REDEMOS

RECONFIGURING EU DEMOCRACY SUPPORT. TOWARDS A SUSTAINED DEMOS IN THE EU'S EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD

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Conceptual framework & design of custom-made instruments of democracy promotion

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Executive Summary

The REDEMOS Working Paper D5.2 presents a new approach to diagnosing political regimes and their development. Its objective is to enhance the precision and effectiveness of democracy support by tailoring it to the specific characteristics of target political regimes in the EU's eastern neighbourhood. The paper advocates for a more refined and context-sensitive approach to democracy support, one that aligns with the political realities of the region.

The point of departure for this paper is twofold: First, over the past few decades, policymakers and practitioners have increasingly relied on democracy measurement, casting it in the form of democracy indices that shape empirical knowledge. This, in turn, influences practical-political decisions regarding democracy support activities. However, not only is the measurement of democracy a contested issue, but there is also an ongoing debate about its interpretation and application. Second, the global state of democracy has become more complex: since the 2000s, different pathways have emerged. Democratisation often did not lead to fully consolidated democracies, creating a growing grey zone of hybrid or intermediate regimes, which have proven more vulnerable to destabilisation. Another trend has been democratic backsliding or erosion, the predominant form of movement away from democracy in recent decades. This complexity challenges democracy support, which must increasingly account for the dynamic nature of political regimes in target countries.

This paper bridges the ongoing debate on the measurement of regimes and regime transformation, on the one hand, and the practical-political need for democracy support that is precisely tailored to the specific conditions of the target regimes (both the direction and kind of their dynamics), on the other. We propose a new approach that distinguishes between static and dynamic regime states. In terms of static regimes, we differentiate between autocratic stasis and democratic stability. Referring to the dynamic nature, we conceptualise downturns and upturns, as well as regressions and progressions. This framework allows for a finer-grained classification of political regimes and their transformations.

Using the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project, the paper analyses regime changes in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine from 1990 to 2023. It identifies their specific regime states and highlights periods of stasis, intra-regime changes, and transitions across different regime categories. Our analysis reveals that Azerbaijan and Belarus have experienced sustained autocratic trajectories, while we observe gradual improvements in democratic quality in Armenia, Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova; with the latter two showing an oscillating upward movement.

Our findings demonstrate a high regime dynamic in the EU's eastern neighbourhood, especially in the intermediate zone comprising electoral autocracies and democracies. Both are highly vulnerable and thus require specific attention by domestic actors and external democracy supporters, such as the EU. Particularly important becomes thus the in-depth study of institutional and actor-related conditions that drive downturns and regressions in electoral democratic settings. This also bears practical consequences such as a specific programming on how best to protect and defend democratic gains in electoral democratic contexts. Another takeaway from our study is that external democracy support in a target country needs to consider: (a) its position on the autocracy-democracy continuum; (b) whether it is in a static or dynamic state, and if dynamic, (c) the direction and kind of regime change.

"One size fits all" approaches are long overcome and prove to not be efficient. Our framework provides the basis for a more informed and precisely targeted policy action. We claim that a more regime-sensitive approach is needed when it comes to choosing the instruments of external democracy support. For policy action, the paper suggests tailoring democracy support strategies to the specific regime states of target countries, considering the nuances of autocratic stasis, democratic stability, downturns, upturns, regressions, and progressions. The more precise regime states and their development can be captured, the more precise democracy support activities can be tailored.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AIE	Alliance for European Integration
BTI	Bertelsmann Transformation Index
CA	Closed Autocracy
CUSUM	Cumulative Sum of Deviations
EA	Electoral Autocracy
ED	Electoral Democracy
EDI	Electoral Democracy Index
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
ERT	Episodes of Regime Transformation
EU	European Union
HPD	Highest Posterior Density
HPD	Highest Posterior Density
L&L	Lührmann and Lindberg
LB	Lower bounds
LCI	Liberal Component Index
LD	Liberal Democracy
LDI	Liberal Democracy Index
PCRM	Party of Communists
PDM	Democratic Party of Moldova
PE	Point estimates
RoW	Regimes of the world
SD	Standard Deviation
SM	Supplemental Material
UB	Upper bounds
V-Dem	Varieties of Democracy

1. Introduction

Theorists of external democratisation converge on the normative consensus that efforts at democracy promotion should be context-sensitive (Kurki 2008; Hobson 2009). A contextualist approach to external democracy support implies sensitivity to regime-specific characteristics and corresponding custom-made instruments of policy action in the target country. We share this belief and propose that a regime-sensitive approach to external democracy support should start from a precise diagnosis of target political regimes.

The point of departure for this paper is twofold: First, in recent decades, policymakers and practitioners have increasingly taken democracy measurement into account, often cast in the form of democracy indices such as the Freedom in the World (Freedom House), Polity IV/V, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), and the most recent, most ambitious, and certainly one of the most commonly referenced: the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project. It is widely understood that democracy indices shape empirical knowledge, which, in turn, may influence practical-political decisions regarding democracy support activities (Munck and Verkuilen 2002, Coppedge et al. 2011, Kneuer 2023). However, within the field, not only are the methods of measuring democracy a contested issue, but there is also an ongoing debate about their interpretation and application (more below).

Second, the real-world picture of the global state of democracy has become more complex. Since the 2000s, different pathways have emerged: democratisation that has not led to fully consolidated democracies, resulting in a growing grey zone of hybrid or intermediate regimes that have proven more vulnerable to destabilisation. These regimes often oscillate between low and medium levels of democratic quality. Another path involves democratic backsliding or democratic erosion, which has been the predominant form of democratic decline in recent decades. This trajectory sees legally elected incumbents and their parties deliberately hollow out democratic institutions, aggrandise the executive, weaken the separation of powers and the rule of law, and ultimately change the democratic rules of the game. These developments pose significant challenges to democracy support activities. The most tangible consequence is that regime transformation has become more likely, and regimes are experiencing greater dynamics. Therefore, democracy support must increasingly account for the dynamic nature of political regimes in target countries.

Most approaches in the comparative politics literature rightly view the issue of regime diagnosis as an exercise of semantic work and ontological specification. Such approaches are primarily concerned with issues of validity (Adcock and Collier 2001) and thereby orient their analytical gaze on providing fruitful definitions and sound concepts. One dominant view in this strand of conceptual work presupposes defining political regimes relative to liberal democracy as an ideal regime type. An entire body of scholarship emerged from this democracy-centric bias in conceptualising political regimes (Collier and Levitsky 1997; Merkel 2004). A non-trivial consequence of this democracy-centric bias represents viewing regime changes as deviations *away* from liberal democracy.

A highly influential example of viewing regime transformation in this way comes from Lührmann and Lindberg (henceforth L&L), who treat “autocratisation as democratisation in reverse” (2019, 6). Extending their concept of autocratisation to cases that share the downward direction and degree of change, L&L find that the “third wave of autocratisation” is manifest. This finding quickly spread through the academic community and was subsequently corroborated by the scholars who introduced the Episodes of Regime Transformation (ERT) framework (Boese et al. 2021; Wilson et al. 2023; Maerz et al. 2023). On the other hand, pointing to problematic issues of measurement validity and reliability in L&L’s approach, Skaaning (2020), Tomini (2021), and, most recently, Coppedge et al. (2024b), in reference to the application of the produced measurements, have formulated cautionary notes (more below). Thus, the debate is far from settled.

This paper bridges the ongoing debate on the measurement of regimes and regime transformation, on the one hand, and the practical-political need for democracy support that is precisely tailored to the specific conditions of the regime state in target countries (both the direction and kind of regime change), on the

other. We argue that a more precise diagnosis of political regimes is necessary. To this end, we propose a new approach that allows for a finer-grained classification of political regimes and their transformations, thereby providing better insight into regime dynamics in a given country.

Before we go into detail exposing our framework, we present our understanding of regime classification. We rely on the categories suggested by Lührmann et al. (2018) in their Regimes of the World (RoW) typology, which includes four (sub)regime types: liberal democracy, electoral democracy, electoral autocracy and closed autocracy (see Figure 1).

Liberal democracies are understood as those regimes in which both free and fair elections are held, and the rule of law and the implementation of liberal principles are fulfilled, while only the first criterion applies to electoral democracies. In electoral autocracies, elections are held in a multi-party system, but they cannot be called completely free and fair. In closed autocracies, however, multi-party elections are either absent or below a minimal empirical standard.

