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and explorative analysis

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# Democratic Resilience in the Twenty-First Century. Search for an analytical framework and explorative analysis \*

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## **Abstract**

This study presents a comprehensive conceptualization of democratic resilience as regime performance and regime capacity. It introduced the Resilience Capacity (ResCap)-Index and combines different approaches of measuring autocratization to capture varieties of resilience performance in democratic regimes. The usefulness of the concept of democratic resilience and its measurement for empirical research is demonstrated through an explorative study of up to 117 countries across the world since 2000. The preliminary evidence from our explorative analysis suggests that resilience capacity has a significant and substantial effect on a country's predicted probability to prevent a substantial loss of democratic qualities or the breakdown of its democratic regime, but not the ability of the political system to recover from such democratic erosion or breakdown. This supports the view that it is necessary to differentiate between different forms of democratic resilience which, though temporarily connected, depend on different forms or combinations of resilience capacities.

**Keywords:** Democratic resilience; resilience measurement; resilience capacity; resilience performance; democratic backsliding; autocratization.

# 1. Introduction

Worldwide, concerns about the health of democracy shape academic and public discourses. To the extent that it is useful to generalize about “waves”, several scholars find that the Third Wave of democracy which began in the early 1970s, has been replaced by a Third Wave of autocratization since the late-1990s. While global democracy reports stress the pressing need to act for democracy to prevail (Angiolillo et al. 2024; Freedom House 2024; Bertelsmann Stiftung 2024), scholars have called for a better understanding of what protects democracies and enables political systems to cope with threats to their democratic institutions, norms and practices (Merkel and Lührmann 2021; Coppedge et al. 2022; Riedl et al. 2023). In this context, the concept of 'democratic resilience' has increasingly gained currency, although it is rarely coherently conceptualized or measured.

In this explorative study, we make four main contributes to resilience research as an emerging subfield of democracy studies. First, we present a novel and comprehensive conceptualization of democratic resilience that differentiates between the resilience performance and the resilience capacities of political regimes. Second, we combine different approaches of measuring autocratization to capture varieties of democratic resilience in political systems whose democratic institutions and processes are under stress. Third, we propose a set of measurable characteristics within a given country, which could influence the level of democratic resilience (resilience capacities). Fourth, we demonstrate the usefulness of our framework by analyzing democratic resilience in up to 117 countries since 2000.

Our statistical analysis demonstrates that resilience capacity as measured by the Resilience Capacity (ResCap)-Index is significantly and positively associated with the ability of a political regime to prevent a substantial deterioration of the democratic qualities of its political institutions and processes and, if it experiences democratic erosion, to resist the breakdown of its democratic institutions. However, we cannot confirm that democratic resilience has a significant and substantial effect on the ability of a political regime to recover and bounce-back from an episode of autocratization.

Below we first conceptualize democratic resilience. Next, we discuss various ways of measuring resilience performance and resilience capacities. We then explore democratic resilience in the twenty-first century. Finally, we discuss conclusions drawn from our findings and avenues of further research.

## 2. Defining Democratic Resilience

Resilience is an established concept in many academic disciplines such as ecology and engineering, psychology, organizational and risk management, criminology, urban planning, and public health (Faulkner et al. 2020; Stollenwerk et al. 2021; Holloway and Manwaring 2023). In political science, considering democratic systems through the lens of resilience is a relatively new perspective, which has gained attention mainly in the research on current threats to democracy, autocratization and democratic backsliding in particular (Merkel and Lührmann 2021; Boese et al. 2021; Riedl et al. 2023; Holloway and Manwaring 2023). Nonetheless, democratic resilience remains a term with no standardized definition and operationalization, which carries a range of different meanings and entails a variety of different practices in different national contexts.

Following existing works in a variety of academic disciplines, we generally understand resilience as the capacity of an entity or system to resist to shocks, to absorb them, to bounce back from them and to move forward, in order to maintain or enhance its identity, if not structures and functions (Stollenwerk et al. 2021; Folke et al. 2004, 558). As Holloway and Manwaring (2023: 72) note, “resilience is ... not a single property that a democratic system would possess and exhibit in all circumstances, but rather a response process of ‘patterned adjustments’ that a system (or agents within) may demonstrate in *varying degree*” (emphasis added). Moreover, resilience is both a process and a state. Building upon this general understanding of resilience, we define democratic resilience as the *ability of a democratic systems to endure with exogenous and endogenous shocks and stressors in a non-violent manner through democratic means of political participation, thereby preventing or recovering from a durable loss of democratic qualities of its political institutions, processes and practices*. Democratic resilience includes the state as one governance actor among many, but also non-state, and societal actors in a broader sense. If democracies are resilient, they are not only able to fend off stressors and crises, but to develop coping mechanisms allowing them to deal with risks in the long run, preserving, reviving or enhancing their level of ‘democraticness.’

Inspired by Bănică et al. (2021), we make an analytical distinction between how resilient a democratic system actually is (resilience as “performance”) and the ability of that system to *remain or to become* resilient (resilience as “capacity”). Resilience as *performance* manifests itself through one or more of the following three outcomes (Merkel and Lührmann 2021; Stollenwerk et al. 2021):

1. *Continuation*: a political system withstands the given level of stress without substantial deterioration of its quality or regime character. This is similar to what Boese et al. (2021) conceptualize as “onset resilience”, which means that democratic regimes resist

autocratization right from the beginning so that the democratic quality of practices, principles and process continues on the same or similar level during a period of stress or crisis as before and after that period of time.

2. *Resistance*: a democratic system is able to limit the negative impact of a shock so that it might suffer from the erosion of democratic qualities but can preserve its core identity as a (minimally) democratic regime. This is similar to what Boese et al. conceptualize as the potential of a democracy already on the slippery slope of autocratization to resist regime breakdown (“breakdown resilience”) (Boese et al. 2021).
3. *Bounce back*: Onset and breakdown resilience concern one-directional dynamics. “Bounce back” resilience, on the other hand, adds a second direction to the study of democratic resilience and regression. “Bounce back” resilience is manifested in the use of stress-absorbing strategies and mechanisms that allow a political system, after a crisis that has seriously threatened the continuity and quality of basic democratic political mechanisms, to “” and what Nord et al. (2024) conceptualize as democratic “turnarounds” in wbounce-back at a similar or even higher level of democratic quality of its political institutions, processes and principles. This is similar to what Linz (1978) defined as “re-equilibrationhich a lack of onset resilience or breakdown resilience is “closely followed by and inherently linked to” subsequent and substantial increase in the political regime’s level of democraticness (Nord et al. 2024: 9).

In contrast to resilience performance, *resilience capacity* assesses the general ability of a political regime to cope with risks or shocks. It implies to identify and to measure the conditions or driving factors that are hypothesized to position the political system to respond and recover better. The resilience capacity operates as a “moderator which determines the extent to which a given stressor poses a threat” to that political system (Helgest et al. 2022). If the resilience capacity matches the intensity of a stressor, then the political system could cope with the stress without significant changes in the democratic qualities of its structures and processes (*continuation*), or, at least, preserve its regime identity (*resistance*). In contrast, when the level of stress far exceeds the resilience capacities, then democratic decline or democratic breakdown seems to be the most likely outcomes. Stress may also lead to an initial decline in the quality of democracy, but resilience capacities can mitigate the shock and may even lead to a recovery of previous levels of democratic quality (*bounce-back*).

The capacity of a system to be resilient and the level of actual resilience are linked by the concept of resilience mechanisms – those causal processes through which capacities impact the actual

resilience performance of the system. These mechanisms may play out in different ways. A comprehensive conceptualization of the conditions, capacities and consequences of democratic resilience would include resilience mechanisms. However, given the explorative character of this paper, and our main research interest detailed in the introduction, the rest of the paper focuses on resilience performance and resilience capacities.

### **3. Measuring Democratic Resilience**

Accurately measuring democratic resilience requires reliable and valid data on democracy. Fortunately, numerous indicators of democracy can be utilized in order to measure democracy across a large number of cases (Coppedge et al. 2020; Møller and Skaaning 2024). In contrast, there is a lack of well-tested metrics to measure resilience. Despite the rise of the resilience thinking to prominence, to the best of our knowledge there is only one attempt to systematically measure the democratic resilience of a large number of political systems across different regions and time periods (Boese et al. 2021). Accordingly, performance indicators of democratic resilience must be able to measure the level or degree of resilience a system exhibits at a given point in time, whereas capacity indicators identify a set of measurable characteristics within a given country, which influence the level of democratic resilience.

#### **(1) Measure Democracy**

Democracy barometers differ in terms of their understanding of democracy and the type of data to be used. For the purpose of this study, it is sufficient to acknowledge that actual empirical research relies on procedural understandings of democracy (Bogaards 2010; Møller and Skaaning 2024). Still, the debate is whether an essentially electoral understanding of democracy as a method of political competition open to participation is sufficient, or if modern democracy requires the presence of more substantial elements, such as the rule of law, minority rights and horizontal accountability (“liberal democracy”); deliberate qualities of the decision-making process (“deliberative democracy”); high levels of political participation of the citizens (“participatory democracy”); or political egalitarianism (“egalitarian democracy”) (Coppedge et al. 2020). The choice of a specific concept of democracy in turn has important consequences both in terms of how one measures the democratic qualities of political regimes in general and with regard to the resilience of a democracy in particular. However, to the best of our knowledge, existing democracy barometers and studies in democratic regression and resilience generally adopt electoral or liberal conceptions of democracy (cf. Boese 2019; Boese et al. 2021; Riedl et al. 2023). Electoral democracy is an example of a narrower concept of democracy in which only the minimum



procedural requirements of a democracy are met, which are necessary for civic participation in the political process through voting and opinion making. A liberal democracy, in turn, fulfills all the conditions of electoral democracy, but goes beyond them by including procedures of rule of law, minority protection and horizontal accountability, among others (Møller and Skaaning 2024; Coppedge et al. 2020).

Another longstanding debate among democracy researchers concerns the question whether measures of democracy should rely on expert-coded indicators, observational data, individual-level survey data, or a combination of different types of data (Fuchs and Roller 2018; Skaaning 2018). In the context of current research on global democratic backsliding, this debate has once again attracted a great deal of attention, particularly due to a critique of measurements of democracy through expert surveys by Little and Meng (2024) (see also *Political Science & Politics*, 2024). Most democracy barometers exclude citizen perceptions as they can be perhaps identified in opinion poll data because this type of data can be problematic if scholars plan to compare democratic qualities across countries or globally. Instead, most democracy barometers rely on expert-coded data, usually with a focus on institutional and procedural characteristics of democracy.<sup>1</sup> Such expert-coded data may be potentially vulnerable to issues of inter-coder-reliability and coder bias, and information that expert coders rely on may be biased to start with (Little and Meng 2024: 159). However, relying solely or mainly on “more objective data” (ibid.) is insufficient to capture the complexities that characterize the concept of democratic quality and, building on this, the concept of democratic resilience. In the sense of the evaluation scheme for democracy indices proposed by Munck and Verkuilen (2002), the “reliability” criterion may be overemphasized, while the “validity” aspect is neglected. Moreover, it is an illusion that more “objective” indicators are always observer-invariant (Knutsen et al. 2023, Lott and Croissant 2024).

Although democracy barometers exist in large numbers, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset is the most ambitious and methodologically advanced one (Coppedge et al. 2020, Pemstein et al. 2023, Coppedge et al. 2023c). The V-Dem project distinguishes between five high-level principles of democracy (electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian), operationalizes these principles, and collects data to measure those (Coppedge et al. 2020). Of these principles of democracy, the electoral democracy and the liberal democracy indices are most widely used in empirical research. With about 400 specific indicators, multiple, independent coders for each (non-factual) question, systematic inter-coder reliability tests, confidence bounds for all point estimates associated with non-factual questions, and transparent aggregation procedures, the

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<sup>1</sup> See Boese (2019) for a comprehensive overview of the differences between common expert-coded democracy data

V-Dem Project is the de facto gold standard in empirical democracy research. It seems quite intuitive to use this data to measure democratic resilience.

