

CONNECTING DEMOCRATIC STOCK TO DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE: AUTOCRATIZATION IN TURKEY AND VENEZUELA

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Author's declaration

I, the undersigned, **M. H. Fatih Uyar** candidate for the MA degree in Political Science declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 7 June 2023

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Abstract

Turkey and Venezuela are two outlier cases which have relatively high democratic stock (previous democratic experience) but surprisingly low levels of democracy today. This study attempts to answer why these countries' democratic stock could not turn into democratic resilience in the face of autocratization, leading to their democratic breakdown. To explain the causal chain, this paper argues that after two outsiders, Erdoğan and Chávez, got elected in a context that delegitimized the existing political systems, the undemocratic behaviour of the opposition and the establishment elites further legitimized the two leaders' attacks on checks and balances in the eyes of many academics, intellectuals, and people. Until around the last decade, autocratization was misinterpreted as democratization in both countries, and this eventually decreased the democratic resilience of these countries against autocratization. This work is a hypothesis-generating comparative case study that provides a parallel demonstration of the theory with the help of academic literature, online sources, and public opinion surveys to understand the perception of scholars, intellectuals, and the public.

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This work is dedicated to Turkish and Venezuelan people who continue the democracy struggle despite all difficulties and unfair circumstances. Their determination is the reason why there is hope.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The state of democracy in the world is alarming today despite many countries democratizing, as the ongoing autocratization trend has resulted in the breakdown of many democracies such as Hungary, India, Turkey, and Venezuela according to the V-Dem dataset (Coppedge et al. 2023). Although there seems to be a global wave of autocratization, the current levels of democracy in these countries are unexpected, considering their previous democratic experience. The regimes of these countries fit into Levitsky and Way's (2002) competitive authoritarian type, no longer counted as democratic. However, it is found that there is a correlation between a country's democratic stock¹ and democratic resilience (Boese-Schlösser et al. 2020; Boese et al. 2021). Indeed, Edgell et al. (2020) point out that a country's democratic stock and current level of democracy are strongly correlated. Nevertheless, two deviant cases, Turkey and Venezuela, have relatively high democratic stock but surprisingly low levels of democracy today as seen in Figure 1, presenting a research puzzle. Both countries democratized early in the 1950s and since then had elections resulting in incumbent changes until Erdoğan and Chávez. This is not to overestimate their previous levels of democracy, as they were not liberal but electoral democracies, with Turkey being called a tutelary one (Esen and Gümüşçü 2016), and Venezuela a flawed democracy (Kornblith 2013). However, they had democratic regimes for about a half-century², and the level of public support for democracy is high in both countries³. These did not prevent their democracies from breakdown under the rule of Recep

¹ Conceptualized as "a country's accumulated past democratic experience" by Edgell et al. (2020, 9).

² Except for short military coup interruptions in Turkey.

³ Those who find democracy the best form of government are around 77% in Turkey (Çarkoğlu and Toprak 2006). Similarly, around 80% of Venezuelans find democracy the best form of government according to *Latinobarómetro* data in the last decade, which has been the highest level in Latin America.

Tayyip Erdoğan and Hugo Chávez, whereas there are cases like Ecuador and Bolivia that proved to be more resilient to autocratization by averting breakdown or returning to democracy after the breakdown, which begs the question why Turkey and Venezuela could not.

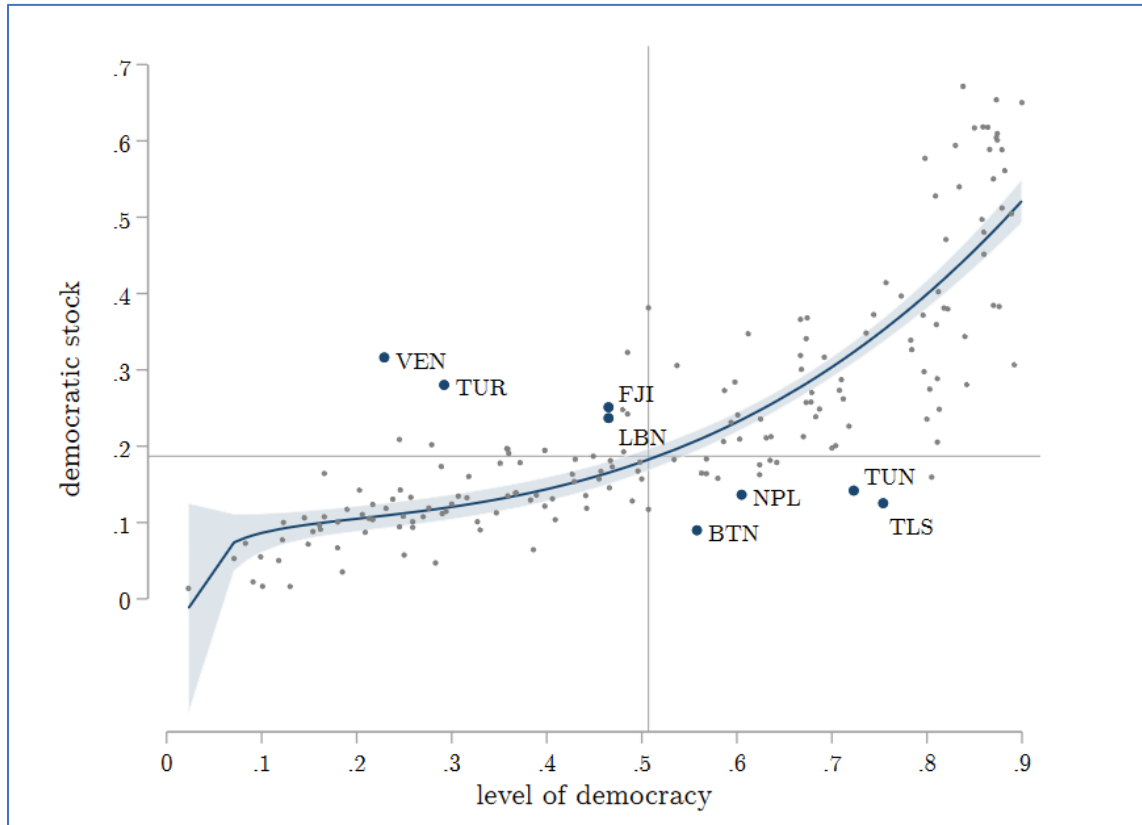


Figure 1: Democratic stock and democracy level using V-Dem's EDI (Edgell et al. 2020)

Fuchs-Schündeln and Schündeln (2015) demonstrate that having experience with democracy increases support for democracy, helping these countries preserve democratic institutions. In addition, political parties and judiciary institutionalized under democratic rule lead to the endurance of democracy later on (Pérez-Liñán and Mainwaring 2013). In this study, I set out to explain why the democracies in Turkey and Venezuela failed to be resilient in their current autocratization period in spite of their relatively high democratic stock. In other words, I attempt to answer why the then-present horizontal (state institutions), vertical (voters and parties), and diagonal accountability (civil society and media)

mechanisms in these countries, which would have been expected to be relatively strong, could not halt the autocratization process. Thus, this paper will contribute to the literature by connecting democratic stock to democratic resilience with the negative cases of Turkey and Venezuela, which will help us better understand the reasons for the success of autocratization and the failure of democratic resilience. This study puts the emphasis on opposition and elite behaviours that distort society's perception of democracy, which has not been given particular attention in the literature. According to V-Dem, Turkish democracy started to erode in around 2006, leading to its breakdown in 2014 with Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP), and Venezuelan democracy started to backslide in 1998, leading to its breakdown in 2004 with Chávez and Chavismo. This study mainly focuses on autocratization in Erdoğan and AKP's first three terms (2006-2015) and Chávez's first two terms (1998-2007) so as to cover the events leading to and after the democratic breakdown.

RQ: Why could autocratization in Turkey and Venezuela not be stopped despite their relatively high democratic stock? Why did their democracies fail to be resilient?

Today autocratization occurs more gradually. Autocrats coming to power via elections know that they have to proceed at a slower pace not to cause abrupt resistance. Both Erdoğan and Chávez took the path of what Bermeo (2016) calls 'executive aggrandizement' by incremental steps. This opened up space to them, through which they could try to put forward the grey shades of the democratic backsliding compared to the completely black-and-white situation of a coup d'état, leading to the failure of society to see the increasing autocratization. Both Erdoğan and Chávez came to power as outsiders⁴ in a context of economic crisis and political instability that delegitimized establishment elites and parties. Their populist

⁴ Erdoğan is a former member of a religious fundamentalist party, coming from a peripheral background. Chávez is a former military officer who led two unsuccessful coup attempts.

discourse emphasized an electoral, majoritarian, and more direct understanding of democracy in which the elected, who represents the people, was not limited by any checks and balances such as bureaucracy, judiciary, or military. The opposition and establishment elites in both countries attempted to overthrow or undermine the incumbents by resorting to undemocratic means in the 2000s. For instance, a military coup shortly ousted Chávez's regime with the support of the opposition in 2002, whereas in Turkey the opposition, the judiciary, and the military prevented AKP's candidate from being elected as president in 2007.

Based on the context mentioned above, this paper argues that such undemocratic moves delegitimized the opposition and the establishment elites further, giving Erdoğan and Chávez an opportunity, too good to miss, to attack the checks and balances. The previous non-democratic attempts of the elites made these attacks legitimate and appear as a sign of further democratization in the eyes of some scholars and intellectuals and society although the attacks undermined democracy. Thus, democracy perception here gives an answer to the puzzle that Turkey and Venezuela are too autocratic compared to their long democratic experience. After the incumbents eroded horizontal accountability mechanisms, the opposition found themselves on an uneven playing field, still competitive but authoritarian, which paved the way for the further weakening of diagonal and vertical accountability mechanisms such as civil society, media, fairness of elections, and hence democratic resilience. It was only then that people started to understand that their country is getting more and more authoritarian.