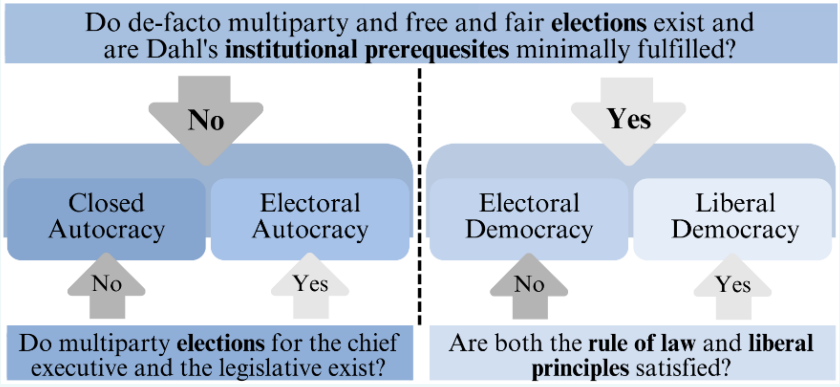

Figure 1: Regime Type Classification

Notes: Own graph based on Lührmann et al. (2018, 63).

These regime types are placed on a continuum that spans the entire range from the optimal point of democratic expression to the lowest point of autocratic expression. Along this continuum, a variety of changes can occur. We argue that previous approaches have not adequately captured these changes and, therefore, propose a new approach.

Designing our framework, we follow Sartori (1970) and suggest that while regime changes might be similar as regards direction and *degree*, they can be conceptually different in *kind*. Concerned with appropriate concept intensity (Sartori 1970), we introduce a new framework of regime states. We distinguish between *three types of regime states*: a) autocratic stasis or democratic stability; b) downturns or upturns within a given regime category; c) and regressions or progressions across different regime categories. The first type of regime states defines static regimes that do not experience meaningful change. The second type defines political regimes that experience meaningful change, but it takes place within the confines of a given regime category. Finally, regressions or progressions reflect meaningful transformation that is sufficient to lead to transition to an inferior or superior regime category within a connected time period.

This approach is designed for application on a global scale, meaning it applies to the entire universe of cases. In this paper, we apply the framework of regime states as a descriptive tool to political regimes from the EU's eastern neighbourhood: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Data that we rely on for regime diagnosis in this region comes from the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI), provided by the V-Dem project (Coppedge et al. 2024a), and covers the extended period 1990-2023. The devised empirical strategy implies a stepwise approach and involves regime classification, regime transition detection, and temporal analysis of regime states.

Our analysis reveals significant regime diversity and provides two types of results. The first type covers the trajectories of the examined countries from 1990 to 2023. We find that Azerbaijan and Belarus experienced sustained downward regime trajectories, whereas Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and, to a lesser degree, Ukraine, experienced gradual improvements in their democratic quality. In Georgia and Moldova, this improvement is reflected in an oscillating upward movement. The second type of results suggests the absence of consolidated democracies in the EU's eastern neighbourhood. On the contrary, electoral autocratic stasis appears to be the most prevalent regime state in this region. Moreover, in line with existing scholarship (Diamond 2002), electoral democracies remain highly vulnerable and susceptible to regression (more below).

The framework of regime states contributes to substantive knowledge and political practice in at least three ways. First, it provides the conceptual foundation for a more refined description of political regimes and the direction of their development. It avoids the democracy-centric bias and accounts for bi-directional regime change within the wide range between closed autocracy and liberal democracy, and *vice versa*. It also allows viewing downturns and upturns, as well as regressions and progressions, as being governed by the logic of asymmetric relations, thus relaxing the assumption of mechanical symmetry between opposing regime transformation processes. The proposed framework is jointly exhaustive in that it can account for all logically possible regime states, but it can also distinguish between different types of regime states and mutually exclusive states within each type. Second, the framework of regime states can be used as a prescriptive tool to devise custom-made instruments of policy action. The more precise regime states and their development can be captured, the more precise democracy support activities can be tailored. For instance, whereas cases may be similar in their regime static nature, closed autocratic stasis and electoral autocratic stasis reflect qualitatively different phenomena and require correspondingly a differentiated approach to policy action. Finally, the framework can also be used as a heuristic devise to explore new research questions and endeavours. By engaging with the politically relevant debate on the "third wave of autocratisation", our framework can be used to investigate what kinds of regime states are manifested by this wave.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. Section 2 extends the current debate on autocratisation and makes the case for the need of a more refined framework for regime diagnosis. Section 3 introduces the new framework of regime states, as well as its structural and functional characteristics. Section 4 outlines the stepwise empirical strategy employed. Section 5 presents the results of the analysis and robustness test, while the final section discusses some implications of the main findings and concludes.

2. The "Third Wave of Autocratisation"

In the last decade or so, it has been discussed repeatedly if global regime dynamics point to what Huntington (1991) proposed to consider as a reverse wave; that is, that countries experiencing autocratisation outnumber countries experiencing democratisation. While some scholars argued that we are running into a reverse wave (Diamond 2008, 36), others denied this conclusion (Levitsky and Way 2015, 48). Based on a new operationalisation and data collected by the V-Dem project, L&L (2019) confirmed that "a third wave of autocratisation is here". They argue that the third wave of autocratisation started in 1994 and is defined by the gradual decline of democratic rules and practices, facilitated by democratically elected leaders who exploit the democratic process to extend their grip on power (L&L 2019, 12). In contrast to the first two reverse waves (Huntington 1991), L&L observe that the third wave of autocratisation is characterised by democratic erosion – a distinct path of democratic regression – marked by subtler and more piecemeal regression rather than sudden coups or blatant repression. The finding that the world has entered a new reverse wave was subsequently corroborated by scholars who introduced the ERT framework (Boese et al. 2021; Wilson et al. 2023; Maerz et al. 2023).

On the other hand, Skaaning (2020, 1533) criticises two problems in L&L's paper: conceptualisation and measurement. He opines that their "definition of waves of regime change deviates from the conventional understandings" and "operationalisation of regime changes do[es] not capture all degrees of change." In a

similar vein, Tomini (2021, 3) argues that the finding about the third wave of autocratisation "brings together, under a single label, phenomena that are significantly different from each other."

Further modifications to definitions and conceptualisations have also been proposed. Unlike L&L (2019), Maerz et al. (2023) conceptualise regime transformation covering democratisation as well as autocratisation, and regarding the latter, the authors distinguish between democratic regression and autocratic regression. In their view, democratic regression may result in the following outcomes of autocratisation episodes: averted regression, diminished democracy, pre-empted democratic breakdown and democratic breakdown. Conversely, autocratic regression may result in what is called, somewhat tautologically, "regressed autocracy" (Maerz et al. 2023, 4-5). Leininger suggests considering the direction of regime change, which leads her to distinguish between autocratic regression and democratic deepening as the two phases of democratisation, and democratic regression and autocratic deepening as the two phases of autocratisation (Leininger 2022, 6). Similarly, Kneuer argues that there are theoretical reasons to distinguish the transformative dynamics within democracies from those within countries that are already autocratic (Kneuer 2023, 840).

All in all, the scholarly debate touches on three crucial and highly relevant questions: how to conceptualise autocratisation, how to operationalise autocratisation, and more than that, how to interpret descriptive data. Here "the eye of the beholder matters a lot when deciding what to make of these results" (Møller and Skaaning 2022). Indeed, because "how scholars interpret and practitioners apply indices have a practical implication that is connected to the 'half-full or half-empty glass' question'' (Kneuer 2024, 298). Thus, caution is needed when it comes to the practical effects of democratic measurement (Kneuer 2024, 300). Firstly, the underlying conceptualisation influences the classification of the country and the mapping of trends. As more and more policymakers and practitioners refer to democracy measurement or even base their decisions on it, awareness is needed on the side of the scholars in the hour of interpreting the data and providing their interpretation publicly (Kneuer 2024, 299). Secondly, caution is needed regarding the practical effect of democracy measurement. Euphoria on democratisation as well as an overly gloomy perspective can lead to public misperceptions (Kneuer 2024, 299). Consequently, Skaaning postulates that a critical discussion is needed since the conceptualisation and measurement suggested by L&L "seem to influence key substantive conclusions about trends in democratisation and autocratisation" and "can lead to skewed perceptions of trends of autocratisation (and democratisation)" (Skaaning 2020, 1534).

