



Observing incumbent abuses: improving measures of electoral and competitive authoritarianism with new data

Samuel Handlin

To cite this article: Samuel Handlin (2016): Observing incumbent abuses: improving measures of electoral and competitive authoritarianism with new data, Democratization, DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2016.1149814

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2016.1149814>



Published online: 07 Mar 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 53



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Observing incumbent abuses: improving measures of electoral and competitive authoritarianism with new data

Samuel Handlin*

Department of Political Science, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, USA

(Received 29 May 2015; accepted 31 January 2016)

Electoral and competitive authoritarian regimes have become a major focus of comparative research. Yet, finding measures that distinguish these regimes from democracies is challenging, especially for scholars conducting large-*N* cross-national research, as this conceptual distinction rests on incumbent abuses that are difficult to systematically observe. This article reviews common measures that simply utilize extant regime indicators to draw the line with democracy, demonstrates their poor performance in mirroring a benchmark from case-based measurement, and illustrates the adverse implications for theory building. The article then shows how data on incumbent abuse from the National Elections Across Democracy and Dictatorship (NELDA) and Varieties of Democracy (VDEM) projects can be utilized to construct alternative measures. A NELDA-based measure far outperforms extant alternatives in mirroring the case-based benchmark. The article then discusses why a VDEM-based alternative should be a superior option once data is available and how one might be constructed.

Keywords: competitive authoritarianism; hybrid regimes; measurement; varieties of democracy; methodology

Competitive and electoral authoritarian regimes have proliferated in the post-Cold War era, attracting great attention from scholars of regime change and democratization. By definition, these regimes combine the formal institutions of democracy – particularly contested multiparty elections and broad adult suffrage – with antidemocratic incumbent abuses of state power, such as harassment of the opposition, manipulation of electoral authorities, intimidation of voters, improper pressure exerted on the media, and the large-scale appropriation of state resources for partisan ends.¹ The spread of these regimes has inspired a large and still growing wave of scholarship examining their dynamics, with particular attention

*Email: sam.handlin@utah.edu

to the role of electoral competition as a stabilizing or destabilizing device and the conditions under which such regimes democratize.²

Researchers of electoral and competitive authoritarianism are faced with several tricky issues of measurement. Perhaps most fundamentally, researchers must figure out how to distinguish competitive and electoral authoritarian regimes from democracies. Debates about how to conceptualize and measure democracy are legion in social science.³ Nevertheless, the proliferation of electoral authoritarianism has introduced a new level of complexity to these issues. By definition, distinguishing such regimes from democracies requires assessing not just the presence of formal democratic institutions but also the antidemocratic activities of incumbents, which tend to be informal and often intentionally hidden from view. Dealing with these measurement issues is particularly troublesome for scholars conducting large- N cross-national research. Scholars conducting case studies can draw upon detailed assessment of original and secondary materials to determine the extent of antidemocratic violations by incumbents in order to better score borderline cases.⁴ For scholars conducting large- N cross-national research, such strategies are impractical, given the necessity to score hundreds or thousands of cases. Scholars, therefore, rely on extant cross-national regime indicators to draw the line between democracy and competitive or electoral authoritarianism.⁵

This article reviews these approaches to measuring competitive and electoral authoritarianism among large- N cross-national researchers, illuminates their substantial limitations, and presents two alternative measurement strategies that leverage information on incumbent electoral abuses from recently or soon-to-be available data, the National Elections Across Democracy and Dictatorship (NELDA) data set and the Varieties of Democracy project (VDEM).⁶ The first section discusses case-based and extant large- N cross-national measures of electoral and competitive authoritarianism, shows that distinguishing electoral autocracy from democracy is a particularly difficult challenge, and highlights a common drawback to large- N measures. These approaches do not directly and/or transparently integrate observations of incumbent abuses to score borderline cases. The second section examines how well four such measures recover a benchmark available from case-based measurement: Levitsky and Way's scoring of competitive authoritarian regimes in 1995.⁷ Of the 33 cases that Levitsky and Way score as competitive authoritarian, these four measures each similarly score only 15–16. The third section turns to the implications of alternative measurement strategies for theory building and causal inference, showing that assessments of Levitsky and Way's theory regarding the impact of Western linkage on democratization change dramatically if one evaluates the theory in the alternative case universes yielded by commonly utilized large- N measures. The last section then illustrates how information from NELDA and VDEM might be deployed to construct better measures of competitive or electoral authoritarianism suitable for large- N cross-national research. A NELDA-based measure yields a universe of competitive authoritarian regimes very similar to that produced by Levitsky and Way's case-based approach – 26 of 33 cases are similarly scored as opposed to

the 15–16 congruent cases yielded by extant measures. Data from VDEM, once available, might be used to construct an even stronger measure of electoral authoritarianism that overcomes certain drawbacks associated with NELDA.

Conceptualizing and measuring competitive and electoral authoritarianism

Competitive and electoral authoritarian regimes are particular kinds of hybrid regimes most fully theorized in the new century. According to those scholars most influential in developing and popularizing the concepts, such regimes possess basic institutions commonly associated with procedural democracy, most importantly multiparty elections with broad suffrage that are at least minimally open and competitive. Yet, incumbents also abuse their power to an extent that cardinal elements of procedural democracy – most critically free and fair elections or broad protections for civil liberties – are violated.⁸ The combination of these two characteristics – institutions otherwise associated with democracy and incumbent abuses of democratic practice – defines the category. Examples of such abuses include the exclusion of some opposition parties and candidates, significant infringements on the civil liberties of opponents, significant restrictions on opposition access to media and campaign finance, significant controls on the activities of independent media outlets, violent intimidation, outright electoral fraud, and politicization of state resources to such a degree that the opposition cannot compete on a reasonably equal footing. For a regime to qualify as competitive or electoral authoritarian, incumbent abuses cannot be minor or incidental, but must be “profound and systematic” or “frequent enough and serious enough”.⁹ Competitive authoritarian regimes are generally viewed as the subset of electoral authoritarian regimes in which competition between incumbents and opposition is truly meaningful.