In short, this study presents an agency-centred approach by arguing that the non-democratic actions of the political and state actors in the 2000s in Turkey and Venezuela played a key role in undermining democratic resilience by justifying the undemocratic moves of Erdoğan and Chávez, which appeared to the public as steps of democratization. Having learned their lesson, the opposition turned out to be more democratic in these countries, but it

was too late for the prevention of the democratic breakdown as the checks and balances were to a great extent gone. The implication from these cases is that resisting autocratization by undemocratic means before the consolidation of autocracy is not a good strategy since it backlashes.

Their similarities should not lead us to underestimate the differences between the trajectories of the two countries, one of them as a Southeastern European country under a right-wing populist government, and the other presenting left-wing populism in a Latin American context. Erdoğan's ideology was political Islamism, whereas Chávez promised to bring the revolutionary ideology of the "Socialism of the 21st Century". In addition, the autocratization started as soon as Chávez came to power and democratic breakdown occurred faster in Venezuela which is more autocratic than Turkey today, as Erdoğan did not have control of his party in the beginning, unlike Chávez, and the Turkish judiciary was stronger than in Venezuela, which could close Erdoğan's party in case of executive aggrandizement, constraining autocratization in his first term.

The next chapter reviews the literature with regard to the measures of democracy, autocratization, democratic stock, and democratic resilience, and then discusses the theoretical framework and the research design. The third chapter provides the political and historical background for Turkey and Venezuela, on which this thesis builds. The following analysis chapter starts with the examination of the academics and intellectuals who supported the moves of Erdoğan and Chávez, at least until the autocratization appeared to be obvious to them, as their support contributed to the positive public democracy perception in Turkey and Venezuela. The chapter continues with the study of the surveys about the democracy perception and satisfaction of the Turkish people in Erdoğan's first three terms and the Venezuelan people in Chávez's first two terms. Finally, the last chapter makes concluding remarks.

Chapter 2: Literature Review, Theoretical Argument, and Methodology

This chapter begins with a discussion of which measure of democracy should be used, then proceeds to review the literature on autocratization, democratic stock, and democratic resilience, and thereafter provides the theoretical framework and the research design.

2.1. Measures of Democracy

It is important to indicate why I use the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project's Electoral Democracy Index (Polyarchy Index) as the measurement of democracy, rather than another. In this regard, Vaccaro (2021) is beneficial to look at, as he compares the most used democracy measurements: Vanhanen's *Competition and Participation*, Center of Systemic Peace's *Polity IV*, Freedom House's *Civil Liberties and Political Rights*, and V-Dem's *EDI*. Although the measurements are correlated, the author finds that they are not interchangeable because using a different index can and does lead to a different result (2021). For example, VAN fails to capture the democratic backsliding in Venezuela under the Chávez period, whereas Polity IV does not record any democratic erosion in Hungary under Viktor Orban from 2010 to 2018 (681). To these, I can add that Freedom House fails to show the autocratization in Turkey under Erdoğan until 2013, although it started 7 years before, which V-Dem accurately captures as well as it does Venezuelan and Hungarian autocratization. Therefore, the choice of correct measurement directly affects my cases, Turkey and Venezuela. Nevertheless, I do not take V-Dem's quantitative index for granted. That it correlates with qualitative facts the best is the reason why I use it, and I am aware that it should be cross-checked via observations and qualitative analyses with regard to what is happening in the politics of countries.

2.2. Autocratization

This study follows Boese et al.'s typology of autocratization (2020, 10), which is seen in Figure 2. In this typology, regimes are divided into four subtypes. Going in the direction from liberal democracy to electoral democracy, which also includes tutelary or flawed democracies, is depicted as democratic regression. In addition, passing from electoral democracy to electoral autocracy or competitive authoritarianism is regarded as a democratic breakdown. Further decline in democracy levels in the direction of closed autocracy is described as autocratic regression, whereas autocratization is the concept that covers all types of regression in democracy levels.

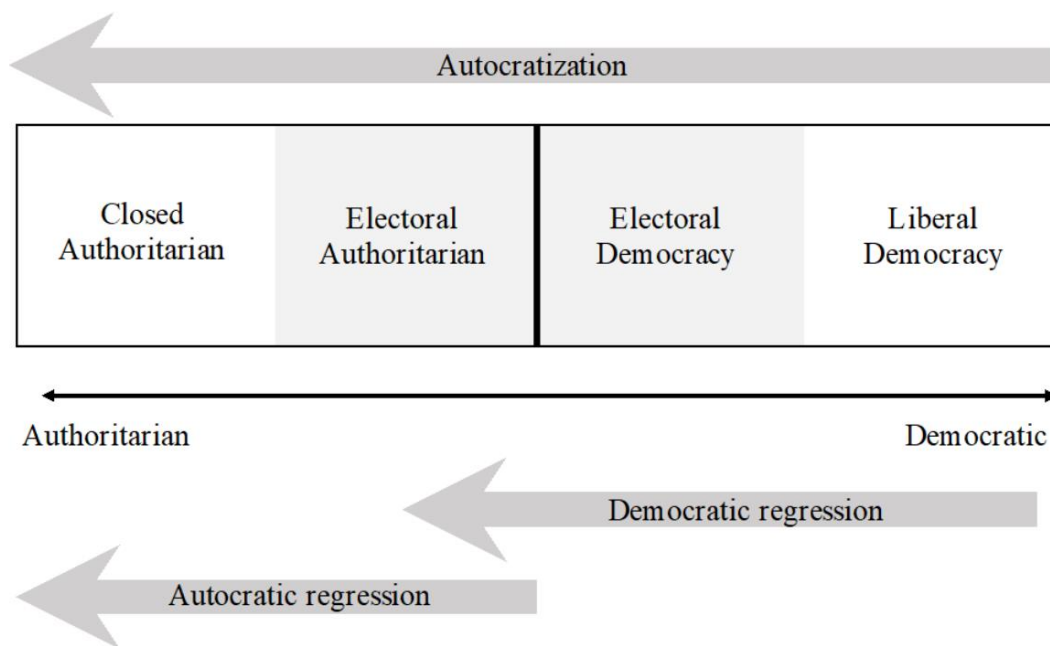


Figure 2: Typology of autocratization (Boese et al. 2020, 10)

According to Lührmann and Lihnberg (2019), we are currently living in the third wave of autocratization. The authors observe that this wave is more gradual, and sudden autocratization attempts are happening less today. In *How Democracies Die*, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) underline the gradual character of the death of democracies today, which is

called slow death by O'Donnell (1995). Bermeo (2016) also argues that abrupt forms of autocratization are in decline, whereas more gradual forms are on the rise. Coppedge (2017) identifies the gradual concentration of power in the executive as the global trend in autocratization. Svobik (2014) makes a distinction between incumbent takeovers and military coups, suggesting that the risk of an incumbent takeover is much higher today and new democracies are more exposed to it. Sato et al. (2022) suggest that autocratization tends to erode horizontal accountability first, followed by diagonal accountability, and then vertical accountability. Lastly, as Papada et al. (2023, 6) demonstrate, 42 countries autocratized last year as a new record, and the global level of democracy slid back to the 1986 level. Although the current wave is milder than the previous ones in history, it poses a serious threat to democracies since only 20% of democracies could avert breakdown after facing democratic erosion (Boese et al. 2021), whereas Turkey, Venezuela, and many others could not, however slow it was. In fact, the slowness of autocratization contributed to decreased public awareness of autocratization in these countries.

2.3. Democratic Stock and Democratic Resilience

The concepts of democratic stock and democratic resilience have been used in the literature several times under different topics. To begin with, democratic stock is used and operationalized by Gerring et al. (2005) in the name of 'democratic capital', emphasizing the role of learning and institutionalization. The authors look at the relationship between democratic capital and economic growth. Similarly, Persson and Tabellini (2009) use the same term democratic capital although with a different measurement, investigating the relationship between democratic capital and consolidation of democracy by focusing on economic development. Finally, Edgell et al. (2020) develops a new measurement by using

the name of democratic stock with V-Dem Institute's Electoral Democracy Index. By using this measurement of democratic stock, Boese-Schlosser et al. (2020) and Boese et al. (2021) do not focus on economic growth but rather look at which factors can lead to democratic resilience, one of them being democratic stock. The authors conceptualize resilience as the ability to prevent autocratization and make a distinction between onset resilience to democratic regression and breakdown resilience to democratic breakdown. Both find that judicial constraints on the executive and having experienced democratic institutions increase resilience to autocratization, so countries with high democratic stock are less vulnerable to democratic breakdown (Boese-Schlosser et al. 2020, 23). Boese et al. (2021) note that economic growth increases resilience to the onset of autocratization, but it does not have an impact once autocratization begins and heads to a democratic breakdown. Nonetheless, I will not make a distinction between the two resilience as in their resilience typology since onset resilience and breakdown resilience exclude the resilience that occurs after a democratic breakdown. For instance, Bolivia and North Macedonia became electoral democracies again after their democratic breakdown in the last decade (Papada et al. 2023, 28), implying that resilience is possible even after a breakdown of democracy.

Some scholars have conceptualized democratic resilience as well. Merkel and Lührmann (2021) stress that democratic resilience to autocratization is in four levels of a political system: political community, its institutions, political actors, and citizens. Laebens and Lührmann (2021) use a different terminology based on Lührmann, Marquardt, and Mechkova's (2020) conceptualization of political accountability mechanisms, which considers checks on the executive by other state institutions such as the judiciary as horizontal, pressure from civil society and media as diagonal, and electoral level as vertical accountability. Laebens and Lührmann (2021) focus on how the accountability mechanisms

halted the democratic erosion before reaching breakdown in the recent cases of Benin, Ecuador, and South Korea. The authors conclude that multiple accountability mechanisms working together helped them achieve success (922), showing the importance of accountability mechanisms for resilience. The erosion of the independence of judiciary or media means the erosion of democratic resilience as in the cases of Turkey and Venezuela.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

The general question within which this study develops is when and why autocratization succeeds or fails. For this question, Guachalla et al. (2021) emphasize incumbent strategies or capabilities such as the capacity to mobilize civil society in favour of oneself to explain when competitive authoritarianism takes root. Presenting another actor-centred approach but not one that focuses on incumbents, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) stress the agency of political parties and their leaders in the face of autocrats. Even if democracy support is very high among the population, it depends on the political parties to prevent autocrats from gaining power as in the case of Venezuela (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 20). Haggard and Kaufman (2016) focus on actors too but also reveal the structural background that paved the way for democratic erosion, such as economic crisis. Lührmann (2021) defines the beginning of autocratization as when dissatisfaction with existing political institutions and parties rises. Such context enables anti-pluralists to come to power and lead a country to a democratic breakdown if accountability mechanisms fail to be resilient. As Laebens and Lührmann (2021) point out, accountability mechanisms are the key to democratic resilience.

