

Varieties of contemporary democratic breakdown and regression: A comparative analysis

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Abstract. The goal of this article is to understand which combinations of explanatory conditions account for the qualitative differences within forms of democratic breakdown (i.e., transition *from* democracy to a hybrid or authoritarian regime) and democratic regression (i.e., transition *within* democracy through a loss of democratic quality). The analysis focuses particularly on the specific features of those processes of change ending up with a transition from democratic rule, compared to those producing a simple loss of democratic quality within the democratic regime. Applying two-step fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA), the study aims to integrate different types of explanatory factors, offering a fresh and comprehensive perspective on this phenomenon.

Keywords: democratic breakdown; democratic regression; regime change; qualitative comparative analysis (QCA)

Introduction

The goal of this article is to understand which combinations of explanatory conditions account for the qualitative differences within forms of democratic breakdown (i.e., transition *from* democracy to a hybrid or authoritarian regime) and democratic regression (i.e., transition *within* democracy through a loss of democratic quality). These processes deserve to be analysed independently of their counterpart democratisation for at least three reasons. First, the absence of factors that promote democratic development does not necessarily imply democratic regression or breakdown. The causal asymmetry between these processes means that complex configurations of *different* factors must be used in order to effectively explain both processes, as has been highlighted in the literature (Kitschelt 1992; Mahoney & Snyder 1994; Møller & Skaaning 2012). A separate analysis of democratic regression therefore becomes necessary.

Second, democratic regression as an empirical phenomenon does exist and is significant. Following the initial studies on the transition process which, especially in the early 1990s and in the wake of the end of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, theorised the progressive and uncontested spread of democracy at the global level, the analyses became more realistic regarding the difficulties of the democratisation process during the third wave. In fact, the empirical reality has shown that major obstacles remain to the diffusion of democracy, and that the risk of a regression or breakdown in established or newly democratic countries has increased in recent times. As pointed out by Diamond (2008), the regression and breakdown of democracy has been occurring on a regular basis over the past few decades, especially in newly democratic countries, but also in several established democracies. Moreover, during the last few years, there has been an increase in

the cases of democratic backsliding (see Diamond 2008), involving paradigmatic countries such as Venezuela, Thailand and Pakistan.¹

Third, to date, there has not yet been a comprehensive analysis or explanation of the phenomenon of democratic regression and breakdown. This article aims to fill this gap. There is a growing need to survey the literature on this topic, which, although still underdeveloped, already encompasses relevant studies that employ different theoretical and methodological approaches and focuses on different geographical areas or different explanatory factors. Ultimately, the goal is to provide a comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of the factors accounting for a regime change *from* democracy (i.e., democratic breakdown).

The research question can be formulated as follows: which factors account for the qualitative differences between democratic breakdown and democratic regression? The analysis will focus particularly on the specific features of those processes of change ending up with a transition *from* democratic rule, compared to those producing a simple loss of democratic quality *within* the democratic regime. Applying fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA), this study aims to integrate different types of explanatory factors, offering a fresh and comprehensive perspective on this phenomenon. As we will detail further below, QCA was chosen because of its ability to deal with configurational forms of explanation, which make it possible to include equifinal and conjunctural concepts of causality, as well as because of its predominantly case-oriented nature.

The article is organised as follows. It begins with the analysis of the literature, highlighting the lack of strong theories on democratic regression and breakdown. Thereafter, the article presents a differentiation between the context and proximate factors as an appropriate analytical strategy, before moving on to justify the choice of fsQCA and introduce the calibration process. Finally, the results of the analysis are presented and there is discussion of the study's contribution to the existing literature, while referring to several illustrative cases. The findings show the importance of the presence of mutually reinforcing inequalities as a contextual condition favouring democratic breakdown, and particularly highlight the role of crisis as a triggering factor for the process and the ambiguous role played by the opposition forces, formalising two different models of democratic breakdown.

Explaining democratic regression and breakdown: A promising but fragmented literature

In this section, we consider only those analyses that explicitly address democratic regression and breakdown. Consequently, and because of the asymmetry that exists between democratisation and its opposite, studies on the transition to democracy or the stability of democratic regimes are not taken into account since this article is based on the idea that the hypotheses and explanatory factors proposed in the literature on democratisation do not necessarily serve the same function in explaining democratic regression and breakdown (Kitschelt 1992; Mahoney & Snyder 1994; Møeller & Skaaning 2012). A separate analysis of the reverse process is therefore required.

Democratic regression and breakdown are growing topics in the literature. However, the existing contributions are deeply fragmented. The first clear division lies between the large number of studies devoted to the so-called two 'reverse waves' of democratisation – namely the interwar and the mid-1950s/mid-1970s periods – and the lack of studies on

the contemporary period (i.e., from the 1970s). The first and second reverse waves are especially suitable for a comparative analysis since they offer several cases in relatively homogeneous contexts. Several scholars have focused specifically on Europe (Luebbert 1991; Ertmann 1998; Berg-Schlosser & Mitchell 2000, 2002; Capocchia 2005; Møller et al. 2015, 2016) and some on Latin America (Stephens 1989; Cohen 1994; Mainwaring & Perez Linan 2014), while others have compared these two regions (Linz & Stepan 1978; Rueschemeyer et al. 1992; Bermeo 2003). Taken together, these studies provide a complete picture of the regression and breakdown of the democratic regimes in Europe between the two world wars and in Latin America after the Second World War.

Moving our focus to democratic regression and breakdown following the beginning of the third wave of democratisation, there is a lack of comprehensive comparative analyses. Despite some remarkable examples of (comparative) country case studies on military and one-party regimes (Brooker 2000), postcommunist countries (Fish 2001; Erdmann & Kneuer 2007; Bunce et al. 2010), Africa (Tusalem & Morrison 2013), Southeast Asia (Slater et al. 2014), the whole world (Kapstein & Converse 2008), the impact of independent judiciary (Diskin et al. 2005; Gibler & Randazzo 2011), and inequality (Houle 2009), the literature is largely fragmented, also due to the absence of a clear and identifiable 'third reverse wave'. Unlike before, scholars are now confronted by several cases of regression and breakdown in different parts of the world, which renders a sound comparison difficult. The gap is only partially filled by those studies that tend to be based on a large quantitative dataset and seeking to explain the phenomenon from a global and historical perspective (Przeworski et al. 2000; Pevehouse 2002; Boix & Stokes 2003; Slater et al. 2014; Acemoglu & Robinson 2006; Gleditsch & Ward 2006). Our article aims to address this gap by undertaking a comparative analysis of the common patterns of democratic regression and breakdown across different regions and cultural areas.

A second division in the literature concerns the theoretical approach and the objectives of the explanation: we can distinguish between approaches identifying the *conditions* for democratic regression and breakdown and analyses of the *processes* which primarily focus on the role and strategies of the actors. In the former approach, scholars have pointed out many different factors in their explanatory models: a first tradition focused on *economic conditions* (Lipset 1959; Przeworski et al. 2000; Boix & Stokes 2003), emphasising the link between economic development and democratisation or democratic stability. However, this does not necessarily provide evidence regarding the causes of democratic regression and breakdown. Several scholars in this field converge on the importance of macroeconomic performance (Gasiorowski 1995; Berg-Schlosser & Mitchell 2000, 2002; Møller et al. 2015) for the likelihood of democratic regression and breakdown, while other studies explicitly emphasise its links with unequal wealth distribution (Boix 2003, and the response by Haggard & Kaufman 2012; Acemoglu & Robinson 2006; Kapstein & Converse 2008; Houle 2009; Slater et al. 2014). In general, the link between socioeconomic factors and democracy has been most frequently tested concerning democratisation or the stability of the democratic regime, but less regarding recent processes of democratic regression and breakdown.