Research into competitive and electoral authoritarianism poses numerous difficult questions of operationalization and measurement.¹⁰ To operationalize these concepts in research, scholars must make finer grained judgments about systematized concepts and appropriate indicators, which can be tricky in practice. The primary challenges for scholars involve precisely defining the conditions that

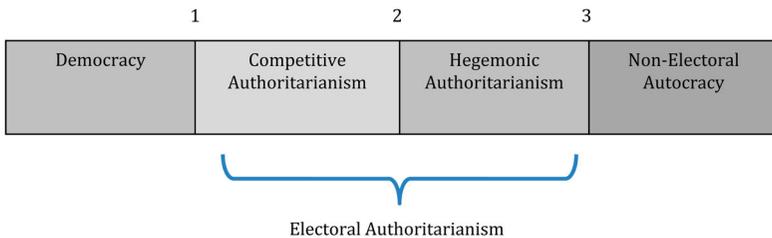


Figure 1. Regime types and borders in study of electoral authoritarianism.

conceptually distinguish regimes at the three borders illustrated in [Figure 1](#) and subsequently operationalizing these distinctions in measurement. Border number 3, between electoral authoritarianism and fully closed regimes, presents relatively few problems. Scholars typically conceptualize this distinction based on the presence of regular multiparty elections with full or nearly full suffrage. In some cases, researchers add the additional criterion that a regime cannot be so repressive as to make these elections meaningless even as facades.¹¹ Measurement is then relatively straightforward. Scholars draw upon established indicators of multiparty electoral competition and suffrage. Those adding criteria regarding regime repressiveness either make qualitative assessments regarding specific forms of repression or use a threshold from graded regime measures.¹²

Border number 2, between competitive and hegemonic authoritarian regimes, poses greater challenges. Some scholars, focused only on the broader category of electoral authoritarianism, may not feel it necessary to draw this distinction at all. Those that do make the distinction have often emphasized the element of uncertainty inherent to competitive authoritarian regimes and thus the notion that competition is “real” or “genuine” in ways not true under hegemonic regimes. Measurement of “real” competition has proven more difficult. Most commonly, scholars have utilized the vote share of incumbents as an indicator of competitiveness, deeming regimes in which incumbents receive less than 70–75% of the vote in presidential or legislative elections to be competitive.¹³ Other scholars, believing such thresholds arbitrary and reflecting an overly restrictive understanding of competitiveness, advocate for more minimalistic criteria.¹⁴

While acknowledging the importance of borders 2 and 3, this article focuses greater attention on border number 1, the thorny distinction between electoral or competitive authoritarianism and democracy. From a conceptual perspective, we can employ the approach (discussed above) pioneered by Levitsky and Way and Schedler. Some scholars of political regimes might believe that Levitsky and Way’s or Schedler’s conceptual standard for democracy is set too high. Nevertheless, in empirical studies of competitive and electoral authoritarianism, we rarely find research that clearly and explicitly adopts different conceptual criteria. Rather, empirical researchers tend to simply adopt the definitions of these agenda-setting studies, citing them when introducing key terms and eschewing explicit conceptual differentiation.

Measurement along the boundary between democracy and electoral autocracy still poses great difficulties. We must consider the issue of an operational threshold of incumbent abuse: how much incumbent abuse is too much incumbent abuse for a regime to be considered democratic? An even greater challenge involves figuring out how to observe incumbent abuses so that we can determine whether this threshold is met or exceeded. As Schedler notes, incumbent antidemocratic practices tend to be informal and frequently actively concealed by regimes, a “hidden realm of authoritarian electioneering” often very difficult to observe.¹⁵ Yet, since the boundary between democracy and electoral autocracy is defined by the presence of systematic incumbent abuses that violate democratic principles,

then we must find some way to observe those abuses and integrate those observations into regime measures.

Scholars conducting case studies and those engaged in large- N cross-national research have different tools at their disposal for addressing these problems. Case-study researchers seek to overcome these obstacles through a systematic assessment of primary or secondary materials geared toward detecting and scoring incumbent antidemocratic abuses of the state. For example, Levitsky and Way distinguish democracy and competitive authoritarianism by assessing whether cases are marked by one or more incumbent activities significant enough in scope to violate principles of free and fair elections, broad protections of civil liberties, or an even playing field. To make that determination, they create a checklist of specific incumbent violations that violate these principles. They then comb through the secondary literature for each case, scoring their checklist for specific time periods. The set of borderline cases is then sorted into democratic and competitive authoritarian categories based on whether or not this process produced positive scores in terms of substantial levels of incumbent abuse.¹⁶

Scholars engaged in large- N cross-national research must score many more cases (potentially thousands), making case-based measurement strategies infeasible. Therefore, researchers have relied on extant regime indicators to distinguish democracy from electoral or competitive authoritarianism. The drawback of these approaches is that extant regime indicators either do not incorporate information on incumbent abuse or do so in ways that are opaque or do not match the conceptual definition. As such, it is often unclear whether cut-off points between democracy and electoral autocracy actually reflect the presence or absence of systematic and profound incumbent abuses.

Scholars employing dichotomous regime data to draw the line between democracy and electoral autocracy have most commonly employed data from Cheibub, Ghandi, and Vreeland (CGV) or Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (GWF).¹⁷ These data sources take different approaches distinguishing democracy and electoral autocracy, with the divergence largely due to different perspectives on the possibility and utility of observing incumbent abuses that jeopardize the fairness and competitiveness of elections. Those scholars producing the CGV data and its antecedents recognize that authoritarian regimes may hold multiparty elections and that competitive elections are an important criterion for democracy.¹⁸ However, they argue that assessments of incumbent abuse and the fairness of the electoral playing field are inherently subjective and unreliable. Rather than using such assessments to draw the line, therefore, the CGV measure infers competitiveness from the occurrence (or not) of electoral turnover under consistent rules. If only one party is observed to have won elections across a regime spell, CGV will deem the case autocratic. If an electoral turnover occurs under consistent rules, CGV will then retrospectively apply the democratic label to the regime spell, inferring that the regime was democratic all along. The use of electoral turnover offers an objective decision rule that can be applied consistently across cases and time periods. However, if we are specifically attempting to operationalize concepts

like competitive and electoral authoritarianism – in which incumbent abuses themselves are definitionally central to drawing this line – then the use of electoral turnover as a proxy may be problematic. A regime that commits all manner of abuses may still lose eventually at the ballot box despite its best efforts at biasing elections. CGV will deem this regime democratic, not just when the election is lost but also during the previous spell.

The GWF approach draws the line between democracy and electoral autocracy through direct assessment of whether elections are “reasonably fair (and) competitive”. In this sense, the GWF data hews more closely than CGV to the practices of case-based measures of competitive or electoral authoritarianism. There are two potential drawbacks. First, GWF must necessarily rely upon somewhat subjective judgments regarding the presence of incumbent abuses and these judgments are not made by country experts (as in VDEM) or, one assumes, based on a particularly deep and systematic assessment of primary and secondary sources (as in NELDA). Second, although GWF does integrate observations of incumbent abuses, there remains a significant disjuncture between measure and concept in terms of how the line between democracy and autocracy is drawn. GWF establishes a limited number of severe conditions for considering a regime autocratic: the outright banning of major opposition parties, widespread violence and intimidation against the opposition, fraud large enough to change the outcome of an election, or extreme domination of the media.¹⁹ Other methods of manipulation, less blatant but still systematic and serious, may go undetected.

