Protests in Defence of Democracy

Exploring the Heterogeneous Mobilizing Effects of Democratic Erosion

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Abstract

Facing democratic erosion, when do people take to the streets to protest in defence of democracy? Since the early 2000s both electoral and liberal democracies have experienced a wave of democratically elected incumbents seeking to, and succeeding in, eroding central democratic rights, norms, institutions, and procedures. While an extensive literature exists on how protests can drive democratization processes, much less is known about the role of collective direct action in episodes of democratic erosion. A vibrant civil society and a citizenry committed to democratic principles are often theorized to function as a bulwark against authoritarianism. However, systematic research on both if, and when, people will defend democracy is undeniably lacking. In this thesis, I argue that democratic erosion affects both the opportunities and the motivation to engage in protests, and that these mechanisms have contradictory mobilizing effects. Through combining data on democratic erosion along different components and data on anti-state protests, I create a panel data set with near global scope covering the time period 1990-2020. Implications of my theoretical framework are tested in a regression framework using country fixed-effects Poisson models. I find no evidence that democratic erosion is positively associated with increased protest activity. Some variation appears when disaggregating democratic erosion and looking at erosion targeting different democratic components. However, the vast majority of my findings suggest that democratic erosion does not spur protests in defence of democracy. The results challenge the widely held assumption that citizens will defend democracy and function as a bulwark against authoritarianism. Thus, these findings have considerable implications for the theoretical and empirical understanding of democratic erosion, and how democracy may be preserved. Moreover, this thesis informs the emerging scholarship on democratic erosion and autocratization, as well as the established literature on protests and contentious politics.

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All remaining errors are my responsibility alone.

Kaja Sparre Bakke
Oslo, June 2022

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1 Introduction

Democracy as a system of political governance is currently being challenged by a global move towards autocracy. In 2021, a record high number of 33 countries, home to 36% of the world population, experienced substantive and significant democratic deterioration. Simultaneously, the number of democratizing countries plummeted to 1978 levels with only 15 countries, housing 3% of the world population (Boese & Lindberg, 2022). This autocratization trend can be traced back to the turn of the century, further exaggerated by a significant decline in in the number of countries making democratic advancements since at least 2006 (Diamond, 2021; Repucci & Slipowitz, 2021).

Autocracies undergo autocratic consolidation and democracies experience the erosion of democratic rights, norms, institutions and procedures. Whereas the concept of autocratization encompasses all movements along the autocratic-democratic continuum toward autocracy, democratic erosion denotes declines in democratic quality in democracies. Rather than experiencing further democratization, a large number of electoral democracies revert back to authoritarian characteristics. Moreover, liberal democracies, earlier assumed to be consolidated, seem not to be immune to elected incumbents with both the will and the means to challenge democracy (Boese & Lindberg, 2022; Hellmeier et al., 2021).

While democracy has weathered earlier periods of recession (Cornell, 2020; Huntington, 1991), this wave is unique in both scope and form. Democratic erosion constitutes a novel political reality, particularly as it is not confined by regional boundaries, nor does it seem to discriminate between unconsolidated and consolidated democracies. Moreover, rather than experiencing abrupt and complete breakdowns, democracies today are being gradually eroded as incumbents[1] slowly undermine the pillars of democratic competition (Bermeo, 2016; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). These pillars include freedom of expression and association, individual liberties and the independence and capacity of electoral, judicial and legislative bodies.

Examples of countries that have recently undergone democratic erosion includes democracies such as Poland and the United States, while countries such as India,

[1] I use "incumbent" to refer to either the individual holding executive office or the party or administration in office

Hungary, Nicaragua and Zambia have experienced complete democratic breakdown and are now categorized as autocracies.[2] In several instances of leader-driven erosion of democratic pillars, the attempts of power-grabbing by aspiring autocrats have been met with strong and immediate resistance by citizens mobilizing in defence of democracy. Examples include Poland, Bolivia and Romania. While the trend of democratic erosion is increasing, it exists side by side with a globally unprecedented movement of mass mobilization for democracy. 2019 was labelled "the year of protest", and people took to the streets to defend democratic norms and rights in 29 democracies (Maerz et al., 2020, p. 910). Pro-democratic mass mobilization peaked in 2019, the year that, according to scholars "might have been the largest wave of mass, nonviolent anti-government movements in recorded history" (Chenoweth, 2020, p. 69). Nevertheless, aspiring autocrats are not always met with fierce popular resistance. In some cases people have remained surprisingly silent facing democratic erosion. And in countries such as Turkey and Hungary, aspiring autocrats have even remained popular among a significant portion of the population. The considerable variation in popular response to democratic erosion poses a puzzle captured in the following research question:

> *When is democratic erosion met with mass mobilization in defence of citizens' democratic rights and freedoms?*

Much has been written about how protest and other forms of contentious politics play into the process of democratization (Beetham, 1992; Bermeo, 1997; Bermeo & Yashar, 2016; Brancati, 2014; Celestino & Gleditsch, 2013; Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Dahlum et al., 2019; della Porta, 2014; Gleditsch & Rivera Celestino, 2016; Haerpfer et al., 2019; Huntington, 1991). However, significantly less attention has been awarded the role of protest in defence of democracy, facing episodes of democratic erosion. While Bermeo (2016, p.14) writes that "slow slides toward authoritarianism often lack both the bright spark that ignites an effective call to action and the opposition and movement leaders who can voice that clarion call", the past two decades have witnessed several prominent mass mobilizations against elected leaders' attempts to limit democratic rights. Nevertheless, the role of mass mobilization and protests in defence of democracy remains unexplored – especially from a quantitative perspective.

Under conditions of democratic erosion citizens experience the loss of fundamental democratic rights and freedoms that they have grown accustomed to, and likely feel entitled to. Moreover, they witness a political system they, often trust and

[2]Following the Regimes of the World categorization (Lührmann, Tannenberg, et al., 2018)

believe in, crumble at the hands of a democratically elected incumbent. Thus, I theorize that democratic erosion will motivate protests in defence of citizens' democratic rights and freedoms. I call this the motivation mechanism.

Until a democracy fully breaks down, there is at least a minimal protection of civil liberties ensuring the basic right to oppose the incumbent. Nevertheless, protesting in democracies still requires one to solve the collective action problem. This is presumably easier to do in democracies compared to autocracies, but democratic erosion makes it harder in more than one way. The characteristics of the current wave of democratic erosion highlight how it is incremental by design, deliberately shrouded by complex bureaucracy and strategically executed by powerful incumbents. Further, democratic erosion limits the democratic qualities that ensure opportunities to engage in anti-state protest activity. Hence, while citizens may be motivated to protest in defence of democracy, their opportunities to do so are simultaneously narrowed. I call this the opportunity mechanism.

In an effort to shed light on when democratic erosion is met by popular resistance, I disaggregate democracy and explore how erosion of different democratic components show heterogeneous effects on both opportunities and motivation to engage in anti-state protests. I argue that in order to understand when people stand up against democratic erosion, one need to understand how democratic erosion targets different aspects of democracy and how the erosion of these different democratic components are experienced and perceived differently by the citizenry.

1.1 The Findings and their Implications

I examine my research question using quantitative regression methods by combining data on democratic quality and anti-state protests in a near global sample covering the time period 1990-2020. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study of this kind. Thus, I adopt an exploratory approach and stay agnostic throughout. By using a near global sample and remain cautious about restricting my data unnecessarily, this thesis seeks to delineate some general trends in citizen mobilization in defence of democracy.

When using an aggregated measure of democracy, I find no evidence supporting the hypothesis that democratic erosion is positively associated with increased anti-state protest frequency. I argue that this lack of association may be caused by the opportunity and the motivation mechanisms countering each other. Both opportunity and motivation is necessary preconditions for mobilization, and while democratic erosion may increase motivation, it simultaneously decreases opportunity. If these effects overall and on average are equally strong, this would yield null

results.

When disaggregating democracy and examining the link between erosion of particular democratic components and subsequent protest, some variation appears. I find some support for the hypothesis that democratic erosion targeting freedom of expression is positively associated with subsequent anti-state protests. However, democratic erosion targeting freedom of association, individual liberties, the electoral system or judicial and legislative constraints on the executive are insignificant predictors of anti-state protests. While I expected democratic erosion targeting democratic institutions such as electoral, judicial and legislative bodies to be less motivating for direct action in defence of democracy, the overall lack of significant relationships between democratic erosion and protest is surprising. Based on the analysis conducted in this thesis, the general answer to "when democratic erosion is met with mass mobilization in defence of democracy", is that it is not. This is of course a sweeping generalization, and we know that there are several instances where democratic erosion has been countered by fierce popular resistance, but on average anti-state protest activity does not increase in response to democratic erosion.

This thesis contributes to the emerging field of autocratization- and democratic erosion studies by disaggregating the concept of democracy and exploring how the effects and consequences of democratic erosion differ across democratic components. Moreover, it speaks to the contentious politics literature and highlights how, while both necessary, the opportunity to protest and the motivation to protest may work in opposite directions. This underlines the importance of taking both into account when studying protest. My results also challenge the widely held assumption that a vibrant civil society and an active citizenry will defend democracy and function as a last bulwark against authoritarianism. Additionally, this research is of relevance to pro-democracy organizations and movements across the world. Understanding how democratic erosion unfolds and what motivates "the average" citizen to take action, is of great importance to those seeking to preserve and defend democracy. As democratic erosion limits the space and opportunities for collective direct action, organizers need to strengthen mobilization efforts, communicate the consequences of democratic erosion and offer accessible and compelling ways of joining the pro-democracy movement.

No democracy is perfect. However, it is better than the available alternatives and the future of democracy closely relates to the future of freedom in the world. Democracies both can and have abused individual rights and liberties, and likewise well-regulated authoritarian regimes can provide high degrees of security and order for its citizens. Overall however, the democracy hold the ability of offering equity, individual liberty and social accountability. Indeed, some measures of these elements are essential components of democracy. Defending democracy is thus important.

And while this defence can take many forms (i.e., trough the ballot, party membership or volunteer work), an important one is through direct action and protest. Protests as a form of contentious politics exists outside the established political institutions and is available as a direct way of directing claims towards the government (Tilly, 2008). Citizen claims-making towards the incumbent is an essential part of democracy, and this thesis explores the role of protests when democracy is under threat.

1.2 Organization of the Thesis

What follows is a clarification of key terms and a discussion about the grounds for an exclusive analysis of democratic erosion rather than a more comprehensive study on autocratization. In the next chapter, I situate the research question within the literature on democracy and democratic erosion, and establish the relevant research gaps. Here I also discuss the nature of contentious politics in democracies. The following theory chapter is devoted to the determinants of mass mobilization. I argue that both opportunity and motivation are necessary preconditions for mobilization, and discuss how erosion of different democratic components may impact these mechanisms heterogeneously. The theory chapter is followed by two chapters on data and methods respectively. I present my data sources, variable operationalizations and continuous justifications and explanations of my process. Moreover, I discuss the methodological challenges that arise when using observational data for causal inference in general and the more specific issues related to my study. Next, I present my statistical results using a country fixed effects Poisson regression with heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation robust standard errors. These results are then rigorously examined through a set of robustness checks to ensure reliable and valid estimates. I test alternative specifications of both the dependent variable and the explanatory variables. Moreover, I account for influential observations, time trends and protest claim. The empirical analysis is followed by a discussion of the results where I contextualize my findings, discuss their implications and raise the study's limitations. Last, I conclude by summarizing my research and provide recommendations for future studies.

1.3 Clarifications

1.3.1 Democratic Erosion Rather than Autocratization

This thesis focus on democratic erosion as part of the broader category of autocratization. The empirical implications of this is that my sample is constrained to democracies. I only seek to isolate the effect of declining democratic quality in democratic states, not the further decline in democratic attributes experienced in autocracies.

The reason for this selection is twofold. First, the erosion of democratic norms, institutions and procedures *in democracies*, is a key part of the puzzle. While we are more used to seeing autocracies fluctuate on the autocracy-democracy continuum, democracies, and in particular liberal democracies, have conventionally been expected to continue to democratize. With the current wave of democratic erosion, this proposition is challenged. Second, theoretical justification for separating democratic erosion from autocratic consolidation can be found in Charles Tilly's (2007, p.xi) fundamental observation that "undemocratic and democratic regimes feature very different repertoires of contention (...) [and] as democratization or de-democratization occurs, dramatic alterations of repertoires also occur".[3] Thus, studying when democratic erosion is followed by contentious claims-making through protest events, the context matters.

Discussing the role of progressive protest movements and the fight for democracy, Srdja Popovic and Slobodan Djinovic (2018, p.68) notes that "in the present world, progressives, ironically, have institutions that they need to defend rather than overthrow". The distinction between *defend* and *overthrow* speaks to the core of why this thesis exclusively focus on democratic erosion. I postulate that the causal mechanisms driving protests in defence of democracy are different compared to the causal mechanisms driving protests demanding democracy by challenging dictators. This includes differences in personal risk, information flow, the incumbent's legitimacy and the likelihood of encountering violent state repression. Studying the mobilizing effects of democratic erosion and autocratic consolidation simultaneously through the broader category of autocratization are thus likely to obscure interesting insights.

1.3.2 Defining Protests and Mass Mobilization

Protest is a form of contentious politics, in the sense that it involves episodic (i.e. non-routine), public and collective conflicts of interest between claim-makers and their objects, in which the government is a stakeholder (McAdam et al., 2001; Tilly, 2008). From this, it follows that protests take place outside routine channels of

[3]See also Bueno de Mesquita, 2003; M. W. Svolik, 2012

expressing political opinion. Further, protest as a category of direct action is broad and encompasses actions ranging from sit-inns to riots to non-violent mass marches.

While protests can take many different forms, this thesis primarily focuses on events in which a group of individuals is taking to the streets in forms of public demonstrations. Protests are thus understood as "coordinated, collective claims on authorities, made through public performances" (Tarrow, 1998). I use protest and mass mobilization interchangeably. Moreover, anti-state protests are defined as protests leveraging a direct claim on the government of the country the protest takes place in, distinct from protests directing collective claims on other groups or other governments.

In democracies the most common way of participating in contentious politics is trough street protests, and more specifically trough mass demonstrations. Demonstrations are examples of collective, contentious and coercive political action. The protesters are united by a specific grievance or demand, and taking to the streets is defined as a strategic activity with a social or political objective. The intentions of the protest action is to evoke awareness and publicity, rally support for their claim, and mobilize additional supporters, as a means to produce the desired change (Sharp, 1973).

Mass protest events require a minimal level of coordination, but vary in their organization, size, duration and objective. In the data sources I draw on, protest events require a lower threshold of 50 participants to be counted. However, I do not confine the analysis to “protest campaigns”. These are defined as “a series of observable, continuous tactics” employed by a recognizable non-state actor with a distinguishable leadership, toward a state actor (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011, p. 250). Moreover, I do not distinguish between violent and non-violent protests. In my sample, comprising only democracies, the majority (75%) of protests are non-violent. See Figure A.1.

Lastly, throughout this thesis, I use the terms "protest intensity", "protest frequency" and "protest activity" interchangeably.

1.3.3 The People that Protest

Throughout this thesis, I refer to the unspecified group of "people" and "citizens". These are general terms and encompass a broad range of identities. When I state that citizens protests in defence of democracy and to oppose the incumbent, I do not mean that everyone protests, not that everyone oppose the incumbent. Rather I refer to "a substantive group". While "substantive" is vague and fluid across contexts, time and countries, I operate with a lower threshold of 50 people. Moreover, I recognize that not everyone affected by democratic erosion, or protesting against it, in a given

country are citizens of that country. Nevertheless, I use the term citizen to emphasise that democratic rights and freedoms are intrinsic linked to the relationship between those that govern and those being governed - defined by citizenship.

"The people" is not a homogeneous group. This is particularly important to acknowledge when studying democratic erosion. The incumbents driving the erosion of democratic norms, institutions and procedures are elected in elections that at least meet a minimal criterion of being free and fair. These leaders have strong constituencies and are generally elected on populist platforms taking advantage of a polarized population (Meléndez & Kaltwasser, 2021; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Sato & Arce, 2022). Populists are increasingly successful in securing public support, polarize the public and erode fundamental democratic rights all at the same time. Moreover, incumbents are likely to strategically frame their efforts to erode democracy as needed by society, wanted by the public and legitimate based on election results. This way they can appease large parts of their support base and increase the likelihood of remaining in office.

Last, another important point is that democratic erosion does not affect everyone equally. While this has received little scholarly attention, everything we know about marginalization should tell us that democratic erosion is likely to disproportionally target already vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Democratic erosion will have different effects along lines of class, gender, sexual orientation, age and ethnicity. These differences are not addressed in this thesis, but should inform future scholarship on democratic erosion.

2 Literature Review

Asking the question of when citizens will take to the streets to defend their democratic rights, this thesis seek to bridge the literature on democratic erosion and the literature on contentious politics. This chapter seeks to situate contentious politics and protest within the socio-political context of democratic erosion. To do so, I start by defining democracy before moving on the concept of democratic erosion. I then discuss how the nature of contentious claims-making in democracies, before turning to what we (don't) know about protest in defence of democracy in episodes of democratic erosion. I end by outlining the research gap and how this piece of research contributes to filling said gap.

2.1 Defining Democracy and its Tenets

Democracy is not a straight forward concept to define. Both scholars and practitioners continue to disagree upon the depth and breadth of the concept. While "essentially contested concepts" may produce fruitful theoretical debates and new empirical research (D. Collier et al., 2006; Gallie, 1955), conceptual clarity remains an important pillar of sound empirical research.

In the democracy literature, longstanding conceptual and methodological discussions include whether democracy is best understood as a multidimensional (Coppedge et al., 2011; Dahl, 1971), continuous (Bollen & Jackman, 1989; Lindberg, 2006), polychotomous (D. Collier & Levitsky, 1997), or a dichotomous concept (Alvarez et al., 1996; Cheibub et al., 2010). Moreover, the distinction between precise differentiation between democratic and various types of autocratic regimes remains contested (Diamond, 2002; Geddes et al., 2014; Kailitz, 2013; Wahman et al., 2013).

The most minimal conception of democratic regimes is centered on elections, and relies on the notion that the ruled have the authority to choose their rulers (Huntington, 1991; Przeworski, 1999; M. W. Svolik, 2012). By democracy, Schumpeter refers to a method of political decision: "the democratic method is an institutional system for political decision-making in which the individual acquires the power to decide through a competitive struggle for the voters' votes" (Schumpeter, 1994). Thus, the essence of Schumpeterian democracy lies in its competitive element and constitutes

a minimal definition. Autocracy then becomes the residual category in relation to democracy (Przeworski et al., 2000; M. Svolik, 2008; M. W. Svolik, 2012). While routine elections of political leaders are essential for any democracy, most contemporary regimes hold de-jure multiparty elections with universal suffrage (Lührmann, Tannenberg, et al., 2018). This enables the conclusion that while elections are a necessary condition for democracy, it is not a sufficient one (Kadivar, 2018).

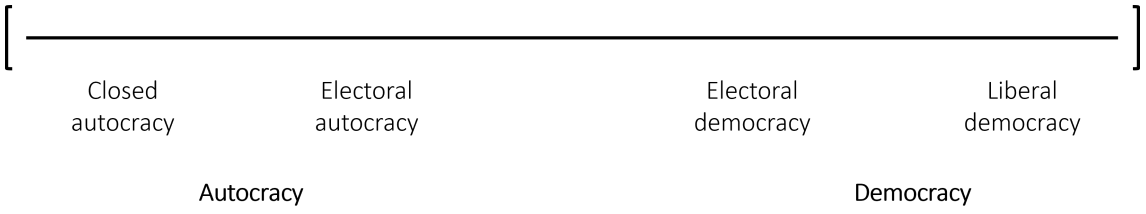
Departing from the most minimalist definition of democracy, Dahl's influential characterization is substantively more comprehensive. His definition holds that in a democracy, full opportunities should be guaranteed to all citizens, including: (i) formulating their preferences; (ii) expressing, through individual or collective action, their choices to their peers and to the government itself; and, (iii) have their preferences also considered in the conduct of government (Dahl, 1971, 1998). Moreover, he estimates that there are at least eight conditions to guarantee these opportunities: (i) freedom to create and join interest groups; (ii) freedom of expression; (iii) right to vote; (iv) right to run for public office; (v) right of political leaders to contest support and votes; (vi) right to obtain information in alternative sources; (vii) free and appropriate electoral process; and, (viii) institutions holding the government accountable to election results (Dahl, 1998). While this definition is certainly more comprehensive than the Shumpeterian one, it does not capture what scholars and practitioners alike have come to define as liberal democratic components, including equality before the law, civil liberties and institutional constraints on the executive (Berman, 2017; Zakaria, 1997). Along with the contention between dichotomous and continuous measures of democracy, the distinction between liberal democracies and illiberal (or electoral) democracies remains a central debate in the democracy literature (Beetham, 1992; Coppedge et al., 2011).

In this thesis, a continuous conceptualization is preferred over a dichotomous one. A continuous measure allows for variation in political regimes ranging from full autocracy to full democracy. Hence, it allows for the conceptualization of *degrees* of democracy captures incremental changes in regime characteristics that a dichotomous understanding by definition overlooks (Elkins, 2000). Based on the classical understanding of democracy and its tenants by Dahl, the Regimes of the World (RoW) project (as part of the broader V-Dem project) outlines a highly useful categorization of political regimes, that while allowing for a continuous understanding also appreciates the need for categorical measures. The project divides the world's political regimes into four overarching categories: closed autocracy, electoral autocracy, electoral democracy and liberal democracy (Lührmann, Tannenberg, et al., 2018). While electoral democracies are defined as political regimes that were established in free and fair multiparty elections taking place in a context where freedom of speech, association, and universal suffrage were guaranteed (Dahl, 1971, 1991;

Lührmann, Tannenberg, et al., 2018), liberal democracies need more: their survival and quality depend also on institutionalized checks and balances that check the power of those who govern (Lührmann, Tannenberg, et al., 2018; Merkel, 2004; O'Donnell, 1999). Electoral autocracies hold de-facto multiparty elections for the chief executive, but they fall short of democratic standards due to significant irregularities, limitations on party competition or other violations of Dahl's institutional requisites for democracies. Lastly, in closed autocracies, the chief executive is either not subjected to elections or there is no meaningful, de-facto competition in elections.

As the appropriate type of regime measure depends on the nature of the research question at hand (Adcock & Collier, 2001), this thesis adopts RoW's understanding and conceptualizes the different political regimes to lie on a scale ranging from full autocracy to liberal democracy. This allows for a continuous measure, enabling movement in both directions along the scale, with four useful overarching clusters. This thesis does not focus on regime change understood as the definite move from democracy to autocracy.[4] Rather, it adopts a continuous understanding of regime governance ranging from full autocracy to full democracy, with the possibility of regimes to gradually move along that scale in both directions. This is visualized in Figure 2.1

Figure 2.1: Categorization of Political Regimes



[4]For an exploratory analysis of the effect of pro-democracy mobilization on regime change, see the V-Dem working paper by Hellmeier and Bernhard (2022) titled *Mass Mobilization and Regime Change: Evidence From a New Measure of Mobilization for Democracy and Autocracy From 1900 to 2020*

2.2 Democratic Erosion as a Sub-Type of Autocratization

This thesis uses democratic erosion to conceptualize deterioration in democratic components. However, numerous terms have been used by various scholars to describe similar phenomena. These include democratic backsliding (Bermeo, 2016; Waldner & Lust, 2018), democratic breakdown (Linz, 1978), de-democratization (Bogaards, 2018; Tilly, 2003), autocratization (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019), democratic recession (Diamond, 2015, 2021), democratic deconsolidation (Foa & Mounk, 2016, 2017), stealth authoritarianism (Varol, 2014) and authoritarian consolidation (Cassani & Tomini, 2020). While these terms are often used interchangeably with reference to the same empirical phenomena, they hold somewhat different meanings and evoke different associations.[5]

Following recent scholar work (Cassani & Tomini, 2020; Kneuer, 2021; Laebens & Lührmann, 2021; Lührmann, 2021; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019; Merkel & Lührmann, 2021; Skaaning, 2020), I conceptualize autocratization as all movements on the continuous scale of democracy-autocracy, away from democracy towards autocracy. Autocratization can start and stop at any point on the regime continuum. It thus follows that autocratization can result in democratic breakdown [6] or in substantive reduction in democratic attributes (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019).

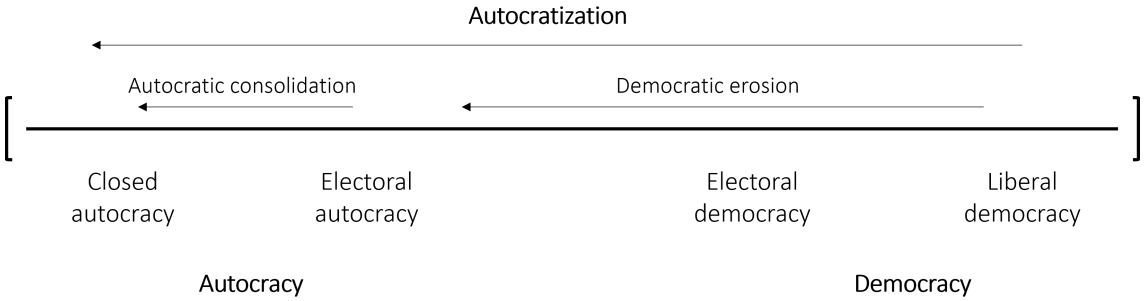
In line with the comprehensive conceptualization of autocratization provided by Maerz et al. (2021), I define two different starting zones on the regime continuum. These starting zones define two different processes of autocratization. *Democratic erosion* occurs within the limits of democracy, while *autocratic consolidation* (in direct reference to the widely adopted concept of democratic consolidation) refer to the decline of remaining democratic traits within the demarcation lines of autocratic regimes and cause the regime to move closer to the autocratic end of the regime continuum (Carwile et al., 2020). See Figure 2.2 below. Thus, autocratization encompasses both democratic erosion and autocratic consolidation. At its

[5]While backsliding commonly is used to describe the gradual decline in democratic quality, I prefer the term erosion for two reasons. First, the metaphor of erosion implies a exogenous force driving the erosion (in nature, water or wind), while backsliding denotes an endogenous and not necessarily a willed action. Democratic deterioration is actively orchestrated and executed by the incumbent. Second, erosion evokes an image of something being withered down and hollowed out, whereas backsliding signals a clearly defined and observable negative movement. One of the key characteristics of the current wave of democratic decline is the gradual, concealed and obscured stripping of the meaning and capacity of democratic norms, rights and institutions. Rather than openly declaring democratic decline, the incumbent erodes democracy while still keeping up a façade of the former structure.

[6]I define democratic breakdown as when democratic erosion has gone so far that the country is downgraded to an electoral autocracy in the Regimes of the World classification (Hellmeier et al., 2021)

core, democratic eorosion denotes the state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain an existing democracy (Bermeo, 2016, p. 5). Ultimately I conceptualize democratic erosion as a sub-type of the overarching autocratization processes: democratic erosion occurs in the context of autocratization.

Figure 2.2: Autocratization and Democratic Erosion



The recent "third wave of autocratization" has spurred a growing literature on the challenges, erosion, decline, and crisis of democracy.. While these works differ in their analyzes of causes and consequences, as well as in methods and theoretical approaches, they generally agree that the main contemporary threat to democracy is its gradual demise caused by elected illiberal leaders that, after coming to power, aggrandize their prerogatives at the cost of legislative and judicial bodies, while simultaneously limiting liberal rights of individuals, civil society and media (Bermeo, 2016, 2019; Diamond, 2021; Kneuer, 2021; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

This is the essence of democratic erosion; it is characterized by incumbents' self-serving actions restricting democratic institutions and rescinding key democratic rights such as access to information, meaningful political participation, or the rights of the political opposition (Laebens & Lührmann, 2021). A distinctive feature of the current wave of attacks on democracy is its piecemeal and gradual nature (Bermeo, 2016; Huq & Ginsburg, 2018; Waldner & Lust, 2018).

While both democracy and autocracy long have been understood to move in waves (Huntington, 1991), there is emerging consensus among democracy scholars that the current trend of autocratization is distinct in both scope and form.[7]. In his seminal work on the third wave of democratization, Huntington (1991) also accounted for the possibility of waves of democratic reversal reversals in the post cold

[7]For critical takes on the wave methaphor, see Skaaning (2020) and Tomini (2021). For critical takes on the novelty of the autocratization trend, see (Levitsky and Way (2015), Diamond (2015) and Youngs and Carothers (2017)

war era. The wave metaphor allows for a notion of fluid change which readily lends itself to the concept of regime instability. Change, be it democratization or autocratization, is inherently unstable as it entails movements. It is unsurprising that newly democratized countries, often categorized as illiberal or electoral democracies, may experience waves of democratic reversal - in fact, these types of democracies have made up the majority of backsliding democracies since 2006 (Diamond, 2021).