A second tradition has instead favoured *political and institutional factors*, such as the form of government, the concentration of executive power, institutional checks and balances, the party system, the distribution of power and the institutional balance. This

latter, central perspective highlights why an excessive concentration of executive power constitutes a risk factor for democratic stability and a possible trigger of democratic regression and breakdown. Several empirical analyses have been conducted with regard to this phenomenon, including Berg-Schlosser and Mitchell (2000) on the interwar period, and Fish (2001, 2006) on the role of constitutional engineering and ‘superpresidentialism’ in postcommunist countries. Similarly, Svulik (2015) examined incumbent takeovers or *coups d’état* (see also Bermeo 2016) from 1945 to 1990. The central insight is that the presence of a strong government facing little control may be a key factor for regression and breakdown.

Another institutional element is related to the concept of ‘democratic consolidation’ (Huntington 1991; Linz & Stepan 1996; O’Donnell 1996; Schedler 1998; Munck 2001; Morlino 2011; Tomini 2015) and involves the construction of solid links between the democratic institutions and society, both in terms of legitimacy and the effective functioning of the representative channels, and the match between the institutional distribution of power and the degree of pluralism in society (Lijphart 1999; Erdmann 2007; Schneider 2009). Although the number of studies devoted to this process is extremely vast, the link between consolidation and democratic regression and breakdown has not yet been analysed in depth. In their study on African states, Slater et al. (2014) showed how weak, unconsolidated democracies are more likely to backslide (see also Svulik 2015; Goldstone et al. 2010).

A third institutional element is related to the party system. A first factor is the characteristics of the party system, particularly the fragmentation of the political offer and the number of effective parties (Sartori 1994; Linz & Stepan 1996; Schneider 2009; Kneuer 2007) that may also illustrate the level of instability of the political system. Furthermore, the presence of a dominant party system may be an element of stability in the event of the rise of new political parties or during a crisis. As a second factor, the importance of the stability of the party system for the overall democratic regime has been underlined (Mainwaring & Scully 1995; Seawright 2012; Deschouwer et al. 1996; Bull & Rhodes 1997). The rationale behind this is that any destabilisation of the system, due to the emergence of new political actors or to the collapse of the previous parties that were central to the political system, or even to a radical change of all the main political actors, is a decisive trigger for democratic regression and breakdown.

The third tradition focuses on *social factors*, following Moore (1966), which analyses the working class (Luebbert 1991; Rueschemeyer et al. 1992) or the peasantry (Huntington 1968; Ertmann 1998). However, these studies offer limited generalisations outside the respective cultural/political regions and the analysed timeframe (see also Lust & Waldner 2015). Of special interest here, is the presence of social and ethno-linguistic cleavages in democratic societies (Rabuska & Shepsle 1972; Bates 1974; Lijphart 1999; Diskin et al. 2005; Tusalem & Morrison 2013) which may provide a basis for political instability and social conflicts and thus be conducive to democratic regression and breakdown.

Finally, a last tradition looks at *international conditions*. Møller et al. (2016) explored this factor with regard to interwar democratic regression and breakdown, while Bunce et al. (2010) looked at Eastern European countries and Stefes and Sehring (2007) former Soviet republics in the Caucasus. From the perspective of diffusion processes, Gleditsch and Ward (2006) show how the presence of democratic neighbours decreases the probability of democratic regression and breakdown.

After discussing the literature on the conditions for regression and breakdown, we turn to the analysis of the processes. With regard to this, scholars have adopted a strategic approach. This more recent perspective is linked to the contributions to democratisation studies by scholars such as Rustow, Linz, Stepan, Schmitter and O'Donnell during the 1970s and 1980s. At that time, the focus moved from the structural pre-conditions of democratisation to the role of the actors and their strategies within the process. Linz (1978) was probably the first to address this systematically with regard to democratic regression and breakdown, laying special emphasis on the role of the actors who are capable of steering the process either in favour of or against the stability of democracy, independently of structural constraints. Although this constitutes an important starting point, it has been criticised for its inconsistent and vague use of certain concepts, and for the difficulty related to empirically testing the hypotheses (Coppedge 2012; Lust & Waldner 2015).

Subsequently, different hypotheses on the role of the actors in a democratic regression and breakdown process were developed. Bermeo (2003) identified the importance of the choices of the elites and the relationship between the elites and the citizens. Capoccia (2005) analysed the role of the political parties and the process of the formation of political coalitions for or against democracy. Cohen (1994) examined the strategies of the political actors in Latin America and the consequences of this regarding the stability of the political regime. Fish (2001, 2006) combined his structural analysis of the conditions of regression and breakdown with a study of the strategies of presidents and prime ministers.

Moving from the analysis of the actors' strategies to that of their perceptions and values, Brooker (2000) analyses the origins of military regimes and one-party dictatorships, pointing to the role of authoritarian culture. Mainwaring and Perez Linan (2014) show the importance of the pro- or anti-democratic normative preferences of the elite. While focusing on different aspects of political action (strategies, perceptions, values), scholars converge on one point: restricted political elites play a key role through their strategic decisions, which are often dictated by their pre-existing beliefs and commitment or opposition to democracy. More specifically, there exists clear asymmetry with respect to the process of democratisation. Whereas, next to the elites' commitment, the involvement of the highest number of citizens in democratic practices is also vital for the successful establishment of a democratic regime, the reverse process is primarily based on the rejection of democratic practices by elite actors. Also, as evidenced by Tilly (2007), democratisation requires more time than democratic regression and breakdown: in democratisation processes, the progressive involvement of an increasing number of spheres of society and the learning of democratic practices by the citizens and the elites often takes a considerable length of time. In regression and breakdown processes, meanwhile, the unilateral decision of the elite to withdraw from democratic practices can take place in a relatively short space of time.

In brief, we are faced with an empirically, theoretically and methodologically fragmented literature. The studies on democratic regression and breakdown have focused on *conditions* or *processes*, but rarely on both. Structural explanations refer to economic crises or low economic performance, weak or inappropriate institutional design, ethnic tensions, a lack of legitimacy and international influence. Agency factors focus on public opinion and elite preferences, elite (mis)behaviour, disloyalty toward democracy at the mass and elite levels, and the role of the military or external actors. This leaves us with the insight that strong multicausality, where combinations of various factors imply (often alternatively to one

another) the outcome, is a central feature of democratic regression and breakdown that makes it impossible to provide a comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon based on a single independent variable or a set of such (see the concluding remarks of Berg-Schlosser & Mitchell 2000). At the same time, there exists relative agreement that the decisions of the political leaders and parties might play the most important role in the processes of regression and breakdown.

Moreover, the literature highlights different intensities of the phenomenon: negative changes *of* regime that produce a democratic breakdown to (different types of) non-democratic regime, or democratic regression *within* the democratic regime which result in a lower quality of democracy. We will build on this distinction in order to show how these processes differ in terms of causation.

This article aims to fill these gaps through undertaking a comparative analysis that also includes regions other than Western Europe and Latin America, covering processes of democratic regression since the beginning of the third wave of democratisation, and making use of *combinations of conditions*. This also sets the basis for subsequent in-depth analyses. Therefore, we study the conditions prior to the process in order to provide an empirical basis for a future analysis of individual cases, which will consider the actors' role in greater depth.

Combining the contextual and proximate conditions for democratic breakdown

The lack of strong, comprehensive theorisation on democratic regression and breakdown justifies the choice of an inductive approach for the selection of the conditions. The examination of the existing studies allows, in fact, makes it possible to highlight some of the conditions that have been frequently used in order to include them within a consistent analytical framework. For this purpose, we acknowledge that the study of democratic regression and breakdown should consider a plurality of explanatory factors using an integrative approach, following Mahoney and Snyder (1994). We therefore adopt a funnel research strategy, assuming that an explanation can only be achieved by first analysing the contextual conditions for democratic regression and breakdown and then the proximate factors which should be sufficient for the outcome. In this perspective, we combine a mainly structuralist approach with certain elements related to short-term changes, adding a more dynamic perspective to the analysis.