In this paper, I present a mostly agency-centred approach inspired by the existing literature (Guachalla et al. 2021; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018) to answer why autocratization succeeded and democratic resilience failed in Turkey and Venezuela. However, the

explanation should not ignore how Erdoğan and Chávez came to power, which can be grasped only by taking into account also the structural background of economic crises and contempt for traditional political parties and establishment institutions as in the relevant literature (Haggard and Kaufman 2016; Lührmann 2021).

Following agency-centred approaches, Cleary and Öztürk (2022) see the answer in whether an opposition uses radical or moderate strategies to challenge an incumbent autocrat. According to them, only moderate moves can lead to an opposition victory. The authors talk about whether the opposition supports the state elites' attempts to oppose the government too, but the main emphasis is on the opposition. Although the Turkish case is also elaborated on in the article, the 2007 presidential election crisis is not mentioned, which may be a crucially fruitful example to discover the causal model between the opposition behaviour and the regime outcome. In a similar vein, Gamboa (2017) uses the radical-moderate distinction for the opposition behaviour, arguing that moderate strategies like electioneering and legislating are needed to challenge the incumbent rather than radical strategies like recall referendum, impeachment, or coup attempts. They determine the cost of repressive action by the incumbent and the domestic and international legitimacy of the opposition. Although both Cleary and Öztürk (2022) and Gamboa (2017) make a significant contribution to the literature by asserting the importance of opposition strategies in regime outcomes, the causality between opposition behaviour and democratic resilience remains ambiguous. For the causal mechanism, the undemocratic-democratic distinction can be more relevant than the radical-moderate distinction because the undemocratic character of the opposition and elite strategies rather than the radical character can legitimize autocrats' populist model of democracy and their attacks on accountability mechanisms to erode checks and balances.

To conclude, although economic crises delegitimized the establishment and gave an opportunity to populists to come to power in Turkey and Venezuela, the behaviour of the political actors played a key role in the failure of democratic resilience thereafter in these cases. Erdoğan and Chávez used the right strategies to undermine and attack democratic institutions in their countries. Nevertheless, autocratization was not inevitable, and what legitimized their attacks on checks and balances early on was the behaviour of establishment elites and opposition. This study joins ranks with the present literature in emphasizing the opposition behaviour (Gamboa 2017; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Cleary and Öztürk 2021) in addition to elite behaviour but looks at whether they are democratic or non-democratic rather than moderate or radical. In the literature, attention was not particularly given to these factors. This paper explores the causal mechanism further and hence fills the gap in the literature by attempting to connect the undemocratic opposition and elite behaviour and the success of autocratization through the distorted democracy perception of the public. The theoretical argument here is that the undemocratic behaviour of opposition and elites further legitimizes the autocrats' populist vision of democracy without checks and balances in the eyes of the public, resulting in their attack on accountability mechanisms without sufficient resistance and hence the further weakening of democratic resilience. The misinterpretation of autocratization as democratization in these countries provides the answer to the question why they autocratized despite their democratic experiences, solving the puzzle. Figure 3 summarizes the hypothesis generated in this study.

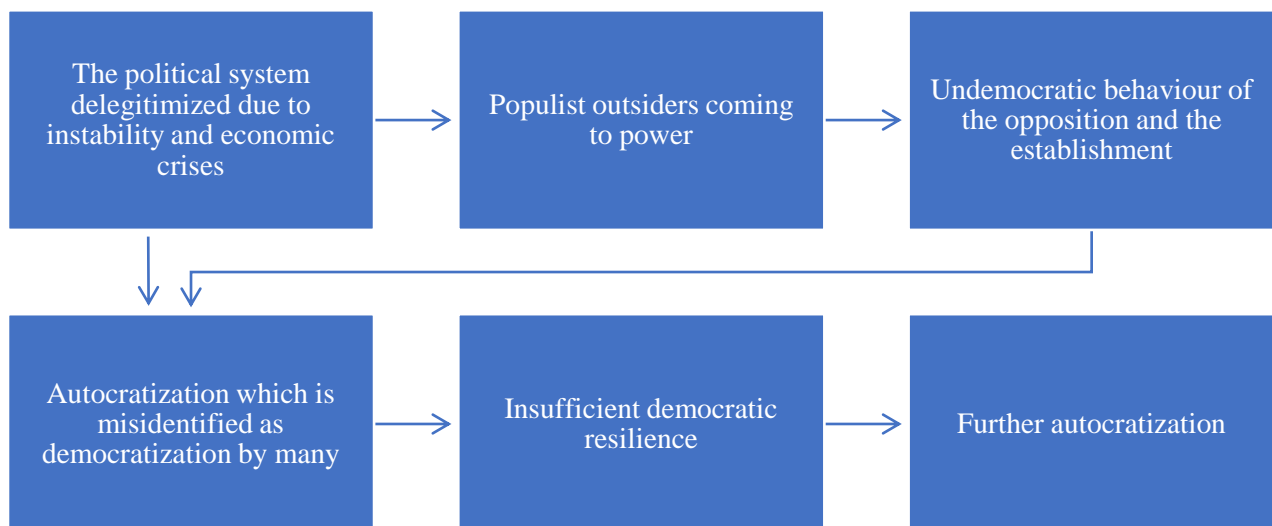


Figure 3: Successful autocratization in countries with high democratic stock

In the cases of Turkey and Venezuela, economic crises and political instability delegitimized establishment parties and elites, paving the way for two outsiders, Erdoğan and Chávez, to come to power, as shown in the literature. What this paper argues is that the non-democratic attempts of the opposition and state elites to undermine or overthrow the incumbents in these countries (further) legitimized Erdoğan and Chávez's attacks on checks and balances and made them appear as steps of democratization in the eyes of some academics and intellectuals and the people. This legitimation prevented the democratic resilience of Turkey and Venezuela from being sufficient to stop autocratization.

This study mainly focuses on autocratization in Erdoğan and AKP's first three terms and Chávez's first two terms, i.e. 2006-2015 in Turkey and 1998-2007 in Venezuela so as to cover both the events leading to the democratic breakdown (2014 in Turkey and 2004 in Venezuela) and the onset of the aftermath of the breakdown. In these periods, the power of Erdoğan and Chávez was more constrained as the checks and balances on the executive were stronger. The opposition and establishment elites may have overcome the threat of autocratization by democratic means at that time. However, their resort to undemocratic

methods led to further autocratization after which they had fewer means left to undermine the regime. The lesson to be learned from these cases is that the use of democratic means is very important to challenge the autocrats in their early periods. After they consolidate their power, it may be too late for democracy even if the opposition and elites start to behave democratically.

2.5. Research Design

Both of the countries selected for this comparative case study were electoral democracies when autocrats came to power. Turkey and Venezuela are extremely deviant cases in the sense that they autocratized to a great extent in spite of having a democratic regime for about a half-century (see Figure 1). The events considered are autocratization attempts of the government and the undemocratic moves of the opposition and elites in the first two terms of Erdoğan in Turkey and the first three terms of Chávez in Venezuela. This paper is a hypothesis-generating study arguing that the two countries provide a parallel demonstration of the theory that non-democratic moves of opposition and elites result in further autocratization by distorting democracy perception.

In this comparative case study, I explore the causal mechanism between democratic stock and democratic resilience with an emphasis on opposition and elite behaviour that can result in the misidentification of autocratization as democratization. For this, I look at two things: The first is the academics, intellectuals, and journalists who supported the Erdoğan and Chávez regimes in their early periods. As Gramsci (1999) argues, hegemony becomes possible only with the support of an intellectual bloc that acts as a mediator between the ruler and the ruled. To this, Ersoy and Üstüner (2016) add that the support of intellectuals can legitimize the moves of the regime in the eyes of the public as in the example of Turkey.

Although not all of them, many academics and intellectuals supported the regime or some of the actions of the regimes due to the misinterpretation that they are democratizing the country, which contributed to the misinterpretation of the public as well. This decreased the democratic resilience of these countries and increased the support of the public for the latent autocratization attempts of Erdoğan and Chávez. Therefore, the second thing I look at is how the Turkish and Venezuelan people actually perceived these autocratization attempts. If they found their countries more democratic after these attempts or were more satisfied with the democracy at that time, that would confirm my hypothesis that there was not sufficient democratic resilience since the public did not perceive it as autocratization.

Firstly, I look at when and to what extent academics and intellectuals supported the autocratization steps of the regime in Turkey and Venezuela in the aforementioned periods. To understand that, I make use of the academic literature and mostly secondary online sources for both countries. As the significant autocratization steps in Turkey were taken after the undemocratic attempts of the opposition and elites, the question for Turkey is whether significant support among intellectuals and academics for Erdoğan and AKP's autocratization steps existed after the non-democratic moves of the opposition and elites. However, the situation is a little different for Venezuela since Chávez started autocratization before the undemocratic moves of the opposition and elites, as the anti-establishment context and the then-present balance of power allowed him to do so. The presence of pro-Chávez academics and intellectuals before the undemocratic moves of the opposition and establishment would imply that the legitimacy crisis brought by the partyarchic democracy made Chávez's promise of participatory democracy resonate with some scholars. Their presence would be expected to continue at least for some time after the non-democratic steps of the opposition and the establishment legitimize Chávez's policies further.

