongful vote counting, and irregularities in voter and candidate registration; political liberties refer to the undermining of those political liberties that are not directly associated with elections. Examples are repression of freedoms (expression, association...) and they are not only targeted at politicians but also supporters, journalists, and activists; civil liberties are those limitations that are not inherently related to politics. They include measures that pose threats to human rights and freedom principles; horizontal accountability, where its debilitation happens when the executive power establishes measures that destabilize the balance with the legislative power. This will be discussed in depth in the next section.

Two more concepts are worth mentioning. First, polarization is identified as another phenomenon that drives autocratization (Warburton, 2020). Polarization erodes democracy because it “routinely weakens respect for democratic norms, corrodes basic legislative process, exacerbates intolerance and discrimination, diminishes societal trust, and increases violence throughout the society” (Carothers and O’Donoghue, 2019, p. 2). An additional problem that comes with polarization is that people leave democracy aside to support their leaders and contradict the opposing side. Thus, it's an important weapon for autocratizers (Hicken, 2020). This will be further discussed in the next section (2.1.3), where the importance of having center-oriented voters for vertical accountability is described. Finally, populism tendencies. Understanding populism is challenging, because not all populist leaders undermine democratic quality (Svolik, 2019). It is defined as a "political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, noninstitutionalized support from large numbers of

mostly unorganized followers" (Gammon, 2020, p. 101). In some cases, populist leaders are part of the losing party instead of the elected party, which hinders the ability to identify it as a cause of autocratization. In addition, some authors as Muddhofir (2020) see populism as a symptom rather than a cause of autocratization.

2.1.3. How is autocratization halted? The use of accountability mechanisms

Based on the previous section, the primary drivers of autocratization stem from the executive power. This section argues that if autocratization is mainly coming from the government, then the means to halt it lie elsewhere. Concretely, this section will look at accountability mechanisms as a means to resist autocratization.

Accountability mechanisms are one of the most important characteristics of good governance. Simply put, (political) accountability are constraints on a government's use of political power (Lührmann et al, 2020). They help us understand the quality of a certain democracy. However, when accountability mechanisms fail or are weakened, the ability to constrain executive power is low, which in some cases leads to autocratization. The functions of accountability are conceptualized as two-fold in this thesis: active (constraining) and passive (weakened). Actively, as mechanisms that ensure the regime maintains its democratic quality, either by improving its legitimacy or preventing/halting its move towards autocracy. Passively, as apparatus that can be weakened by the state, which will prevent actors from successfully performing their roles or functions. The spatial relations between different mechanisms and actors who are involved in the process are one of the attention points in this section.

In classical political science theory, two types of accountability can be identified: vertical (constraints from below) and horizontal (constraints from above) (O'Donnell, 1999). The realm to which actors from civil society belong has been debated over the years. Some argued that they exercise vertical accountability and link the state to society (ibid., 1999), while others argued that they are part of horizontal accountability (Schmitter, 1999). However, recent discussions have driven away from this debate thanks to the introduction of a new categorical concept: diagonal accountability (Lührmann et al., 2020). This distinction is accommodating, given that civil society is an important player in

resisting autocratization (Tomini et al., 2022). *Figure 1* illustrates the relationship between the government and the three accountability mechanisms. Viewing accountability in a heuristic and three-dimensional way, allows us to drive away from notions of hierarchy and classic dichotomies of “above” being powerful and “below” being powerless (Schedler et al., 1999).

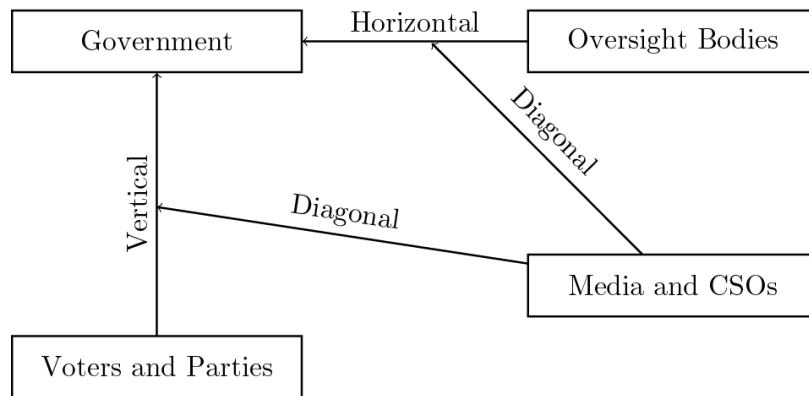


Figure 1. Relationship of Accountability Subtypes (Lührmann et al., 2020)

Laebens and Lührmann (2021) study several cases where halting autocratization through accountability mechanisms has been successful. In these cases, they did not succeed in preventing it but at least they stopped it on time. They take different forms and different mechanisms are triggered in each of the three cases (Benin, Ecuador, and South Korea), but they lay out interesting findings. However, they call for further research on “negative” cases, meaning cases where autocratization has not been halted. This would allow for a theory testing of their research design. Indonesia is a case where (so far) accountability mechanisms have not been successful in halting autocratization. Therefore, the exploration of the case this thesis focuses on fits the research agenda laid by some of the most influential authors in the field. Ahead, the three kinds of accountability will be explored briefly while also providing practical examples.

Vertical accountability is the ability of the population to hold the government accountable by means of elections and political parties (Schedler et al., 1999). It can also be seen as the relationship between the electorate and the elected. Although this will depend on the legal pre-conditions that voters are presented in the first place, the use of vertical accountability is aimed to help remove the office incumbents who are abusing power (Laebens & Lührmann, 2021). It is important to note that sometimes voters might

not make the right choices for several reasons, one of them being a polarized environment. Svobik (2019) explores why sometimes voters support rulers who undermine democracy and concludes that citizens, although they consider themselves supporters of democracy, might choose partisan interests before democracy. In the case of Indonesia, there is high polarization between Islamists and pluralists. In this situation, voters might choose their leader just because voting for the opponent might represent a threat to their interests (even if it's more democratic). For this same reason, Svobik (2019) argues that centrists are a key democratic force, as they are not driven by partisan interests and are more likely to choose the most democratic candidate.

Horizontal accountability is designed to protect against abuses of power. In electoral or liberal democracies, there are three classical sectors that provide horizontal accountability: legislature, judiciary, and public administration (O'Donnell, 1999). Some authors argue that civil society actors should be included in the notion of horizontal accountability (Schmitter, 1999). While others believe it should be limited to intra-state relations (O'Donnell, 1999). However, this is no longer a concern as civil society is now viewed as pertaining to its own category of diagonal accountability. Thus, as O'Donnell argues, horizontal accountability is for intra-state agencies or institutions to provide. The way they provide checks and balances usually comes in the form of overseeing, imposing sanctions, and coordinating against the executive. As O'Donnell (1999) put it, "Effective horizontal accountability is not the product of isolated agencies, but of networks of agencies (up to and including high courts) committed to upholding the rule of law" (1999, p. 5). Horizontal accountability is weakened when executive power alters the balance by reducing the capacities of institutions (Laebens and Lüthmann, 2021).

Following this line of thought, it becomes relevant to look at which agencies have the power or responsibility to provide checks and balances. These could be in the form of independent legislatures, courts, regulatory bodies, counter-corruption agencies, and election commissions (Schmitter, 1999). Official corruption is one of the major concerns in many new polyarchies (O'Donnell, 1999). Transparency International (TI) finds with the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) that the global average of corruption (where 100 means very clean and 0 means highly corrupt) has not changed for the past 10 decades, scoring 43 out of 100 (TI, 2022). Hence, anti-corruption agencies (ACA) are relevant oversight bodies to executive power. They are defined as "public (funded) bodies of a durable nature, with a

specific mission to fight corruption and reduce the opportunity structures propitious for its occurrence in society through preventive and/or repressive measures” (de Sousa, 2010, p.5). There are two main functions of an ACA: prevention and repression (ibid., 2010). Prevention is less perceivable and has a long-term goal of changing the social norms and culture encircling corruption. In contrast, repression involves more direct and visible actions that are aimed at a specific case. Although conceptually different, they are interrelated and complement each other. They are institutions providing checks and balances not only to the executive power but also to the private sector. In Indonesia, the KPK is a great example of a successful ACA (Power and Warburton, 2020). However, as it will be shown in the analytical part of this thesis, actions taken in the past 5 years have changed the effectiveness and trustworthiness of the institution.

Diagonal accountability is understood as the pressures coming from the media and CSOs. Here, civil society actors are seen as pressuring agents. Their agency, however, can take different shapes and functions, regarding different factors. One of the main spaces is mobilizations or protests. Another one is to use the media to call out incumbents. These actions are important, but it is assumed that protests and civil society pressures are not sufficient to halt autocratization by themselves, but they might be necessary to trigger accountability mechanisms or to make them successful (Laebens & Lührmann, 2021, p.920). The ability of actors to use diagonal pressure might be weakened by executive power by restricting civil, associational, and political liberties. Diagonal accountability is an important addition to the framework because it demonstrates that accountability actors might need to work together to be successful in halting autocratization. Therefore, it is key to remember that although being different subtypes, they complement each other.

Figure 2 takes the 5 modes advanced by Cassani and Tomini (2020) and places them in Laebens and Lührmann’s 3 accountability sub-types. This figure exemplifies which modes could undermine each accountability type. Although each mode could directly or indirectly undermine the three accountability types, the diagram illustrates which are the most affected ones. Military intervention might come with provoked elections, which affects vertical accountability; electoral manipulation affects elections, which undermines the ability of voters to provide vertical accountability; limitations on political and civil liberties affect the ability of non-state actors to provide diagonal accountability; and lastly, both texts establish horizontal accountability on their own

category, meaning that the weakening of oversight bodies undermines their ability to provide horizontal accountability.

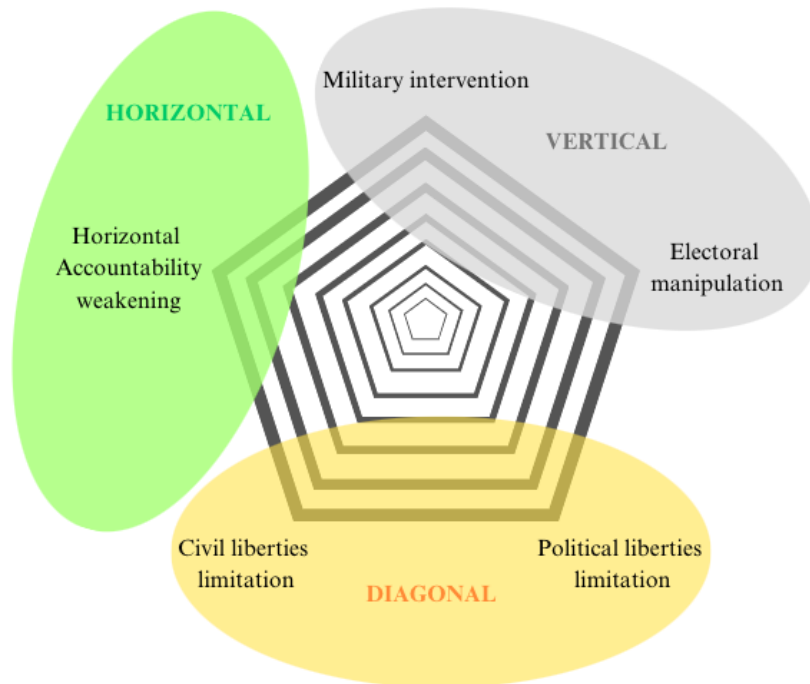


Figure 2. *Autocratization Modes x Accountability Mechanisms*
Based on Cassani & Tomini (2020), Laebens & Lührman (2021)

2.2. Theories on Civil Society

Relevant authors of autocratization theory have focused on the drivers of autocratization (Diamond, 2021). However, little to no attention has been given to the resisters of such a process. Tomini et al. (2022) describe autocratization resisters as “any activity, or combination of activities, taken by a changing set of often interconnected and interacting actors who, regardless of the motivations, attempt at slowing down, stopping, or reverting the actions of the actors responsible for the process of autocratization” (p. 3). This definition conveys three points: autocratization resistance is agent-based and takes place in a collective manner; it is formed by more than one action or strategy; and actors are not necessarily pursuing democracy. As Cleary and Öztürk argue, the strategies of opposition against autocratization processes should be considered under an agent-based perspective (2022).