Nevertheless, it is not only weak democracies that are experiencing democratic erosion during the current "third wave of autocratization" (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). Previously, a common conception of democratization maintained that once initial democracy is established, it must be consolidated so that democracy becomes the only viable option. Once consolidated, democracy was expected to endure. However, the recent developments of democratic erosion begs the question of whether democracy can, and ever was, the "only game in town" (Linz & Stepan, 1996). Presumed consolidated democracies, such as USA and Poland, have also experienced substantive democratic erosion in recent years. Moreover, India, often labeled "the biggest democracy in the world" have undergone extensive democratic erosion to the point of democratic breakdown in 2019 (Hellmeier et al., 2021) Figure 2.3 show the count of political regimes categorized as electoral and liberal democracies respectively between 1990 and 2020. The graph show a stark increase from 1990 up until just after 2000, before the curves flatten. While the count of electoral democracies have remained fairly steady post 2000, the count of liberal democracies markedly declines after 2010, clearly illustrating the current wave of democratic erosion.

In an influential article from 2016, Nancy Bermeo, argues that the current trend of democratic erosion is distinct in its form and unprecedented in scale. In line with Bermeo's (2016) conclusion, Berman (2021, p.72) states that "although all previous democratic waves have been followed by undertows, democratic backsliding today is distinctive in at least one critical way: Contemporary democracies are more likely to decay gradually than to die quickly". Although studies on the wave-like nature of democratization processes have long been present in the field of political science, the revival of autocratic fluxes in recent years has contributed to an increased focus on democratic erosion within the literature (Bermeo, 2016; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019).

The recent setbacks in democracy have spurred a new wave of studies on democratic erosion, studying this either comparatively or focusing on specific countries such as the United States (Bermeo, 2016; Graham & Svolik, 2020; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Waldner & Lust, 2018). This body of literature points to how contemporary democratic erosion differs from what we know about highly abrupt events of democratic breakdowns (rather than erosion) in previous decades, commonly triggered by external challengers through events such as coup d'états or civil wars.

Contrary, recent democratic setbacks unfold in a more clandestine manner and are usually gradual, slow, difficult to detect and often driven by democratically elected leaders (Bermeo, 2016; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Lührmann et al., 2019; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019; Lührmann, Mechkova, et al., 2018).

Recent global trends of democratic erosion increasingly occur within the law and through the law - often reinventing extant legal provisions, altering their meaning or application (Bermeo, 2016; Huq & Ginsburg, 2018; Hyde, 2020). Put differently: "Backsliding makes elections less competitive without entirely undermining the electoral mechanism" (Waldner & Lust, 2018, p. 95). Especially the characteristics of leader-driven democratic erosion has received a lot of scholarly attention, and several studies have been published about the strategies of aspiring autocrats (Bermeo, 2016; Kneuer, 2021) and the failures of political parties, elites and institutions to constrain them (Carey et al., 2020; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Przeworski, 2019). Moreover, drivers of democratic erosion such as international factors (Diamond, 2021) and the proliferation of political populism and polarization (McCoy et al., 2018; Mudde, 2004; Somer et al., 2021; M. W. Svolik, 2019) have received recent scholarly attention.

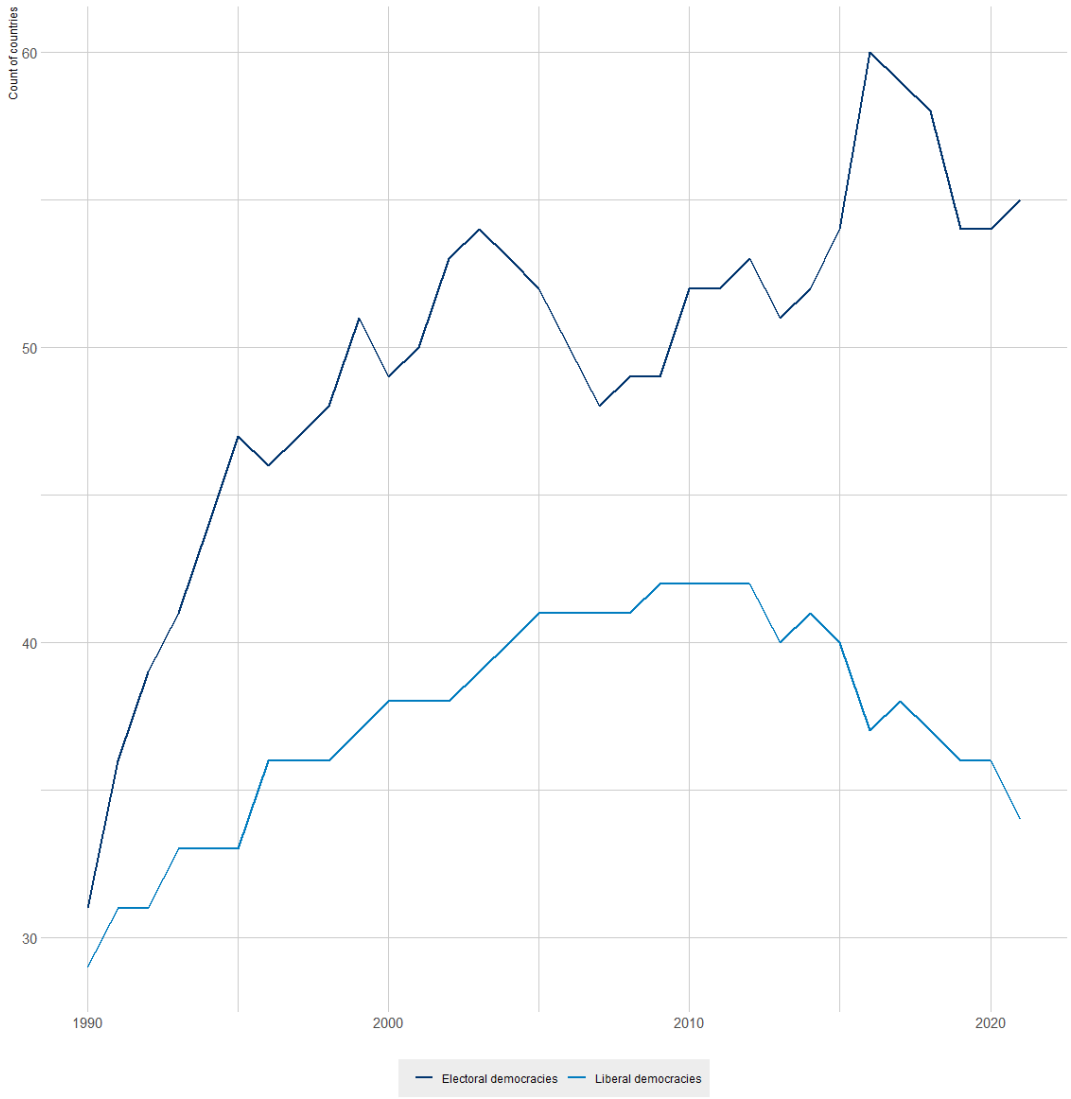
In this thesis, I am departing from this focus on elites and institution to explore role of ordinary people in episodes of democratic erosion. Although it is widely assumed that full autocratization would be difficult to achieve faced with widespread and fierce popular opposition (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; Haggard & Kaufman, 2016; Przeworski, 2019), few studies systematically consider when such widespread and fierce popular mobilization will occur in a context of democratic erosion. The subsequent section will outline which place mass mobilization has in democracies. regim

2.3 Contentious Claims-Making in Democracies

In democracies, the conventional channels of political action, such as voting and party membership, offer regular and institutionalized ways for citizens to express their political views, direct claims towards the authorities and otherwise participate in politics (Bond et al., 1997; Schock, 2013).[8]. These channels may be more or less functioning across the scale of democracies. Nevertheless, all these methods involve trying to get someone else - usually the government - to take action on an issue. However, as alluded to by the more comprehensive definitions of democracy, democratic participation expands beyond election cycles. At least in theory, democratic rulers are politically dependent upon the ruled.

[8]For an extensive dissection of the conceptual meaning of "political participation" see van Deth (2014)

Figure 2.3: Regime Types Across Time



(a)

Political dependence concerns acceptance by the citizenry of a government's authority, monopoly of violence and claim to legitimacy (Rousseau, 1791). A government's ability to command obedience is reduced if it is widely perceived as acting in an unjust, ineffective, corrupt, or unconstitutional manner. While these traits can be checked and challenged through the ballot, they are often more directly contested through contentious politics. Protest is a form of contentious politics, in the sense that it involves episodic (i.e. non-routine), public and collective conflicts of interest between claim-makers and their objects, in which the government is a stakeholder (McAdam et al., 2001; Tilly, 2003)

Contentious politics occur outside the established political system and is thus

particularly useful when the aim is to challenge the fundamental political structures such as levels of democratic quality (McAdam et al., 2001; Tilly, 2008). When citizens partake in elections, they implicitly accept the overarching political structure. Although voting and participating in contentious claims-making are not mutually exclusive by any means, they are fundamentally different. This understanding can help explain why citizen's often fail to remove authoritarian inclined incumbents through elections, as voters often are faced with two valid but potentially conflicting concerns: democratic principles and partisan interests (Carey et al., 2020; M. W. Svolik, 2019).

The ability of incumbents to avoid being held accountable between elections is demonstrated by the consistency which electoral authoritarian leaders such as Putin, Mugabe, Chavez, Erdoğan, or Orbán have assailed civil society while consolidating their power (Bratton & Masunungure, 2007; Corrales, 2015; Esen & Gumuscu, 2016; Kornai, 2015; Lipman, 2016). While contentious claims-making is intrinsically linked to election cycles (Tilly, 1997), they are not limited by them. Moreover, although contentious claims-making per definition exist outside the institutionalised democratic channels, that does not mean that the existence of contentious politics in a polity is at odds with democracy. On the contrary, Tarrow (1989) argues that nonviolent political contentious action is good for democracy: it forces governments to comply with citizen's demands and forces citizens to participate in the political process. This is particularly important in between elections and other forms of institutionalised claims-making to ensure that elected officials are held accountable to the promises they made during their campaigns (Ekiert & Kubik, 1998; McAdam & Tarrow, 2010).

It is commonly assumed that the institutionalized channels of political claims-making (i.e. routine elections and institutionalized party systems) in democracies reduce the need for contentious politics and extra-political protests (Arce, 2010; Hipsher, 1996). Moreover, the conventional channels of democratic participation may be preferred to contentious politics as they are well within the bounds of legality and require less effort and risk by the individual (Hipsher, 1996).

However, previous research has also shown that a higher level of democratic quality reduces the mobilization costs for civil society actors and thus is more conductive to protest (Goldstone, 2004). This is particularly salient in liberal democracies where the right of assembly and freedom of speech are protected. Nevertheless, there are different contextual factors that determine the degree of protest activity in democratized countries (Nam, 2007; Su, 2015). It seems like contentious politics take on a substantively different form across regime types (Tilly, 2007). Thus, one can expect protests in defence of democracy to evolve differently compared to protests demanding democracy in autocratic states. Moreover, while the latter is thoroughly,

although not exhaustively, studied, the former has received little scholarly attention.

The role of contentious politics and mass protest in the processes of democratization has yielded an extensive literature (ADLER & WEBSTER, 1995; Bratton & van de Walle, 1992; Dahlum et al., 2019; Della Porta, 2016; della Porta, 2014; Hudáková, 2021; Kim, 2000; O'Donnell & Schmitter, 2013; Przeworski et al., 1999; Schock, 2005). And it is well-documented that organized mass mobilizations can force incumbent autocratic regimes from power, either indirectly by demanding democratic concessions or directly by executing a coup in the name of democracy (Acemoglu, 2006; Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Haggard & Kaufman, 2016).

While studies emphasize the diversity of civil society actors and points to parts of civil society that are likely to support autocratic policies (Armony, 2004; Berman, 1997; Bermeo, 2003; Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2020; Riley, 2010), a fairly unanimous body of literature still assert that an active civil society and pro-democracy mobilization through channels of contentious politics increase the chance of successful transition from autocracy to democracy (Bermeo & Yashar, 2016) (see references in Hellmerier and Bernhard (2022) V-Dem working paper). Moreover, it is often assumed that a strong civil society makes democracies more resilient (se references from theory-section) and that civil society can actively mobilize and protect democracy if mass-based radical political movements and parties challenge the political system (Kornhauser, 2008; Lederer, 1940; Riley, 2010). However, this proposition has not been systematically and empirically tested.

2.4 Research Gap: Protests in Defence of Democracy

Much has been written about protest in democratization processes, and civil society and "ordinary citizens"[9] commonly are assumed to function as a bulwark against aspiring autocrats. However, very little scholarly attention has been awarded the question of *when* ordinary citizens will take to the streets to protest in defence of democracy. This thesis seeks to contribute to this research gap.

Both in democratization research and democracy-promotion practice, a bulwark's "democratic culture" (or Verba and Almond's (1963) civic culture) has been assumed to serve as a defence against authoritarianism. This notion is also present in the chapter on "mores" in Tocqueville's "Democracy in America", where he argues that "mores", seen as the internalization of democratic norms into the collective consciousness of a society, may serve as a defence against non-democratic tendencies

[9]The term "ordinary people" is borrowed from Bermeo (2003) Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times: The Citizenry and the Breakdown of Democracy

(Tocqueville, 2002). Building on Tocqueville's conceptualization of the institutionalisation of democratic norms as a bulwark against non-democratic tendencies, Barry Weingast (1997) argue that democracy becomes self-enforcing when citizens value democracy high enough esteem to be willing to defend them by withdrawing support from the sovereign when he attempts to violate. Weingast states that: "citizens in stable democracies not only must value democracy but also must be willing to take costly action to defend democratic institutions against potential violations" (Weingast, 1997, p. 261). Democracy survives, according to this line of reasoning, when opportunistic elites are kept in check by a vibrant civil society and an active citizenry, both willing and able to sanction behaviours that violate the rules of democracy (North et al., 2000; Przeworski, 1991). This "last line of defence" is often viewed to center around strong civil society scrutiny of government institutions as a critical factor in establishing, sustaining and defending democracy (Bernhard et al., 2017; Bernhard et al., 2020; Croissant & Haynes, 2021; Diamond, 1994; Scholte, 2002; M. W. Svolik, 2019).

Scholars have continued on this path and discussed how an "active citizenry" (Korolczuk, 2016), an organized "monitory civil society" (Keane, 2018) and "institutionalized parties and a vibrant civil society" (Cornell, 2020), may prevent or stop the autocratic aspirations of incumbents.[10] The question about how democracies survive episodes of democratic erosion is related to a broader question that has incited rich scholarly discussion: What makes democracies resilient? Much of the research on this issue has focused on the role of structural factors, particularly economic factors (Boix, 2015; Cheibub et al., 1996; Lipset, 1959) and ethnic, religious or political "subcultures" among the country's population (Beissinger, 2008; Dahl, 1971). Another strand of research has focused on the role of institutional structures and design in successfully facing threats to democracy (Linz, 1990; Norris, 2008; Sartori, 2005).

Svolik (2019, p.20) asks "when can we realistically expect ordinary people to check the authoritarian ambitions of elected politicians?". While his answer focuses on voter behaviour and partisan loyalty, the analysis offers valuable insight into the dynamics between ordinary citizens and authoritarian-leaning incumbents. Also exploring this dynamic is Claasen's (2020) study on democratic mood. Contrary to the understanding that "democracy creates its own demand" (Denemark et al., 2016), Claasen finds that increases in democratic quality depress democratic mood while decreases amplify it. He concludes that "should elected leaders start dismantling democratic institutions and rights, public mood is likely to swing rapidly toward democracy again, providing something of an obstacle to democratic backsliding"

[10]See also Tocqueville 1988[1835; 1840, Lipset et al. 1956, Putnam et al. 1993 and Welzel 2013.

(Claassen, 2020, p. 51). While democratic mood and democratic action are fundamentally different, they are intrinsically linked and Claasen's study points towards possible resistance against democratic erosion. Bernhard et al. (2020) study how civil society and democratic political parties, both when active and institutionalized, can be mobilized in defence of democracy (Bernhard et al., 2020). However, as Bernhard et al. (2020, p.2) notes "despite the widely held belief about the salutary effects of a strong civil society and institutionalized political parties, until recently, comprehensive testing has been difficult if not impossible". While the authors find support for the hypothesis that an active civil society and institutionalized democratic parties strengthen the resilience and durability of democracies, they do not account for *when* civil society actors opt out of formal claims-making channels in favour of contentious performances. Indeed, the role of citizen-led mobilization in defence of democracy has been pointed to as an important area for future study (Hyde, 2020).

I argue that before we dive into the immensely complex question of how civil society actors may preserve democracy, we need to take a step back and seek to understand *when* these actors and individuals are compelled to engage in contentious claim, mobilize resources and risk participating in anti-state protests to check the incumbent driving the erosion of democratic institutions, norms and procedures. Recent research has suggested that threats to democracy can, on average, cause increased public support for democracy, but it is not yet clear whether all forms of declines are similarly likely to cause increased support, and if this support translates to mobilization in defence of democracy. There is limited research on drivers of anti-state protests in democracies, and when studied institutional explanations have been the focus (Nam, 2007; Su, 2015). Focusing on the role played by individuals, this thesis shifts the focus away from structural and institutional factors to investigate how ordinary citizens react to democratic erosion - and when we can expect them to take to the streets.

Due to its concealed and incremental nature, piecemeal erosion of democracy may provoke only fragmented popular resistance rather than mass mobilization across entire societies. As Bermeo (2016) notes "when backsliding yields situations that are fluid and ill-defined, taking action to defend democracy becomes particularly difficult" (Bermeo, 2016, p. 6). Moreover, "slow slides toward authoritarianism often lack both the bright spark that ignites an effective call to action and the opposition and movement leaders who can voice that clarion call" (Bermeo, 2016, p. 14). Without common identification of violations, the mobilization of citizens in defence of democracy becomes even more challenging (Gandhi, 2019, p. 15).

Moreover, participation in protests is a costly form of political behavior compared to conventional participation through the ballot (Dahlum et al., 2019). Although

this cost likely is higher in autocracies compared to democracies, all contentious actions outside the institutionalized political structures impose costs on the participants, especially when it transcends the boundaries of legality. While the majority of protests in democracies are nonviolent (Chenoweth, 2020) and seldom met with brutal repression, an aura of actual or potential violence commonly accompanies both media representations and popular perceptions of protest events. These images are part of an overall view which balances the 'right to protest' against a need for 'law and order'. With reference to the latter, authorities may present a threat of violence in the form heavy police presence and engage in violent repression of protesters. The threat of violence rises the costs of protesting. However, the individual cost also includes social stigma, time and energy. Together, this presents a collective action problem (Olson, 1971). To overcome the cost barrier, people need to be sufficiently motivated to accept the costs.

This chapter has bridged the two extensive bodies of literature concerning democratic erosion and protest. It has placed protest politics within the context of democratic erosion, and in doing so it has identified a substantive research gap. As the first study, to the best of my knowledge, to systematically test the effect of democratic erosion on the subsequent occurrence of protests in defence of democracy in a cross-national time series framework, my contribution is to delineate the details of when ordinary citizens engage in contentious claims-making facing threats to democracy. The research question guiding this thesis is: when is democratic erosion is met with mass mobilization in defence of democracy? And the subsequent theory chapter is devoted to delineate the necessary mobilizing mechanisms for protests in defence of democracy.

3 Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I present the theoretical framework guiding this thesis. The theoretical foundation will be how people overcome and solve collective action problems with attention to opportunities and motivation. This is a rather conventional starting point when seeking to explain when people protest, and draws heavily on the classic literature of contentious politics and social movements (della Porta, 1988, 2014; Kuran, 1997; Kuran & Romero, 2019; McAdam & Tarrow, 2011; McAdam et al., 2001; Tarrow, 1993, 1996; Tilly, 2004, 2006). While there is a large body of literature concerned with how, why and when protests, oftentimes seeking democratization, succeed (Amenta, 2006; Amenta et al., 2005; Andrews, 1997; Banaszak, 1996; Celestino & Gleditsch, 2013; Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Dahlum et al., 2019; DeNardo, 1985; Giugni, 2004, 2007; Giugni et al., 1999; Kadivar & Ketchley, 2018; Soule & Olzak, 2004), this thesis focuses on the drivers of protest participation and leaves the question about success for future studies.

I broadly split the preconditions of mass mobilization into two complimentary and necessary categories: opportunities and motivations. While this thesis is centred on *collective* action, it is ultimately the individual who chooses whether to participate in any given protest event. This calculus is informed both by individual motivation and opportunity to engage.

Democratic erosion motivates protests in defence of democracy while simultaneously limiting the space and opportunity to come together in collective claims-making. The interplay between these two opposing mechanisms poses a key contention as they isolated predicts opposite outcomes. They pull in opposite directions and only the combined outcome - the count of protests - is empirically measurable. Thus, it becomes challenging to accurately delineate the specific dynamics. Nevertheless, disaggregating democracy and studying how democratic erosion of different democratic components affects protest intensity improve the insight into the mobilizing dynamics. While erosion of different democratic aspects will influence both the motivation for and the opportunity to protest, the relative strengths of these divergent mechanisms are likely to differ.

Micromobilization studies ask what causes some individuals to decide to participate in protests, whereas others, who are seemingly equally affected by a given

situation, decide not to. To answer this question, structural factors have frequently been cited with reference to resource mobilization theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). This attention to resources and opportunities can also be found in the classic framework of greed and grievances form the civil war literature (Cederman et al., 2013; P. Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon & Laitin, 2003). As a counter to the focus on opportunities, other scholars have emphasized cognitive liberation as the process by which members of some aggrieved group "collectively define their situations as unjust and subject to change through group action" (McAdam, 1999, 2013). Moving further in this direction, relative deprivation and frame alignment theories underlines how individual perceptions of reality shape the decision to engage in collective action or remain on the sidelines (Bartusevičius & van Leeuwen, 2022; Gurr, 1970; D. Snow et al., 2014; D. A. Snow et al., 1986).

I argue that relative deprivation and frame alignment theory lend useful and valuable lenses to study protests in defence of democracy through. Particularly when addressing individual motivations. Relative deprivation theory provides an explanation of how perceptions of relative disadvantages, here cause by democratic erosion, cause emotions of anger and injustice, which in turn motivates direct action in the form of protest. I particularly draw on the concept of decremental deprivation, which allows for internal individual comparisons between past and present. Frame alignment theory further explain how civil society groups (or other actors) can amplify and frame individual grievances to increase mobilization. This is further substantiated by insights from the literature on civil society's organizational capacity and the general, yet fundamental observation made by scholars and activists alike, that people very rarely take direct action in the form of protest. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to theorize why democratic erosion sometimes is met with fierce resistance and other times with deafening silence.

3.1 Democratic Erosion at Large

Before addressing how erosion of different democratic components may explain when people protest in defence of democracy, I turn to democratic erosion a large. In this section I demonstrate how democratic erosion positively affects the motivation to protest while simultaneously negatively affecting the opportunities to engage in collective actions.

To underline how these two mechanisms work in opposite directions, I outline two theoretical scenarios where each mechanism is isolated. I start by exclusively discussing democratic erosion as a motivator, which results in hypothesis H1a. This if followed by an examination of the opportunity mechanism. Isolating the opportu-

nity mechanism leads to an alternative hypothesis, H2b. Last, I acknowledge that these are only theoretical scenarios and that democratic erosion will interact with these two mechanisms in tandem. I thus discuss the relative strength of motivation and opportunity in the context of democratic erosion. Ultimately, I believe motivation to be most important mobilizing mechanism in the context of democratic erosion.

3.1.1 Democratic Erosion as Decremental Deprivation

Since the publication of *Why Men Rebel* (Gurr 1970), relative deprivation has been theorized to motivate direct collective action, both violent rebellion and non-violent contentious actions (Bartusevičius & van Leeuwen, 2022; Cederman et al., 2013; Cederman et al., 2011; Grasso et al., 2019; Nagel, 1974; Russett, 1964; Sigelman & Simpson, 1977; Smith et al., 2012; van Zomeren et al., 2008).[11] At its core, the concept of relative deprivation is based on subjective perceptions of inequalities. While objective inequalities certainly informs subjective inequalities, they do not necessarily correspond (Gurr, 1970; Langer & Mikami, 2013; Rustad, 2016; Smith et al., 2012). Rather, the effect of the former on the latter is modified by a range of other conditions.[12]

Individual action is ultimately determined by the individual's perception of their situation. Hence subjective grievances and relative deprivation are particularly useful when seeking to explain protest patterns. Relative deprivation is defined as an "actor's perception of discrepancy between their value expectations and their value capabilities" (Gurr, 1970, p. 24). Value expectations are "the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled" and value capabilities are "the goods and conditions they think they are capable of getting and keeping" (ibid., 24). Relative deprivation arises due to a perception of a discrepancy between what one has and what one believes one is rightfully entitled to.

Extant empirical research on the mobilizing qualities of relative deprivation has mainly focused on static inequalities, and often group-based inequalities rather than individual inwqualities (Cederman et al., 2013; Østby, 2008, 2013).[13] Moreover, inequalities have often been linked to economic resources. In contrast, I'm basing my argument on dynamic and individual inequalities with reference to political

[11] While Gurr's seminal publication popularized and significantly advanced the theory of relative deprivation within the context of grievance theories of collective action, the idea that satisfaction and deprivation are relative to the available comparison that one has were originally developed by Stouffer et al. (1949) and Merton (1957)

[12] See Power (2018) for an in-depth qualitative investigation into the diverging effects of absolute deprivation and relative deprivation, as well as the tension between objective and subjective grievances (Power, 2018)

[13] For critiques, see Bartusevičius, 2019; Dyrstad and Hillesund, 2020; Koos, 2018; Miodownik and Nir, 2016; Pettigrew, 2015, 2016; Rustad, 2016

freedoms and rights. Although this is not the most conventional application of relative deprivation theory, it is fully supported by Gurr's original contribution and further tested by several scholars (Bartusevičius & van Leeuwen, 2022).

Gurr argued that persistent relative derivation, as a consequence of inequality, was likely to lead to psychological adjustment rather than direct action, underlining the need for understanding dynamic forms of relative deprivation, including changes in individual's living conditions (Gurr, 1970, pp. 46–56). The notion that people react to undesirable change rather than an undesirable status quo is extensively demonstrated in both social psychology (Pettigrew, 2015) and behavioural economics (Kahneman et al., 1991; McDermott et al., 2008). It is also used in prospect theory and loss theory (Bartusevičius & van Leeuwen, 2022; Mercer, 2005; Tezcür, 2016). Temporal comparisons compared to static comparisons, produce stronger negative emotions, which in turn more strongly motivate participation in collective action (Pettigrew, 2015). Moreover, temporal comparison promote risk-seeking, whereas static comparisons promote risk-aversion, which in turn relate to the probability of joining protests (Kahneman et al., 1991; McDermott et al., 2008). The specifics of these mechanisms are well beyond the scope of this thesis, so for now these remain as general assumptions laying the foundation for my context-specific arguments.

While the inequalities linked to deprivation most commonly have been conceptualized in economic terms, Gurr did note in his original work that the actual goods or conditions over which deprivation may occur vary across cultures and include welfare (e.g., constitutional protections), power (e.g., to influence politics) and interpersonal values (e.g., ability to participate in associations) (Gurr, 1970, pp. 25–26). Recent studies have also examined the mobilizing effects of political inequalities and grievances and found significant effects (Dyrstad & Hillesund, 2020; Hillesund, 2015; Miodownik & Nir, 2016).

I conceptualize democratic erosion as a potential cause of individual dynamic deprivation. The individual may perceive this deprivation as an unjust grievance causing emotions of frustration and anger which in turn motivates action and participation in protest activity (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Berkowitz, 1989). This correspond to the notion of decremental deprivation which arises when the individual's value capabilities decrease while the value expectations remain unchanged.[14] In the context of democratic erosion, decremental deprivation arises when the individual experience loss of democratic rights and freedoms while still viewing the

[14]Other forms of dynamic deprivation are "aspirational deprivation", which arises when value capabilities remain unchanged but expectations increase, and "progressive deprivation" which occurs when steady and simultaneous improvement in value expectations and capabilities is followed by stabilization or decline in the latter.

same rights and freedoms as rightful entitlements. The present is thus perceived as a "domain of loss where the pre-crisis status quo becomes the standard reference point" (Mercer, 2005, p. 5). In these situations, prospect theory predicts risk-seeking with the aim of limiting the current loss and averting future loss, and, by extension, higher susceptibility to being mobilized for direct collective action (Bartusevičius & van Leeuwen, 2022; Kahneman et al., 1991; McDermott et al., 2008; Mercer, 2005; Tezcür, 2016).