The present paper contributes to this important scholarly debate, which is still far from settled. In doing so, we take a conceptual stance. Our concern refers to the conceptualisation and operationalisation of autocratisation and the implicated interpretation, and how a biased perspective in all three areas can be avoided. We put forward the argument that it is rather the very basic diagnosis of the state of political regimes in the world that requires a more precise framework. We find problematic the inclusion of all instances of meaningful democratic and autocratic downturns within the conceptual boundary of autocratisation, as done by L&L (see **Figure 2**).

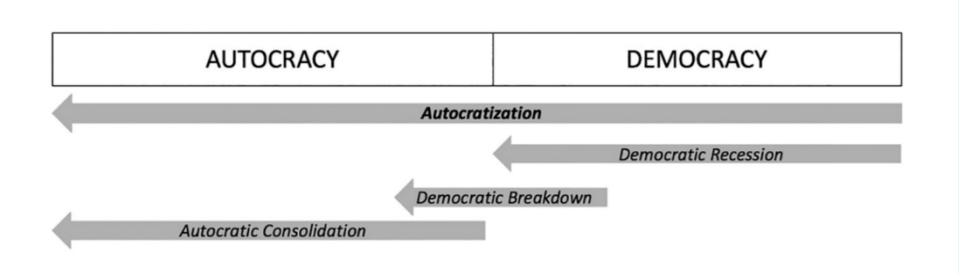

Figure 2: Autocratisation as Democratisation in Reverse

Notes: Lührmann and Lindberg (2019)

L&L (2019, 6-8) view downturns on different segments of the autocracy-democracy continuum, as well as of different magnitudes across these segments, as instances of autocratisation. Let us consider briefly a non-trivial example in order to show the implications of such a conceptualisation. The authors treat the drop in point estimate for Spain in 2013-2017 and for Russia in 1993-2017 as representing a case of "autocratisation". Moreover, they also qualify the "type of autocratisation" in both cases as representing "democratic erosion". Note however that while Spain experienced a change from 0.88 to 0.77 (by 0.11), the corresponding point estimate for Russia changed from 0.53 to 0.27 (by 0.26) on the EDI (Coppedge et al. 2018). That is, drops in regime quality on different segments of the autocracy-democracy continuum and of different magnitudes are qualified in the same way: autocratisation. The problem becomes immediately apparent: regardless of whether a given country is a liberal democracy, electoral democracy, electoral autocracy or a closed autocracy, any downward cumulative change of at least 0.1 on the EDI is evaluated as autocratisation. This uniform qualification is expected to have implications for the extent of assessment and interpretation of autocratisation in the world, as done by L&L (2019).

Therefore, we build on an important conceptual distinction made by Giovanni Sartori (1970, 1036) and believe that, although downturns in regime quality may be similar as regards direction and *degree*, they can be qualitatively different in *kind*. Thus, "what is" type of ontological questions and "either-or" mode of analysis are not only worth exploring for polities crossing the threshold between autocracy and democracy and *vice versa*, but also for those experiencing downturns and upturns within the confines of a given conceptual container, such as liberal democracy, and for those regressing or progressing to inferior or superior regime categories. On this basis, we believe that the Sartorian conceptual distinction in *kind* is fruitful to be considered for a more precise diagnosis of political regimes and their direction of change. In the next section, we introduce the framework of regime states, reflect on its structural characteristics, and outline its descriptive, prescriptive and heuristic functions.

3. Conceptualising a New Framework of Regime States

1.1 The Framework of Regime States

Introducing the framework of regime states, we start from three basic, but salient assumptions borrowed from Lührmann et al. (2018). First, in line with their regimes of the world (RoW) typology, we agree that it is conceptually useful to distinguish between four regime types: closed autocracy (CA), electoral autocracy (EA), electoral democracy (ED), and liberal democracy (LD).[1] Second, we adopt the idea that these regime categories can be represented on a [0, 1] continuum. Third, at a higher level of generality, we also agree that one can distinguish between two segments of the continuum: (a) an autocratic segment, which includes CA and EA regimes, and (b) a democratic segment, which subsumes ED and LD regimes. We illustrate these three basic assumptions in Figure 3.

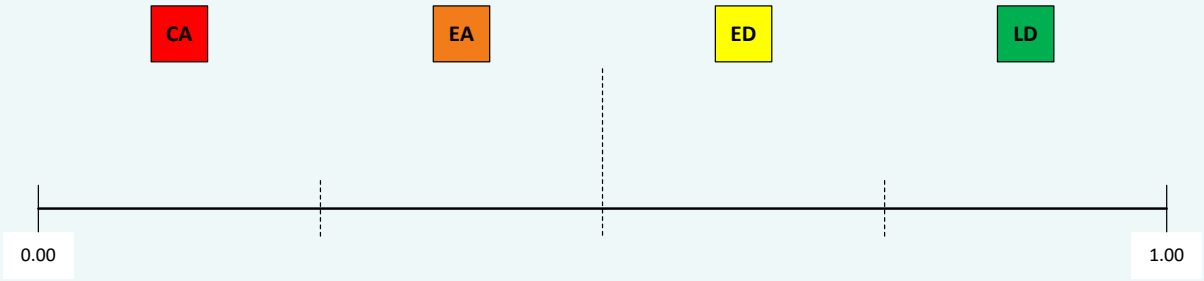

Figure 3: Regime Classification (Based on RoW)

[1] We adopt the RoW typology but not its corresponding measure entirely, as it uses the mere formal provision of 'multiparty elections' as the benchmark to distinguish between CA and EA regimes.

Notes: CA – closed autocracy, EA – electoral autocracy, ED – electoral democracy, LD – liberal democracy. Dashed vertical lines delineating regime categories imply that corresponding thresholds can vary depending on definitions, concepts and type of data used.

Building on the above salient insights from Lührmann et al. (2018), we distinguish three types of regime states. We define regime states as mutually exclusive manifestations of political regimes on the autocracy-democracy continuum, encompassing either static conditions or dynamic changes within and between regime categories unfolding within a connected time period.

The first type of regime states implies *no significant change* resulting in *stasis* and *stability*, such as CA stasis, EA stasis, ED stability and LD stability. Note that we use *stasis* for the autocratic and *stability* for the democratic segments of the continuum. Autocratic stasis is viewed as a negative occurrence, whereas democratic stability is imbued with a positive connotation to acknowledge their different effects for the extent of *exclusion* or *inclusion* in a given political setting. We believe that durable autocratic exclusion and long-term democratic inclusion represent qualitatively different states. With this distinction, we tackle the long existing problem of how to escape the normative dilemma that stability in democracies is associated with a positive performance and outcome, while inertia in autocracies with an undesired result. Moreover, representing distinct kinds of regime states (Sartori 1970), we expect for CA and EA stasis to be underpinned by different constellations of institutions and actors. We also expect for distinct constellations of institutions and actors to underpin ED and LD stability. However, both autocratic stasis and democratic stability define *static* political regimes, which do not experience meaningful change in quality over a connected time period. We illustrate these four states of autocratic stasis and democratic stability in Figure 4.

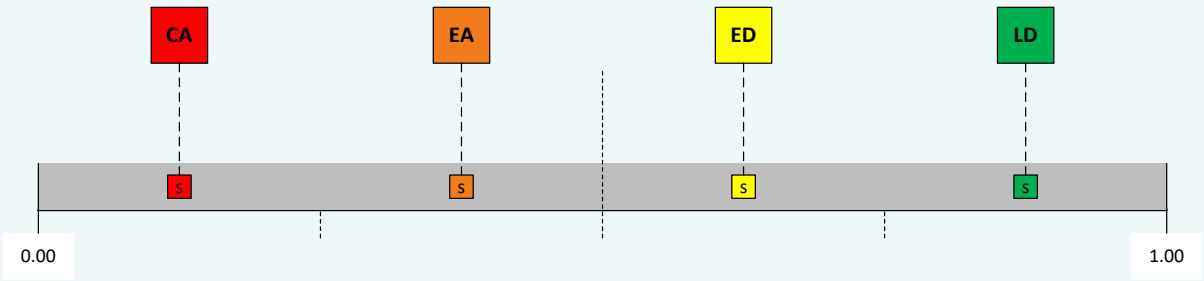

Figure 4: Stasis and Stability

Notes: CA – closed autocracy, EA – electoral autocracy, ED – electoral democracy, LD – liberal democracy; s – stasis/ stability. Dashed vertical lines delineating regime categories imply that corresponding thresholds can vary depending on definitions, concepts and type of data used.