It is important to not forget that the pre-existing conditions (institutional, structural, economic, social...) matter when we are trying to explain autocratization (Tomini et al., 2022). However, this section focuses on the actors. Specifically, it zooms in on civil society, which the literature points out as one of the most relevant resisters to autocratization. Linz and Stepan (1996) recognize civil society organizations (CSOs) can play a crucial role in initiating transitions, preventing setbacks, and helping to consolidate and strengthen democracy. However, there are disagreements on whether civil society plays a primary or a secondary role in transitions (Ufen, 2023). This section visits such disagreements. The main objective is to explore theoretical concepts that will help answer the second research question (*What is the role of civil society in resisting the weakening of the KPK and autocratization in Indonesia?*). There are three questions that will be touched upon:

- ❖ What is civil society?
- ❖ What roles can civil society take?
- ❖ How is CS constrained or weakened?

The first question is answered in section 2.2.1 with the use of definitions and contrasting lines of thought. The second question, in section 2.2.2, touches upon different roles that civil society can take in regime change. Additionally, sub-section 2.2.2.1. focuses on anti-corruption practices employed by citizens. The third question, in section 2.2.3, visits constraining mechanisms summarized under the concept of shrinking space. Throughout the chapter, there are links made to diagonal accountability, which was defined in the previous chapter.

2.2.1. Defining civil society

Civil society is a popular concept that does not have a single definition. It is far from being a homogeneous category. It is a space, a site, and an actor (Alagappa, 2004), defined by CIVICUS as “an arena outside the family, the state, and the market that is created by individual and collective actions, organizations, and institutions to advance shared interests”. These categories may include

“formal and informal voluntary and ascriptive organizations including churches, labor unions, farmers’ organizations, academic and student groups, debating

societies and reading groups, nonstate media, NGOs, occupational associations, business federations, and sports and leisure groups. ... Transnational and global organizations and movements, as well as diaspora and exiled communities, that significantly influence the composition and dynamics of civil society in a country should also be taken into account.”

(Alagappa 2004, p.36)

Influential thinkers such as Hegel, Tocqueville, and Marx started conceptualizing civil society during the 19th century. Hegel viewed it as an issue for social order and Marx as an arena of exploitation that had to be combated through revolution. Tocqueville, however, viewed it as a positive force to sustain democracy when the government is weak. The concept of civil society has expanded beyond its origins in Western philosophy and is now embraced by cultures around the world (Alagappa, 2004). Despite experiencing neglect during a significant part of the 20th century, the idea of civil society is being revived after the major contributions of civil society in regime transitions of Eastern Europe after 1989 (Seligman, 1995). One approach that dominates the literature nowadays is that the line between the state and society is usually blurred (Weiss, 2021).

Due to the extensiveness of actors that take part in civil society, their role in democracy and regime transitions is significantly ambiguous and dynamic. They might act as supporters or resisters of autocratization. There are scholars positioning themselves on both sides of the argument. Hadiwinata and Schuck (2016) divide them into liberal-normative theorists and historical-empiricist theorists. The first group advocates for a positive relationship between civil society and democracy. Most authors in this group belong to an “older” generation, namely Schmitter, Diamond, and Whitehead. The second group is a bit more skeptical. To put it briefly, they argue that assuming that civil society is correlated to liberal democracy is problematic. These authors include Alagappa, Chandhoke, and Kopecky. Stemming from this debate, two faces of civil society in new democracies are born: “civil” when their actions contribute to democracy, and “uncivil” when they contribute to undermine democracy (Hadiwinata & Schuck, 2016, p.67).

As it is argued by Aspinall (2004), “Only civil society that is truly civil supports democracy” (p.62). In Indonesia, different versions of civil society are seen, as will be exemplified in section 5. Hence, it is an example of this duality between civil and uncivil.

By arguing that there is a duality, the intention is not to conclude that civil society can either be harmful or beneficial to democracy. Instead, civil society is dynamic, and there are actions that fall in a grey zone. However, it is a useful distinction when researching the effects of civil society. Additionally, some authors argue that the only way for uncivil society's undemocratic agendas to be neutralized or counteracted is through contention within civil society (Chandhoke, 2011). Following this argument, it seems that the only way to improve civil society is within itself. However, as will be argued in here and in the analysis chapter, there are other factors that come into play. As mentioned earlier, to better understand the different roles of civil society, it is important to take a step back and consider the political and social environment. As argued by several authors such as Bernhard (2020) and Della Porta (2014) "the strength of civil society actors depends on political opportunity structures and the overall constellation of political forces" (Ufen, 2023, p.102). Therefore, there are some actors and structures that will act as enablers while others as constrainers (or as both).

An example of an enabler is those who provide funding. Many CSOs, especially in developing countries are highly dependable on external funding (Aspinall, 2019). This funding can go directly to the organizations or there can be more steps involved, which is when receiving the funding becomes more complicated. In Indonesia, the approach of funders has switched to the state rather than civil society, which as a result reduces the support for NGOs (Mietzner, 2012). This seems to be a common trend in developing countries, which get more help in the initial stages of development but then donors tend to reduce their attention in further parts of the process, which becomes complicated in electoral democratic countries where corruption is very present (ibid.). Democracies might not actively seek to erode space for civil society, but they let it happen as a consequence of other policies i.e., anti-corruption (Anheier et al., 2019, p. 4). There are some actions that are seen as more direct, such as the limitations of political and civic liberties which are linked to a weakening of diagonal accountability in section 2.1.3. These actions come from the executive power. Additionally, these constraints that directly affect civil society are further discussed in section 2.2.3, where the threat of shrinking space is mentioned.

2.2.2. The role of CS and its connection to regime change

Civil society can take a wide variety of functions and distinct groups can perform several roles at once (Alagappa, 2004). After reviewing the literature, there are 5 functional distinctions worth mentioning: advocacy, service provision, watchdog, research, and spreading awareness. Advocacy refers to CSOs that advocate for causes and try to influence policy, such as climate change. Service provision focuses on providing services to communities with the aim to develop and build capacity (Brass, 2022). Watchdog organizations provide checks and balances to the executive power and institutions (Choi, 2011). Research usually consists of institutes that develop knowledge and discuss, such as think tanks. And finally, spreading awareness is a function that some organizations perform more actively than others, but mainly with the aim of educating and informing the population.

The role of civil society can also be classified in relation to regime change. Bernhard (2020) classifies civil society into four ideal modalities. Although he takes Eastern Europe following 1989 as an example, these modalities can also be useful to explore regime change elsewhere. He calls them insurgent, institutionalized, uncivil, and firewall civil society (ibid, 2020, p.341). Insurgent CS refers to those who resist authoritarian rule and in some cases are successful in substituting the regime with democratic rule. Institutionalized CS is constructed by those supporting activities following the democratic transition that work with the purpose of strengthening and institutionalizing the new regime. Uncivil CS is divided in two. First, anti-system, which is formed mainly by antidemocratic organizations such as terrorist groups, criminals, and political actors that are focused on the violent displacement of democracy. Second, semi-loyal organizations, include groups that lack a proper commitment to democracy. This group is likely the trickiest of all, as their actions can fluctuate more often according to what they stand for at a specific moment in time. They might support democracy at some times and pursue illiberal agendas that undermine the system at other times. For example, due to partisan interests. The final ideotype described by Bernhard is firewall CS. This refers to the activities done that can make civil society become an accountability mechanism. This can be linked to the accountability types that are described in the previous theoretical section (2.1.3).

2.2.2.1. CS engagement in anti-corruption

As mentioned in section 2.2.2, one of the roles that CS can take is becoming a watchdog. This increases diagonal accountability. The Christian Michelsen Institute Anti-Corruption Resource Center (CMI-U4) argues that civil society can become a strong watchdog by engaging in different activities, including supporting and organizing anti-corruption campaigns, training journalists with the skills they need to investigate corruption (U4, 2021) and engaging in activities that enhance the transparency and accessibility of data (UN, 2004). Camargo (2018) argues that although there is no “one-size fits all”, there are several actions that can encourage civil society actors to counter corruption by enhancing social/diagonal accountability mechanisms. These actions include citizen charters (where citizens are informed about their rights as users), social audits (collected and analyzed organizational and project data is shared with citizens), citizen report cards (public services assess citizen feedback), and participatory budgeting (citizens are given a say in budget formulation and execution). These tools are assuming that the citizen's voice is key to social accountability (ibid., p.4). However, there are some challenges that can limit the ability of civil society actors to provide diagonal accountability. These are visited in the following section.

2.2.3. Constraints to CS: a shrinking space

One of the biggest challenges of civil society in the 21st century is a shrinking or closing space (Della Porta & Steinhilper, 2021, p. 1). This notion was mainly developed about 10 years ago (van der Borgh & Terwindt, 2012; Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014). A closing civic space is defined as “attempts by governments to disrupt international funding flows to local civil society organizations (CSOs) and further reduce their political voice through legal restrictions and other forms of repression” (Toepler et al., 2020, p. 649). Karen Ayvazyan (2019) identifies 10 trends that can be observed and identified as a shrinkage of space. Some of them are restrictions on international funding, restrictions on freedom of association and expression, criminalization of activities carried out by CSOs, intimidation, and violent attacks against CS actors. This section will touch upon the 4 mentioned trends.

Firstly, one of the main forms of repression is the restriction or delegitimization of foreign funding. Funding is one of the most important mechanisms for international actors to support domestic NGOs engaged in democracy (Mietzner, 2012). Carothers and Brechenmacher (2014) find that governments engaged in pushback are also working on creating a political environment in which recipients of international donations are intimidated and publicly discredited. Some strategies to delegitimize them include framing foreign donors as puppets of Western powers pursuing larger geopolitical strategies (ibid., p.11). Secondly, restrictions on freedom of association and expression. Although one of the premises of civil society is that they should be able to organize freely, some countries are making it increasingly difficult by requiring CSOs to obtain approval from state authorities prior to being registered and starting to operate (Ayvazayan, 2019). This is increasing the barriers that CSOs face when trying to be established. When countries introduce these new laws or regulations, they usually justify them as a way to increase accountability and transparency (ibid., 2019, p. 9). Therefore, they sometimes get by with implementing authoritarian reforms in democracies because they receive support from several sectors of society.

Thirdly, criminalization campaigns targeting CSOs are common. They are understood as “the use of legal frameworks, strategies, and political and legal actions with the intention of treating the defense, promotion, and protection of human rights as illegitimate and illegal.” (Martin, 2015, p.52). In the context of autocratization, it is used to frame supposed enemies of democracy, which might make democracy more prone to authoritarian abuse (Mietzner, 2018). Delegitimizing actions of different sectors of civil society not only affects their reputation but also represents an obstacle to development or the ability of civil society to act as a resisting actor (Ayvazayan, 2019, p.11). Fourthly, direct attacks on civil society. These can be both physical and digital. With the rise of the digital age, the arenas in which civil society can experience attacks have expanded. Cyber-attacks are becoming more common, and civil society leaders are becoming targets in some countries (Cyble Blogs, 2021).

2.3. Outline of the theoretical framework

This section has visited two main concepts: autocratization and civil society. In part one, autocratization is seen as any gradual process driving away from democracy

(Lindberg & Lührmann, 2019). Two outlines have been discussed: causes of autocratization and accountability mechanisms. Most causes are traced back to the executive power as a main driver of autocratization. On accountability mechanisms, vertical, horizontal, and diagonal accountability have been described in two ways, as mechanisms to halt autocratization and as arenas weakened by the state. Part Two has focused on civil society as a resister to autocratization. Civil society is seen as a dynamic, multifaceted arena that can employ its agency to provoke change. Different roles have been explored, with a special emphasis on anti-corruption and watchdog activities. Lastly, constraints to civil society have been explored by arguing that civil society is experiencing a closing or shrinking civic space.