Secondly, to understand the democracy perception of the Turkish people, I look at two sources. One is the *World Values Survey* which has data for Turkey in 2007 and 2011 with the question of how respondents would rate the democraticness in their country, which is relevant to this paper. The other is the research of Çarkoğlu and Aytaç (2015) that has data on how many per cent of the population is satisfied or dissatisfied with the democracy in Turkey for years from 2006 to 2015 with the exception of 2012 and 2014. For the case of Venezuela, finally, I look at *Latinobarómetro* which has data from 1998 to 2007 except for 1999, with the question of whether and how much respondents are satisfied with democracy in Venezuela.

Chapter 3: Autocratization in Turkey and Venezuela

This chapter briefly covers the political and historical background of autocratization in Turkey and Venezuela.

3.1. The Case of Turkey

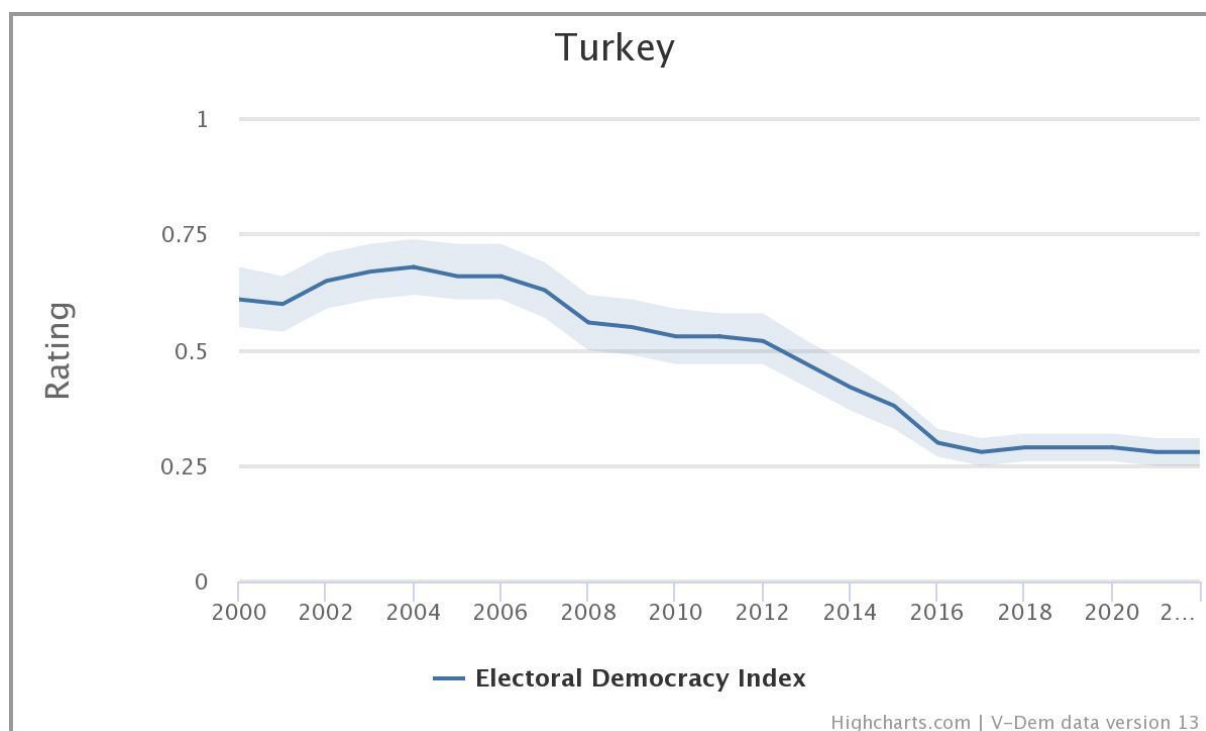


Figure 4: Turkey's democracy levels according to V-Dem's Electoral Democracy Index

Turkey before the AKP rule was considered an electoral democracy by V-Dem. The tutelary powers of the military were a major obstacle for Turkey to become a full democracy. After the 1997 Military Memorandum which overthrew the political Islamist Welfare Party (RP)-led coalition and the following closure of RP by the Constitution Court, the reformist and moderate faction of the RP found AKP, Erdoğan being among the founders. As traditional political parties lost trust with the economic crises in 1999 and 2001 in addition to political instability, Erdoğan used this opportunity with anti-establishment and anti-elitist

rhetoric by presenting himself as a man of the people coming from a rural and peripheral background as opposed to the elites (Castaldo 2018, 473-474). Due to the high 10% threshold in the parliament, AKP came to power getting a majority with only 34.28% of the votes in the 2002 general elections. In his first term, Erdoğan did not attack horizontal accountability mechanisms since the still strong judiciary could ban him or his party from politics or the military could overthrow him. He rather focused on economic growth and reforms to get European Union membership (475). Actually, the EU accession process resulted in an increase in Turkey's levels of democracy up until 2004 as seen in Figure 4. In addition, there were many liberals like Abdullah Gül and Ali Babacan in the party, constraining the power of Erdoğan. Moreover, the AKP defined itself as a conservative democratic party rather than an Islamist one (Şen 2010, 59), which did not go beyond self-claim though. Indeed, Erdoğan stated early on in 1996 when he was the mayor of Istanbul that democracy is a tram that one rides as far as one goes and then gets off (Castaldo 2018, 473), and he showed the signs of getting off this democracy tram after the attacks from the establishment.

The still intact 1982 constitution had strengthened both the military and the executive including the president and the prime minister's cabinet. This implied a balance of power although both were impediments to further democratization (Sözen 2020b, 214).

Nevertheless, the presidency with appointment powers to the high courts meant that once a party gets a majority in parliament and gets their presidential candidate elected, they would increase their power over the judiciary as well (Sözen 2020a, 23). When AKP wanted to elect one of its founders, Abdullah Gül, whose wife wears a headscarf, as the president in 2007, the secularist media and civil society protested against it in the main cities, worrying that the presidency of a non-secular politician is a threat to secularism in Turkey. The secularist main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) boycotted the vote, and then they applied to the

Constitution Court to cancel the vote claiming that the necessary threshold for the number of votes was not reached. The military declared an e-memorandum, warning the AKP leadership that the military would protect secularism, and the CHP leadership neither supported this nor took a clear and strong stance against military interference. The judiciary joined the opposition and the military by cancelling the vote, which prevented the AKP from getting the presidency (Castaldo 2018, 476). These undemocratic moves of the opposition and the establishment gave Erdoğan an opportunity to erode the checks and balances in the name of democratization.

Erdoğan called for early elections in 2007, and this time his party won by 46.58% with the help of his anti-establishment and anti-elitist discourse that emphasizes popular national will at the expense of checks and balances. He also proposed direct presidential elections for a referendum in the same year, which passed by 68.95%. The confidence gained, Erdoğan started attacking the rivals of his executive, autocratizing the country. After the judiciary's attempt to close the AKP, which resulted in fining and almost banning AKP in 2008, unlawful and irregular Ergenekon trials started with the help of Gülenist (a religious movement) judiciary members, which tried many dissident generals, judiciary members, journalists, and other influential figures through the help of fabricated evidence, eventually undermining the power of the military (Castaldo 2018, 477). In addition, the incumbent government sent tax inspectors to the biggest and dissident media group, Doğan Medya, with a big fine, forcing them to sell their outlets, which undermined the independence of media (Sözen 2020b, 217). The 2010 Constitutional Referendum, which passed by 57.88%, increased the executive's influence on the judiciary further (Castaldo, 477-478). There were some scholars (Sözen 2008; Yıldırım 2009; Sözen 2011; Aslan-Akman 2012) who warned that Turkey is getting more authoritarian. However, a lot of scholars and liberal intellectuals supported the unlawful

Ergenekon trials and the 2010 constitutional reform (see Chapter 4.1) since they decreased the influence of the military over politics, which they regarded as democratization steps. Alas, these moves altogether left the already strengthened executive free of checks and balances (Sözen 2020b, 215), hardening the executive aggrandizement.

Increasing authoritarianism and personalisation (Öztürk and Reilly 2022) of the Turkish political regime were observed as the Gezi protests erupted in 2013, which faced police repression, resulting in six deaths. The government increasingly jailed dissident journalists (Castaldo 2018, 480). Although autocratization began much earlier, the Gezi in 2013 was a critical point in the sense that most of the scholars and the liberal intellectuals, who promoted the AKP as a democratizing force against tutelage, broke with the regime for they understood that the AKP is autocratizing the country after seeing the repression. Authoritarianism and personalisation were even furthered after the failed Gülenist coup attempt in 2016, which was opposed not only by the government but also by the opposition and secular military officers. Thereafter, Erdoğan used this opportunity by declaring a state of emergency and proposed a hyper-presidential system for a referendum in 2017. That passed by 51.41% with some electoral irregularities, consolidating Erdoğanism (Yılmaz and Bashirov 2018).

The opposition formed an alliance in the 2019 local elections and took major cities like Istanbul and Ankara from the hands of AKP. In fact, the government repeated the elections in Istanbul, which were lost by a small margin by claiming that the election was counted unlawfully. Nonetheless, this resulted in the reaction of the voters who chose the opposition candidate with even more votes in the repeated Istanbul elections, i.e. by 54.22%.

Although the opposition was expected to win the 2023 general elections, Erdoğan managed to win by a small margin of 52.18% in a runoff.

2002	Erdoğan's AKP came to power in the context of political instability and economic crises.
2007	The opposition, the judiciary, and the military prevented AKP's presidential candidate from getting elected by undemocratic means.
2007	Erdoğan's AKP won the early elections by a high margin.
2008	The AKP had a narrow escape from a closure trial.
2008	Unlawful and irregular Ergenekon trials started with the help of Gülenists, which undermined the secular generals, judiciary members, and dissidents.
2010	The Constitutional Referendum passed, enabling Erdoğan's AKP to gain control of the judiciary.
2013	The Gezi protests erupted and the government turned to violence to repress it.
2016	The Gülenist coup attempt failed, and Erdoğan became more authoritarian.
2017	Turkey passed from a parliamentary to a hyper-presidential system by a small margin in a referendum.