The second type of regime states reflects *intra-regime change* resulting in *downturns* and *upturns*. It defines polities that experience discernible downturn or upturn changes but fall short of regressing or progressing to inferior or superior regime categories. We borrow "downturn" and "upturn" qualifications as signifiers of regime directional change from Knutsen and Skaaning (2022) but reserve them for situations in which regime transformation does not lead to transition to a different regime category. Hence, changes within the regime types characterise polities that experience losses or gains in quality, but, essentially, oscillate within the same regime category (see Figure 5). Tracking intra-regime changes is an important step in identifying their direction and magnitude.

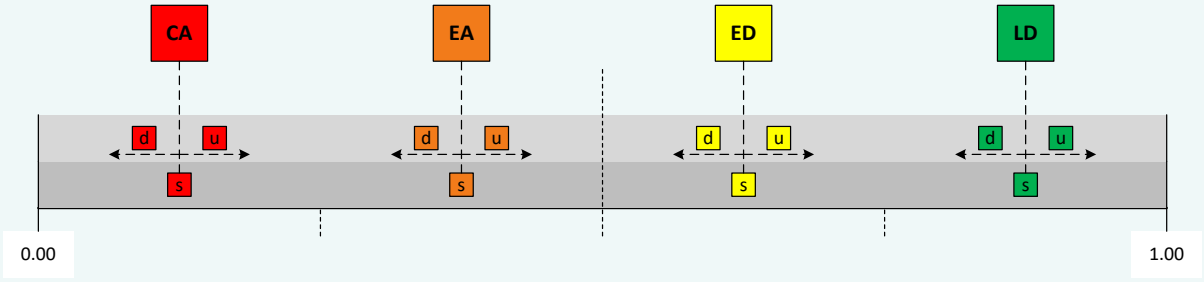

Figure 5: Downturns and Upturns

Notes: CA – closed autocracy, EA – electoral autocracy, ED – electoral democracy, LD – liberal democracy; s – stasis/ stability; d – downturn, u – upturn. Dashed vertical lines delineating regime categories imply that corresponding thresholds can vary depending on definitions, concepts and type of data used.

The third type of regime states implies *regime transitions* resulting in *regressions* and *progressions*. It defines polities that either regress to an inferior or progress to a superior regime category. Such polities experience a qualitative change that is sufficient for them to be requalified into a different regime category. Note that progression to ED is conceptually equivalent to autocratic breakdown, whereas regression to EA is conceptually analogous to democratic breakdown. However, regressions and progressions can themselves be of three sub-types. First, there may be regressions and progressions of small magnitudes, such as, for instance, those defined by minor differences of $|\Delta LDI_t| = 0.04$ across regime category thresholds. Second, regressions and progressions can also represent transformation processes involving large magnitudes of $|\Delta LDI_t| = 0.4$. Third, there may be also cases of *cascading regressions* and *progressions* that involve transitions across $2 \leq n \leq 3$ regime category thresholds occurring in *different* years but as part of a connected time period. Figure 6 illustrates regime transitions by arrows that transcend hypothetical thresholds delineating regime categories.

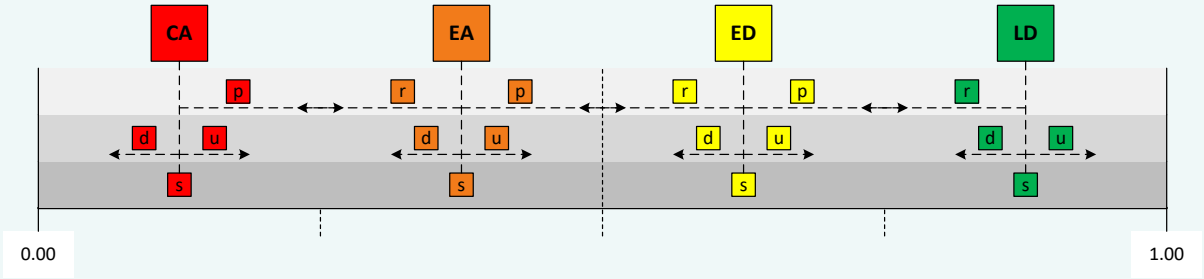

Figure 6: Regressions and Progressions

Notes: CA – closed autocracy, EA – electoral autocracy, ED – electoral democracy, LD – liberal democracy; s – stasis/ stability; d – downturn, u – upturn; r – regression, p – progression. Dashed vertical lines delineating regime categories imply that corresponding thresholds can vary depending on definitions, concepts and type of data used.

The point of departure for this framework is a refined way of capturing the location of a given polity on the autocracy-democracy continuum, its static or changing nature, and if the latter applies, the direction and kind of its movement (within or across regime categories). This approach is certainly less parsimonious but adds significant precision to the assessment of regime dynamics. This more fine-grained picture also allows for the identification of non-trivial decisions by key political actors and peculiar constellations between actors and institutions. The above framework maps out all logically possible regime states, except for abrupt regime changes caused by the loss or gain of sovereignty, revolutions, coups d'état, and autogolpes, which are highly impactful yet rare events.

1.2 Structural Characteristics

Structural characteristics that underpin the framework of regime states relate to three main aspects: (a) bi-directional change; (b) relational asymmetry; and (c) joint exhaustiveness and mutual exclusiveness. First, the framework of regime states reflects the idea of *bi-directional change* along a continuum defined by CA and LD as opposite poles. Hence, it can account for regime transformation in either upward or downward directions. In this way, the framework avoids the democracy-centric bias of defining political regimes relative to LD as an ideal type. The democracy-centric view has its own merits, but it overlooks the distribution of political regimes at present and even more so from a long historical perspective, with autocracies representing the dominant form of political organisation.

Second, the framework is also defined by *relational asymmetry*. We do not expect that the mere absence of conditions that are responsible for downturns would also be sufficient for upturns. This expectation of relational asymmetry is consistent with set-theoretic logic (Ragin 2008; Schneider and Wagemann 2012; Duşa 2019). In a set-theoretic framework, if the presence of condition X is sufficient for the outcome Y, then this does not imply that the absence of X would be sufficient for the absence of Y, as in the following expression:

$$X \rightarrow Y \neq {\sim}X \rightarrow {\sim}Y$$

Though upturns and downturns may occur in opposite directions within a given regime category, we do not expect that upturns will always be driven by the mere absence of conditions that are sufficient for downturns. We expect the same set-theoretic principle to govern the logic of regressions or progressions to different regime categories. The mere absence of conditions responsible for regressions are not expected to be sufficient for progressions to superior regime categories.

Third, the framework is also defined by *joint exhaustiveness and mutual exclusiveness*. Similar to classifications in natural sciences, the organisation of concepts in clear and functional taxonomies in social sciences has to make sure that all meaningful representations of the concept under study are accounted for and to remain specific enough to discriminate sets based on their exclusive qualities (Sartori 1970, 1038; Gerschewski 2021, 10). In this vein, our framework accounts for the entire *genus*, distinct *classes,* and mutually exclusive *species* of regime states. It accounts for all logically possible regime states but remains fine-grained enough to capture three types of regime states, defined by their static qualities and changes within and across regime categories. At the same time, the framework is also apt at discriminating among mutually exclusive states, such as stasis or stability, downturns or upturns, and regressions or progressions within each type.

1.3 Functional Characteristics

In order to be useful, the framework of regime states needs to satisfy at least three practical functions: (a) to be reflective of empirical reality (*descriptive function*); (b) to suggest new insights for political practice (*prescriptive function*); and (c) to generate new research questions (*heuristic function*).

First, in contrast to the framework that includes qualitatively distinct phenomena in the conceptual boundary of autocratisation (L&L 2019), the framework of regime states allows for a more precise distinction between instances of downturn change within a given regime category and cases of regression to an inferior regime type. Such a precise distinction becomes possible with the advent of fine-grained regime-sensitive data provided by V-Dem (Coppedge et al. 2024a). Similarly, the framework also allows for a more precise distinction between instances of upturn change within a given regime category and those of progression to a superior regime type. For this purpose, we devise an empirical strategy that involves regime classification, regime transition detection, and temporal analysis of regime states (more below).