Another group of scholars relies on cut-off points within graded regime measures to draw the line between democracy and electoral authoritarianism. Schedler suggests using the Freedom House political rights score, with cases with scores in the intermediate range of 4–6 falling into the electoral authoritarian category. Howard and Roessler instead define the universe of potential electoral authoritarian regimes as those cases receiving Freedom House political rights scores of 3 or higher and Polity scores of 5 or lower. These approaches raise slightly different, but no less substantial, problems. A large body of work has examined the difficulty of inferring particular kinds of practices or institutional arrangements from specific cut-off points on such scales.²⁰ In this case, the problem is particularly significant, because a specific set of such practices – systematic and profound incumbent abuses – distinguish regimes conceptually. For example, one of the advantages of the Freedom House political rights index is that five of the 10 underlying questions touch on incumbent abuse, such as the fairness of elections and the treatment of opposition. But the other five questions address different subjects, such as tutelar dynamics, corruption, and the treatment of minorities. For a given case, we have no idea what combination of these underlying indicators produces the aggregate score. While aggregate scores at the extremes of the scale surely reflect the presence or absence of high levels of incumbent abuse, we cannot know whether cases with scores nearer the middle – pragmatically, the possible cut-off points for analysis – are marked by substantial incumbent abuse or not. This

problem only becomes magnified, of course, if we aggregate even more information, such as combining this data with a Polity score.

One common approach to assessing the validity of measures is content validation, or the assessment of whether measures fully capture the domain of the concept under investigation.²¹ In this sense, we can conclude from the above discussion that case-based measures have superior content validity than measures commonly employed in large-*N* cross-national research because they incorporate direct observations of incumbent abuses, and assessments of whether such abuses rise to the level of being systematic and profound, in order to draw the line between democracy and electoral autocracy. Large-*N* measures reliant on extant democracy indicators, in contrast, either do not capture a vital part of the range of content in the competitive or electoral authoritarian concept or do so opaquely or in ways that do not match conceptual standards. Were we to operationalize other regime concepts (or use a non-mainstream definition of electoral authoritarianism), we might conclude that large-*N* measures have equal or even superior content validity. But when used to operationalize the concepts of competitive and electoral authoritarianism as most commonly used in research, case-based measures are superior.

Comparing large-*N* measures to a benchmark from case-based research

How well do commonly utilized large-*N* cross-national measures perform in capturing distinctions between democracy and competitive or electoral authoritarianism? One perspective can be gained by comparing the results they yield to a benchmark available from case-based research, the coding of Levitsky and Way regarding competitive authoritarian regimes around the world in 1995.²² This comparison is useful for several reasons. First, in most large-*N* cross-national research that explicitly deploys the competitive authoritarian concept, Levitsky and Way's definition of competitive authoritarianism tends to be adopted without explicit conceptual differentiation. As noted above, some scholars of political regimes may believe that Levitsky and Way's definition of democracy is too stringent. Nevertheless, in the empirical literature, explicit conceptual disagreement is very rare. Therefore, we can productively compare measures commonly used in this research programme knowing that differences in measurement are not explicitly motivated by different prior choices about conceptualization. Second, as noted above, case-based measures appear to have superior content validity. While Levitsky and Way's scoring is certainly not infallible, it provides a useful benchmark for assessing how well measures that either do not capture incumbent abuse or do so in problematic ways approximate a more valid measure that directly assesses the quality of interest.

To conduct this comparison, I construct four different measures of competitive authoritarianism, each a replication or close variant of a large-*N* cross-national measure utilized in prominent research. These measures all rely on extant regime indicators to draw the line between democracies and autocracies, before

then drawing upon other data to determine which autocracies are competitive authoritarian. The first two measures respectively use the GWF and CGV data to draw the line between democracy and autocracy.²³ The third measure (FH-Polity) combines data from Freedom House and Polity.²⁴ The fourth measure (FH) focuses only on the Freedom House political rights index.²⁵ To facilitate comparison, I also apply the same set of exclusion restrictions employed by Levitsky and Way to these measures, excluding cases from analysis that have very small populations, cases marked by strong tutelary dynamics, cases in which the most important executive office is not elected, and cases characterized by utter state collapse, a significant ongoing civil war, or foreign occupation.

Table 1 presents the universe of competitive authoritarian regimes yielded by each measure for the year 1995. Several initial observations can be made. First, the four large-*N* cross-national measures all score substantially fewer cases as competitive authoritarian – ranging tightly from 23 to 26 – than do Levitsky and Way.²⁶ Second, each of these measures scores as competitive authoritarian only 15 or 16 of the 33 cases scored as such by Levitsky and Way, less than half. Finally, while congruence with Levitsky and Way is the focus of analysis, congruence among the large-*N* cross-national measures is also low. Only 12 cases (Cambodia, Gabon, Georgia, Guinea, Malaysia, Mauritania, Mexico, Peru, Senegal, Serbia, Togo, and Yemen) are scored as competitive authoritarian by all four.

We are particularly concerned with congruence between measures in drawing the line between competitive authoritarian regimes and democracies. Since discrepancies between measures can also result from how they distinguish competitive authoritarianism from other forms of autocracy, only considering the aggregate level of congruence can be misleading. A closer look reveals that while each of the large-*N* cross-national measures do indeed differ from the case-based benchmark in their categorization of numerous autocracies, the majority of discrepancies result from divergent approaches to drawing the line between competitive authoritarianism and democracy. There are 14 cases that Levitsky and Way score as competitive authoritarian but the CGV-based measure does not due to treating them as democracies (Albania, Armenia, Benin, Croatia, Dominican Republic, Ghana, Macedonia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine). There are also 14 such cases for the GWF-based measure (Albania, Benin, Croatia, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Macedonia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Zambia). There are 12 such cases for the FH-Polity measure (Benin, Botswana, Haiti, Macedonia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Moldova, Slovakia, Taiwan, Ukraine, and Zambia). Finally, there are also 12 such cases for the FH measure (Albania, Benin, Botswana, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Russia, Slovakia, Taiwan, Ukraine, and Zambia). For each measure, the number of such cases nearly equals the number actually scored the same.

A telling further observation is that discrepancies in this regard are largely unidirectional. There are relatively few cases that Levitsky and Way score as democratic but the large-*N* cross-national measures consider competitive

Table 1. Competitive authoritarian regimes in 1995, various measures.