## **(2) Measuring resilience performance**

Measuring democratic resilience is a challenging endeavor. Generally, one can distinguish between two approaches. Both approaches require continuous democracy data. One approach –the “delta approach” – measures democratic resilience performance as the extent of change in the level of democratic quality above a defined threshold over a defined period of years that is long enough to exclude ephemeral changes (Lott and Croissant 2024). While a “significant” drop of the level of democratic qualities of a political regime would indicate a weaker ability of a system to resist shocks, only ephemeral changes or a substantial increase would suggest a stronger ability of the system to resist and adopt to shocks and stressors without losing democratic quality. This approach could also be used to operationalize the performance of a system in terms of its ability to recover from the negative impact of a shock and return to a level of democracy that equals or exceeds that of the year(s) before the onset of a political crisis or autocratization process.

However, the “delta approach” comes with some pitfalls and tradeoffs. A first one is to set a time delta that is long enough to exclude ephemeral changes in the level of democracy and short enough not to miss wave motion (in terms of short term democratic regression/backsliding and fast recovery). One obvious short time delta is to compare the level of democracy between  $t$  and  $t-1$  (i.e., Cassani and Tomini, 2019). Increasing the delta to, for example, five years, would reduce the risk to include ephemeral changes in the level of democracy as the period ... is long enough to encompass one term of most governments” (Coppedge 2017: 7). One could also further increase the time delta, for example to ten years. However, there is a tradeoff between the time delta and the threshold in the delta approach detecting autocratization. Setting the time delta to one year and using an undemanding threshold would increase the risk to identify ephemeral changes in the level of democracy that do not represent cases of autocratization. In addition, the risks to identify measurement noise rather than real autocratization cases in this combination is relatively high. In contrast, when using a larger time delta and an undemanding threshold researchers are likely to overestimate autocratization (Type 1 error – false positive). Type II errors (false negatives) are likely in cases when researchers choose a minor time delta (for example one year) and using a demanding threshold to detect substantial declines in the level of democracy. Overall, setting the time delta and thresholds remain error-prone decisions.

An alternative approach – the “episode approach” – treats democratic resilience as the avoidance of a (gradual) process of connected years during which sustained declines in the quality of democracy take place. In recent years, this approach has become increasingly popular in empirical democracy research. Maerz and her coauthors (2023) have made a key contribution to the measurement of autocratization with the Episodes of Regime Transformation (ERT) dataset.<sup>2</sup> Autocratization episodes are conceptualized as interrelated periods of substantial cumulative decline in democratic qualities in any given political regime. The episode approach treats democratic resilience as a process of connected years during which a political regime is able to avoid a substantial loss in democratic quality (“onset resilience”) or is able to avoid a regime transition from a more democratic to a less or non-democratic regime (“breakdown resilience”) (cf. Boese et al. 2021).

This approach is an important first step towards developing valid and reliable measures of democratic resilience, though it emphasizes notions of democratic resilience as “resistance” and continuation of the discrete regime type, but it does not accommodate the full notion of resilience as a “bouncing back” from initial damage, or improvement of political practices, rules and procedures without prior damage. However, Marina Nord and her co-authors introduced recently the concept of “democratic turnarounds” by which they mean processes of democratization which follow up on initial erosion of democracy and which are in one way or the other endogenously interlinked and closely connected in time to prior episodes of autocratization (Nord et al. 2024). Such episodes of democratic turnaround are cases of reversed autocratization or “bounce back” which can result in a restoration of the regime’s previous level of democratic qualities (“U-shaped” turnaround), a substantial improvement in democratic traits compared to the previous level (“J-shaped”) or a (substantial) increase in democratic qualities, though the new democratic level constitutes a substantial decline compared to the previous level (“L-shaped”) (ibid). We combine the conceptual approaches by Boese et al. (2021) and Nord and co-authors (2024) into a three-stage approach to democratic resilience:

- I. Political regimes with sufficient onset resilience register a continuation of their level of democratic qualities whereas those without experience an autocratization episode (stage I)
- II. Political regimes that experience a substantial deterioration of democratic qualities (autocratization episode) may or may not resist the breakdown of its core identity as a (minimally) democratic regime (stage II).

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<sup>2</sup> The ERT is a dataset that utilizes V-Dem data on electoral democracy to capture episodes of regime transformation from 1900 to today.

III. Once the autocratization episode has come to an end (at a lower level of democratic quality than before the onset of democratic backsliding), those regimes can bounce back, that is they experience an episode of democratic “turnaround” (stage III).

After detailing our measure of resilience performance, which by itself is a challenging conceptual endeavor, we present our resilience capacity conceptualization and suggest a way to measure it across countries and time.

### **(3) Resilience capacity**

Resilience capacity assesses the capacity of a polity to resist and bounce-back from a crisis. If the resilience capacity matches the intensity of a stressor, then a political system could cope with the stress without significant changes in its quality, would be able to escape slow or sudden death, or bounce-back from an initial decline in the quality of democracy. When the level of stress far exceeds the resilience capacities, then bounce-back, decline or democratic breakdown seem to be the most likely outcomes. In this case, a system’s short-term ability to build up new resilience-capacities towards the stressor is of critical importance for achieving a bounce-back scenario.

Building on a four-level framework recently proposed by Merkel and Lührmann (2021) we propose a number of indicators, which can be used to measure the capacity of a democratic system to resist, adapt or recover from shocks. The four levels are the following:

1. macro-institutional (core institutions of democratic regime);
2. political parties;
3. societal (civic culture and civil society); and
4. political community.

However, Merkel and Lührmann’s framework lacks a concrete operationalization of these four levels. We fill this gap by identifying nine indicators of resilience capacity. Table 1 summarizes the variables and indicators and depicts the direction of relationship between capacity and performance.

**Table 1. Variables and indicators of resilience capacity**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Justification for inclusion</b>	<b>Indicator and data source</b>
<b>Macro-institutional level</b>		
<i>Democracy Stock</i>	Political system with more and stronger democratic experiences and legacies have a higher capacity to anticipate, adopt, resist or recover from the repercussions of external shocks or stress.	EDI (Coppedge et al. 2023a); cumulative weighted sum of EDI values for all previous years. A conventional two and a half-percent annual depreciation rate ( $1 - \delta$ ) was used.
<i>Executive Constraints</i>	The more the executive is constrained by independent judiciary and effective legislative oversight, the stronger is horizontal accountability, which is an important resilient mechanism.	Polity V (EXCONST) (Marshall and Gurr 2020). Higher scores indicate stronger constraints.
<i>Rule of law</i>	The stronger the rule of law, the better individual and collective rights are protected and the stronger the incentive to keep and defend democracy.	Legal System and Property Rights (Fraser Institute 2023). Higher scores indicate better rule of law.
<b>Political actors</b>		
<i>Anti-pluralist Party Index</i>	The more political parties are committed to pluralism and democratic processes, the better the ability of the party system to reduce political uncertainty, and to provide more stable pro-democratic representation.	Democratic Party Index (Angiolillo et al. 2023; V-Dem; Coppedge et al. 2023a); higher scores indicate less anti-pluralist party preferences in the party systems and thus better resilience capacity.
<i>Polarization (V-Dem)</i>	The stronger political polarization, the more a society is divided into antagonistic political camps and the weaker is the resilience capacity of the political system.	Political polarization indicator (V-Dem; Coppedge et al. 2023a); higher values indicate more polarization.
<b>Civic culture and civil society</b>		
<i>Robustness of civil society</i>	The more robust a civil society, the higher the capacity for vertical accountability, public consultation and consensus-building, and critical support of the state by society.	Core civil society index (v2xcs_ccsi) by V-Dem; higher scores indicate better resilience capacity (Coppedge et al. 2023a).
<i>Distribution of power resources</i>	Wider distribution of relevant power resources make it easier for citizens to play a role in democratic politics which strengthens democratic resilience.	Equal Access Index (V-Dem, Coppedge et al. 2023a), measures the degree to which all groups “enjoy equal de facto capabilities to

		participate, to serve in positions of political power, to put issues on the agenda, and to influence policymaking” (Coppedge et al. 2023b, 56).
<b>Political community of citizens</b>		
<i>Political trust</i>	Higher levels of political trust induces less openness for anti-system alternatives and promote willingness of actors to overcome collective action problems and cooperate in the face of emerging or present risks to democratic systems.	Ji, Jiang, and Zhang (2024) latent estimates of political trust (Different surveys, such as ESS, WVS, EVS, LB, ISSP, etc.) based on latent variable approach by Claassen (2019). Higher values indicate more political trust and thus more resilience capacity.
<i>Confidence in Democracy</i>	Higher confidence in democracy induces less openness for anti-government/anti-system alternatives.	Claassen (2020) latent estimates of confidence in democracy (Different surveys, such as ESS, WVS, EVS, LB, ISSP, etc.).

The **macro-institutional level** concerns core procedural rules and institutions which are relevant for the survival and democratic quality of the regime. Based on the existing literature we identify three institutional variables on this first level. The first one is a country’s accumulated experience with democratic institutions and practices. Following an important literature on historical legacies of democracy, we assume that democracy is a “stock variable” (Gerring et al. 2012; Svobik 2008): political systems with more and stronger democratic experiences and legacies have a higher capacity to anticipate, adopt, resist or recover from the repercussions of external shocks or stress. Accordingly we create a democracy stock variable (see Egdell et al. 2020). A second institutional variable concerns executive constraints. The institutional relationship between the executive on the one hand and the legislative and judiciary branches of government on the other determines the quality of the “horizontal accountability mechanism” (Laebens and Lüthmann 2021). Parliamentary and judicial oversight can serve as important obstacle against “executive aggrandizement” (Bermeo 2016; cf. Laebens and Lüthmann 2021). Accordingly, we assume that democracies have a stronger capacity to be resilient when the executive is effectively constrained by an independent and impartial judiciary and by legislative oversight. Third, we assume that the stronger the rule of law in a country, the better individual and collective rights are protected and the stronger the incentive of elites and citizens to keep and defend democracy (e.g., Coppedge et

al. 2022; Dixon 2023). As for the measurement of rule of law as resilience capacity of a political system we use the Fraser Institute's "Legal System and Property Rights" indicator, which is a composite indicator comprising seven individual indicators derived from a variety of sources (Fraser Institute 2023).

At the level of relevant **political actors**, political parties play a key role (Merkel and Lührmann 2021; Crum and Olear 2023; Capoccia 2005). To operationalize this level, we identify two party-related variables. First, democracy relies on nonviolent mechanisms of political participation and political inclusion (Rummel 1997). Accordingly, political party systems with stronger commitment to democracy and pluralism strengthen the resilience capacity of a democracy by protecting it against anti-democratic political actors (Coppedge et al. 2022). In party systems with parties in government and opposition with strong commitment to pluralism and democracy, it is less likely that anti-system movements gain political relevance. In contrast, political systems in which political parties or movements promote anti-pluralist ideologies, and whose supporters generally interact in a hostile manner, have a weaker capacity to be resilient (Riedl et al. 2023). Second, political polarization weakens social cohesion and threatens the ability of citizens to find a common political ground as well as the acceptance of the procedural consensus which democracy rests upon (Somer et al. 2021). Therefore, we assume that the stronger political polarization in a political system, the weaker is its resilience capacity.