A weakness that is found in the theoretical articles that have been discussed in this chapter is that most are focusing on “successful” resistance to autocratization. This can be attributed to a long-standing tradition in academia to focus on the good or successful side of cases (Skaaning, 2020). However, this thesis will show a more ambiguous side of resistance, where the Indonesian civil society is not a clear example of success (at least for the time being). Even Laebens and Lührmann (2021) call in their article for a focus on unsuccessful cases, as their study of accountability mechanisms as methods to counter autocratization is focused on positive cases.

3. Methodology

The purpose of this section is to walk the reader through the methodology employed. By laying out an overview of the choice and use of the method, it will describe the approach taken to answer the research questions. A qualitative case study using semi-structured interviews and participant observation has been chosen as a method. The chapter is divided into four main sections. In the first section, the research design is described. This includes the thought process behind formulating research questions, the advantages of choosing a qualitative case study, the criteria for selecting participants, and the ethical considerations taken prior to the data collection. Secondly, the data collection details, which include how informants were reached out, a table describing those interviewed, and the type of questions that were asked. Third, the data analysis, where the software used is described, and the main themes and codes on the data are identified.

Finally, challenges experienced in the field as well as limitations to the methodology chosen are reflected upon.

3.1. Research design: choice of methodology

This first segment describes the process of the research design. It discusses the idea, the formulation of the research questions, the choice of method (participant observation and semi-structured interviews), and the advantages of choosing a qualitative study for the research design. Moreover, two sub-sections discuss the process of selecting participants and ethical considerations, where I reflect on my positionality and other relevant issues.

The initial idea for this thesis first came to life after attending courses relating to autocratization and South-East Asia. This awoke my interest in a discipline that I knew very little about, but that I found very relevant to understanding everyday political life. After being exposed to in-class discussions and conducting an initial literature review, Indonesia was chosen as a focus. Indonesia is the largest country in South-East Asia, and there's extensive research done on its history and politics. However, some linkages remain to be explored. Baxter (2021) argues that case studies usually play two roles: theory-testing and theory-generating (p.115). The literature on the three main areas of this thesis (autocratization, civil society, and Indonesia) is extensive, but research on the connection that I establish between the three – civil society resistance to autocratization in Indonesia – is not as affluent. Thus, this case study aims to both test theory and generate knowledge. My initial question was how civil society resists autocratization in Indonesia, but acknowledging the complexity and extensiveness of that question, it was a necessity to narrow it down to an approachable case. After reviewing newspapers and research articles, I stumbled upon the case of the weakening of the KPK in 2019, a practical and recent case where I was able to identify several key elements: hollowing out of a relevant institution, massive protests led by civil society, and distrust in the government's reasoning behind the released new rules. From this, the two main research questions were formulated:

- (1) How is the weakening of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) linked to autocratization in Indonesia?
- (2) What is the role of civil society in resisting the weakening of the KPK and autocratization in Indonesia?

Concerned with the practical aspects of autocratization in Indonesia, these questions pointed out to a qualitative case study, which is seen as a cross-sectional approach to research design where its study (of a smaller unit) leads to the understanding of a larger unit or phenomena (Baxter, 2021, p. 109). I wanted to collect data about the opinions and experiences of those involved in the process of autocratization in Indonesia. Therefore, interviews were chosen as the method. As there are different types of actors involved at different stages and with different points of view, structured interviews would not have given a valuable result. As I wanted to be adaptable to what each interviewee could bring to the table, semi-structured interviews were chosen to embrace this flexibility. An interview guide was created to make a mental map of the main themes. Moreover, it allowed me to redirect the conversation when the interview moved too far from the research topics (Dunn, 2021, p. 158). Additionally, because I was in the field, I was also able to observe and participate. This required me to be a very attentive observer and to record data with the use of observational field notes. Although I initially did not give much importance to participant observation, I realized a few months after conducting it that it had shaped my perspective and brought me knowledge that I would not get only from interview answers. The practical details about how the methods were conducted will be discussed in the next section (3.2).

There are 5 main reasons why I decided to go with a qualitative case study rather than a different methodology. First, the complexity of the topic. As explored in the theory chapter, autocratization is a complex and multifaceted process; civil society is a sophisticated arena consisting of a wide variety of actors and spaces, thus, qualitative methods are an appropriate choice to capture these complexities and nuances of individual perspectives that are essential to understanding the research questions. Second, there is limited existing research on civil society resistance to autocratization in Indonesia, particularly from first-hand perspectives. This choice of methods allowed me to collect rich and detailed data that can help fill these gaps in the literature. Third, the nature of the research questions. My questions emerged from my literature review, and they have been flexible during the data collection and analysis. If I had chosen a quantitative study, my research questions would have been harder to adapt during the process. Forth, the access to participants. Being an outsider with no previous network in Indonesia and with a limited timeframe, it would have been difficult to obtain a larger sample (that is usually required

for quantitative methods). However, since I focused on a rather small sample (10 informants), it allowed me to dive into their perceptions more in-depth. Finally, the theoretical approach. I was interested in learning how individuals experience autocratization and resistance and how they take part in the process, and for this reason, a qualitative project was better suited to capture such perspectives (Cope & Hay, 2021, p. 4). In summary, the 5 advantages I find to this choice of methodology are a better representation of the complexity of the topic, a way to fill in gaps in the literature, a small sample that allowed me to explore in-depth perspectives, flexible research questions, and a focus on individual perspectives.

3.1.1. Participant selection

Participants were selected according to their possible knowledge of the research topic that could provide significant insights. Particularly, I was interested in hearing from members of civil society, since it is their role that I wanted to explore with the second research question. Therefore, it can be said that I used criterion sampling as described by Michael Patton (2015). Background work included identifying actors that appeared in research articles, newspapers, and documentaries. There was specifically one documentary by Watchdog called *Endgame* (2021) where they interviewed several actors who had been fired from the KPK. This background work allowed me to comprehend what kind of opinions I could get from participants (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2021, p. 99). I researched several organizations that were involved in anti-corruption and were knowledgeable on the KPK, as well as other major actors that could have an opinion on the agency and the events of 2019, such as those involved in democracy and human rights.

Lynch (2008) argues that “research on civil society organizations may be constrained by undemocratic governments who wish to prevent scholarly access to local populations” (p. 717). This is not something I perceived from those I interviewed, but it’s a possible reason why some of those contacted did not accept the opportunity to be interviewed. I found that generally, my informants were grateful to have the opportunity to share their opinion and experiences. Advantageously, given that spreading awareness is one of the main purposes of civil society, the possibility that their opinions would be reflected in the thesis was seen by them as a good opportunity. In section 3.2. I build on

participant selection by describing the procedures I followed when contacting the sample and the challenges I encountered.

3.1.2. Ethical accountability

Prior to the data collection process, there were several concerns visited with the aim of establishing ethical accountability. Research is understood as embedded in sociocultural, and political contexts (Catungal and Dowling, 2021, p. 18). In qualitative methods, it is important for the researcher to be reflexive about their own positionality in the specific context (ibid., p. 19). Lynch (2008) argues that there are two main ethical considerations to take when interviewing civil society actors. First, those considering the positionality and worldview of the researcher and how those can shape the research. Second, those related to the informants, whose experiences and identities are significantly different from the researcher. In this case, I was an outsider, as I was not connected to Indonesia in any way. Other axes of difference to consider are race, gender, sexuality, and class. These differences between myself and the different informants were contemplated as well as the need to acknowledge a possible bias. Similarities were also considered, such as age - most of the informants were Gen Z and millennials. Moreover, since I was raised in Catalonia, I was able to relate to some of the political struggles discussed in the interviews. Both Indonesia and Spain are flawed democracies with a recent authoritarian past, worrisome levels of corruption, and regional sovereignty struggles.

Since this research is done in a professional academic context, it is governed by institutional guidelines (Catungal and Dowling, 2021, p.31). For this reason, data clearance from the NSD (Norwegian Centre for Research Data) was needed prior to starting the data collection. This clearance involved drafting a consent form to inform participants of what their participation in the project implied, the kind of data that would be collected, and the way this data would be used and stored. The consent form that was provided to the participants is attached at the end of this thesis as *Appendix 1*. Some other ethical considerations were privacy and confidentiality. Participants shared their personal opinions and experiences, which made it essential to make their identities anonymous. The next section provides more details on how this anonymity was ensured. One last consideration I'd like to mention in this section is that even after taking these ethical strategies or precautions with the aim of reducing potential risks or harm, there is a need to recognize

that our efforts are not always effective, but that at least we are reflecting on our positionality and expressing the ethical concerns (Lynch, 2008, p. 717).

3.2. Data collection: use of methodology

The aim of this section is to explain the process of data collection. Fieldwork was conducted in Jakarta, Indonesia from January 5th until February 4th. All interviews were taken in person during this period except for the last one, which was taken online after I left the field. The selected sample was contacted through email by providing a description of the project and asking if the specific organization or actor would be interested in participating. At first, I experienced difficulties with receiving answers. Therefore, I decided to change my approach. I started contacting the organizations on my list on social media (Instagram) rather than on the emails provided on their websites, which were usually the typical *info@name.org*. Instagram was rather effective, as the younger generations are very active on social media, and it is a more informal way to do a first contact. Moreover, some of my interviewees provided me with other contacts, which is commonly known as the snowball effect (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2021, p.100). Once I had a few answers, I sent the consent form and asked if they could sign it before the interview. Some informants had to be reminded, but obtaining consent was not an issue.

Without aiming for this particular result, I ended up having 5 female informants and 5 male informants. This reduces the possibility of gender biases. In total, the data collected consists of 7 semi-structured interviews with the participation of 10 informants. Three of these interviews were group interviews with 2 informants each. They are a sample of 3 activists or NGO members, 1 ex-public servant, 4 experts or researchers, and 2 reporters. The CSOs include non-governmental organizations (DEEP Indonesia, Muhammadiyah, and ICW), social movements or campaigns (ER and Greenpeace), a research institute (SETARA Institute), and a social media platform for Indonesian politics. Some of them had insider knowledge, as they had previously been part of the KPK. To keep the anonymity but at the same time personify the informants, I have given them random names based on a list of common Indonesian names found on the Internet. These can be found in **Table 2**. Moreover, I provide their occupation as well as the date of the interview. This will help the reader (and myself) identify the opinions of particular informants in the course of the analysis.

Informant	Occupation	Date
Muhammad	Activist / NGO	23/01/2023
Siti	Ex-Public servant	24/01/2023
Agus	Activist / NGO	26/01/2023
Abdul	Expert / Researcher	26/01/2023
Ida	Expert / Researcher	31/01/2023
Maria	Expert / Researcher	01/02/2023
Rini	Expert / Researcher	01/02/2023
Budi	Reporter	03/02/2023
Bambang	Reporter	03/02/2023
Iwan	Activist / NGO	13/02/2023

Table 2. *Informants interviewed.*

As mentioned in the previous section, an interview guide was developed, but it allowed flexibility. Questions were divided into three themes: general politics, perception of the KPK, and civil society resistance in 2019. The question types can be divided into descriptive (assessing the knowledge of the participants), storytelling (identifying the players and order of events), opinion (personal impressions), and devil’s advocate (Dunn, 2021, p. 155). An example of a devil’s advocate question is the following: “Many argue that Indonesia is one of the most successful democracies in Southeast Asia. Do you agree?” with this question I expected to get a contradicting answer, which was the case with 9/10 informants. Moreover, I tailored the questions in each interview by thinking of what would provide me with enriching answers. For example, I was able to ask those affiliated with the ICW more specific questions about the KPK, since they’ve been working with them whereas with the SETARA Institute, I focused more on questions about the general state of democracy, as that was their area of expertise. *Appendix 2* provides the general interview guide that was used. In terms of practical aspects, all interviews were recorded after receiving consent.