Second, the framework of regime states can also suggest more precise insights for political practice. The prescriptive function of our framework refers to the relevance of regime measurement (generally labelled as

democracy measurement) for policy makers and practitioners, especially in the field of democracy promotion. The strong mutual influence between research and political practice – governments and international actors need benchmarks for their decisions – becomes particularly obvious and tangible in respect to democracy measurement (Kneuer 2024, 300). As Munck argues in his referential work (2009), democracy measurement fulfils various critical functions for democracy promotion actors: describing the state of affairs, monitoring compliance with standards and progress towards goals, diagnosing countries and issuing early warnings, evaluating programs, and making decisions (Munck 2009, 5-7). In this sense, enhanced measures of democracy bear a public good aspect (Coppedge et al. 2011, 261). Based on our framework, a relevant (non)governmental actor interested in furthering the democratic process in a given context may start their evaluation from a precise location of the target regime on the autocracy-democracy continuum. Then, they might examine whether the target regime in question is in a state of stasis/ stability or flux. If the latter applies, they will need to consider further whether the change occurs in a downturn or upturn direction within a given regime category, or whether it involves a regression to an inferior or progression to a superior regime type. Identifying the exact location on the autocracy-democracy continuum, the state of stasis/stability or flux and the precise direction of change within a given regime category or across different regime types should not be viewed as an end in itself. It should have implications for the exact areas of policy intervention.

Third, the regime states framework enables the exploration of numerous new research questions. Illustrating just a few of these questions, one can interrogate the extent to which the "third wave of autocratisation" (L&L 2019) is a manifestation of qualitatively distinct regime states. For instance, one can investigate the extent to which observed losses in regime quality represent instances of downturns or regressions on the democratic spectrum of the continuum or instances of downturns or regressions on the autocratic segment of the continuum. A similar line of inquiry can be pursued regarding the first two reverse waves and, equally, the three waves of democratisation (Huntington 1991). However, when examining the broader phenomenon of regime waves, scholars of regime change need to assess: (a) the ratio of *cases* involving losses or gains in regime quality; (b) the ratio of the *magnitude* of change in opposite directions; and (c) the ratio of the *global population* residing in countries experiencing distinct regime states along the autocracy-democracy continuum. Here, consider that, in contrast to "natural kinds" (Mahoney 2021), the phenomenon of regime wave represents a non-essentialist social construct that originates at the interaction of human representational mind with external environment. Therefore, any exegesis on reverse waves should demonstrate that they reflect genuine events rather than being manifestations of what Francis Galton would refer to as "regression to the mean". Similarly, one can also explore the asymmetries implied by different constellations of institutions and actors that explain opposing processes: (a) downturns and upturns within a specific regime category; and (b) regressions and progressions toward qualitatively different regime types. The next section sheds light on data and employed empirical strategy.

4. Data and Empirical Strategy

The data used in this study comes from the LDI (v2x_libdem) of V-Dem (Coppedge et al. 2024a). The LDI is a composite measure that includes the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) (v2x_polyarchy) and the Liberal Component Index (LCI) (v2x_liberal). While the EDI is considered to measure the "minimum of democracy", focusing on the context and integrity of elections, the LDI goes beyond this. The LDI includes individual liberties as well as judicial and legislative constraints on the executive. As a result, the LDI is able to identify phenomena such as executive aggrandisement, the weakening of the rule of law, and the undermining of the separation of powers. These aspects are highly relevant for assessing democratic quality and provide more precise insights into potential flaws in a country's governance. On this basis, we consider the LDI the more appropriate index.

Given the specific purpose of this paper, we apply the framework of regime states to all countries from the EU's eastern neighbourhood examined by REDEMOS – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine – over the extended period from 1990 to 2023.

Our empirical strategy is defined by three core steps: regime classification, regime transition detection, and temporal analysis of regime states. The first step involves the classification of political regimes based on the RoW typology (Lührmann et al. 2018). While we use the RoW typology, we suggest a different methodology for setting empirical thresholds to identify different regime types. We follow the method of Riedl et al. (2024, 8) for establishing the threshold between EA and ED. They use an innovative approach by calculating the global mean LDI score for the period 1990-2023 (our period of interest). We choose this method because it provides a significantly less artificial threshold compared to others and is more closely aligned with real-world occurrences of regime states. This results in a threshold of 0.391. Note that Riedl et al. set it at 0.393 on the LDI. This minor difference is explainable, given that we use the most recent version of the LDI (Coppedge et al. 2024a). For the threshold between ED and LD, we also follow Riedl et al. (2024, 9) and set it at 0.80 on the LDI. A similar threshold of 0.80 on LCI is used for the RoW typology (Lührmann et al. 2018). Searching for an empirical anchor to identify a plausible threshold between CA and EA, we turn to a well-established statistical parameter: standard deviation (SD). One can reasonably expect EA regimes to populate a region of 1 SD below the global mean of the distribution (0.391). For our period of interest, 1 SD is 0.269 on LDI, which implies that the approximate transition point between CA and EA would be at around 0.122 on LDI. We report the corresponding descriptive statistics for the global LDI in Appendix A of the supplemental material (SM).

In the second step, we identify years when the above empirical thresholds are crossed, signifying transitions to inferior (e.g., from ED to EA) or superior (e.g., from CA to EA) regimes categories. This step is instrumental for the identification of regressions and progressions. Given the uncertainty in LDI data, as reported in Coppedge et al. (2024a), we iterate this step with the Highest Posterior Density (HPD) intervals (one standard deviation lower and upper bounds) in SM Appendix D.

In the third step, temporal analysis of regime states introduces a detailed examination of annual LDI value *changes*. It distinguishes between years of notable change and periods of stasis or stability, employing a differential approach to identify contiguous years with negative (indicative of losses in quality), positive (indicative of gains in quality), and negligible or no changes in LDI values. The rules for delineating negative, positive, and no change sets are defined, as follows:

Negative change sets: Identify contiguous years exhibiting a decrease of $\Delta \leq -0.01$ in LDI values. They reflect downturns within a given regime category or regressions to inferior regime categories, as in the following expression:

$$S_{\text{negative}} = \{t \mid \Delta LDI_t \leq -0.01, n > 1\}$$

Here, t indexes the years in the dataset, S_{negative} represents the set of years that are part of a negative change set, ΔLDI_t is the change in LDI from year t - 1 to year t, and n is the number of contiguous years meeting this condition.

Positive change sets: Detect contiguous years with an increase of $\Delta \geq 0.01$ in LDI values. They reflect intra-category upturns or progressions to superior regime categories, as in the following formalisation:

$$S_{\text{positive}} = \{t \mid \Delta LDI_t \geq 0.01, n > 1\}$$

No change sets: Identify contiguous years with minimal or no change in the LDI value of $|\Delta| < 0.01$. They denote periods of autocratic stasis or democratic stability, as in the following expression:

$$S_{\text{no change}} = \{t \mid |\Delta LDI_t| < 0.01, n > 1\}$$

where $|\Delta LDI_t|$ accounts for the absolute magnitude of change (of less than 0.01) in the LDI without regard to its direction (positive or negative).

Hence, in defining the above rules, we opt for a regime-sensitive approach that allows the V-Dem data to speak for itself. We only input conditions of yearly negative, positive and no changes and require that such

sets involve $n > 1$ years. Opting for an absolute magnitude of change of $|\Delta LDI_t| < 0.01$ to distinguish no change sets from negative and positive sets is consistent with other approaches that take yearly differences of ±0.01 as potential signifiers of autocratisation or democratisation episodes (L&L 2019; Maerz et al. 2023). However, such approaches underestimate periods of regime stasis or stability and use arbitrary parameters for tolerance, annual reverse, and cumulative turns. In contrast, we define a specific rule for no change sets, since we believe that periods of regime stasis or stability are conceptually and empirically important to be accounted for. Finally, setting the minimum limit of contiguous negative, positive and no change at $n > 1$ years (at least 2 consecutive years) ensures that meaningful information about regime dynamics is preserved. In what follows, we apply the framework of regimes states as a descriptive tool to political regimes in the EU's eastern neighbourhood.