At the level of **civic culture and civil society**, citizens' attitudes and behaviors are also relevant for democratic resilience. The more widespread and anchored democratic values and attitudes are in a society and the more vital and active civil society is, the better protected is democracy to external shocks and external challenges (Merkel and Lührmann 2021; Bernhard et al. 2020; Coppedge et al. 2022). We approximate this capacity level via two indicators. First, the robustness of civil society and, second, the societal distribution of relevant power resources. The more robust a civil society, the higher the capacity for "diagonal" accountability (Laebens and Lührmann 2021), public consultation and consensus-building and critical support of the state by society. Furthermore, democratic resilience is the ability of political systems to cope with exogenous and endogenous stressors in a nonviolent manner through democratic procedures of political participation. Following Tatu Vanhanen's work (1997) on democracy and the dispersion in the distribution of power resources, this implies that the resilience capacity of a democracy is stronger when social groups "enjoy equal de facto capabilities to participate, to serve in positions of political power, to put issues on the agenda, and to influence policymaking" (Coppedge et al. 2023).

Finally, the **level of political community of citizens** is important because in less unequal, conflictual and more cohesive communities, citizens’ common sense of belonging strengthens and it is easier for political elites to accept compromises and play by the established democratic procedures (Linz and Stepan 1996; Riedl et al. 2023). We approximate this fourth dimension of the resilience capacity of a democracy through two survey-based indicators: political trust, and confidence in democracy.<sup>3</sup> We assume that higher trust in political institutions among the citizens strengthens the ability of regimes to respond to shocks and stress and renders it more difficult for anti-system alternatives to gain political traction. In addition, the more citizens and elites have confidence in democracy the more they are willing to comply with democratic decisions and policies. This reduces reaction and implementation costs of the democratic system and strengthens its capacity to deal effectively with external or internal disturbances.

Table 2 uses Bayesian factor analysis to assess the content validity of the different components of our resilience capacity measure. The sample covers up to 117 countries worldwide with data since 2000, depending on data availability. Some of the data for the second attribute of resilience capacity (political parties) had to be interpolated due to missing country-year observations for those country-years between two elections (political parties attribute).

**Table 2. Conceptual alignment across components (Bayesian Confirmatory Factor Analysis)**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Loading (<math>\Lambda</math>)</b>	<b>Uniqueness (<math>\Psi</math>)</b>
Institutional variables	Democratic stock	-0.96	0.083
	Executive Constraints	-0.725	0.478
	Rule of Law	-0.8	0.366
Political parties	Polarization	0.668	0.546
	Anti-Pluralist-Party Index	-0.55	0.687
Civil society and civic culture	Distribution of power resources	-0.88	0.222
	Robustness of civil society	-0.839	0.293
Political community	Political trust	-0.716	0.479
	Satisfaction with Democracy	-0.846	0.274

Note: Negative factor loadings indicate that the variables load negatively on the respective overall attribute. For the Resilience Capacity Index construction, these negative values are inversely rescaled to obtain an index that ranks from low capacity (0) to high capacity (1). Source: see Table 1.

<sup>3</sup> Another and perhaps the best indicator for this level is what Linz and Stepan (1996) call “citizenship agreement”. However, the only measure for this would be the Bertelsmann Transformation Index’s “state identity” indicator, which is only available for non-OECD countries since 2005 and in two-year intervals (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2024), and is an expert-coded indicator.



All three indicators of the macro-institutional attribute of resilience capacity load on a single dimension, though the uniqueness of executive constraints component is relatively high indicating weaker fit into the one-factor model. The second attribute of the resilience capacity – political parties dimension – shows that the fits for the Anti-Pluralist-Party Index as well as for the polarization indicator are relatively high. However, both uniqueness scores indicate that a relative large portion of the variance is unexplained by the political parties’ factor. In the civic culture and civil society attribute of resilience capacity, the factor analysis clearly indicates that the two dimensions of this attribute load strongly on a single attribute. The two different survey items used to conceptualize the political community attribute of resilience capacity also load strongly on a single factor. Once again, the uniqueness scores indicate that a part of the variance is unexplained with this dimension, in particular for the political trust latent variable. Although our approach for evaluation the resilience capacity has an explorative nature, the findings provide overall moderate to strong empirical support regarding the construct validity of the resilience capacity measure.

#### **(4) Index Construction**

We use the mean of the individual factor loadings from the Bayesian Factor Analysis presented in Table 2 to aggregate the different indicators to the four attributes on the country-year basis. We aggregate the factor scores of these attributes to three different indices. First, we build an additive Resilience Capacity Index (AResCap) using each attribute equivalently. It is defined as:

$$AResCap = \frac{1}{4} * \text{Macro institutional attribute} + \frac{1}{4} * \text{Political parties attribute} + \frac{1}{4} * \text{Societal attribute} \\ + \frac{1}{4} * \text{Political community attribute}$$

This additive index assumes that each attribute can compensate lower values in other dimensions and thus conceptualizes the different attributes as mutually substitutable aspects of resilience capacity. In contrast, the multiplicative Resilience Capacity Index (MResCap) assumes that the different attributes are individually necessary conditions for resilience capacity. Thus, by using the multiplicative aggregation rule we combine information from all constitutive elements of resilience capacity. The MResCap index is defined as:

$$MResCap = \text{Macro institutional attribute} * \text{Political parties attribute} * \text{Societal attribute} \\ * \text{Political community attribute}$$

Since both the necessary conditions and the substitutable logic have reasoned support, and since both have evidently the virtue of discriminating at different ends of the spectrum, we use the average between the two resilience capacity indices as our preferred solution to the aggregation of

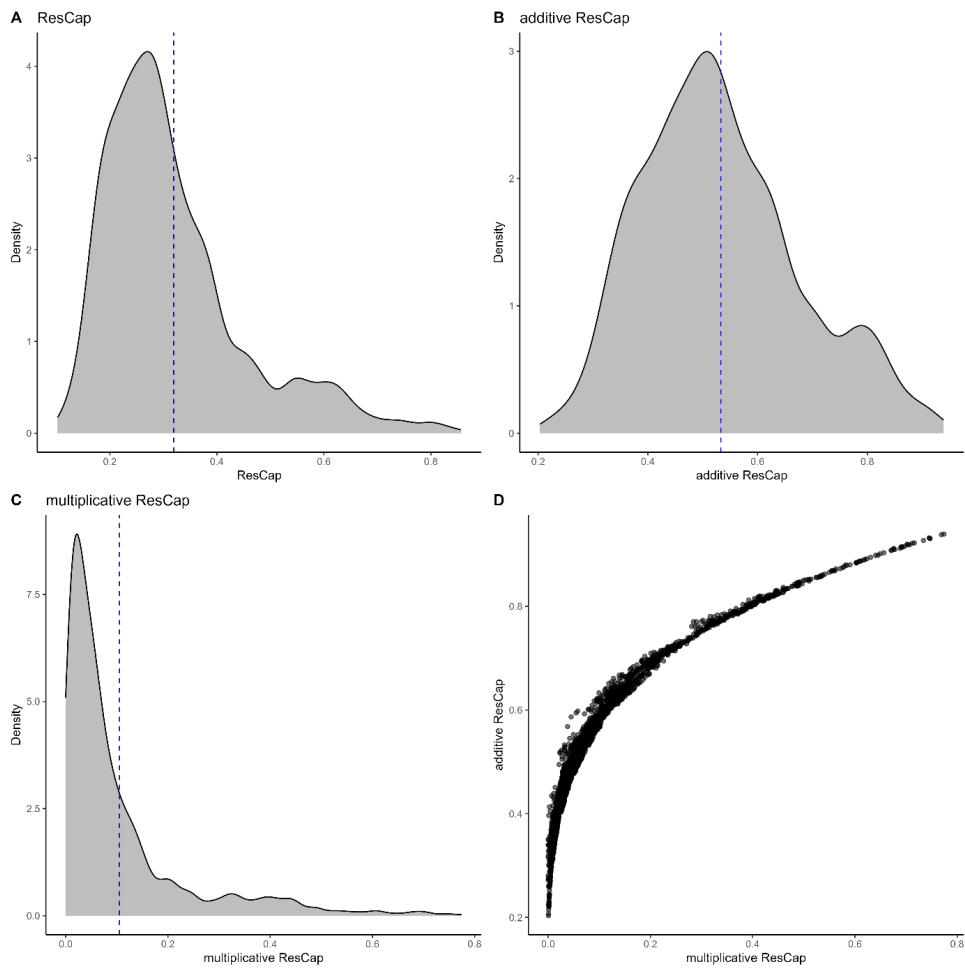
a complex concept, such as resilience capacity. The Resilience Capacity (ResCap) Index is thus constructed by averaging both indices as:

$$ResCap = 0.5 * AResCap + 0.5 * MResCap$$

Figure 1 details the empirical distribution of the ResCap Index, as well as the relationship between the different aggregation rationales. The left-skewed distribution of observations in the multiplicative ResCap index contrasts with a more balanced distribution of cases in the additive Resilience Capacity Index, whereas empirical distribution of the ResCap Index lies somewhere between the two alternatives. Still, even here the distributions suggest that many countries may exhibit substantial shortcomings in terms of their capacity to be democratically resilient—a finding that also reflect the mixed character of political regimes in our sample, which includes regimes at every level at the continuum between hard autocracies and liberal democracy. In the Supplementary Appendix we also re-plotted Figure A1 with only democratic regimes (cf. Section 4.2 for sampling rules).

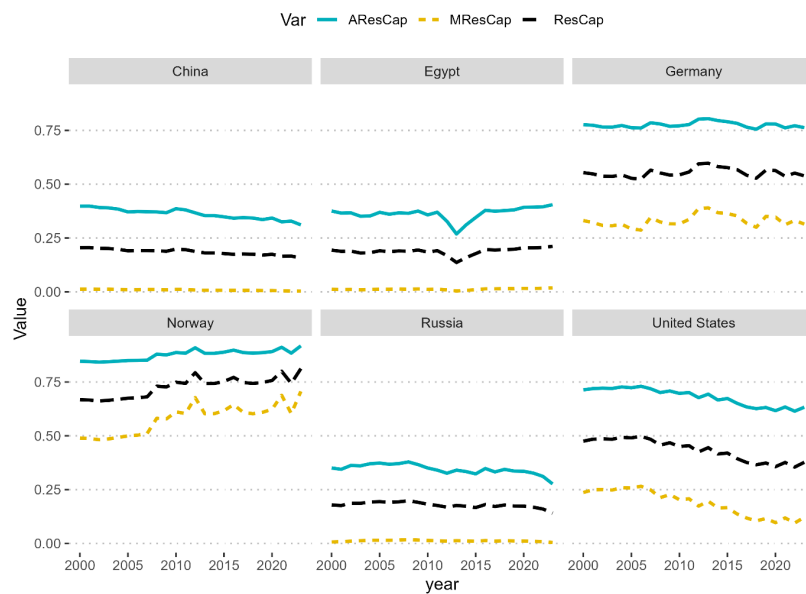
Figure 2 shows six different country examples, namely, China, Egypt, Germany, Norway, Russia, and the United States of America. Across these six countries Norway performs the best, followed by Germany, and the United States. China as a stable autocracy performs similar to the trajectories in Egypt and Russia, which both experienced autocratic hardening since the 2010s. To allow a test of face validity, Figure A2 to A5 in the Appendix presents the data for all countries in our sample. After constructing the individual attributes (some of which have data missing from the latent variables in the political trust and satisfaction with democracy data), we interpolated missing values at the attribute level with a spline inter- and extrapolation. This applies to all countries from 2019, since then, for example, the Polity V data (executive constraints) are missing for the macro-institutional attribute.

**Figure 1: Aggregation to Resilience Capacity**



Note: Blue vertical lines show the mean value for each Capacity Index.

**Figure 2: Country examples and resilience capacity indices**



## 5. Exploring Democratic Resilience in the Twenty-First Century

In the following, we demonstrate the usefulness of our conceptualization of democratic resilience for empirical research through an explorative study of resilience performance and resilience capacities in up to 117 countries across the world. Due to data restrictions, we are only able to analyze the association between our resilience capacity index, its versions and the resilience performance of democracies in the period 2000 to 2023. This time span covers a number of disruptive socioeconomic transformations and global crises which should have, perhaps, triggered a resilience response, such as the terrorist attacks on 9/11 and the Global War on Terrorism, the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) from 2007 to 2009, the Covid-19 Pandemic (2020 to 2023), and the Ukraine War since February 2022. For this reason and because of the common view that democracy in the early twenty-first century is increasingly challenged by autocratization (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019; Møller and Skaaning 2024), we believe that this period is particularly well suited to identify different levels and capacities of democratic resilience empirically.