Figure 5: A brief summary of autocratization in Turkey

3.2. The Case of Venezuela

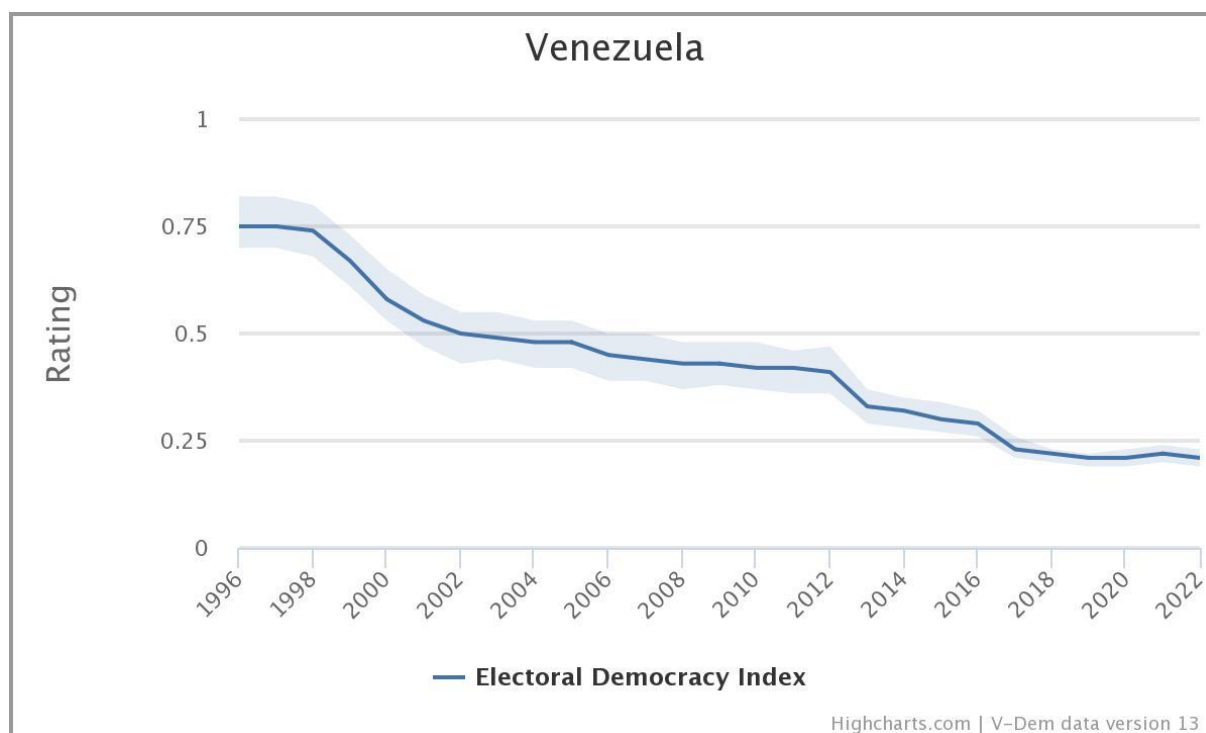


Figure 6: Venezuela's democracy levels according to V-Dem's Electoral Democracy Index

Venezuela before the Chávez rule was considered an electoral democracy by V-Dem. Unlike Turkey, which had a parliamentary system until 2018, Venezuela had a presidential system, and Chávez, the leader of two failed coups in 1992, came to power by presidential elections in 1998 by 56.20% as an outsider (Levitsky and Loxton 2013, 124), taking the largest support from popular classes (Cannon 2004). Like in Turkey, an anti-establishment mood was dominant in Venezuela because of lasting economic crises, a rise in poverty, and corruption scandals. He managed to gain support by criticizing the inefficiency and corruption of the bureaucracy. However, unlike the beginning of AKP, Chávez's Fifth Republic Movement was a personalistic platform in which he did not have constraints as Erdoğan did in the beginning. Also, Chávez had a more extreme populist discourse than Erdoğan, and he promised to get rid of the established political system. In this system, named 'partyarchy', the

traditional political parties of the Punto Fijo Pact shared power via bureaucratic posts and oil wealth, which not only initially stabilized the Venezuelan democracy for two decades but also afterwards posed an obstacle for Venezuela to become a full democracy. There were already demands to reform this system such as the proposals of the COPRE (a presidential Commission for the Reform of the State), some of which were applied, to increase citizen participation in democracy and decentralization (Velasco 2022).

After Chávez came to power with more radical and popular promises to make the democracy more participatory, he started autocratizing the country by monopolizing the power in his hands under the guise of participatory democracy. He lacked a majority in the parliament, but his proposal for a constituent assembly passed in a referendum, after which Chavista parties got an overwhelming majority in the elections thereof. In 1999, apart from starting to take horizontal accountability mechanisms under Chávez's control, the new assembly wrote a new constitution approved by 71.78% (Levitsky and Loxton 2013, 124-125), which put forward a more participatory and inclusionary democracy model that nevertheless strengthened the presidency vis-à-vis the checks and balances (Selçuk 2016, 579). Although Chávez won these elections and referenda in 1998-1999 with high margins, all of them had high levels of abstentionism, with at least 50% of the electorate abstaining.

After Chávez got elected by 59.76% in 2000, the assembly passed a law empowering the executive to enact laws without approval from the legislative. This autocratization step intensified opposition from various groups such as business elites, worker's unions, and private media. Increasing protests and strikes resulted in violence that led to a military coup which shortly ousted Chávez in 2002. The opposition who supported the coup attempt could not foresee the public outrage against the opposition and support for Chávez (Gombata and

Cameron 2022, 147). This undemocratic move of the opposition and the establishment contributed to Chávez showing himself more democratic. To break the general strike in the same year and sideline the public administration, he took control of PDVSA, a state-owned company that dominated oil production and was a stronghold of the opposition, by appointing loyalists to its administration and firing its administrators and workers who supported the strike (Muno and Briceño 2023). In 2004, the opposition collected more than three million signatures for a referendum to remove Chávez, but Chávez won the referendum. After he increased his control over the Supreme Court without directly weakening its power but by staffing it with loyalists (Urribarri 2011), the opposition boycotted the 2005 legislative elections, the results of which weakened the checks and balances even further. He got re-elected in 2006 by 62.85% (Gombata and Cameron 2022, 148). Autocratizing Venezuela more and more, Chávez proposed to abolish the presidential term limits in the 2007 referendum, in which he was defeated by a small margin. He put forward another referendum to abolish the term limits combined with other amendment offers in 2009. He won by 54.87% this time and stated his ambition to rule the country beyond 2030⁵. When the opposition won local elections in Caracas in 2008, he created a parallel administrative position for the government of Caracas, making the position of the mayor de facto unfunctional.

As Chávez died in 2013, Nicolás Maduro replaced him but could not reach his popularity. He won the early elections by a small margin with the help of electoral irregularities. As the violence and economic distress increased, protests erupted in 2014, which was heavily repressed by the government, resulting in 43 deaths (Gombata and Cameron 2022, 149-150). In 2015, the opposition gained control of the assembly in the

⁵ Carroll, Rory. 2009. "Hugo Chávez Wins Referendum Allowing Indefinite Re-Election." *The Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/feb/16/hugo-Chavez-indefinite-rule>.

elections. Nevertheless, Maduro countered by transferring the responsibilities of the national assembly to the Supreme Court, as a self-coup attempt. Stronger protests came out despite the reversal of the decision, and Maduro reacted by creating a new constituent assembly in 2017 (Muno and Briceño 2023, 80). 2018 elections were full of irregularities, and the main opposition candidates were prohibited from running in the elections, resulting in a low turnout and Maduro's victory by 67.85%. In 2019, the national assembly declared Maduro illegitimate and the head of the assembly Juan Guaidó as the president, which was recognized by Western states (Gombata and Cameron 2022, 149-151). However, Maduro remains the incumbent with the de facto powers.

1998	Chávez came to power by 56.20% in the context of political instability and economic crises.
1999	The new constitution, approved by 71.78% of the voters, not only expanded participation and inclusion but also increased the powers of the presidency.
2000	After Chávez's re-election, a new law empowered the executive to enact laws without the approval of the legislative.
2002	Increasing strikes and protests resulted in an eventually failed coup attempt that was supported by the opposition.
2004	Chávez increased his control over the Supreme Court by staffing it with loyalists.
2013	Maduro replaced Chávez and won the elections by a small margin, leading to economic distress, protests, and increasing authoritarianism.
2015	After the opposition got a majority in the assembly, Maduro tried to bypass the assembly but had to reverse this decision after protests.
2018	Increasing electoral irregularities and the prevention of opposition candidates resulted in Maduro's victory with a low turnout.
2019	The national assembly declared Maduro illegitimate and the head of the assembly Juan Guaidó as the president, which remained a symbolic move.

Figure 7: A brief summary of autocratization in Venezuela

Chapter 4: Perception of Autocratization

4.1. Academics and Intellectuals in Turkey

Until the Gezi protests in 2013, the hegemonic perspective in academia was the one that misinterpreted AKP as a democratizing force that brings stability to Turkey as opposed to the tutelary establishment (Tansel 2018; Sözen 2020b) despite the existence of critical scholars like Sözen who pointed out early on in 2008 that Turkey under Erdoğan's AKP is moving from tutelary democracy to populist competitive authoritarianism. Özbudun and Hale's study (2009) is a major example of the hegemonic perspective that perceived autocratization as democratization (Sözen 2020b, 210). As Tansel (2018) demonstrates, in this period, AKP was considered conservative democrat (Özbudun 2006; Duran 2008) and AKP's Turkey was seen as a model democracy for the region by many scholars (Altunışık 2005; Akyol 2011; Atasoy 2011; Bâli 2011; Çağaptay 2014; Yalçın 2012). Turkey under AKP was seen as a potential peace broker as well (Sandole 2009). Kanra (2005) and Nasr (2005) thought that AKP could bridge Islam and democracy. Moreover, according to Heper (2013), Erdoğan "as the representative of the pious periphery, contributed to the periphery's walk to the centre and put an end to the hegemony of the Republican establishment in Turkey" (154), which Heper conceived as a huge contribution to Turkish democracy. AKP was regarded as a civilianizing force fighting with military tutelage (Cizre 2011; Akça and Balta-Paker 2012; Aydın 2013; Bardakçı 2013), leading to increased democracy⁶. Dağı (2008, 30) emphasized that the parts of the population once suppressed by the establishment elites are growing weight with AKP. Optimism about Erdoğan's AKP was observed also in the international

⁶ Yel, Ali Murat, and Alparslan Nas. 2013. "Taksim Square Is Not Tahrir Square." *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2013/6/12/taksim-square-is-not-tahrir-square>.

media. As Berlinski (2017) notes, Steven Cook from the Council on Foreign Relations praised AKP for democratizing Turkey⁷. In addition, many articles in *Economist*⁸, *New York Times*⁹, *Foreign Policy*¹⁰, *Haaretz*¹¹, *Deccan Herald*¹², *Financial Times*¹³, and *Reuters*¹⁴ perceived the AKP era in Turkey as a successful instance of democratization (Berlinski 2017) although the AKP was autocratizing the country.

