ERC Consolidator Grant 2019
Research proposal [Part B1]

The Emergence, Life, and Demise of Autocratic Regimes

ELDAR

Name of the Principal Investigator (PI): Carl Henrik Knutsen
Name of the PI's host institution for the project: Universitetet i Oslo (UiO)
Proposal duration in months: 60

ELDAR will investigate three aspects of autocratic politics: 1) the emergence of autocratic regimes; 2) policy-making (“life”) in autocracies in the areas of education, infrastructure, pensions and media regulation; 3) autocratic regime breakdown. ELDAR offers a comprehensive perspective, highlighting the interconnections between these three aspects – for example, the particular policies chosen may mitigate or exacerbate specific risks to the regime – and studying them jointly in one framework. ELDAR will address the preferences and capacities of vital actors in autocratic politics – the leader, regime support groups, and mobilized opposition groups. Special attention will be directed towards identifying and linking the different actors entering support and opposition coalitions to constituent social groups (e.g., industrial workers and landowners). Team members will also study the specific, and diverse, institutions that underpin autocracies, such as characteristics of regime parties or legislative elections. In extension, ELDAR will explicitly model – theoretically and empirically – how support- and opposition groups and institutions interact in affecting regime change and policy making in autocracies.

Examples of more specific questions include: Are autocracies less willing to use the education system for ideological indoctrination if the regime tightly controls the media environment? Are autocracies less likely to break down if they provide generous special pensions to military officers? To investigate such questions empirically, ELDAR will collect data, with global coverage and long time-series, on the numbers, social identity and other features of groups that support and oppose regimes. These efforts yield unprecedented opportunities for large-n studies of autocratic emergence and demise. Three other datasets, on education systems, buildings, and pensions, will also enable pioneering empirical studies on core policy areas in autocracies.
ERC Consolidator Grant 2019
Research proposal [Part B2]

a. State-of-the-art and objectives
Regimes characterized by a low degree of democracy are often referred to, jointly, as “autocracies”. Yet, such regimes vary a lot on several other dimensions of interest. For example, they display a wide variety of institutions – some have elections, parties and legislatures, others have neither. Likewise, the social groups that support (and oppose) these regimes vary greatly across contexts. Hence, it is perhaps unsurprising that autocracies exert great variation – and more so than democracies – in which economic policies they pursue (Knutsen 2018) and in decisions on war and peace (Weeks 2014). Achieving a comprehensive understanding of why different autocracies select the policies that they do is of interest not only to scholars, but also to policy makers and citizens across the world – autocratic regimes, including in large powers such as Russia and China, are key players in affecting the global security environment and in shaping the global economy.

Yet, for most of the sub-discipline’s history, comparative political scientists have focused mainly on the institutions and actors that populate democratic politics, with a particular eye towards the established democracies of United States and Western Europe (Munck 2007). When addressing countries with autocratic systems, researchers tended to ask questions about prospects for successful transitions to democracy (O’Donnell & Schmitter 1986) and evaluate economic and other preconditions for democratization (Lipset 1959; Diamond 1992). Granted, the focus of comparative social scientists has shifted, and autocratic politics has been a thriving research field for the last 15 years or so in political science and related disciplines. Nonetheless, our cumulated knowledge on the topic is still modest when compared to knowledge about politics in consolidated democracies. Indicatively, the emergence of new autocracies, and the breakdown of old ones, often take observers by surprise (Mounk 2018).

There are several issues that continue to impede our understanding of autocratic politics. In brief, these issues, which pertain even to state-of-the-art work, relate to a need to “unpack” the relevant actors that support or oppose autocratic regimes, the need to study autocratic institutions at a more disaggregated and detailed level, and a need to study the specific contents of policies rather than crude proxies such as total tax revenue or average years of schooling. By addressing these issues, the objective of ELDAR is to provide new theoretical insights and ground-breaking empirical knowledge on three core aspects of autocratic politics:

1. the (gradual or abrupt) processes leading to the emergence of autocratic regimes;
2. the policies implemented in different autocratic regimes, under different contexts;
3. why some autocratic regimes endure whereas other end quickly.

One novel notion underpinning ELDAR is that these three aspects should be studied together, in one framework. To illustrate, processes behind the emergence of autocratic regimes may also influence the policies subsequently chosen, partly by influencing which groups have political power and which do not. Supporters need to be pleased and opposing and unresolved groups also need to be dealt with. Further, autocratic regimes and their key supporters often pursue particular policies exactly because these policies are anticipated to prolong regime survival. Hence, studies of autocratic regime emergence (1) will give relevant insights to studies of policy selection (2), which, in turn, will inform studies of autocratic survival (3). ELDAR takes a comprehensive perspective that accounts for these, and other, interdependencies between autocratic regime emergence, policy selection and regime breakdown, instead of – as many previous studies have implicitly done – assuming that the three aspects are independent of each other.

Another key notion of ELDAR is that in order to understand autocratic policy selection and regime change, one must address the preferences and capacities of different actors of relevance – the autocrat, the autocrat’s key supporting groups, and opposition groups – and the country’s specific institutions.

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1 “Autocracy” thus describes regimes that cluster towards the negative pole of a concept with “democracy” at the positive pole (Goertz 2006). Our core definition of autocracy is a regime where popular control over political decision-making is limited, and where political influence is unevenly distributed between citizens (Beetham 1999). In practice, leaders are thus not elected or they are selected in elections that are highly manipulated or restricted to narrow elites. Deciding on the exact cut-off between (relatively) autocratic and democratic regimes, for any continuous regime definition, inevitably introduces arbitrariness (Bogaards 2012). Space constraints disallow discussions on how to best locate the cut-off or other detailed discussions on measurement (see Knutsen 2011a). In ELDAR we will mainly draw on the “Regimes of the World” categorization (Lührman et al. 2018), based on V-Dem data, to distinguish democracies from autocracies.
These features interact in affecting policy outcomes and regime change. Some groups may – because of their numbers or particular resources at their disposal – be better suited for enacting their interests in certain institutional settings (e.g., in the presence of multi-party autocratic elections). Further, both institutions and the capacities of groups are dynamic entities that are affected by each other. Particular institutions will enhance the power resources of some groups over time and mitigate those of others. Likewise, groups that support and oppose the incumbent autocrat will often enter contests over institutional change.

Let me illustrate these abstract notions with a hypothetical example: Consider an autocratic support coalition consisting mainly of large land-owners in an agrarian society (one historical example is Tsarist Russia, more recent examples abound in, e.g., Central America) where the leader is intent on pursuing economic policies that spur industrialization. Such policies could include investing in infrastructure such as ports and railroads, or granting tax exemptions to manufacturing sectors. Without a strong, institutionalized regime party – leaving the support coalition without a venue for bargaining for compensation or controlling how revenue from industrial activity is used – agrarian elites have incentives to derail efforts to industrialize. Industrialization might create new industrial elites that could support the ruler, thus reducing the influence of agrarian elites in the long term. This might, in turn, lead the agrarian elites to try to pressure the autocrat to abstain from pursuing industrialization, or – if this is unsuccessful – remove the leader and replace him/her with another one that is more willing to comply.

In the presence of a strong, institutionalized regime party, however, the agrarian elites will have fora for continuous negotiation, monitoring and control that could make mutually beneficial deals with the leader credible (e.g., Magaloni 2006; Bizzarro et al. 2018). Agrarian elites could consent to industrializing policies in exchange for credible commitments of monetary compensation in the future. Incidentally, this will also make agrarian elites less eager to replace the ruler, thus extending the expected tenure of the leader and perhaps prolonging the survival of the wider regime. But, if we adjust this example, assuming that the main support coalition members come from the urban middle classes (a current example being the military regime in Thailand), industrializing policies may have ensued both with and without a regime party, given that these actors likely have clear preferences in favour of industrialization.