### (1) Resilience capacities

In a first step, we detail differences in the resilience capacity between types of political regimes and world regions. There are clear differences in resilience capacity between different types of political regime: liberal democracies have substantially more resilience capacity than electoral democracies and the latter have more capacity than non-democratic political systems. However, the capacity of most political system to cope in a democratic way with challenges as enacted by various stressors appears to be generally limited (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Resilience Capacity (ResCap-Index) by regime type and region, 2000 to 2023**

Regime type	Liberal democracy	Electoral democracy	Electoral autocracy	Closed autocracy
ResCap (average by category)	0.473	0.293	0.215	0.208
Region	Average by region	SD by region	Min by region	Max by region
Western Europe and North America	0.539	0.129	0.303	0.854
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.309	0.096	0.13	0.641
Asia and Pacific	0.284	0.072	0.164	0.462
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.271	0.096	0.13	0.45
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	0.258	0.071	0.136	0.453
The Middle East and North Africa	0.239	0.059	0.136	0.376

Source: the authors

Generally, resilience capacity in the industrialized democracies in Western Europe and North America is better developed than in the global South. Strikingly, the democratic resilience capacity in post-Communist Europe and Eurasia lacked behind all other regions except for the Middle East and North Africa, pointing to the shallowness of post-Socialist democratic institutions, processes and values. However, as the mean ResCap values disguise important within region differences in the resilience capacity, the preliminary analysis here will be detailed in the next steps. As can be seen in Table 4, there are clear differences in the resilience profile within each region. At the same time, the individual regions differ not only in terms of their average aggregated resilience capacity. They also show pronounced differences within the individual dimensions.

**Table 4. Dimensions of resilience capacity by region, 2000-2023**

	<b>Institutional dimension</b>	<b>Political parties dimension</b>	<b>Civil society and civic culture dimension</b>	<b>Political community dimension</b>
Asia and Pacific	0.377	0.468	0.618	0.544
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	0.355	0.495	0.683	0.333
Middle East and North Africa	0.486	0.504	0.697	0.413
Sub-Sahara Africa	0.299	0.443	0.691	0.488
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.298	0.48	0.511	0.458
Western Europe and North America	0.836	0.708	0.905	0.566
<b>Global Average</b>	0.447	0.515	0.707	0.462

Source: the authors

Four findings are particularly noteworthy. First, the institutional capacity dimension is among the weakest in all regions except the OECD democracies of Western Europe, the Antipodes and North America. The large gap between the latter region and all other regions of the world is hardly surprising, as this is the group of countries with the strongest democracy stock. It is also hardly surprising that the countries in the Middle East and North Africa bring up the rear in all dimensions (with the exception of the political community). However, the second finding may come as a surprise. Asia and Pacific is the regions with one of the strongest resilience capacities at the level of the political community, second only to Western Europe and North America. What lies behind this are high political trust and satisfaction with democracy in many countries in the region, in particular in the less democratically governed Asian countries (cf. Global Barometer Survey, 2018). In contrast, post-communist Eastern Europe and Central Asia perform the worst here. In Latin America and the Caribbean as well as in Western Europe and North America, this area also appears to be something like the Achilles heel of democratic resilience. Third, the capacity

for resilience is also low in the dimension of political parties. Although more in-depth studies are needed, it appears that the general pattern reflects two distinct phenomena: the erosion of established patterns of political representation and party systems in the OECD world, coupled with the increase in political and particularly affective polarization and support for anti-pluralist and anti-system actors, as well as the lack of institutionalization and consolidation of political parties and systems of political representation in many young democracies (Bértoa and Enyedi, 2021; Norris and Inglehart 2019). Fourth, in most regions, democratic resilience is the strongest in the area of civil society and civic culture than in the other three dimensions. This could indicate that diagonal mechanisms of democratic resilience could have a hitherto underestimated significance, although this needs to be tested in further research.

## **(2) Resilience performance**

In this section we test more systematically whether the resilience capacity of countries is associated with a stronger resilience of democracies. As discussed before, we differentiate between three categories of democratic resilience: continuation (“onset resilience”), resistance (the “breakdown resilience”) and bounce back (“turnarounds”). In a first step, we present a descriptive analysis of the distribution of these three categories and discuss some cases. In a second step, we analyze the association between the resilience capacity index, the resilience against an autocratization onset, and the breakdown resilience of democracies. In the third step, we analyze the association between resilience capacity and the ability of weakened democracies to bounce back, that is, if different types of democratic turnarounds are more likely when the resilience capacity is high. As an additional analytical approach, we differentiate between democracies that experienced a prolonged decline in democratic qualities but bounced back and those where autocratization was not followed by democratic turnarounds. To measure onset and breakdown resilience as well as democratic turnarounds, we use the operationalization by Nord et al. (2024b) and the ERT data by Maerz et al. (2023) in V-Dem’s 14<sup>th</sup> version.

### *1. Descriptive Analysis*

Table 5 shows the distribution of autocratization outcomes and democratic turnarounds for all regime transformation episodes, which are at least one year active after 2000. Based on the dichotomous measure of democracy proposed by Boix, Miller, and Rosato (2013), version 4 and extended until 2023 by the authors, we sample 94 democracies. As mentioned above, democracies without an autocratization episode are considered having onset resilience; those democracies that

lack onset resilience but do not breakdown, are considered as having breakdown resilience; and those that experienced a democratic turnaround are considered having bounce-back resilience.

Overall, in this sample we have registered 77 autocratization episodes. From these 77 episodes, 33 episodes were democratic turnarounds, while the remaining 44 episodes did not result in a democratic turnaround (cf. Table 5). Of 44 episodes without onset resilience and without democratic turnaround, eleven resulted in a democratic breakdown. In another two cases, the regression of democratic qualities did not neither lead to democratic breakdown nor was it followed by any positive movement towards more democratic qualities. In another 13 episodes democratic qualities have been flawed enduringly (“regressed autocracies”), and another 18 episodes had censored outcome, that is, the current episode was still ongoing at the end of the coding period.

**Table 5. Overview Outcomes**

Type	Number of Episodes
Democratic breakdown	11
Democracies without breakdown	2
Regressed autocracies*	13
Censored outcomes	18
Democratic turnaround	
J-shape turnaround	10
U-shape turnaround	19
L-shaped turnaround	4
Total	77

\* Cases classified as democracies by Boix, Rosato and Miller’s restrictive democracy criteria, but as autocracies in the ERT dataset.

Of the 33 episodes in which the democratic regime proved some kind of bounce-back resilience, a total of ten episodes led to substantially higher democratic qualities (“J-shaped” turnaround). As detailed in Table 6, these countries are diverse as Pakistan, Niger, Thailand, and Nepal. In another 19 cases, the initial autocratization process was followed by the restoration of the pre-episode democratic level (“U-turn”). Examples are South Korea between 2008 and 2017, Bangladesh between 2002 and 2010, and Brazil between 2016 and 2023. Finally, four cases yielded substantially lower level of democratic qualities compared to the pre-episode levels (“L-shaped” turnarounds). This type of democratic turnaround was registered in Bolivia between 2006 and 2023, Thailand from 2013 to 2023, Tunisia 2013 to 2023, and Benin 2018 to 2023.

**Table 6. Autocratization Episodes, Democratic Turnarounds, and Outcomes**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Start Episode</b>	<b>End Episode</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Belarus	1995	2001	Democratic breakdown
Venezuela	1998	2018	Democratic breakdown
Philippines	2001	2005	Democratic breakdown
Türkiye	2005	2017	Democratic breakdown
Honduras	2006	2010	Democratic breakdown
Hungary	2006	2023	Democratic breakdown
Nicaragua	2006	2023	Democratic breakdown
India	2009	2023	Democratic breakdown
Philippines	2016	2023	Democratic breakdown
Burkina Faso	2018	2023	Democratic breakdown
El Salvador	2018	2023	Democratic breakdown
Peru	1990	2002	J-shaped turnaround
Thailand	1991	2001	J-shaped turnaround
Armenia	1993	2019	J-shaped turnaround
Niger	1999	2005	J-shaped turnaround
Pakistan	1999	2010	J-shaped turnaround
Nepal	2000	2009	J-shaped turnaround
Liberia	2003	2007	J-shaped turnaround
Madagascar	2006	2018	J-shaped turnaround
Nepal	2012	2016	J-shaped turnaround
Lesotho	2015	2023	J-shaped turnaround
Bolivia	2006	2023	L-shaped turnaround
Thailand	2013	2023	L-shaped turnaround
Tunisia	2013	2023	L-shaped turnaround
Benin	2018	2023	L-shaped turnaround
Bulgaria	2001	2018	No democratic breakdown
Slovenia	2012	2021	No democratic breakdown
Indonesia	2009	2023	Outcome censored
Ghana	2013	2023	Outcome censored
Greece	2013	2023	Outcome censored
Croatia	2013	2023	Outcome censored
Mauritius	2014	2023	Outcome censored
Botswana	2015	2023	Outcome censored
Mongolia	2015	2023	Outcome censored
Poland	2015	2023	Outcome censored
Niger	2016	2023	Outcome censored
Peru	2016	2023	Outcome censored
Senegal	2017	2023	Outcome censored
Guatemala	2018	2023	Outcome censored
Guyana	2019	2023	Outcome censored
South Korea	2019	2023	Outcome censored
Armenia	2020	2023	Outcome censored
Mexico	2020	2023	Outcome censored



<b>Country</b>	<b>Start Episode</b>	<b>End Episode</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Romania	2021	2023	Outcome censored
Ukraine	2021	2023	Outcome censored
Russia	1993	2004	Regressed autocracy
Haiti	2009	2023	Regressed autocracy
Burundi	2010	2017	Regressed autocracy
Bangladesh	2011	2018	Regressed autocracy
Egypt	2013	2014	Regressed autocracy
Cambodia	2013	2023	Regressed autocracy
Pakistan	2015	2023	Regressed autocracy
Tanzania	2015	2021	Regressed autocracy
Mali	2017	2023	Regressed autocracy
Guinea	2019	2023	Regressed autocracy
Kyrgyzstan	2019	2023	Regressed autocracy
Sudan	2019	2023	Regressed autocracy
Belarus	2020	2023	Regressed autocracy
Ukraine	1996	2007	U-shaped turnaround
Malawi	1999	2013	U-shaped turnaround
Ivory Coast	2000	2001	U-shaped turnaround
North Macedonia	2000	2003	U-shaped turnaround
Haiti	2001	2008	U-shaped turnaround
Moldova	2001	2011	U-shaped turnaround
Bangladesh	2002	2010	U-shaped turnaround
Sri Lanka	2004	2018	U-shaped turnaround
North Macedonia	2005	2023	U-shaped turnaround
Thailand	2005	2012	U-shaped turnaround
Ecuador	2007	2018	U-shaped turnaround
Mali	2007	2014	U-shaped turnaround
South Korea	2008	2017	U-shaped turnaround
Niger	2009	2012	U-shaped turnaround
Ukraine	2010	2020	U-shaped turnaround
Zambia	2010	2023	U-shaped turnaround
Moldova	2012	2021	U-shaped turnaround
Burkina Faso	2014	2016	U-shaped turnaround
Brazil	2016	2023	U-shaped turnaround

In Table 7, we calculated the average resilience capacity, the standard deviation, and minimum and maximum values across the different episode outcomes. The results show that the resilience capacity one year prior to the autocratization onset was the highest in cases of democratic breakdown and in U-shape democratic turnarounds. The lowest average democratic resilience capacity was registered in J-shaped democratic turnaround. We will address this finding below.