We will combine this strategy of differentiating two qualities of explanatory factors with qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) which, as we will detail below, identifies explanatory alternatives (equifinality) of complex configurations of conditions (conjunctural causation). Assuming such complex causal paths, it is difficult to formulate *a priori* clear hypotheses in QCA regarding exactly how these paths will be composed. However, QCA is nevertheless assumption-driven. Already the choice of conditions goes back to the claim that this condition is part of the solution formula.²

Before discussing the conditions, we must define our conceptualisation of our *explanandum* – namely democratic breakdown. Despite the growing literature on this phenomenon (albeit with different labels), there is still no shared definition and, surprisingly, there have been few explicit attempts to find one. Bermeo (2016: 2) generally defines 'democratic backsliding' as 'the state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain an existing democracy'. Lust and Waldner (2015: 3) call it a

‘change that negatively affect competitive elections, liberties, and accountability’. We do not aim to provide an extensive conceptual discussion here and rely therefore on a pluralist understanding of democracy in a Dahlian perspective as the starting point for our conceptualisation of democratic breakdown. We see it as a reduction in the two fundamental dimensions of democracy: contestation and inclusiveness (see also Coppedge et al. 2008).

Moreover, due to our interest in understanding the qualitative differences between democratic regression and democratic breakdown, we have built on the simple but effective distinction proposed by Erdmann (2007) between ‘loss of quality’ (a negative process concerning democracy and resulting in a change *within* a democratic regime), ‘hybridisation’ (a change *from* a democratic *to* a hybrid regime) and ‘breakdown of democracy’ (a change *from* a democratic *to* an authoritarian regime). We adopt this perspective and also adopt the Freedom of the World index by Freedom House (FH). Despite its limitations, this index offers the advantage of precisely mirroring this tripartite division between ‘loss of quality’, ‘hybridisation’ and ‘breakdown’ (see Munck & Verkuilen 2002; Coppedge et al. 2016).³ The normative underlying conceptualisation of democracy leans explicitly towards liberal and procedural democracy, through a universalist conception of the values of freedom and the importance of the implementation of civil and political rights. As highlighted in the literature, the FH index has been extensively employed as a synonym for procedural democracy (Munck & Verkuilen 2002; Coppedge et al. 2008, 2016). In addition to the fact that it fits with our tripartite conceptualisation, it also provides detailed annual reports on all cases that explain the reasons for the changes and make it possible to identify small variations from year to year. This fits with the case-oriented methodology used in this article, which requires an in-depth knowledge of the cases. The index covers the period 1973–2014, making annual assessments of political rights and civil liberties on a scale from ‘1’ (most free) to ‘7’ (least free), where political regimes are classified as ‘free’ (between 1 and 2.5), ‘partly free’ (2.51–5.5) or ‘not free’ (5.51–7). This allows us to draw a distinction between democratic regimes and hybrid or authoritarian regimes.

Regarding the explanatory factors, we propose a distinction between *contextual* and *proximate* conditions. As far as the contextual conditions are concerned, two economic conditions, two political conditions, one social condition and a final condition related to the international context are considered, each of which is related to a specific hypothesis proposed in the literature (see above). The two economic conditions are *economic development* (C1: DEVELO), assessed through GDP per capita, and *economic inequality* (C2: INEQUA), based on income distribution. The two political conditions are the type of *party system* (C3: PARTYS), and here in particular the degree of fragmentation of the political offer, and the *duration of democracy* (C4: DURDEM) as a proxy for the consolidation of the democratic regime. The social condition is *ethnolinguistic fractionalisation* (C5: ETHNOF). Finally, there is a condition regarding *the external context* (C6: CONTEX), pointing to the diffusion of democracy across the neighbouring countries. The rationale is that a regional context in which democracy is common and widespread contributes to the internal stability of each specific democratic regime.

Regarding the proximate conditions, we again take the available literature into account and formulate one condition on executive power, one on the party system and one on the social situation. They differ from the contextual conditions because they indicate *short-term* developments in the institutional, political and social dimensions, for which the actors’ roles

are included in our analysis. The first condition is the *concentration of executive power* (C7: EXECUT), indicating the level of fractionalisation of the executive power: the presence of a stronger government may render control over the executive difficult or ineffective. While this certainly correlates with the type of party system (C3), condition C7 grasps the short-term change rather than the long-term structural features of the party system. It refers to short-term executive strengthening or weakening due to electoral results or political crises, such as the rapid weakening of the Turkish executives between 1971 and 1980 (the year of the military coup) or the rapid change from a coalition government to a one-party minority government under the same bipartisan structure of political competition. Even though both C3 and C7 indicate *also* the degree of competition of the party system (and the concentration of power), the conceptualisation of democratic regression differs substantially from these conditions since it deals with, according to Dahl (1971: 2), the opportunities for citizens to '1) formulate their preferences, 2) to signify their preferences to their fellow citizens and 3) to have their preferences weighed equally in the conduct of government'.

The second condition is the *volatility of the party system* (C8: VOLATI). This is again directed towards short-term developments. Destabilisation of the system, due to the emergence of new political actors, to the collapse of the previous parties which were central to the political system, or to a radical change in all of the main political actors, is seen as a decisive factor for democratic breakdown (see Kneuer 2007).

Finally, the third proximate condition is the presence of *social instability* (C9: PROTES) in the form of strikes, demonstrations or anti-government protests, which may also occur in the short-term perspective and may trigger strong reactions by the government, again through non-democratic means. This condition is used as a proxy for the presence of a social crisis.

As becomes clear, we differentiate between structural contextual conditions that refer to one part of the literature, while we capture the more agency-oriented factors through so-called 'proximate conditions', which are shorter term and can easily be influenced, altered or instrumentalised by the actors. It is evident that agency unfolds within these structures. Thus, we opt for a design which renders it possible to identify the contexts within which agency can unfold and then to place various processes based on agency within these contexts. This will also enable us to demonstrate which forms of agency are sufficient for democratic regression in which context. Thus, such an approach not only has the analytical power to differentiate between various types of causes, but also to deal with proximate conditions in a context-sensitive manner.

Qualitative comparative analysis and the study of democratic regression and breakdown

As mentioned above, our research design takes the form of a QCA, based on the groundbreaking work of Ragin (1987, 2000, 2008; see also Schneider & Wagemann 2012). QCA is configurational in nature (Rihoux & Ragin 2009), which can be defined as a combination of conjunctural causality and equifinality (Blatter et al. 2017; Siewert & Wagemann 2017; Wagemann 2017). These aspects of causal complexity, as well as asymmetry as (partially) a consequence of it (Schneider & Wagemann 2012: 81ff), stem from the fact that QCA is based on set theory rather than linear algebra, as most standard statistical techniques are

(Goertz & Mahoney 2012). This is ideal for our research question since we assume regression and breakdown processes to be the results of alternative (= equifinality) combinations of factors (= conjunctural causation) which are not simply the negative mirror image of the explanation of democratisation processes (= asymmetry).