Levitsky and Way	CGV	GWF	FH-Polity	FH
Albania	Botswana	Botswana	Albania	Cambodia
Armenia	Cambodia	Cambodia	Cambodia	Colombia
Belarus	Cameroon	Cameroon	CAF	Congo
Benin	Djibouti	Gabon	Congo	Croatia
Botswana	Gabon	Georgia	Croatia	Djibouti
Cambodia	Georgia	Ghana	Djibouti	Dominican R.
Cameroon	Guinea	Guinea	Dominican R.	Gabon
Croatia	Guinea-Bissau	Guinea-Bissau	Gabon	Georgia
Dominican R.	Guyana	Kenya	Georgia	Ghana
Gabon	Haiti	Malaysia	Ghana	Guinea
Georgia	Kenya	Mauritania	Guinea	Haiti
Ghana	Malaysia	Mexico	Guinea-Bissau	India
Haiti	Mauritania	Mozambique	Malaysia	Macedonia
Kenya	Mexico	Namibia	Mauritania	Malaysia
Macedonia	Mozambique	Peru	Mexico	Mauritania
Madagascar	Namibia	Russia	Mozambique	Mexico
Malawi	Peru	Senegal	Peru	Moldova
Malaysia	Russia	Serbia	Romania	Nicaragua
Mali	Senegal	Syria	Russia	Paraguay
Mexico	Serbia	Taiwan	Senegal	Peru
Moldova	Syria	Tajikistan	Serbia	Romania
Mozambique	Taiwan	Togo	Togo	Senegal
Peru	Tajikistan	Yemen	Yemen	Serbia
Romania	Togo			Togo
Russia	Yemen			Yemen
Senegal	Zambia			
Serbia				
Slovakia				
Taiwan				
Tanzania				
Ukraine				
Zambia				
Zimbabwe				
Congruent	16	15	15	15
Dem, LW CA	14	14	12	12
CA, LW Dem	2	1	0	4

Note: Cases in bold font are those congruent with the Levitsky and Way measure.

authoritarian. Overall, the large- N cross-national measures are much more likely to score relatively borderline cases as democracies, a tendency that makes sense given that these measures integrate less refined tools for picking up abuses that tip cases into the competitive or electoral authoritarian category. This treatment extends even to some cases that are widely viewed as instances of competitive or electoral authoritarianism by regional and country experts, such as Ukraine, Armenia, and Zambia. Beyond those examined here, other large- N data sources that plausibly might be used to draw the line between democracy and electoral autocracy

appear to be even more prone to divergence with Levitsky and Way's scoring. For example, Freedom House's measure of "electoral democracy" scores democratic 18 cases that Levitsky and Way score competitive authoritarian.

One possible explanation for high levels of discrepancy is that measuring competitive authoritarian regimes in the early-to-mid 1990s, a chaotic period when many such regimes were first emerging, presents uniquely difficult problems. Do large- N cross-national measures better replicate the case-based benchmark during other time periods? Levitsky and Way do not produce a global list of competitive authoritarian regimes for any year other than 1995, hampering our ability to answer this question. Some insight can be gained, however, by looking at their scoring of regimes in 2008 (the year they measure outcomes) among their original 35 cases, augmented by later research that applied the same measurement standards to the Andean region in Latin America.²⁷ Together, these two sources list 22 competitive authoritarian regimes existing in 2008. How many were similarly scored by the four large- N cross-national measures in 2008? The GWF measure similarly scores eight of 22 cases, the CGV measure seven of 22, the FH-Polity measure six of 22, and the FH measure 11 of 22. Discrepancies between case-based measurement and common large- N cross-national measures are not confined to the early post-Cold War years.

Implications for theory building and causal inference

One worry about the findings in the previous section is that discrepancies between measures might jeopardize the ability of scholars to engage each other in a collaborative research programme. If a theory developed in relation to one universe of competitive or electoral authoritarian cases is tested and found wanting by another scholar using a different measure, how can we know whether these conflicting findings are due to factors such as new evidence or more refined techniques of empirical analysis or whether they are merely the result of different measurement choices? This problem is particularly troubling for two reasons. First, there seems to be a particularly significant discrepancy between case-based and large- N cross-national measures. Taking insights from case-based research and testing them in broader samples, an important step for many research programmes, might be problematic with current measurement practices. Second, discrepancies between measures may have particularly adverse consequences for our ability to pursue the key question of why competitive or electoral authoritarian regimes democratize, since alternative measures differ so much in how they distinguish the case universe and the outcome of interest.

One perspective on the problem is to examine whether the use of alternative measures actually changes our evaluation of the strength of a prominent hypothesis. The goal of this exercise is neither to prove or disprove the hypothesis nor to show that one measure is superior to another. Rather, we simply seek to assess the sensitivity of inferences about an important hypothesis to measurement choice. As an illustrative example, this section takes Levitsky and Way's linkage

hypothesis for explaining democratization in competitive authoritarian regimes and assesses how it fares in their own case universe versus those yielded by the other four measures.²⁸ The authors argue that democratization in competitive authoritarian regimes after the Cold War is mainly explained by high Western linkage, a concept capturing a diffuse set of political, economic, and social ties between a given country and the European Union and/or United States. While their theoretical model is multivariate, incorporating the susceptibility of regimes to Western leverage and their organizational power, high linkage to the West represents the only path to democratization. Their empirical analysis shows a remarkable association between high linkage and democratization. The theory correctly predicts 10 of the 15 episodes of democratization and 29 of 35 cases overall, results captured in the left hand columns of [Table 2](#).

How well does the linkage hypothesis fare if we define the universe of competitive authoritarian regimes in 1995 – and the eventual outcomes of subsequent democratization or not – using the large-*N* measures? The FH-Polity and FH measures show a more modest amount of support for the theory. High linkage is arguably sufficient for democratization, but now only accounts for a minority of the democratization episodes around the world. The CGV-based and GWF-based measures yield results suggesting somewhat more pessimistic conclusions. There are very few high linkage cases at all, since these measures have excluded nearly all of Eastern Europe and the Caribbean basin from the competitive authoritarian case universe by treating borderline cases as democracies in 1995. While the few high linkage cases do experience democratic transitions, such cases are now significantly outnumbered by the number of democratizations in medium-to-low linkage cases. High linkage might still plausibly explain a few cases, but the power of the linkage hypothesis to explain post-Cold War competitive authoritarian regime trajectories in general appears much more limited.

The point of this exercise is not to undermine the validity of major theoretical inferences about competitive authoritarianism. Levitsky and Way would likely argue that their measure is superior and that other measures simply do not capture the appropriate case universe. Scholars using other measures, in turn, have produced substantial insights that might plausibly find even stronger backing in the group of cases defined by case-based measurement. For example, the inclusion of more cases in Eastern Europe might actually strengthen Brownlee's contention that competitive authoritarian regimes are "portents of pluralism" or Donno's proposition that overt pressure from the West increases the likelihood that elections in competitive authoritarian regimes produce liberalization.²⁹ Rather, demonstrating the sensitivity of the linkage theory to choices about measurement simply underlines the significant drawbacks of extant measurement practices. If other scholars introduce new hypotheses and generate findings that cast doubt on the linkage theory while using alternative measures, it will be difficult to know whether those findings were driven by theoretical and empirical advances or measurement choice. That uncertainty makes it difficult to build a collaborative research programme centred on the iterative testing of alternative hypotheses.

Table 2. Strength of the linkage hypothesis within five different case universes.