As Sözen (2020b) indicates, Özbudun's article in 2014 after the Gezi protests warned about AKP's majoritarian drift that can lead to authoritarianism, which implied the end of the hegemonic perspective. Roughly until the Gezi protests that erupted in 2013, however, not only academics but also many left-wing liberal intellectuals saw Erdoğan's AKP as a democratizing force for Turkey despite significant autocratization. The liberal intellectuals had different worldviews from the conservative religious supporters of the AKP, but they embraced the AKP's goal of eliminating the military tutelage, which they assumed would lead to a new democratic Turkey (Ersoy and Üstüner 2016, 407). Ahmet İnsel was one of those intellectuals, of Marxist origin, as he (2003) argued that AKP coming to power finally

⁷ "U.S.-Turkey Relations - A New Partnership: Report of a CFR-Sponsored Independent Task Force." 2012. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOJHui2bvdE>.

⁸ "Is Turkey Turning Its Back on the West?" 2010. *Economist*. <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2010/10/21/is-turkey-turning-its-back-on-the-west>.

⁹ "Turkey Goes from Pliable Ally to Thorn for U.S." 2010. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/09/world/middleeast/09turkey.html>

¹⁰ Walker, Joshua W., and Lenore Martin. 2011. "Is Turkey Losing Its Balancing Act in the New Middle East?" *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/05/26/is-turkey-losing-its-balancing-act-in-the-new-middle-east/>.

¹¹ Fishman, Louis. 2011. "The Region's Only Real Democracy?" *Haaretz*. <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2011-08-05/ty-article/the-regions-only-real-democracy/0000017f-db2d-df62-a9ff-dfff68d30000>.

¹² Kinzer, Stephen. 2011. "Turkish PM Erdogan's Post-Election Challenge." *Deccan Herald*. <https://www.deccanherald.com/content/169338/turkish-pm-erdogans-post-election.html>.

¹³ Gardner, David. 2012. "Triumphalist Turkey can't go it alone." *Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/content/2ac6f3ce-87b4-11e1-ade2-00144feab49a>

¹⁴ Cameron-Moore, Simon, and Ibon Vilelabeitia. 2011. "Concerns over Democracy Dominate as Turkey Votes." *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-elections-democracy-idUSTRE75936Q20110610>.

provided Turkey with a chance to democratize and added that “Among the political leaders prominent in the history of the Turkish Republic, Erdoğan was the person most clearly and authentically ‘one of the people’” (303). In this context, the 2010 Constitutional Referendum was a critical point because the liberal intellectuals joined the Yes campaign with the slogan “Not enough, but yes.”¹⁵. Through this referendum, Erdoğan’s AKP proposed several constitutional amendments that increased the power of the executive over the judiciary at the expense of the influence of the military. With the support of liberals and the anti-tutelage mood caused by the undemocratic behaviour of the military and the judiciary against the presidential candidate of the AKP in 2007, the Yes vote came dominant by 57.88%. Liberal intellectuals assumed that this demilitarization would mean democratization. Nevertheless, it proved to be a part of the process of executive aggrandizement.

An article by 140journos¹⁶ shows the statements of some of the liberal intellectuals, both the former pro-AKP and pro-Yes statements in the 2010 constitutional referendum campaign and anti-AKP statements a few years later. Although these intellectuals started to become dissidents by opposing the autocratic character of Erdoğan’s AKP a few years after the referendum, they contributed to autocratization by campaigning for Yes in the referendum, which led Erdoğan’s AKP to increase its power on the judiciary. Here are some examples from the article: Murat Belge, a writer, academic, and literary critique, formerly said that the No campaigners were unreasonable in the sense that they opposed the constitutional amendments just because they hated AKP¹⁷; and then he later on stated that he

¹⁵ The list of those who supported the “Not enough, but yes.”: “‘Yetmez Ama Evet’ Açıklamasına Destek Verenler.” 2010. *Bianet*. <https://www.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/124637-yetmez-ama-evet-aciklamasina-destek-verenler>.

¹⁶ 140journos. 2016. “2010 Anayasa Referandumunu Yeniden Düşünmek: ‘Yetmez Ama Evet.’” *Medium*. <https://140journos.com/2010-anayasa-referandumunu-yeniden-dusunmek-yetmez-ama-evet-b9f978e9444a>.

¹⁷ <http://arsiv.taraf.com.tr/yazilar/murat-belge/referandum-oncesinde/12684/>

felt as if he had been fooled by Erdoğan¹⁸. Orhan Pamuk, a Nobel Prize-winning writer, claimed that the constitutional amendments would give way to squaring accounts with the 1980 military coup¹⁹ and later on indicated his anger for the centralization of power and the lack of freedom of expression in Turkey²⁰. Hasan Cemal, a journalist, argued that he supported the Yes campaign because he saw it as an opportunity to downgrade the bureaucratic tutelage and pave the way for democracy and the rule of law²¹ and later on admitted, without expressing remorse, that Erdoğan would not lead to democracy²². Cengiz Çandar, a journalist, emphasized that the Yes vote was the only way for a democratic regime based on the rule of law²³ and then acknowledged that the path after the referendum appeared to be not democratization at all and said, “Enough already.”²⁴. Mehmet Altan, an economist and journalist, implied that the No-sayers were supporting the military tutelage brought by the 1980 coup just to oppose the AKP for political reasons²⁵ and thereafter suggested that there was no democratization but only the handover of power within the existing regime²⁶.

4.2. Academics and Intellectuals in Venezuela

In Venezuela, there were scholars and intellectuals who supported the regime until the democratic breakdown as in Turkey, but their perspective did not have hegemony over the

¹⁸ <http://www.taraf.com.tr/murat-belge-destekledigimiz-erdogan-sahici-degilmis-kendimi-kandirilmis-hissediyorum/>

¹⁹ www.dipnotkitap.net/DENEME/Manzaradan_Parcalar.htm

²⁰ <http://gazetemanifesto.com/2016/06/08/yetmez-ama-evetci-pamuk-ifade-ozgurlugune-saygi-duyulmamasindan-oturu-ofkeliyiz/>

²¹ <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/evet-demokrasi-kazandi-ama-daha-cok-sey-var-demokrasi-konusunda-yapilacak-/hasan-cemal/siyaset/siyasetyazardetay/13.09.2010/1288339/default.htm>

²² <http://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/hasan-cemal/45-soruda-tayyip-erdogan-ne-yapiyor,7766>

²³ <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/evet-in-en-onemli-gerekcesi-15472386>

²⁴ <http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/cengiz-candar/yetmez-ama-evete-son-1153917/>

²⁵ <https://www.cihan.com.tr/tr/mehmet-altan-referandum-ak-parti-karsitligina-kurban-edilmek-isteniyo-144190.htm>

²⁶ <http://haber.sol.org.tr/medya/akpyi-elestiren-mehmet-altan-masum-mu-haberi-51071>

critical perspective. Therefore, their influence on the public democracy perception was more limited compared to the Turkish case. However, as Gombata and Cameron (2022, 141) argue, Chávez appeared to democratize the country as opposed to the status quo, which is similar to Turkey. The authors show that although pro-Chavismo academics (Wilpert 2007; Ellner 2010) indicated optimism through the belief that the Chávez regime would lead to a more participatory or radical democracy, some scholars started to see the regime as getting more and more authoritarian around 2006 although autocratization started as soon as Chávez came to power.

As Hawkins (2016) demonstrates, the scholars were divided into two groups, liberal ones that saw Chávez as against liberal democracy and radical ones that perceived Chávez as fulfilling radical democracy. Blanco Munoz (1998) and Zago (1998) are examples of the radical camp, showing optimism for the prospects of the Chavista movement. Even later, many radical scholars (Cannon 2009; Fernandes 2010; Spanakos 2011; Ciccariello-Maher 2013) celebrated the rise of the popular class with Chávez (Hawkins 2016, 319). Although radical scholars admitted the clientelist character of the Chávez regime, most of them (Laclau 2006; Schiller 2011) supported Chavismo in the name of wealth redistribution and participatory democracy. As Mainwaring (2012) shows, Muntaner, Chung, Mahmood, and Armada (2011) claimed that the healthcare experience improved to a large extent under Chávez, especially at a local participatory level. Ponniah (2011) suggested that Chávez has expanded participatory democracy. Smilde (2011) considered Venezuela under Chávez as a participatory democracy as well.

Moreover, some academics (López Maya and Panzarelli 2013) from the radical camp were also committed to liberal values, so they broke with the regime by criticizing its

authoritarian character that did not fulfil the participatory promise. Margarita López Maya, an important historian and political sociologist, blamed the Venezuelan opposition for the polarization before but then recognized that Chávez triggers polarization to increase his power (Hellinger 2012). In an interview, López Maya remarked that “criticisms have come from previously pro-Chávez intellectuals on the left, like myself. This has been difficult, but I can’t go along with this growing authoritarianism. The situation is very dangerous. Chávez has developed a vertical relationship with the people” (Rosen 2007, 8). Nonetheless, other scholars (Lebowitz 2006) perceived Chávez’s controlling the state power as necessary to change the world. In addition, there were intellectuals like Luis Britto Garcia, a writer and novelist, who embraced the Chavismo movement²⁷.