5. Results

1.4 Descriptive Statistics

Presenting the results of the analysis, we begin by calculating and displaying descriptive statistics that provide information on the variance and overall distribution of yearly LDI changes in the EU's eastern neighbourhood.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Country	Mean_Diff	Median_Diff	SD	Minim_Diff	Maxim_Diff	Kurtosis
Armenia	0.0028	-0.003	0.0569	-0.095	0.223	10.906
Azerbaijan	-0.0005	-0.001	0.0259	-0.071	0.115	15.005
Belarus	-0.0094	-0.001	0.0345	-0.143	0.072	9.122
Georgia	0.0104	0.004	0.0342	-0.041	0.133	7.600
Moldova	0.0093	0.001	0.0447	-0.087	0.148	4.804
Ukraine	0.0005	0.002	0.0393	-0.132	0.091	6.228

Notes: The table provides descriptive statistics about yearly changes in LDI value in the EU's eastern neighbourhood.

As indicated by the sign of mean differences in LDI values, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine experienced gradual improvements in liberal democratic characteristics over the period studied. Conversely, Azerbaijan and Belarus's negative mean differences (-0.0005 and -0.0094, respectively) point to a slight but consistent loss in regime quality. The higher standard deviations in the case of Armenia (SD = 0.0569) and Moldova (SD = 0.0447) suggest that these countries experienced more volatile regime trajectories, indicating significant fluctuations in their way towards or away from liberal democracy. Armenia's wide range between its minimum and maximum yearly differences (-0.095 to 0.223) also underscores periods of profound regime transformation, reflecting significant down- and upward regime changes. Finally, the higher Kurtosis values in the case of Azerbaijan (15.005) and Armenia (10.906) suggest a distribution with more pronounced tails, indicating that extreme values are more frequent than a normal distribution would predict. We illustrate yearly changes in LDI in the EU's eastern neighbourhood in SM Appendix B. Alternatively, we also report cumulative sum of deviations (CUSUM) in SM Appendix C. In contrast to year-to-year differences in LDI values, CUSUM emphasises the aggregated departure from the mean and is thus apt at spotting systemic changes or trends over time. We turn now to the results on regime classification, regime transitions, and regime states in our region of focus.

1.5 Regime States in the EU's eastern neighbourhood

1.5.1 Regime classification

Based on LDI data (v2x_libdem) and the corresponding empirical thresholds introduced in the methods section above, we find that political regimes in the EU's eastern neighbourhood fluctuated between: EA (1990-2017) and ED (2018-2023) in Armenia; CA (1990-1991, 1994-2023) and EA (1992-1993) in Azerbaijan;

CA (1999-2023), EA (1990-1991, 1995-1998) and ED (1992-1994) in Belarus; CA (1992), EA (1990-1991, 1993-2012) and ED (2013-2023) in Georgia; EA (1990-1993, 2001-2009) and ED (1994-2000, 2010-2023) in Moldova; and EA (1990-2006, 2010-2023) and ED (2007-2009) in Ukraine. Hence, Armenia, Moldova, Ukraine and, most likely, Georgia[2] have never experienced CA regimes. This finding resonates with the well-established scholarship on competitive authoritarianism that also evaluates post-Soviet regimes (Levitsky and Way 2010; Way 2015). In contrast, CA is prevalent in Azerbaijan and Belarus. Furthermore, the correlation coefficient between the RoW measure (v2x_regime) and our findings is r = 0.703, indicating a strong positive but not perfect association.

1.5.2 Regime transition

LDI data suggests that the EU's eastern neighbours have experienced between one and three instances of transitions to inferior or superior regime categories in the period 1990-2023. We superimpose in Figure 7 all instances of regime transitions on the overall regime dynamics in our region of interest, fit trend lines and display confidence intervals to account for uncertainty in LDI data.

As one can visualise, the only regime transition experienced by Armenia occurred in 2018 as part of the Velvet Revolution that brought Nikol Pashinyan and his My Step Alliance, including the Civil Contract party, to the forefront of Armenian politics. Its progression to ED is reflected in higher scores on all dimensions of LDI, especially in the domain of free and fair elections with a notable improvement from a point estimate of 0.20 in 2016 to 0.92 in 2019 (Coppedge et al. 2024a). The positive trend line confirms descriptive statistics that are reflective of gradual gains in Armenia's LDI characteristics.

Azerbaijan and Belarus, the two cases displaying a sustained downward regime trend, experienced their regime transitions in 1990s. Reflective of the broader *Zeitgeist* defined by fragmentations and openings of previous autocratic regimes unfolding across Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the Cold War (Fukuyama 1989, Przeworski 1992; Fish 1999; McFaul 2002), Azerbaijan progressed to EA and Belarus transitioned to ED in 1992[3]. The opposite regression to CA in Azerbaijan follows the election of Heydar Aliyev to the presidential post by a staggering 98.8% of vote cast in the first round of elections. The new administration under Heydar Aliyev dismantled judicial and legislative constraints on the executive and reversed the initial embryonic openings in the domain of free and fair elections, and freedom of association. Whilst consecutive regressions of Belarus to EA and then to CA took place in 1995 and 1999[4], they appear to be part of a transformation period that started in 1994, when Aleksandr Lukashenko became the president of Belarus. By 1999, losses in regime quality affected all LDI dimensions. However, the most severe losses occurred with the neutralisation of legislative and judicial constraints on the executive (Coppedge et al. 2024a), as a result of the 1996 rigged constitutional referendum that introduced a superpresidential system of government (D'Cruz et al. 2023).

After two opposite regime transitions at the beginning of 1990s, a significant upturn due to the Rose Revolution in 2003 and the first peaceful transfer of power in 2012, Georgia advanced to ED in 2013[5] with an improved environment for free and fair elections, and freedom of expression (Coppedge et al. 2024a). Despite inherent data subjectivity, illustrated by lower and upper bounds in SM Appendix D, LDI indicates that Georgian political regime has been on a gradual but steady upward trend since 1990.

[2] Based on LDI point estimates, Georgia appears to have been under a CA regime in 1992. However, this may be subject to measurement error, since LDI lower bounds do not confirm the regression to CA of Georgia in 1992.
[3] Belarus's progression to ED in 1992 is confirmed by LDI upper bounds, but not by lower bounds that suggest an EA upturn in 1991-1992.
[4] Consecutive regressions of Belarus to EA and CA are confirmed by LDI lower and upper bounds with a slight time difference, which is reported in SM Appendix D.
[5] Georgia's progression to ED in 2013 in confirmed by LDI lower and upper bounds. However, according to LDI upper bounds, the first transition to ED might have occurred earlier in 2004 in the result of transformations bought about by the Rose Revolution.

Moldova's progression to ED in 1994[6] concluded a cycle of genuine political transformation at the beginning of 1990s manifested with gains across all LDI dimensions (Coppedge et al. 2024a). A reverse regression to EA occurred in 2001[7] with the ascension to power of the conservative Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM), affecting most LDI dimensions, but especially legislative constrains on the executive (Coppedge et al. 2024a). However, Moldova's political regime bounced back to ED in 2010 following the power transfer to the pro-EU Alliance for European Integration (AIE). The trend line corroborates descriptive statistics from Table 1 and suggests a gradual improvement in Moldova's LDI characteristics throughout 1990-2023.

Finally, Ukraine experienced two instances of regime transitions in the result of political reform brought about by the Orange Revolution and autocratic restoration. Progression to ED in 2007[8] was driven by a critical mass of democratic achievements during the leadership of President Yushchenko. Constitutional amendments, forced by revolutionary events in 2004 and entered into force in 2006, introduced limitations to the presidential power, a five-year term for the *Verkhovna Rada* and proportional representation with a 3% threshold. The electoral environment improved substantially for the regular and snap legislative campaigns of 2006 and 2007, respectively, as well as conditions for the exercise of freedom of expression and assembly (Coppedge et al. 2024a). Regression to EA in 2010[9] was driven by the revisionist agenda of newly elected President Yanukovych, who implemented formal interventions that reinstated the institutional equilibrium prior to the 2004 constitutional reform.

[6] Moldova's progression to ED in 1994 is confirmed by LDI upper bounds, but not by lower bounds that suggest an EA upturn in 1991-1994.
[7] Moldova's regression to EA in 2001 is confirmed by LDI lower bounds, but not by upper bounds that suggest an ED downturn in 2000-2001.
[8] Ukraine's progression to ED in 2007 is confirmed by LDI upper bounds, but not by lower bounds that suggest an EA upturn in 2005-2007.
[9] Ukraine's regression to EA in 2010 is confirmed by LDI upper bounds, but not by lower bounds.