Interview answers were not the only data collected in the field. I was exposed to other kinds of interactions that have shaped my perception. These interactions can be framed as participant observation, as I was taking part in daily life practices while observing. This is one of the advantages of being in the field over conducting online interviews. No notes were taken in-moment, but I kept a field diary where I expressed my thoughts on different experiences. An example of participant observation includes my attendance at an event hosted by the SETARA Institute, to which I was invited after conducting an interview with them. The attendees included researchers, activists, and other CSO actors. Although none of my conversations with them were recorded, it provided me with an informal setting to ask questions and hear about their opinions and experiences in a more laid-back manner.

3.3. Data analysis: making sense of data

This section describes the tools used to analyze as well as the main themes identified after coding. There are three different software that were used to store and analyze data. The first two are approved by the University of Oslo as safe data storage. I used the *Diktafon* app to record the interviews. To transcribe, I used *Autotekst*, an automatic speech-to-text tool using AI technology developed by the University of Oslo. After using the automatic transcription, I listened to each of the interviews and made corrections. I stored these transcriptions in *Obsidian*, a note-taking app that is saved to my local device and does not collect any personal data nor send any data to their server. Once I had everything written down, it was time to try to make sense of the data by organizing and coding.

I have aimed to conduct a discursive analysis to identify the main themes that could be extracted from the data collected. The goal of this way of analyzing was to “reveal the process through which particular ideas forge social and spatial realities become dominant” (Waitt, 2021, p. 351). I followed a series of steps based on Waitt’s chapter on Foucauldian discourse analysis (2021). First, I read through the transcripts and highlighted what initially seemed relevant. This allowed me to be reflexive and look at the data with “fresh eyes”. Second, I started organizing the data in different categories. To identify themes, I had the theories described in the theory chapter in mind, but I also searched for things repeated in several interviews. I classified data into 4 big categories, and then around 6 sub-themes for

each category. The big 4 were: the current state of democracy, the role of civil society, the repression of civil society, and the law reform of 2019. More specifically, some themes that I'd like to highlight because of their repetitiveness and thus relevance to the informants were: critiques of the Jokowi administration, cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns, infiltration of the police in other institutions, and accelerated legislative system. Third, after coding the themes under the relevant themes and searching for repetition, I tried to take notes on inconsistencies or differences of opinions between informants. One thing that surprised me was that while most had a condemning perception of the government and the state of democracy, one informant was less critical and focused only on the good side of Indonesian politics.

Coding data had a purpose beyond organizing and cleaning data. It was used as a technique to ensure transparency and trustworthiness. One of the main strategies to ensure a rigorous case study is to go into detail on participant opinions (Baxter, 2021, p. 112), which is what is aimed to be accomplished by having a clear structure of the sayings that were most relevant.

3.4. Limitations and challenges

Although the list of challenges that a researcher experiences in the field is extensive (Gergan & Smith, 2021), there are two that I'd like to highlight. Language is probably the first thing that comes to mind when considering doing research in a foreign country. However, I must admit that although the language was a barrier for my daily activities in Jakarta such as buying groceries or taking public and private transportation, it was not as big of a barrier when conducting interviews. Most of the informants were fluent in English. Interviews with 2 informants had some advantages in this sense because when one of the informants lacked a term in English, they asked the other informant, and they were able to complement each other very well. Not only in terms of language, but I found that group interviews were very enriching because they helped both interviewees engage with each other and give more complete answers (Cameron, 2021, p. 201). A second challenge and perhaps the one I struggled with the most in Jakartan daily life was being a foreign woman trying to get around in the city. This affected my feeling of vulnerability and limited my ability to get around on my own in the city. Moreover, I had to cancel one of my interviews

because the informant was making me feel uncomfortable. This type of risk was not something I planned for, but I believe that it was part of the experience.

From an academic lens, three method limitations were identified in the qualitative case study: generalizability and replicability, sample size, and positionality biases. One of the main criticisms of case studies is their lack of generalizability, which concerns the degree to which findings apply to other cases (Baxter, 2021, p. 121). As previously mentioned, this is a place-specific study, which means that the findings are contextually based. Baxter (2021) and others argue that it might take some time to find out, as the transferability of theories is proved with time. Thus, this thesis aims to give explanations that can be comparable and potentially applicable to unstudied contexts in the future. Secondly, the issue of the sample size is not as relevant in qualitative studies (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2021, p. 100), but knowing when is enough is challenging. I tried to tackle this challenge by interviewing different types of civil society actors so that the sample would be representative. Given that, there are activists and NGO members as primary sources and researchers, experts, and journalists as secondary sources. However, as I've carried out my data analysis, I have realized that it was not so much about quantity, but rather quality and the way I could portray the data. Thirdly, avoiding biases is almost an impossible task, but trying to understand one's positionality in comparison to others is more approachable. Qualitative research involves an identity play with asymmetrical relationships (Catungal & Dowling, 2021, p. 25), and a way to increase critical reflexivity is to be conscious of our effect on other's lives one thing that I found very useful was to exchange experiences with other master's students prior and after fieldwork. One last issue that I find worth mentioning is that findings are provisional, as one cannot know for certain that a new way of seeing does not lie around the corner" (Lynch, 2008, p. 710). Below, the findings and analysis of the data will be discussed.

4. Autocratization

To answer the first research question *What is the role of civil society in resisting the weakening of the KPK and autocratization in Indonesia?* this section follows a top-down approach. It starts by exploring the general characteristics of Indonesian (illiberal) democracy and then it finishes by zooming in on the specific case of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK). It combines fieldwork findings and analytical

observations to lay out a fruitful discussion. It is divided into 4 sub-sections. First, the history of Indonesia after the democratic transition serves to understand what type of regime it is and to identify the events that point to trends of autocratization, as defined by Lindberg & Lührmann (2019). Second, The signs of autocratization are identified, concerning the theories explored in the theoretical chapter, particularly, the framework put forward by Cassani & Tomini (2020) on the modes of autocratization. Third, the type of institution the KPK is and the specific measures that led to its weakening is described. Finally, the research question is answered by discussing how the measures taken to weaken the KPK exemplify the broader trend of autocratization.

4.1. How did we get here? From *reformasi* to *reformasi dikorupsi*

Indonesia began democratizing in 1998, after 5 decades ruled by 2 authoritarian leaders, who are also Indonesia's first two presidents: Sukarno (1945-1967) and Suharto (1968-1998). Five presidents have followed: Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie (1998 – 1999); Abdurrahman Wahid (1999 – 2001); Megawati Sukarnoputri (2001 – 2004); Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004 - 2014) and Joko Widodo (20014 – 2024). The transition to democracy began with the resignation of Suharto amid the financial crisis. The pre-conditions of the regime change were not ideal: an unclear division between military and executive powers, a repressed civil society, endemic corruption, violent ethnic and religious conflicts, and a rapidly spreading financial crisis affecting Asian countries. However, the reforms were aimed to change all that. They included: the separation of executive and military power, the establishment of free and competitive elections (the first ones taking place in 1999), the liberalization of the party system, and the insertion of legal and judicial reforms which permitted the propagation of independent media and the enlargement of space for civil society, amongst others. To fight corruption, the set up for a new Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) began with the transition although the agency was not fully established in the system until 2004.

The bases of the democracy included unique traits of Indonesia. It highlighted values of pluralism and tolerance together with the Pancasila, which are the five pillars that conform to the state ideology. The Pancasila was first articulated by President Sukarno in 1945 when the transition to an independent nation was officially taking off. The five

values, in different words than the original translation are the belief in one God, a just and civilized humanity, Indonesian unity, a system of democracy guided by knowledgeable representatives, and equality in social justice for all the peoples in Indonesia. These principles have stayed as the basis of national sentiment for all these years, and they are considered sacred. Criticizing the Pancasila is considered an offense of up to 5 years of imprisonment (Human Rights Watch, 2022). It's been widely criticized outside Indonesia for not including atheism as an accepted practice. In fact, it only allows 6 official religions: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Catholicism. This is widely discriminatory to minority religions and non-believers.

In line with religion, one of the characteristics that stands the most out about Indonesian democracy is that the political (and social) division is not so much based on ideological sides like right and left, but rather on Islamists and Pluralists (Fealy, 2020). The basis of the pluralist side is that no religion should be central to Indonesian life and that different beliefs should be accepted. Therefore, it is more Pancasila-based. There is a wide range of actors that identify with pluralist values, but some of the most relevant ones in the past years are Golkar, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). National Democrats (NasDem), Gerindra, and the United Development Party (PPP). Contrarily, the Islamist side comprises those groups who believe the Islamic laws (sharia) and principles should be implemented in all domains of political and social life basing its reasoning on the fact that it's the predominant religion and the one that has the most historical ties. They usually pursue religion as a central aspect of their campaigns and they include groups such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). One informant said that the PKS is "the only party that is actually ideologically Islamic" (Bambang, personal communication, February 3, 2023). As for HTI, it is no longer legal in Indonesia, which will be discussed further below.

Even though religion is an important factor to have a good understanding of the political environment, parties do not seem to have a very strong ideology, instead, they are personalistic. Informants explained that "parties in Indonesia aren't ideologically based, but they're more authority based, meaning that they revolve around their leader" (Budi, personal communication, February 3, 2023). Another informant mentioned that it is in civil society movements that we can tell more clearly the difference between Islamism and pluralism, rather than with the parties (Bambang, personal communication, February 3,

2023). However, as it will be shown in the second part of the analysis (section 5), the line between civil society organizations and political parties is not always so clear in Indonesia. The Jokowi cabinet is a good example of this because it includes leaders with different presumed ideologies and religious ideals.

The current president of Indonesia, Joko Widodo (commonly referred to as Jokowi) has been in power since 2014, with a reign consisting of two terms: 2014-2019 and 2019-2024. Jokowi does not come from classical Indonesian elites, instead, he came from a humble background and that was one of the reasons why most Indonesians were very hopeful at the beginning of his first term. In particular, one informant said:

“I was the biggest fan, I was supporting his campaign, I even stayed up all night counting votes online through all the papers just to make sure the other guy didn’t cheat. I was very trusting and hopeful towards him.” (Muhammad, personal communication, January 23, 2023).

However, the perception of the Jokowi administration has taken a turn, especially during the president’s second term:

“This government, I think they are pushing our democracy to the limit right now” (Siti, personal communication, January 24, 2023)

“Overtime it has become clear that he (*Jokowi*)’s killed opposition.” (Muhammad, personal communication, January 23, 2023).

“There are so many problems in Indonesia since Jokowi's second term. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, democracy is currently at its lowest point since 2006.” (Agus, personal communication, January 26, 2023)

To further understand this change of opinion, 3 events will be described below: the imprisonment of Ahok in 2016, the re-shuffle of the cabinet in 2020, and the law reforms that started in 2019 and kept going until today.

In 2016, the former governor of Jakarta - Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (known as Ahok) was accused of committing blasphemy (Lamb, 2017). These accusations had as a premise that Ahok had blamed the opposition for using the Qur’an to convince all Muslims that they should not vote for non-Muslim leaders. The FPI (Islamic Defenders Front)

framed it as a violation of the law of Insult on Religion, which arose a massive protest of somewhere between 50,000 and 200,000 attendees (France-Presse, 2016). In this case, the objective of the protests was accomplished, as Ahok was removed from his position as governor and convicted of two years in prison (Lamb, 2017). This occurrence is also a good example of several criminalization campaigns that were employed by the government (Mietzner, 2018), which include framing some important figures and banning extremist organizations. The details of some criminalization campaigns will be discussed in section 5.2.2.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a good indicator of the state of politics in Indonesia, just as it was for many other countries. In December 2020, Jokowi decided to reshuffle his cabinet, by dismissing 6 ministers. In particular, the health minister – Terawan Agus Putranto, whose dismissal was quite expected after he made some controversial statements. Together with the current vice president Ma'ruf Amin, they publicly declared that Indonesians would be safe from the virus if they kept their regular prayers in line (Setiawan and Tomsa, 2020, p. 83). This declaration was not only highly inaccurate from a medical point of view but could also be viewed as an act of discrimination, as not all Indonesians pray. Terawan was replaced by a former banker – Budi Gunadi Dadikin, which points to Jokowi's technocratic solutions that are deemed insufficient to solve political issues (Setiawan & Tomsa, 2020, p. 1). Other COVID-19 controversies include public statements made by major Muslim organizations (NU, MUI, Muhammadiyah) who supported vaccine programs by naming them halal and stating that it was an obligation for all Muslims to get the vaccine (Rochmyaningsih, 2021). In addition to the reshuffle of cabinets, Jokowi added some controversial figures to his administration. Indonesian presidents have a reputation for including political opponents in coalitions of power (Setiawan & Tomsa, 2020). Although Jokowi had first promised that he would not follow the tradition of *rainbow cabinets*, this took a different turn when he appointed Prabowo Subianto as Defence Minister. Prabowo had been his main running opponent during both the 2014 and 2019 elections and the main representative of the Islamist side. When he lost, critics wrote that "Indonesia has been 'saved' from a would-be autocrat" (Power & Warburton, 2020, p.5). These happenings are very frustrating for Islamist extremists, whose hopes for a strong leader to represent their interests vanished after Prabowo accepted the position. Moreover, this narrows the space for opposition and leads to laws

and regulations being passed without many barriers (Muhammad, personal communication, 23 January 2023).