4.3. Public Democracy Perception in Turkey

There are two sources to understand the democracy perception in Turkey. The first is the *World Values Survey (WVS)* which has data for the years 2007 (Inglehart 2018a) and 2011 (Inglehart 2018b) in Turkey²⁸. In both years, Turkish respondents were asked how democratically the country was being governed at that time on a scale from 1 to 10. The mean of the answers, i.e. the average democracy perception increased from 6.01 in 2007 to 6.41 in 2011. As seen in Figure 8, 43.5% of the respondents found Turkey in 2007 at least fairly democratic (rating it from 7 to 10), whereas 53.6% of the respondents found Turkey in 2011 at least fairly democratic with a significant increase, as seen in Figure 9. These results show that people did not realize the autocratization happening between 2007 and 2011, especially

²⁷ “The Role of Intellectuals in the Bolivarian Revolution: A Conversation with Luis Britto Garcia.” 2020. *Venezuelanalysis*. <https://venezuelanalysis.com/interviews/14818>.

²⁸ Data are found in <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>.

through the 2010 Constitution Reform and on the contrary perceived what is happening as democratization just like many scholars and intellectuals did.

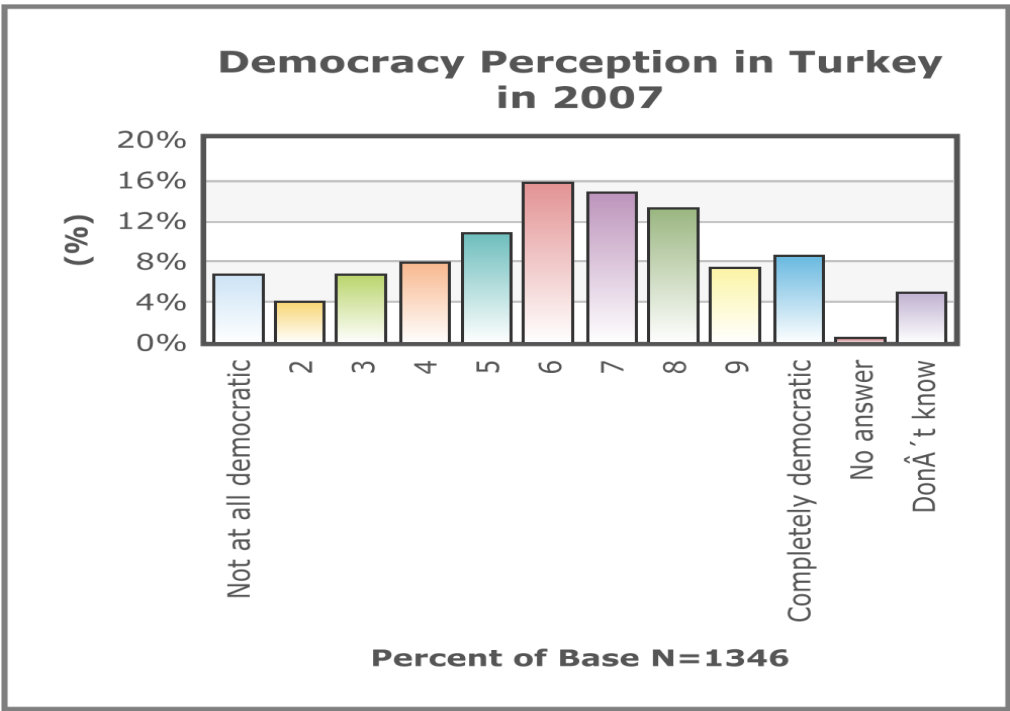


Figure 8: WVS Democracy Perception in Turkey in 2007 (Inglehart 2018a)

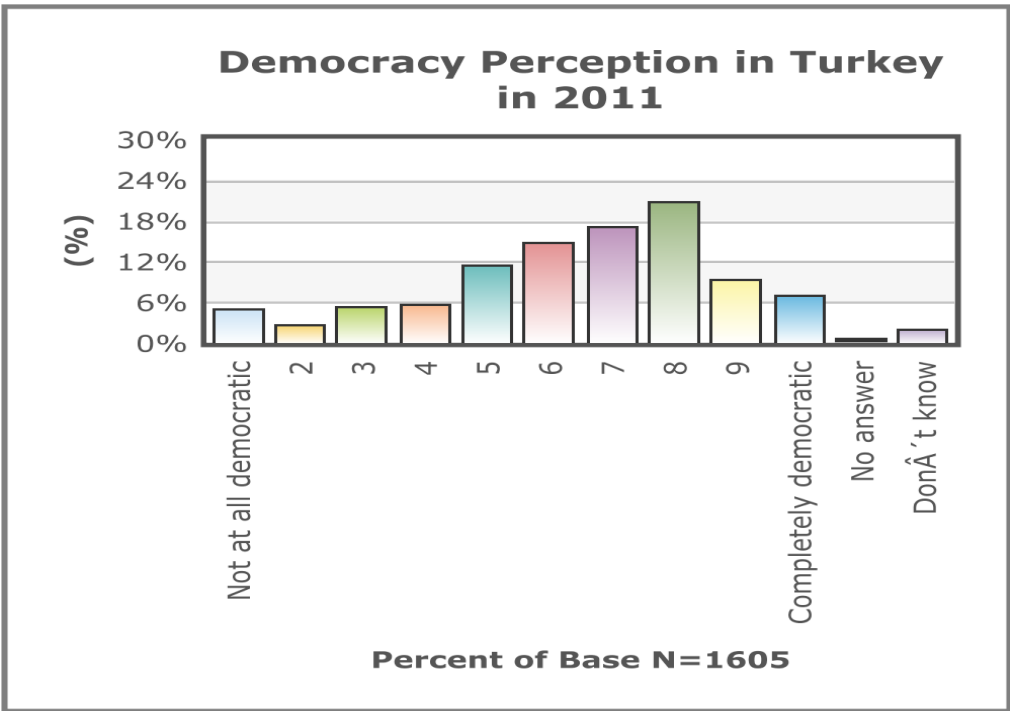


Figure 9: WVS Democracy Perception in Turkey in 2011 (Inglehart 2018b)

The second data source for Turkey is Çarkoğlu and Aytaç's (2015) research, in which respondents were asked how much satisfied they were with the functioning of democracy in general in the country throughout the years from 2006 to 2015.

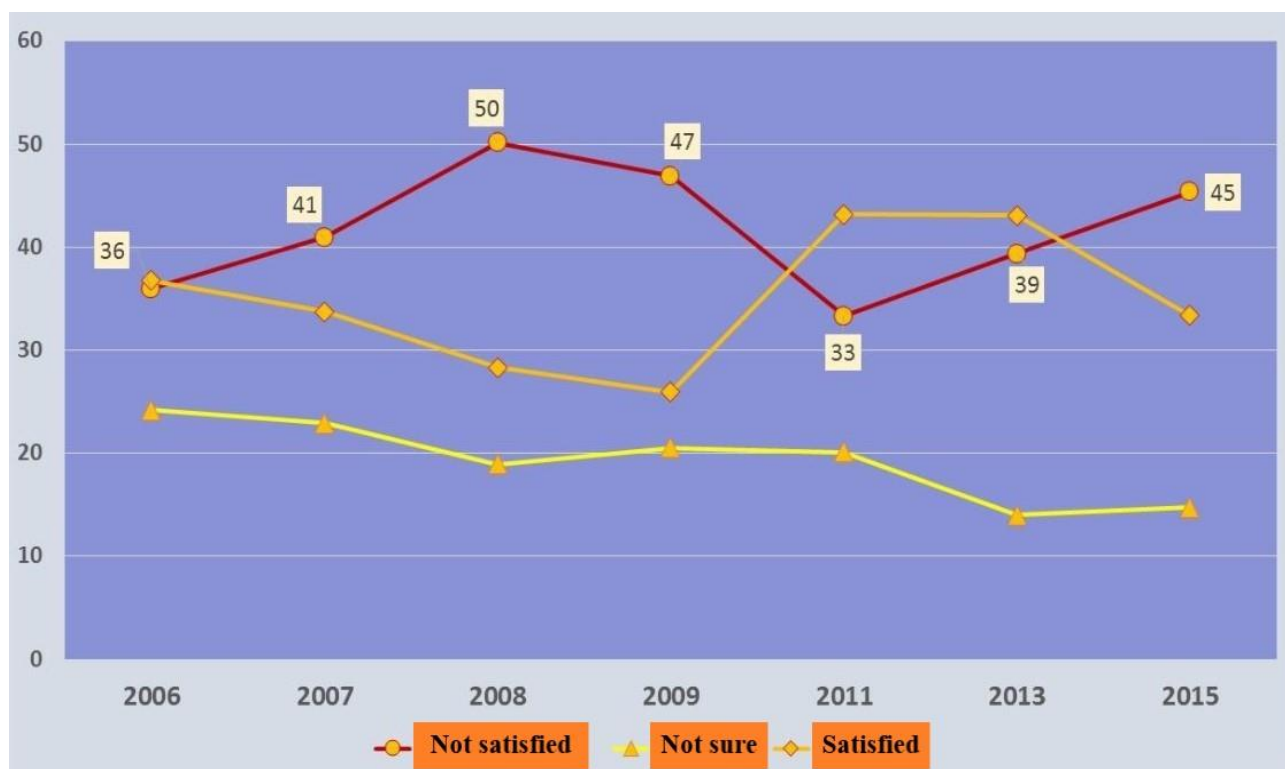


Figure 10: Democracy Satisfaction in Turkey (Çarkoğlu and Aytaç 2015)

As seen in Figure 10, dissatisfaction with democracy in Turkey increased from 36% in 2006 to 50% in 2008. This is not surprising since the polarization and the fight between the AKP and the establishment combined with the opposition got risen in this time period. The non-democratic moves of the establishment and the opposition, which are the prevention of Abdullah Gül's election as president and the closure trial of the AKP, gave the impression that the democratically elected government was impeded by the elites. Thereafter, dissatisfaction decreased from 50% in 2008 to 33% in 2011. This implies that when Erdoğan's AKP claimed to fight the military and bureaucratic tutelage for the sake of democratization, people indeed perceived it as democratization, also getting influenced by the academics and intellectuals

who did so. The key reason for the democratization perception was the 2010 Constitutional Reform in this period, which was actually a critical point enabling the progress of autocratization in Turkey. However, dissatisfaction has risen from 33% in 2011 to 45% in 2015. This period includes the Gezi protests that erupted in 2013, the repression of which made academics and intellectuals realize that Turkey has been autocratizing. The research of Çarkoğlu and Aytaç shows that the public perception was parallel to the perception of academics and intellectuals since people became more dissatisfied with the level of democracy as Gezi got suppressed.