While political violence often is the outcome studied through the lens of relative deprivation, previous studies have found that decremental deprivation also is likely to trigger non-violent protest activity (Giugni & Grasso, 2016; Grasso & Giugni, 2016).[15] Grasso et al. (2019) study the divergent effects of relative deprivation on different types of political participation in democracies. They find that relative deprivation[16] depress volunteering with parties as well as other types of conventional political participation, while stimulating engagement in various kinds of protest activism. These findings support the argument that individual feelings of relative deprivation have mobilising effects for protests and is in line with earlier grievance-based accounts of protest participation that have linked relative deprivation to anti-systemic action (Buechler, 2004).

Loosing what one once possessed is likely to be experienced as particularly unfair (Bartusevičius & van Leeuwen, 2022). Moreover, the loss of individual democratic rights and freedoms are visible to the individual, often painful and can easily be viewed as unjust. These are feelings that then constitute the motivation to participate in protest activity in defence of democracy. Additionally, the reference point established by decremental deprivation provides a clear goal for potential protesters: either to reverse the changes or at least to prevent anticipated future changes. A clear goal is important both for protests success, but also in aiding initial mobilization (Popovic & Miller, 2015). Moreover, people have a stronger reason to believe their actions matter if the goal is perceived as clear and obtainable. Beliefs about the efficacy of collective action and the necessity of acting are temporally and contextually variable and subject to micromobilization efforts to amplify them (D. A. Snow et al., 1986). At a fundamental level, walking out the door to protest requires a certain belief that your actions matter.

Democracy is a public good, meaning that it is non-rivalling and non-excluding. This provides incentives for free-riding. If the protest in defence of democracy is successful, the individual will receive democratic rights and freedoms whether they

[15] While I do not distinguish between non-violent and violent protests, I recognize that the majority of protests in democracies are non-violent. See Figure A.1

[16] Here conceptualized as a negative economic context and operationalized through a survey question asking respondents whether they felt that their household economic conditions had deteriorated in the last 5 years (Grasso et al., 2019, p. 405)

participated in the protests. Thus, to mobilize people need to be convinced that their presence matter (Gamson, 1992; Popovic & Miller, 2015; Popović & Djinovic, 2018).

In democracies, the incumbent is dependent on the support of the electorate. While the extent of this dependence varies cross the democracy continuum, it will be difficult for the incumbent to maintain position if enough people (including, opposition parties, private companies, organizations, interest groups and other individuals) unite against the deliberate efforts to erode democratic norms, institutions and procedures. Moreover, as democratic erosion is willed politics, it can, at least theoretically, be reversed. It is thus, theoretically and conceptually plausible that protest activity will restore the the situation to match the established reference point. If that is not perceived as plausible by citizens, protesting may still deter or halt future democratic erosion. Citizens experiencing democratic erosion should thus have a minimal belief that their actions matter.

Behavioural economists find that risk-seeking, such as participating in collective action, is related to prospective losses (i.e., future democratic erosion) rather than prospective gains (i.e., future democratic consolidation) (Kahneman et al., 1991; Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; McDermott et al., 2008). Faced with negative prospects, individuals may find themselves morally obliged to act to prevent further worsening of the situation. This is particularly relevant in the study of democratic erosion as this is a result of a deliberative strategy by the incumbent. The incumbent has been elected, often on a platform highlighting anti-democratic values and plans (Berman, 2021; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Democratic erosion seldom happen in isolation, but is rather part of a bigger political campaign. Citizens are often aware of this, both at an abstract level but also in their day-to-day lives as future limitations of democracy often is a central part of the public political discourse. Seeking to be perceived as sufficiently democratic, the incumbent is likely to frame their actions as needed by society, wanted by the public and legitimate based on election results (McCoy et al., 2018). Thus, plans of further limitations put on democracy are not completely hidden from the public sphere, and prospective losses of democratic rights and freedoms may function as a motivator for direct action.

Isolating the motivational effect of democratic erosion, relative deprivation theory provides a credible explanation of how and why democratic erosion may have a mobilizing effect. As citizens perceive democratic erosion as a loss, causing feelings of unfairness, injustice and anger, they become motivated to engage in risk-seeking actions such as anti-state protests. Grounded in this discussion, my first hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1a *Democratic erosion is associated with increased anti-state protest intensity*

3.1.2 Democratic Erosion as Opportunity Limiting

As briefly touched upon earlier, democratic erosion does not only motivate direct action, it also limits the opportunities to organize and engage in protest activity. Broadly speaking the opportunities for direct collective action in the form of protest can be assumed to be relatively high in democracies (Goldstone, 2004). As democracies seek to uphold the right of assembly and freedom of speech, as well as generally allowing for diverging opinions and abstaining from violent repression of peaceful protests, the barriers for collective action are *comparatively* low. This makes mobilizing anti-state protests in democracies a different endeavour than mobilizing in autocracies as protests in the form of peaceful demonstrations generally is viewed as a legitimate form of engaging with authorities.[17] Moreover, one could expect democratically elected leaders to be more responsive to citizens' demands compared to their autocratic counterparts (Grimes, 2013).

Although opportunities for protest activity are relatively high in democracies, these opportunity structures are intrinsically linked to democratic rights and freedoms - such as freedom of assembly and freedom of speech. Consequently, when democratic erosion unfolds, it limits the opportunities to protest.

Protest events such as rallies, sit-ins or demonstrations rarely occur spontaneously. Rather, they require some minimal level of organization. This entails both consensus mobilization (gathering sympathizers) and action mobilization (motivate action) (Klandermans, 1984). Here, the civil society landscape, media autonomy and capacity of opposition parties are important factors - both in diffusing information and in facilitating collective action. When these resources are limited, constrained, or otherwise repressed as consequences of democratic erosion, the capacity for organizing collective action is reduced.

In many ways the classic collective action problem can be solved not by mobilizing individuals directly, but rather compel civil society organizations, opposition parties, media actors and other interest groups to mobilize through their already established and interconnected networks. The social networks established and maintained through civil society groups and organizations provide an inducing space to develop common narratives, diffuse information and plan direct action (Gamson, 1992; Klandermans, 1997; Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; Paxton, 2002). Limiting this space also limits civil society's primary function: to provide "the basis for the

[17] While demonstrations by no means are the only form of protest, it is the most common one in the current climate of contentious politics (Chenoweth, 2020) and the one associated with mass mobilization

limitation of state power" (Huntington, 2016, p. 204). Together with independent media actors, civil society is able to serve as democracy's watchdog by externally checking the incumbent (Diamond, 1994; Lipset et al., 1956).

Democratic erosion does not only limit the organizational capacity necessary for collective action, it also increase the costs associated with participating in protest activity. Democratic erosion commonly limits individual liberties - such as transparent laws with predictable enforcement and an impartial public administration - and the independence and fairness of the judicial system. Moreover, democratic erosion often entails expanded authorities at the expense of normal regulations, commonly in the form of expansion of police powers. This increase the risk associated with protest activity and may cause people to keep their preferences more private and to be more hesitant to openly oppose the regime. Hence, collective action becomes harder to achieve.

Exclusively addressing the effects of democratic erosion on opportunities to protest, yields alternative expectations. While opportunities are relatively high in democracies, they are intrinsically linked to democratic rights and freedoms. Thus, when democratic erosion unfolds, it limits the opportunities to engage in protest activity. This is particularly relevant for anti-state protests. Consequently, I present an alternative first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1b *Democratic erosion is associated with decreased anti-state protest intensity*

3.1.3 Summary

Democratic erosion have opposing effects on the opportunities and motivation to protest in defence of democracy. The two hypotheses 1a and 1b represent theoretical scenarios where motivation and opportunity work in isolation. However, in reality these mechanisms are triggered in concert and will simultaneously impact the likelihood of seeing protests in defence of democracy. Hypothetically, if the two effects were of same magnitude, we would not see any relationship between democratic erosion and anti-state protests, neither positive nor negative. If one were to be stronger however, this would cause democratic erosion to be either positively or negatively associated with protest activity.

In the case of democratic erosion, I postulate that the motivational effect will be more important than the limitations put on opportunities. While democratic erosion curtails opportunities to protest, there is a lower limit to this curtailment. As I am studying democratic erosion, my sample only contains democracies. Once a country experiences sufficient democratic erosion to no longer fall into the category of democracies, democratic breakdown has occurred, and the country is no longer part

of my sample. India function as an illustrative example here. India is included in my sample of democracies up until 2019 when the country dropped from an electoral democracy to an electoral autocracy. As this thesis is concerned with democratic erosion, the autocratic consolidation in India post 2019 is irrelevant here. As a theoretical and practical consequence, the countries in my sample cannot exhibit extreme repression of opportunities to protest.

Moreover, the extensive list of anti-state protests in autocracies serve as a reminder that people will find ways to overcome the collective action problem if sufficiently motivated. Theories of cascade effects (Kuran, 1991; Lohmann, 1994) and the safety of large numbers (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; DeNardo, 1985; Granovetter, 1978; Marwell, 1993), both provide convincing explanations of how barriers to protests can be overcome if people are sufficiently motivated.

Based on my discussion of democratic erosion as a decremental deprivation, I argue that the loss of democratic rights and freedoms hold the potential to be sufficiently motivating. The experience of loss and the fear of prospective losses should motivate anti-state protests. This is not to say that democratic erosion *always* will be followed by protests in defence of democracy, but rather than given the lower limit of curtailment of opportunity structures, the motivation to protests caused by democratic erosion is likely to outweigh the limits on opportunities. Consequently, I postulate that hypothesis H1a are stronger than hypothesis H1b. In the following empirical analysis, I thus test H1a:

Hypothesis 1a *Democratic erosion is associated with increased anti-state protest intensity*

3.2 Disaggregated Democratic Erosion

Democracy is an aggregated measure of multiple democratic components - including norms, rules, institutions, and procedures. As democratic erosion targets these different aspects of democracy, both opportunities and motivation to protest are likely to be affected. However, there are few reasons to believe that motivation and opportunity are affected equally across erosion of different democratic components. Democratic erosion in the form of limiting media independence and democratic erosion targeting the judiciary's ability to check the incumbent have different implications for how the space and opportunity for protest activity is limited. Similarly, motivation to engage in protest activity is likely to be dependent on the aspect of democracy targeted. Some types of democratic erosion are likely to be perceived by citizens as stronger injustices and more detrimental to democracy. These types of democratic erosion are thus more likely to have stronger mobilizing effects

In this section, I examine how erosion of different democratic components have heterogeneous mobilizing effects, and how this interplay is expected to impact the outcome that is protests in defence of democracy. I argue that democratic erosion of individual democratic rights and freedoms, such as freedom of expression and association as well as individual civil liberties, will have a more directly negative effect on opportunities to protest compared to erosion targeting democratic institutions such electoral, legislative, and judicial bodies. However, democratic erosion targeting individual democratic rights and freedoms will also cause stronger motivation to participate in anti-state protests compared to erosion of democratic institutions.

In line with the above discussion on the relative strengths of the opportunity and motivation mechanisms in the context of democratic erosion, I believe the motivation mechanism to be the most important in predicting anti-state protests. This leads to hypotheses H2-H7.

3.2.1 Heterogenous Effects on Opportunities

While all forms of democratic erosion limit the space for people to hold the incumbent accountable, there is variation in how direct citizens experience these limitations. As touched upon in the previous section, civil society and opposition parties remain key actors in facilitating collective anti-state protests. A vibrant civil society expands citizens access to information, sustain activist networks through social embeddedness (Klandermans et al., 2008) and contributes to the creation of a public sphere outside established authorities (Cohen, 1999; Habermas, 1989). As people become versed in politics and are socialized into democratic citizens (Diamond, 1994; Lipset et al., 1956; Putnam et al., 1994), opposition parties and civil society actors can use their networks to mobilize for protests. While not all civil society organizations oppose authoritarianism and different associations have been shown to have divergent effects on democracy (Paxton, 2002), those likely to experience the costs of democratic erosion are generally pro-democracy and plurality. Consequently, when democratic erosion targets the freedom of association, the opportunities for protests in defence of democracy are limited.

I argue that the same is true for freedom of expression and individual liberties. When freedom of discussion or media independence is limited due to democratic erosion, overcoming the collective action problem becomes harder. A central part of coming together in collective action is information sharing. The role of media actors in democracies is somewhat similar to that of civil society. Often conceptualized as "the fourth estate", independent media actors are essential in checking the incumbent and critically communicating political decisions to the public. Doing so, they enable citizens to stay informed and to hold the incumbent accountable.

Moreover, one of the reasons why opportunities to protests in democracies generally are quite high, is the trust in the authorities that they will abstain from unnecessary repression, allow diverging opinions, and secure the right of assembly. If individual liberties such as transparent laws with predictable enforcement, access to justice and an impartial public administration are challenged by democratic erosion efforts, the trust in authorities is likely reduced. Individuals may become wearier of participating in protest actions, and although they might be want to voice their disagreement with the incumbent, the risk associated with protesting might be perceived as too high.

Evidence point to civil society organizations and media actors being two of the democratic aspects *most often* targeted by incumbent-led democratic erosion efforts (Boese & Lindberg, 2022; Hellmeier et al., 2021). This observation concurs with the understanding of democratic erosion as a deliberate strategy initiated and led by the incumbent to strategically erode democracy while remaining in office (Bermeo, 2016; Paloumpis et al., 2019; Varol, 2014). In democracies, remaining in office entails re-elections, or at the very least that incumbents are not deposed by parliament. Consequently, they must continue to appease their support base and act within certain limits while incrementally eroding democracy. The incumbent knows that they need to allow for a certain amount of dissent to continue to come present as democratic. Violent repression of peaceful anti-state protests will likely induce backlash (Aytaç et al., 2018; Francisco, 2004), as will sudden shut-downs of independent media favouring the opposition. However, gradually limiting the associational landscape, heightening barriers to forming civil society organizations, incrementally reducing media freedom etc. are likely to pass with less negative attention. Moreover, it limits the fundamental opportunities to organize collective action. Democratic erosion targeting civil society autonomy and capacity reduces the ability to organize and sustain mobilization in defence of democracy. Ultimately it preventively limits protest while avoiding the potential backlash associated with reactive repression.

Democratic erosion targeting institutions such as electoral, judicial, and legislative bodies will reduce opportunities to protest, however, not as strongly as other forms of democratic erosion. While independent and resourceful democratic institutions are a fundamental part of a functioning democracy, the weakening of such institutions will likely have less direct effects on the space and opportunities for protesting. As an example, while protest acts might be protected or limited by laws upheld by the court, the judiciary is mainly concerned with the constraining the executive. Similarly, free and fair elections and an independent legislature only indirectly affect the space for contentious actions. Reduced compliance with the judiciary or diminished legislative oversight may allow the incumbent to more ag-

gressively repress civil society organizations and protesters. However, the effect on protest spaces are directed through repression of individual rights and freedoms such as freedom of expression and association. As contentious politics occur outside the institutionalized political system, it is less affected by democratic erosion targeting democratic institutions and procedures compared to democratic erosion targeting individual rights and freedoms.

Seen in isolation, the opportunity mechanism would predict that democratic erosion targeting freedom of expression, freedom of association and individual liberties would cause comparatively less protests than democratic erosion targeting electoral, judicial and legislative bodies. However, as I will turn to next, democratic erosion targeting individual rights and freedoms are also likely to more directly influence citizen's motivations to protest. If sufficiently strong, these motivational affects may outweigh the limits imposed on opportunities to protest.

3.2.2 Heterogenous Effects on Motivation

Opportunities to protest are not sufficient predictors of protest activity by themselves. Ultimately, people must care about the issue at hand and be motivated for direct action. And as the well-known activist and scholar Srdja Popovic so bluntly notes, most people don't understand, or care, about the inner workings of the state bureaucracy (Popović & Djinovic, 2018). However, they care about their everyday life and they notice, and are moved by, injustices that affect them directly (Popovic & Miller, 2015, p. 35). Thus, organizers and activists need to make the fight relevant for the individual (Popovic & Miller, 2015, p. 32). Moreover, people need to feel like their actions matter so organizers have to pick "pick fights big enough to matter and small enough to win" (Jonathan Kozol in Popovic, 2015 p. 37). "Picking fights big enough to matter and small enough to win" is just as much an issue of framing as anything else. Some types of democratic erosion are more visible, affect the individual directly and easier to frame as injustices that warrant direct action.

Facing democratic erosion, there likely exist some core group that cares deeply about the issue. Be it a civil society organization, think tank, academic network or opposition party. These groups will perceive the erosion of democracy as unjust and illegitimate, warranting direct action in defence of democracy. The general public however, might be characterized by indifference, deception, ambiguity or uncertainty (Goffman, 1974). It then becomes the core group's task to frame the issue of democratic erosion in a way that informs, explain and motivates a wider segment of the population to take action. When democratic erosion yields situations that are fluid and ill-defined, taking action to defend democracy becomes particularly difficult (Bermeo, 2016, p. 6). The technical, far-removed and deliberately shrouded

erosion of democracy must be framed and amplified in a manner that makes people care enough to take action.

Drawing on both relative deprivation theory, presented above, and frame alignment theory, which will be discussed below, I argue that democratic erosion targeting individual democratic rights and freedoms *on average* will induce stronger feelings off injustice and loss compared to democratic erosion targeting democratic institutions such as the electoral, judicial, and legislative bodies. Moreover, it will be easier for the core group to frame democratic erosion targeting individual rights and freedoms in ways that increase mobilization compared to democratic erosion targeting democratic institutions. These two arguments are interconnected as the individual feelings of loss, injustice and anger associated with democratic erosion affect how susceptible the individual is to accept and internalize the framing provided by the core group.

Frame alignment theory has a long standing in the study of both protest emergence and protest success. Frame alignment refers to the linkage of individual and civil society organizations' interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs are congruent with civil society organizations' activities, goals and ideology (D. A. Snow et al., 1986, p. 464). By providing context and rendering events meaningful, frames function to organize experience and guide both individual and collective action (Goffman, 1974).

In the context of democratic erosion, people must both be made aware of the consequences of the incumbent's actions and then interpret them as sufficiently negative and unjust to warrant action. The interpretative element points to "the enormous variability in the subjective meanings people attach to their objective situations" (McAdam, 1999, p. 34). If democratic erosion is successfully framed as adverse and unjust, it is easier to mobilize people to action as injustice is a stronger mobilizer than misfortune (Gamson, 1992; Piven, 1977; Turner, 1969). This is in line with Gamson's (1982) argument that rebellion against authorities is partly contingent on the generation and adoption of of an injustice frame that defines the actions of the authority as unjust and thereby legitimates noncompliance. De Vydt and Ketelaars (2021) empirically test the mobilizing effects of frame alignment on protest turnout and find a significant and positive effect, corroborating what has often been treated as a theoretical assumption rather than an empirical question.

One form of frame alignment is frame amplification which refers to the "clarification and invigoration of an interpretive frame that bears on a particular issue, problem or set of events" (D. A. Snow et al., 1986, p. 469).[18] Democratic erosion targeting individual rights and freedoms such as the freedom of discussion, access to

[18]Snow et al. (1886) outlines four types of frame alignment processes. These are 1) frame bridging, 2) frame extension, 3) frame transformation, and 4) frame amplification.

justice or barriers to civil society autonomy are more likely to causes stronger feelings of decremental derivation as the changes, and their consequences, generally are visible to the individual and felt immediately. Once the perception of unjust loss is installed in the individual, it is easier for civil society organizations and other actors to amplify these feelings through framing efforts, resulting in mobilization in defence of democracy. The verb "framing" alludes to an "active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614). Something is being done by someone to alter someone else's perception of reality. This is easier to do when the erosion of democracy targets many at the same time (Chwe, 2001), is visible to the public, is concrete, affects individual's every-day life and clearly stems from the incumbents willed politics. Democratic erosion targeting individual democratic rights and freedoms fulfil these criteria.

Certain frames can aid in the coordination of individual grievances and shape the collective narrative, but the individual experience still lies at the core. While reduced legislative constraints on the executive and reduced civil liberties may be equally detrimental to the objective measure of democracy (e.g., by V-Dem or Freedom House), individuals are likely to experience, interpret and perceive them differently (D. A. Snow et al., 1986). Consequently, they are likely to react differently.

For example, while democratic erosion targeting civil society limits opportunities to protest, it also directly targets people that are already likely to engage in protest activity. People active in civil society organizations will likely perceive democratic erosion in general as an unjust deprivation and thus be motivated to act. Moreover, the same people will likely be particularly motivated to engage in protest activity facing democratic erosion targeting civil society in particularly. This speaks to the core tension between opportunity and motivation.

Democratic erosion is generally shrouded in bureaucracy and difficult to detect (Bermeo, 2016). However, democratic erosion targeting the inner workings of institutions and the relations between different parts of the government are particularly difficult for the public to identify, understand and react to. Democratic erosion of this kind is far-removed from the individual and may not seem urgent not detrimental to democracy. The average citizen does not know enough about the appointment of judges or the powers of the legislature to react boldly to erosion of these institutions (Beaulieu, 2014). However: people react to the erosion of individual rights and freedoms. It is individual, affect them personally, happen immediately and easily framed as unjust.

Here it is important to keep in mind what democratic erosion entail. As it occurs in democracies, democratic erosion targeting the election system rarely takes the form of outright electoral fraud. Similarly, democratic erosion targeting judicial or legislative bodies seldom result in the complete disregard of the constitution or the

suspension of the parliament. Rather, democratic erosion is incremental in nature and driven by the incumbent to gradually dismantle democratic norms, rules and institutions (Berman, 2021; Bermeo, 2016; Kneuer, 2021; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019).

Last, standing up to a whole bureaucratic reform may seem like an impossible task. Especially since incumbent will try to counter any framing of such activities as democratic erosion and deliberately shroud the details. Although there are exceptions, such as Burkina Faso in 2014 and Senegal 2011/12 where people defend democracy by protesting efforts to revise term limits (Yarwood, 2016), it is generally easier to mobilize people to protest against a reduction in a specific civil liberty that people both are aware of, care about and believe they can affect (Popovic & Miller, 2015).

3.2.3 Summary

I postulate that democratic erosion targeting freedom of expression, freedom of association and individual liberties will see *comparatively stronger* limitations on opportunity to protest than democratic erosion targeting electoral, judicial, and legislative bodies. However, erosion of the latter three democratic components will cause *comparatively weaker* motivation to engage in protest activity. On the other hand, the loss of democratic rights and freedoms, in particular those tied directly to the individual, will cause stronger feelings of deprivation. These are further amplified by civil society actors through framing efforts, to motivate action. The motivational mechanism is particularly strong for individual rights and freedoms such as the freedoms of expression and association, as well as individual liberties.

In line with the discussion in section 3.1.3 Summary, I argue that both opportunity and motivation will be affected by erosion of different democratic components. However, I believe the motivation to protest caused by loss of individual rights and freedoms to be stronger than the resulting barriers to collective action. Thus, I present the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2 *Democratic erosion targeting freedom of expression is associated with increased anti-state protest intensity*

Hypothesis 3 *Democratic erosion targeting freedom of association is associated with increased anti-state protest intensity*

Hypothesis 4 *Democratic erosion targeting individual liberties is associated with increased anti-state protest intensity*

Furthermore, I argue that the erosion of democratic systems and institutions fail to motivate sufficiently to cause substantive anti-state mobilization. While this type of democratic erosion imposes comparatively less restrictions on the opportunity to protest, it also targets bureaucratic and complex institutions far removed from citizen's everyday life, making mobilization difficult. This leads me to the last set of hypotheses, 5-7. Note that these last three hypotheses predict no relationship between democratic erosion and anti-state protests. This is because I don't expect the motivational aspect to be strong enough to outweigh the limited opportunities, rather, I expect the two effects to cancel each other out.

Hypothesis 5 *Democratic erosion targeting electoral institutions is* ***not*** *associated with increased anti-state protest intensity*

Hypothesis 6 *Democratic erosion targeting judicial constraints is* ***not*** *associated with increased anti-state protest intensity*

Hypothesis 7 *Democratic erosion targeting legislative constraints is* ***not*** *associated with increased anti-state protest intensity*

Before moving on the empirical analysis, I want to stress that none of these hypotheses and assumptions are very strong. This thesis remains an exploratory study. While it is useful to clarify the theoretical expectations and to provide a preliminary explanation of the empirical outcomes, these will likely be subject to change as further research on the relationship between democratic erosion and protests in defence of democracy expand and improve.

Moreover, regardless of sound theoretical reasoning, human behaviour is difficult to predict and protests remain somewhat spontaneous and arbitrary (D. A. Snow & Moss, 2014; Tarrow, 1993). Even those participating in protests may do it for various reasons that does not necessarily have anything to do with any kind of ideational affinity with the movement (Ketelaars et al., 2014; Munson, 2008). Protests are also dynamic and evolve as people interact. What started as a small act may spark a revolutionary uprising, and what one maybe would think to cause mass mobilization can easily fizzle out. Just as movements and campaigns change over time, so does the individual calculus determining whether to participate in protests. These decisions are thus subject to continuous reassessment and renegotiation. Recognizing the individual, dynamic and ongoing nature of this phenomena may help to understand why it is difficult to predict when people mobilize (D. A. Snow & Moss, 2014). Moreover, it can shed light on why people react differently to seemingly similar situations.

The following empirical analysis will be guided by my theoretical expectations

and rigorously test the presented hypotheses, H1a and H2-H7. I return to the contention between opportunities and motivation as I discuss my findings in chapter 7.

4 Data and Operationalizations

In this chapter, I present the data used in the analysis along with the operationalizations of the different variables. These variables measure the theoretical concepts presented earlier in the thesis. Along with the operationalizations, I present the data sources that the variables are derived from.

4.1 Data

Analysing the relationship between democratic erosion and subsequent mass mobilization in defence of democracy requires comprehensive data on both phenomena. Combining various sources, I have constructed a cross-sectional time-series resulting in an unbalanced panel data set. The unit of analysis is country-years and the data set covers the time period between 1990 and 2020. The near global coverage yields 5667 rows of observations, however, missing data on certain variables somewhat limit the final sample.

The restricted time span of 30 years is the result of both practical and theoretical considerations. The Mass Mobilization data set, which the dependent variable is drawn from, only goes back to 1990. Although this might seem like an arbitrary cut off for a country-year analysis, it covers the entire current wave of autocratization and democratic erosion widely considered to have started in the early 2000s (Bermeo, 2016; Diamond, 2021; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019; Repucci & Slipowitz, 2021).

I include countries that are classified as electoral or liberal democracies according to the RoW categorization in my dataset. As regimes can change, countries may drop out (or in) of my data set over the time period. To limit this fluctuation, I only include countries that have been classified as democracies for at least 10 years between 1990 and 2020. This need not be 10 consecutive years. This is both theoretically and practically motivated. Theoretically, my analysis is focused on democratic erosion rather than democratic breakdown. Thus, the countries found on the cusp of democracy, or only experiencing brief periods of democratic rule, are of lesser interest here. Practically, several challenges arise when pursuing regressions of very short time series (Hyndman & Athanasopoulos, 2018), especially when using fixed effects methods like I am doing (Hill et al., 2020; Mummolo & Peterson, 2018).

4.2 Operationalizations

Careful consideration of measurement validity is necessary to ensure sound research (Adcock & Collier, 2001). As described by Adcock and Collier (2001), measurement validity should entail consistency from theoretical concepts to variable operationalizations to the specific scores. The following operationalizations are based on the theoretical conceptualizations presented in my theoretical framework and strive to be both coherent and reflective of the empirical world.

4.2.1 Dependent Variable: Protest Intensity

The Mass Mobilization Data Set

While there are numerous event data sets on mass mobilization, the majority are ill-suited for my research purposes for two main reasons. First, due to the scarcity of source material such as media reports or social media posts, most protest data lack the temporal and spatial coverage to facilitate a broad statistical analysis of the recent wave of democratic erosion. Second, few data sets contain details on the claims put forward by protesters, thus making it difficult to link protest events to democratic erosion.