Furthermore, we implement our thoughts on the differentiation between context conditions (= structure) and shorter term aspects (= agency-related) with an established particular tool of QCA – namely the so-called ‘two-step approach’ (Schneider & Wagemann 2006; Schneider 2009). Appropriately for our theoretical model, the two-step approach distinguishes between remote and proximate conditions. Remote conditions are more distant from the outcome, no matter whether distance is defined in terms of time, space or causal immediateness; Schneider and Wagemann (2012) also call them ‘outcome-enabling conditions’. By contrast, proximate conditions operate more closely to the outcome. As its name indicates, this analytical method consists of two steps: the analysis of the remote conditions is purposefully underspecified (i.e., it only serves as an approximate identification of environments). The final causal argument is then made subsequently, when, in the second step, the proximate conditions are analysed together with those combinations of remote factors for the breakdown of democracy which had been identified as vital contexts in the first step. A further positive side effect of the two-step approach is that a higher number of causal conditions can be used than is the case when using the traditional one-step procedure. While there is no definite ‘perfect fit’ of the number of conditions and the number of cases in QCA (Marx 2010), the number of logically possible combinations of conditions usually exceeds that of the empirically realised combinations (for this phenomenon of ‘limited diversity’, see Schneider & Wagemann 2012: Chapter 6). When applying a two-step approach, the negative effects of this phenomenon decrease dramatically (Schneider & Wagemann 2006: 762) since the conditions are organised into two separate analyses that are then both characterised by lower numbers of conditions and thus theoretically possible combinations.

While QCA produces a standardised solution formula, one of its basic roles is to link the formal results back to the individual cases, which can be confirming, contradictory, non-explained or irrelevant (Schneider & Wagemann 2012). While various possibilities exist regarding how case studies can be pursued following a QCA (Schneider & Rohlfing 2013), we do not invest in such comparisons (which would require lengthy, separate, in-depth studies), but do illustrate our analysis with case details.

Case selection is, of course, crucial. When analysing democratic regression and breakdown, countries showing a negative trend in democratic performance constitute the target population, thereby logically excluding all countries which do not show any negative changes in their democracy. The unit of analysis is the case of regression and breakdown, rather than the country, which means that a single country might provide several cases (e.g., Bolivia in 1995 and 2003). Using the FH index, all cases from 1973 to 2014 (corresponding to the less widely analysed contemporary period; see the literature review above) have been selected according to the following criteria:

- Countries with less than a million inhabitants at the time of democratic regression or breakdown (e.g., micro-states such as Vanuatu) are excluded. This is mainly due to the extreme idiosyncrasy that often characterises these cases and the difficulty in retrieving reliable data for the analysis.

- Countries with less than two years of a democratic regime prior to the regression or breakdown (e.g., Zambia, Bangladesh or Burkina Faso) are excluded since frequent changes from and to democracy constitute clear evidence of a non-consolidated democracy.
- Countries with less than two years of continuing regression, or of a breakdown which occurred less than two years ago, are excluded in order to avoid including countries with scores that are affected by methodological artefacts.

Since democratic regression or breakdown has been defined as the transformation of an *existing democracy*, all cases showing a regression from a hybrid or an authoritarian regime (expressed by FH scores of over 2.5) are also excluded. To overcome the limitations and ambiguities associated with the FH index, all cases have been cross-checked with the Polity IV index (Marshall et al. 2014) and no adjustments were required. The 59 cases which remained for analysis after this procedure are listed in Table 1. The table also shows the different types of democratic regression and breakdown and identifies the cases for each category.

For this universe of cases, the outcome and the explanatory conditions must be calibrated (Table 2). The central aim of this is to assign fuzzy values to cases (Ragin 2008: 71; Schneider & Wagemann 2012: 24). Full membership of, for example, the set of all democracies results in a fuzzy value of 1, and full non-membership in 0, the point of indifference being 0.5, with all the other values lying between 0 and 1, indicating the degree of membership of a given case within a set. Online Appendix 1 provides detailed information about the rules used to calibrate the sets for this analysis.

Analysis and discussion

A QCA usually starts with the analysis of the necessary conditions (Table 3). Our analysis does not reveal any necessary condition since no single consistency level comes close to the recommended value of 0.9 (Schneider & Wagemann 2012: 278).⁴ QCA also offers to analyse OR unions of conditions which would then represent necessary ‘functional equivalents’, if (and only if) this is justified on theoretical grounds, and combines conditions in such a way that they represent a macro concept (Schneider & Wagemann 2012: 74). Neither pair (or triple or any higher-order union) fulfils this requirement in the present study, not least because the conditions have been purposefully modelled to represent as many different factors as possible regarding a democratic breakdown.

In the two step-procedure, the analysis of sufficiency starts with the remote conditions, which results in three paths (Table 4) indicating that democratic breakdown can occur in three different enabling contexts. The first consists, very simply, of economic inequality (INEQUA), meaning that a democratic breakdown is more likely possible in countries with high levels of economic inequality. The second context shows a simultaneous absence of economic development (~DEVELO) and a presence of ethnolinguistic fractionalisation (ETHNOF). The conjunctural logic of QCA does not allow us to define these two conditions as separate outcome-enabling contexts; they must be combined. Finally, a third combination of remote conditions refers to a single case only – namely Chile 1, describing the breakdown of the Chilean democracy in 1973. It combines the presence of economic development

Table 1. Selected cases and types of democratic regression and breakdown

Suspected (0)*	(Regression) Loss of democratic quality (0.1–0.49)		Breakdown to hybrid regime (0.51–0.99)		Breakdown to authoritarian regime (1)						
	From	To	From	To	From	To					
Benin (1999)	2	2.5	Argentina (1990)	1.5	2.5	Argentina (2001)	1.5	3	Chile (1973)	1.5	6
Chile (1998)	2	2.5	Belgium (1996)	1	1.5	Bolivia (1995)	2.5	3	Gambia (1994)	2	6.5
Dominican Republic (2003)	2	2.5	Botswana (2009)	2	2.5	Bolivia (2003)	2	3	Mali (2012)	2.5	6
Lithuania (2004)	1.5	2	Bulgaria (1996)	2	2.5	Brazil (1990)	2	3.5	Nigeria (1983)	2.5	6
Romania (2004)	2	2.5	Bulgaria (2009)	1.5	2	Colombia (1988)	2.5	3.5	Thailand (2005)	2.5	5.5
			Colombia (1975)	2	2.5	Dominican Republic (1990)	2	3			
			Ecuador (1984)	2	2.5	Ecuador (1996)	2.5	3			
			Greece (1984)	1.5	2	Gambia (1980)	2	3.5			
			Greece (1993)	1.5	2	India (1975)	2.5	4			
			Greece (2011)	1.5	2	India (1991)	2.5	3.5			
			Hungary (2011)	1	1.5	Lebanon (1975)	2	4			
			India (1980)	2	2.5	Lesotho (2009)	2.5	3			
			Italy (1977)	1.5	2	Malawi (1999)	2.5	3			
			Italy (1992)	1	2	Mauritius (1978)	2	3			
			Italy (2008)	1	1.5	Mexico (2006)	2	3			
			Jamaica (1976)	1.5	2.5	Papua New Guinea (1987)	2	3			