The third event, and the one that this thesis puts the most focus on is the law reforms of 2019. These bills threatened the protection of some minority groups (bills on criminal code and anti-sexual violence), climate change and natural resources (bills on land, minerals, and coal), and the reform of the anti-corruption law which mainly concerns the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK). In reaction to these, a massive protest was mobilized on September 23, 2019. Not only were they protesting against the passing of the specific bills, but also on the underlying concern that civil society demands were not taken into account by the government (Aspinall, 2020). By making a link to the reformasi period in 1998, the protests of 2019 had the slogan of “reformasi dikorupsi” meaning that the reform had been corrupted. Although Jokowi seemed to take demands under consideration at first and stopped the passing of the bills, it was only momentarily. Some changes were made, but they were not significant enough. Some months after the protest, it became clear that civil society had not been able to ‘save the KPK’ and that the protests had been unsuccessful. Section 4.3. will go into more in detail on what these reforms implicated for the KPK, and section 5 will discuss the reaction from civil society and the repression coming from the government.

As explored in the theory section, there are different categories that define those regimes that are in the middle or even in a grey zone. Indonesia is classified as an *electoral democracy* by the V-Dem institute and as a *flawed democracy* by EIU. Other terms that are used by experts on Indonesia are *patronage democracy* (Aspinall, 2019), *illiberal democracy* (Hadiz, 2017), and *hybrid regime* (Power & Warburton, 2020). None of these terms are incorrect. In fact, they are similar and compatible with each other as they point to different analytical lenses through which experts have analyzed the trajectory of Indonesia’s young democracy. The three events that were visited above might not seem like a big deal when looked at separately. However, when added together and put in perspective, it becomes clearer that Indonesia is autocratizing. By Lührmann and Lindberg’s definition of autocratization (any process away from democracy) and as identified in the V-Dem 2023 report, Indonesia is experiencing a gradual but significant democratic decline. The following section will look at the characteristics of this autocratization.

4.2. Signs of autocratization

Section 4.1. has laid out the main picture of Indonesian politics during the last 5 years. This section points out the specific factors that are identified as signs of autocratization and describes them. Although it was tempting to try to place the identified mechanisms under existing theory, such as the 5 modes of autocratization identified by Cassani and Tomini (2020), I find that drafting my own categories is a more useful way to present the findings and that although some of them can be related to the theories discussed in chapter 2, others cannot. Therefore, the identified mechanisms are divided into the following groups: elections and parties; legislative reforms affecting oversight bodies; disinformation campaigns; the influence of the oligarchy and elites; police infiltration, and restrictions of civil society. Furthermore, this last category is further built in section 5.3, where civil society repression by the government is discussed.

On the first mechanism, elections and parties, there are three themes distinguished: vote buying, expensive elections, and barriers to party creation. Vote buying is one of the most common ways of electoral manipulation. Hicken (2020) argues that according to V-Dem data, every election since 1999 has been accompanied by an increase in vote buying in Indonesia (p.35). One of the interviewees argued that vote buying is possible in Indonesia because many people lack education opportunities:

“I bet some of them don’t even know what democracy is (...) Since there are so many parties and candidates they get confused and end up voting for whoever looks the most handsome” (Budi, personal communication, February 3, 2023).

Other examples of electoral manipulation concern the barriers to becoming a party in Indonesia. One informant referred particularly to their attempts of creating a green party focused on the climate change fight, which has not been possible because of the lack of resources (Muhammad, personal communication, January 23, 2023). Moreover, it is required that parties have a specific budget in order to participate in national elections. An income that is only reachable in Indonesia by economic elites (Bambang, personal communication, February 3, 2023). Lastly, elections are very expensive and disorganized. As argued by Setiawan & Tomsa (2022), elections in Indonesia represent a huge logistical challenge. For example, in 2019 they held 5 elections on the same day (including the presidential and the House of Representatives, DPR), which involved the registry of 193

million voters in more than 800,000 voting stations and additionally the KPU (General Elections Commission) received complaints from more than 300 unsuccessful candidates which included General Prabowo, who ran for the presidency against Jokowi (ibid., 2022, p. 45). All of these elements affecting ballots are threatening vertical accountability.

The second mechanism involves different reforms directed at oversight bodies, which are weakening horizontal accountability. In other words, they are decreasing the quality of democratic institutions. Regarding the legislative system, there are two main points to highlight in the past years. First, that law reforms are happening at a quicker pace than usual, and second, that even though some laws have existed for a while, it's in the past 5 years that they've been put into use in a more aggressive way. For example, one interviewee explained that some reforms are being done in 2 weeks' time, which is very quick for the legislative system. This swiftness is argued to have increased after the 2019 protests (Siti, personal communication, January 24, 2023). Another interviewee mentioned that articles that prevent criticism of the government have been around for a long time, but it is only recently that they have been put into use in a more restrictive manner (Bambang, personal communication, February 3, 2023). Moreover, a more direct way to weaken horizontal accountability concerns limiting the power of certain institutions like the case of the KPK, which is discussed in the next section.

The third mechanism is also connected to horizontal accountability. It is about the police being infiltrated into other horizontal institutions. Particularly in the case of the KPK, the current chairman of the agency Firli Bahuri is part of the police body. Some informants had some comments about Firli and about the changes in the KPK:

“When Firli says no, it's a no. There's a lot of political power around him, especially since he's really close with the PDI-P party. So the situation is not really good for KPK (...) We don't really trust Firli, there's a lot of allegations that he leaked information to different suspects” (Siti, personal communication, January 24, 2023)

“There's a joke that we have. We call the KPK offices a “police Kuningan”, Kuningan means sub-district so it's almost like sub-district police in the KPK nowadays” (Rini, personal communication, February 1, 2023)

Stemming from this, it does not seem too irrational to argue that the division between the police, the state, and the KPK is blurred.

The fourth mechanism is disinformation campaigns. One of the largest disinformation campaigns connected to the 2019 civil servant test is the accusation that the KPK had been infiltrated by an Islamist faction associated with the Taliban. This was used as a justification for conducting the test with the aim of getting rid of those who had infiltrated (Nuraniyah, 2020, p, 94). However, many believe that these were fake news to frame the KPK as radicals and Islamists, and even to get rid of those who were doing a good job, or as an informant put it. Some informants commented on this:

“They kicked out all the good guys from the KPK” (Muhammad, personal communication, January 23, 2023).

“Even my parents believe the Taliban thing” (Siti, personal communication, January 24, 2023)

According to informants, there are rumors that the government pays influencers and celebrities to distribute disinformation on their social platforms, since their opinions are considered very important for the Indonesian citizenry (Siti, personal communication, January 24, 2023). On a different note, President Jokowi has claimed that the government is also being a victim of disinformation campaigns (Idris et al., 2023). The same article also mentions that “the biggest propagator of disinformation seems not to be political renegades, but the Widodo administration” (ibid.).

The fifth mechanism put forward is the repression of civil society. Although this is discussed extensively in section 5.2.2., this paragraph introduces some trends. These are mainly drawn from what informants mentioned. Firstly, some of the laws introduced in 2019 are targetting religious and sexual minorities which are restricting and discriminative. Secondly, cyber-attacks are being experienced with higher frequency, and civil society actors are being hacked. Thirdly, protests and mobilizations are being answered with violence coming from police and military bodies. Fourthly, there are more restrictions to communication between CSOs and democratic institutions. These restrictions are not usually based on law, but rather new informal practices that are being identified by informants. Lastly, experts have identified a shift in the direction of foreign donations,

which are now more aimed at the government rather than NGOs or other organizations (Mietzner, 2012).

Lastly, the role of elites and oligarchs is worth mentioning. Oligarchs in Indonesia are very embedded in the system, and they not only control the way the economy works (Hadiz & Robinson, 2013) but also the political sphere and the media. Scholars agree that if it were not for the support of oligarchs, Jokowi would have probably never been able to come to power (Setiawan & Tomsa, 2022). Because oligarchs have been there for a long time, it is unlikely that this sort of system will stop once Jokowi’s term ends (Power & Warburton, 2020).



Figure 3. Signs of autocratization in Indonesia

The different trends mentioned in this section are summarized in **Figure 3**. This figure shows how the different trends fit into the weakening of the three accountability mechanisms. In addition, the case of the KPK exemplifies many of these trends, especially regarding the weakening of horizontal accountability. The next section goes in-depth on the events concerning the weakening of the KPK.

4.3. The KPK: Watchdog or Attack Dog?

The Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi (KPK, Corruption Eradication Commission) was formed in 2002 as a government agency with the goal of fighting corruption, as per Law No. 30/2002. Its set-up was seen as an indication that the state was committing to answering the demands of *reformasi* (Mediana et al., 2021, p. 346). An oversight body independent of the government was seen as crucial, as the government had not been able to handle corruption effectively in the past (ibid., p.346). One informant described the KPK as the “child of the Indonesian reformation back in 1998” (Siti, personal communication, January 24, 2023). The establishment of the commission also made Indonesia look good internationally, as it was one of the parties signing the United Nations Convention Against Corruption in 2003. After some years in operation, it has been praised as one of the most successful anti-corruption agencies in the world (Choi, 2011).

Its functions, among others, include supervision of, and collaboration with agencies who are authorized to eradicate acts of corruption, conducting investigations and prosecutions of criminal acts of corruption, taking measures to prevent further corruption, and monitoring state governance (Hendriana, 2021). The structure consists of five commissioners (one chairperson and four vice-chairpersons) and four advisors. These are changed every four years. As mentioned in the theory chapter, it is hard to measure the success of a corruption agency, since there are different measurements one can pay attention to. In the case of Indonesia, some measurements can be perceived as contradicting. On the one side, the KPK has a good case record, with a conviction rate of a 100% in its first 13 years of operation (Centre for Public Impact, 2016). The conviction rate measures the cases where prosecution led to conviction (Choi, 2011). On the other side, Indonesia still experiences rampant corruption, as indicated by the Corruption Perception Index (CPI), which as of 2021 Indonesia scores 34 out of 100 (0 is most corrupt, 100 is least corrupt) and this places Indonesia below the international average of 42/100. Having these two measurements, it is hard to tell whether the KPK is as successful as it's commonly claimed to be. Another related indicator is public trust in the agency, which can be measured by public citizen surveys. In 2018, the KPK scored around 85% on the level of trust (Wardani & Noviana, 2022). Although this has decreased after 2019, for reasons that will be discussed below, it can be said that the KPK has been considered a

publicly trusted and impartial agency until 2019. When asked about their opinion on the KPK, informants said:

“In my state of mind, politicians are inherently corrupt because they have privilege, power, and resources. If they are not controlled, they will do bad and corrupt things. The KPK is the one that's preventing them from doing corrupt things”. (Siti, personal communication, January 24, 2023)

“The KPK has previously proven itself, you can look at their records and you'll see they've pursued high profile cases in the past” (Budi, personal communication, February 1, 2023)

However, when asked if their perception had changed over time, informants highlighted different issues:

“The anti-corruption agency is not the only thing needed to remove corruption (...) the KPK is meant to be a temporary thing (...) nobody has ever tackled the root issue or closed any loopholes to deter them from doing more corruption” (Muhammad, personal communication, January 23, 2023)

“With the current situation of the KPK, we don't put high expectations on this institution” (Iwan, personal communication, February 13, 2023)

Moreover, in 2022 it scored 74% in the level of trust survey (Wardani & Noviana, 2022), which is a significant (10%) decrease from 2018. Why and how did this decrease in trust happen? The following sub-section looks at how the KPK was weakened and the tensions that left to such weakening.