The Mass Mobilization in Autocracies database (MMAD) is one of the more detailed and robust protest data sets out there. However, it does not cover mobilizations in democracies which is vital to the analysis of democratic erosion, as opposed to autocratic consolidation. Another widely used data source is the NAVCO data sets that operate with the campaign as unit of analysis. While these data sets are useful for analysing social movements and their dynamics, they do not capture individual protest events nor more spontaneous reactions in the form of contentious politics. Moreover, they generally capture pro-democracy movements in autocratic or semi-democratic states. A more recent contribution to the protest data foundation is the inclusion of questions of mass mobilization for pro-democratic and pro-autocratic aims in the annual V-Dem expert survey. They ask "In this year, how frequent and large have events of mass mobilization for pro-democratic/pro-autocratic aims been" (Coppedge, 2022, p. 230). The possible answers are: 0: There have been virtually no events, 1: There have been several small-scale events, 2: There have been many small-scale events, 3: There have been several large-scale and small-scale events, and 4: There have been many large-scale and small-scale events. While the data-generating question goes to the core of my research, this method yields a relatively crude measure of protest frequency and size, more suitable to understand full regime transformations rather than democratic erosion (Hellmeier & Bernhard, 2022). Thus, this measure is not parsimonious enough to explore the relationship

between democratic erosion and the subsequent pro-democratic protests that this thesis seeks to do. Lastly, there are various machine coded data sets (i.e., SPIID and SCAD), however, most of them generally do not cover the claims of the protests which is necessary to link them to democratic erosion.

Ultimately, the Mass Mobilization (MM) data set (Clark & Regan, 2016) is the best option for my research purposes. The data set contains events where 50 or more protesters publicly demonstrate against the government, resulting in more than 10,000 protest events. Moreover, the data set spans from 1990 to 2020 and thus cover the relevant time period for the current wave of democratic erosion.

The project aims to identify any protest event where the protest targets the government, and where it involves at least 50 people. The project does not code protests in one country that are targeted at the policies of another country and in that sense, it captures only "home grown" protest activities targeted at state policies. The data set categorizes the protest claims of each individual protest enabling filtering of protests based on their demands. Protest size, protester identity and use of violence, as well as seven categories of government response are also coded.

The MM data set identifies seven categories of protester demands that describe the types of issues that motivate protest behaviour. Any protest event can have multiple demands and the data set records up to four. These categories are: labour or wage dispute, land tenure or farm issues, price increases or tax policy, police brutality or arbitrary actions, political behaviour/processes, removal of corrupt or reviled political person, social restrictions.

Protests coded as labour or wage disputes captures demands against state policy that influence labour conditions or wage rates. This can for example be state regulations regarding working hours or minimum wage. Land tenure or farm issues cover protests against access to or restrictions imposed on the use of land, for example by requisitions or regulations of previously public areas. Price increases or tax policy accounts for demands over subsidies, tax increases or levies, as well as the cost of food, utilities or similar necessities.

Police brutality or arbitrary actions captures demands against the treatment of citizens by the authorities, typically for violations of civil liberties. The political behavior or processes category is quite broad and seek to reflect demands against the political process that determines who rules and how. Protests demanding changes to the electoral system, public reform or other institutional changes are captured here. Removal of corrupt or reviled political person reflects demands against official corruption, primarily systematic corruption that generates a demand for the removal of an individual or small group within the government. Lastly social restrictions capture the imposition of constraints on interactions among or between groups. This can be restrictions imposed on certain civil society organizations or discrimination

of specific minorities.

To reduce heterogeneity in my data and, to limit potential omitted variable bias due to this heterogeneity, I restrict my sample to include protests coded as having one of the latter four demands (police brutality, political processes, removal of corrupt politician, social restrictions) as its first and/or second priority. This means that a protest coded as having labour or wage disputes as its first claim and social restrictions would be included in my sample. I have chosen this selection criterion to both exclude irrelevant protests and to include protests that may be focused on a specific issue (i.e., land rights) while also presenting claims directed at policies connected with democratic rule. In the MM data set most protests are attributed one claim category while some have two and only a few are coded as having three or four claims. While my main analysis restricts the sample of protest according to this criterion, I run robustness checks using all protests.

Potential Bias

While I still argue that the MM data set is the best source of anti-state protest data in democracies, I want to note two concerns related to potential bias. The first is specific for the MM data set and the second relates to the fundamental issue of using news sources for gathering protest event data

The MM project is US based and sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force which is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). While government funding is no reason for concern by itself, this is combined with the observation that the data set, which aim to be global in scope, omits certain countries. Most notably the US, Australia and New Zealand are left out without further explanation.

The major advantages of newspapers as sources for protest event data are access, selectivity, reliability, continuity over time, and ease of coding (Hutter, 2014, p. 349). However, there is always a degree of selection bias in the form of either event characteristics (bigger and more violent events are more widely reported), news agency characteristics (the presence and resources of a news agency influence their reporting) and/or issue characteristics (issues of a more general concern are more often reported) (Hutter, 2014; Ortiz et al., 2005). For the MM data set, coders search Lexis-Nexis for "Protest", "Demonstration", "Riot" or "Mass Mobilization" for each country-year. While not exhaustive (i.e., "gathering" could have been included), this list captures a fairly wide range of protest activity. However, the same cannot be said about the selection of newspapers. The coders are initially restricted to five major publications: New York Times, Washington Post, Christian Science Monitor, Times of London and Jerusalem Post. The North-Western weight in the source material is likely to bias the data collection towards protests in European and North

American countries and away from protests in smaller countries in other parts of the world. Moreover, as the data set cover anti-state protests, there could potentially be bias in the source material towards countries with governments not aligned with the general policies of North American and European states.

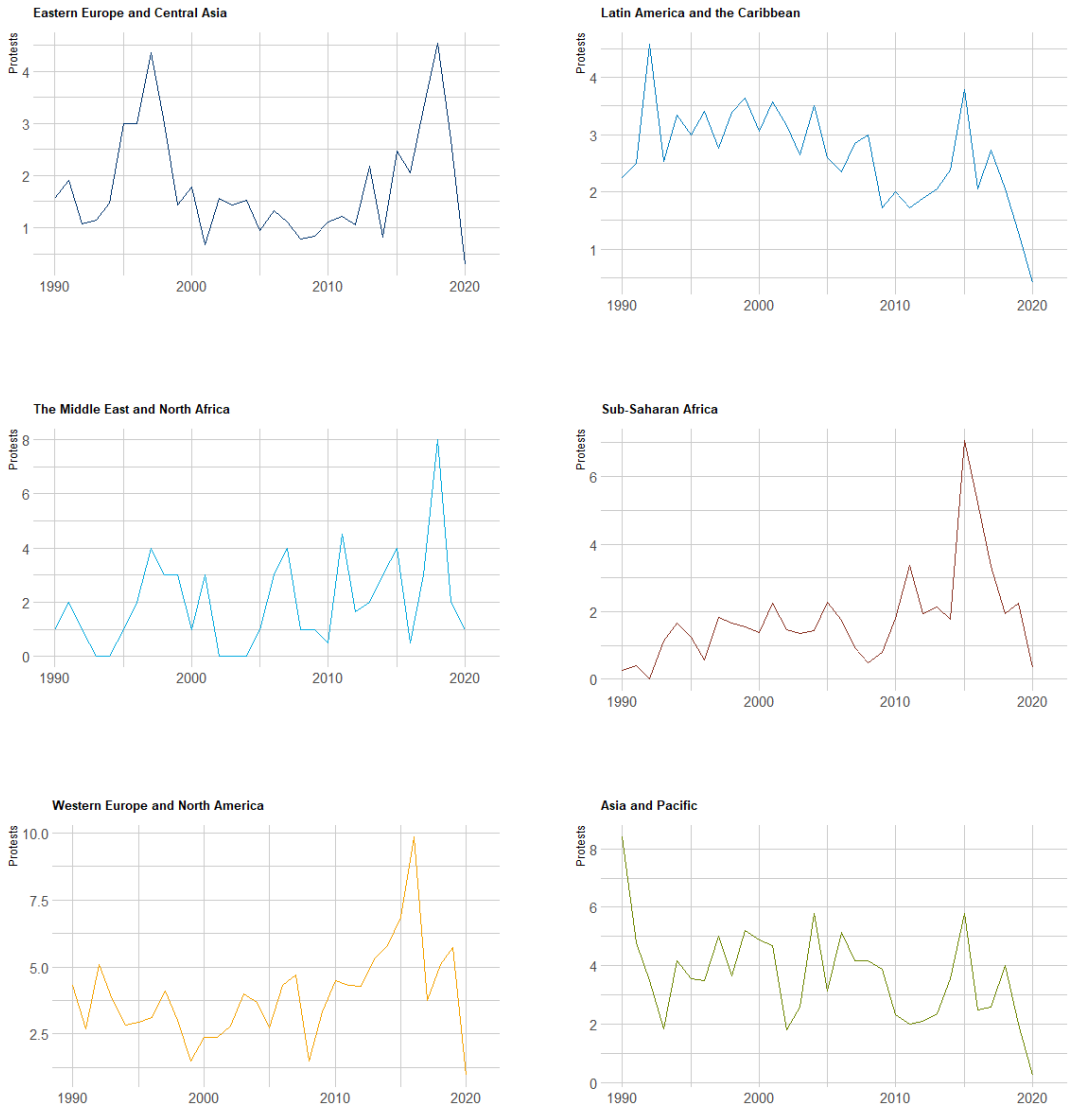
This potential bias is mitigated by the coders in that they, if searches in the main sources return less than 100 articles (for a country over a year), they expand the search to include regional and other sources (Clark & Regan, 2016). If this expansion still fails to return 100 articles, wire-reports are added to the list. While alleviating some of the concerns about bias, this should be remembered when utilising the data and taken into account when inferring both descriptive and causal inferences.

Protest Intensity

I transform the protest data into a panel data set up by counting the number of (relevant) protests in a given country year. The count then reflects protest intensity and will be my main dependent variable. I found this preferable compared to the option of a dichotomous dependent variable. The latter would lead to a logistic regression model and would predict the likelihood of observing protest occurrence in a country-year.

As I am interested in the full relationship between democratic erosion and protest activity, the variation in the outcome that count data allows for yields interesting and valuable information. Figure 4.1 show the regional average count of protests across time. In addition to illustrate regional differences, this graph also shows interesting variation across time. An alternative operationalization would be protest occurrence. This way I could use a binary variable to denote whether *any* protests occurred in a given country year. However, keeping the dependent variable as a count retains more information from the original event data, I allows for the study of the variation in protest intensity. A binary operationalization of protest occurrence would give the same importance to the case of 1 protest in a country-year as the case of 90 protests in a country-year, whereas a count accounts for the difference. I will return to the methodological implications of using count data in the next chapter.

Figure 4.1: Protest Intensity Across Regions



The Y-axis denotes the average count of protests in the region in a given year

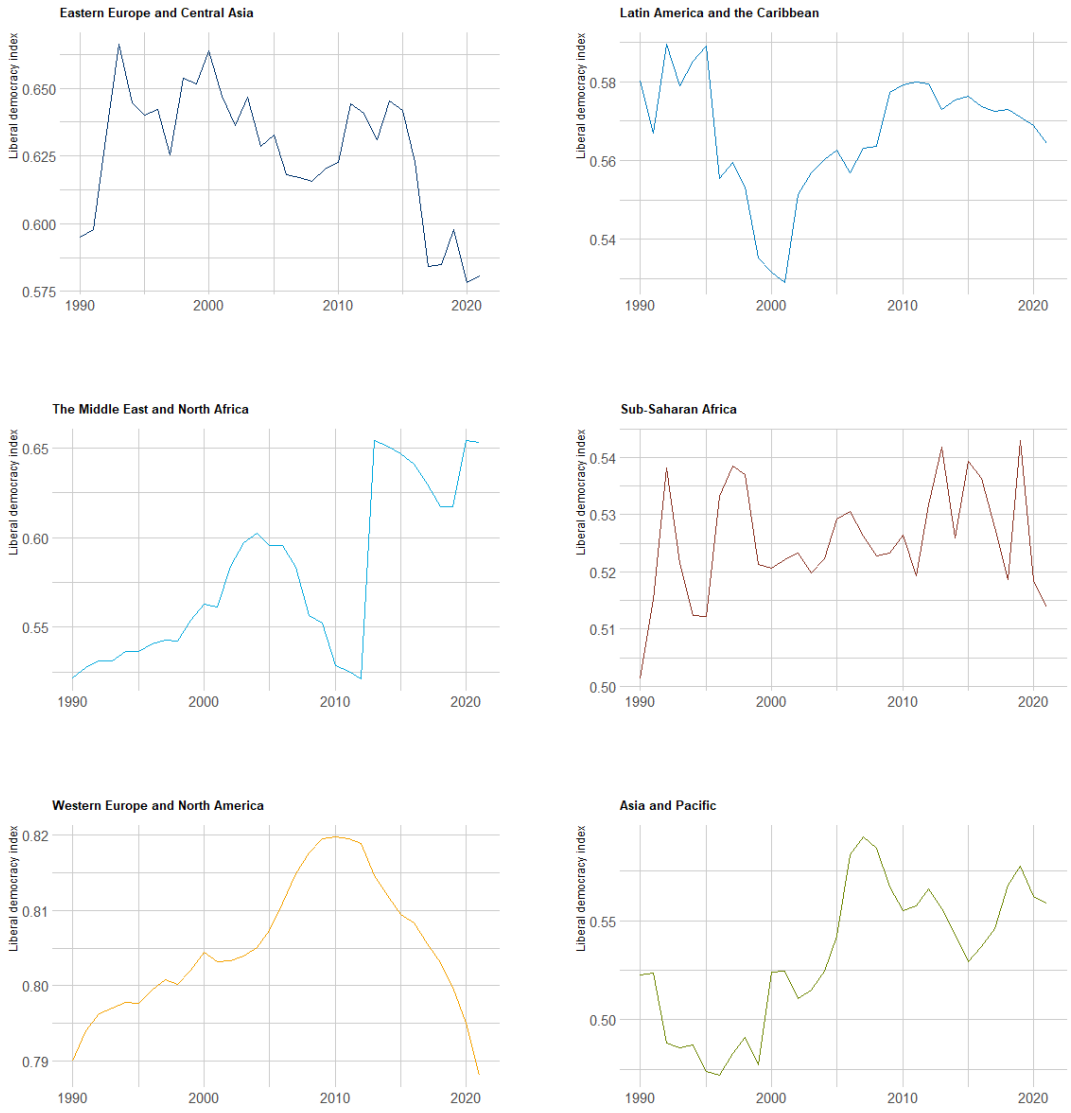
4.3 Independent Variable: Democratic Erosion

As outlined in earlier chapters, democratic erosion is a contested and currently developing concept. In this thesis, I conceptualize democratic erosion as any decline in democratic quality from year t-1 to year t occurring in countries categorized as democracies in year t. If the country no longer can be categorized as a democracy in year t, democratic breakdown has occurred rather than democratic erosion.

To measure change in democratic quality, I rely on V-Dem's Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) (Coppedge et al., 2015). This is a comprehensive measure of both electoral and liberal aspects of democracy and thus useful when seeking to measure incremental changes in democratic quality within democracies. Moreover, the index is based on several sub-indexes offering parsimonious measures of not only the aggregated levels of democratic quality, but also changes in specific democratic components. I will return to the attributes of these sub-indexes below. Figure 4.2 illustrates the temporal development of the LDI across regions. The six panels show both regional and temporal variation. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Europe and North America, a noticeable decline in democratic quality is visible post 2010. The Middle East and North Africa see a sudden and substantive increase in democracy following the Arab Spring in 2011, whereas Asia and the Pacific see a decline between 2005 and 2015, followed by five years of improvement. Last, although exhibiting fluctuation, democracy levels in Sub-Saharan Africa remain centred on roughly the same level across the 30-year span. Sub-Saharan Africa is commonly pointed to as the only region that seems to be relatively resilient to the current autocratization trend (Lührmann et al., 2019; Maerz et al., 2020).

As is common for the V-Dem democracy indexes, the initial indicators are based on country expert coding of specific democratic components, with extensive measures to ensure intercoder reliability, then aggregated through estimates from a Bayesian factor analysis model into sub-indexes, which again is combined to form the high-level measures. These indexes commonly range from 0 to 1.

Figure 4.2: Democratic Quality Across Time - LDI



4.3.1 Total Democratic Erosion

When studying democratic erosion at large, I use the LDI and look at decline in this index from year t-1 to year t, in a given country. See Table 4.2. While it is common to define thresholds reflecting certain magnitudes of decline in democratic attributes to measure democratic erosion, I keep the index as is in my main models to make sure that I capture all forms of decline. Democratic erosion is gradual and deliberate. While bigger shocks might more protest activity compared to minute changes, I also seek to capture the incremental nature of democratic erosion. Moreover, as this thesis presents a first exploratory analysis of the relationship between democratic erosion and protest, I'm hesitant to restrict the data unnecessarily.

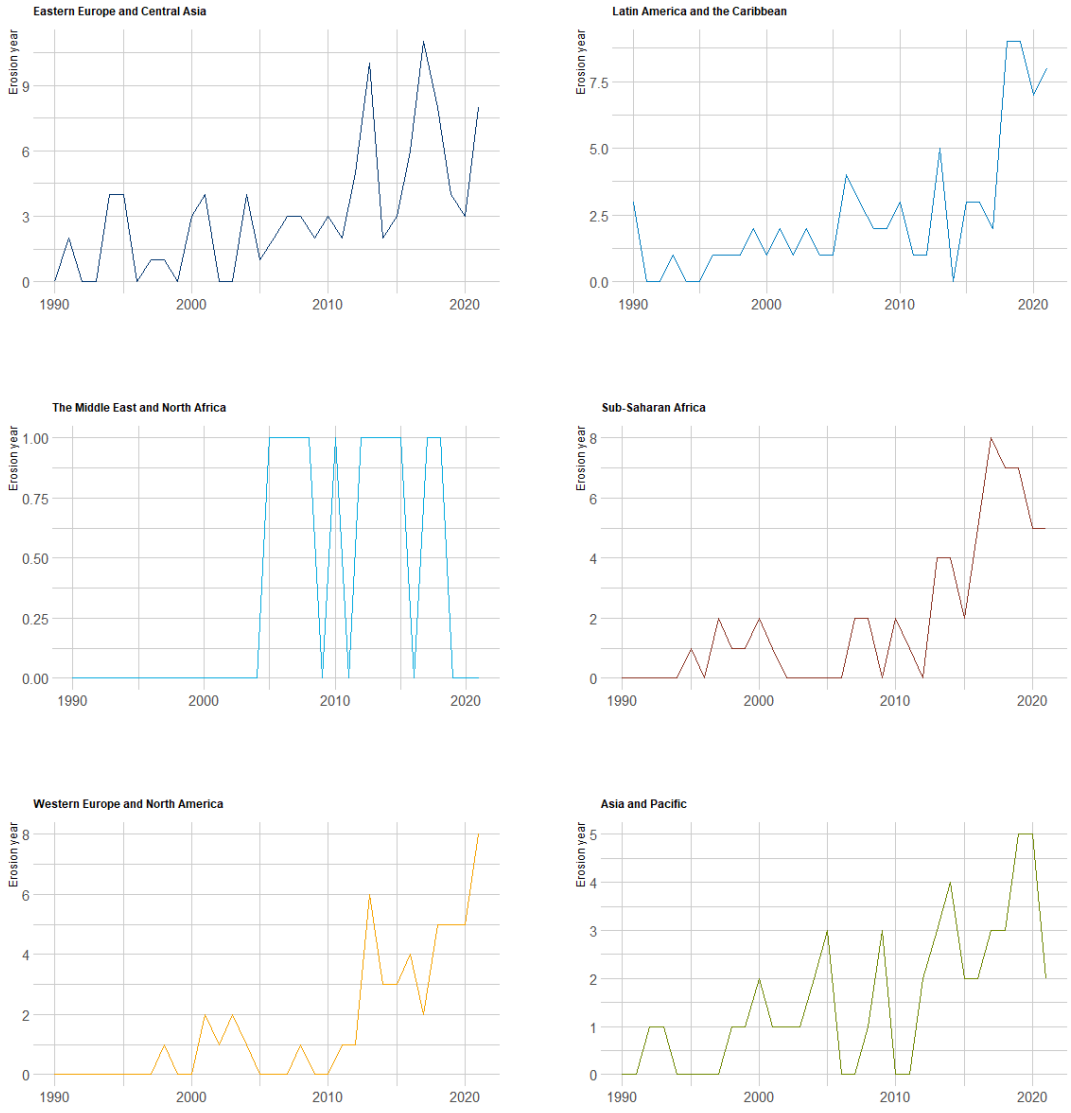
I do however use an alternative operationalization relying on defined thresholds of decline to determine democratic erosion to ensure the robustness of my results. The main purpose of this alternative operationalization is to restrict the independent variable to measure *negative* change in the LDI. This allows me to rule out that my initial results are driven my *positive* change in the LDI, reflecting democratic consolidation. I test three different thresholds for democratic erosion: declines of 0.05, 0.02 and 0.01. The result is three binary independent variables coded 1 if there was a decline of 0.05, 0.02 or 0.01 respectively from year t-1 to year t, and 0 otherwise. This specification seeks to mirror part of the operationalization used by the Episode of Regime Transformation data set (ERT) (Maerz et al., 2021). The data set contains a binary variable denoting episodes of autocratization (including both autocratic consolidation and democratic erosion). The variable is described as "a period of substantial and sustained decreases on V-Dem's Electoral Democracy Index (EDI)" and the default parameters require that such a period begin with an initial –0.01 decrease on the EDI and a total decrease of at least –0.10 throughout the episode. An autocratization episode ends the final year of a negative change less than or equal to the initial decrease (e.g. –0.01), prior to experiencing an annual increase, cumulative increase, or stasis period. These are defined in the defaults as +0.03, +0.10, and 5 years respectively (Edgell et al., 2021).

Although this is one of the most comprehensive data sets on autocratization, I do not use it for my analysis for two main reasons. First, ERT is based on changes in the Electoral democracy index and not the Liberal democracy index. I'm mostly interested in democratic erosion, where deterioration of liberal components is a central element. Second, I'm not interested in *episodes* of democratic erosion per se. Rather I want to study the mobilizing effects of democratic erosion in one year on the protest intensity in the subsequent year.

Figure 4.3 show the sum of country-years where there was a decrease in the LDI of minimum 0.01 compared to the previous year. In addition to illustrating both

regional and temporal differences, the figure also reflects the increase in democratic erosion associated with the "third wave of autocratization".

Figure 4.3: Sum of Erosion Years Across Time



Note the odd trend present in panel 3: Middle East and North Africa is due to the shift between 0 and 1.

4.3.2 Erosion of Democratic Components

To measure democratic erosion beyond changes in the Liberal democracy index described above, I disaggregate the LDI and use the relevant sub-indexes comprising it (Coppedge, 2022). The LDI is composed of both electoral and liberal elements. The electoral components include the freedom of expression and alternative sources of information index, the freedom of association index, the clean elections index, share of population with suffrage and the elected officials index. The liberal components include the equality before the law and individual liberty index, the judicial constraints on the executive index and the legislative constraints on the executive index. All indexes range from 0 to 1.

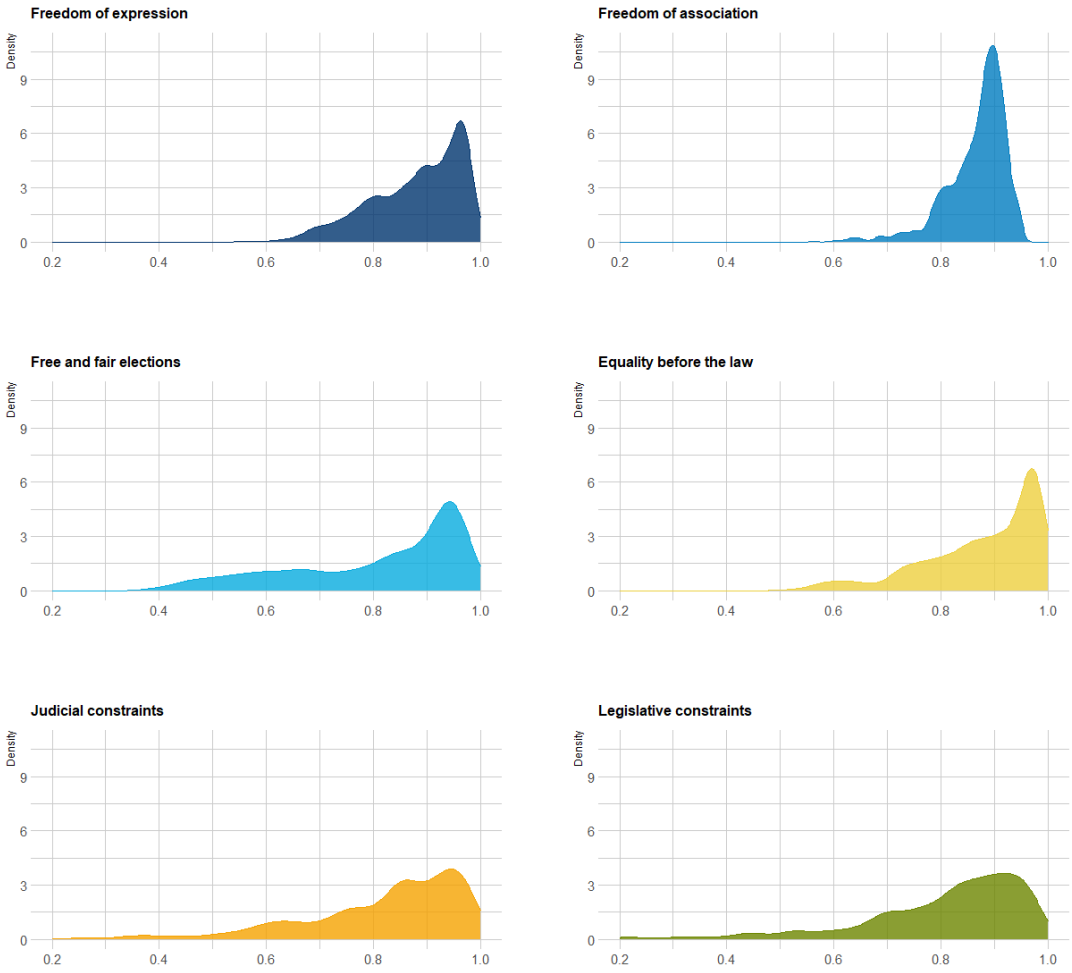
Out of the eight components, I only include six in my analysis. First, the share of population with suffrage is excluded as it reflects the *de jure* provisions of suffrage extension, and not necessarily a core democratic component. While important for democracy, the share of suffrage here is mostly used in historical cases. Moreover, it does not exhibit much variance in my sample consisting of democracies between 1990 and 2020 where suffrage extension has been high and stable. The elected officials index is also excluded as it is "useful primarily for aggregating higher-order indices and should not necessarily be interpreted as an important element of democracy in its own right" (Coppedge, 2022, p. 48). This index captures *how* officials are elected, and thus reflects the structure of the electoral system rather than its quality.

The sub-indexes I will employ as independent variables in the analysis are listed in Table 4.1 and their density distributions are presented in Figure 4.4. As expected, given the selection of democracies, they are all, though to varying degree, concentrated to the right.Figure 4.5 show the distribution of observations of protests across the democratic erosion variables. As the sample of countries is concentrated fairly high up on the democracy indexes, so are the counts of protests. Moreover, high propensity for zeroes across all variables is evident. Nevertheless, this figure also reveals some interesting variation. While count of protests across freedom of expression, freedom of association and individual liberties are all mostly located to the upper left, the other variables display a wider variation. These correlations are between *levels* of democratic attributes and protest frequency across countries. In the statistical analysis I aim to delineate the relationship between *changes* in these attributes and subsequent protest levels.

Table 4.1: Democratic Components

Democratic components
Electoral components
Freedom of expression and alternative sources of information index
Freedom of association index
Clean elections index
Liberal components
Equality before the law and individual liberty index
Judicial constraints on the executive index
Legislative constraints on the executive index

Figure 4.4: Density Distributions of Democratic Components



The freedom of expression and alternative sources of information index (below referred to as the freedom of expression index) measure the extent of government respect of press and media freedom, the freedom of ordinary people to discuss political matters at home and in the public sphere, as well as the freedom of academic and cultural expression. The freedom of association index measures the extent to which parties, including opposition parties, are allowed to form and to participate in elections, and to what extent civil society organizations are able to both form and to operate freely without state repression. The clean election index reflects the extent that elections are free and fair, meaning an absence of registration fraud, systematic irregularities,government intimidation of the opposition, vote buying, and election violence.

The equality before the law and individual liberty index (below referred to as the individual liberty index) measures the extent to which laws are transparent and rigorously enforced and public administration impartial, and to what extent citizens enjoy access to justice, secure property rights, freedom from forced labour, freedom of movement, physical integrity rights, and freedom of religion. The judicial constraints on the executive index (below referred to as the judicial constraints index) reflects the extent that the executive respect the constitution and comply with court rulings, and to what extent is the judiciary able to act in an independent fashion. Lastly, the legislative constraints on the executive index (below referred to as the legislative constraints index) measure the extent that the legislature and government agencies are capable of questioning, investigating, and exercising oversight over the executive.