Continued

Table 2. Calibration of the outcome and conditions

Country	Structural conditions							Proximate conditions			
	OUTCOME	DEVELO	INEQUA	PARTYS	STABIL	ETHNOF	CONTEX	EXECUT	VOLATI	PROTES	
Argentina 1	0.35	0.53	0.33	0.7	0.08	0.17	0.4	0.28	0.18	1.0	
Argentina 2	0.67	0.76	0.58	0.7	0.65	0.17	0.4	0.95	0.64	1.0	
Belgium	0.07	1.0	0.1	0.8	1.0	0.66	0	0.19	0.47	0.23	
Benin	0	0.04	0.21	0.9	0.11	0.55	1	0.12	0.53	0.05	
Bolivia 1	0.58	0.06	0.6	0.8	0.35	0.86	0.6	0.5	0.78	1.0	
Bolivia 2	0.61	0.06	0.81	0.9	0.77	0.86	0.4	0.95	0.54	1.0	
Botswana	0.21	0.26	0.63	0.3	1.0	0.32	0.8	0.95	0.11	0.05	
Brazil	0.7	0.3	0.82	0.8	0.05	0.64	0.4	0.61	0.94	0.5	
Bulgaria 1	0.21	0.07	0.19	0.7	0.06	0.11	0.8	0.95	0.34	0.99	
Bulgaria 2	0.14	0.31	0.1	0.7	0.69	0.11	0.2	0.32	0.98	0.29	
Chile 1	1	0.77	0.35	0.9	0.14	0.53	0.8	0.47	0.26	1.0	
Chile 2	0	0.53	0.7	0.8	0.14	0.53	0.4	0.33	0.25	0.43	
Colombia 1	0.21	0.11	0.7	0.6	0.65	0.67	1	0.95	0.24	0.29	
Colombia 2	0.64	0.1	0.54	0.6	0.96	0.67	0.2	0.95	0.09	0.77	
Dominican Republic 1	0.61	0.07	0.52	0.7	0.29	0.47	0.2	0.95	0.57	1.0	
Dominican Republic 2	0	0.12	0.57	0.6	0.88	0.47	0.2	0.58	0.17	0.57	
Ecuador 1	0.21	0.17	0.36	0.8	0.05	0.76	0.6	0.27	0.99	0.35	
Ecuador 2	0.58	0.1	0.69	0.8	0.6	0.76	0.4	0.49	0.76	1.0	
Gambia	0.7	0.06	0.95	0.1	0.5	0.83	1	0.95	0.56	0.05	
Gambia	1	0.06	0.79	0.1	0.93	0.83	1	0.95	0.2	0.05	
Greece 1	0.14	0.93	0.27	0.7	0.14	0.04	0	0.95	0.7	0.82	
Greece 2	0.14	0.96	0.15	0.7	0.65	0.04	0	0.95	0.55	0.65	
Greece 3	0.14	0.99	0.17	0.7	0.99	0.04	0	0.95	0.17	1.0	

Continued

Table 2. Continued

Country	Structural conditions							Proximate conditions			
	OUTCOME	DEVELO	INEQUA	PARTYS	STABIL	ETHNOF	CONTEX	EXECUT	VOLATI	PROTES	
Hungary	0.07	0.77	0.13	0.8	0.77	0.03	0.2	0.95	0.85	0.05	
India 1	0.73	0.05	0.3	0.1	0.88	0.94	1	0.95	0.19	1.0	
India 2	0.21	0.05	0.13	0.1	0.95	0.94	1	0.9	0.47	1.0	
India 3	0.64	0.04	0.15	0.8	0.99	0.94	0.8	0.69	0.31	1.0	
Italy 1	0.14	0.99	0.2	0.8	0.95	0.05	0	0.95	0.13	1.0	
Italy 2	0.28	1.0	0.15	0.8	1.0	0.05	0	0.42	0.88	0.86	
Italy 3	0.07	1.0	0.14	0.9	1.0	0.05	0	0.73	1.0	0.08	
Jamaica 1	0.35	0.46	0.39	0.6	0.6	0.36	0.6	0.95	0.05	0.65	
Jamaica 2	0.21	0.14	0.24	0.6	0.98	0.36	0.4	0.95	0.08	0.14	
Japan	0.28	1.0	0.13	0.1	0.99	0.03	0.6	0.95	0.2	0.29	
Latvia	0.28	0.82	0.2	0.9	0.55	0.7	0.2	0.21	0.73	0.08	
Lebanon	0.82	0.36	0.54	0.9	0.05	0.25	1	0.2	0.15	1.0	
Lesotho	0.58	0.05	0.59	0.3	0.11	0.11	0.8	0.95	0.92	0.57	
Lithuania	0	0.5	0.19	0.9	0.35	0.25	0.2	0.43	0.97	0.05	
Malawi	0.58	0.04	0.51	0.7	0.05	0.69	0.8	0.95	0.09	0.65	
Mali 1	0.21	0.04	0.25	0.3	0.5	0.92	0.8	0.23	0.92	0.05	
Mali 2	1	0.04	0.15	0.3	0.73	0.92	0.8	0.23	0.92	0.82	
Mauritius 1	0.61	0.18	0.39	0.9	0.18	0.48	1	0.65	0.97	0.08	

Continued

Table 2. Continued

Country	Structural conditions							Proximate conditions			
	OUTCOME	DEVELO	INEQUA	PARTYS	STABIL	ETHNOF	CONTEX	EXECUT	VOLATI	PROTES	
Mauritius 2	0.07	0.26	0.22	0.9	0.99	0.48	0.8	0.95	0.21	0.05	
Mexico	0.61	0.63	0.54	0.8	0.14	0.11	0.2	0.87	0.29	0.71	
Nigeria	1	0.06	0.2	0.3	0.04	0.94	1	0.59	0.69	0.18	
Papua New Guinea 1	0.61	0.07	0.53	0.8	0.29	0.97	0.8	0.15	0.78	0.65	
Papua New Guinea 2	0.58	0.05	0.53	0.9	0.93	0.97	0.6	0.87	0.21	0.57	
Peru	0.58	0.06	0.33	0.8	0.11	0.52	0.2	0.95	0.98	0.94	
Philippines 1	0.58	0.06	0.35	0.9	0.03	0.94	0.6	0.95	0.05	0.57	
Philippines 2	0.58	0.06	0.35	0.9	0.65	0.94	0.6	0.78	0.85	0.05	
Romania	0	0.17	0.2	0.9	0.11	0.1	0.2	0.95	0.28	0.05	
Senegal	0.58	0.05	0.25	0.1	0.11	0.9	0.8	0.95	0.51	0.05	
South Africa	0.14	0.29	0.87	0.1	0.43	0.95	0.4	0.93	0.13	0.05	
Sri Lanka	0.64	0.05	0.21	0.7	0.98	0.36	0.8	0.95	0.41	1.0	
Thailand	1	0.11	0.32	0.3	0.35	0.73	0.6	0.59	0.41	0.65	
Turkey	0.97	0.23	0.54	0.7	0.08	0.14	0	0.95	0.41	1.0	
Ukraine	0.58	0.1	0.09	0.9	0.69	0.36	0.6	0.6	0.99	0.05	
United Kingdom	0.07	1	0.16	0.6	1	0.3	0	0.95	0.35	0.77	
Venezuela 1	0.67	0.37	0.36	0.7	0.95	0.54	0.2	0.95	0.25	1.0	
Venezuela 2	0.73	0.33	0.42	0.7	0.99	0.54	0.4	0.57	0.94	0.14	

Continued

Table 2. Continued

Country	Structural conditions (Raw data)				Proximate conditions (Raw data)			
	DEVELOI	INEQUAI	STABILI	ETHNOFI	EXECUTI	VOLATII	PROTESI	
Argentina 1	0.043	43.1	7	0.288	0.656	10.1	145	
Argentina 2	0.388	52.2	18	0.288	0	23.9	275	
Belgium	4.179	28.0	144	0.589	0.737	19.2	30	
Benin	-0.924	36.5	8	0.525	0.838	20.8	0	
Bolivia 1	-0.828	52.7	13	0.74	0.501	28.6	140	
Bolivia 2	-0.845	60.1	21	0.74	0	21.1	175	
Botswana	-0.315	53.7	43	0.399	0	6.2	0	
Brazil	-0.257	60.5	5	0.576	0.427	38.3	50	
Bulgaria 1	-0.797	35.7	6	0.225	0	15.7	120	
Bulgaria 2	-0.247	28.2	19	0.225	0.629	47.6	35	
Chile 1	0.410	44.0	9	0.515	0.518	13	375	
Chile 2	0.041	55.9	9	0.515	0.618	12.6	45	
Colombia 1	-0.617	56.0	18	0.596	0	12.3	35	
Colombia 2	-0.665	51.2	31	0.596	0	4.5	70	
Dominican Republic 1	-0.763	50.5	12	0.483	0	22	325	
Dominican Republic 2	-0.601	51.9	25	0.483	0.446	9.6	55	
Ecuador 1	-0.484	44.4	5	0.657	0.662	49	40	
Ecuador 2	-0.650	55.6	17	0.657	0.509	27.7	160	