The above are only examples of how characteristics of the actors that support the incumbent regime interact with institutions (here pertaining to a regime party) in influencing which policies are selected. These policies, in turn, affect other outcomes of interest, such as regime survival. Likewise, features of the actors that are in opposition to the regime may interact with different institutions in affecting which policies are selected and how they are designed. For instance, employing repression against well-organized, high-capacity groups such as industrial workers may only be a feasible strategy for autocrats with a strong security apparatus. Similarly, autocrats facing opposition by a highly educated and tech-savvy middle class might respond by investing in a modern, regime-controlled media operation – a recent example being Putin’s Russia. Alternatively, co-opting such opposition groups through, for example, generous pension schemes or spending on high-quality education may be preferable. These examples illustrate how we must study institutions, actors and policies together to fully understand how autocratic politics works.

The theoretical point of departure for ELDAR is thus to understand autocratic politics as nested multiplayer games, played over particular policies, institutional change, or even regime change (see also Schedler 2002; Svolik 2012). In these games – which sometimes involve violent- and sometimes nonviolent contests (e.g., Chenoweth & Stepan 2011) – outcomes hinge on the preferences and capacities of the autocratic leadership, support groups, and opposition groups, as well as on existing institutional features. Even the most prominent existing theories have mostly treated the support- and opposition coalitions as unitary actors with homogeneous preferences over polices and regimes (e.g., Boix 2003; Acemoglu & Robinson 2006; Ansell & Samuels 2015). Yet, each entity is typically a coalition that consists of very different social groups, often with diverging preferences as well as varying capacities to realize these preferences. In ELDAR, these actors will be “unpacked” by specifying the socio-economic (or other) groups that different coalition partners represent as well as other pertinent features such as group size (i.e., breadth of support for/opposition against the regime) and capacities to arrange effective violent or nonviolent collective action (Dahlum, Knutsen & Wig 2019). Likewise, most studies have focused on a few, highly aggregated, institutional dimensions, notably elections and regime parties. ELDAR will move the research on autocratic institutions forward by disaggregating and studying a variety of these institutions.

This simultaneous focus on actors and institutions also has downstream implications for how autocratic politics should be studied empirically, with repercussions for what data should be collected. ELDAR will include empirical studies that employ detailed measures on different autocratic institutions and key actors, sometimes covering more than 200 polities, globally, and with some time series extending across more than
two centuries. Recent data collection on institutions in democracies and autocracies, most notably with the V-Dem dataset (see Coppedge et al. 2018; Knutsen et al. 2018), means that measuring detailed institutions is now often possible to do with available sources. Yet, systematically collected data on actors, which extend across countries and over time, is harder to come by. Thus, ELDAR will collect data on the numbers, geographical location, and social identity, using rather detailed classification schemes of the groups that, respectively, support and (mobilize to) oppose autocratic regimes. These two data collection efforts, which are both described in more detail in Section B, will generate unprecedented opportunities for large-n empirical studies on the origins of policy-making and regime change in autocracies.

Other data collection efforts will pertain to features of policies. These efforts will open up for pioneering empirical studies on some of the most important policy areas of modern states. Specifically, the studies in ELDAR will focus on four policy areas (new data collection is needed for the three first): pensions, education, infrastructure, and media. Autocratic policy making in the first three areas have a long history. They were – and are – a mainstay of modern states, and have often been targeted on specific constituencies, with fairly clear political intentions (see, e.g., Knutsen & Rasmussen 2018). Policy-making on media and communication also has a long history, in terms of regulation of individual expression and regime propaganda. Yet, new challenges, as well as opportunities, have arisen for autocrats in this area in recent decades, notably with the emergence of the internet (Geddes 2018). We will study how specific policies come about, but also how the selected policies tie key constituencies to autocratic regimes and thereby play an integral role in securing autocratic rule and stabilizing regimes.

Qualifications for being the Principal Investigator (PI) of ELDAR

Before I turn to reviewing the existing literature on autocratic politics, with a particular focus on knowledge gaps that ELDAR will fill, let me outline why I am well-suited to carry out this project. Please note that the other members of ELDAR – three Postdocs and seven identified researchers with the requisite skills and knowledge for conducting different parts of this project – are described in more detail in Section C.

First, I have already established myself as an internationally recognized scholar and made several notable contributions to the literature on autocratic politics. The quality and productivity of my research is illustrated by my numerous publications, including several in the top political science journals and recognized economics and interdisciplinary development studies journals. My most recent articles include nine publications after 2015 in American Journal of Political Science (2), British Journal of Political Science (2), Comparative Political Studies (2), Journal of Politics, and World Politics (2), all of which are co-authored with at least one ELDAR team member. My prior work contains theoretical (to name one example, on how security-threat context affects autocrats’ selection of economic policies; Knutsen 2011b), methodological (e.g., on how to instrument for, and estimate effects of, regime type when it is endogenous to property rights protection; Knutsen 2011c) and empirical contributions (e.g., on short- and long-term effects of autocratic elections on regime survival; Knutsen et al. 2017). Many of these contributions, and the skills acquired when working with them, are highly relevant for the theoretical and empirical work planned in ELDAR.

I have won awards for my research and data work: My PhD monograph (The Economic Effects of Democracy and Dictatorship) won HM the King of Norway’s Gold Medal for the best dissertation in the Social Sciences 2012, and was shortlisted for the 2012 ECPR Jean Blondel Prize for the best European dissertation in Political Science. My article in World Development (Democracy, State Capacity, and Economic Growth) won the 2014 Chr. Michelsen’s prize for the best study in development research by a Norwegian scholar under 40. Also, my co-authored article on how elections destabilize autocratic regimes in the short-term, but stabilize them long-term, published in World Politics, received the 2018 NEPS Medal for best contribution to Peace Science. Particularly important for ELDAR is my vast experience with several small and large data collection projects. I am a co-recipient of APSA’s 2016 Lijphart-Przeworski-Verba Prize for the best dataset in Comparative Politics, for V-Dem. This, alongside other experiences and achievements (see Part B1), signifies that I can conduct groundbreaking research on autocratic politics.

Second, I have the requisite project management experience and research leadership skills to make ELDAR successful. I am one of five PIs of V-Dem (ELDAR member Gerring is another PI, and Skaaning was PI until 2018), which is the most extensive, international research network in this field of research and which has built the largest cross-national dataset on democracy. I am also the Research Group Leader of “Comparative Institutions and Regimes” (CIR), a new but relatively large group (see Part B1) at my department. In 2018, CIR achieved the top score and was evaluated by an international panel as one of a handful of political science milieus in Norway to be an excellent, international-level research group. All ELDAR members located at the University of Oslo are – or in the case of the Postdocs, will be – part of CIR.
Further, I have taken an extensive research leadership course, and have leadership experience from different smaller and larger projects. Alongside other project leader roles, I am currently PI of a larger project with a “Young Research Talent Grant” (ca. 850 000 €) from the Research Council of Norway, which ends November 2019. This project part-financed the Historical V-Dem data collection, and involves collaborative research with several international scholars on the economic consequences of political institutions. I have supervised or currently supervise 4 postdocs (incl. Dahlum, Rasmussen and Wig on the ELDAR team), and have supervised or currently supervise 9 PhDs (incl. Dahlum, Gjerlsøw and Wig) and 22 MA students (incl. Dahlum and Djuve). I have published extensively together with my PhD students and Postdocs, and several of them also already have excellent independent publication track records. Finally, I have a vast network of scholars in political science and economics, which I can draw on for this project.