**Table 7. Resilience Capacity and Outcomes**

<b>Episode Outcome</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>No. Cases</b>
Democratic breakdown	0.308	0.050	0.223	0.382	11
No democratic breakdown	0.244	0.040	0.206	0.286	2
Outcome censored	0.287	0.037	0.253	0.339	18
Regressed autocracy	0.295		0.295	0.295	13
U-shaped turnaround	0.305	0.066	0.164	0.433	19
J-shaped turnaround	0.218	0.060	0.113	0.336	10
L-shaped turnaround	0.277	0.059	0.166	0.369	4

## *2. Onset and breakdown resilience and resilience capacity*

To investigate the association between our resilience capacity index, onset resilience, and breakdown resilience more systematically, we adopt the research design by Boese et al. (2021) and test if resilience capacity is associated with more onset resilience or with more breakdown resilience. Overall, our sample of 94 democracies (as sampled by the BMR dataset; see above) includes 47 autocratization onsets since 2000. Similar to Boese et al. (2021), we use a probit model with Firth’s method of bias reduction to estimate the onset resilience. Countries without onset resilience are coded as ones and democratic country-years in ongoing autocratization episodes are excluded in this onset model. To model democracies’ breakdown resilience in the second stage, we use a standard bivariate probit model with non-random sample selection. As in all selection models, the first stage models the probability that a country-year is in an autocratization episode, using the sample of 1,867 country-years. Country-years in ongoing episodes are not excluded, logically. In the second outcome stage, we estimate the probability of a democratic breakdown using the subsample of country-years that are in an ongoing autocratization episode, that is, it lacks onset resilience. The second stage outcome variable is coded as one for each episode-year in which the democracy broke down.

Beyond the ResCap Index as the main explanatory factors modelling onset and breakdown resilience, we also control for other factors. We include measures of GDP per capita and GDP

growth estimates from Fariss et al. (2023) to capture the level of economic development and the growth performance of democracies. We control for the population and the average regional electoral democracy level using a six fold geopolitical classification. To control for unobserved factors, we include a nonlinear time trend as well as regional dummies to account for regional heterogeneity. All explanatory variables, including the resilience capacity index, are lagged by one year.

Table 8 presents the results of the standard onset model estimating the onset probability in Model 1 and two-stage Heckmann results in Model 2. In additional tables in the Supplementary Appendix the results for the different resilience capacity indices were documented.

**Table 8. Main results of onset and breakdown resilience in 93 democracies since 2000.**

	Model 1	Model 2	
	Onset	First Stage	Breakdown Onset
Intercept	-77.26 *** (15.66)	-38.86* (21.54)	38.48 (28.23)
Resilience Capacity	-2.98 *** (0.83)	-5.69*** (1.61)	-10.35*** (2.89)
GDP pc log	-0.11 (0.12)	-0.04 (0.2)	0.13 (0.22)
GDP growth	0.01 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	0.06 (0.06)
Population log	0.07 (0.04)	0.09 (0.07)	0.02 (0.09)
Regional democracy levels	-0.81 (1.43)	-1.79 (1.89)	-0.7 (3.15)
Western Europe and North America	-0.01 (0.41)	0.29 (0.69)	-3.08*** (0.78)
Sub-Saharan Africa	-0.08 (0.36)	-0.11 (0.52)	0.27 (0.81)
Asia and Pacific	0.29 (0.31)	0.14 (0.52)	0.57 (0.71)
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	0.06 (0.21)	0.17 (0.37)	-0.24 (0.41)
MENA	0.21 (0.64)	0.13 (0.94)*	0.06 (1.17)
Year	1.35 *** (0.29)	0.66 (0.39)	-0.69 (0.51)
Year squared	-0.01 *** (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
AIC	388.39	1604.66	

	Model 1	Model 2	
	Onset	First Stage	Breakdown Onset
BIC	458.02		1754.03
Log Likelihood	-181.20		-775.33
Num. obs.	1565	1867	349 (27 breakdowns)

Notes. Country-clustered standard errors, standard errors in parentheses. All right-hand sided variables lagged by one year. AIC = Akaike information criterion. BIC = Bayesian information criterion. \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ .

To illustrate the substantive effects more intuitively, we simulate predicted probabilities. The plots shown in Figure 3 show how the probability of an autocratization onset varies with the resilience capacity of a country. With more resilience capacity a country's predicted probability of an autocratization onset decreases. With a resilience capacity of 0.2, which is the level of resilience capacity for Madagascar in 2005, that is one year before an autocratization onset occurred, democracies have a predicted onset probability of 5.05% (95% CI = [0.019, 0.221]) in contrast to a predicted onset probability of 0.2% (95% CI = [0.0002, 0.016]) for democracies with a resilience capacity of 0.6, which is equivalent to Finland in the 2010s.

**Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of onset resilience over different measures of resilience capacity. Estimates and 95% confidence intervals are based on simulations.**

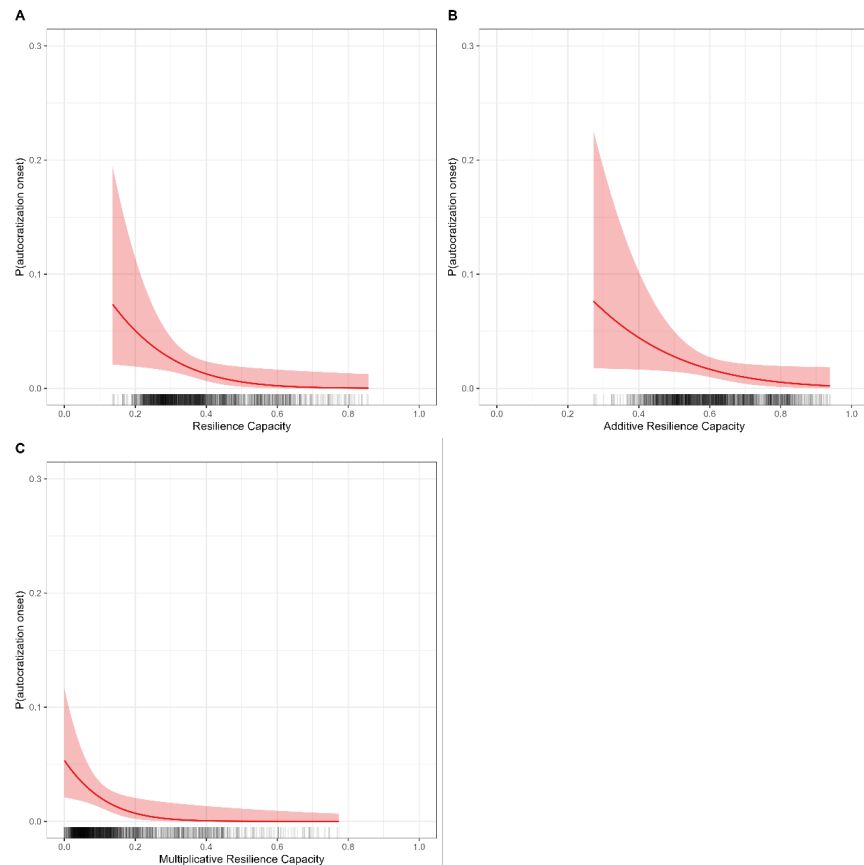
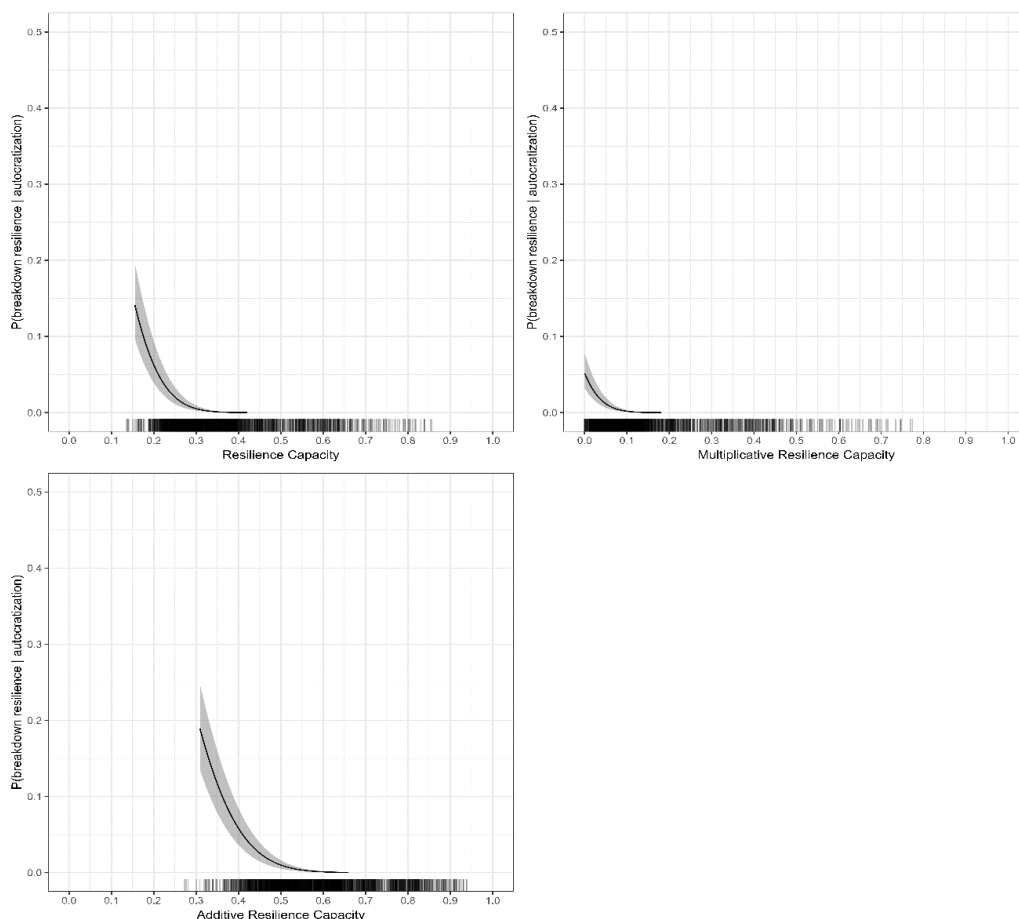


Figure 4 visualizes the second stage results of the Heckmann selection model, as presented in Model 2. In the second stage, more resilience capacity is clearly related to a lower probability of a democratic breakdown. The predicted probability is much lower for countries with lower resilience capacity. For example, with a resilience capacity of 0.2, which is equivalent to the resilience capacity of Moldova in 2005, the predicted probability of a democratic breakdown is 6.2% in a country-year. For a resilience capacity of 0.4, the predicted probability of a democratic breakdown is 0.02%. In sum, comparing Figure 4 and Figure 5 shows the importance of distinguishing empirically between different types of democratic resilience, that is onset, breakdown and, perhaps, bounce-back resilience.