Continued

Table 2. Continued

Country	Structural conditions (Raw data)				Proximate conditions (Raw data)			
	DEVELO1	INEQUA1	STABIL1	ETHNOF1	EXECUT1	VOLAT11	PROTES1	
Gambia	-0.846	70.1	15	0.716	0	21.5	0	
Gambia	-0.843	59.4	28	0.716	0	10.8	0	
Greece 1	0.859	39.8	9	0.085	0	25.6	75	
Greece 2	1.041	32.6	18	0.085	0.013	21.3	60	
Greece 3	1.553	34.0	36	0.085	0	9.2	240	
Hungary	0.399	31.2	21	0.013	0	31.5	0	
India 1	-0.888	41.6	25	0.878	0	10.2	425	
India 2	-0.891	31.4	30	0.878	0.127	19.3	1280	
India 3	-0.928	32.5	41	0.878	0.366	14.8	790	
Italy 1	1.612	36.0	30	0.114	0	7.4	250	
Italy 2	3.964	32.5	45	0.114	0.556	33	80	
Italy 3	3.242	32.0	61	0.114	0.330	80	10	
Jamaica 1	-0.047	45.7	17	0.424	0	0.3	60	
Jamaica 2	-0.555	38.3	34	0.424	0	3.6	20	
Japan	5.662	31.1	39	0.014	0	10.6	35	
Latvia	0.507	36.3	16	0.61	0.720	26.6	10	
Lebanon	-0.174	51.1	5	0.356	0.732	8.5	180	
Lesotho	-0.906	52.5	8	0.218	0	36.3	55	
Lithuania	-0.002	35.8	13	0.353	0.549	43	0	

Continued

Table 2. Continued

Country	Structural conditions (Raw data)				Proximate conditions (Raw data)			
	DEVELOI	INEQUA1	STABIL1	ETHNOFI	EXECUTI	VOLATII	PROTESI	
Malawi	-0.969	50.3	5	0.606	0	4.7	60	
Mali 1	-0.939	39	15	0.833	0.700	36	0	
Mali 2	-0.932	33	20	0.833	0.703	36	75	
Mauritius 1	-0.446	45.7	10	0.489	0.398	42.2	10	
Mauritius 2	-0.310	37.1	38	0.489	0	11.05	0	
Mexico	0.174	51	9	0.219	0.181	14.05	65	
Nigeria	-0.825	36.1	4	0.857	0.437	25.3	25	
Papua New Guinea 1	-0.756	50.9	12	0.984	0.786	28.6	60	
Papua New Guinea 2	-0.897	50.9	28	0.984	0.181	11.2	55	
Peru	-0.838	42.7	8	0.51	0	46.3	95	
Philippines 1	-0.827	43.8	3	0.859	0	0	55	
Philippines 2	-0.829	44	18	0.859	0.286	31.35	0	
Romania	-0.471	35.9	8	0.208	0	13.8	0	
Senegal	-0.875	39.2	8	0.791	0	20.15	0	
South Africa	-0.273	63.1	14	0.886	0.073	7.57	0	
Sri Lanka	-0.871	37	34	0.422	0	17.6	220	
Thailand	-0.624	42.5	13	0.634	0.438	17.65	60	
Turkey	-0.371	51	7	0.255	0	17.68	485	
Ukraine	-0.676	26.4	19	0.422	0.434	48	0	
United Kingdom	3.256	33.6	110	0.389	0	15.8	70	
Venezuela 1	-0.154	44.4	30	0.524	0	12.5	255	
Venezuela 2	-0.209	46.8	41	0.524	0.454	38.6	20	

Table 3. Analysis of the necessary conditions (coverage values omitted)

Condition	Consistency
develo	0.337
~develo	0.866
inequa	0.665
~inequa	0.763
partys	0.778
~partys	0.546
stabil	0.608
~stabil	0.625
ethnof	0.786
~ethnof	0.419
contex	0.757
~contex	0.570
execut	0.832
~execut	0.412
volati	0.666
~volati	0.629
protes	0.745
~protes	0.469

Table 4. First step: Analysis of sufficiency (remote conditions)

	INEQUA +	~DEVELO*ETHNOF	DEVELO* CONTEX
Consistency	0.772	0.649	0.766
Raw coverage	0.665	0.750	0.252
Unique coverage	0.103	0.230	0.024
Cases covered	Argentina 2; Bolivia 1, 2; Brazil; Colombia 2; Dominican Republic 1; Ecuador 2; Gambia 1, 2; Lebanon; Lesotho; Malawi; Mexico; Papua New Guinea 1, 2; Turkey	Bolivia 1, 2; Brazil; Colombia 2; Dominican Republic 1; Ecuador 2; Gambia 1, 2; India 1, 3; Malawi; Mali 2; Mauritius 1; Nigeria; Papua New Guinea 1, 2; Peru; Philippines 1, 2; Senegal; Thailand; Venezuela 1, 2	Chile 1

Notes: The consistency cut-off for the first step is 0.764; this is not too high a value, but the first step of a two-step analysis should be deliberately underspecified since the underlying model does not yet contain all conditions to be analysed (see Schneider & Wagemann 2012: 254). Solution coverage: 0.919. Solution consistency: 0.656. Cases not explained: Sri Lanka, Ukraine.

(DEVELO) with the external context (CONTEX). This uniqueness of Chile is unsurprising because the presence of high economic development within a non-democratic regional context is relatively rare among the cases under analysis. It is for good reasons that the demise of democracy in Chile in 1973 is regarded as a special case among Latin American countries. In terms of our analysis, this rarity and specificity leads to the need for this third context.

The low consistency value ('solution consistency') confirms that, in accordance with Schneider and Wagemann's (2006) proposed two-step procedure, the analysis of remote conditions is underspecified, yielding only an approximate sufficiency. This low consistency value has the advantage that coverage is relatively high, indicating that it is possible to assign nearly all cases (apart from Sri Lanka 2 and Ukraine) to at least one of the enabling contexts. Furthermore, this deliberate under-specification makes it possible to add the proximate conditions which complete the explanation. Since equifinal solutions may overlap, it is also possible to assign single cases to more than one path.

In the subsequent step, these three contexts, defined as new sets, are inserted into the analysis, together with the proximate conditions, which results in an analysis of six conditions. Four paths can be identified (Table 5).⁵ The remote combination of an absence of economic development and a presence of ethnolinguistic fractionalisation forms part of three out of these four paths. Within this context, the combination of the volatility of the party system with the concentration of executive power, of volatility with social instability and of executive power with social instability account for a democratic breakdown. In other words, within this special context of low economic development and high ethnolinguistic fractionalisation, the three proximate conditions (volatility, concentration of executive power and social instability), if combined in pairs, imply a democratic breakdown and differentiate this context. The fourth path includes yet another remote context – namely inequality – which is combined with a high concentration of executive power and social instability.

A first comprehensive understanding of the findings is more promising than examining each individual path. Therefore, the QCA solution formulae are linked to the cases, respecting the configurative logic of QCA. The values of unique coverage indicate that the four paths overlap significantly.