### Extant literature, knowledge gaps, and overarching research questions

Important theoretical and empirical contributions on autocratic politics have been made over the last 15 years. One strand of research has involved conceptualizing and categorizing the variety of autocratic systems, along several dimensions. Extant work has, for example, categorized autocracies according to formal and informal rules for selecting and maintaining leaders in power (Geddes et al. 2014; Anckar & Fredriksson 2018), presence and nature of elections (Levitsky & Way 2010; Wahman et al. 2013), and how the regime legitimates itself to its citizens (Kailitz 2013; Gerschewski 2018). The result has been a number of (partially overlapping) schemes, categorizing autocracies into categories such as “personalist-”, “single-party-”, and “competitive authoritarian” regimes.2

A second prominent strand of research has investigated how structural economic factors such as income-, asset- and land inequalities stabilize or destabilize autocratic regimes, thus affecting prospects for democratization (Acemoglu & Robinson 2000, 2006; Boix 2003; Ansell & Samuels 2010, 2015). A third strand pertains to how natural resource revenues not only prolong the survival of autocratic regimes (e.g., Ross 2001, 2012, but see Haber & Menaldo 2011) but also affect how they are governed, for instance by increasing corruption nationally (see Busse & Gröning 2013) and locally (Knutsen et al. 2017). A fourth focus point has been how particular institutional features, notably legislatures and regime parties, influence the shape of economic policies, with ramifications for outcomes such as direct investments and economic growth (Gandhi 2008; Wright 2008; Gehlbach & Keefer 2012; Bizarro et al. 2018). A fifth strand investigates how autocratic institutions, in particular multi-party elections (Brownlee 2007; Gandhi & Lust-Oskar, 2009; Schedler 2013; Knutsen et al. 2017), affect regime survival (see also Svolik 2012; Geddes et al. 2014).

Still, we are far from achieving a full understanding of how, why and when autocracies emerge and fall, and why different autocrats select the policies that they do – with consequences for the life and welfare of citizens domestically and abroad. In particular, three issues impede our understanding of autocratic politics:

**First**, what characterizes the key groups that contest for political power, and how such characteristics affect autocratic politics, require further systematic study. While extant studies have systematically analyzed different features of the chief executive (Goemans et al. 2009) or the size of the coalition supporting the leader (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003), the socio-economic composition of opposition groups and autocratic support coalitions require more attention. Most studies treat the support coalition or the opposition as unitary actors in terms of motivations. Yet, each typically consists of different groups that often have diverging policy preferences, which, in turn, can have consequences for which type of political regime each group prefers (Acemoglu & Robinson 2006; Boix 2003; Knutsen & Wegman 2016). Further, different groups may also differ in their capacities for pushing through their preferred policies under an autocratic regime, but also for organizing sustained support for the regime or for orchestrating collective action against it (Welzel 2013; Dahlum, Knutsen & Wig 2019).

Hence, **who** makes up the coalitions that support or contest the regime can have vital implications for autocratic politics. Granted, classic theoretical statements and qualitative-historical case studies have highlighted the role of particular social groups (e.g., Moore 1966; O’Donnell 1973), for example by proposing that there are regime-stabilizing consequences of having rich landowners in the autocratic support coalition. Likewise, numerous studies propose that if the opposition draws from the urban middle- and working classes – groups that are strengthened by the dual processes of industrialization and urbanization – the chances of autocratic breakdown and subsequent democratization increase (Lipset 1959; Rueschemeyer et al. 1992; Collier 1999). Also contemporary theories that link “modernization” to autocratic breakdown

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2 In the empirical studies of ELDAR, autocratic regimes will mainly be differentiated along several – typically continuous – institutional dimensions rather than categorized as distinct types.
make assumptions certain social groups, such as the urban middle classes, playing key roles in these processes (Welzel, 2013; Fukuyama 2014).

Yet, such assumptions remain to be directly tested in a quantitative cross-country set-up, and it remains to be evaluated how general or context-sensitive these assumptions are. This gap between theory and empirical knowledge presumably stems from a lack of measures of relevant groups that have extensive coverage and are comparable across countries and time. Even the most cutting-edge cross-national tests have relied on distant proxies of the preferences and capacities of particular groups of regime supporters and opponents, such as urbanization, GDP or Gini measures of inequality (Boix 2003, Ansell & Samuels 2015). This obstacle to empirically founded knowledge will be alleviated by the data collection on regime support- and opposition groups under ELDAR.

Second, many studies use sharp categorizations of autocratic regimes based on one or more institutions (e.g., Hadenius & Teorell 2007; Geddes et al. 2014). Yet, different institutions co-exist in a variety of bundles, and using sharp categories (e.g., being or not being a “dominant party regime”) rather than placing regimes on continuous dimensions (e.g., extent of party institutionalization) leaves detailed information on the table. Hence, many existing studies focus mainly on one institutional dimension at the time and use crude categorizations rather than more nuanced, continuous measures. In addition, the literature on autocratic institutions has also had a selective focus:

Some institutions have been widely studied, notably autocratic elections, regime parties and legislatures (e.g., Geddes, 1999; Gandhi & Przeworski 2007; Gandhi 2008; Gandhi & Lust-Oskar 2009; Magaloni 2006; Svolik 2012; Wright 2008). Numerous other institutions, such as executive councils and bodies regulating and censoring the mass media, have received less attention, except for in country-case studies. This has presumably been due to the lack of extensive data on such institutions. Further, more nuanced hypotheses – also on effects of specific features of the more widely studied institutions – are found in theoretical and case-study work, but not scrutinized in large-N empirical work. For regime parties, for example, hypotheses that are more refined have been made on how the infrastructure for engaging in clientelistic exchanges with key constituencies (Magaloni 2006) or the rules for leadership replacement (Huang 2008) can influence political stability, and even regime survival. Comprehensively testing for the effects of nuanced features of regime parties, but also elections and legislatures, is thus a fertile area for future research.

With the V-Dem dataset (Coppedge et al. 2018), which was recently extended with historical data all the way back to 1789 for numerous polities (Knutsen et al. 2018), the opportunities for addressing such knowledge gaps have improved greatly. V-Dem includes about 400 indicators on institutional features, covering both de jure and more evaluative indicators (on how institutions work in practice) pertaining to elections, parties, legislatures, civil liberties, civil society, media, etc. Hence, while ELDAR will collect new data on actors and policies, V-Dem will be the main source for capturing the institutional features of interest.

Third, one complicating and hitherto under-explored feature (but, see Svolik 2012; Albertus & Menaldo 2014), is that the two aspects above may interact: How different social groups (that support or contest the regime) affect autocratic politics is likely contingent on the types of institutions in place, and vice versa. Moreover, social groups will affect which institutions that are established and maintained, and particular institutions may be more conducive to support coalitions consisting of certain groups. These considerations suggest that there are complex causal linkages, which demand comprehensive theorizing on how institutions and actors interact as well as detailed data to capture features of key groups and of relevant institutions.

Very recent and carefully conducted experimental and survey-experimental studies are starting to provide us with bits and pieces of information on key links in the intricate web of autocratic politics. To name some prominent insights, Svolik (2018) shows how political polarization, which is partly endogenous to the strategies of incumbent leaders and opposition groups, make citizens more conducive to accept violations of democratic norms, thereby enhancing opportunities for actors aiming to concentrate power in their own hands. Further, Young (2018) shows how repressive regime tactics may hinder mobilization among regime opposition members via imposing fear and thus affecting the individual decisions that help foster collective action. Likewise, opposition tactics may affect actions taken by regime elites; the field experimental results in Chen et al. (2016) suggest that leaders may respond very differently, and more often grant concessions, when facing well-organized opposition and threats of collective mobilization. While isolating specific mechanisms, these studies all highlight the conditional nature of the strategies taken by various actors, and point towards the inherent complexity of processes of regime change and policy making in autocracies. In ELDAR we will try to piece such mechanisms together and model complex webs of relationships. The goal is thus to build more comprehensive theory of autocratic politics.
More specifically concerning theory development, some contributions from ELDAR will be non-formal, qualitative arguments. Yet other arguments require the development of formal, game-theoretic models to address complex interactions between multiple actors. I have competencies and experiences with formal modeling, but aim to recruit one Postdoc with formal modeling skills to bolster this part of the project. This Postdoc must also have competencies in agent-based modeling (e.g., Macal & North 2010), which I, at present, only have cursory knowledge of. Agent-based modeling is almost new to the study of autocratic politics (but, see Jung & Lake 2011), but seems to be a very promising tool for this area of study. The complexity – both in terms of number of relevant actors and the multiple relevant institutional features that may affect outcomes – of the games that we want to model, implies that conventional formal theorizing may be hard to do successfully. Agent-based modeling will thus be a key tool for simulating the strategies of different actors and for generating precise predictions of outcomes in settings where analytical predictions from standard formal models are intractable. This, in turn, will open up for more informed and fruitful empirical studies that can test a range of specific, context-sensitive hypotheses. The envisaged agent-based modeling constitutes a high-risk part of the project, especially since I must recruit a new team member with specific expertise in such modeling. Yet, this is a part of the project with very high potential gains.