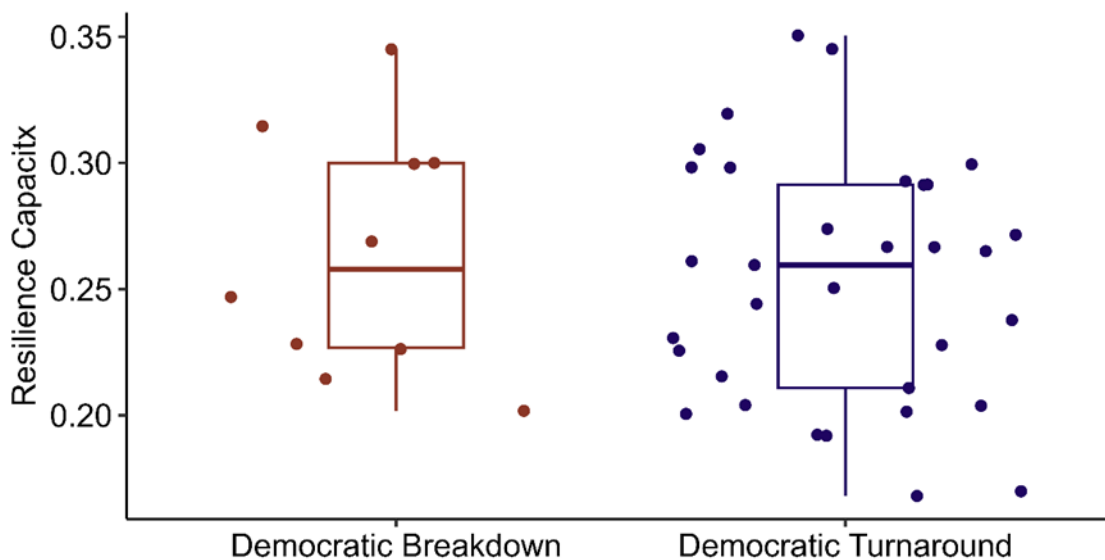
**Figure 4. Predicted probabilities of breakdown resilience different measures of resilience capacity. Estimates and 95% confidence intervals are based on simulations from the model parameters.**



### 3. Bounce-Back Resilience and Resilience Capacity

Finally, we analyze whether more resilience capacity prior to an autocratization onset increases the chances of a democratic bounce back after an initial democratic regression or democratic breakdown. As a first descriptive test, we compare the resilience capacity one year before the democratic breakdown or the democratic turnaround respectively of those country-years that are in ongoing autocratization episode (Figure 5). As we have shown before, more resilience capacity is statistically associated with more democratic resilience and a reduced probability of a democratic breakdown in an ongoing autocratization episode in the second stage. Therefore, we would also expect that countries with a democratic turnaround have a greater resilience capacity before the turnaround compared to the breakdown cases.

**Figure 5. Resilience Capacity, one year before breakdown or turnaround**

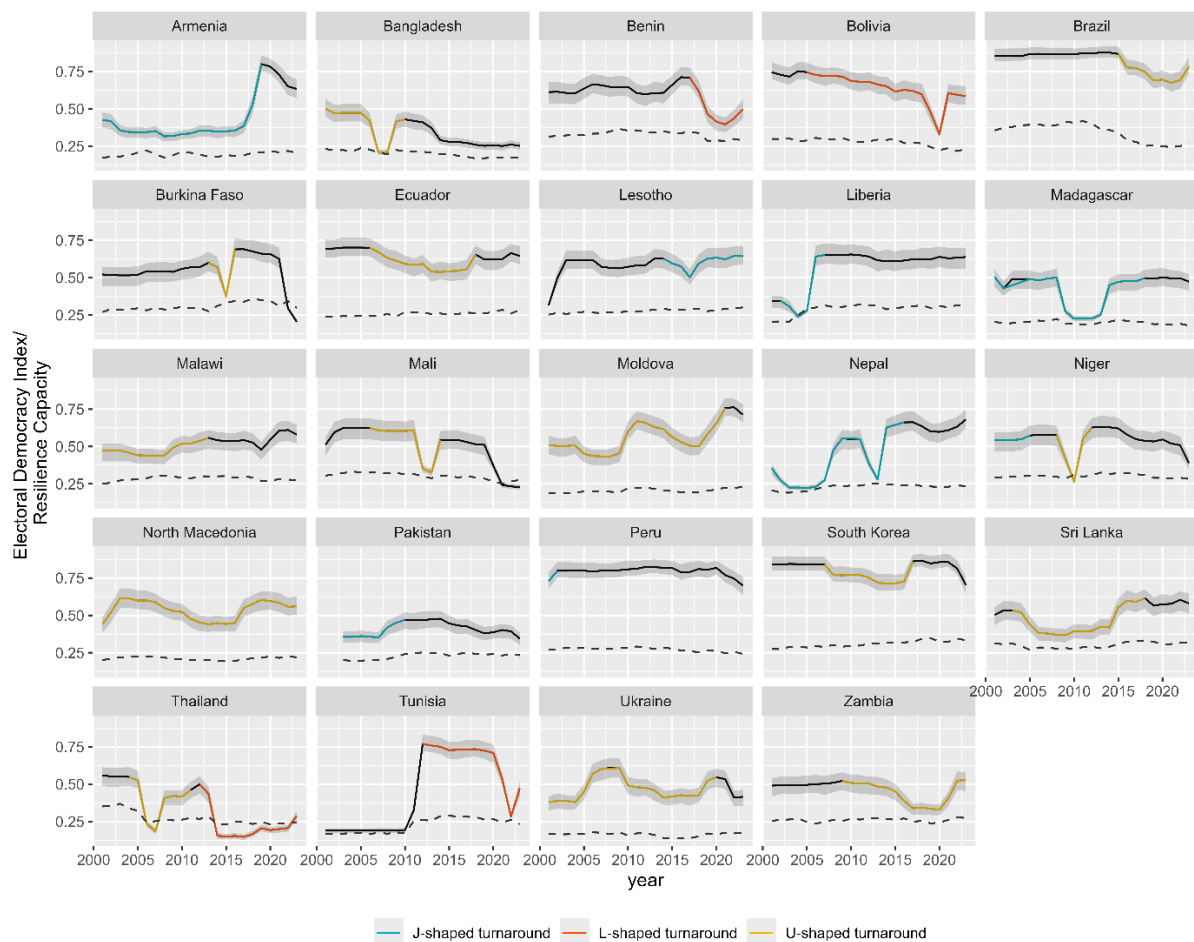


In Figure 6, we plot the country trajectories of each of the 24 countries with one or more democratic turnarounds. The figure reveals that resilience capacity was relatively low for each country in which a democracy bounced-back from a prior autocratization, which aligns with Figure 6.

While this suggest that resilience capacity as measured in this explorative study and bounce-back resilience – measured as episode of democratic turnaround – are not systematically related, a number of caveats are in order. First, the number of cases is quite small and too small for more systematic inferential statistical analysis. Therefore, the analysis is limited to some descriptive

explorations. Second, the concept of democratic turnaround may be a flawed way to operationalize and measure democratic bounce-back resilience. Third, comparing the resilience capacity one year before a democratic breakdown or a democratic turnaround respectively could be insufficient because with a one-year lag, the level of measured resilience capacity could already reflect the corrosive impact of ongoing democratic regression and autocratization. In sum, we advise that future studies develop alternative operationalizations of the concept of bounce-back resilience.

**Figure 6. Electoral Democracy Index and Resilience Capacity for every democratic turnaround case**



## 6. Conclusion

This explorative study aimed at contributing to empirical resilience research by introducing a novel conceptualization of democratic resilience and demonstrating how it could be applied in empirical research. Building upon existing contributions in interdisciplinary resilience studies as well as

democratization research we argued that in order to understanding how democracies can counter autocratization, respond to democratic backsliding and bolster existing democratic institutions, practices and processes, it is necessary to differentiate between democratic resilience as performance (the level or degree of resilience a system exhibits at a given point in time) and resilience as capacity (a set of measurable characteristics within a given political system, which influence the level of democratic resilience). Based on the extant literature, we proposed measures for three stages of democratic resilience and also indicators for resilience capacity and developed an index of resilience capacity. The proposed measures and indicators should not be taken as final; to be clear, it is an initial and explorative attempt to quantify democratic resilience as performance and as capacity with macro-level indicators.

Our analysis of up to 117 countries, 94 democracies and 77 episodes of autocratization in the period 2000 to 2023 produced a number findings with relevance for both academia and policy-makers and which ought to motive future research. We find that resilience capacity has a significant and substantial positive effect on both the probability that a democracy will be resilient against the onset of democratic backsliding and the breakdown of democracy. Democratic backsliding is undoubtedly real. But so is democratic resilience and while there is much to worry about democratic regression worldwide, there are also transitions in reverse direction. However, the probability that a political regime will bounce back from autocratization does not seem to be related to our indicators and dimensions of resilience capacity, though it remains to be seen if this is because of the operationalization of this type of democratic resilience, the indicators of resilience capacity or because the two phenomena are unrelated.

On these grounds, we propose four areas for expanding research into this nascent research agenda. First, expanding the temporal coverage of the empirical study, which however, will also require the production of new and better data. Second, the indicators identified as empirical referents of the concept of resilience capacity are far from perfect. Therefore, a constructive dialogue and search for more and perhaps better indicators is warranted. Third, another area of follow-up research concerns the analysis of causal mechanisms. A comprehensive understanding of democratic resilience ought to understand “how” resilience contributes to the continuation, improvement, or recovery of democracy from stress, crisis or shock. Finally, it is important to strengthen the connection between research about democratic resilience and the broader agenda of interdisciplinary resilience studies. Democratic resilience certainly is an important field of research in its own right. However, it is also important for developing a better understanding of other, broader and also pressing challenges. In recent years, the world has witnessed a disturbing



surge in the frequency and intensity of natural or manmade disaster and socioeconomic crises, exacerbated by climate change and geopolitical changes. These events have left lasting impacts on communities, economies, cultural systems, and ecosystems, demanding urgent attention and comprehensive solutions. In the face of such challenges, it is of crucial importance to understand how political, especially, democratic resilience can contribute to the facilitation of effective responses and foster societal resilience.

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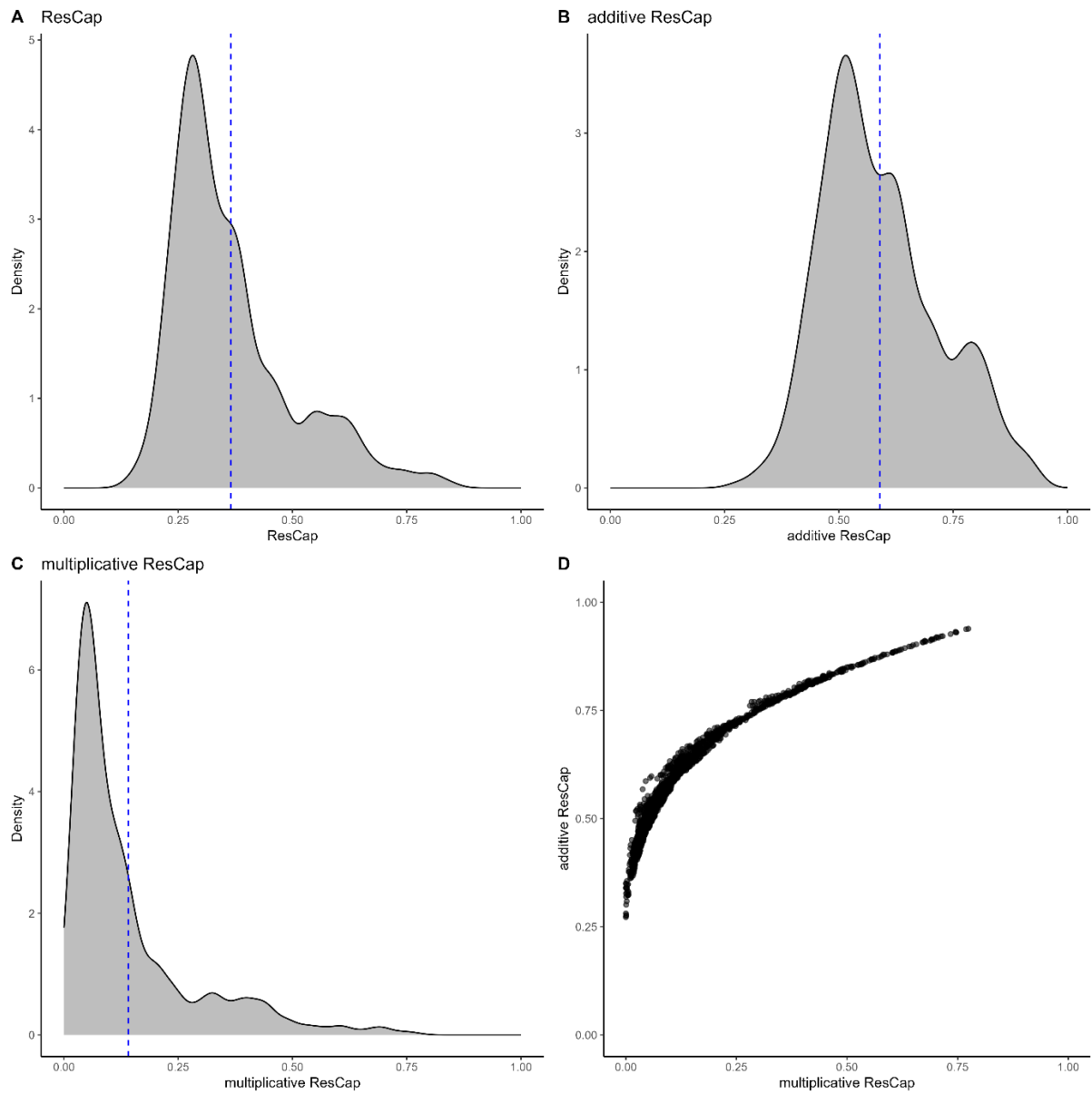
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# Appendix