	Levitsky and Way		CGV		GWF		FH-Polity		FH	
	High Linkage	Med/Low Linkage	High Linkage	Med/Low Linkage	High Linkage	Med/Low Linkage	High Linkage	Med/Low Linkage	High Linkage	Med/Low Linkage
Outcome: Democracy	Croatia	Benin	Guyana	Georgia	Mexico	Georgia	Albania	Georgia	Croatia	Colombia
	Dominican R.	Ghana	Mexico	Guinea-	Serbia	Ghana	Croatia	Ghana	Dominican R.	Georgia
	Guyana	Mali	Serbia	Bissau	Taiwan	Guinea-	Dominican R.	Guinea-	Macedonia	Ghana
	Macedonia	Peru	Taiwan	Ghana		Bissau	Mexico	Bissau	Mexico	Guinea
	Mexico	Ukraine		Kenya		Kenya	Romania	Malaysia	Nicaragua	India
	Nicaragua			Peru		Mauritania	Serbia	Peru	Romania	Moldova
	Romania			Senegal		Peru		Russia	Serbia	Paraguay
	Serbia					Senegal		Senegal		Peru
	Slovakia									Senegal
	Taiwan									
Outcome: Stable or Unstable Autocracy	Albania	Armenia		Botswana		Botswana		Cambodia		Cambodia
		Belarus		Cambodia		Cambodia		CAF		Congo
		Botswana		Cameroon		Cameroon		Congo		Djibouti
		Cambodia		Djibouti		Gabon		Djibouti		Gabon
		Cameroon		Gabon		Guinea		Gabon		Haiti
		Gabon		Haiti		Malaysia		Guinea		Malaysia
		Georgia		Malaysia		Mozambique		Mauritania		Mauritania
		Haiti		Mauritania		Namibia		Mozambique		Togo
		Kenya		Mozambique		Russia		Togo		Yemen
		Madagascar		Namibia		Syria		Yemen		
		Malawi		Russia		Tajikistan				
		Malaysia		Syria		Togo				
		Moldova		Tajikistan		Yemen				
		Mozambique		Togo		Syria				
		Russia		Yemen						
		Senegal		Zambia						
		Tanzania								
		Zambia								
		Zimbabwe								

Table 2. Continued.

	Levitsky and Way		CGV		GWF		FH-Polity		FH	
	High Linkage	Med/Low Linkage	High Linkage	Med/Low Linkage	High Linkage	Med/Low Linkage	High Linkage	Med/Low Linkage	High Linkage	Med/Low Linkage
Predictions Summary	29/35 Total Predicted, 10/15 Democratizations Predicted		20/26 Total Predicted, 4/10 Democratizations Predicted		16/23 Total Predicted, 3/10 Democratizations Predicted		16/23 Total Predicted, 6/13 Democratizations Predicted		16/25 Total Predicted, 7/16 Democratizations Predicted	

Using alternative data to sort borderline cases and improve measurement

The research agenda into competitive and electoral authoritarian regimes would be aided by large-*N* cross-national measures that, like case-based practices, made direct observations of a range of incumbent antidemocratic practices. These observations could then be combined with other regime indicators in order to “sort” borderline cases into the democratic and electoral/competitive authoritarian categories. This section presents and discusses two ways in which new sources of data might be utilized in this way.

Leveraging data from NELDA

The NELDA database provides information on the characteristics of every national election held worldwide from 1946 to 2012, including numerous indicators of incumbent abuses. This subsection shows how NELDA data might be incorporated into a measure of competitive authoritarianism and evaluates this measure in ways similar to the analyses conducted above. Constructing a measure of competitive authoritarianism requires us to distinguish these cases both from democracies – where NELDA can help – and from other forms of autocracy. To best focus our attention on the former issue, the heart of the matter in this article, I adopt similar approaches to extant measures regarding the latter. To be considered competitive authoritarian, an autocracy must possess multiparty electoral competition and the incumbent must have won less than 75% of the vote in the most recent presidential or legislative election.³⁰

The central innovation of this measure involves utilizing the NELDA data to help sort borderline cases into the democratic and competitive authoritarian categories based on the presence or absence of significant incumbent abuses. The NELDA data includes a battery of questions illuminating incumbent abuses in national elections. All scored as yes/no binaries, they capture the presence or absence of the following: (1) pro-incumbent media bias; (2) government harassment of the opposition; (3) opposition leaders prevented by the government from running for office; (4) opposition electoral boycotts; and (5) significant levels of concern from domestic and international observers that the election would not be free and fair. These variables were coded by a team of researchers based on systematic analysis of a variety of primary and secondary sources.³¹ The first three indicators offer direct measures of incumbent abuse. The latter two provide more indirect assessments, but are likely to be useful in capturing other abuses such as resource disparities and the politicization of electoral and legal institutions.³²

We can aggregate these data into a dichotomous variable that captures the presence or absence of a significant incumbent abuse. For each country-year, I create a dichotomous variable that reflects whether any of the aforementioned five indicators of incumbent abuse was positive in the previous two national elections (legislative or executive), provided those elections were held in the previous five years.³³ I create a dichotomous, rather than polychotomous, measure because

the concepts of electoral and competitive authoritarianism define such regimes by the presence of substantial antidemocratic incumbent abuses but do not distinguish cases within the category according to their level of abuse. A case that registers four kinds of abuse in the NELDA data is probably more autocratic than a case that registers only two. But the concepts of competitive and electoral authoritarian treat both as instances of the phenomenon.

I then use this dichotomous indicator to sort cases of multiparty electoral regimes that have borderline combined Polity scores into the democratic and electoral authoritarian camps. Countries with a Polity score of 8 are scored as a democracy, those with a polity score of 5 and below are scored as some form of autocracy, and countries with Polity scores of 6–7 (typically seen as the threshold for democracy by scholars) are sorted into the democratic or autocratic categories depending on whether they score positively in terms of incumbent antidemocratic violations. The rationale for only sorting borderline cases based on indicators of incumbent abuse is that this helps avoid the possibility of false negatives and positives. For example, Senegal in 1995 is widely considered a quintessential case of electoral authoritarianism, with a Polity Score of -1 . But, for whatever reason, NELDA does not pick up incumbent abuses there, a deficiency in the measure. By automatically scoring this non-borderline case as electoral authoritarian, we prevent it being mistakenly categorized as democratic.

Table 3 displays the competitive authoritarian regimes identified by the NELDA-based measure for the year of 1995. The universe of competitive authoritarian cases yielded by the measure is much more similar to the case-based benchmark. Of the 33 competitive authoritarian regimes suggested by that benchmark, the NELDA-based measure similarly scores 26, a figure that compares quite favourably to the 15–16 congruent cases yielded by extant large- N cross-national measures, captured in Table 1. Particularly noteworthy is the degree of congruence regarding how measures distinguish competitive authoritarian regimes and democracies. Only four cases are scored as democratic by the NELDA-based measure but scored as competitive authoritarian by Levitsky and Way. All four – Botswana, Madagascar, Slovakia, and Taiwan – are particularly tough cases to classify. There are no examples, as with extant large- N measures and cases like Ukraine, Armenia, and Zambia, of the NELDA-based measure scoring a case democratic that is widely considered an autocracy by regional experts.