These sub-indexes reflect distinct democratic components, and while often moving in joint fashion, they develop at different rates across time. Figure 4.6 uses India as an example. All of the democratic components decline substantively after 2010, however, not at the same pace. India scores the highest on the judicial constraints on the executive index up until 2014, in 2019 however, this is the index with the lowest score. Comparatively, both the level of freedom of expression and equality before the law and individual liberties see a significantly more moderate decline over the same time period. In 2019, India underwent democratic breakdown and moved from electoral democracy to electoral autocracy. This example both serves as an illustration of how the different democratic components change at different rates, and underlines the value of studying popular reactions to declines in different components.

In the main analysis, I employ these sub-indexes as independent variables a is, see Table 4.2. This allows democratic erosion of any magnitude. However, as with the LDI, I adopt an alternative operationalization as a robustness check to ensure that my results are not driven by positive change in democratic quality. The alternative operationalizations are binary variables denoting whether there was a decline in the

respective democratic component of at least 0.01 from year t-1 to year t. I choose the threshold of negative 0.01 to mirror the ERT dataset. Moreover, there are few instances of drastic (more than 0.01) negative change in my sample, reflecting the gradual nature of democratic erosion.

Figure 4.5: Distributions of Observations Across Key Variables

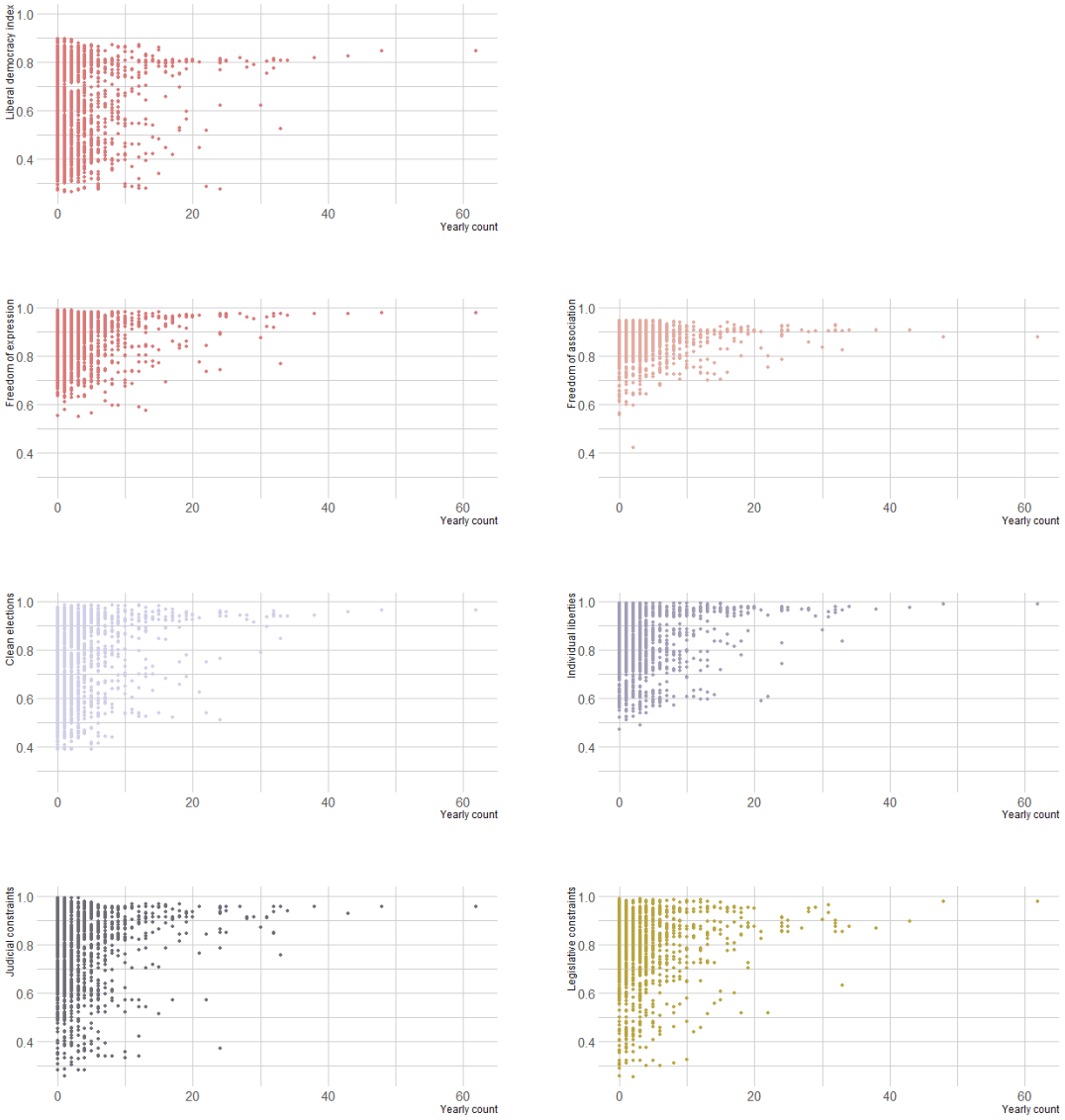
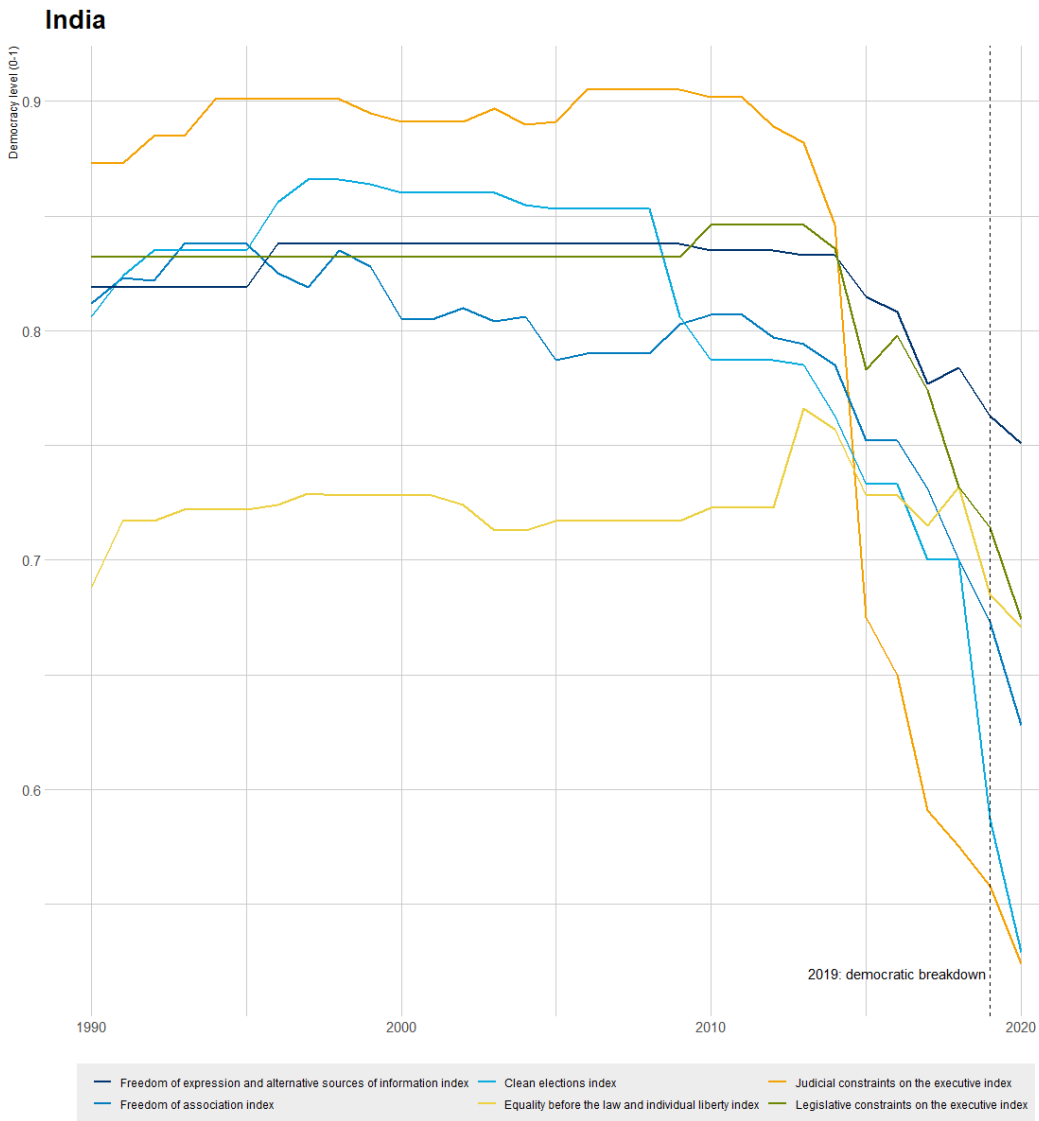


Figure 4.6: Democratic Components Across Time: India



4.4 Control Variables

To avoid issues of over-fitting and post-treatment bias, I keep the list of covariates conservative and only include a carefully selected list of theoretically motivated controls (Achen, 2005; Ray, 2003, 2005). Moreover, I start by presenting the bivariate relationship between democratic erosion and protest before gradually introducing control variables in two stages. As I employ unit fixed effects, which I will discuss in the methods chapter, the list of relevant control variables remains modest. Unit fixed effects account for all time-invariant covariates. While the country region would likely be a relevant inclusion in other models, the fixed effects models render such variables redundant. The full stet of control contains six variables, see Table 4.2.

I include two variables capturing the economic context. *GDP constant (logged)* is a common control in protest models as it captures the general levels of economic wealth in a country (Chenoweth & Ulfelder, 2017; Paloumpis et al., 2019). Economic grievances are a well-known driver of protests, however, to account more specifically for changes in the economic situation, I also include *GDP growth*. GDP growth is included to account for economic instability as crisis and economic downturn may prompt protests, while economic growth tends to be associated with reduced protest activity (Arce & Bellinger, 2007). Moreover, in times of severe economic crisis, elites and masses alike are less inclined to support democracy, because they are negatively affected by the downturn (Krishnarajan, 2019; Lipset, 1981). Both variables are drawn from the World Bank database. GDP constant is logged to constrain the variable, and GDP growth is defined as annual percentage growth.

Moreover, I include a binary variable capturing *election years* to address the effect of elections as focal points of contention (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010; Nygård, 2020; Tilly, 1997). During election seasons, citizens become more engaged in politics and more aware of their neighbors' discontent (Hollyer et al., 2015; Tucker, 2007). Elections are also affecting citizens simultaneously (Fearon, 2011) and opposition leaders have stronger incentives to coordinate mass protests and alert citizens to irregularities, ultimately affecting the results (Javeline, 2003). Moreover, elections may also represent political change, including democratic erosion. Most aspiring autocrats driving democratic erosion have been elected on polarizing, populist and anti-democratic platforms often rendering elections the starting point of a period of democratic erosion. The variable is based on the V-Dem dataset ("v2elmulpar") and coded 1 if there was a national election that year, otherwise 0.

Last, I use two population variables, *population size (logged)* and *percentage of urban population.* Population size is a standard control variable when modelling both protest onset and protest intensity (Chenoweth & Ulfelder, 2017). Usually, it

is included in regression on the basis that more populous countries tend to see a higher number of protests. While this is less relevant in a fixed effects framework as the population size exhibits limited variation within countries over a thirty-year period, I test the variable as a control in certain models. The percentage of the country's urban population is also included in certain models to account for a more specific population effect. A larger urban population is associated with both higher support for democracy and higher propensity for protest (Dahlum et al., 2019). Both variables are drawn from the World Bank database. Population size is logged to constrain the variable and urban population is defined as a share of the total population.

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	**type**	**min**	**mean**	**max**
Protest intensity	count	0	2.714	62
Liberal democracy index	continuous	0.265	0.630	0.896
Freedom of expression index	continuous	0.551	0.880	0.989
Clean elections index	continuous	0.389	0.803	0.987
Individual liberty index	continuous	0.472	0.872	0.993
Judicial constraints index	continuous	0.122	0.809	0.992
Legislative constraints index	continuous	0.123	0.795	0.989
Population (logged)	continuous	12.750	16.070	21.030
Urban population	continuous	13.090	61.720	98.080
GDP growth (per capita)	continuous	-22.517	2.098	42.789
GDP constant (per capita, logged)	continuous	5.618	8.907	11.630
Election year	binary	0	0.3073	1

5 Methods

In this chapter, I present the methodology utilized to test the hypotheses from chapter X. The research design of the thesis is quantitative, justified by the aim to delineate broader trends in mass mobilizations as reactions to democratic erosion.

As outlined in the previous chapter, I have an unbalanced panel data with near global scope covering 30 years. My dependent variable is protest intensity operationalized as the count of protests in a given country year. My independent variables measuring democratic erosion are indexes drawn from the V-Dem dataset measuring the quality of different democratic components.

The modelling choices are based on the data structure as well as my aim to understand the effect of *changes* in the independent variables, and not varying levels, on the outcome variable. I start by explain my choice of statistical model before I present possible threats to causality and ways to mitigate them. Ultimately, I argue that a Poisson regression model with country fixed effects and Newey-West standard errors is the best estimation method for this research.

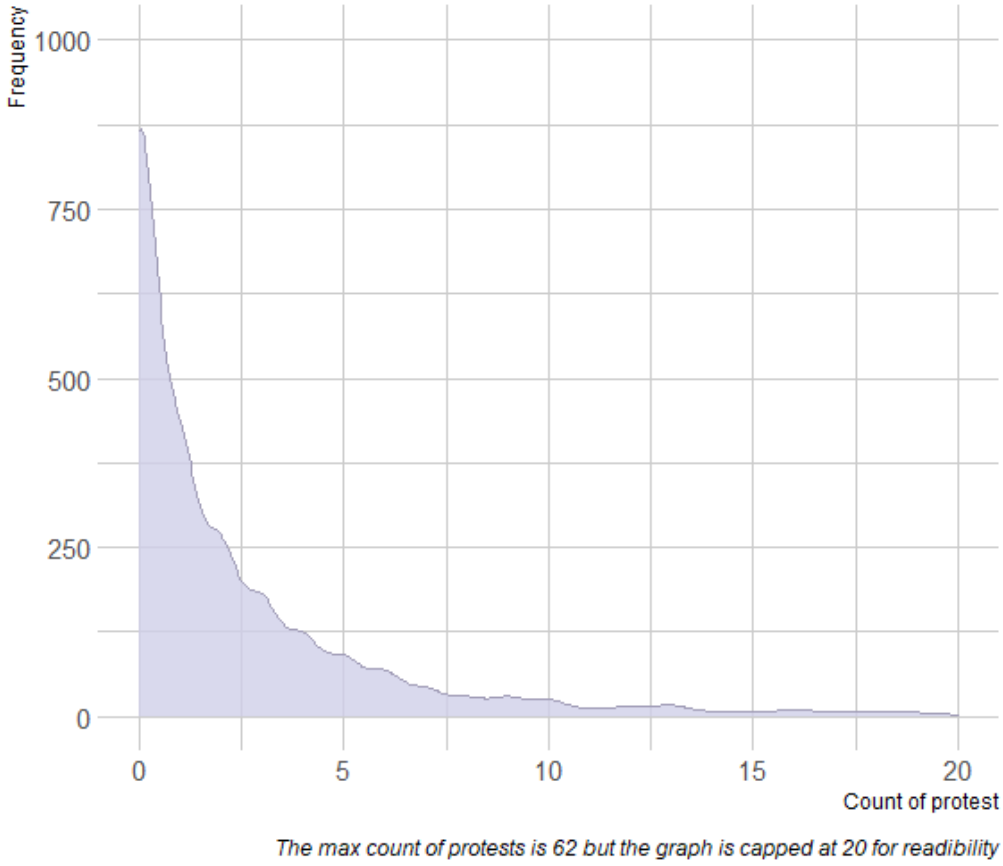
5.1 Choice of Statistical Model

The number of protests is a a count variable which is defined as non-negative integer values representing the count of the occurrence or presence of an event. Counts are common in the social sciences and particularly in the field of peace and conflict studies as the research object often is rare events such as the occurrence of wars, or in this case protests. See Figure 5.1 for the distribution of protests, and note in particular the high number of zeros.

Such variables are "intrinsically heteroskedastic, right skewed, and have a variance that increases with the mean of the distribution" (Hilbe, 2011, p. 30). Thus, there are a few issues that would arise with the usage of regular ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. First, as the dependent variable is a count but OLS assumes linearity and allows for negative predicted values, the model will produce predictions that are impossible in reality (Ward & Ahlquist, 2018, p. 910). Second, the residuals are heteroskedastic and not normally distributed, which is a prerequisite for the usage of OLS regression.

It is possible to transform a count variable, by de-meaning it or taking the inverse hyperbolic sine, and model it by using panel-corrected standard errors. However, this is unnecessary as there are models specifically constructed to handle count data (Cameron & Trivedi, 2013; Wooldridge, 2010, p. 645). However, I will supplement my main analysis with logistic regressions using protest occurrence as dependent variables to test the robustness of my findings.

Figure 5.1: Distribution of the Dependent Variable - Protest Count



5.1.1 Count Models and Fixed Effects

The distribution of the dependent variable as a count with a high number of zeros and a heavy tail suggest the use of count models as they are tailored to handle count outcomes that are highly skewed (Long, 1997). The Poisson regression model (PMR) is the point of departure for most count models and is based on the Poisson distribution. The central assumption for PRM is the variance assumption requiring equidispersion as such:

$$Var(y|x) = E(y|x)$$

This requires the conditional mean to equal the conditional variance, a requirement often violated by count data. Just based on the density plot of the protest variable, and remembering that it ranges from 0 to 90, one should expect the protest count to be overdispersed. A formal test for overdispersion (see appendix) confirms that the conditional variance exceeds the conditional mean. Due to this overdispersion the Poisson model is likely to yield inefficient parameter estimates, downward biased standard errors, and thus, large spurious z-scores (Long, 1997, p. 230). This would result in smaller p-values, leading to an overestimation of significance of the variables and an increase in making a type II error (false positive) (Long, 1997, p. 230). Although a violation of the equidispersion assumption will yield biased standard errors and inefficient coefficient estimates, the coefficients estimates themselves will not be biased (Winkelmann, 2008, p. 189).

The negative binomial is most commonly turned to facing overdispersed data as it allows for overdispersion by including a dispersion parameter (alpha) that reflects unobserved heterogeneity among observations and an error term drawn from the gamma distribution (Long & Freese, 2014, p. 243). In Figure A.2 the PMR probabilities are compared to NBR probabilities. The PMR clearly underpredicts zeros, and overpredicts one to seven while the NBR displays a much better fit.

Nevertheless, model selection requires attention to more than the data structure and variable distributions (Ver Hoef & Boveng, 2007). It should also consider the empirical question at hand. To use the constructed panel dataset to shed light on the relationship between democratic erosion and subsequent protest intensity, I need to control for the spatial heterogeneity among countries and the many country-specific factors that may influence both democratic erosion and protest intensity.

Omitted variable bias is the primary statistical challenge in non-experimental research (Allison, 2009; DeMaris, 2014; Wooldridge, 2010), and both the PMR and the NBRM will yield biased coefficient estimates facing unobserved confounding factors (Mark, 2017; Winkelmann, 2008, p. 189). With a panel dataset covering 120 countries, there is likely to be several country-specific effects correlated with both the dependent and the explanatory variables. Thus, the models (as most other regression models) would yield biased coefficient estimates. A common and robust way to avoid this bias is to apply unit fixed effects. Unit (country) fixed effects methods confines attention to variation across variables to a given unit by controlling for all unobserved stable covariates, avoiding cross-unit comparisons. Such stable covariates commonly represent historic, cultural or geographical factors. Two relevant examples for the prediction of protests could be previous (pre-1990)

experience with protest movements challenging the regime or the political culture in a given country. Both factors could plausibly affect both democratic erosion and protest activity and should thus be controlled for. As both factors are country specific and time-invariant, they are implicitly accounted for by applying country fixed effects.

Country fixed effects are of particular use in my case as I am interested in the effect of (negative) *change* in democratic qualities on protest intensity, rather than the effect of different *levels* of democratic qualities. Fixed effects methods enable the former by using only within-unit variation to estimate the parameters and then averaging the estimates over all units (Allison & Waterman, 2002). By using country fixed effects, I make both a methodological choice to avoid omitted variable bias, and a theoretical choice to only study the within-country over time variation (Bell & Jones, 2015). This is a conscious and deliberate choice. While I am aware that I forgo the opportunity to study the variance found between countries, I prioritize the possibility of more robustly study the effect of within-country change in democratic erosion on protest intensity.

Calculating the intraclass correlation reveals that 28.3% of the variance in protest intensity is found across countries while 71.7% is found to be within countries across years.[19]. The large variation found within countries further motivates leveraging fixed effects. First, it suggests that protests are driven by country specific time-variant factors, e.g., democratic erosion, rather than being a result of different countries distinct "protest levels". Second, to study the variance of interest - within countries across time - I would need to isolate it and control for the across country variance. Leveraging country fixed effects enable this isolation. I do not employ time fixed effects in my main analysis for two reasons. First, although it is possible that there are certain time trends in my data that affect all countries homogeneously, the risk is limited. As an example, although the Arab Spring in 2011 represent a time trend affecting several countries, it likely did not affect my *whole* sample of democracies. Second, two-way fixed effects models rely heavily on specific modelling assumptions and are inherently difficult to interpret (Imai & Kim, 2021; Wooldridge, 2021). I do, however, introduce year fixed effects as a robustness check.

While the NBRM seems to fit my data better as it allows for overdispersion, it is not a true fixed effects method (Wooldridge, 1999). The problems with combining fixed effects and NBR are described in detail elsewhere (Allison & Waterman, 2002; Blackburn, 2015; Ver Hoef & Boveng, 2007; Wooldridge, 2021), and some of the main issues are that a fixed effects NBR model fail to allow for serial correlation, imposes a very specific overdispersion form and does not drop time invariant covari-

[19]I am using the method of variance partitioning developed by Leckie et. al. (2019)

ates (Wooldridge, 1999). Ultimately, this leads to biased coefficient and inconsistent estimation.

So even though the overdispersion in the data initially would suggest a negative binomial model, this is not advisable when applying fixed effect. However, the PRM model is a true fixed effects method as the unconditional maximization of the likelihood and conditional likelihood consistently yield identical estimates for beta and the associated covariance matrix (Allison & Waterman, 2002; Cameron & Trivedi, 2013).

It is only the standard errors that are biased, the coefficient estimates in the poisson model are unbiased even in the case of overdispersion. Moreover, the downward biased standard errors estimated by the PRM due to overdispersion is possible to correct for by applying heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. Despite overdispersion the poisson model with robust standard errors is a much better option than the negative binomial when modelling fixed effects. Thus, I move forward with a Poisson regression model with heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors.

5.2 Methodological Challenges and Ways to Meet Them

5.2.1 Post-treatment Bias

Often seeking to reduce potential omitted variable bias end up introducing another form of bias: post-treatment bias (King, 2010). This issue arises when important variation is "controlled away" by too many and wrong covariates, often referred to as garbage can models (Achen, 2005). This occurs when choosing the wrong controls, for instance, by controlling for something that is caused by the treatment or by including irrelevant control variables.

The risk of introducing post-treatment bias is reduced when using fixed effects as the list of relevant covariates is shortened when giving up cross-country comparisons (Hill et al., 2020). To further avoid bias, I lean on theory to choose the relevant control variables. Additionally, I test both different controls and different operationalizations of the controls in order to assess the robustness of my results.

5.2.2 Correlation and Multicollinearity

High degrees of correlation among the independent variables (also called multicollinearity) makes it more difficult to draw inferences through statistical modelling as the model have a hard time distinguishing the independent effect of each predictor. As the effects appear simultaneously, the causal inference becomes highly uncertain.

Additionally multicollinearity leads to inflated standard errors, and an increased risk of rejecting a true hypothesis (King et al., 1994). This is especially challenging when trying to isolate the effects of erosion of democratic components as they are both correlated and likely interdependent. While certain democratic components are more volatile and more frequently targeted by autocratizing leaders, democratic erosion very seldom occurs in only one democratic component (Hellmeier & Bernhard, 2022). A correlation matrix, see **??**, shows that the correlation coefficients range from 0.5 to 0.76 for the sub-indexes. When faced with multicollinearity, the concerned variables should be taken out of the regression, as the presence of multicollinearity implies that the information that this variable provides about the outcome is redundant in the model (Bruce & Bruce, 2017; James et al., 2013). For this reason, I do only include one democratic component in each model, leaving me with six main models respectively estimating the effects of erosion in each component on protest intensity. I am aware that this modelling choice might spur concerns regarding omitted variable bias. However, the correlation among the sub-indexes are too high to allow for reliable coefficient estimation while including them in the same regression. Nevertheless, as a robustness check, I run models where I include the Liberal democracy index as a control variable. This is done to capture the effect of democratic erosion in other components than the one modelled, and to test the effect of the potential omitted variable bias. Further, the high correlation and the intertwined nature of these sub-indexes are considered when I interpret my results.

However, multicollinearity also concerns control variables. See Figure A.4 for correlation matrix. Unsurprisingly, the control variables are quite highly correlated, ranging from 0.5 to 0.76. This could challenge the precision of my models. The highest correlation scores are caused by the logged population variable and the urban population variable.

To further test whether there are cause for concern due to multicollinearity in the models, I estimate the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for the six main models (one for each independent variable), see Table A.1. The general VIF scores show limited variance inflation for all variables except for the logged population size and the percentage of urban population. This is not too surprising as I am employing country fixed effects and only have a temporal span of 30 years.[20] Hence, variables that do not vary substantially across time do not contribute much information to the analysis (Hill et al., 2020, p. 8). The population variables are thus rendered less informative as predictors of protest intensity. Due to the high correlation and high VIF scores, I omit the two population variables from my main models. In the

[20]When using fixed effects, the level of multicollinearity is generally higher as variance is constrained to within units. Thus, VIF scores (or more correctly Generalized VIF scores) are commonly higher in these models, without causing additional issues for estimation.

appendix I report the results with these variables included as controls. The results do not change in any meaningful way.

5.2.3 Panel Data and Serial Correlation

I am working with a panel data structure observing multiple countries over multiple years. The time-series element of this introduces complications relating to non-independence of observations, order, and serial correlation (Studenmund, 2017). In the PRM "observations within predictors are assumed independent of one another, and predictors are assumed to have minimal correlation between one another" (Hilbe, 2011, p. 32). Nevertheless, time-series almost always violates the assumption of independent identically distributed (iid) observations.

To test for serial correlation, I conduct a Breusch-Godfrey test for serial correlation, see appendix, and found evidence of positive autocorrelation; meaning that the count of protests in one year positively influence the count of protests in the following year(s). This is not surprising as protests commonly occur in waves and there is little reason to assume protest activity to be bounded by the year structure.

While the PRM assumes iid observations, serial correlation will not bias the coefficient estimates, only the standard errors, and is thus possible to adjust for. By adjusting the variance-covariance matrix I'm able to correct the standard errors with attention to both heteroskedasticity (due to the overdispersed data) and autocorrelation due to time dependency. I do this by applying Newey-West (1987, 1994) standard errors.[21] These are heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation (HAC) robust standard errors.

5.2.4 Endogeneity and Reverse Causality

Endogeneity can be caused by omitted variable bias, measurement error and multi-way causality. Reverse causality is linked to multi-way causality and concerns cases where Y causes X but X does not cause Y. A plausible scenario is that protest activity influences the state of democracy, or that a third variable affect them both causing them to occur simultaneously. An active civil society that regularly stages protests against the incumbents efforts to erode the democracy might reduce the likelihood of democratic erosion events occurring in the future as the costs of democratic subversion are increased for the incumbent (Bernhard et al., 2020). This poses challenges when inferring causality, and as the social world inherently is interconnected and endogenous, this is a fundamental issue in political science. To address the issue of endogeneity, I lag all my independent and control variables so

[21] I use the Newey-West standard errors using Bartlett kernel weights from the Sandwich package in R.

that my models estimate the effects of democratic erosion in one year on subsequent protest levels in the year after. This aids in avoiding threats to causality caused by endogeneity and reverse causality, however, it does not completely eliminate the concerns. Thus, I let the literature and theory guide my choices of control variables and keep my models as clean as possible. Moreover, I remain agnostic when interpreting the results and acknowledge that causality is inherently problematic to determine through statistical modelling of observed data.