4.3.1. The weakening of the KPK

As mentioned above, the KPK is known for having pursued high-profile cases, as an informant put it “Elites have felt targeted by the KPK and that's why they have tried to bring the agency down” (Iwan, personal communication, February 11, 2023). This has led to several attempts to bring the KPK down. It was not until 2019, however, that these attempts were successful. There are several tensions that lead to the events of 2019 and one way to exemplify them is with the Gecko vs Crocodile (cicak versus buaya) cases, a long-running conflict between the KPK and the police (Mudhoffir, 2022, p.12). These

included accusations based on fabricated evidence, such as the one formulated against ex-KPK commissioner Novel Baswedan which claimed that he had used violence in an investigation against a suspect. In 2017, he was a victim of an acid attack that left him partially blind. Media and the internet pointed out that he had been targeted by the police because of pursuing high-profile cases (Siti, personal communication, January 24, 2023). In addition, he was dismissed in 2019 after the civil servant test, which are discuss below.

On September 2019, the revision of the law on the KPK was passed. A major change can be detected by making a comparison between the initial writing of the law in 2002 and then the revision of 2019: On Article 3 of Law No. 30 in 2002, the KPK was defined as “a state institution that is carrying out its duties and authorities in independent and free from the influence of any power.” However, in the amendment of 2019, it is defined under Law No. 19 of 2019 as “a state institution within the family of executive powers that is carrying out its duties and authorities in independent and free from the influence of any power”. The main difference here is that the KPK is now placed under the executive power, whereas during the first years, it was considered independent from the executive, legislative and judicial powers. Precisely this independence was what allowed the KPK to detect cases in all three branches. Moreover, this law was pushed through by the legislator in two weeks and with no input from the public (Schütte, 2021a). One informant agreed that this is really quick for the legislative system and that changes in these types of legislation usually take up to a year (Siti, personal communication, January 24, 2023).

As part of the KPK’s inclusion into the executive body, its employees needed to be included under the civil servant system and they had to take a test to enter the apparatus. This exam was conducted in 2021, and 75 out of around 1300 employees failed it (Schütte, 2021b). 75 might not seem like a lot, but it was when the names of those facing dismissal became public that civil society started to react. As illustrated in the documentary “Endgame” (2021) produced by a well-known film company in Indonesia called Watchdog, some of the questions (which became public a few months after) are very controversial and arguably irrelevant. They included questions such as “Are all Chinese equal?” “Are all Japanese bad?” and other controversial statements. Many actors of civil society then concluded that the aim of this civil servant test was to get rid of those

investigators who were involved in strategic cases. Concretely, one informant mentioned as follows:

“What we believe to be one of the reasons for their laying off, was because the investigators were working to develop a case which allegedly would target Megawati.” (Rini, personal communication, February 1, 2023).

Although these are rumors among CSOs, given the current state of democracy and criminalization campaigns that have been happening, it does not seem unlikely. Megawati Sukarnoputri, former president of Indonesia (2004-2009) and daughter of Sukarno is the current chairperson of the PDI-P, the same party that Jokowi is part of. She’s part of an established elite in Indonesia, which is characterized by strong family ties and legacies. Concretely, her daughter Puan Maharani is said to be having a major role in the future elections in 2024 for the PDI-P (Winardi, 2023).

Together with the KPK law revision, there are 4 measures or characteristics that illustrate the weakening of the KPK: the politicization of the institution, the new supervisory board, Talibanization accusations, and new wiretapping regulations. First, some of the newly recruited staff of KPK come from the police, which is highly controversial because it poses barriers to exposing corruption cases linked to the police or other allied institutions (Muddhofir, 2022, p. 10). Moreover, as demonstrated above with the Gecko v Crocodile cases, the police and the KPK have a long history of tensions. But now that there are many police figures inside the KPK, informants are saying the agency has gone from being a watchdog to an attack dog (Rini, personal communication, February 1, 2023). Second, the creation of a selection committee whose purpose was to nominate new commissions for the agency. President Jokowi appointed the members of the selection committee, which is in simpler terms an infiltration of the executive power in the independent body. Not only that, but some of the members he selected were highly controversial as they had ties to the police and to Suharto. An example is Idriyanto Seno Adji, the former lawyer for President Suharto and expert adviser for Kapolri (police) (Muddhofir, 2022, p. 14). Third, the accusations claiming that the KPK had been Talibanized, and infiltrated by radical Islamic groups, which has already been described above (sub-section 4.2) as an example of a disinformation campaign. Finally, the removal of KPK’s wiretapping authority. Permission now needs to be given by the supervisory

board. This was justified by the rights of privacy, but critics rather see it as a way to protect corrupt politicians (Muddhofir, 2022, p. 14).

As one informant said “The KPK is now a tool for the government to beat their opponents” (Budi, personal communication, February 1, 2023), which points out to the government heavily influencing the KPK activity. A case that can help exemplify the way the government is using the KPK to its advantage is that of Anies Baswedan, who was the governor of Jakarta from October 16 2017 until October 16, 2022. One month before the end of his governance, on September 7th, 2022, he was called into the KPK office to be investigated, where he was held for 11 hours (Paat, 2022). The investigation concerned his use of city money for a business activity (a Formula E race), which is technically against the rules. Nonetheless, no corruption charges were presented. This could be another dismissed case of alleged corruption, but if we look at the bigger picture and realize that Anies plans to run for the 2024 elections (ibid.), it has much larger implications. One informant argued that the investigations against him were a strategy of the current government (or more specifically the PDI-P) to sabotage his future candidacy (Rini, personal communication, February 1, 2023). Additionally, his cousin Novel Baswedan used to be part of the KPK. Nonetheless, he was one of the laid-off investigators after the civil servant test in 2019. My informant also mentioned that there were rumors that Anies had not previously been accused by the KPK because his cousin Novel would have defended him, but that now that he’s no longer in the institution there was no impediment (Rini, personal communication, February 1, 2023).

All these events turn into the question of what will happen with the KPK. Will it be able to regain its trust in society? Will it recuperate its previous functions and independence? Or is this the end of the KPK as we know it? One informant said that there’s a common quote in Indonesian, to which the English translation would be “The KPK was built by the PDI-P and destroyed by the PDI-P” (Budi, personal communication, February 1, 2023). Now there is little hope for any change to be happening soon, especially since there is no real opposition that could push for a change in the reforms. However, as the 2024 elections are approaching, there is still some hope, as there could be a change in the dynamics. One informant mentioned that there are speculations that there will be three candidates instead of two (Bambang, personal communication, February 3, 2023)

4.4. Links between the KPK and autocratization in Indonesia

In relation to the first research question *How is the weakening of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) linked to autocratization in Indonesia?* The KPK exemplifies the broader political context of autocratization in Indonesia because its weakening represents a case of horizontal accountability being hollowed out. Some of the trends identified in the weakening of horizontal accountability in Indonesia are disinformation campaigns, police infiltration, acceleration of reforms, and removal of powers. All of these have also been identified with the case of the KPK, which exemplifies the interrelation between both spheres.

After considering all these cases that have been discussed in this section and that would point to Indonesians having a questionable opinion of the Jokowi administration and the legislative and judicial bodies, a survey conducted on April 2023 indicates that total public satisfaction with the performance of the president reached 78.5%. which is the highest recorded percentage in the past decade (Nurmalasari & Arkyasa, 2023). Additionally, support for democracy is still prevalent (Setiawan & Tomsa, 2022). Nonetheless, the trends explored point to a gradual autocratization process, which means there is a disconnection between what society perceives and supports (democracy and Jokowi) and what some sectors of civil society fail to connect (autocratization and Jokowi).

Civil society and the state have had conflicting views on the KPK. The executive power has been on board with the weakening of the KPK, as recalled by this informant:

“I think everybody is on board with the weakening of KPK at the time, not only the political parties, but also the police, and also I think a lot of businesses really appreciate these reforms of KPK because in a corrupt society like Indonesia, sometimes bribery is the way to go.” (Siti, personal communication, January 24, 2023)

Civil society has mainly stood as the main supporting base for the KPK (Aspinall, 2019). They have been willing to mobilize when there were signs that the agency was being undermined. Thus, their role bears attention and it is what the following section focuses on.

5. Civil Society Resistance

Civil society is a key element in the establishment, maintenance, and defense of democracies (Bernhard et al., 2017). It is likely even more important in autocracies or electoral democracies (Mietzner, 2021). This section aims to answer the second question asked in this thesis: *What is the role of civil society in resisting the weakening of the KPK and autocratization in Indonesia?* In general terms, civil society has been unsuccessful in resisting the weakening of the KPK and in turn autocratization in Indonesia because of two main reasons: CS is disorganized, fragmented, and lacks a long-term vision; and the government has increased its repressive measures, which prevents CS from acting as a resister. To dive into these arguments, this section will be organized in the following way: First, the mobilization of CS against the 2019 reforms is looked at. Then, the reasons why this mobilization was unsuccessful are explored by looking at two major spheres: internal problems and external pressures coming from the government. Finally, the main arguments are summarized with the aim to give a clear response to the research question.

5.1. How did CS react to the weakening of the KPK?

In 2019, Indonesia saw the biggest mass of protests since 1998, when an anti-authoritarianism civil society demanded reform and transition to democracy, a period known as *reformasi*. Three years ago, the goals of the protests were different in character, but the demands are somewhat connected. The main feature that triggered the protests was the proposed reform of the criminal code and the passing of the KPK law. The first one threatened several human rights, particularly concerning minorities. The second one affected the independence and strength of Indonesia's anti-corruption agency, which has already been discussed in section 4.3. Although the practical aim of the protest was to address the specific bills and proposals, the goals fit in a larger phenomenon of resisting democratic backslide, which has been discussed throughout this thesis. This section discusses first how civil society organized the movement as well as the main demands and then how the government responded.

Civil society in Indonesia, although widely fragmented and disorganized, came together to protest on the 23rd of September 2019, with the slogan of *#reformasidikorupsi* (the reform has been corrupted). Different local student coalitions organized the

demonstrations with the use of social media. Even though they were organized separately, they shared similar demands (Lane, 2019). The main request was for the withdrawal of the changes in the Law on the KPK. Other requests included different issues concerning the criminal code: which criminalized hate speech against the president and concerned the arrest and charging of political activists (Lane, 2019); the anti-sexual violence bill concerning domestic violence and other sexuality issues which targeted ex-marital sex and rights of sexual minorities; and bills on natural resources (land, mineral, and coal bills), which are considered to exploit farmers and lack enough action to fight climate change and natural disasters such as forest fires. The violence and issues experienced in Papua were also one of the issues protested.

To repress the protest, there was the use of force coming from the police including water cannons and tear gas, which were mainly aimed at dispersing the protests in front of the parliament building in Jakarta (Kaligis, 2020). There were also people killed due to beatings and gunshots. According to one of my informants, 9 people passed away during the protests and many others were victims of violence and went missing (Rini, personal communication, February 1, 2023). The government tried to justify the brutality of the repression by arguing that some protesters were not mobilizing peacefully. More concretely, Hengki Haryadi (Chief of West Jakarta Metro Police) made a distinction between protestors peaceful *protesters*, and violent *rioters* (Kaligis, 2020). This is controversial not only because it justifies the use of force against citizens but also because it makes a distinction between two tiers of protesters, which implies that some lives have more importance than others.