Further, hypotheses deduced from theoretical arguments in ELDAR will be stringently tested on extensive and original data material. We will thus conduct research that contributes to close the above-described knowledge gaps, and that responds to three general questions:

1. Why do autocratic regimes emerge (either abruptly or gradually) in some contexts but not in others?
2. Why do autocratic regimes implement the policies that they do?
3. Why do some autocratic regimes endure whereas others end quickly?

**Project organization and outcomes**

These three questions correspond to the three core aspects of autocratic politics that were listed at the outset, and each question forms the basis for one of ELDAR’s three work packages (WPs) on: 1) the emergence of autocracies; 2) the policies pursued in autocracies; 3) the survival of autocratic regimes. More specific questions and hypotheses will be detailed under the description of each WP. Each WP will provide new theoretical arguments for understanding, respectively, the emergence, life, and demise of autocratic regimes. Each WP will also provide new empirical knowledge on autocratic politics by drawing on new data, stringent research designs, and state-of-the-art methods.

But, the three general questions – and thus research under each WP – will not, and should not, always be clearly separated. To exemplify, how autocracies emerge – addressed in WP1 – may help explain which groups make up the regime’s support coalition (Svolik 2012), as which ones are excluded from power, as well as the institutions adopted at the outset to placate the new support coalition (Alberius & Menaldo 2014). The institutions and actors that underpin the regime are, in turn, key for explaining the dynamics of autocratic policy making in WP2. Further, the policies selected will affect which social groups that support the regime and which ones oppose it. This is relevant for the dependent variable in WP3 (regime breakdown); one common assumption is that the selection of many policies is motivated by the regime wanting to avoid breakdown (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). Hence, studying links between specific policies and regime survival may sometimes even be viewed as investigating whether the policy has had its intended effect. Understanding when and where a policy appears also allows for explicitly modelling this “selection process” to correct for potential biases when studying how a policy affects regime survival (see Section B). Hence, insights from WP2 will be critical for designing studies in WP3 that can arrive at consistent estimates of how policies in different areas affect regime survival.

While such interrelationships are addressed, when relevant, in all studies of ELDAR, they will be of special focus in an overarching monograph (output 4.1). This book will be co-authored by different team members towards the end of the project (M45-M60), and will sum up ELDAR’s wider argument and key findings.

![Diagram](Figure 1: A broad overview of project structure and timing of main tasks.)
Figure 1 visualizes ELDAR’s main parts, and Figure 2 details the timeline of the project, both concerning outputs and personnel. The most thorough treatment of autocratic policy selection and regime survival will be made in the mentioned monograph (4.1). The team members/co-authors will hold a small workshop (output 7.3), the third workshop of the project, to discuss and coordinate the work with the book. The second workshop (7.2) will center on ongoing research articles by ELDAR members and other relevant scholars. The first workshop (7.1) will invite core team members and other scholars experienced in relevant data collection to discuss and evaluate different aspects of the, by then, finished datasets, and provide inputs for ongoing data collection. Data collection for the five datasets (5.1–5.5) is thoroughly addressed in Section B.

### Table 7.1 Timeline of activities and participants.

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### Figure 2 Timeline of activities and participants.

Regarding academic audiences, team members will regularly participate in seminars and major political science and inter-disciplinary conferences to present ongoing research. We will make our studies available, pre-publication, as working papers in the V-Dem series or other accessible series for timely dissemination. ELDAR will result in several articles, as detailed below in the description of the three WPs. We aim to publish them in the top, general political science journals or in highly regarded sub-field journals, especially in comparative politics. We set aside funds for open access fees for all articles. We aim to publish the monograph on a top university press. As described in Section B, all datasets from ELDAR will be made publicly available online, alongside relevant supporting information and documentation.

ELDAR will disseminate knowledge to policy makers by actively engaging with relevant communities such as national development agencies and international organizations working with democracy support or Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16. We will follow past practices of the PI and other members and disseminate findings to national politicians, government agencies, NGOs, and IGO in interactive fora such as V-Dem’s Annual Policy Day, and maintain our good contacts with actors such as UNDP’s Oslo Governance Centre, Westminster Democracy Foundation, ILO, OECD’s Governance Network, and International IDEA. These actors will also be among the recipients of our three policy briefs (outputs 6.1-6.3). These briefs will draw on findings and insights from three research articles – one from each WP.

For dissemination to the wider public, we commit to writing at least one blog post or op-ed for each article produced under ELDAR. We will primarily aim for visible English-language outlets such as Washington Post’s Monkey Cage Blog, but complement this, when relevant, with op-eds and media appearances in
Scandinavian-speaking channels. Finally, we will accompany each scientific publication with a 5-10 minute YouTube video, drawing on available infrastructure and expertise at the UoO for these productions.

We turn now to the discussion of the research planned under each of the three WPs, before we discuss issues of methodology and data collection. I will participate in all mentioned studies, in all WPs. For the other team members, their contributions to specific studies (and datasets) are described in Section C.

**WP1 – The Emergence of Autocratic Regimes (Months 1-24)**

On July 15th, 2016, parts of the Turkish military attempted a coup d’état, aiming to overthrow the regime centering on Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. For a few hours, it seemed as if the current regime would end. However, fortunes changed over the night, with regime-loyal parts of the military and other security forces fighting back, large crowds of government supporters flocking onto the streets, and international allies and domestic opposition parties expressing their support for the “democratically elected government”. After consolidating power, an animated President Erdoğan immediately cracked down on the coup makers, but also alleged associates and sympathizers. Thousands of military personnel and others were arrested, and scores of judges, police officers, academics, and teachers were fired. Erdoğan, in a moment of brutal honesty, exclaimed, “[t]his uprising is a gift from God to us because this will be a reason to cleanse our army” (Reuters 2016). Thus the coup accelerated the already ongoing process of fortifying powers around the President in Turkey’s increasingly authoritarian regime (see Esen & Gumuscu 2016).

While Turkey’s regime has changed incrementally and, according to some widely used measures, passed the threshold from democratic to autocratic even before 2016 – V-Dem’s Regimes of the World categorization (Lührmann et al. 2018) dates the transition to 2014 – the 2016 events are illustrative for wider processes of autocratization. The Turkish example highlights the two main modes of “autocratization” – democratization in reverse – namely military coup d’état and autogolpe, or self-coup by the sitting leader (see Svolik 2009, 2015; Fish 2006). A recent literature has made some headway into investigating the structural determinants of military coups (e.g., Powell 2012, Powell & Chacha, 2016). An even larger quantitative literature has investigated the structural correlates of democratic breakdowns, such as low income levels and income inequality (e.g., Przeworski et al. 2000; Houle 2009). Despite this, extant statistical models on regime change typically do a worse job, according to different metrics, in explaining why democracies or “mixed regimes” transition into autocracies – be it rapidly or gradually – than transitions into democracies (Knutsen & Nygård 2015). Further, theoretical contributions that address the actors who drive the former transitions often lack in specificity, discussing autocratizing “elites” broadly and mainly assigning them with monetary incentives for pursuing regime change (e.g., Acemoglu & Robinson 2006).