The high level of congruence between the NELDA-based measure and the case-based benchmark of Levitsky and Way is attributable to the general approach of deploying indicators of incumbent abuse from NELDA to sort borderline cases and not simply reliant on specific choices regarding data aggregation. A few sensitivity tests demonstrate the robustness of this approach to different choices. First, we could construct the measure such that borderline cases are scored as competitive authoritarian if they register two or more (rather than one or more) incumbent abuses in the NELDA data. Doing so only shifts two cases into the democratic camp, South Korea and Macedonia, and does not decrease overall congruence. The NELDA-based measure now disagrees with Levitsky and Way regarding

Table 3. Competitive authoritarian regimes in 1995.

Levitsky and Way		NELDA-Based	
Albania	Mozambique	Albania	Mauritania
Armenia	Peru	Benin	Mexico
Belarus	Romania	Cambodia	Moldova
Benin	Russia	Cameroon	Mozambique
Botswana	Senegal	CAF	Peru
Cambodia	Serbia	Congo	Romania
Cameroon	Slovakia	Croatia	Russia
Croatia	Taiwan	Djibouti	Senegal
Dominican R.	Tanzania	Dominican R.	Serbia
Gabon	Ukraine	Gabon	Syria
Georgia	Zambia	Georgia	Tajikistan
Ghana	Zimbabwe	Ghana	Togo
Haiti		Guinea	Ukraine
Kenya		Guinea-Bissau	Yemen
Macedonia		Haiti	Zambia
Madagascar		Kenya	
Malawi		S. Korea	
Malaysia		Macedonia	
Mali		Malawi	
Mexico		Malaysia	
Moldova		Mali	
Congruent Cases		26	
Score Democracy, Levitsky and Way		4 (Botswana, Taiwan, Madagascar,	
Score Competitive Authoritarian		Slovakia)	
Score Competitive Authoritarian,		1 (S. Korea)	
Levitsky and Way Score Democracy			

Note: Cases in bold font are those congruent with the Levitsky and Way measure.

Macedonia, but comes into alignment regarding South Korea. Second, we could expand the set of borderline cases, such that those with Polity scores from 5–7 are categorized as democratic or competitive authoritarian according to the presence of incumbent abuses (rather than just 6–7). This results in the reclassification of only three cases as democratic rather than competitive authoritarian: Georgia, Guinea-Bissau, and Romania. The NELDA-based measure now disagrees with Levitsky and Way regarding Georgia and Romania but comes into alignment regarding Guinea-Bissau. The level of congruence is largely unchanged and still much higher than that produced by extant measures.

Another perspective can be gained by assessing, similar to Table 2, how well the linkage hypothesis fares in a case universe defined by the NELDA-based measure. As Table 4 shows, the linkage hypothesis finds very strong support in this case universe, accurately predicting 32 out of 36 outcomes and eight of 12 episodes of democratization. This comparison does not validate the NELDA-based measure, but it suggests that the measure would be more useful than extant alternatives for the purposes of large-*N* testing of hypotheses developed in case-based

Table 4. The linkage hypothesis within case universe defined by NELDA.

	NELDA	
	High Linkage	Med/Low Linkage
Outcome: Democracy	Albania Croatia Dominica R. S. Korea Macedonia Mexico Romania Serbia	Ghana Peru Ukraine Moldova
Outcome: Stable or Unstable Autocracy		Benin Cambodia Cameroon CAF Congo Djibouti Gabon Georgia Guinea Guinea-Bissau Haiti Kenya Malawi Malaysia Mali Mauritania Mozambique Russia Senegal Tajikistan Togo Yemen Zambia
Predictions Summary	31/35 Total Predicted, 8/12 Democratizations Predicted	

research, as we could be more confident that any discrepancies between findings were not simply due to differences in measurement choice.

While the NELDA-based measure performs very well, we can also identify some drawbacks. First, NELDA provides only a few indicators of incumbent abuse, opening up the possibility of false negatives, as regimes might tilt the playing field in other ways. Second, these indicators are measured as binaries, giving scholars little flexibility in setting thresholds for how much abuse is considered too much for a regime to be scored as democratic. A third drawback is that the indicators are not scored annually, but only for national elections. Scholars

might reasonably ask why incumbent abuses in past elections should necessarily colour the scoring of a regime several years into the future, especially if a political sea change occurred in the interim.

Leveraging data from VDEM

A similar measure could also be constructed using data on incumbent abuse from VDEM, rather than NELDA, to sort cases into the democratic and electoral authoritarian categories. The VDEM project, collecting a huge variety of regime indicators and other information on every country in the world for 1900–2014, contains information on many of the same abuses occurring during elections as NELDA. But it also offers more detailed coverage of electoral abuses, as well as greater information regarding incumbent abuses that occur between elections. While this greater number of indicators can improve measurement, it also produces a quandary: which indicators should be employed to measure incumbent abuse and therefore help sort cases into the democratic and electoral autocratic categories? Scholars are likely to be faced with the task of balancing two competing imperatives, attempting to achieve coverage of the key forms of abuse most often associated with the competitive and electoral authoritarian concepts, while also placing some pragmatic limit on the number of indicators utilized.

One useful approach might be to find a few indicators for each of three general categories. First are antidemocratic activities during elections. As an example, VDEM provides the basis to measure whether election results were potentially altered by fraud (v2elfrdchg), whether there was government intimidation of opposition voters (v2elintim), and whether the election was free and fair overall (v2elfr-fair). A second category of abuse involves more constant violations of civil liberties. Here one might want to draw on VDEM indicators for freedom of discussion for men and women (v2cldiscm, v2cldiscw), degree to which government represses and/or controls the formation and activity of civil society (v2csreprss, v2cseeorgs), and censorship in the print and broadcast media (v2mecenefm). A final category involves institutional manipulation in ways that keep competition unfair. This might involve undue government influence over electoral authorities (v2elembaut), significant barriers to the formation of political parties (v2psbars), or systematic media bias against the opposition (v2mebias).

These data have several other attractive properties that help overcome drawbacks associated with the NELDA data. Rather than binaries, most indicators are measured on ordinal scales in which values capture distinct levels of government activity or abuse. It is therefore considerably easier to choose values that capture when incumbent abuses are systematic or serious, therefore matching measure to concept. Finally, VDEM also offers a variety of alternatives for drawing the line between competitive and hegemonic regimes and between electoral and fully closed autocracies. While the optimal strategy for constructing measures using the data source remains a matter to be debated and evaluated, there are many

good reasons for the more general debate about measuring competitive and electoral authoritarianism in large- N research to converge on a discussion about how VDEM data would be best utilized to do so.