To give an end to the protests, Joko Widodo announced on the night of September 23rd that the reforms would be put on hold and that demands from civil society would be considered before the passing of the different bills (Lane, 2019). At the start of 2020, a revisory team was established to make recommendations for changes in the different bills. However, although some small changes were made, none of the major issues were addressed and the bills passed anyway (Siti, personal communication, January 24, 2023). A few months later it was clear that the goals of the protests had not been accomplished and that the movement had been unsuccessful. Experts are saying that the protests consisted of a “short-lived movement” (Robet, 2020), which has not been proven to be enough to fight creeping autocratization.

This so-called failure led experts to consider the role of civil society in Indonesia. One informant complained that civil society in the past years has been (and continues to be) too reactionary (Muhammad, personal communication, 23 January 2023). It seems that every time the government makes a change, civil society's response is to mobilize by organizing protests. However, there seems to be a lack of long-term goals. Additionally, another role that civil society can take is oppositional. As mentioned in section 4, the Jokowi administration does not have a strong opposition political side now that Prabowo and other oppositional figures are part of the coalition. Therefore, it could be civil society's role to be that oppositional force (Muhammad, personal communication, 23 January 2023). This does not seem to be the case, and it is becoming clear that short-term actions are not enough to fight the long-term and gradual process of autocratization.

Stemming from recent happenings, some elements of Indonesian civil society are being framed as uncivil. As discussed in the theory section, uncivil society is seen as elements of CS that have a negative effect on human development, peace, security, and democracy (Bettinger-Lee, 2009, p.20). These elements can be seen in different groups, which will be further discussed in the next section. Moreover, if we consider that civil society had a strong role in the transition to democracy in 1998, what explains why they are no longer able to support democracy and resist autocratization trends in 2019? The next section will discuss several arguments that try to answer that question.

5.2. What explains CS's limited capacity to resist autocratization?

Civil society is usually considered the last line of defense in combating autocratization (Mietzner, 2020). Indonesia's CS is usually characterized as extensive and politically involved. However, in the past years, it is experiencing worrisome challenges. One of the main characteristics is deep polarization, which can be perceived as a barrier to acting as autocracy resisters. To understand the challenges that are affecting civil society, arguments are built in two lines of thought. The first one focuses on the internal configurations of civil society and its relationship with other actors. The reasonings used to justify the major issues inside CS can be summarized in four concepts: historical context, state-society relations, fragmentation, and oligarchic media. The second group focuses on

repression directed at civil society coming from the government, where several strategies, including criminalization campaigns, are mentioned.

5.2.1. Internal problems to CS: Only CS that is truly civil supports democracy

This section argues that CS in Indonesia is unable to effectively resist autocratization. The main reason behind this insufficiency lies in a shortage of historical or contextual elements that would allow them to resist such tendencies. By describing the role of civil society in different historical periods, this section allows the reader to understand where civil society is coming from and what explains their role today. Deriving from that, three sub-arguments are also put forward. The first one is that the unclear division between state and society makes it difficult for civil society to act as a successful opposing force. The second one is that fragmentation and deepening polarization is contributing to a divided civil society whose priorities are shifting from democratic support to partisan interests. The last one is that a lack of independent media is harmful because it lacks the capacity to support civil society and provide diagonal accountability.

By addressing the role of civil society after the colonial period (1602-1949) and a period of short-lived “democracy” (1949-59), four major political periods are distinguished: Guided democracy (1957-1965), the New Order (1966-1998), Reformasi (1998-today), and autocratization (2014-today). The periodization given to both reformasi and autocratization is subjective and changing. In this case, reformasi is seen as the start of political and social reform as well as the transition to democracy, which can be argued to still be happening. The start of autocratization is very difficult to place (Lindberg and Lührmann, 2019), but after discussing it with my informants, it’s placed in 2014, the same year that President Jokowi was elected.

Ed Aspinall (2004) argues that civil society in 1950-60 was polarized and that most CSOs were affiliated with political parties (2004, p. 62). As argued later, this is not so different from the civil society environment that we find today. The Guided Democracy is characterized by Aliran politics. When Clifford Geertz did fieldwork in Indonesia in the 1950s, he described Aliran politics in the following way: “An aliran consists of a political

party surrounded by a set of voluntary social organizations formally or informally linked to it.” (Geertz, 1959, p. 37). He also argued that at that time, there were 4 predominant aliran on the island of Java: The Communist Party of Indonesia (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI), the Indonesia National Party (Partai Nasional Indonesia, PNI), the Masyumi Party, also known as the council of Indonesian Muslim associations (Partai Majelis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia) and NU (Nahdlatul Ulama). Out of these 4, the only NU is still present in the Indonesian political environment. Through institutions linked to the aliran, villagers were able to arrange loans, ask for assistance on their crops and houses, get educated on internal and external affairs, and engage in cultural and social activities (ibid.). Because of their extensive range of action and networks, it was difficult to tell the difference between organizations and the state (Aspinall, 2004). Moreover, polarization became extreme, as the aliran groups had very distinct goals in mind. Particularly, the PKI became very effective in expanding its membership, which was seen as a threat by other major groups (Ufen, 2023). This ended in 1965 when a failed coup attempt was blamed on the PKI and used as a premise to kill and imprison the members of the party. This purge was led by General Suharto, who later became the second-ever president of Indonesia (Setiawan & Tomsa, 2022, p.104). Following this catastrophe, the PKI and all expressions of communism were banned, which gave an end to an organized left in Indonesia.

Not only was it the end of communism, but also the start of a long authoritarian period in which associational life was almost non-existent (Ufen, 2023). The period under Suharto’s rule receives the name of the New Order, characterized by a de-politicization of civil society (Setiawan & Tomsa, 2022, p.104). Aspinall (2004) divides civil society in the New Order into three categories: corporatist sole organizations, semi-corporatist organizations, and pro-oppositional civil society organizations (2004, p. 71-72). The first group was led by the military or state functionaries, so they were an extension of the state. The second group includes organizations that had an independent forming but committed to sharing common goals with the state to protect their existence such as Muhammadiyah and NU. The third group was made of NGOs that although originally predominated by middle-class leaders that shared common goals with the state, started flourishing, and by 1996, there were around 800 NGOs in Indonesia (ibid, 2004, p.72).

From these two major periods, we can conclude that the division between state and society in Indonesia was blurred from 1957 until 1998. The following paragraphs look at

how this division evolved in the past 25 years. Although it would make sense that the division became clearer with the transition to democracy, there are some characteristics that are not pointing in that direction. The expansion of CS in the 1990s led to a widening of opinions being voiced, which was enlarged with the pacted transition. Indonesian civil society is usually praised for having had an important role in the transition to democracy in 1998. However, some scholars disagree. On the one hand, Aspinall (2004) and others argue that the transition to democracy happened because of pressures from below. On the other hand, Muddhofir (2022) argues civil society in Indonesia has not had a major political role since 1965.

To understand civil society under autocratization and why it is unable to present itself as a resisting actor, three arguments are presented. The first one is that some powerful actors of CS are embedded in the state instead of acting as a separate force that can provide diagonal accountability. A good way to exemplify this is using Mudhoffir's concept of "government-turned-activists-reformers" (2022), which he uses to talk about middle-class reformers who justified the government's actions to weaken the KPK. This group has sided with the Jokowi administration, and they are not only acting as blind supporters but also actively spreading harmful information. Specifically, the Taliban rumor described in section 4.3. was spread by government-turned-activists-reformers (ibid.). This issue was also mentioned by several of my informants: "Currently, as you know, some of the activists go into the government (...) When we try to speak up, some of the activists in the government actively try to reduce our voices." (Rini, personal communication, February 1, 2023). As a result, other civil society actors no longer want to collaborate with government activists: "We made the bold line between civil society and activists in government because we never want to work again with them." (Maria, personal communication, February 1, 2023). Additionally, civil society in Indonesia is mostly made of middle-classes, who are argued to lack information on what society needs: "CS activists in Indonesia have been characterized as floating democrats hovering above but unconnected to Indonesian society" (Äntlov et al., 2010, p.424), an argument that is accompanied by my informants, who said, "privileged people, they don't really understand the socio-political aspects of Indonesia" (Siti, personal communication, January 23, 2023).

The second argument is that civil society is fragmented. Two mechanisms exemplify this: polarization and competition. As mentioned in the above paragraphs,

Indonesian civil society was very polarized in the years leading to the ban of the PKI. Although it was less polarized under Suharto's regime, the transition to democracy and the recent years have seen a widening of this polarization. Eve Warburton (2020) argues that many analysts recall polarization as a critical factor in democratic backsliding (p. 63). In the first 15 years of Indonesian democracy, polarization has not been that present. The party system is highly patronage-driven, and parties haven't had issues forming coalitions with each other in the past, regardless of their ideology (Setiawan & Tomsa, 2022). Nonetheless, elections since 2014 have been marked by political polarization due to the candidates being strongly affiliated with the pluralist or Islamic side. Political polarization has been accompanied by civil and social polarization. A good example is the events around the imprisonment of former Jakarta governor, Ahok. After he made controversial comments on the role of Islam in politics, the FPI, a former Islamist group organized a massive mobilization that led to his imprisonment (France-Presse, 2016). Following these events, the government also applied some repression, which is described in the following section. Consequently, the undermining of democratic support due to polarization is identified as a characteristic of uncivil society. When asked about polarization, informants mentioned the role of Islam and argued that it is mainly visible in civil society, however, it bears reminding that the division between civil society organizations and the state is blurred:

“A lot of the influence that Islam plays towards politics is actually from civil society organizations and Islamic organizations from the grassroots.” (Bambang, personal communication, February 3, 2023)

“Indonesia's political environment recently has been quite polarized. So we're actually afraid of attacks from a certain side of politics rather than the government itself” (Budi, personal communication, February 3, 2023)

As put by Setiawan and Tomsa (2022) an important source of fragmentation is competition for funding (p. 112). Fragmentation has been present in Indonesian civil society for a long time, but a new factor entered this dimension with the transition to democracy. Civil society in Indonesia is highly dependent on foreign funding or government funding in order to thrive (or survive). As a result, NGOs are in constant search of projects that will get them the funding they seek (Aspinall, 2013). Consequently, civil society is divided. One informant even argued that CSOs have stopped collaborating

because the competition for funding is too extreme (Muhammad, personal communication, January 23, 2023). Additionally, it is creating a gap between those who receive more funding since they gain a bigger influence and thus their interests are at the forefront of the agenda.

The third argument is that the media is not capable of giving civil society the support it needs. The media is one of the main channels for spreading awareness and informing different sectors of civil society, but this becomes a complicated task when media is not free. Even though media in Indonesia is not state-owned, it is not independent as it is owned by powerful business figures and conglomerates with political interests. That is why informants are saying that the media environment in Indonesia is an oligopoly (Bambang, personal communication, February 3, 2023). Concretely, scholars are arguing that the media partisanship and lack of independence became very clear with the 2014 elections: “Media tycoons like Surya Paloh or Hary Tanoesoedibjo, who owns the MNC (Media Nusantara Citra) Group, openly used their media outlets to promote the interests of their own political parties and the presidential candidates they supported.” (Setiawan & Tomsa, 2022, p. 109). Add more

Some additional issues that were mentioned by informants include the two followings. First, COVID-19. The pandemic has limited the ability of CS to organize and collaborate. Even though some parts of the world have more or less moved past the pandemic, in Indonesia it is still very present as vaccination rates are still not so high and face mask mandates still apply. This implicates a barrier to organizational life (Muhammad, personal communication, 23 January 2023). Second, an informant mentioned that many CS actors are reaching the point of exhaustion. The continuous disregard of their voices by the government is making their actions feel useless, which does not look as promising for the future (Rini, personal communication, February 1, 2023).

As visited in this section, Indonesian civil society faces many internal challenges that are rooted in historical events. However, they also face external pressures that make it more difficult for them to employ their role as resisters. Many of these pressures or limitations are coming from the state, which is what is described in the following section.

5.2.2. External pressures: Government repression

This section visits the identified mechanisms of repression coming from the executive power and identifies them as modes that weaken diagonal accountability. It makes active use of the informants' quotes, as they exemplify the mechanisms that are more suffered. These are cyber-attacks, direct violence, criminalization strategies, the weakened relationship between the state, institutions, and society, and restrictions on funding. All of them can be identified as modes that weaken diagonal accountability, as exemplified in *Figure 3* (p.41).