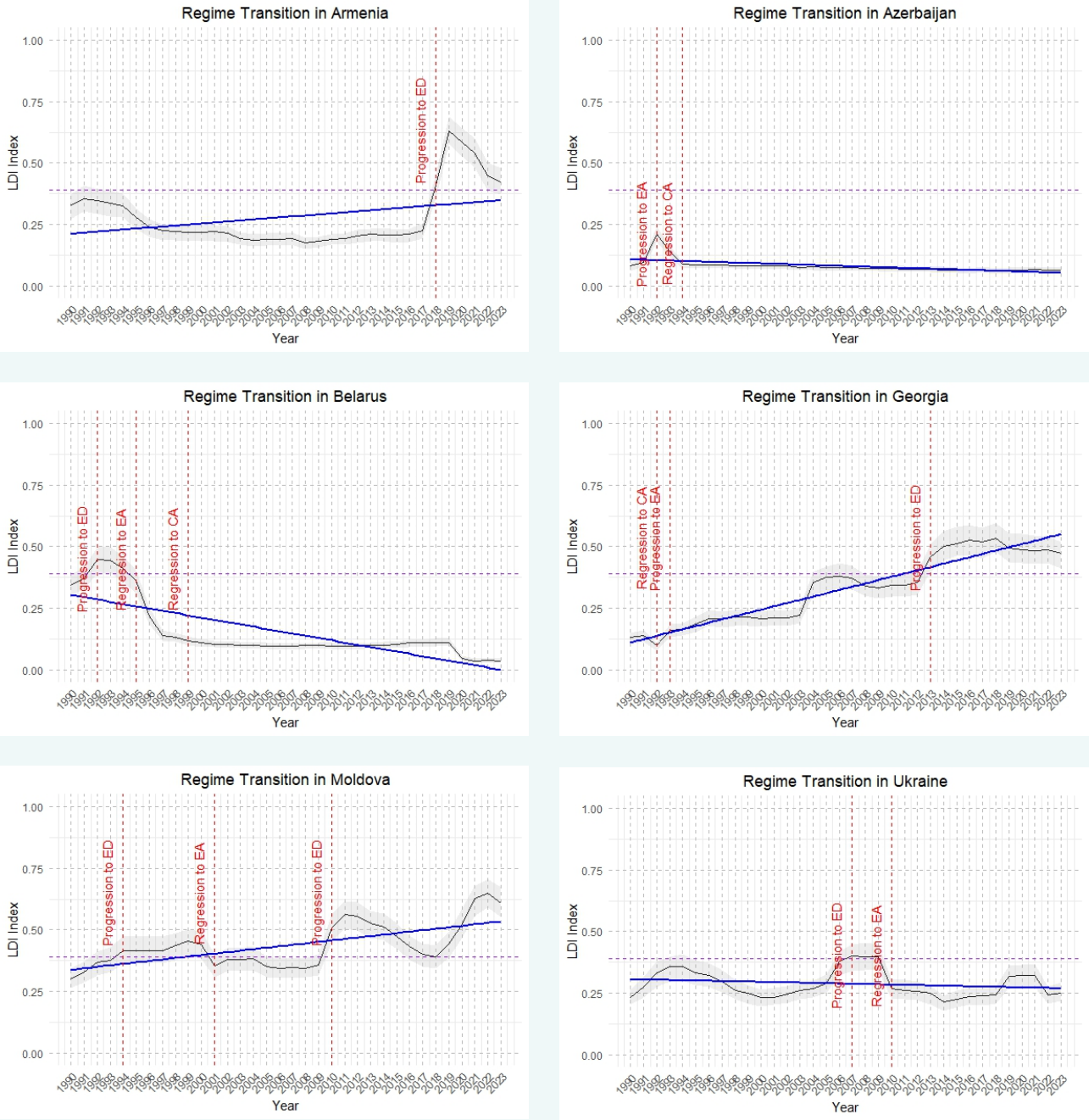

Figure 7: Regime Transitions

Notes: The figure illustrates regime transitions in the EU's eastern neighbourhood in the period 1990-2023.

1.5.3 Regime states

In this sub-section, we compress in Table 2 all regimes states that we find in the EU's eastern neighbourhood, based on LDI point estimates (v2x_libdem). An extended account of regime states experienced by individual countries is presented in chronological sequence with LDI point estimates, lower and upper bounds (18 iterations) in SM Appendix D.

Our analysis yields important results that provide a nuanced view of the development of countries in the EU's eastern neighbourhood. A glance at the overall regime dynamics shows an exceptionally high level of regime changes across the entire group: 18 episodes of stasis or stability, 13 episodes of downturn or upturn, and 14 regime transitions. A closer look at the individual regime states reveals the following:

First, we find that CA stasis represents the most durable regime state in our region. This refers to Azerbaijan in 1995-2023 and Belarus in 2000-2019. At the same time, EA stasis appears to be the most prevalent regime state in the EU's eastern neighbourhood. It is noteworthy, however, that episodes of EA stasis are relatively shorter than those of CA stasis and alternate with downturns or upturns, or even regime transition. The obvious analytic implication of this finding is that periods of EA stasis need to be studied in their own right, instead of being obscured under a "tolerance" parameter (cf. L&L 2019; Maerz et al. 2023).

Second, we find only three cases of ED stability: Moldova (1995-1997), Ukraine (2008-2009), and Georgia (2020-2022). Note that these episodes are rather short. This is our most worrying finding. It suggests that democracy could not take root in a sustained way, and stability over a longer period of time could not be established. Reassuringly, this finding corroborates previous research confirming that electoral democracies remain highly vulnerable and susceptible to either downturns or regressions (Diamond 2002). Since Moldova and Ukraine regressed subsequently to EA in 2000-2001 and 2010, respectively, and Georgia experienced losses in regime quality in 2023, both domestic forces and international actors committed to democratic reform need to remain highly vigilant to any internal and external efforts aiming at undermining democratic gains in ED settings. Overall, our findings are meaningful as they reveal a strong dynamic (in either direction) in the intermediate zone between liberal democracy and closed autocracy. This draws particular attention to ED and EA for democracy support.

Third, another important piece of information from our analysis refers to the direction of the movements. The upturns (eight) clearly outweigh the downturns (five). And the largest group of upturns (six) refers to movements from electoral autocracy to electoral democracy. A similar picture emerges for the progressions and regressions: eight movements towards democracy are offset by six movements towards autocracy. And here, too, the progression to electoral democracy is the largest group with six transitions.

Table 2: Regime States in EU's eastern neighbourhood (LDI)

Type	Regime states	Cases	Change
Stasis & Stability	CA stasis	AZE (1995-2023), BLR (2000-2019), BLR (2022-2023)	No change
	EA stasis	ARM (1992-1993), ARM (1998-2002), ARM (2004-2007), ARM (2013-2016), GEO (1997-2002), GEO (2006-2007), GEO (2009-2011), MDA (2003-2004), MDA (2006-2008), UKR (2011-2013), UKR (2017-2018), UKR (2020-2021)	No change
	ED stability	GEO (2020-2022), MDA (1995-1997), UKR (2008-2009)	No change
	LD stability	N/A	No change
Downturns & Upturns	CA downturn	BLR (2020-2021)	Negative
	CA upturn	No cases	Positive
	EA downturn	ARM (1994-1997), UKR (1995-2000)	Negative
	EA upturn	GEO (1995-1996), GEO (2003-2005), MDA (1991-1992), UKR (1991-1993), UKR (2002-2003), UKR (2015-2016)	Positive
	ED downturn	ARM (2020- 2023), MDA (2013-2017)	Negative
	ED upturn	MDA (1998-1999), MDA (2019-2022)	Positive
	LD downturn	N/A	Negative
	LD upturn	N/A	Positive
Regressions & Progressions	Progression to EA	AZE (1991-1992), GEO (1993)	Positive
	Regression to CA	AZE (1993-1994), BLR (1999), GEO (1992)	Negative
	Progression to ED	ARM (2017-2019), BLR (1991-1992), GEO (2012-2016), MDA (1994), MDA (2009-2011), UKR (2005-2007)	Positive
	Regression to EA	BLR (1994-1997), MDA (2000-2001), UKR (2010)	Negative
	Progression to LD	N/A	Positive
	Regression to ED	N/A	Negative

Notes: The table includes all regime states experienced by EU's eastern neighbours in the period 1990-2023 (based on LDI).