Conclusion

This article contributed to scholarship on electoral and competitive authoritarianism by reviewing and illustrating some drawbacks of extant measurement practices and showing that recently and soon-to-be available data provide useful alternatives for improving measurement. More specifically, the article established four points. First, measures commonly utilized in large- N cross-national research share a common drawback: they have weak content validity because they do not integrate observations of incumbent abuse to score cases as democracies or electoral autocracies or do so in ways that are opaque or do not match conceptual standards. Second, prominent extant measures perform quite poorly in replicating a benchmark available from case-based measurement. Third, the use of alternative measures can have substantial implications for causal inference regarding why electoral authoritarian regimes democratize, arguably the most important theoretical question in this line of research. Finally, data sources such as NELDA and VDEM should allow for the construction of measures that solve many of these problems by incorporating direct observations of incumbent abuse to sort borderline cases.

Adoption of measures leveraging new data might further the development of research in several ways. By more closely mirroring best practices from case-based research, these measures should allow for more productive engagement between case-based and large- N researchers studying why and whether competitive and electoral authoritarian regimes democratize. Large- N researchers could better evaluate whether hypotheses developed in case-based analysis hold in larger samples. In turn, case-based researchers could more productively explore the causal mechanisms underlying theories developed in large- N cross national studies, knowing that their assessments of when cases crossed the line from competitive or electoral authoritarianism to democracy accorded with the measures that generated the findings in the larger sample.

New measurement strategies should also be useful in studying transitions in the opposite direction, from democracy to competitive authoritarianism. Democratic backsliding and the possibility of a decline in global democracy levels have become major preoccupations for scholars and policy makers in recent years. To best study such phenomena, we need measures up to the task of adequately capturing democratic erosion and the shift from democracy to electoral authoritarianism. Common measures that simply draw on extant regime indicators may not serve researchers well in this respect, as democracy indicators can be “sticky” and fail to adequately register new incumbent abuses. Measures leveraging NELDA and VDEM should have a better chance of picking up new incumbent abuses and correctly shifting cases into the autocratic category. Adoption of these measurement

practices would thus greatly aid large-*N* cross-national research on the dynamics of democratic erosion and facilitate greater engagement between these researchers and scholars conducting case-based analysis.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. For basic overviews, see Schedler, “The Menu of Manipulation”; Schedler, *Electoral Authoritarianism*; Levitsky and Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism”; Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*.
2. Examples include Howard and Roessler, “Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes”; Brownlee, “Portents of Pluralism”; Bunce and Wolchik, “Defeating Dictators”; Bunce and Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders*; Levitsky and Loxton, “Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism”; Donno, “Elections and Democratization”; Schedler, *The Politics of Uncertainty*; Lust-Okar, “Elections Under Authoritarianism.”
3. For a few examples, see Bollen, “Issues in the Comparative Measurement of Political Democracy”; Munck and Verkuilen, “Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy”; Merkel, “Embedded and Defective Democracies”; Munck, “Drawing Boundaries”; Levitsky and Way, “Why Democracy Needs a Level Playing Field”; Teorell, *Determinants of Democratization*; Coppedge, *Democratization and Research Methods*; Coppedge and Gerring, “Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy”.
4. Bunce and Wolchik, “Defeating Dictators”; Bunce and Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders*; Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*; Levitsky and Loxton, “Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism.”
5. See Howard and Roessler, “Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes”; Brownlee, “Portents of Pluralism”; Donno, “Elections and Democratization.”
6. Hyde and Marinov, “Which Elections Can Be Lost?”
7. Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*.
8. See Levitsky and Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” 52–53; Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, 5–7; Schedler, “The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism”; Schedler, *The Politics of Uncertainty*, 1–3. In their later work, Levitsky and Way add an additional democratic criterion that can be violated by incumbent abuses, a reasonably even playing field. Importantly, however, incumbent actions viewed as undemocratic due to their violation of the even playing field tend to also violate at least one of the other criteria (an action that massively tilts the playing field is also likely to make an election “unfair”). In this sense, adding the playing field criteria makes explicit ideas about equality that are implicit in the other criteria, but does not significantly expand the range of incumbent abuses considered undemocratic.
9. Quotations are respectively from Schedler, “The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism,” 3 and Levitsky and Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” 53. It should be stressed that incumbent abuses can also be found in democracies. What distinguishes democracy from electoral autocracy is not the occurrence of any kind of incumbent abuse whatsoever, but whether such abuses are systematic and serious.
10. For useful discussions, see Munck, “Drawing Boundaries”; Morse, “The Era of Electoral Authoritarianism”; Bogaards, “How to Classify Hybrid Regimes.”
11. Schedler, *Electoral Authoritarianism*, 3.
12. Howard and Roessler, “Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes”; Schedler, *Electoral Authoritarianism*; Schedler, *The Politics of Uncertainty*.

13. Howard and Roessler, "Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes"; Brownlee, "Portents of Pluralism"; Donno, "Elections and Democratization"; Schedler, *The Politics of Uncertainty*.
14. Hyde and Marinov, "Which Elections Can Be Lost?"
15. Schedler, *Electoral Authoritarianism*, 9.
16. Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*. See Appendix I for a detailed explanation of their measurement strategy.
17. The CGV data, discussed in Cheibub et al., "Democracy and Dictatorship Revisited," updates the dichotomous regime measures originally developed by Alvarez et al., "Classifying Political Regimes," and subsequently utilized in Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development*. An example of a study using the CGV data to measure electoral authoritarianism is Kinne and Marinov, "Electoral Authoritarianism and Credible Signaling in International Crises." An overview of the GWF data can be found in Geddes et al., "New Data on Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions." Examples of studies using the GWF data to do so include Brownlee, "Portents of Pluralism," and Donno, "Elections and Democratization."
18. See discussions in Alvarez et al., "Classifying Political Regimes" and Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development*.
19. Geddes et al., "Autocratic Regimes Codebook."
20. Munck and Verkuilen, "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy"; Bogaards, "Where to Draw the Line?"
21. Carmines and Zeller, *Reliability and Validity Assessment*; Collier and Adcock, "Measurement Validity."
22. Levitsky and Way find 35 competitive authoritarian regimes existing during the 1990–1995 period, and explicitly state that 33 of these remained extant in 1995 (with Guyana and Nicaragua having already transitioned to democracy). Since they do not provide scores for every regime year from 1990–1995 we can only use their scoring for 1995 as a point of comparison.
23. The GWF measure mirrors that of Brownlee, "Portents of Pluralism" and Donno, "Elections and Democratization" while the CGV measure is more similar to Kinne and Marinov, "Electoral Authoritarianism and Credible Signaling in International Crises." Within the universe of autocratic regimes, the measures distinguish electoral authoritarian regimes as those possessing regular multiparty elections for the national executive and competitive authoritarian regimes as those electoral regimes in which incumbents received less than 75% of the vote in either the most recent legislative or executive election (as operationalized through the Database of Political Institution's indices of executive and legislative competitiveness).
24. This measure mirrors, as closely as possible, the measure utilized in Howard and Roessler, "Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes." The measure scores as democratic cases with a Freedom House Political Rights score of 2 or better or a Polity score of 6 or better and autocratic otherwise. Competitive authoritarian cases are defined as those autocracies with Freedom House Political Rights scores less than 7, Polity scores greater than -8, and incumbent vote share in the most recent legislative or executive election less than 75%. This last aspect of the measure represents a small departure from Howard and Roessler, whose work focuses only on scoring elections under autocracy (rather than scoring all possible regime-years) and uses the actual vote share in those elections to determine competitiveness, with a threshold of 70%.
25. This is the measure proposed in Schedler, *Electoral Authoritarianism*, which scores cases as democratic that have Freedom House political rights scores of 3 or less and electoral authoritarian if they have scores of 4–6. Because it focuses on the larger category of electoral authoritarian regimes, there is no mechanism for distinguishing the subset that is competitive authoritarian. To facilitate comparison with other measures,