5.3 Summary

To summarise, I choose to use Poisson regression models as my dependent variable is a count and because Poisson regression models are fully robust and consistent fixed effects models. I employ country fixed effects both avoid omitted variable bias, and to enable the isolation of within-country variation. Democratic erosion is found within countries across time. To account for overdispersion in my dependent variable and account for serial serial correlation, I use Newey-West standard errors that correct for heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation. Last, I only include one democracy index in each model to avoid issues of multicollinearity. The main models are presented below. In addition, I use a series of alternative model specifications as robustness checks to ensure the validity and consistency of my models.

As described in this chapter, I have taken several steps to correct the downward biased standard errors caused by heteroskadasticity and serial correlation. This is done to mitigate the risk of observing Type I errors, meaning the risk of rejecting a true null hypothesis. However, in the effort of limiting the risk of Type I errors, one run the risk of increasing the risk of encounter Type II errors, referring to the risk of failing to reject a false null hypothesis. While a heightened risk of failing to reject a false null hypothesis arguably is preferable to rejecting a true null hypothesis, I recognize that the adjustment of the standard errors may cause too conservative estimates. Moreover, due to the limitation of variance, the statistical power in fixed effects models are generally observed to be relatively low (Hill et al., 2020). Consequently, significant findings are likely to be robust. On the other hand, insignificant findings might be caused by both statistical rigour (adjustment of the standard errors) and Type II errors (failing to reject false null hypotheses). For now, I note this risk and proceed with the HAC standard errors. I will however, return to this point when discussing and contextualizing the results.

The main models are presented below.

Total democratic erosion:

$$M1 : Protest - count_i = exp(\alpha_i + \beta_1(LDI) + log(\beta_2(GDP)) + \beta_3(election - year) + \beta_4(GDP - growth)$$

Disaggregated democratic erosion

$$M2 - 7 : Protest - count_i = exp(\alpha_i + \beta_1(sub - index) + log(\beta_2(GDP)) + \beta_3(election - year) + \beta_4(GDP - growth)$$

Each sub-index will be estimated in a separate model without the others.

Sub-indexes

Freedom of expression and alternative sources of information index
Freedom of association index
Clean elections index
Equality before the law and individual liberty index
Judicial constraints on the executive index
Legislative constraints on the executive index

6 Results

In this chapter, I present the empirical analysis of the data. I start by describing the observed changes in democratic quality found in my data. Section 6.2 focuses on the general mobilizing effect when democratic erosion is operationalized as decline in the Liberal Democracy Index, while section 6.3 presents the results when democracy is disaggregated into six different sub components. I then discuss the substantive interpretation of the key variables, before conducting several robustness checks to ensure that my results are not due to model misspecifications. This chapter first and foremost presents the empirical results and test their robustness, while Chapter 7 provides a more in-depth discussion on the findings and their implications.

My main models are conducted using Poisson regression methods. The regression coefficients are thus presented as the logs of the expected counts. A positive coefficient indicates an increase in the expected counts of protests, while a negative coefficient indicates a decreased expected count. Beyond direction, the logs of the expected counts are, however, not readily interpreted. Therefore, I will present the incident rate ratios in certain cases.

The count of protests is defined as a rate, and the rate at which events occur is called the incidence rate. As the difference between logs of the expected counts (i.e., from t_0 to t_{0+1}) can also be expressed as ratios, the incident rate ratio is calculated by exponentiation the log of the expected count.

The democracy indexes all ranges from a theoretical 0 to theoretical 1, with higher values denoting higher quality of the democracy aspect measured. As I am testing the effect of democratic erosion, I am interested in *declines* in these variables. Thus, the interpretations will be based on the association between one unit decrease in the explanatory variable, and the expected count of protests. This is important to keep in mind when reading the results.

I use Poisson regression models with Newey-West standard errors to correct for heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation. My models also include country fixed effects. Due to the country fixed effects, the interpretation of the regression coefficients becomes *the average effect of one unit change in X is associated with *beta* change in the log of expected counts of Y, within a given unit and holding all other factors constant.*

6.1 Descriptive Magnitude of Change

It is futile trying to explain change based on static factors: "one cannot predict a variable from a constant and will do a poor job of trying to predict a variable from a near constant" (Treiman, 2009, p. 370). While a general statement, this is particularly important to reflect on when employing fixed effects (Hill et al., 2020; Mummolo & Peterson, 2018). Using country fixed effects effectively confines the variance used in the models to the within-unit variance, disregarding any cross-country variation. Thus, "sufficient variability over time in the predictor variables" (Treiman, 2009, p. 370). Two important potential implications of this variance reduction are: imprecision in descriptions of the variation being studied and the use of implausible counter factuals to characterize substantive effects (Mummolo & Peterson, 2018, p. 1).

I thus start by explicitly describing the variance observed within countries across time, see Table 6.1. First, the range of protests observed within a country-year spans from 0 to 62. However, this ranges across countries, and as I am only leveraging the within-country variance in my estimations, this is not a true representation of the relevant variation. Looking at the within-country, across time, variation in protest intensity, I find that the average change over the course of 30 years is 11. This is substantively less than 62 for two reasons: first, I am only looking at within country change, and second, the large number of zeroes in my data affects the averaging.

The observed variance in the democracy variables are also presented in Table 6.1. The theoretical range of the LDI is from 0 to 1. However, in my sample of democracies, the range across countries is from 0.27 to 0.9 (or a range of 0.63) Already, the empirical variance is limited. Moreover, exclusively looking at the variance observed within countries yield an average range of 0.14, equal to 21.8% of the observed range. This means that, on average a country in my sample experiences a change of 0.14 across the time period between 1990 and 2020. The same pattern of variance reduction is evident in all the explanatory variables. The largest average range is found int the clean election index, while the smallest average range is found in the freedom of association index.

I will return to the implications this have for the use of counterfactuals at the end of the chapter when I am providing a substantive interpretation of the main results.

Table 6.1: Empirically Observed Variation

	Min	Max	Range	Average change	% range subject to change
Protest	0	62	62	11.08	17.87097
LDI	0.2650	0.8960	0.631	0.138	21.87005
Freedom of expression	0.5510	0.9890	0.438	0.113	25.79909
Freedom of association	0.4220	0.9470	0.525	0.084	16
Clean elections	0.3890	0.9870	0.598	0.211	35.28428
Individual liberties	0.4720	0.9930	0.521	0.088	16.8906
Judicial constraints	0.1220	0.9920	0.87	0.126	14.48276
Legislative constraints	0.1230	0.9890	0.866	0.161	18.59122

6.2 The General Mobilizing Effect of Democratic Erosion

I begin by estimating the effect of democratic erosion operationalized as any decline in the LDI. This measure is not disaggregated, but rather an overarching index covering both electoral and liberal components of democracy. The dependent variable is protest intensity, operationalized as the count of protests in a given country-year. I use poisson estimations with Newey-West standard errors to correct for heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation. Moreover, I use country-fixed effects to account for unobserved heterogeneity and to better measure the effect of *change* in the independent variable.

The results are presented in Table 6.2. Model 1 is a simple bivariate model with only the independent variable, LDI as regressor. In model 2 I introduce GDP (logged), GDP growth and a binary variable capturing election years as control variables. Although LDI is signed in the expected direction (a *decrease* in LDI is associated with *increased* protest intensity), the coefficient estimate is not statistically significant at conventional levels in any of the models.

As noted in the section 5.2.2 Correlation and multicollinearity, I exclude two population variables from my main models due to high correlation and to avoid issues of multicollinearity. Including population size and degree of urbanization do however not cause alterations of the result, see Table A.2. I continue leaving these two variables out of my models.

As the LDI capture both democratic erosion and democratization, it is possible that these effects, estimated for each country and then averaged, cancel each other out. Therefore, I test an alternative operationalization of the independent variable where I am able to isolate democratic erosion from democratization. The results are presented in Table A.3.

Table 6.2: Protest Intensity: LDI

	Total erosion	
	Protest intensity	
	Poisson	
	(1)	(2)
LDI	−0.243	−0.439
	(0.645)	(0.785)
GDP log		0.074
		(0.217)
Election year		0.083
		(0.055)
GDP growth		0.001
		(0.012)
Constant	0.238	−0.310
	(0.344)	(1.675)
Effect	Country FE	Country FE
SE	Newey-West	Newey-West
Observations	2,204	2,137
Log Likelihood	−5,125.615	−4,970.306
Akaike Inf. Crit.	10,429.230	10,120.610
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

I operationalize democratic erosion as a binary variable denoting whether there was a substantive decline in democratic quality from year t-1 to year t. The substantive decline is operationalized as a decline in LDI of more than 0.05, 0.02 and 0.01 in model 1, 2 and 3 respectively. In model 4, I depart from the notion of "substantial decline" and include a binary variable denoting whether there were *any* decline in LDI from year t-1 to year t. The results are very similar to those presented above. There is no indication that the lack of significance is a result of the effects of democratization and democratic erosion cancel each other out.

I also test the effect of democratic erosion on protest onset, rather than protest intensity. Protest onset is operationalized as a binary variable capturing whether there were any protests in a given country-year. Running logistic regressions, see Table A.4, I find no significant relationships between democratic erosion and protest onset.

Based on these results, democratic erosion does not seem to be associated with increased protest activity in any substantive or significant way. Consequently, I find no support for hypothesis 1. Nevertheless, this might not be too surprising. Democratic erosion measured as negative change in the LDI provides a crude measure

of democratic erosion, and as discussed in the theory chapter, democratic erosion affects both motivation and opportunity to protest. As these mechanisms pull in opposite directions, the in-significant results might be due to the two effects cancelling out each other. I will discuss this in greater detail at a later point. Before that, I will analyse the effect of erosion of different democratic components on protest activity.

6.3 The Effect of Democratic Erosion - Disaggregated

I use the disaggregated version of V-Dem's Liberal Democracy Index to test the effects of democratic erosion along different components on subsequent protest intensity. See Table 4.1. Each of the five sub-indexes are introduced in a new model to avoid issues of multicollinearity. The dependent variable is protest intensity, operationalized as the count of protests in a given country-year. I use poisson estimations with Newey-West standard errors to correct for heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation. Moreover, I use country-fixed effects to account for unobserved heterogeneity and to better measure the effect of *change* in the independent variables.

Table A.5 presents the bivariate regressions of just democratic erosion on protest intensity. While bivariate regressions hold limited explanatory power, it is a useful point of departure to avoid issues of over fitting models. None of the models show a strong relationship between democratic erosion along different components and protest. The coefficient estimates for all of the six democratic indexes are negatively signed, which indicates that a decrease in any of the indexes is associated with an increase in protest activity. However, none of the estimates are statistically significant at the conventional level of 0.05, and only legislative constraints is significant at the 0.1 level. The absence of significance is expected for the indexes capturing the quality of electoral, judicial and legislative bodies (see H5-H7). As outlined in hypotheses H2, H3 and H4 however, I expected the indexes capturing freedom of expression, freedom of association and individual liberties to be associated with increased protest activity. Thus, the results from the bivariate regression models do not support H2, H3 or H4.

To further test the mobilizing effect of democratic erosion in different democratic components, I introduce relevant control variables. I include GDP (logged), GDP growth and a binary variable capturing election years as control variables. The results are presented in Table 6.3. While not reaching the conventional significance threshold of 0.05, both freedom of expression and freedom of association are negatively signed and significant at the 0.1 level. This might indicate that democratic

erosion in these two democratic components have some mobilizing effect, however, the reliability of these estimates is ambiguous. I do not find strong support for hypothesis H2 and H3. I do not find support for H4. However, the absence of significance is expected for the indexes capturing the quality of electoral, judicial and legislative bodies. I thus find support for H5, H6 and H7. As these coefficients are presented as the logs of the expected counts, interpretation beyond direction is not very intuitive. I will provide a substantive interpretation of these estimates in the next section, 6.3.1. For now, the coefficients of the explanatory variables with confidence intervals based on the HAC standard errors are presented in Figure 6.1.

None of the control variables are estimated to be significantly associated with protest intensity. This is expected as all models employ country fixed effects. Many of the control variables remain fairly constant within countries across the time period and thus hold limited explanatory power. Nevertheless, including theoretically motivated control variables is still useful to better isolate the effects of the independent variables. Including population size and percentage of urban population do not alter the results in any meaningful way, see Table A.6.

I also run the models with the Liberal democracy index as a control variable to gauge the potential effect of omitted variable bias caused by including only one democracy index in each model. The results are presented in Table A.7. The results remain robust. Freedom of expression and freedom of association remain negatively signed and are significant at the 0.05 and 0.1 level respectively. There does not seem to be substantial omitted variable bias.

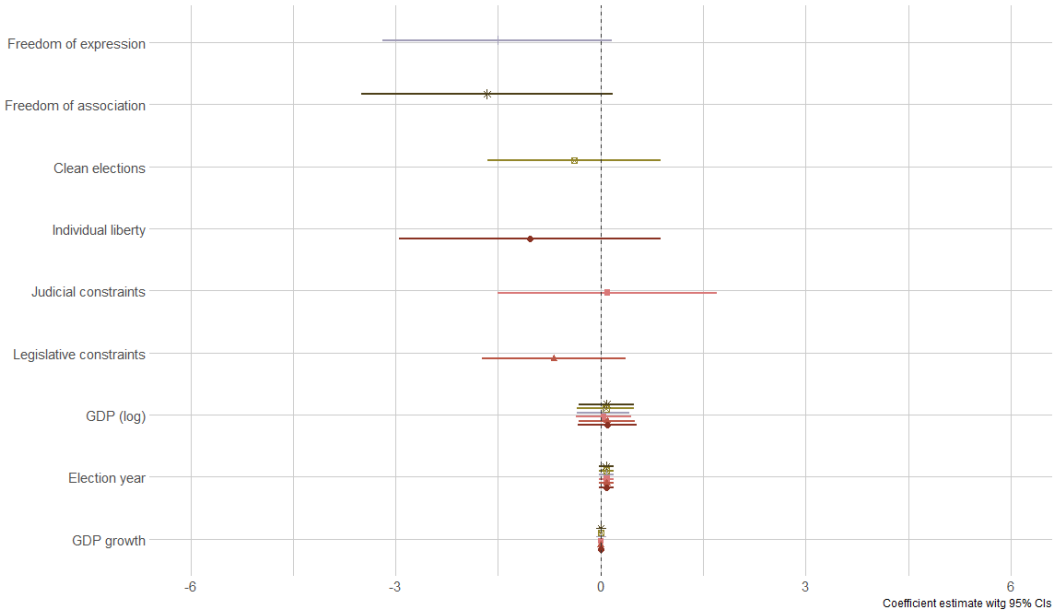
I also test the effect of disaggregated democratic erosion on protest occurrence. Protest occurrence is operationalized as a binary variable denoting whether *any* protests occurred in a given country-year. I use logistic regression with HAC standard errors and the results are presented in Table A.8. Here freedom of expression is signed in the expected direction and significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that, in a given country, democratic erosion targeting this aspect of democracy increases the likelihood of observing protest in the subsequent year. Democratic erosion targeting legislative constraints on the executive also seems to be a significant predictor of protest occurrence.

Table 6.3: Protest Intensity: Disaggregated

	Erosion disaggregated					
	Protest intensity					
	Poisson					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Freedom of expression index	−1.513*					
	(0.853)					
Freedom of association index		−1.664*				
		(0.939)				
Clean elections index			−0.387			
			(0.643)			
Individual liberties index				−1.036		
				(0.975)		
Judicial constraints index					0.096	
					(0.818)	
Legislative constraints index						−0.685
						(0.539)
GDP log	0.040	0.089	0.074	0.096	0.045	0.094
	(0.195)	(0.206)	(0.214)	(0.218)	(0.208)	(0.208)
Election year	0.086	0.079	0.083	0.082	0.086	0.085
	(0.054)	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.054)
GDP growth	0.001	0.003	0.0005	0.002	0.0003	0.001
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Constant	0.954	0.755	−0.320	0.245	−0.320	−0.062
	(1.621)	(1.592)	(1.680)	(1.649)	(1.723)	(1.626)
Effect	Country FE	Country FE	Country FE	Cuuntry FE	Country FE	Country FE
SE	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West
Observations	2,137	2,137	2,137	2,137	2,137	2,137
Log Likelihood	−4,960.513	−4,961.787	−4,970.357	−4,968.235	−4,971.630	−4,965.903
Akaike Inf. Crit.	10,101.030	10,103.570	10,120.710	10,116.470	10,123.260	10,111.810

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Figure 6.1: Predicted Probabilities of Protest Intensity



Coefficients and CIs from Table 6.3, Country FE

Using changes in the full indexes as measures for democratic erosion may cause inefficient estimates as it allows for change in both directions, representing democratic consolidation as well as democratic erosion. To test whether this obscures my findings, I isolate democratic erosion and explicitly estimate the relationship between decline in democratic capacities and protest. I operationalize the independent variables as binary variables denoting a substantive decline in the individual democratic component (at least > 0.01) from year t-1 to year t. The results are presented in Table A.9. The coefficient estimates are not statistically significant at conventional levels in any of the models. Nevertheless, both freedom of expression and freedom of association are signed in the expected direction.[22]. This corroborates the findings from my main models, suggesting that democratic erosion is not associated with increased protest activity.

The coefficients estimated in both Poisson (log of expected counts) and logistic (log odds) regression are not readily interpretable beyond direction. I now turn to the substantive interpretation of the coefficients that display at least some level of significance.

[22]Here, the expected direction is positive. This is because a 1 on the binary independent variables reflects "substantive democratic erosion" from year t-1 to year t

6.3.1 Substantive Interpretation of the Effects

As discussed in section 6.1, it is necessary to establish plausible counterfactuals when interpreting the substantive implications of fixed effects models. While my models show limited significance, I will discuss the substantive effects of democratic erosion targeting the freedom of expression and the freedom of association. as shown in Table 6.3, the estimated coefficients of freedom of expression and freedom of association are -1.51 and -1.66 respectively. These coefficient estimates are significant at the 0.01 level, meaning that 90 times out of a 100, the estimated effect can be distinguished from 0. As neither estimate reaches the conventional level of significance at 0.0, the effects of these variables should be interpreted with care. Moreover, as noted earlier, I cannot rule out that the results are due to positive change in the democracy indexes, rather than negative change.

The Poisson model estimates the log of the expected counts, which are cumbersome to interpret beyond direction. Exponentiation the coefficient estimates however, yields incident rate ratios (IRRs) which are more intuitively interpreted. This yields IRRs of -4.54 and -5.28 respectively. As I am interested in declines in democratic quality, representing democratic erosion, I flip the signing of these estimates. This leads to the interpretation that: on average, the expected count of protests in a given country is multiplied by a factor of 4.54 if the freedom of expression index decreases by one unit in that country, ceteris paribus. Similarly, the expected count of protests in a given country is, on average, multiplied by a factor of 5.28 if the freedom of association index decreases by one unit in that country, ceteris paribus.

There is however a significant caveat to this interpretation. As the two democracy indexes range from 0 to 1, a "one unit decrease" would mean a decrease from 1 to 0. As described in section 6.1 and showed in Table 6.1, this is not empirically plausible. The observed range in these variables spans from 0.55 to 0.99 (equal to 0.44) for freedom of expression and from 0.42 to 0.95 (0.53) for freedom of association. Moreover, the average range observed *within* countries across time is 0.11 and 0.08 respectively.

A significantly more plausible counterfactual is thus a decrease in freedom of expression and freedom of association equal to the respective standard deviation (rather than unit). The standard deviation in the freedom of expression index is 0.09. Multiplying the original coefficient estimate of -1.51 with the standard deviation gives -0.14. Exponentiating and flipping the signing to reflect decreases in the variable gives and IRR of 1.15. This can then be interpreted: as on average, the expected count of protests in a given country is multiplied by a factor of 1.15 if the freedom of expression index decreases by one standard deviation in that country,

ceteris paribus. Doing the same for freedom of association (with a standard deviation of 0.06), wields the interpretation that the expected count of protests in a given country is, on average, multiplied by a factor of 1.11 if the freedom of association index experiences a decrease equal to one standard deviation that country, ceteris paribus.

6.4 Robustness Checks

I have already sought to strengthen the robustness of my results by testing two different operationalizations of democratic erosion. This is done to increase the internal validity and ensure that the results are not driven by model specifications. In this section I conduct further robustness checks to test the robustness of my (null) results.

6.4.1 Outliers and Influential Observations

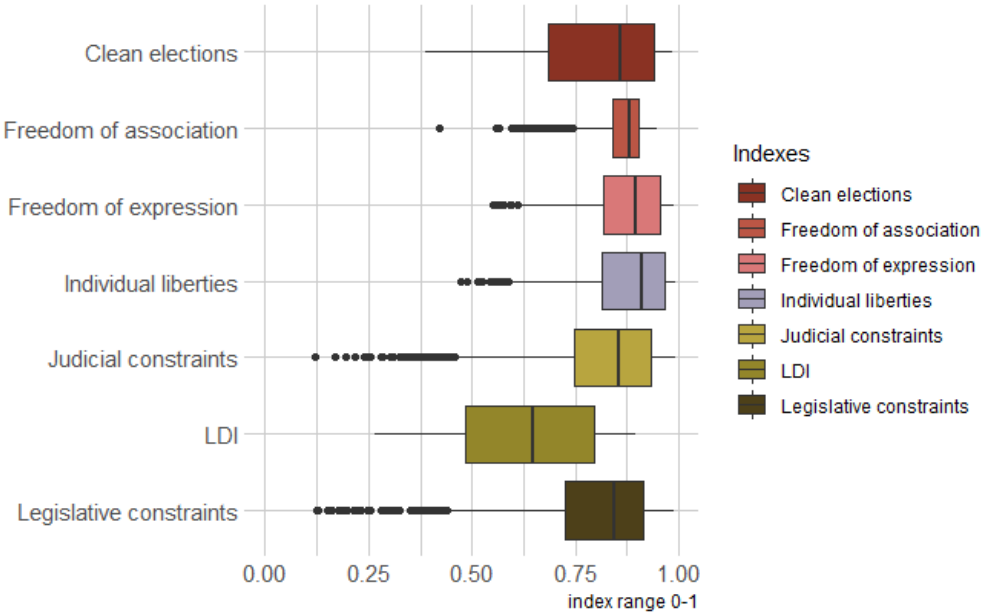
The data that I am working with contains several outliers and potentially influential observations. As already discussed, the nature of my dependent variable as a count entails outliers due to the high count of zeroes and a heavily skewed tail, see Figure 5.1. Employing count models such as PRM take this into account. Nevertheless, my independent variables measuring democratic erosion are also fraught with outliers, as can be seen in Figure 6.2. While most countries in my sample of democracies will be concentrated at the top of the democracy indexes, the democracy category allow for some variance. While countries with high scores on certain sub-indexes often have high scores on other, a low score in one area can, to a certain extent, be countered by a high score in another to still ensure democracy status.

Influential observations are observations that greatly impact the results of a regression, for instance because they have extreme values on the independent variable. It is conceivable that some of the outliers detected in the explanatory variables are sufficiently strong to drive my results.

In particular, I am interested in finding out if certain countries greatly impact the estimated coefficients. The fixed effects regressions estimate the average effect using within-country variance and are thus subject to varying levels of country influence.

To test the degree of excessive country-specific influence, I run the models several times, dropping one country each time. As I have 100 countries in my sample, this entails 100 estimations. For each estimation I extract the beta coefficients. This is done to isolate the effect the individual countries have on the joint estimate. If the estimated coefficient changes substantively when one country is dropped,

Figure 6.2: Distribution of Democracy Indexes



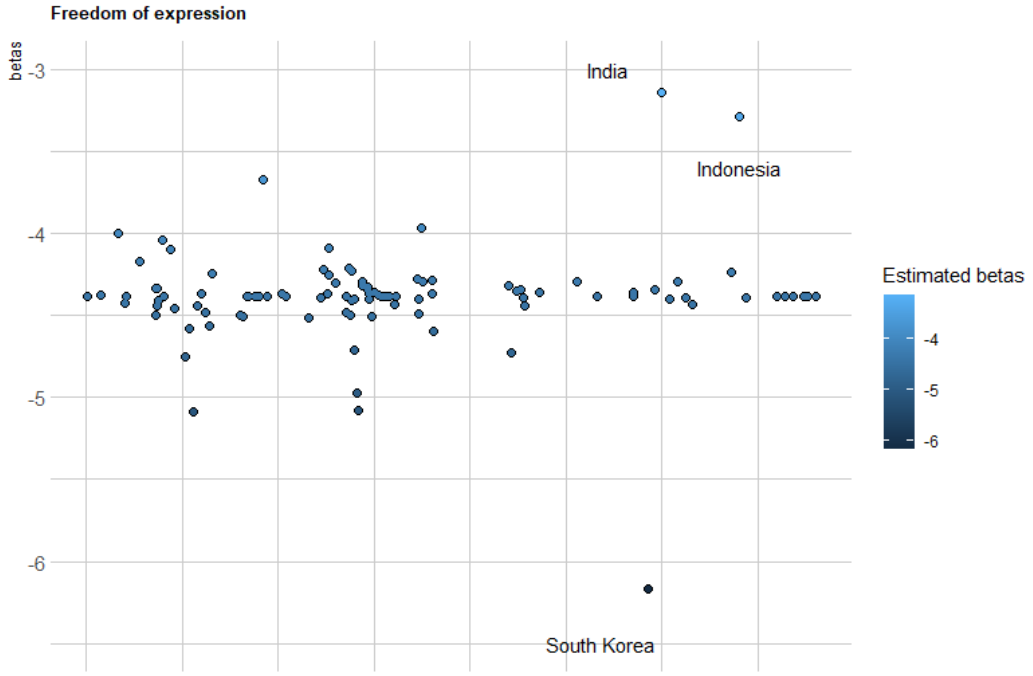
that country is said to greatly influence the estimation. I can then exclude highly influential countries and re-run my models to check if the results change in any meaningful way.

To illustrate the process, I start with the model including freedom of expression as explanatory variable. The estimated beta coefficients for the freedom of expression index are plotted in Figure 6.3. Each point represents the coefficient estimated when a country was dropped. Most model iterations yield fairly consistent estimates. The exceptions are the models where India, Indonesia, South Korea was dropped.

To test the magnitude of the effects, I run the model excluding all three countries. I do the same with other models as well, including freedom of association, individual liberties, clean elections, judicial constraints and legislative constraints. The plotted beta coefficients can be found in Figure A.5.

The regression results when excluding the influential countries are presented in Table A.10. When doing this freedom of expression remains negatively signed and significant at the 0.1 level. Moreover, as a result of excluding Ecuador from the analysis, the coefficient estimate for legislative constraints is negative and significant at the 0.05 level. This latter finding contradicts hypothesis H7. The remaining estimates of the explanatory variables are insignificant. Apart from the changes in the legislative constraints variable, the exclusion of influential countries does not seem to alter the results in any meaningful way.

Figure 6.3: Influential Countries - Freedom of Expression



6.4.2 Time Trends

In my main models, I employ country fixed effects to account for unobserved heterogeneity across countries and thus to avoid potential omitted variable bias. The country fixed effects absorb all cross country, time invariant factors. However, time variant factors are not controlled for. If there exist time variant factors that influence the outcome variable, this could introduce bias in my estimations. Protests are known to diffuse across regions in waves (Andrews & Biggs, 2006; Gleditsch & Rivera, 2017; Koesel & Bunce, 2013; Leon-Ablan et al., 2021), rendering temporal heterogeneity plausible. To test whether such heterogeneity might influence my result, I run my models with both country fixed effects and year fixed effects. Time fixed effects can control for the unchanging and unobservable omitted variables by adding dummy variables for all time periods (sans one) (Studenmund, 2017, p. 494).

The reason I have not adopted two-way fixed effects in my main models is that it further reduced the variability in the data used in the estimations, limiting the statistical power. Moreover, the time span of 30 years is fairly narrow, reducing the concern of major temporal influence. Lastly, the interpretation of two-way fixed effects is complex and not always readily available (Wooldridge, 2021).

When applying two-way fixed effects to the model using the LDI as a measure of democratic erosion, the results do not change in any meaningful capacity. The

LDI is still negatively signed and insignificant. See Table A.11. The same is true for the models using the sub-indexes as measures of erosion of different democratic components. The only variable approaching significance is freedom of expression which is negatively signed and significant at the 0.1 level. See Table A.12.

When applying two-way fixed effects to the model specification operationalizing democratic erosion as a binary variable capturing substantive declines in democratic capacities from year t-1 to year t, the results also remain robust. Freedom of expression is, as the only explanatory variable, negatively signed and significant at the 0.05 level. See Table A.13.

6.4.3 All Protests

In my original sample, I only included protests coded as having one of the four following claims as their first or second priority: police brutality, political processes, removal of corrupt politician, social restrictions. I did this to limit noise in my data and to enable a plausible link between democratic erosion and subsequent protests.