Yet, once we recognize that military coups and self-coups are the two most common modes for transitioning into autocracy (Svolik 2015), this opens up for more precise theorizing about the key actors, and their motivations, in such processes of autocratization. First, it is key to make more informed assumptions about the motivations of military actors – which can range from increasing military budgets, to avoiding government take-over by socialists, to avoiding civil war – in order to understand the emergence of autocracies through military coups. Further, modeling fractions within the armed forces and alliances with other social groups, such as large land owners and industrialists, is vital for understanding such regime changes. It is also important to model popular grievances and the level of public support for the incumbent, which likely affect the expected costs of conducting a coup (Nordlinger 1977). For self-coups, the motivations of the incumbent – perhaps particularly related to a desire to stay in power – is critical. It is also important to incorporate how the institutional context affects the capability of executives to pursue successful self-coups. Strong parliaments, for example, deter self-coups (Fish 2006).

Finally, as the Turkish example alludes to it, is important to model interactions between the actors that can organize military coups and leaders that may conduct self-coups. Both coups and self-coups may be motivated as pre-emptive strikes against political rivals that could grab power. Recent literature on pre-emptive coups can thus be a fruitful building block (e.g., Wig & Rod 2016). Hence, a comprehensive, nuanced, theory of the emergence of autocracies should specify the motivations and capacities of key actors (the leader, the military, potential coalition partners, sometimes including foreign actors), their levels of popular support, the institutional environment, and forward-looking strategic interactions between the actors.

My team and I will specify such a theory in the **first study** of WP1 (1.1): First, we will create a **multidimensional typology of autocratization processes** by mapping out the relevant I) actors and II) types of institutional decline. Second, leveraging the typology’s first dimension, we will make informed and differentiated assumptions about what motivates the actors. Third, we will incorporate how the institutional context affects the capability of actors to succeed with military coups and self-coups, in particular. We will
formally model the strategic interactions between key actors using game theory and agent-based modeling. This theoretical discussion on how and why autocracies emerge will be combined with statistical tests of the theory’s core observable implications and illustrative case examples. Data collection financed by ELDAR, notably on regime support group identities, will be used, as will existing data on attempted and successful coups (Powell and Thyne 2011) and modes of regime breakdown from V-Dem (14 category-scheme; see Djuve et al. 2018). We will summarize key findings from this article, and discuss possible implications for the democracy-work of NGOs, foreign aid agencies and other actors, in Policy Brief 6.1

The second study of WP1 (1.2) will be a more focused large-n empirical analysis. The study will address how specific social groups supporting the incumbent affects prospects for autocratization and whether it does so through increased risks of self-coups or military coups. Agrarian elites are often viewed as particularly detrimental to democracy, especially in contexts of large land inequality or where the mode of production is highly labor intensive. In such contexts, agrarian elites have both the incentives and capacities to support autocratic rule (Ansell & Samuels 2010, 2015; Boix 2003; Albertus 2018). With data collected by ELDAR (the regime support group data in 5.1 cover also democracies), we will test whether landed elites entering support coalitions in democracies or “mixed” regimes increases risk of autocratization through self-coups. Moreover, we will test whether landed elites being outside the support coalition increases the risk of military coup – landed elites may more often support military actors financially or by facilitating coordination in such situations. These relationships will be nuanced by investigating, e.g., the relationship between landed elites in the support coalition and self-coups under systems with weak and strong parliaments. Finally, certain arguments pertaining to landed elites (Ansell & Samuels 2015; Boix 2003) also suggest that big business elites in some sectors such as the mining sector – where capital is immobile and hard to move abroad – or in sectors with extensive state ownership – and thus tight dependency links between business elites and the regime – should play a fairly similar role in (at least partly) industrialized societies. Hence, the design used for studying agrarian elites will also be applied to study such business actors.

The third study (1.3) – or possibly set of studies – will consider which institutional constructs are erected once an autocracy emerges, depending on the mode of transition into autocracy and the social group constellations that back and that oppose the new regime. Some transitions into autocracy come gradually (e.g., Putin’s Russia), and institutional features may evolve as the leadership consolidates and concentrates power in its own hands or disperses power to support groups by building new institutions (Svolik 2012; Boix & Svolik 2013). Yet other autocratic transitions are marked by clear, immediate changes to the institutional set-up – including how elections are run, whether political parties are allowed, and how institutions regulating or repressing civil liberties are designed. Such differences established in the transition process may have longer-lasting consequences through path dependencies. To exemplify, one hypothesis is that autocracies emerging from military coups have stricter regulation of multi-party competition than those emerging from self-coups – military actors should have less experience with, and capacity to, compete even in rigged elections than former presidents (who were at one point elected in more competitive elections). Formerly elected leaders can continue to cultivate their broad support bases among, say, urban workers and peasants, and design electoral and other institutions that allow them to continue to reap benefits from this support even as the country slides away from democracy (fairly recent examples arguably include Putin in Russia, Chavez in Venezuela, and Erdoğan in Turkey). This study will focus on elections, regime parties, and institutions regulating the media. The study will be especially important because many institutional features are persistent; institutions adopted at regime inception could shape autocratic institutional make-up – and thus the policies pursued, as discussed under WP2 – for years to come. Empirically, we will rely on large-n analysis using V-Dem and the new datasets 5.1 and 5.2, but complement this analysis with qualitative case studies assessing particular transitions and adoptions of specific institutional designs (see Section B).

WP2 – The Life of Autocratic Regimes (Months 18-40)
Policy selection in autocracies is a complex game between the autocrat, his/her support coalition, citizens, and organized opposition forces, played using the levers provided by existing institutions. Support and opposition coalitions can be further broken down into groups, which allows for better modeling motivations and actor-capacities. Rich theoretical and case study literatures suggest that autocrats act on a range of motivations (Wintrobe 1998), but two very common ones are the desire (for the autocrat or wider regime) to remain in power (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003) and to maximize private consumption (Olson 1993). One fruitful starting point for theorizing is thus to model the choices of autocrats as being motivated by both private consumption and remaining in power (see Knutsen 2015).

Studies in ELDAR will construct theories following these assumptions, and test their downstream implications. But, the new data will also allow for evaluating whether the core assumptions have empirical
plausibility, by probing notions related to consumption-maximizing dictators (e.g. investigating how and when autocrats use public revenue for building lavish homes) or survival-oriented regimes (e.g. investigating whether distributive policies actually target the exact groups considered vital for regime survival). Further, policy selection hinges not only on who the relevant actors are, but also on the institutional context that these actors operate within. The notion that a set of actors with similar preferences and power resources may yield different policy outcomes, under different institutional contexts, will be central to the theorizing in WP2. For instance, the existence of a strong regime party may tilt policy outcomes away from the autocrat’s ideal point and closer to outcomes preferred by key groups in the support coalition.

The first study of WP2 (2.1) builds on ongoing work by ELDAR team members (Gerring, Gjerløw & Knutsen, 2018), which shows that autocracies, in general, outperform democracies on several infrastructure variables, including railroads and electrification. (These infrastructure data are collected in another project led by Gerring). Still, preliminary analysis identifies large variation between autocracies on infrastructural development, and different arguments suggest that autocracies may be strongly incentivized to pursue infrastructure spending in some contexts (e.g., when facing external security threats; Knutsen 2011b), but not in others. We will develop and test the hypothesis that autocracies may be “pressured” into investing in certain kinds of infrastructure when urban groups in the manufacturing sector are key support coalition members. These groups are likely beneficiaries from investments in, e.g., railroads and electrification, which are often productivity-enhancing for the industrial sector, but also costly to finance (and thus not necessarily desired by other groups). Further, these groups might even pressure the autocrat into providing such investments as concessions also when they are outside the support coalition, if they are able to organize mass opposition movements and thus pose a credible threat to the regime. Hence, understanding the preferences, influence and organizational capacity of urban groups could help explain why some autocracies invest heavily in infrastructure, while others do not. We will conduct large-N tests and more detailed investigations of “crucial cases” (see Section B) to assess these notions.