As far as our expectations are concerned, the conditions C3 (role of the party system), C4 (years from democratic installation) and C6 (role of the regional context) have not been found to be relevant for the outcome of the democratic breakdown, while all other conditions (the remote conditions: level of economic development, presence of economic inequality, and ethnic or language cleavages; and the proximate conditions: concentration of executive power, volatility of the party system and high level of social instability) are all somewhere apparent in the result.

With regard to the existing structuralist literature, the result is interesting for two reasons: first, it shows how socioeconomic inequality is *per se* a contextual condition conducive to a democratic breakdown; and second, it underlines that a lack of economic development alone does not yet constitute a favourable context for this outcome, but needs to be combined with the presence of an ethno-linguistically divided society. This element makes it possible to suggest a hypothesis about the role of the unequal distribution of economic resources between ethnic or linguistic groups as a strong element of democratic instability.

Table 5. Second step: Analysis of sufficiency (contexts and proximate conditions)

	VOLATI* EXECUT* (~ DEVELO* ETHNOF)	VOLATI* PROTES* (~ DEVELO* ETHNOF)	EXECUT* PROTES* (~ DEVELO* ETHNOF)	EXECUT* PROTES* INEQUA
Consistency	0.884	0.863	0.816	0.884
Raw coverage	0.452	0.366	0.460	0.492
Unique coverage	0.144	0.053	0.063	0.129
Cases covered	Bolivia 2; Brazil; Dominican Republic 1; Gambia 1; Mauritius 1; Nigeria; Peru; Philippines 2; Senegal; Venezuela 2	Bolivia 1, 2; Brazil; Dominican Republic 1; Ecuador 2; Mali 2; Papua New Guinea 1; Peru	Bolivia 2; Brazil; Colombia 2; Dominican Republic 1; India 1, 3; Malawi; Papua New Guinea 2; Peru; Philippines 1; Thailand; Venezuela 1	Argentina 2; Bolivia 2; Brazil; Colombia 2; Dominican Republic 1; Lesotho; Malawi; Mexico; Papua New Guinea 2' Turkey

Notes: The consistency cut-off for the second step of the analysis is 0.849. Solution coverage: 0.785. Solution consistency: 0.831. Cases not explained: Chile 1, Gambia 2, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Ukraine. See Online Appendix 2 for X-Y plots for each path.

The addition of the three proximate conditions, then, makes it possible to highlight two further aspects: the role of crises in causing the onset of a democratic breakdown, which confirms some of the hypotheses initially proposed by Linz (1978) regarding the impact of crises on the stability of political regimes; and the role of opposition forces, emphasising the importance of an ‘inclusive’ legitimisation of the democratic system which is an important topic in the studies on democratic consolidation (Morlino 2011).

More broadly, two different models of democratic breakdown emerge. The first can be defined as the ‘*opposition-based model*’ and largely overlaps the first path, which combines a context marked by a lack of economic development and ethnolinguistic fractionalisation, with the presence of volatility of the party system and a concentration of executive power. This variant describes a context of ethnic division and poverty, where ethnic divisions are often reflected by political divisions (as in many Latin American countries), and poverty is linked to the poor functioning of the government (as in many African countries). The twofold role of the opposition is the crucial element in the process of democratic breakdown:

In a first version, a growing strength of the opposition may produce, as a reaction, a concentration of power within an incumbent government with authoritarian tendencies or abuses of power. This situation is illustrated by the case of the Philippines where, during the 2004 elections, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo’s administration used the powers of the executive to rig the elections as a response to growing political opposition (Hutchcroft 2008; Quimpo 2009). Similarly, the leftist opposition won the 1976 election in Mauritius, but the ruling party managed to remain in office amid controversies, creating a minority government and reacting by restricting civil liberties (Bowman 1991).

In a second variant, the seizure of power through elections and the creation of a strong government by an opposition that proves to be disloyal to democratic practices imply the breakdown of democracy. An illustrative example is the change of government in Bolivia after the 1993 elections, when Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada replaced Jaime Paz Zamora as the President of the Republic, introducing economic and social reforms that encountered strong opposition in the country, especially on the part of certain politically underrepresented indigenous ethnic groups. As a reaction, and disregarding democratic practices, the government adopted increasingly authoritarian measures, up to the declaration of a six-month state of emergency in 1995 (Van Cott 2008). A more extreme case is represented by Chavez’s rise in Venezuela during the 1990s (Coppedge 2005), followed by the immediate consolidation of power and the progressive erosion of democratic institutions.

Next to this ‘*opposition-based model*’, a ‘*crisis-based model*’ can be defined, emerging from an analysis of the other three paths. Within this model, the context may be the lack of economic development matched to ethnolinguistic fractionalisation or, as an alternative, the presence of strong socioeconomic inequality. The key element in the democratic breakdown is the presence of a crisis, which becomes manifest through anti-governmental protests and strikes, and to the emergence of social movements. Faced with this situation, again two situations can be described. The first arises when governments that are characterised by a high concentration of power react by abusing their power and repression, thus becoming responsible for a regression in civil rights and political liberties. The declaration of a state of emergency in India by the government of Indira Gandhi in 1975 (Chakrabarty 2008), facing mass protests, strikes and anti-government demonstrations, provides a good example of these dynamics, as well as the case of Peru in the late 1980s, when the government was

Table 6. Modes of democratic breakdown

	Internal threat	External threat
Opposition-based	Government reaction to opposition strength	Disloyal opposition
Crisis-based	Government reaction to crisis	Military reaction against inept government

responsible for abuses and restricting civil liberties in the face of instability and protests, further exacerbated by the activities of the terrorist group, the Shining Path (Kenney 2004).

The second situation occurs when the inability of the government to solve the crisis produces a backlash, which in turn leads to the overthrow of that government via a coup and the following suspension or dismantling of the democratic institutions. The 2012 military coup in Mali (Whitehouse 2012), after months of anti-government protests at the mismanagement of the Tuareg rebellion in the north of the country, provides a good example of this, as well as the military coup in Turkey in 1980 (Hale 2013), after years of the government's inability to find a solution to the political and social clashes and tensions that occurred during the 1970s.

Table 6 summarises the two models of democratic breakdown with their two possible variations as far as the source of the threat to democracy is concerned – namely from the government in charge (internal threat), or from a source such as the military or the opposition (external threat). Note that the third remote condition – the combination of the presence of economic development and the external context – does not appear in the final solution of sufficiency. This is unsurprising since this context only referred to Chile in 1973. This case then is labelled 'not explained' in the final solution apparently because the processes at work are better examined by conducting an in-depth case study.

The parameters of fit indicate highly consistent values for both the final solutions and the four explanatory paths. The small values for the unique coverages show that the four paths overlap to a great extent. Nevertheless, the values for solution coverage and the solution consistency show that the final solution explains both well and broadly. With regard to the cases that are not covered by any of the paths (and thus remain unexplained), it is unsurprising that the two cases not covered previously in the analysis of remote conditions (Sri Lanka 2, Ukraine) and Chile 1, as the case illustrating the third remote combination which then did not pass the analysis of proximate conditions, remain unexplained. However, the addition of the proximate conditions into the analysis also leaves Gambia 2 and the Lebanon unexplained. This is also expressed in a coverage value clearly lower than in the analysis of remote conditions, but at the same time greatly outweighed by the consistency value. The two cases of Gambia 2 and the Lebanon certainly require further analysis in the light of their specificity: the former for the key role of civil-military relations and the rivalry between different army factions, and the latter for the major regional geopolitical factors that have contributed to the outbreak of the civil war and the end of democracy.