To conclude, the survey results for the case of Turkey support this paper's argument that a significant portion of the public misinterpreted the autocratization in the AKP era as democratization, which decreased democratic resilience. When autocratization became clear to the public, Turkey was already considered an autocracy rather than a democracy.

4.4. Public Democracy Perception in Venezuela

There is one data source to understand the democracy perception in Venezuela, and that is *Latinobarómetro*, through which data for the autocratization period in Venezuela can be found. Respondents were asked how much satisfied they were with the way democracy works in their country.

Category	1998	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Very satisfied	13.2%	28.1%	16.7%	21.1%	18.5%	19.6%	28.0%	32.8%	29.3%
Rather satisfied	22.5%	27.6%	25.8%	21.3%	19.5%	24.1%	29.8%	26.5%	30.3%
Not very satisfied	39.5%	36.8%	41.8%	43.5%	34.3%	36.3%	30.6%	30.5%	29.9%
Not at all satisfied	24.8%	7.5%	15.7%	14.1%	27.6%	20.0%	11.6%	10.1%	10.6%

Figure 11: *Latinobarómetro Democracy Satisfaction in Venezuela (1998-2007)*

As seen in Figure 11, those who were satisfied were around 36% before and in the year Chávez came to power in 1998. Especially with the acceptance of the new constitution in 1999, public democracy satisfaction rose to around 56% in 2000. Although Chávez began autocratizing the country as soon as he started his first term, the public perception seems not aware of it. On the contrary, public democracy satisfaction was more in the Chávez period compared to the pre-Chávez period. This implies that public perception favoured Chávez's claim that he was expanding participatory democracy in Venezuela despite the fact that he was eroding democracy and checks and balances. Due to the high polarization and non-democratic attempts of the opposition and the establishment to overthrow the regime, such as the military coup, democracy satisfaction decreased to around 40% and remained so from 2001 to 2004, which was still higher than the pre-Chávez period. As Chávez increased his power vis-à-vis the opposition and the establishment by taking control of the judiciary and winning legislative (boycotted by the opposition) and presidential elections in 2005 and 2006, democracy satisfaction rose to around 60%.

Category	2008	2009	2010	2011	2013	2015	2016	2017	2018
Very satisfied	23.9%	17.7%	15.6%	18.1%	20.1%	10.0%	8.6%	9.0%	4.5%
Rather satisfied	25.7%	30.1%	34.8%	27.3%	22.8%	19.9%	15.3%	13.0%	7.5%
Not very satisfied	34.7%	37.3%	32.5%	39.4%	35.2%	30.4%	26.9%	28.0%	26.3%
Not at all satisfied	15.7%	14.9%	17.0%	15.2%	21.9%	39.7%	49.2%	49.9%	61.7%

Figure 12: *Latinobarómetro Democracy Satisfaction in Venezuela (2008-2018)*²⁹

In the period after 2007, in which Chávez stated his ambition to rule the country beyond 2030 and bypassed the elected oppositionist Caracas mayor by creating a new post, public satisfaction regressed to around 45-50% since Chávez appeared more undemocratic

²⁹ Data are found in <https://www.latinobarometro.org/latOnline.jsp>

and remained so until 2013, the year he died. These results indicate that Chávez's claim of participatory democracy was more convincing for the public compared to the pre-Chávez partyarchic Venezuelan democracy. However, as the autocratization became more abrupt and clear with the electoral irregularities and the brutal repression of the 2014 protests in the Maduro period, democracy satisfaction decreased below 30% in 2015, lower than in the pre-Chávez period. After Maduro's self-coup attempt and barring the opposition candidate, public democracy satisfaction regressed to 12% in 2018, a new record for Venezuela.

In conclusion, the survey results for the case of Venezuela support this paper's argument that a significant portion of the public misinterpreted the autocratization in the Chávez era as democratization, which decreased democratic resilience. When autocratization became clear to the public, Venezuela was already considered an autocracy rather than a democracy.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Through the cases of Turkey and Venezuela, this study generated the hypothesis that dissatisfaction with the political establishment and the undemocratic moves of opposition and elites lead many academics, intellectuals, and people to misidentify populist autocratization as democratization. Due to this narrow dichotomous understanding, populist incumbents' attacks on checks and balances do not meet sufficient democratic resilience. This theory provides an answer to the question why countries like Turkey and Venezuela failed to be resilient against autocratization despite having high democratic stock. To sum up the argument of this paper, two populist outsiders, Erdoğan and Chávez, came to power by elections in the context of economic problems and political instability that delegitimized the existing political system in electoral democracies. In Turkey, Erdoğan found the opportunity to attack on checks and balances after the undemocratic moves of the opposition and the establishment such as in the 2007 presidential election, which legitimized his populist attacks as democratization in the eyes of many intellectuals and people, decreasing democratic resilience. In Venezuela, the undemocratic behaviour of the opposition and the establishment such as the coup attempt in 2002 further legitimized Chávez's attacks on checks and balances as the expansion of participatory democracy in the eyes of many intellectuals and people. The evidence from academic literature, online sources, and public opinion surveys such as *WVS* and *Latinobarómetro* support the arguments of this work. This misperception decreased the democratic resilience of both countries, leading to further autocratization.

Thus, this paper filled a literature gap by connecting democratic stock to democratic resilience through the public misperception of autocratization. Even if democratic stock and democracy support are high in a country, democratic resilience cannot suffice unless people

realize autocratization and do not misinterpret it as democratization. In the last decade, misperception decreased in Turkey and Venezuela since autocratization became more obvious. The democracy struggle continues in both countries, but it is harder for dissidents to challenge the incumbent than in the past, as they face a more authoritarian regime now. Nevertheless, the existence of lasting opposition and protests indicate that Turkey and Venezuela are not devoid of democratic resilience.

Apart from their similarities, some differences exist between the two countries. Chávez came to power with a personalistic platform, the Fifth Republic Movement, whereas Erdoğan did not have as much control over his party, the AKP, which included also liberals. In addition, the Turkish judiciary was stronger than the Venezuelan judiciary, and Erdoğan could get banned from politics in case he got out of line. These forced Erdoğan to wait for about one term to erode checks and balances, unlike Chávez who started autocratization as soon as he came to power. Eventually, democracy broke down in Venezuela (2004) earlier than in Turkey (2014), and the former ended up being more autocratic than the latter today. Although public democracy perception is found to be similar in both cases in terms of formerly misinterpreting autocratization, academics and intellectuals have not followed the same patterns in the two countries. On the one hand, seeing the AKP as a democratizing force was the hegemonic perspective for the academia and liberal intellectuals until the Gezi protests in 2013 in Turkey. On the other hand, radical scholars and intellectuals who supported Chávez in Venezuela constituted only one of the two camps, the other being a liberal critical camp. Therefore, their influence was more limited in Venezuela compared to the Turkish case, in which the liberal intellectuals played a major role in the Yes campaign for the 2010 Constitutional Referendum. However, it should be mentioned that the author could not make use of the Spanish literature on Venezuelan intellectuals due to language constraints. Therefore, this thesis provides a more

in-depth understanding of the Turkish intellectual perception (see Chapter 4.1), compared to the Venezuelan one (see Chapter 4.2), which is more limited to English sources.

This study contributed to the literature also by exposing the threat that democrats misidentify autocratizers as democratizers. Although scholars like Scheppele (2018) and Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) pointed out the significance of recognizing an autocrat early on for the endurance of democracy, it does not seem that the academic literature is aware of this threat enough. After all, a lot of academics were mistaken about Erdoğan and Chávez and perceived them as democratizers rather than recognizing their autocratic character (see Chapter 4.1 and Chapter 4.2), which contributed to autocratization. Therefore, it was crucial, in this work, to stress the seriousness of this threat once again through the examples of Turkey and Venezuela.

Another implication from this paper is that resisting autocratization by undemocratic means is not the right strategy, as the undemocratic behaviour of the opposition and elites in the two cases resulted in the legitimization of autocratization in the eyes of many intellectuals and people. Indeed, in Colombia (Gamboa 2017) and Ecuador (Cleary and Öztürk 2020), the opposition resorted only to democratic means against autocrats coming to power in a similar context, and this strategy resulted in incumbent removal and democratic survival in the end. It would be fruitful to compare these positive cases with the negative cases of Turkey and Venezuela in this thesis, but they could not be included due to time and space constraints. Further research is needed to test the theory of this study in these successful cases by looking at the perception of their academics, intellectuals, and public. That would help us better understand the relationship between public perception and the undemocratic behaviour of opposition and elites. Another limitation of this paper is the generalizability of its theory to cases like Hungary and India. Autocratization is still going on in these countries despite the

absence of undemocratic behaviours by the opposition. However, public democracy misperception can still be relevant for these countries through another mechanism, which can be discovered only by further research. Finally, it is important to note that, because of our cases, the implication for the use of democratic means is limited to the early autocratization period, in which autocrats can be genuinely challenged by democratic means such as elections. The current situation in Venezuela where opposition candidates are barred from elections begs further research about which opposition strategies work for restoring democracy in such deeply autocratic regimes.

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