The second study (2.2) will address when and how autocracies use (lower-level) education policies for ideological indoctrination. Autocracies display more variation than democracies, both between countries and over time, on a range of policy and socio-economic outcomes (e.g., Rodrik 2008; Knutsen 2018). The extent to which students are taught basic reading, writing and math skills in school is no exception (Dahlum & Knutsen 2017c). One plausible explanation for the large variation is that some autocracies prefer education systems that yield economically productive citizens, whereas others prefer to use it for indoctrination – in North Korea students spend more than 1/3 of their time learning Juche ideology (Martin, 2004, 167). To study such variation, we will compile a dataset (output 5.4; see Section B) on relevant features of the education system. One hypothesis is that indoctrination in school is a substitute for indoctrination within other organizations, such as youth party organizations or well-developed state media operations. Hence, we will use V-Dem data to test whether autocracies with weaker regime parties or weaker control of the media environment more often use the education system for indoctrination. In extension, we will use survey data (e.g., World Values Survey or Afrobarometer) to study whether indoctrination in school actually “works”. By studying cases with abrupt, relevant education reforms, we can use regression discontinuity designs to test whether cohorts of citizens attending school pre- and post-reform differ in reported political values and attitudes. Policy Brief 6.2 will summarize the findings and discuss implications for relevant policy actors.

The third study (2.3) will evaluate a common assumption of how autocratic politics works by assessing the extent to which gains from distributive policies are directed toward the autocrat’s core support groups and/or exclude groups in opposition to the regime. While often assumed (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Haggard & Kaufman 2008), a systematic and direct test of this relationship has not yet been conducted. To do so, we will expand the SPaW dataset (Rasmussen 2018), which contains variables capturing how many large social groups are covered by different social policy programs, but lacks codified information on which exact groups are covered. Such nuanced group-coverage data (dataset 5.3) will be matched with data on regime support groups (dataset 5.1), allowing us to test the expectation on targeted distribution of resources. For example, we expect regimes backed by industrial workers to be much more likely to adopt and maintain old-age pension- and unemployment benefits programs that cover such groups.

The fourth study (2.4) will build on ongoing work (Gjerløw & Knutsen 2019) showing that autocratic regimes spend far more resources than democracies on one particular type of infrastructure, namely expensive skyscrapers. Weaker electoral and other institutional accountability mechanisms allow autocrats to pursue such expensive projects that are not always in the public interest, but which leaders privately desire for various reasons. Yet, electoral and other institutional constraints differ also between autocracies, and there could thus be systematic patterns in terms of which autocracies tend to build skyscrapers, and expensive building projects more generally. One type of building where the private gains of the autocrat is
even more obvious than for skyscrapers, is the house in which the autocrat resides. Infamously costly examples are Louis XIV’s Versailles palace, Ceausescu’s residence in Bucharest, and, recently, Erdoğan’s residence in Ankara. By drawing on available skyscraper data and constructing a dataset (5.5) on characteristics of leader residencies, we will investigate hypotheses about institutional constraints mitigating expensive building projects. More generally, the concept of “private rents” is often invoked in theoretical models of autocrats and policy making, and they are widely assumed to be lower when institutional constraints on executive power are stronger. But, direct empirical tests of this notion are lacking, likely due to lack of decent, cross-national proxies of “rents”. Dataset 5.5 and article 2.4 will help rectify this situation.

WP3 – The Demise of Autocratic Regimes (Months 36-56)

In WP3, we will explore different factors that can explain why some regimes endure while others die quickly, including socio-economic factors. However, policy variables – studied as dependent variables in WP2 – will be the most prominent such factors. As noted, one common motivation of many autocrats – albeit not the only one – is to avoid regime breakdown for as long as possible. Thus, one intriguing question is whether the policies studied in WP2 are effective in achieving their presumed underlying intention (prolonging regime survival). We must therefore also acknowledge in WP3 that, for example, pension programs or education policies are not exogenous explanatory variables, but rather come from choices made by autocrats and close associates under different constraints. Thus, we should explicitly model and account for such “selection mechanisms” (see Section B; see also Knutsen et al. 2017). Further, we want to study how autocracies die, and which regimes replace them. The regime replacing an autocracy is often another autocracy (Geddes et al. 2014), despite scholars’ pre-occupation with democratization processes. And, while several studies have concentrated on popular revolutions and coups d’état, regimes can die in several other ways. The scheme that ELDAR members and I have previously developed (Djuve et al. 2018) counts 14 distinct modes of regime death. By combining these data with the new data funded by and collected in ELDAR on social identity and other features of opposition- and support groups, we can draw on information from more than 200 polities, starting in the year 1789. This will most likely open up for several new insights into both why and how autocratic regimes end.3

The first study of WP3 (3.1) will investigate how policies related to controlling citizens’ access to information affect breakdown, and how such relationships further depend on the support- and opposition coalition actors in place. One study in WP2 addresses indoctrination in the education system, and a natural follow-up question is whether autocrats can effectively indoctrinate to survive? Regimes mastering how to manipulate citizen attitudes and public opinion may, even without repression, allay risks of popular revolution, but also coups – coup plotters face lower expected costs in removing unpopular leaders (Nordlinger 1977). On the other side, active and informed citizens may play an indirect role in bringing down autocratic regimes, even in elite-centred processes such as coups. A more nuanced question relates to whether the effectiveness of indoctrination is contingent on other policies for controlling information flows. Educational indoctrination could be a substitute for, e.g., state-controlled media/propaganda operations. But, effective indoctrination – making citizens more adherent and supposedly reducing risks of breakdown – could also be contingent on blocking alternative sources of information outside school. If so, education indoctrination could actually have a stronger effect on survival present particular regulatory policies pertaining to mass media, but also, more generally, in institutional environments restricting freedom of expression. We will test this by using extant V-Dem data on media regulation. Further, indoctrination may have become a less effective tool with new forms of “polycentric” mass media, such as the internet, in recent decades (but, see Rød & Weidmann 2015). Finally, the effect of indoctrination (and media regulation) may critically depend also on the type of actors that are in opposition to the regime. Resourceful groups with extensive human capital, such as urban middle classes (and their children), may be less easy targets for indoctrination and more difficult to control in terms of media access and use. Summarizing the key findings from this article and discussing policy implications for relevant actors will be done in Policy Brief 6.3.

The starting point for WP3’s second study (3.2) is that autocratic regimes may prefer implementing welfare programs because these programs allow for credibly promising distribution of resources to key support

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3 Let me illustrate that extending the time horizon may matter for results by referring to ongoing work with other ELDAR members (Djuve et al. 2018): Most studies on autocratic breakdown have so far focused on the post-WWII period. This has led to the finding that coup is the most common mode of breakdown, overall, but is in decline whereas popular uprisings have become relatively more frequent in recent decades (e.g., Svolik 2009). But, when considering modern history from 1789, we find that the frequencies of many breakdown modes, including coups and uprisings, move in non-monotonic, close to cyclical, fashions.
groups (Knutsen & Rasmussen 2018). Previous research has mainly focused on quite broad social groups, such as industrial workers (Mares & Carnes 2009). While broader groups are vital, also narrow groups can be key supporters, especially military officers and state bureaucrats. Theoretically, one should thus expect generous social policies to be targeted at these groups in many autocracies, as also several case narratives suggest (see Haggard & Kaufman 2008). By coding the presence and features of special military and public servants pensions, we will study whether a) such pensions enhance regime survival – and reduce coup risk more specifically; b) whether such effects are stronger where the military/public servants are considered as the regime’s most important support group (country-expert evaluations of this are included in dataset 5.1); c) whether the effects of pensions are stronger for regimes that do not have the requisite institutional tools (e.g., strong regime party) for otherwise credibly promising future distribution of resources to supporters.