To test whether this limitation exert any substantive influence on my results, I run my models without filtering protests by demands. Democratic erosion can take on many shapes and forms, and so can protests in defence of democracy. As Popovic (2015) points out: the famous salt march led by Gandhi had Indian independence at its core while rights to harvest salt became the outward symbol. Similarly, the protests against increased prices of cottage cheese in Israel was just as much directed towards government policies as the companies heightening prices.

When using all protests, the results change slightly. First, the measure of democratic erosion as change in the LDI remain insignificant, but is no longer negatively signed, Table A.14. For the models with disaggregated measures of democratic erosion, not filtering out "irrelevant" protests attenuates the effect of the freedom of expression index to the point of insignificance, see Table A.15. While it is still negatively signed, along with the freedom of association index, the clean election index and individual liberties index, none of the explanatory variables reaches significance.

This indicates that filtering out protests mainly centred around wage disputes, land tenure, price increases or tax policy is a useful strategy for studying the link between democratic erosion and subsequent protests in defence of democracy.

6.5 Summary

Overall, my empirical analysis yields little support for the hypothesis that citizens will take to the streets to defend democracy. Democratic erosion at large is not a significant predictor of increased protest activity in any of my model specifications.

Thus, I find no support for hypothesis H1a: *Democratic erosion is associated with increased anti-state protest intensity.*

Moreover, there are no strong indications that levels of anti-state protests vary across the democratic components being eroded. The freedom of expression index is the only variable that seems to be associated with protest intensity in any meaningful way, however, the strength and robustness of the relationship is ambiguous. While I find some, albeit weak, support for hypothesis H2: *Democratic erosion targeting freedom of expression is associated with increased anti-state protest intensity*, hypotheses H3 and H4 are not supported by my analysis: *Democratic erosion targeting freedom of association is associated with increased anti-state protest intensity* and *Democratic erosion targeting individual liberties is associated with increased anti-state protest intensity.*

I did not expect to find any association between democratic erosion targeting the electoral system, the judiciary or the legislative body. My empirical analysis largely supports hypotheses. Thus I find support for hypothesis H5: *Democratic erosion targeting electoral institutions is* ***not*** *associated with increased anti-state protest intensity.* The same is true for hypothesis H6: *Democratic erosion targeting judicial constraints is* ***not*** *associated with increased anti-state protest intensity.* While the legislative constraints on the executive index seems to be significantly associated with protest intensity when excluding Ecuador, this is the only model specification where the coefficient estimate reaches any conventional significance level. My results largely support hypothesis 7: *Democratic erosion targeting legislative constraints is* ***not*** *associated with increased anti-state protest intensity*, however, there are some uncertainty tied to the strength and robustness of this finding.

As highlighted in summary of the Methods chapter, the risk of observing Type II errors (failing to reject a false null hypothesis), increases with efforts to robust the standard errors to avoid Type I errors (rejecting a true null hypothesis. The (null) results presented in this chapter, could theoretically be caused by type II errors. However, the adjustment of the standard errors is carefully conducted based on sound theoretical and methodological reasoning. Moreover, my results remain robust through several robustness checks, indicating that they are in fact driven by empirical patterns and not model misspecifications. Lastly, Type II errors remain preferred over Type I errors.

7 Discussion

This thesis explored the research question:

> *When is democratic erosion met with mass mobilization in defence of citizens' democratic rights and freedoms?*

Drawing on insights from the protest literature on opportunities and motivations to protest, further substantiated by relative deprivation theory and frame alignment theory, I theorized that democratic erosion would be positively associated with subsequent anti-state protests. Moreover, I expected the mobilizing effects to be conditioned on the democratic component being eroded. In the theory chapter, I argue that both opportunities and motivation are necessary preconditions for protest. However, in the context of democratic erosion however, opportunities and motivation are likely to pull in opposite directions. Nevertheless, I expected the motivation mechanism to hold more importance when explaining protest activity facing democratic erosion.

While letting these theoretical expectations guide my research, this thesis remains an exploratory study of when (or if) people take to the streets to oppose incumbent led democratic erosion. Exploratory quantitative research can "discover empirical generalizations that theory must account for" (Achen, 2005, p. 328). I have provided a plausible theoretical explanation centred on the contention between opportunities and motivation to protest that contextualizes my findings. However, I do not contend that this is the only viable explanation. My findings first and foremost challenge the widely adopted notion that an active citizenry will defend democracy and hold the incumbent accountable when they transcend the rules of democracy. This has important implications for the study of democratic erosion as well as relevant policy implications for pro-democracy actors. Additionally, this analysis shed light on how opportunity and motivation mechanisms may have contradictory effects and potentially cancel each other out. This has implications for the wider literature on contentious politics, as well as for activists and protesters.

In this chapter, I contextualize the statistical findings and provide explanations for the null results. I also discuss limitations and implications.

7.1 Contextualizing the Results

Contrary to my expectations, the vast majority of my models returned insignificant coefficient estimates. The results imply that there is no general association between democratic erosion and subsequent protest activity, and that this is true across different democratic components.

In my main models (Table 6.3), both freedom of expression and freedom of association are signed in the expected direction and significant at the 0.1 level. Although not reaching conventional levels of significance, this is in line with my theoretical expectations based on the contention between opportunities and motivations. Simultaneously, these two democratic components are two of the components that have experienced the biggest decline between 2011 and 2021 (Boese & Lindberg, 2022, p. 17). The apparent general and deliberate attacks on media freedoms, civil society autonomy and freedom of discussion have been framed as representing the "changing nature of autocratization" (Boese & Lindberg, 2022). While the count of protests has fluctuated across the three decades studied, 1990-2020, there has been an increase in protest activity[23] since 2010, culminating in "the year of protest" in 2019. This might shed some light on why these two democratic components hold the most explanatory power when modelling anti-state protests.

As shown in the Results chapter, I find support for hypotheses H5-H7. Declines in the democratic indexes measuring the capacity of the electoral, judicial and legislative bodies are not associated with increased protest activity. In isolation, this supports my theoretical argument that citizens will not be sufficiently motivated to engage in protest activity faced with erosion of democratic institutions and procedures. The gradual limitations imposed on the judiciary and legislature to reduce their ability to check the incumbent are bureaucratic, far-removed from the average citizen's daily life and difficult to frame as fatal to democracy and thus warranting direct action.

This line of reasoning postulates that democratic erosion targeting democratic rights and freedoms that are individual, greatly affects citizens in their day-to-day life and relatively easy to frame as detrimental to democracy should be associated with increased protest activity. My findings display limited empirical support for this argument. However, as I have discussed throughout this thesis, democratic erosion affects both opportunities to protest and motivation. My theoretical expectations relied on the assumption that increased motivation would be more important than limited opportunity in the case of democratic erosion. This might be a flawed assumption. Democratic erosion may impose stronger limitations on the opportunities to protest than I initially assumed. Alternatively, democratic erosion may

[23] At least protest activity that has been recorded and included in the MM dataset

not be as motivating as I hypothesized - even when it targets individual democratic rights and freedoms.

7.1.1 The Sequence of Democratic Erosion

In the theory chapter, I argued that democratic erosion should impact the opportunities to protest heterogeneously depending on the aspect of democracy targeted. Although opportunities for protest activity are relatively high in democracies, these opportunity structures are intrinsically linked to democratic rights and freedoms. Thus, when democratic erosion unfolds, it makes it harder to organize collective resistance. Moreover, erosion of one democratic component will likely lower the bar for executing democratic erosion of other democratic norms or institutions. As an example, if the judicial independence is weakened through deliberate efforts by the incumbent, it becomes more difficult to check the incumbent's subsequent efforts to limit other democratic rights through the court system. While not directly related to protests, this example alludes to the negative reciprocal spiral that is democratic erosion.

When discussing the effects of democratic erosion on opportunities to protest, I argued that democratic erosion targeting freedom of expression and freedom of association would impose the strongest limitations on the society's ability to organize direct collective action. These are also the democratic components that have seen the strongest decline in recent years (Boese & Lindberg, 2022). Moreover, these are commonly also the first democratic components targeted under emerging episodes of democratic erosion. Democratic erosion follows a decently uniform pattern starting with media censorship and reduction in freedoms of expression and ending with limitations in electoral freedom. Hellmeier et al. (2021) describes the process as follows:

> Media and academic freedoms, and civil society, are typically repressed first. Alongside that, ruling governments often polarize society through official disinformation campaigns disseminated via social media and by encouraging disrespect for counterarguments from political opponents. Only then are formal institutions such as the quality of elections undermined in a further step towards autocracy. (p.1061)

This pattern has several implications. First, it speaks to the understanding of democratic erosion as a deliberate strategy executed by the incumbent (Bermeo, 2016; Paloumpis et al., 2019; Varol, 2014). The incumbent continuously has to balance the costs and benefits of engaging in democratic erosion and avoid detrimental backlash from both their constituencies and formal democratic institutions.

It is thus a strategic choice to start by incrementally repressing individual rights and to polarize the society, before targeting the formal institutions. By weakening the social capacity to resist further democratic erosion, the incumbent preventively limits protest while avoiding the potential backlash associated with reactive repression. This leads to the second implication. If freedom of expression and freedom of association are targeted first (and seeing the harshest repression) in episodes of democratic erosion because it will enable further erosion, it might not be surprising that my empirical analysis show no significant effect of democratic erosion targeting other democratic aspects. Put differently, countries experiencing democratic erosion of individual liberties, the electoral system or the judicial or legislative bodies, have likely already seen significant repression of media independence and civil society autonomy. Thus, the latent capacity in the society to organize protests in defence of democracy has already been reduced.

If this is the case, it might provide an explanation of why I find that democratic erosion generally is not met by protests. Nevertheless, this remain speculations and need to be substantiated by carefully selected case studies and process tracing to establish the sequential nature of democratic erosion.

7.1.2 Citizens as Democracy's Last Defence?

An active citizenry and a vibrant civil society are widely assumed to function as a bulwark against authoritarianism. As barriers to collective direct action are relatively low in democracies, it is moreover assumed that citizens will resort to contentious politics and protest activity to check incumbents that transcends the bounds of democracy. This thesis challenges these assumptions.

Based on my analysis, there does not seem to be a general trend of increased protests in defence of democracy facing democratic erosion. While there may be certain civil society organizations or sporadic resistance, the findings presented in this thesis suggest that citizens at large will not defend democracy through anti-state protests. As noted in the introduction, *citizens* are not a homogeneous group. Pernicious polarization is one of the key characteristics of the current wave of democratic erosion (McCoy & Somer, 2019; Somer et al., 2021). Moreover, it is commonly driven in the forefront of the democratic erosion efforts led by the incumbent (Boese & Lindberg, 2022). It is often this polarization that enables the aspiring autocrat, running on a populist and anti-democratic platform, to secure electoral victory (Meléndez & Kaltwasser, 2021; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Sato & Arce, 2022). Thus, a society experiencing democratic erosion is likely to simultaneously experience polarization, making collective action increasingly difficult to organize and execute.

Democratic erosion is a deliberate strategy by the incumbent who leverage a wide

range of tools. Including populist and polarizing policies advancing fractionalization. With a relatively broad support base for the incumbent, far from everyone will be easily motivated to participate in anti-state protests in defence of democracy. And as democratic erosion endures, the organizational capacity needed to frame and communicate democratic erosion as detrimental to democracy and necessary to resist will decrease.

Moreover, democratic erosion might be a weaker motivator for protests even among the pro-democratic parts of the population. Democratic erosion is incremental in nature, shrouded in bureaucracy and framed as legitimate and necessary by the incumbent. As Bermeo (2016, p.14) notes, the piecemeal erosion of democratic components may be "too arcane to be the stuff of mass mobilization". Moreover, democratic erosion seldom has the bright spark or focal element that effectively call citizens to the streets, nor do countries necessarily have strong social movement leaders that can channel the frustration and deprivation felt by citizens into action.

Both frame alignment theory and relative deprivation theory are centred on subjective perceptions of the individual context, rather than objective circumstances. While I address this in my theory chapter, the distinction between objective and subjective inequalities poses a tension in my thesis. The measures of democratic quality and democratic erosion that I employ in my analysis only captures objective realities. While effectively measuring the objective decline in freedom of expression in a given country from one year to another, the democracy indexes are incapable of disseminating information about the subjective experience of that decline. That would require survey-data asking about perceived inequalities (Pettigrew, 2016; Weede, 1981). As I do not have access to such data, there is a possibility that the objective deprivation measured by declines in the democracy indexes fail to translate into subjective perceptions about deprivation. If this is the case, people might not be sufficiently motivated to protest in defence of democracy because they do not perceive democratic erosion as a substantial deprivation.

Ultimately, my findings question to what extent we can rely on citizens, civil society and collective action as a tool to defend core democratic norms, rights, institutions and procedures. If this indeed reflects reality, it might become even more important to preemptively strengthen democratic institutions and enable them to constrain the incumbent before democratic erosion reaches a point where citizens are expected to function as the last bulwark. I will return to the theoretical and practical implications of this in the conclusion.

7.2 Limitations

My findings have limitations regarding reliability and causal inference. The fundamental problem of causal inference references the fact that causality is non observable (King et al., 1994). To a certain extent, one is forced to rely on descriptive observations and convincing counterfactuals. The reliability of the observations and the validity of the research design are thus important to discuss and reflect on.

7.2.1 Reliability

Questions about reliability are ever present in research leveraging observational data. Reliability is the "criterion for evaluating the process by which facts and observations were found, recorded, and collected"(Kreuzer, 2019, p. 126). Issues of reliability are particularly tied to the usage of the Mass Mobilization data set to measure protest. As explained in section 4.2.1 Dependent Variable: Protest Intensity, there are potential bias in the data set due to arbitrary inclusion criteria and limited source material. Moreover, the dependence on news sources to find protest events is likely to favour certain types of protest, i.e., large, Western and violent.

Using news sources to locate protest events relies on the assumption that reported events are an reliable and unbiased proxy for actual events. Discrepancy between actual events and reported events is likely to take the form of under-reporting (Biggs, 2018; Hutter, 2014; Ortiz et al., 2005). This could introduce excessive zeroes in my data. While true zeroes reflect "no protest event", excessive zeroes would reflect "non recording of protest event". These would appear as indistinguishable in the data while reflecting very different data generating processes. I do not account for the possibility of excessive zeroes. One way I could have done that is using a zero-inflated negative binomial model which considers both data generating processes as plausible (Long, 1997). However, a zero-inflated negative binomial model would fail to account for country fixed effects, which I ultimately consider as more important to address than excess zeroes. Moreover, employing fixed effects only leverages within-unit variation, meaning that if there is systematic under reporting of protests events across countries (but constant over time), this will be controlled for in the fixed effects models.

Due to the limited scope of this thesis, I did not account for relative protest size when operationalizing protest intensity. A protest of 60 persons and a protest of 60.000 arguably reflects different levels of mobilization and could provide valuable insight into the mobilizing capacities of democratic erosion. However, it is theoretically and methodologically challenging to account for protest size when transforming event data into panel data with country-years as units. Protest size estimates

are generally not precise (often described as "thousands" or "tens of thousands"), inhibiting a general average of protesters in a country-year. Moreover, the same people generally attend several protests introducing the possibility of double counting protesters. While this pose a limitation of my argument, I leave the issue of protest size for future research. Moreover, I suggest that future research leverage event data on both protests and democratic erosion, among other things allowing for incorporating relative protest size as a covariate.

7.2.2 Validity

The broad concept of validity refers to the commitment to measure what we think we measure (King et al., 1994, p. 25). I have already pointed to the discrepancy between observed relative deprivation and subjective perceptions about relative deprivation connected to the measure of democratic erosion. This remains an issue of measurement validity (Adcock & Collier, 2001), that should be addressed in future studies.

Turning to internal validity, I have employed different model specifications and variable operationalizations throughout the empirical analysis to ensure that my explanatory variables capture the empirical reality of democratic erosion. This is done to robust the internal validity, which is concerned with the proposed and estimated causal effect and refers to the extent to which we can be confident that the explanatory variable produced the observed effect (Halperin & Heath, 2020, p. 149). Nevertheless, a persistent challenge in my research design is that the concept of democratic erosion is strenuous to measure. It is particularly difficult to separate democratic erosion targeting different democratic components from each other. First, democratic erosion is likely to occur in several components simultaneously. Second, the democratic erosion of one component is likely to enable democratic erosion of another component.

I have sought to mitigate this issue of interdependence by estimating the effect of democratic erosion of particular democratic components in individual models. This way, multicollinearity is reduced, and the individual effects are isolated. However, this also heightens the risk of omitted variable bias as democratic erosion targeting component Z might be correlated with both democratic erosion targeting component X, which is being modelled, and the outcome Y. Additionally, this research design fails to account for the sequence of democratic erosion discussed above. While raising questions about the validity of my findings related to the specific democratic components, my overarching finding that on democratic erosion generally is not followed by protests in defence of democracy remains robust.

There is often some contention between internal and external validity. Exter-

nal validity refers to the generalizability beyond the particular study. While case studies or process tracing studies concerned with causal chains, may enable stronger internal validity and more robust causal claims, large-N analyses are better suited to probe or test general propositions. The aim of this study was to explore the understudied linkages between democratic erosion and protests. Remaining a broad, indicative, and exploratory study, this thesis does not propose strong claims about causal pathways or deterministic relationships. Nevertheless, limits to generalizability are always present. As described in the introduction, I consciously limited my sample to only include democracies and exclusively study democratic erosion. The main justification for this research design choice was the assumption that the causal mechanisms linking deterioration of democratic attributes to protests are distinctly different in democracies compared to autocracies. Thus, I do not claim generalizability beyond democratic contexts.

7.3 Recommendations for Future Research

While this thesis studies citizen mobilization in defence of democracy, it does not address under what conditions these mobilizations are likely to be *successful* in halting democratic erosion. This is left for future studies. However, to enable the study of correlates of successful protests, further research is needed on when and why people *sometimes* take to the streets in defence of democracy.

I make three interconnected recommendations for future research on protests in defence of democracy. First, when studying democratic erosion, and autocratic autocratization at large, one should more critically examine the assumption that citizens will take to the streets to defend democracy. While this is true in some cases, this thesis finds no systematic relationship between democratic erosion and subsequent anti-state protests. By challenging and critically address this assumption researchers may gain new insights into how democratic erosion is perceived, experienced and reacted to by citizens.

From this, the second recommendation follows. The possibility of contrary effects of democratic erosion on opportunities and motivation to protest should be acknowledged. This dual effect may explain why democratic erosion fails to be consistently met by protests in defence of democracy. Carefully selected case studies and rigorous process tracing efforts are needed to establish the causal path from democratic erosion, through opportunity and motivation, to protests. Moreover, the possibility of non-linear effects should also be explored. While this thesis constitutes an initial effort to distinguish democratic erosion from autocratic consolidation, further investigation could yield important insights. Democratic erosion at the very top of the

democracy scale might be perceived substantially different compared to democratic erosion occurring in a country at the brink of autocracy.

Third, future research should look into the possibility of matching event data on democratic erosion with readily available event data on protests. Parsimonious study of the linkages between specific democratic erosion events (e.g., the passing of a law limiting media independence) and subsequent protest events would enable a deeper understanding of the causal mechanisms at play. Moreover, awarding attention to the sequencing of such democratic erosion events could yield valuable insights into democratic erosion as a deliberate strategy and how it is used to pre-emptively limit opportunities for resistance.

8 Conclusive Remarks

Extensive research has been done on how protests can oust dictators and aid democratization. However, we know much less about when people will take to the streets to defend democracy against aspiring autocrats. This thesis has contributed to filling this research gap by asking: when is democratic erosion met with mass mobilization in defence of citizens' democratic rights and freedoms? To answer the question, I have systematically examined the mobilizing effects of democratic erosion in democracies between 1990 and 2020.

Drawing on established concepts and theories from the contentious politics literature, my theoretical framework has been grounded in the notion that both opportunities and motivation are necessary preconditions for collective direct action. Further, I theorized that democratic erosion both limits opportunities and increases motivation, resulting in an ambiguous mobilizing effects. As democratic erosion requires a minimum of democratic quality, I hypothesised that the motivation mechanism would be more important in predicting mass mobilization in defence of democracy. I also disaggregated democracy and examined the heterogeneous effects of opportunities and motivation across different democratic components.

To test my theoretical expectations, I combined democracy data from V-Dem on different democratic components with anti-state protest data sourced from the Mass Mobilization dataset. I also included relevant covariates, resulting in a panel dataset with near global coverage covering 1990-2020, and thus the entire "third wave of autocratization". To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study of this kind. Hence, I adopted an exploratory approach.

In my statistical analysis, I found no support for my first hypothesis, that democratic erosion is associated with increased protest intensity. When disaggregating democracy and examining the link between erosion of particular democratic components and subsequent protest, some variation appears. I find some support for the second hypothesis: that democratic erosion targeting freedom of expression is positively associated with increased protest intensity. However, democratic erosion targeting freedom of association, individual liberties, the electoral system or judicial and legislative constraints on the executive remain insignificant predictors of anti-state protests. While I expected democratic erosion targeting democratic in-

stitutions such as electoral, judicial and legislative bodies to be less motivating for direct action in defence of democracy, the overall lack of significant relationships between democratic erosion and protest was unexpected. I argue that the null results can be explained with reference to the contention between opportunities and motivation. As these mechanisms yield contradictory expectations, the effects might cancel each other out. Moreover, disaggregation of democracy shed light on how democratic erosion both constitutes a deliberate strategy by the incumbent and unfolds in an accelerating manner. Successful democratic erosion of one democratic aspect enables further democratic erosion in other aspects. Simultaneously opportunities to oppose the incumbent continuously decrease. Building on this insight, I argue that my results could be caused by the strategic sequencing of Democratic erosion, first targeting freedom of expression and freedom of association. This is in line with my theoretical assumptions regarding how democratic erosion across different democratic components heterogeneously affects opportunities and motivation.

My findings contribute to the emerging field autocratization- and democratic erosion studies by disaggregating the concept of democracy and exploring the mobilizing effects of democratic erosion across democratic components. To the best of my knowledge, this thesis constitutes the first effort to systematically examine the mobilizing effects of democratic erosion. The disaggregation of democracy is also novel and yields valuable insights into the complexity of democratic erosion. Moreover, this thesis speaks to the contentious politics literature and highlights how, while both necessary, the opportunity to protest and the motivation to protest may work in opposite directions. This underlines the importance of considering both mechanisms when seeking to explain protest activity - also in other contexts than democratic erosion. Last, my results challenge the widely held assumption that a vibrant civil society and an active citizenry will take to the streets to defend democracy against authoritarianism. This has long been a strong assumption in the literature on democracy, civil society and protests. However, my findings call for more deliberate and critical examinations of this assumption's validity and generalizability. This has implications for both future research, as outlined in my recommendations for future research, and pro-democracy groups, which I will turn to next.

8.1 Policy Implications

Social movement leaders and committed activists know first-hand how difficult it is to mobilize people in anti-state campaigns (Popovic & Miller, 2015). My findings are not novel in that respect. However, the results of my empirical analysis have several

other policy implications for those seeking to defend democracy, be it opposition parties or civil society organizations.

First, this thesis highlights how the nature of democratic erosion makes it particularly difficult to oppose through protests and mass mobilization. Democratic erosion indeed lacks the bright spark or focal element that effectively call citizens to the streets. For pro democratic civil society organizations, opposition parties and social movements, this means a larger portion of resources must be directed to mobilizing initiatives. The concealed nature of democratic erosion requires clear messaging, strong framing and direct communication about the potential consequences of further erosion. Simultaneously, democratic erosion confines the opportunities to organize collective resistance. Consequently, civil society organizations and other pro-democratic groups have to not only increase mobilization efforts, but also utilise innovative strategies and new repertoires to cope with increasing constraints. This poses considerable challenges for those defending democracy.

Second, my findings challenge the notion that citizens will take to the streets to defend democracy. Thus, pro-democracy groups might have to focus their effort on strengthening democratic institutions and procedures rather than relying on popular support for democratic norms and values. As democratic erosion function as a negative reciprocal spiral enabling further democratic erosion, it is crucial to defend democracy at an early stage. If citizens fail to mobilize before democratic reaches a critical point, it will become increasingly difficult to oppose the incumbent. However, if democratic institutions and procedures continuously are strengthened to robust democratic resilience, democratic erosion will be harder for the incumbent to successfully initiate. Democracy needs comprehensive strengthening and defending and pro-democracy groups should cooperate across fields. Democracy is only as strong as its weakest link.

Last, this thesis corroborates the observation frequently presented by the recent wave of research on autocratization and democratic erosion: "those who fall asleep in a democracy might wake up in a dictatorship".[24] No democracy is immune to attacks. Democratic rights, norms, institutions and procedures should not be taken for granted. As previously presumed consolidated democracies currently encounter attacks on core democratic pillars, this insight should not be slept on.

[24]Quote attributed to Otto Gritschneder

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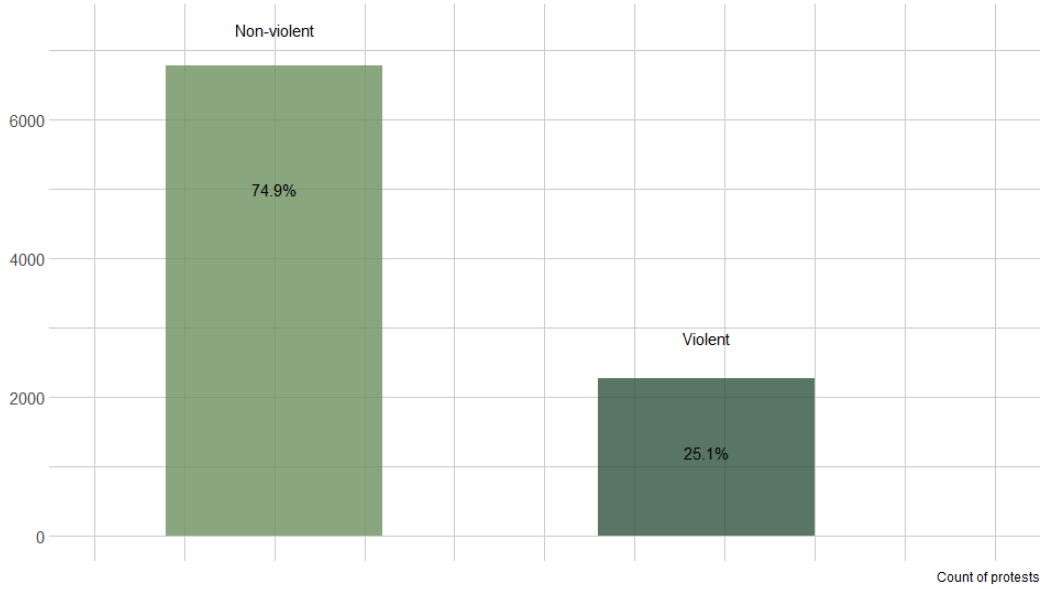
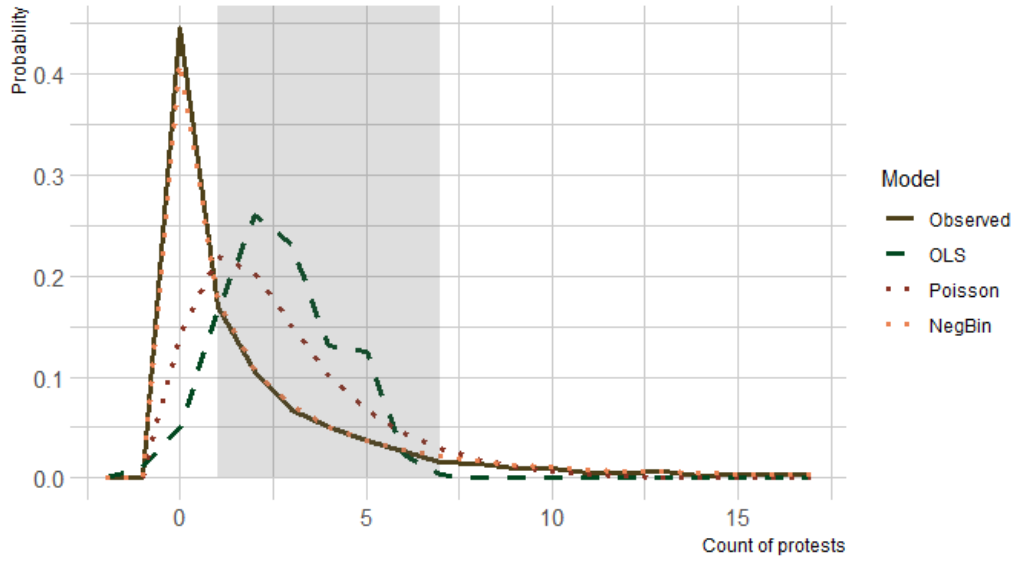
A Appendix

Figure A.1: Count of Violent and Non-violent Protests



Source: Mass Mobilization Data set, 2016

Figure A.2: Comparison of Model Fit



In figure A.2 the Poisson distribution outcome probabilities are compared to NBR probabilities. The Poisson model clearly under predicts zeros and over predicts count 1 to 7. The negative binomial model on the other hand initially displays a much better fit. The OLS model does not display adequate fit.