To complement our study, we have also performed a two-step fsQCA analysis for the negation of the outcome (not-Y). We thus looked for the specific combination of conditions

accounting for democratic regression (i.e., negative change within democracy). The analysis of the necessary conditions does not reveal any necessary condition.⁶ The first step of the analysis of sufficiency highlights, instead, three different enabling contexts for democratic regression: economic inequality, highly competitive multiparty system and/or a long-lasting democratic system. As previously, the analysis of remote conditions remains underspecified. These three contexts are then inserted into the second step along with the proximate conditions, and three paths to democratic regression are identified: a first one, combining the presence of a long-lasting democracy with a highly competitive multiparty system; a second one, combining low economic inequality, a highly competitive multiparty system and low social instability; and a third one, comprising the lack of economic inequality, the presence of a long-lasting democracy and the stability of the party system. These findings related to the negation of the outcome underline the different combinations of conditions that explain democratic regression in comparison with democratic breakdown. The three paths to democratic regression confirm that in longstanding democracies with low economic inequality, that are stable and competitive and with real alternation, party systems can keep under control negative changes in the democratic system by avoiding the phenomenon of breakdown, limiting the ‘reverse process’ to a loss of democratic quality within the democratic system.

Conclusions

This article has dealt with the phenomenon of contemporary democratic regression and breakdown in a comprehensive manner. While this has been thoroughly analysed for the two historical waves of de-democratisation (i.e., between the two world wars and during the 1960s/1970s), such a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon beyond the specific regional and case studies was previously absent from the literature. The application of a two-step fuzzy-set QCA made it possible to understand democratic regression and breakdown as phenomena that may be of different degrees (from the simple loss of quality of democracy up to the transition to an authoritarian regime). The results show two models of breakdown *from* a democratic to a non-democratic regime (be it some of the different forms of hybrid regime or the classical understanding of authoritarianism): an ‘opposition-based model’ and a ‘crisis-based model’. The two share the presence of a context that is characterised by a lack of socioeconomic development and an ethno-linguistically divided society, or, alternatively, high socioeconomic inequality. These results contribute to the literature on democratic regression and breakdown since they fail fully to confirm any of the classic structural approaches deriving from democratisation studies. First of all, the claims of the modernisation theories cannot be supported as the analysis shows that economic development is not a necessary factor for democratic breakdown nor a sufficient condition on its own. The analysis of the process clearly shows how the democratic system, in many of the countries affected by a transition process, remained stable for a long time even if the economic preconditions were absent. Countries in Latin America or Africa show this (e.g., Mali, considered one of the poorest countries in the world). Other hypotheses are also not confirmed. Configuration analysis shows that the presence of a democratic regional context, long-lasting democratic institutions and the type of party system are neither necessary nor sufficient for the process, individually or in combination with other factors. This does not

mean that these factors do not have any weight at all in the process, but simply that the presence of other factors explains more effectively the change and the final result. The role of inequality should also be reconsidered. While it is true that this factor emerges as a sufficient condition in the assessment of structural conditions, in fact this represents just one out of the four paths towards democratic breakdown. However, the partial confirmation of the role of economic inequalities makes sense if compared to the third structural element emerging from the analysis: ethnic-linguistic fragmentation.

In summary, none of the structural conditions that emerged from the literature, taken *individually*, describe the context in which this change occurs. Instead, the findings show the importance of a framework with the general presence of unequal distribution of socioeconomic and political resources as a critical element for the stability of the democratic systems. ‘Mutually reinforcing inequalities’, which combine economic, social, linguistic, regional, ethnic and political exclusions, appear to be, connecting this to democratisation theory (see, in particular, Tilly 2007), a strong indicator of a context that is prone to democratic breakdown. When these economic, social, ethno-linguistic, regional or religious inequalities consolidate and crystallise into political inequalities, they then create favourable conditions for a democratic breakdown. The typical cases in Latin America, Africa and Asia that are examined show exactly how this structural configuration provides a fragile basis for legitimacy in the democratic regime, thus adding to the literature on legitimation within democratic regimes.

When connecting these contexts with more dynamic elements, those hypotheses are supported that emphasise the importance of a crisis for the destabilisation of democracies and the ambiguous role played by the opposition forces, directly linked to the presence of an ‘exclusive’ or ‘inclusive’ legitimation of the democratic regime (Morlino 2011) among all political actors and the role of a normative preference for democracy (Mainwaring & Perez Linan 2014). The recent conclusions by Svobik (2015) on the roles of incumbents and oppositions in this process and the work of Bermeo (2016) are further deepened by the analysis, showing that the threat to democracy may also arise from opposition forces that eventually assume power and turn authoritarian.

This analysis therefore offers a complex explanation of the transition from democracy, connecting different modes of democratic breakdown through a consistent framework based on an empirical analysis. The threat to the democratic system may come from the current government or from outside (i.e., from opposition forces or the military). In the opposition-based model, the opposition forces play the key role first by being on the rise and thus inducing the government to implement an authoritarian concentration of power or to abuse its power, in what can be defined as an ‘executive aggrandisement’ (Bermeo 2016), likely leading to a form of hybrid regime with a highly concentrated executive power. In the second version, opposition forces are the classic ‘disloyal’ actors (Linz 1978) that, once in power, restrict freedoms and democratic practices. In this version, the incumbent government and parties are not directly responsible for this breakdown, but are increasingly unable to handle its progressive weakening and the rise of alternative parties or movements, which turn out to be anti-systemic.

In the crisis-based model, the triggering element is the presence of a crisis (which can take different forms) that results in anti-government protests and demonstrations. Faced with this situation, the government may react by displaying growing authoritarianism, implying

the deterioration or even demise of the democratic institutions in an ‘incumbent takeover’ (Svolik 2015) or the classic ‘*autogolpe*’ (self-coup); in the other version, the inability of the government to cope with the situation and overcome the crisis may also cause a reaction leading to a coup by the opposition or, more likely, the army, in what has been defined as a ‘promissory coup’ (Bermeo 2016).

Furthermore, the results have been obtained using a methodological approach which takes fundamental considerations of explanations seriously and respects assumptions about equifinality, conjunctural causation, asymmetry and the differentiation between structure-oriented remote contexts and agency-oriented proximate conditions. With this approach, it is also possible to connect the various studies on the topic and go beyond case or area studies.

This analysis is not without its limitations, especially regarding the selection of conditions, which inevitably required a certain degree of simplification; the use of a data source such as FH, which has also faced (justified) critique; and, despite the use of a two-step approach, a structural bias and difficulty in finding perfect distinctions between remote and proximate conditions. However, these findings also constitute a starting point for further, in-depth analysis of typical and deviant cases, which may shed further light on the dynamics of the process of regression and democratic breakdown, highlighting in particular the role of the actors involved, and complementing the findings of this article by conducting a more agency-oriented approach.

Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher’s web-site:

Appendix_1: Calibration of the outcome and of the conditions

Appendix_2: X-Y plots

Appendix_3: Analysis of the negation of the outcome

Notes

1. For a critical view on this, see the 25th anniversary issue of the *Journal of Democracy* published in January 2015, especially ‘Is Democracy in Decline?’ (Plattner 2015); ‘Crisis and Transition, but not Decline’ (Schmitter 2015); ‘The Myth of Democratic Recession’ (Levitsky & Way 2015).
2. Although this is a very basic understanding of a hypothesis, this is the moment when theory and, thus, hypothesising become part of the analysis.
3. We use ‘loss of quality’ as a synonym for democratic regression and group ‘hybridisation’ and ‘breakdown’ under the label ‘breakdown to non-democratic regime’, being hybrid or fully authoritarian.
4. Consistency levels indicate the degree to which a statement on necessity (or sufficiency) is supported by the empirical data at hand.
5. X-Y plots for the four paths can be found in Online Appendix 2.
6. Tables for all analyses can be found in Online Appendix 3.

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