## Appendix 1: Figure Concept

Figure A1. Aggregation to Resilience Capacity in Democracies



## Appendix 2: Face Validity Test

Figure A2. Country examples Countries Group A

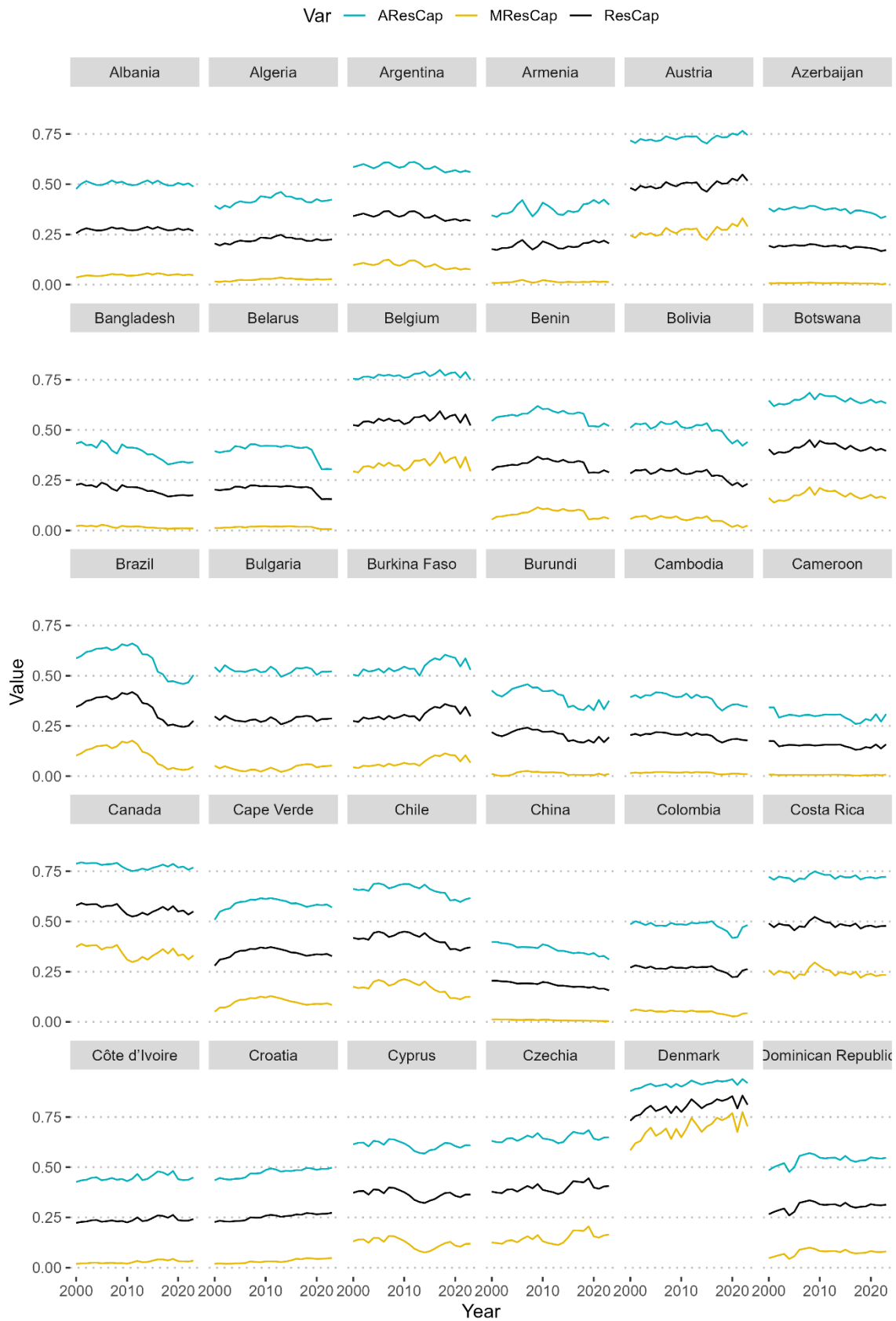




Figure A3. Country examples Countries Group B

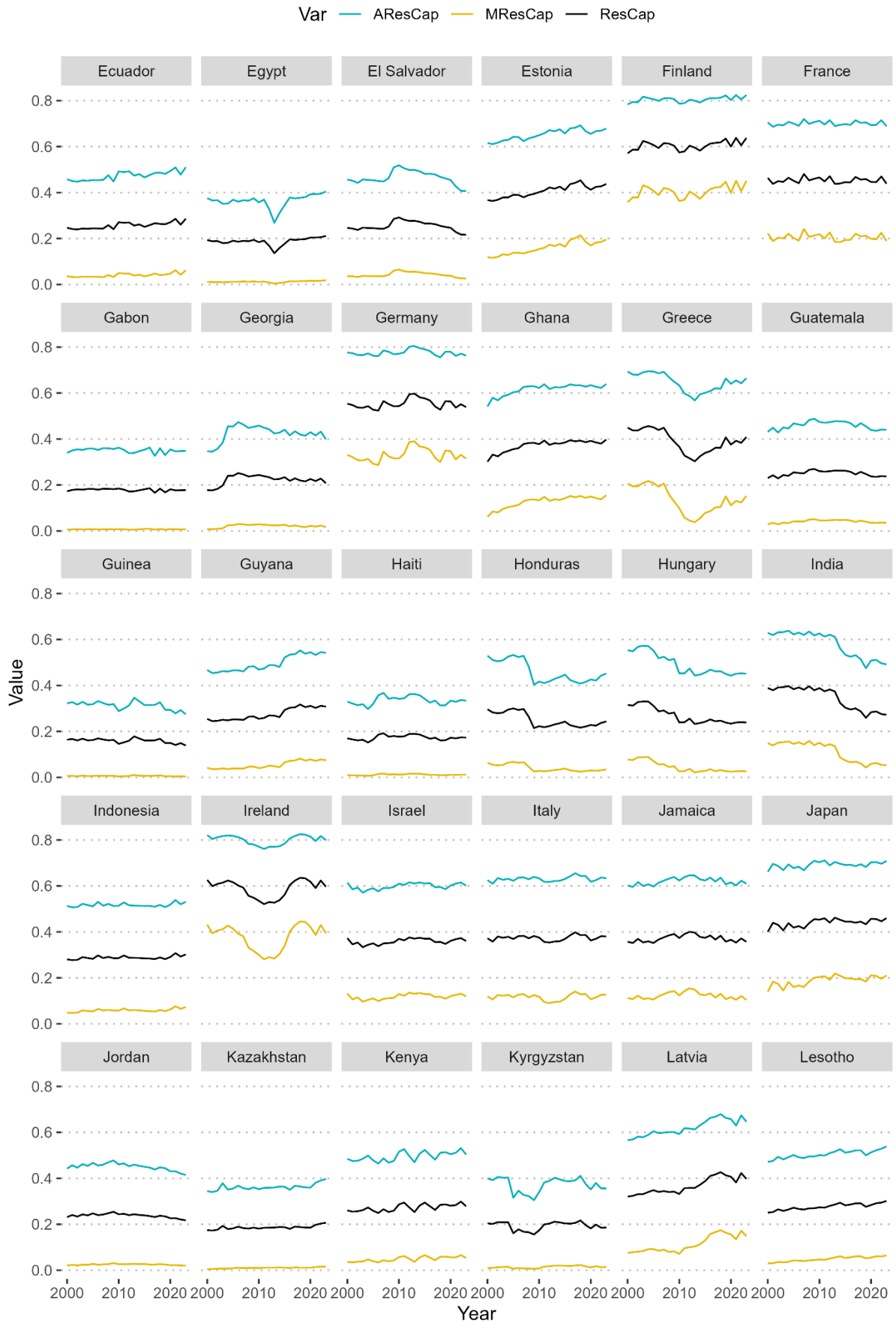


Figure A4. Country examples Countries Group C

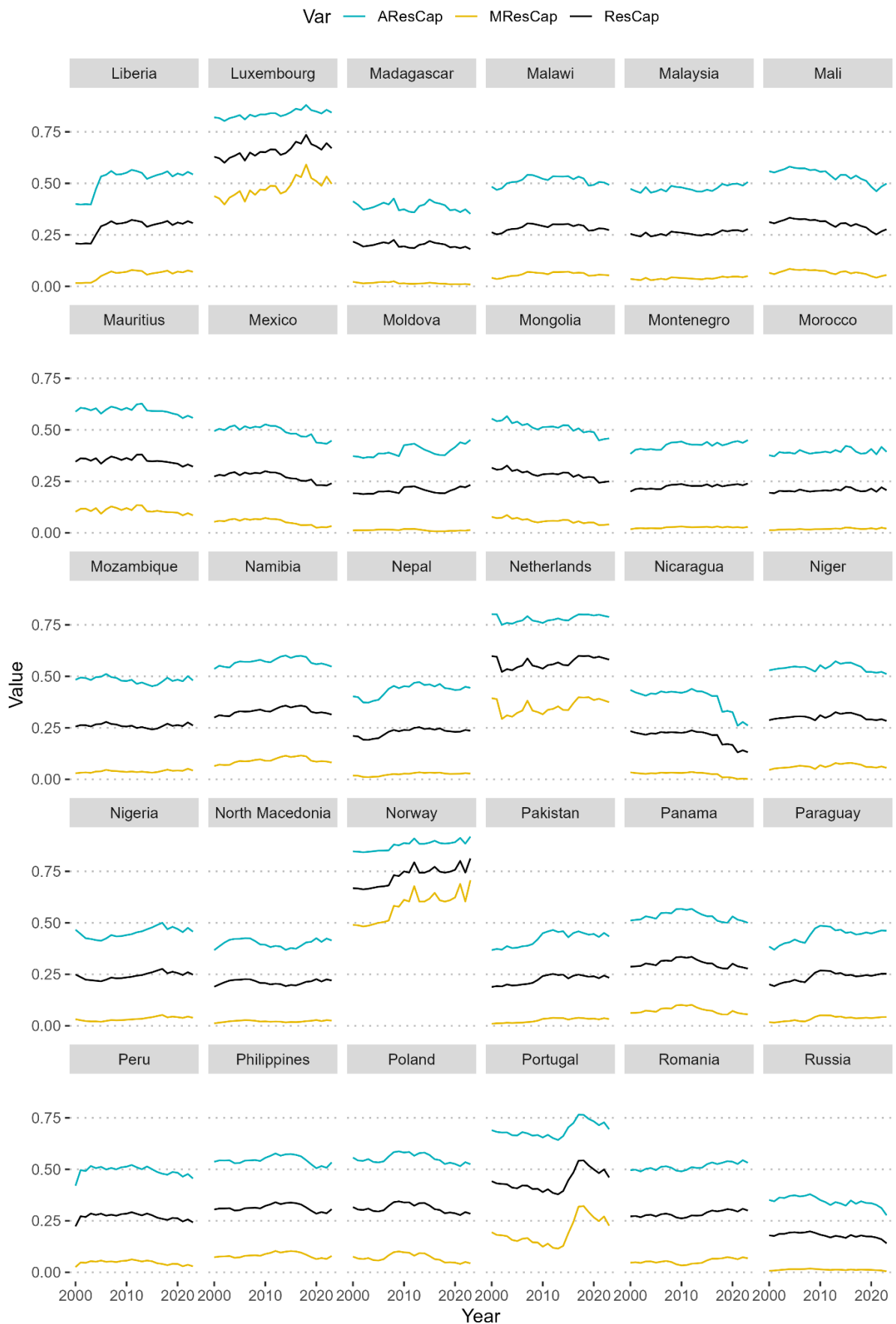
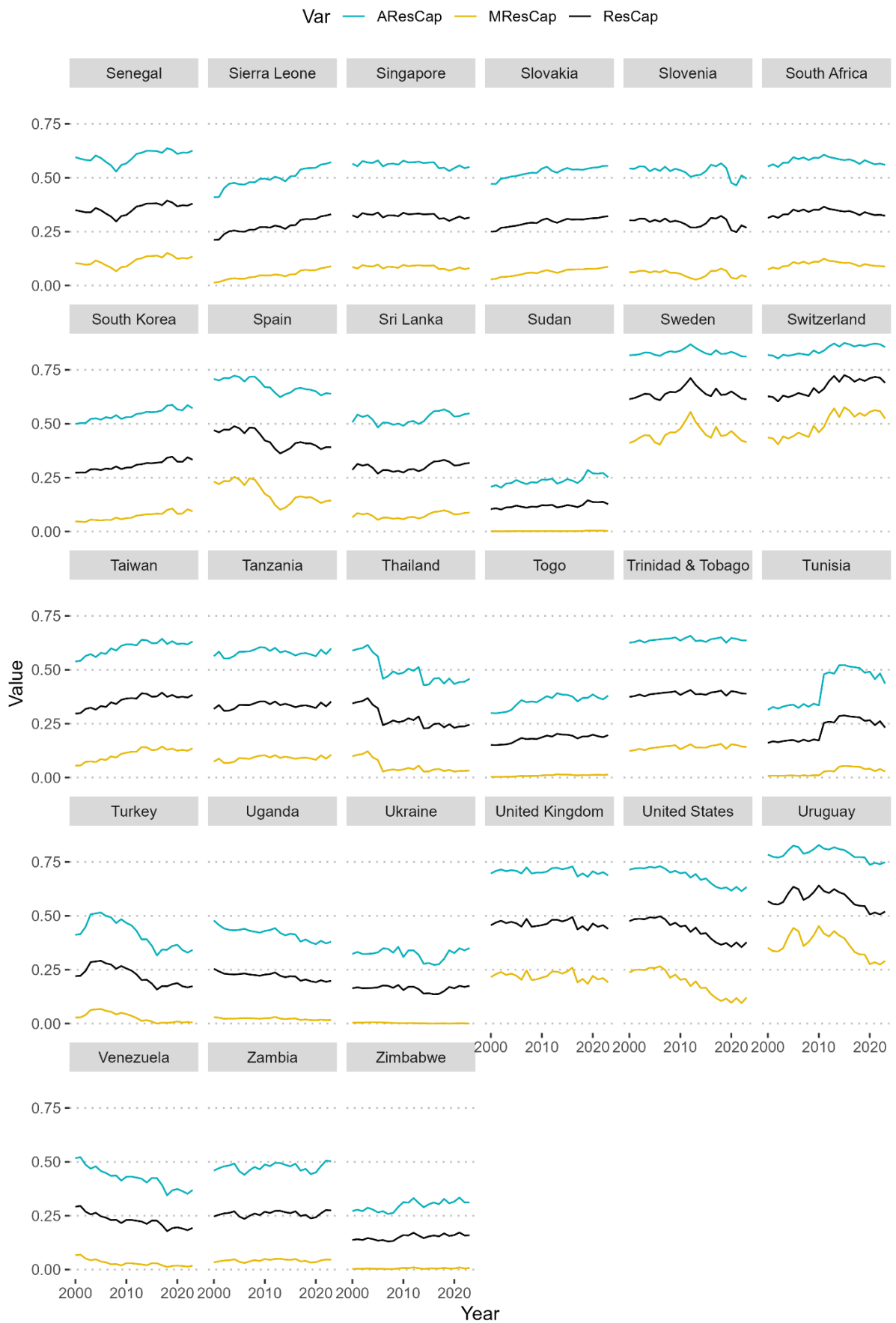


Figure A5. Country examples Countries Group D



## Appendix 3: Additional Regression Analysis

**Table A1. Predicting onset resilience with different resilience capacity as main explanatory variable**

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>
Intercept	-77.26 *** (15.66)	-76.56 *** (15.63)	-77.87 *** (15.64)
Resilience Capacity	-2.98 *** (0.83)		
Additive Resilience Capacity		-2.13 ** (0.67)	
Multiplicative Resilience Capacity			-4.20 *** (1.14)
GDP pc log	-0.11 (0.12)	-0.13 (0.13)	-0.11 (0.12)
GDP growth	0.01 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	0.02 (0.03)
Population log	0.07 (0.04)	0.07 (0.04)	0.07 (0.04)
Regional democracy levels	-0.81 (1.43)	-0.73 (1.49)	-0.81 (1.38)
Western Europe and North America	-0.01 (0.41)	-0.11 (0.42)	0.05 (0.40)
Sub-Saharan Africa	-0.08 (0.36)	-0.07 (0.38)	-0.09 (0.36)
Asia and Pacific	0.29 (0.31)	0.31 (0.32)	0.28 (0.30)
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	0.06 (0.21)	0.09 (0.22)	0.05 (0.20)
MENA	0.21 (0.64)	0.24 (0.67)	0.21 (0.63)
Year	1.35 *** (0.29)	1.34 *** (0.29)	1.35 *** (0.29)
Year squared	-0.01 *** (0.00)	-0.01 *** (0.00)	-0.01 *** (0.00)
AIC	388.39	389.75	386.88
BIC	458.02	459.37	456.50
Log Likelihood	-181.20	-181.88	-180.44
Deviance	362.39	363.75	360.88
Num. obs.	1565	1565	1565

Notes. Country-clustered standard errors, standard errors in parentheses. All right-hand sided variables lagged by one year. AIC = Akaike information criterion. BIC = Bayesian information criterion. \*\*\* p < 0.001, \*\* p < .01, \* p < .05.

**Table A2. Predicting breakdown resilience with different resilience capacity as main explanatory variable**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	First Stage	Breakdown Onset	First Stage	Breakdown Onset	First Stage	Breakdown Onset
Intercept	-38.86*	38.48	-38.89*	38.37	-38.89*	37.09
	(21.54)	(28.23)	(21.44)	(27.85)	(21.68)	(30.32)
Resilience Capacity	-5.69***	-10.35***				
	(1.61)	(2.89)				
Additive Resilience Capacity			-4.01**	-7.62***		
			(1.33)	(1.85)		
Multiplicative Resilience Capacity					-8.22***	-12.93**
					(2.33)	(4.73)
GDP pc log	-0.04	0.13	-0.08	0.14	-0.04	0.02
	(0.2)	(0.22)	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.19)	(0.21)
GDP growth	0.01	0.06	0.01	0.06	0.02	0.05
	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.06)
Population log	0.09	0.02	0.09	0.02	0.09	0.02
	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.09)
Regional democracy levels	-1.79	-0.7	-1.83	-0.86	-1.69	-0.39
	(1.89)	(3.15)	(1.92)	(3.12)	(1.86)	(3.12)
Western Europe and North America	0.29	-3.08***	0.19	-3.0***	0.3	-3.37***