One of the repression mechanisms that was mentioned frequently by my informants was cyber-attacks:

“In every protest, there was somebody's phone getting hacked. I don't know how, but I think it's via spyware. These tools can only be used by government, by military or intelligence agencies because they are classified as weapons” (Siti, personal communication, January 23, 2023)

“There's been a lot of instances where activists and journalists were hacked mysteriously (...) it's very obvious that it's done by someone in the high places” (Bambang, personal communication, February 3, 2023)

“At one point we had an attack in our organization. It affected six of our members, including one ex-commissioner of KPK. They were kicked out of their telegram accounts” (Rini, personal communication, February 1, 2023)

After such attacks, several regulations on cyber laws and privacy were released. However, cyber-attacks still persist in Indonesia, and they keep increasing at a high rate (Cyble Blogs, 2022).

Direct violence has been quite present in the latest protests. From tear gas to water cannons, and even beatings. One informant mentioned:

“For me, it was the first time that I'm doing such big demonstrations and it felt really hopeful. There were nine people that were abused by the police. They got shot and they passed away during that demonstration. But there was no action taken on that” (Rini, personal communication, February 1, 2023)

The Jokowi administration has become known for pursuing criminalization strategies against opposing sides of the government (Mietzner, 2018, p. 261). Examples include those surrounding the protests against Ahok in 2016, which were impelled by the HTI, an organization that ended up being banned under the premise that it was a threat to the country's security due to its extremism. Additionally, some other figures were pursued by the police, such as Rizieq Shihab, who used to be the leader of FPI (ibid., 2018, p. 275). The government advanced several campaigns to criminalize the actions of populist leaders from FPI and HTI, which ended in the banning of both organizations. As Mietzner puts it, their strategy can be summarized as "fighting illiberalism with illiberalism" (p.261).

Some of my informants are arguing that the communication between CSOs and the government or institutions has worsened in the past years, and they are tracing the start of this change to 2019, after the KPK reforms:

"They are good at formality. They accept our proposal for hearings, but once it's done, they tell us 'Thank you for your recommendations, see you next time' and they don't do anything about it. There's nothing that we can do." (Rini, personal communication, February 1, 2023)

"The KPK has cut its relationship with civil society. After Firli was put as head of the KPK, people are saying that even simple invitations to focus groups need to be accepted by him, which I think is ridiculous because why would the head of the KPK want to know about a simple invitation to a focus group?" (Maria, personal communication, February 1, 2023).

These trends point to a weakened relationship between different actors in society. Collaboration and discussion are being blocked, which impedes civil society from pursuing its role as accountability ensurers.

There are also some indirect forms of repression, such as funding restrictions. In the above section, it was mentioned that organizations sometimes lack cooperation attitudes because they compete for funding. Additionally, a trend that is identified by some scholars is that donors (especially international ones) have shifted their focus. According to Mietzner (2012), there has been a reduction in foreign donor support for the NGO sector

and funds are now given to the government instead (p.12). This is a trend that usually happens when a political system leaves the ‘danger zone’, where democracy assistance programs shift their focus from CSOs to the government in the belief that the government is capable of making a good distribution of funds (Aspinall, 2010, Mietzner, 2012).

5.3. How does the failure of CS in saving the KPK exemplify the failure of CS in fighting autocratization?

The arguments put forward in this section are diverse but hold a common ground: civil society in Indonesia is weak, fragmented, and restricted. This case exemplifies an insufficiency in resisting autocratization because it affects accountability mechanisms, concretely diagonal accountability. The lack of capacity or diagonal accountability can be traced back to historical events, and three main weaknesses have been put forward: the division between state and society is unclear, undermining civil society’s ability to act as an opposing force; civil society is divided and polarized, which difficulties having a long-term vision and unified goals; and the media is ruled by the oligarchy, which reduces its capacity to be an impartial actor. Additionally, diagonal accountability is weakened by the state through the use of different mechanisms such as cyber-attacks, cutting communication, criminalization of actors, and imposing restrictions on funding.

All informants agreed that there are several areas to improve in civil society. When asked about their recommendations for the future, informants said the following:

“I think a lot of the civil society right now still is very segmented. Civil society needs to reconsolidate” (Maria, personal communication, February 1, 2023)

“Relearn the indigenous knowledge better: Taking care of one another” “Retire old generations” (Muhammad, personal communication, January 23, 2023)

“When we work with the government, we often face fire and don’t any good feedback. I think with the current situation, the best way is to work at the basis, working with the communities more often. Increasing the capacity, sharing knowledge, and showing alternative ways” (Iwan, personal communication, February 13, 2023)

6. Conclusion

By exploring the hollowing out of the KPK as a result of the law reform and other political constraints, this thesis has aimed to answer the following questions:

- (1) How is the weakening of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) linked to autocratization in Indonesia?
- (2) What is the role of civil society in resisting the weakening of the KPK and autocratization in Indonesia?

The thesis has visited relevant theories on autocratization and civil society resistance in order to answer these questions. The approach consisted of a qualitative case study, with semi-structured interviews as a chosen methodology. Interviews were conducted in Jakarta, with the participation of 10 informants who were active in Indonesian democracy, anti-corruption efforts, and civil society resistance. By making use of theory and data collected from informants, this thesis has presented and analyzed the arguments that are described below.

6.1. Main findings

There are two main concluding points of this thesis.

- (1) the case of the KPK reflects autocratization in Indonesia because it is a case of weakened horizontal accountability
- (2) civil society resistance to the weakening of the KPK has been unsatisfactory because of weakened diagonal accountability.

In relation to the KPK, we can conclude that it has been weakened because of two reasons: on the one hand, the reforms advanced by the Jokowi administration; on the other hand, the inability of civil society to stand up for the agency. A summary of the key points argued follows below. On the autocratization process, there are several remarks. First, it bears repeating that depending on which definition we adopt, Indonesia might or might not be identified as a case of autocratization. By using Lindberg and Lührmann's (2020) definition and the elements explored in this thesis, Indonesia is experiencing a gradual but steady decline in democratic quality. Moreover, most of the trends that can be traced have

deepened after 2014, which could mean that autocratization in Indonesia has worsened since the current president Joko Widodo came into power.

Accountability mechanisms are seen as two-fold. On the one hand, as constraining mechanisms to preserve democratic quality and prevent/halt autocratization. On the other hand, structural dimensions that can be weakened by the executive power, which has a direct effect on the abilities of actors to act as autocratization resisters. The two classical accountability mechanisms have been discussed: vertical (constraints from the electorate) and horizontal (constraints from other state institutions), with the addition of diagonal (pressures from below), which is a recent addition to accountability theory. In this case, I have identified how different autocratization modes or causes target the three different types of accountability (a visual representation has been provided in *Figure 3*). The focus of this thesis has been on the weakening of horizontal and diagonal accountability, but it bears repeating that the three are interconnected.

To sum up, the identified causes related to accountability mechanisms are as follows. With weakening vertical accountability, there are several practices affecting elections and parties: vote buying is very present, especially given that Indonesia has a long history of patronage and clientelism; elections represent a massive logistical challenge, which is not only expensive but lacks organization; and there are barriers to party-creation, as only elites have the capacity and resources. On weakening horizontal accountability, institutions and oversight bodies are mostly affected by the acceleration of reforms, reducing the chance for civil society or institutions or opposition to voice their opinion; infiltration of other forces such as the police in institutions, which diminishes their independence; and disinformation campaigns, used as a tool to worsen institutions' reputation. Targeting diagonal accountability, there are several barriers imposed by the state, which include delegitimization of foreign funding as a way to restrict the capacity of organizations; legal restrictions of freedoms of association and expression, criminalization campaigns targeting relevant figures; and communication barriers between collaborating entities.

The analysis has focused on the weakening of horizontal and diagonal accountability. On the one hand, the weakening of the KPK is argued to be a case of weakened horizontal accountability. Not only it has had some of its main competencies

taken away (such as wiretapping authority), but it has been infiltrated by other bodies such as the police, which experts identify as a shift from a “watchdog organization to an attack dog” (Rini, personal communication, February 1, 2023). Hence, the distinction between the executive power and other institutions has become blurred. On the other hand, the inability of civil society to resist the hollowing out of the KPK is argued to be a case of weakened diagonal accountability. Civil society has not been able to act as autocratization resisters in this case because of two main spheres: internal struggles and external pressures. The internal struggles are argued to be rooted in historical context, which has led to blurred relations between state and society, a media scene ruled by oligarchs, and a polarized and fragmented civil society that competes for funding. The external pressures are mainly attributed to the executive power that has actively restricted the ability of civil society to act as resisters with the use of criminalization campaigns, direct violence, cyber-attacks, funding restrictions, and by blocking communication between CS and extra-state institutions. In addition, some recommendations that are given to civil society by my informants (all of whom are also civil society actors) are named. These include the retirement of old generations as many of them are embedded in the system as activists-turned-government-supporters, which are argued to act as a barrier to change. Other recommendations focus on reconfiguration and collaboration by working from the roots.

Indonesia is autocratizing (Power & Warburton, 2020; Mietzner, 2021; Setaiwan & Tomsa, 2022). This paper has exemplified how the weakening of the KPK and the insufficient resistance of civil society reflects the weakening of accountabilities within the autocratization process. Indonesia is part of a third wave of autocratization (Lindberg & Lührmann, 2019) and therefore its case fits into a broader and global trend. The lessons learned from asking questions about resistance against autocratization in a specific regime (in this case Indonesia) might be valuable for other countries who are under threat of experiencing similar processes (Tomini et al., 2022, p.3), which remarks on the importance of conducting this research.

To finalize, this paragraph touches upon future research areas. As discussed in this thesis, research on autocratization resistance has focused on positive cases (Laebens & Lührmann, 2021), meaning that those who are successful in fighting autocratization receive more scholarly attention. However, there are also lessons to be learned from failed

or neutral cases. Future research might benefit from focusing on such cases. The case of Indonesia is argued as a case of autocratization where resistance hasn't so far made an effect. With the upcoming elections scheduled in February 2024, there might be a glimpse of hope. Civil society is putting all its efforts and resources into the campaign. Hence, there is an opportunity for researchers to pay close attention to future developments. As for the KPK, trust in the institution has decreased, but there might be a time when the agency recuperates its status as Indonesia's "only credibly independent law enforcement agency" (Power & Warburton, 2020, p. 9).

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Appendix I. Consent Form

I've received and understood the information about the project "Autocratization resistance in Indonesia: The role of civil society activism in preventing the weakening of the KPK" and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- to participate in a personal interview
- for the interview to be recorded and transcribed
- for my data to be processed outside Indonesia (in Norway)
- for information about me to be published (your job title)

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. *June 2023*.

(Signed by the participant, date)

Appendix II. Interview Guide

About You

1. What is your occupation/job title?
2. What are your contributions to civic and political life?

General Politics

3. Many argue that Indonesia is one of the most successful democracies in Southeast Asia. Do you agree?
4. Do you believe the state of democracy changed during the Jokowi presidency? How?
5. What do you think is the role of civil society in Indonesia? Is there room for improvement?
6. Based on past events, do you think civil society can exert pressure on the government to change the outcome of a decision? Can you name an example?

About the KPK

7. Do you think the KPK is a reliable agency? Has this opinion changed over the years?
8. How important is the existence of an anti-corruption agency to the well-functioning of a democracy? How does the KPK specifically contribute to strengthening Indonesia's democracy?
9. How familiar are you with the 2019 reforms aimed at the KPK?
 - a. Do you believe the reasons behind the government's decisions were justified?
 - b. Do you believe the protests organized by different sectors of civil society were justified?
 - c. How were the protests repressed/stopped?
 - d. What do you think about the fact that these protests didn't achieve their goal?
10. What do you think the weakening of the KPK means for Indonesia's democracy?
11. Do you believe there is a way to reverse the reforms?
 - a. If yes, which actors will it depend on?