The third study (3.3) will test a prominent argument, by Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003), suggesting that the size of the regime’s support coalition affects various outcomes, including public goods provision, growth, and armed conflict. Coalition size might also affect regime durability by influencing the incentives and capacities of this coalition to maintain the regime, even in the presence of organized opposition. In addition to facing conceptual issues with identifying coalitions in autocracies – which ELDAR will address – existing tests of such relationships have relied on proxy measures of coalition size that are associated with severe validity issues (Gallagher & Hanson 2015). By further elaborating on the notion of support coalitions and by employing new and more direct measures, this study will carefully assess whether or not autocracies with broad bases of support are more stable than those drawing support only from smaller groups. Yet, the identity of the regime’s supporters may also matter. Autocratic regimes backed, e.g., by landowners or military officers may typically endure longer than regimes backed by peasants or urban workers. This, in turn, could stem from general differences in power resources, such as access to capital or weapons, between groups. In any case, we will test whether (and how) both the size and the identity of support coalitions influence regime survival. In extension, we will test plausible hypotheses concerning how such effects depend on institutional features (e.g., a large coalition may matter more in autocracies with multi-party elections).

#### Section b. Methodology

In order to assess the generality and robustness of the theoretical arguments on autocratic policy-making and regime change, the main methodological approach in ELDAR will be statistical studies on large-n data. When theories are not clearly bounded by geographical region or a particular time period, we will test implications on as broad a sample of observations as possible. (Yet, we will systematically test for spatial or temporal heterogeneity, for example by running split-sample tests, Chow tests, or Change-point models).

This typically means that empirical studies will draw on unprecedented large samples, with data from about 150-200 countries globally and time series extending for several decades – often all the way from 1789 to the present (see discussion on datasets below). These studies will be complemented by in-depth country-case studies in order to assess finer-grained mechanisms that are difficult to test by using large-n data. For example, testing for very fine-grained sequences of events during a self-coup or military coup is difficult with cross-country data, as such events can unravel in a few hours (as in the Turkish coup attempt example) and can be difficult to code systematically across countries.

For the statistical studies, the most important source of variation comes from leveraging changes across time within countries. This is enabled by the long time series of the datasets described below, and using within-country variation helps mitigate well-known biases that arise when comparing across countries (see, e.g., Acemoglu et al. 2008). Hence, various panel data methods – which I have much experience and expertise with – will be essential, and so will event history models for studies on regime breakdown. In general, the long time series will allow utilizing models that mitigate risks of omitted variable bias by including country- and year-fixed effects, while also avoiding issues with such models, including downward biased estimates and inflated standard errors, which are more pressing with short time series (Nickell 1981; Beck & Katz 2001). Yet, some hard-to-measure confounders will be unrelated to global trends and vary across a country’s history. Thus, we will also use state-of-the-art causal sensitivity techniques (Blackwell, 2014), leveraging information about bias generated by measured factors to evaluate likely bias from unmeasured factors.

Leveraging the time dimension also improves opportunities for dealing with issues of endogeneity related to reverse causality and selection biases – arguably the biggest challenges to most studies in ELDAR. But doing so by, for example, investigating temporal lags and running differences-in-differences models, is often insufficient for mitigating endogeneity biases when trying to estimate the effect of a particular policy on regime survival (and where this policy may typically be adopted in contexts where the regime is more/less likely to break down in any case). Identifying effects is an ever-present problem in a field where experiments are often unavailable because of practical or ethical reasons. Still, carefully crafted research designs and
appropriate statistical techniques can sometimes go a long way. Where relevant, I will use techniques that draw on exogenous information, for instance the international diffusion of specific institutional features (e.g., Knutsen 2011c; Bizzarro et al 2018) to arrive at consistent estimates of causal effects. That being said, finding strong and valid instruments for a particular study is always difficult, and the isolation of causal effects via these types of methods is thus a high-risk part of the project.

Yet, the identification and modeling challenges presented above are not new to me; they have permeated most previous studies that I have conducted on related topics. While each study requires its particular design to best mitigate such issues, I have acquired a substantial arsenal of techniques that are relevant for dealing with endogeneity biases. Thus, many studies in ELDAR will involve models designed to handle such biases (such as 2SLS and GMM models) that I know well. However, I will, with the help by team members with complementary skills, further expand my arsenal of relevant techniques, for instance by reading up on new developments in synthetic control methods and matching techniques and by learning how to properly conduct causal sensitivity analysis. To this end, ELDAR will organize a methods reading group for team members and other interested scholars at (UoO and PRIO) where participants will take turns to present and elaborate on relevant methods (for studies in ELDAR) in which they have particular expertise.

My team and I will complement the large-n studies with country-case studies. These include both qualitative case studies and studies involving quantitative analysis of micro data from surveys in particular countries. One candidate hypothesis for testing on micro data concerns the impact of autocratic education reform on citizen values. By identifying one or more autocratic regimes with a substantial reform, strongly enhancing the ideological content of teaching, we may use data from surveys such as WVS or Afrobarometer and regression discontinuity designs, separating between cohorts that were and were not covered by the reform, to investigate impact. More generally, extant survey data may provide a complementary data source for different studies investigating the support for, or opposition to, the regime in different social groups, although comparable such data typically exist for fewer years and fewer countries than other data sources.

Some empirical implications on, for instance, the particular actions taken by incumbents and military elites in autocratization processes are not testable in a large-n set-up. Hence, these implications require closer qualitative assessments on particular cases. When using cases to assess mechanisms, we will map out the detailed information on the actions of individuals and social groups or the sequences of events, and compare them against theoretical expectations. We will select cases according to theoretical relevance and possibilities for drawing stringent inferences. Cross-national regressions will be used to identify cases that are “typical” or “a-typical” of the wider distribution of cases, and that may thus be relatively well-suited for, respectively, assessing the proposed mechanisms of the theory or developing new and more elaborate theoretical explanations (see, e.g., Gerring 2007). The cases studied in this project will thus likely include both historical and more recent ones, and our aim will be to draw on cases also from different geographic regions – for self-coups, for example, the above-discussed recent Turkish case might be complemented by a historical case of, say, the self-coup by Napoleon III in 19th century France. We also want to study cases that display theoretically relevant variation across time in order to keep the country-context constant. For studying infrastructural policy and industrialization, for example, we might contrast the (unsuccessful) policy tools used during Mao’s Great Leap Forward (see Chan 2001) with the more successful ones used in China in more recent decades. Key sources for the qualitative case studies will include newspaper articles (searchable in online databases), historical narratives, and possibly archival material (availability depends on country).

Data collection
The studies above require the collection of new data. ELDAR will thus expand three datasets, all of which I have previously contributed to, and initiate two new ones. Figure 2 provides specifics on timing for each dataset, and contributors to each dataset from the team are listed in Section C. We will make all datasets public online alongside codebooks clarifying the rules and sources used for coding. We will take measures to ensure consistency in coding across time and space, and all datasets will contain uncertainty estimates and be subjected to validation- and inter-coder reliability tests. Efforts to expand datasets 5.1- 5.3 will benefit from available material, developed routines, and a large pool of potential RAs from the MA students at UoO.