	(0.69)	(0.78)	(0.68)	(0.75)	(0.69)	(0.78)
Subsaharan Africa	-0.11	0.27	-0.16	0.22	-0.1	0.24
	(0.52)	(0.81)	(0.52)	(0.78)	(0.51)	(0.81)
Asia and Pacific	0.14	0.57	0.13	0.54	0.15	0.6
	(0.52)	(0.71)	(0.53)	(0.71)	(0.36)	(0.69)
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	0.17	-0.24	0.21	-0.24	0.15	-0.12
	(0.37)	(0.41)	(0.37)	(0.4)	(0.35)	(0.44)
MENA	0.13	0.06	0.13	-0.01	0.17	0.28
	(0.94)	(1.17)	(0.94)	(1.17)	(0.93)	(1.17)
Year	0.66	-0.69	0.67	-0.66	0.64	-0.7
	(0.39)	(0.51)	(0.39)	(0.51)	(0.39)	(0.55)
Year squared	-0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
AIC	1604.66		1618.42		1592.47	
BIC	1754.03		1767.78		1741.84	
Log Likelihood	-775.33		-782.21		-769.24	
Num. obs.	1867	349	1867	349	1867	349
		(27 breakdowns)		(27 breakdowns)		(27 breakdowns)

Notes. Country-clustered standard errors, standard errors in parentheses. All right-hand sided variables lagged by one year. AIC = Akaike information criterion. BIC = Bayesian information criterion. \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ .

**Table A3. Predicting onset resilience with different dimensions of resilience capacity as main explanatory variables**

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 4</b>	<b>Model 5</b>
Intercept	-75.52 *** (15.18)	-77.25 *** (15.59)	-71.32 *** (15.22)	-75.15 *** (15.49)	-73.82 *** (15.25)
Institutional Dimension	-0.77 (0.48)				0.86 (0.61)
Political Parties Dimension		-2.14 *** (0.45)			-2.23 *** (0.49)
Civil society and civic culture Dimension			-0.96 (0.50)		-0.84 (0.57)
Political Community Dimension				-0.83 (0.54)	-0.78 (0.53)
GDP pc log	-0.20 (0.13)	-0.15 (0.11)	-0.25 * (0.12)	-0.28 * (0.11)	-0.19 (0.11)
GDP growth	0.00 (0.04)	-0.00 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)
Population log	0.09 * (0.04)	0.07 (0.04)	0.08 * (0.04)	0.07 (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)
Regional democracy levels	-0.47 (1.58)	0.05 (1.46)	0.20 (1.71)	-1.16 (1.61)	-0.13 (1.52)
Western Europe and North America	-0.26 (0.44)	-0.40 (0.42)	-0.42 (0.45)	-0.15 (0.44)	-0.33 (0.44)
Subsaharan Africa	-0.21 (0.40)	0.07 (0.39)	0.04 (0.46)	-0.24 (0.39)	0.25 (0.39)
Asia and Pacific	0.28 (0.34)	0.49 (0.34)	0.47 (0.37)	0.25 (0.34)	0.60 (0.32)
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	0.18 (0.22)	0.29 (0.20)	0.35 (0.21)	0.08 (0.23)	0.27 (0.21)
MENA	0.41 (0.69)	0.50 (0.66)	0.61 (0.72)	0.17 (0.71)	0.38 (0.66)
Year	1.30 *** (0.28)	1.35 *** (0.29)	1.23 *** (0.28)	1.31 *** (0.29)	1.31 *** (0.29)
Year squared	-0.01 *** (0.00)	-0.01 *** (0.00)	-0.01 *** (0.00)	-0.01 *** (0.00)	-0.01 *** (0.00)
AIC	392.85	380.92	392.07	392.55	384.83
BIC	462.47	450.54	461.69	462.17	470.52
Log Likelihood	-183.42	-177.46	-183.03	-183.27	-176.42
Deviance	366.85	354.92	366.07	366.55	352.83
Num. obs.	1565	1565	1565	1565	1565

Notes. Country-clustered standard errors, standard errors in parentheses. All right-hand sided variables lagged by one year. AIC = Akaike information criterion. BIC = Bayesian information criterion. \*\*\* p < 0.001, \*\* p < .01, \* p < .05.