Figure A.3: Correlation Matrix - Predictors

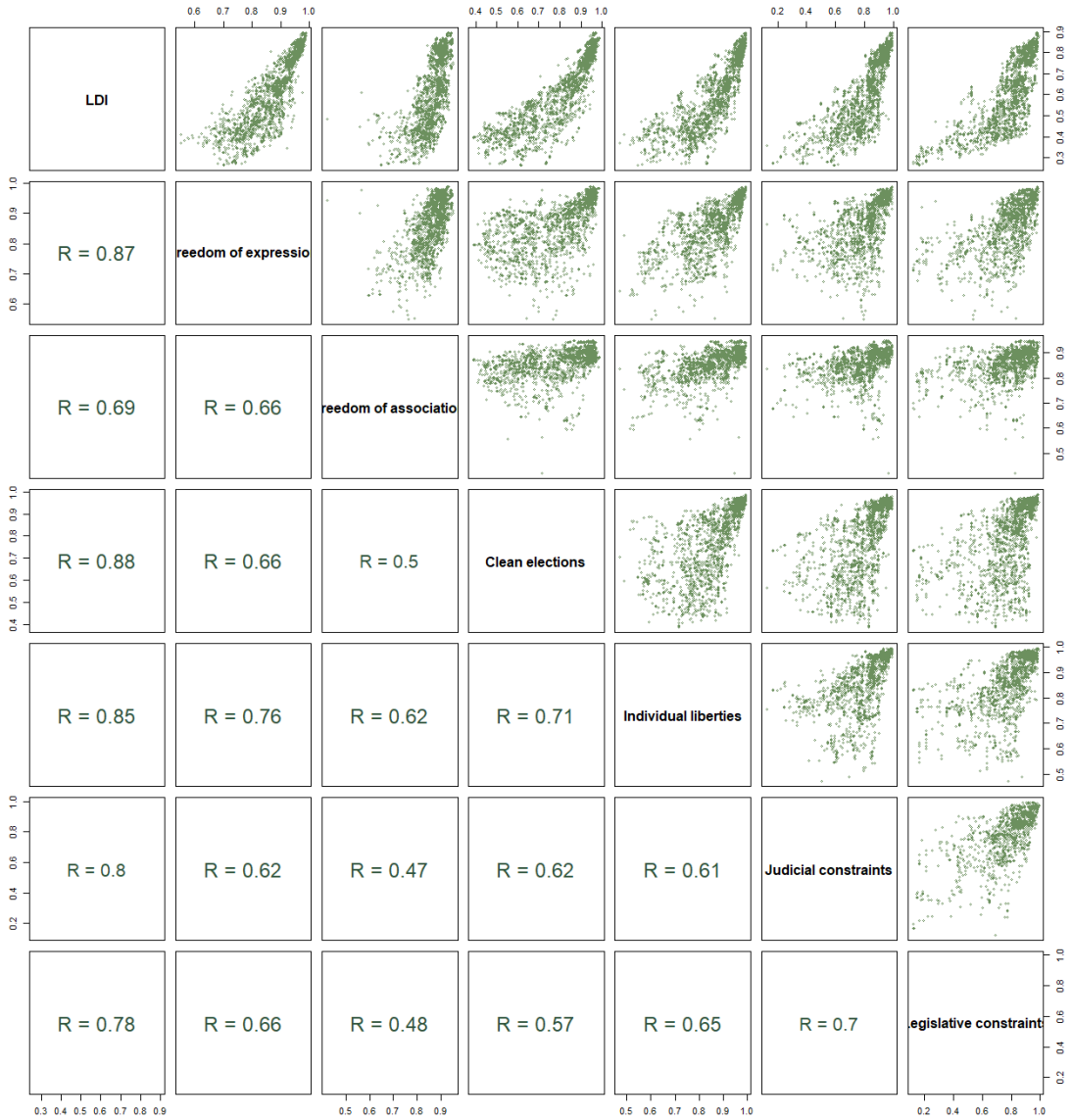


Figure A.4: Correlation Matrix - Controls

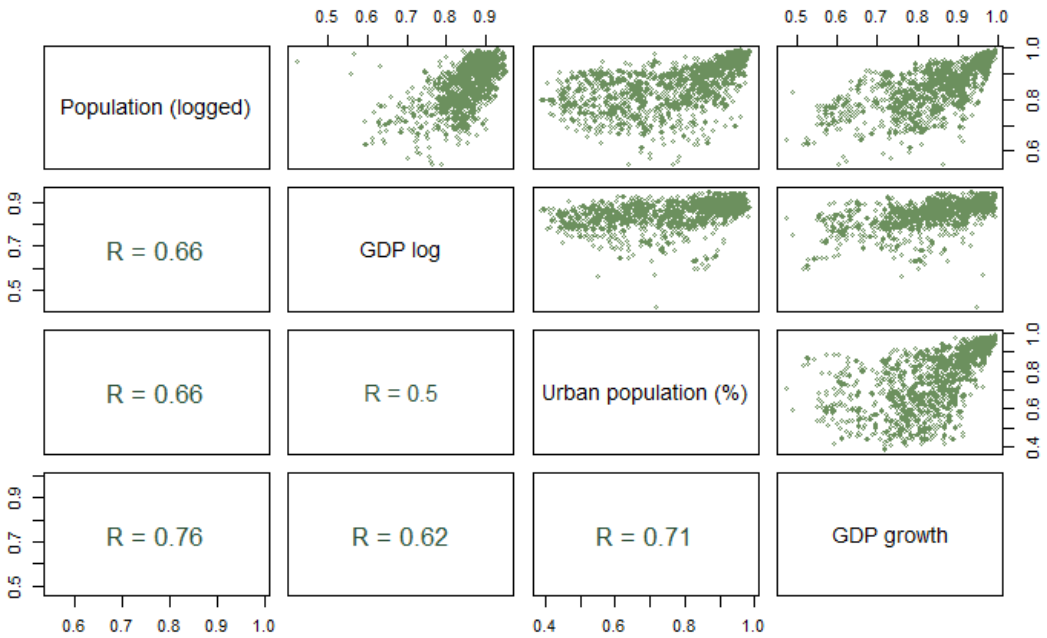


Figure A.5: Influential Countries

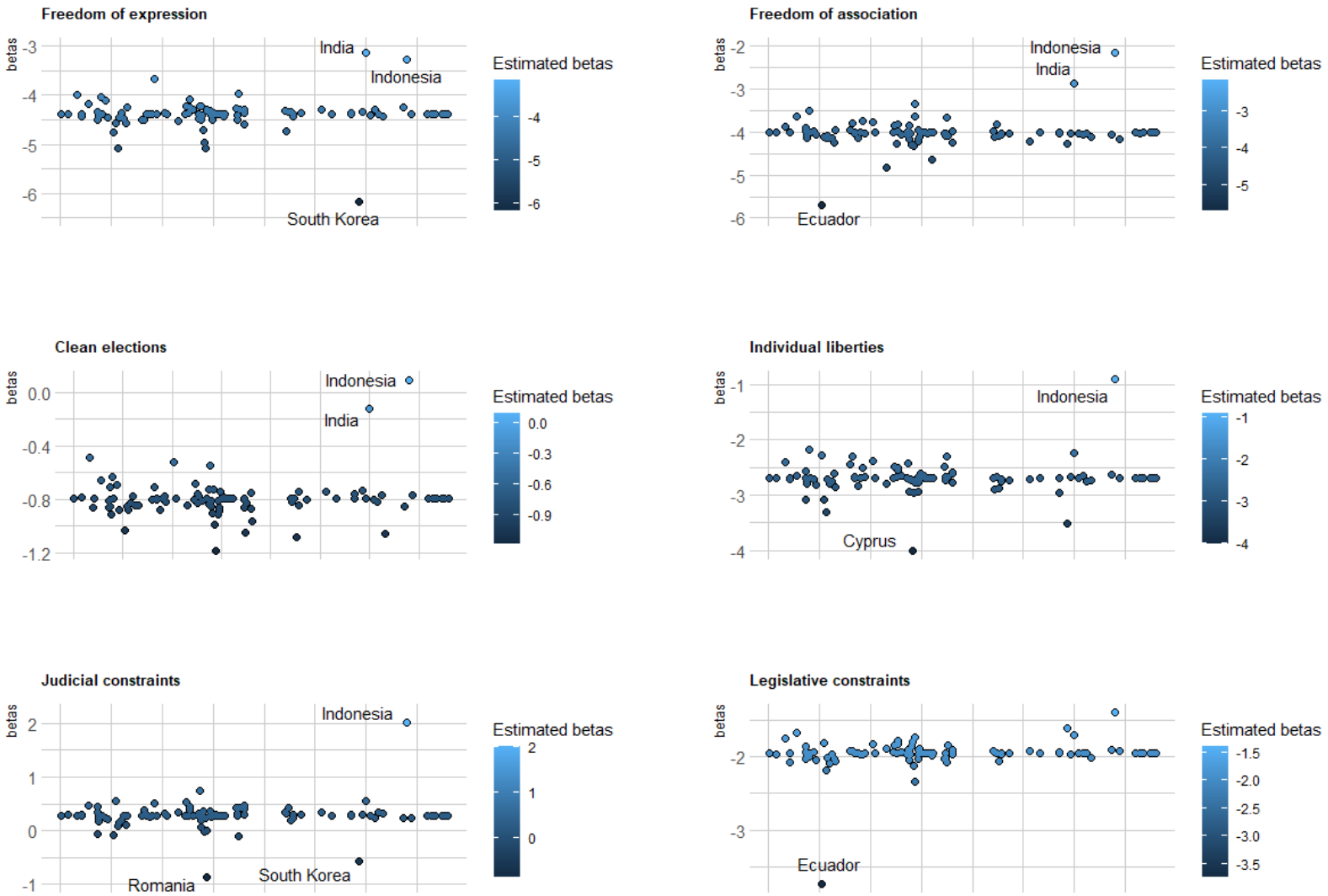


Table A.1: VIF Scores

	GVIF	**Df**	**GVIF^(1/(2*Df))**
Model 1			
Freedom of expression	6.272246e+00	1	2.504445
Population (log)	5.742207e+02	1	23.962902
GDP (log)	6.274360e+01	1	7.921086
Election year (binary)	1.035607e+00	1	1.017648
Urban population (%)	9.749789e+01	1	9.874102
GDP growth	1.168237e+00	1	1.080850
Country FE	2.837747e+06	85	1.091336
Model 2			
Freedom of association	3.654798e+00	1	1.911753
Population (log)	5.509391e+02	1	23.472093
GDP (log)	6.260805e+01	1	7.912525
Election year (binary)	1.035400e+00	1	1.017546
Urban population (%)	9.541633e+01	1	9.768129
GDP growth	1.190115e+00	1	1.090924
Country FE	1.412830e+06	85	1.086868
Model 3			
Clean elections	8.925824e+00	1	2.987612
Population (log)	5.627778e+02	1	23.722939
GDP (log)	6.375371e+01	1	7.984592
Election year (binary)	1.037862e+00	1	1.018755
Urban population (%)	1.007219e+02	1	10.036028
GDP growth	1.165254e+00	1	1.079469
Country FE	2.900291e+06	85	1.091476
Model 4			
Individual liberties	1.452154e+01	1	3.810714
Population (log)	5.812677e+02	1	24.109494
GDP (log)	6.407459e+01	1	8.004661
Election year (binary)	1.038242e+00	1	1.018942
Urban population (%)	9.792549e+01	1	9.895731
GDP growth	1.186363e+00	1	1.089203
Country FE	5.908965e+06	85	1.096055
Model 5			
Judicial constraints	1.053003e+01	1	3.245000
Population (log)	5.674293e+02	1	23.820774
GDP (log)	6.414615e+01	1	8.009129
Election year (binary)	1.035197e+00	1	1.017447
Urban population (%)	9.879471e+01	1	9.939553
GDP growth	1.180851e+00	1	1.086670
Country FE	6.048462e+06	85	1.096206
Model 6			
Legislative constraints	8.500185e+00	1	2.915508
Population (log)	5.618257e+02	1	23.702863
GDP (log)	6.544256e+01	1	8.089657
Election year (binary)	1.034782e+00	1	1.017242
Urban population (%)	9.797619e+01	1	9.898292
GDP growth	1.168910e+00	1	1.081161
Country FE	5.165218e+06	85	1.095188

Table A.2: Protest Intensity: LDI, Including Population Variables

	Total erosion
	Protest intensity
	Poisson
LDI	−0.503
	(0.803)
Population (logged)	−0.037
	(0.642)
GDP log	−0.128
	(0.269)
Election year	0.083
	(0.055)
Urban population (%)	0.027
	(0.019)
GDP growth	0.002
	(0.012)
Constant	0.482
	(8.362)
Effect	Country FE
SE	Newey-West
Observations	2,137
Log Likelihood	−4,959.815
Akaike Inf. Crit.	10,103.630
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.3: Protest Intensity: LDI, Binary

	Total erosion			
	Protest intensity			
	Poisson			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Erosion > 0.05	0.134			
	(0.237)			
Erosion > 0.02		0.118		
		(0.118)		
Erosion > 0.01			0.066	
			(0.116)	
Erosion > 0.00				0.025
				(0.057)
GDP log	0.060	0.046	0.043	0.056
	(0.213)	(0.210)	(0.214)	(0.214)
Election year	0.076	0.076	0.076	0.080
	(0.055)	(0.056)	(0.056)	(0.056)
GDP growth	−0.013	−0.013	−0.013	−0.013
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Constant	−0.323	−0.206	−0.189	−0.302
	(1.721)	(1.702)	(1.728)	(1.730)
Effect	Country FE	Country FE	Country FE	Country FE
SE	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West
Observations	2,126	2,126	2,126	2,126
Log Likelihood	−4,937.813	−4,936.778	−4,937.525	−4,938.266
Akaike Inf. Crit.	10,055.630	10,053.560	10,055.050	10,056.530
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.4: Protest Occurrence: LDI

	Total erosion	
	Protest occurrence	
	logistic	
	(1)	(2)
LDI	−0.985	−0.703
	(0.958)	(1.106)
GDP log		−0.421
		(0.276)
Election year		0.018
		(0.116)
GDP growth		0.002
		(0.014)
Constant	−0.164	3.128
	(0.583)	(2.269)
Effect	Country FE	Country FE
SE	Newey-West	Newey-West
Observations	2,204	2,137
Log Likelihood	−1,092.135	−1,060.728
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,362.271	2,301.457
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Table A.5: Protest Intensity: Disaggregated, Bivariate

	Erosion disaggregated					
	Protest intensity					
	Poisson					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Freedom of expression index	−0.481					
	(0.293)					
Freedom of association index		−0.385				
		(0.339)				
Clean elections index			−0.286			
			(0.283)			
Individual liberties index				−0.340		
				(0.379)		
Judicial constraints index					−0.223	
					(0.338)	
Legislative constraints index						−0.504*
						(0.265)
Constant	0.507	0.453	0.263	0.435	0.280	0.574*
	(0.330)	(0.371)	(0.269)	(0.429)	(0.325)	(0.330)
Effect	Country FE	Country FE	Country FE	Country FE	Country FE	Country FE
SE	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West
Observations	2,252	2,252	2,252	2,252	2,252	2,250
Log Likelihood	−5,235.184	−5,237.857	−5,238.023	−5,238.903	−5,239.313	−5,228.960
Akaike Inf. Crit.	10,648.370	10,653.710	10,654.050	10,655.810	10,656.630	10,635.920
Note:						*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.6: Protest Intensity: Disaggregated, Including Population Variables

	Erosion disaggregated					
	Protest intensity					
	Poisson					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Freedom of expression index	−1.536*					
	(0.888)					
Freedom of association index		−1.738*				
		(0.982)				
Clean elections index			−0.540			
			(0.648)			
Individual liberties index				−1.161		
				(1.019)		
Judicial constraints index					0.114	
					(0.860)	
Legislative constraints index						−0.628
						(0.545)
Population (logged)	0.089	−0.044	−0.072	0.059	−0.042	−0.065
	(0.646)	(0.618)	(0.638)	(0.649)	(0.633)	(0.622)
GDP log	−0.171	−0.119	−0.129	−0.116	−0.158	−0.099
	(0.254)	(0.263)	(0.266)	(0.269)	(0.264)	(0.267)
Election year	0.087	0.079	0.082	0.082	0.086	0.085
	(0.054)	(0.055)	(0.056)	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.055)
Urban population (%)	0.024	0.028	0.029	0.025	0.027	0.026
	(0.020)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)
GDP growth	0.002	0.004	0.001	0.003	0.001	0.002
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Constant	0.108	1.707	0.938	−0.137	0.529	1.065
	(8.285)	(7.995)	(8.267)	(8.398)	(8.236)	(8.072)
Effect	Country FE	Country FE	Country FE	Cuuntry FE	Country FE	Country FE
SE	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West
Observations	2,137	2,137	2,137	2,137	2,137	2,137
Log Likelihood	−4,950.503	−4,950.872	−4,959.052	−4,957.493	−4,961.522	−4,956.803
Akaike Inf. Crit.	10,085.010	10,085.740	10,102.100	10,098.990	10,107.040	10,097.600
Note:						*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.7: Protest Intensity: Disaggregated, Including LDI

	Erosion disaggregated					
	Protest intensity					
	Poisson					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Freedom of expression index	−2.835**					
	(1.313)					
Freedom of association index		−2.339*				
		(1.199)				
Clean elections index			−0.263			
			(0.848)			
Individual liberties index				−0.771		
				(1.035)		
Judicial constraints index					1.083	
					(0.947)	
Legislative constraints index						−0.801
						(0.818)
GDP log	−0.033	0.063	0.090	0.100	0.098	0.096
	(0.223)	(0.225)	(0.224)	(0.226)	(0.219)	(0.224)
Election year	0.087	0.075	0.076	0.074	0.075	0.079
	(0.057)	(0.056)	(0.057)	(0.056)	(0.056)	(0.057)
GDP growth	−0.012	−0.011	−0.013	−0.012	−0.015	−0.013
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
LDI	1.501	0.638	−0.142	−0.058	−1.149	0.351
	(1.170)	(0.950)	(1.059)	(0.889)	(0.927)	(1.165)
Constant	1.976	1.311	−0.383	0.058	−0.841	−0.067
	(1.929)	(1.955)	(1.699)	(1.829)	(1.771)	(1.725)
Effect	Country FE	Country FE	Country FE	Cuuntry FE	Country FE	Country FE
SE	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West
Observations	2,127	2,127	2,127	2,127	2,127	2,127
Log Likelihood	−4,924.827	−4,930.549	−4,938.859	−4,937.849	−4,933.954	−4,935.123
Akaike Inf. Crit.	10,031.650	10,043.100	10,059.720	10,057.700	10,049.910	10,052.250

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.8: Protest Occurrence: Disaggregated

	Erosion disaggregated					
	Protest occurrence					
	logistic					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Freedom of expression index	−3.191**					
	(1.371)					
Freedom of association index		−1.296				
		(1.286)				
Clean elections index			0.083			
			(0.844)			
Individual liberties index				−0.153		
				(1.354)		
Judicial constraints index					−0.259	
					(1.109)	
Legislative constraints index						−1.976**
						(0.964)
GDP log	−0.424	−0.415	−0.467*	−0.454	−0.455*	−0.369
	(0.267)	(0.271)	(0.273)	(0.283)	(0.269)	(0.273)
Election year	0.019	0.016	0.024	0.023	0.023	0.018
	(0.116)	(0.117)	(0.116)	(0.116)	(0.116)	(0.116)
GDP growth	0.003	0.003	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.002
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Constant	5.326**	3.851*	3.166	3.233	3.276	4.129*
	(2.378)	(2.338)	(2.270)	(2.281)	(2.302)	(2.281)
Effect	Country FE	Country FE	Country FE	Cuuntry FE	Country FE	Country FE
SE	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West
Observations	2,137	2,137	2,137	2,137	2,137	2,137
Log Likelihood	−1,058.279	−1,060.571	−1,060.931	−1,060.932	−1,060.910	−1,058.400
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,296.558	2,301.142	2,301.862	2,301.864	2,301.819	2,296.800

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.9: Protest Intensity: Disaggregated, Binary

	Erosion disaggregated					
	Protest intensity					
	Poisson					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Freedom of expression (binary)	0.145					
	(0.093)					
Freedom of association (binary)		0.106				
		(0.114)				
Clean elections (binary)			0.088			
			(0.162)			
Individual liberties (binary)				−0.066		
				(0.125)		
Judicial constraints (binary)					0.134	
					(0.089)	
Legislative constraints (binary)						0.021
						(0.120)
GDP log	0.030	0.046	0.045	0.080	0.034	0.061
	(0.211)	(0.212)	(0.208)	(0.218)	(0.212)	(0.212)
Election year	0.075	0.082	0.071	0.079	0.071	0.077
	(0.056)	(0.056)	(0.059)	(0.056)	(0.056)	(0.056)
GDP growth	−0.013	−0.013	−0.013	−0.013	−0.013	−0.013
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Constant	−0.093	−0.226	−0.204	−0.478	−0.123	−0.328
	(1.710)	(1.717)	(1.687)	(1.764)	(1.715)	(1.714)
Effect	Country FE	Country FE	Country FE	Cuuntry FE	Country FE	Country FE
SE	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West
Observations	2,126	2,126	2,126	2,126	2,126	2,126
Log Likelihood	−4,933.632	−4,936.656	−4,937.122	−4,937.984	−4,934.641	−4,938.577
Akaike Inf. Crit.	10,047.260	10,053.310	10,054.240	10,055.970	10,049.280	10,057.150

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.10: Protest Intensity: Disaggregated, Influential Countries

	Erosion disaggregated					
	Protest intensity					
	Poisson					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Freedom of expression index	−1.507*					
	(0.782)					
Freedom of association index		−1.343				
		(0.890)				
Clean elections index			0.430			
			(0.587)			
Individual liberties index				−0.731		
				(0.802)		
Judicial constraints index					0.091	
					(0.545)	
Legislative constraints index						−1.304**
						(0.510)
GDP log	0.120	0.008	−0.087	0.073	0.186	0.191
	(0.210)	(0.210)	(0.217)	(0.225)	(0.229)	(0.213)
Election year	0.092	0.097*	0.101*	0.083	0.065	0.081
	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.056)	(0.057)	(0.058)	(0.057)
GDP growth	−0.015	−0.010	−0.011	−0.006	−0.015	−0.013
	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.011)
Constant	0.359	1.201	0.666	0.187	−1.396	−0.255
	(1.756)	(1.632)	(1.676)	(1.673)	(1.819)	(1.600)
Effect	Country FE	Country FE	Country FE	Cuuntry FE	Country FE	Country FE
SE	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West
Observations	2,047	2,047	2,077	2,075	2,046	2,097
Log Likelihood	−4,659.193	−4,710.791	−4,794.550	−4,772.057	−4,620.983	−4,841.534
Akaike Inf. Crit.	9,492.385	9,595.583	9,765.100	9,720.114	9,415.965	9,861.067

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.11: Protest Intensity: LDI, Two-way FE

	Total erosion
	Protest intensity
	Poisson
LDI	−0.503
	(0.779)
GDP log	−0.454
	(0.383)
Election year	0.089
	(0.055)
GDP growth	−0.034**
	(0.014)
Constant	3.600
	(2.975)
Effect	Two-way FE
SE	Newey-West
Observations	2,137
Log Likelihood	−4,718.229
Akaike Inf. Crit.	9,674.459
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.12: Protest Intensity: Disaggregated, Two-way FE

	Erosion disaggregated					
	Protest intensity					
	Poisson					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Freedom of expression index	−1.743*					
	(0.899)					
Freedom of association index		−1.452				
		(0.981)				
Clean elections index			−0.415			
			(0.607)			
Individual liberties index				−1.301		
				(0.897)		
Judicial constraints index					0.192	
					(0.786)	
Legislative constraints index						−0.557
						(0.550)
GDP log	−0.514	−0.458	−0.459	−0.431	−0.477	−0.426
	(0.371)	(0.378)	(0.382)	(0.388)	(0.387)	(0.381)
Election year	0.095*	0.088	0.088	0.087	0.092*	0.092*
	(0.053)	(0.054)	(0.055)	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.053)
GDP growth	−0.035**	−0.032**	−0.035**	−0.033**	−0.035**	−0.034**
	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Constant	5.182*	4.561	3.628	4.342	3.489	3.662
	(2.942)	(2.985)	(2.988)	(3.019)	(3.054)	(2.951)
Effect	Two-way FE	Two-way FE	Two-way FE	Cuuntry FE	Two-way FE	Two-way FE
SE	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West
Observations	2,137	2,137	2,137	2,137	2,137	2,137
Log Likelihood	−4,706.454	−4,712.683	−4,718.422	−4,714.650	−4,719.649	−4,716.163
Akaike Inf. Crit.	9,650.909	9,663.367	9,674.845	9,667.299	9,677.298	9,670.327

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.13: Protest Intensity: Disaggregated, Binary Two-way FE

	Erosion disaggregated					
	Protest intensity					
	logistic					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Freedom of expression (binary)	0.326**					
	(0.161)					
Freedom of association (binary)		0.166				
		(0.204)				
Clean elections (binary)			0.040			
			(0.177)			
Individual liberties (binary)				−0.324		
				(0.215)		
Judicial constraints (binary)					0.043	
					(0.184)	
Legislative constraints (binary)						−0.054
						(0.165)
GDP log	−0.283	−0.276	−0.269	−0.231	−0.267	−0.263
	(0.300)	(0.301)	(0.301)	(0.302)	(0.302)	(0.303)
Election year	0.136	0.152	0.146	0.155	0.147	0.152
	(0.122)	(0.122)	(0.126)	(0.121)	(0.122)	(0.121)
GDP growth	−0.048***	−0.048***	−0.048***	−0.048***	−0.048***	−0.048***
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Constant	0.037	−0.025	−0.067	−0.360	−0.090	−0.125
	(2.430)	(2.443)	(2.445)	(2.453)	(2.452)	(2.463)
Effect	Two-way FE	Two-way FE	Two-way FE	Cuuntry FE	Two-way FE	Two-way FE
SE	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West
Observations	2,136	2,136	2,136	2,136	2,136	2,136
Log Likelihood	−1,211.449	−1,212.879	−1,213.189	−1,212.126	−1,213.184	−1,213.168
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,660.898	2,663.758	2,664.377	2,662.252	2,664.367	2,664.336

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.14: Protest Intensity: LDI, All Protests

	Total erosion
	Protest intensity (all protests)
	Poisson
LDI	0.023
	(0.837)
GDP log	−0.0001
	(0.223)
Election year	0.096*
	(0.055)
GDP growth	0.007
	(0.013)
Constant	0.515
	(1.687)
Effect	Country FE
SE	Newey-West
Observations	2,137
Log Likelihood	−5,559.553
Akaike Inf. Crit.	11,299.110
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.15: Protest Intensity: Disaggregated, All Protests

	Erosion disaggregated					
	Protest intensity					
	Poisson					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Freedom of expression index	−0.917					
	(0.941)					
Freedom of association index		−1.084				
		(1.020)				
Clean elections index			−0.287			
			(0.576)			
Individual liberties index				−0.816		
				(0.975)		
Judicial constraints index					0.208	
					(0.758)	
Legislative constraints index						−0.204
						(0.619)
GDP log	−0.002	0.025	0.021	0.037	−0.005	0.015
	(0.196)	(0.203)	(0.212)	(0.213)	(0.207)	(0.213)
Election year	0.096*	0.092*	0.093*	0.092*	0.096*	0.095*
	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.055)	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.054)
GDP growth	0.007	0.008	0.007	0.008	0.006	0.007
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Constant	1.250	1.219	0.487	0.944	0.431	0.582
	(1.589)	(1.607)	(1.659)	(1.621)	(1.669)	(1.622)
Effect	Country FE	Country FE	Country FE	Cuuntry FE	Country FE	Country FE
SE	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West	Newey-West
Observations	2,137	2,137	2,137	2,137	2,137	2,137
Log Likelihood	−5,554.768	−5,554.757	−5,558.636	−5,556.985	−5,559.130	−5,558.919
Akaike Inf. Crit.	11,289.540	11,289.510	11,297.270	11,293.970	11,298.260	11,297.840

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01