- I apply the same threshold of incumbent vote share less than 75% in the most recent legislative or executive election. Schedler, *The Politics of Uncertainty* similarly utilizes Freedom House Political Rights scores between 4 and 6 as the basis for defining the universe of electoral autocracies. This work also adds a variety of conditions and exclusion restrictions, such that the universe of competitive authoritarian regimes extant in 1995 does not perfectly match the list presented in Table 1.
26. Scholars using these measures may find slightly more regimes if they do not apply the same exclusion restrictions as the Levitsky and Way measure, as done here. But employing a laxer set of exclusion restrictions will decrease overall congruence.
 27. Levitsky and Loxton, "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in the Andes."
 28. Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*.
 29. Brownlee, "Portents of Pluralism"; Donno, "Elections and Democratization."
 30. As with the extant large-*N* measures constructed earlier in the paper, I draw this data from the Database of Political Institutions. I also apply the same set of exclusion restrictions used in Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, and applied to the other measures as analyzed above.
 31. For more information on the procedures utilized to generate the NELDA data, see <http://hyde.research.yale.edu/nelda/>.
 32. Using these indirect measures creates some potential for "false positives" in theory, such as an opposition boycotting a perfectly democratic election. After looking carefully at a large number of cases, however, it appears that such false positives are negligible in practice.
 33. I look at the two previous national level elections for two reasons. First, this choice accords with beliefs expressed by many scholars that cases should exhibit democratic behaviour for more than one election before being considered a democracy. Second, this helps minimize the impact of single elections in which, perhaps due to inadequate sourcing or media coverage, antidemocratic violations occurred but were not coded. If there are multiple rounds of the same election, I only use the final round. In the vast majority of regime-year cases, at least two elections occurred in the previous five years.

Notes on contributor

Samuel Handlin is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Utah. His research has also appeared in *Comparative Political Studies*, *the Journal of Politics in Latin America*, and *Latin American Politics and Society*. His first book, coauthored and coedited with Ruth Berins Collier, was published by the Pennsylvania State University Press.

References

- Alvarez, Mike, José Antonio Cheibub, Fernando Limongi, and Adam Przeworski. "Classifying Political Regimes." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 31, no. 2 (1996): 3–36.
- Bogaards, Matthijs. "How to Classify Hybrid Regimes? Defective Democracy and Electoral Authoritarianism." *Democratization* 16, no. 2 (2009): 399–423.
- Bogaards, Matthijs. "Where to Draw the Line? From Degree to Dichotomy in Measures of Democracy." *Democratization* 19, no. 4 (2012): 690–712.
- Bollen, Kenneth. "Issues in the Comparative Measurement of Political Democracy." *American Sociological Review* 45 (1980): 370–390.
- Brownlee, Jason. 2009. "Portents of Pluralism: How Hybrid Regimes Affect Democratic Transitions." *American Journal of Political Science* 53, no. 3 (2009): 515–532.

- Bunce, Valerie, and Sharon Wolchik. "Defeating Dictators: Electoral Change and Stability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes." *World Politics* 62, no. 1 (2010): 43–86.
- Bunce, Valerie, and Sharon Wolchik. *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Post-Communist Countries*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Carmines, Edward G., and Richard A. Zeller. *Reliability and Validity Assessment*. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979.
- Cheibub, José Antonio, Jennifer Gandhi, and James Raymond Vreeland. "Democracy and Dictatorship Revisited." *Public Choice* 143, no. 1-2 (2010): 67–101.
- Collier, David, and Robert Adcock. "Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research." *American Political Science Review* 95, no. 3 (2001): 529–546.
- Coppedge, Michael. *Democratization and Research Methods*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Coppedge, Michael, and John Gerring. "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: A New Approach." *Perspectives on Politics* 9, no. 2 (2011): 247–267.
- Coppedge, Michael, and Wolfgang Reinicke. "Measuring Polyarchy." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 25, no. 1 (1990): 51–72.
- Donno, Daniela. "Elections and Democratization in Authoritarian Regimes." *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 3 (2013): 703–716.
- Geddes, Barbara. "What Do We Know About Democratization After 20 Years." *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 115–144.
- Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright, and Erika Frantz. 2013. "New Data on Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions."
- Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright, and Erika Frantz. 2014. "Autocratic Regimes Codebook: Version 1.2."
- Howard, Marc Morje, and Philip Roessler. "Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes." *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 2 (2006): 365–381.
- Hyde, Susan, and Nicolay Marinov. "Which Elections Can Be Lost?" *Political Analysis* 20, no. 2 (2012): 191–210.
- Kinne, Brandon, and Nicolay Marinov. "Electoral Authoritarianism and Credible Signaling in International Crises." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 57, no. 3 (2013): 359–386.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan Way. "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 51–65.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan Way. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010a.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan Way. "Why Democracy Needs a Level Playing Field." *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 1 (2010b): 57–68.
- Levitsky, Steven, and James Loxton. "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in the Andes." *Democratization* 20, no. 1 (2012): 107–136.
- Lust-Okar, Ellen. "Elections Under Authoritarianism: Preliminary Lessons from Jordan." *Democratization* 13, no. 3 (2006): 456–471.
- Merkel, Wolfgang. "Embedded and Defective Democracies." *Democratization* 11, no. 5 (2004): 33–58.
- Morse, Yonatan. "The Era of Electoral Authoritarianism." *World Politics* 64, no. 1 (2012): 161–198.
- Munck, Gerardo. "Drawing Boundaries: How to Craft Intermediate Regime Categories." In *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, edited by Andreas Schedler. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006.
- Munck, Gerardo, and Jay Verkuilen. "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: Evaluating Alternative Indices." *Comparative Political Studies* 35, no. 1 (2002): 5–34.

- Przeworski, Adam, Mike Alvarez, José Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi. *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Schedler, Andreas. "The Menu of Manipulation." *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 36–50.
- Schedler, Andreas. ed. *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*. Boulder, CO: Lynn Rienner, 2006.
- Schedler, Andreas. "The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism." In *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, edited by Andreas Schedler. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006.
- Schedler, Andreas. *The Politics of Uncertainty: Sustaining and Subverting Electoral Authoritarianism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Teorell, Jan. *Determinants of Democratization: Explaining Regime Change Around the World*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010.