Dataset 5.1: The first dataset extension is on various features of regime support groups (in autocracies and democracies). These questions have already been coded for Historical V-Dem for 91 polities from 1789-1920, and expert coding will appear for recent years for some countries, on a subset of questions, with V-Dem v.9 in April 2019. ELDAR will extend this coding of historical units forward to 2018 for all questions and add about 100 countries that turned independent after 1900. The expert surveys will be run with V-Dem
v.11 in January 2021. The tasks include identifying which among 13 social groups (e.g. ‘Agrarian elites, including rich peasants and large landholders’, ‘Local elites, including customary chiefs’, ‘Urban working classes, including labor unions’) that constitute the regime’s core supporters, at varying levels of importance. Other questions pertain to the size and geographic location of support groups. The questions are answered by V-Dem country experts, and several measures are taken to ensure cross-time and cross-country equivalence, including the careful assessments of question wording, numerous “anchoring vignettes” (see King et al. 2004), some experts rating across countries (“bridge-coding”), and the use of a cutting-edge measurement model to adjust the “raw scores” provided by experts (Pemstein et al. 2018).

**Dataset 5.2:** The second dataset extension relates to opposition actors, where we will train a set of RAs to code features of groups that mobilize against the incumbent regime. They can be organized actors with manifestos and/or organizational structures, or more loosely defined instances of “social groups”. The former includes civil society organizations such as labor unions, employer organizations, women’s rights organizations, and religious organizations. The latter includes mobilized students, urban middle classes, industrial workers, peasants, ethnic groups, public sector employees, etc., that lack a permanent organization. We will extend on previous efforts headed by Dahlum, but with my involvement, on opposition mobilization from 1900–2006. Together we will expand the time series backwards from 1900 to 1789 and from 2006 to 2017, to match the time period of the regime support group data. We will also add variables on characteristics of additional ‘social groups’ and ‘organized actors’. For identifying units (opposition movements), we rely on extant data on opposition campaigns (especially NAVCO 2.0; Chenoweth and Lewis 2013) for 1900–2012, and on newspapers and secondary literature for 1789–1899, paying careful attention to how social groups are labeled and reported on in early years.

**Dataset 5.3:** The third dataset extension pertains to the SpaW dataset (see Rasmussen 2018). The first task will be (for us and RAs) to go back to the sources (which are well-documented and registered) used for coding existing variables on the number of major social groups covered by various social policy programs, in order to register which these groups are. That is, if a certain pension program is registered as covering two major social groups, we will look up the sources and identify which ones these groups are, following a standardized classification scheme (e.g., “industrial workers” and “students”). In extension, we will further subdivide the extant categories, when possible, to produce even stronger overlap with the social group categorizations in datasets 5.1 and 5.2. The second task involves coding features of special pension schemes for two groups, military personnel and public officials, which seem to be common members of autocratic support coalitions, and that historically often obtained pension arrangements early. We have already identified sources from the ILO on features of public servants pensions for many countries, easing coding efforts. Coding military pensions may be more involved, as they are sometimes specific to personnel partaking in particular wars.

**Dataset 5.4:** The first new dataset concerns education practices and reforms, with a particular focus on the ideological content of teaching and curricula at lower levels of education. The sources that will be invoked by RAs and us for this coding include – but are not limited to – various identified lists, structured reports, and other reference works gathered by, in particular, the OECD and UNESCO. We will code several features capturing regime control and use of the education system for indoctrination purposes. Prospective indicators include hours spent on particular subjects, whether texts written by political leaders figure on the curriculum, the autonomy of schools to choose textbooks, autonomy of schools to allocate resources, autonomy of schools in the hiring/firing of teachers, and whether national education legislation explicitly incorporates ideological and political objectives. Further indicators will be added, and how many and how detailed they are will depend on our ability to identify credible source material. Some of the above-noted indicators might only be possible to code for more recent decades, implying some risk for the statistical power of the empirical analysis of the education-related studies listed in WP2 and WP3. Yet, the geographic coverage of this dataset will be global.

**Dataset 5.5:** The second new dataset will be on a particular type of infrastructure, namely buildings used as residencies by leaders. Who these leaders are, i.e., who are the heads of state and government, can easily be identified by using V-Dem. We will subsequently code the size, expense, building year, location, indoor-outdoor area ratio, maintenance expenses, and other facets of the primary residences of these leaders, but possibly also other public or religious structures. Initial pilot coding suggests that estimates for such features are (surprisingly) readily available online. Some sources are even easily amenable to automated data scraping techniques, which team member Haakon Gjerlow has piloted. Features such as building costs are often associated with large uncertainty, which will be addressed in the dataset. The geographic coverage will be global, and time series will extend from 1789 to the present.
Section c. Resources (including project costs)

I commit 50% of my time to ELDAR over the entire period. As my Professor position entails 50% teaching, this is enabled by me allocating available research time and a substantial buy-out. The wider team includes John Gerring at University of Texas, Austin (UTA), among the foremost scholars on case study methodology and effects of regime type on policy selection. Alongside co-authoring, Gerring will give advice on the design of various case studies. The team also includes Svend-Erik Skaaning at Aarhus University. He is among the leading experts on conceptualization and measurement of political regimes. His expertise will be integral to creating the typology of autocratization processes in WP1.

I will also involve five excellent young scholars that I have recently supervised or mentored, and that I have cooperated extensively with: Sirianne Dahlum (Researcher at PRIO; buy-out budgeted as third party cost under other direct costs with no overheads), Vilde Lunnan Djuve (UoO), Haakon Gjerløw (UoO), Magnus Rasmussen (UoO), and Tore Wig (UoO). Figure 2 details the timing of the buy-out periods (Dahlum, Rasmussen, Wig) or 1-year researcher contracts (Djuve, Gjerløw) for each of them. All five scholars have invaluable skills and expertise needed for the data collection efforts and studies planned for ELDAR. Dahlum has expertise in education systems and mass opposition movements. She will thus contribute to the collection of datasets 5.2 and 5.4, plus the studies in WP2 and WP3 on education policies and indoctrination. Djuve and Wig were, together with myself, contributors to the precursor of the regime data in Historical V-Dem (see Djuve et al. 2018; Knutsen et al. 2018). They are thus both needed for successfully realizing dataset 5.1. Substantively, Djuve, who has extensive knowledge on self-coups, will contribute to at least one study in WP1, whereas Wig will, given his expertise, contribute mainly to studies in WP1 and WP3 on regime change. Given his knowledge of infrastructure development as well as specialized competencies in automated data scraping techniques, Gjerløw will contribute to studies in WP2 as well as dataset 5.5. Finally, Rasmussen has expertise on the design and development of social policy programs, and will thus contribute to dataset 5.3 and the studies in WP2 and WP3 pertaining to pension programs.

Third, I will hire three Postdocs, aiming to attract the best available talents globally. Postdoc 1 will contribute to WP1, and more specifically to the formal theorizing of the complex interaction between several actors under different institutional structures in processes of “autocratization”. Skills in game theory and agent-based modeling will thus be prerequisites for this position. Postdoc 2 will contribute mainly to WP2. Candidates working with policy making in a core issue area (education, pensions, infrastructure, or media) will be preferred. This Postdoc must have a firm grasp on panel data regression. Postdoc 3 will mainly work with autocratic survival in WP3. Panel regression and event-history modeling are relevant competencies.

One budget post that requires substantial resources is the hiring of RAs, budgeted under other personnel costs, mainly for the coding of datasets 5.2-5.5. Another sizeable post is fees for the country-expert survey on regime support coalitions (5.1), sub-contracted via the V-Dem Institute, Gothenburg University. I budget for a four month stay at UTA for effective co-authoring with Gerring. I also set aside travel money for team members to present output from ELDAR at high-profile conferences (APSA, ECPR, EPSA, MPSA) and for Gerring and Skaaning to come to UoO. Other budget posts are for Open Access fees, producing YouTube videos, printing and disseminating the three policy briefs, and an audit. I have budgeted for the three mentioned workshops on data collection, discussing research articles, and the monograph. When investing my own time and effort, building a complementary and excellent research team, and ensuring resources for data collection, ELDAR will likely push the research frontier in the field of autocratic politics.
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