Temporal analysis of regime states also reveals several idiosyncratic results. Armenia experienced the steepest improvement in democratic quality in the EU's eastern neighbourhood from 2017 to 2019, driven by profound transformations following the Velvet Revolution. Azerbaijan had the longest period of CA stasis in the region. Given the strategic gain over Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023, which boosted the internal legitimacy of Ilham Aliyev's regime, CA stasis is likely to endure in Azerbaijan. Belarus demonstrates that the competitive election of an autocrat at the helm of national politics can have significant and lasting consequences for a country trapped in a prolonged period of autocratic rule. Georgia exemplifies how the same incumbent elites can restrict political and civil rights after 2022, following a period of slight improvement in 2012-2016. Moldova has the longest experience of democratic rule in the region (Bușcaneanu 2017; Bușcaneanu and Li 2024). However, it remains vulnerable to regression, as seen during the PCRM's takeover in 2000-2001, or to an ED downturn, as evidenced in the period of "state capture" by tycoon-turned-politician Vladimir Plahotniuc and his Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM) from 2013 to 2017 (Tudoroiu 2015; Knott 2018). Ukraine has experienced regime changes that succeed one another in a dialectical fashion, reflecting significant domestic strife and struggle, exacerbated by external influence and aggression.

Overall, the framework of regime states allows a more precise diagnosis of regime dynamics in the EU's eastern neighbourhood than existing approaches (cf. L&L 2019; Maerz et al. 2021). For comparison purposes, we present the findings of these approaches in SM Appendix F. However, how robust are the above empirical results based on LDI estimates? We briefly address this issue in the next subsection.

1.5.4 Robustness

Given the uncertainty in LDI data, we performed a robustness check using the alternative EDI (v2x_polyarchy). We use the method of Riedl et al. (2024) and set the threshold between EA and ED at point 0.501, which is the global mean EDI score for the period of interest: 1990-2023. Interestingly, note that this threshold coincides with the cut-off point used by Lührmann et al. 2018 in their RoW typology. As detailed in the methods section above, we expect EA polities to be located 1 SD (0.268) below the global mean (0.501), implying that the approximate transition point between CA and EA would be around 0.233 on the EDI. We report the corresponding descriptive statistics for the global EDI in SM Appendix A.

Based on EDI and the corresponding empirical thresholds, we find that political regimes in the EU's eastern neighbourhood fluctuated between: EA (1995-2017) and ED (1990-1994, 2018-2023) in Armenia; CA (1990-1991, 2004-2023) and EA (1992-2003) in Azerbaijan; CA (2006-2012, 2020-2023), EA (1990-1991, 1995-2005, 2013-2019), and ED (1992-1994) in Belarus; EA (1990-2003, 2008-2009) and ED (2004-2007, 2010-2023) in Georgia; EA (1990-1991, 2005-2009) and ED (1992-2004, 2010-2023) in Moldova; and EA (1990-1991, 1998-2005, 2010-2018, 2022-2023) and ED (1992-1997, 2006-2009, 2019-2021) in Ukraine. Thus, we can confirm that Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine have never experienced CA regimes. In contrast, Azerbaijan appears to have experienced CA politics in 1990-1991 and 2004-2023, and Belarus in 2006-2012 and 2020-2023. Note that the periods defined by CA regimes in Azerbaijan and Belarus are shorter with EDI than with LDI data. In contrast to the LDI data, Armenia also appears to have experienced ED in 1990-1994, Georgia in 2004-2007, and Ukraine in 1992-1997 and 2019-2021. The correlation coefficient between the RoW measure (v2x_regime) and our findings based on EDI is even stronger: r = 0.815. Furthermore, we also find a strong association of r = 0.778 between our regime classification-related findings based on LDI and EDI.

While employing the EDI point estimates, we identify a higher number of transition cases to inferior or superior regime categories than with LDI data. In the context of alternative EDI data, Belarus and Ukraine account for the lion's share of this higher number, given their fluctuation around the empirical thresholds imposed to delineate regime categories. Hence, our supplementary test suggests that instances of regime transitions are, as expected, sensitive to specific data and threshold choices. Consequently, researchers should be cautious when drawing definite conclusions about regime transitions based on a single index. In this vein, we find that out of 14 transition cases identified with LDI data, 12 are also confirmed with EDI data. Moreover, we performed 12 additional empirical iterations (2 for each case) and report cases of regime transitions with lower and upper bounds on EDI in SM Appendix E.

Finally, the results of the robustness test condensed in Table 3 confirm our general findings at the regional level. First, we encounter the same "limited diversity" problem defined by the absence of regimes states associated with LD throughout 1990-2023 (rows shaded in grey). Second, EA stasis appears to be again the most prevalent regime state in our region of interest, whereas CA stasis of Azerbaijan in 2005-2023 is the most enduring one. Third, based on EDI data, we identify more cases of ED stability. However, the same worrying note applies, since all of them have either experienced regressions to inferior regime categories (Belarus from 1993-1994 to 1995-2001; Georgia from 2005-2007 to 2008; Moldova from 2002-2004 to 2005-2006; Ukraine from 2008-2009 to 2010-2011) or are likely to experience losses in regime quality in 2024 (Georgia from 2020-2022 to 2024).

Table 3: Regime States in EU's eastern neighbourhood (EDI)

Type	Regime states	Cases	Change
Stasis & Stability	CA stasis	AZE (2005-2023), BLR (2007-2012)	No change
	EA stasis	ARM (2000-2001), ARM (2005-2007), ARM (2013-2016), AZE (1997-2003), BLR (2002-2005), BLR (2014-2019), GEO (1994-1995), GEO (1997-2003), MDA (2007-2008), UKR (2001-2004), UKR (2015-2018)	No change
	ED stability	BLR (1993-1994), GEO (2005-2007), GEO (2020-2022), MDA (1996-2000), MDA (2002-2004), UKR (2008-2009)	No change
	LD stability	N/A	No change
Downturns & Upturns	CA downturn	No cases	Negative
	CA upturn	No cases	Positive
	EA downturn	ARM (2002-2004), AZE (1993-1994), UKR (2013-2014)	Negative
	EA upturn	ARM (1998-1999)	Positive
	ED downturn	ARM (2020-2023), GEO (2018-2019), MDA (2012-2017)	Negative
	ED upturn	GEO (2012-2014), MDA (2019-2021)	Positive
	LD downturn	N/A	Negative
	LD upturn	N/A	Positive
Regressions & Progressions	Progression to EA	AZE (1991-1992), BLR (2013)	Positive
	Regression to CA	AZE (2004), BLR (2006), BLR (2020-2021)	Negative
	Progression to ED	ARM (2017-2019), BLR (1991-1992), GEO (2004), GEO (2010), MDA (1991-1995), MDA (2009-2011), UKR (1991-1992), UKR (2005-2007), UKR (2019-2020)	Positive
	Regression to EA	ARM (1993-1997), BLR (1995-2001), GEO (2008), MDA (2005-2006), UKR (1996-2000), UKR (2010-2011), UKR (2021-2022)	Negative
	Progression to LD	N/A	Positive
	Regression to ED	N/A	Negative

Notes: The table includes all regime states experienced by EU's eastern neighbours in the period 1990-2023 (based on EDI).

6. Conclusions

The present paper argues that a context-sensitive approach to external democracy support should start from a precise diagnosis of target political regimes. As obvious as this proposition might seem in hindsight, the existing approaches to regime assessment employ too broad concepts, underestimate periods of regime stasis or stability and impose arbitrary evaluation parameters. The omnipresent use of blockbuster concepts like autocratisation and democratisation to describe qualitatively different phenomena was justifiable when detailed data about political regimes was lacking. However, with the advent of highly detailed and complex indexes, such as those provided by the V-Dem project (Coppedge et al. 2024a), more nuanced concepts are necessary for both descriptive and prescriptive purposes.

Building on the most recent advances in regime classification (Lührmann et al. 2018) and regime-related data collection efforts (Coppedge et al. 2024a), the present paper introduces a new framework of regime states. We define regime states as mutually exclusive manifestations of political regimes on the autocracy-democracy continuum, encompassing either static conditions or dynamic changes within and between regime categories unfolding within a connected time period.

Applying the framework of regime states to the EU's eastern neighbours, our analysis reveals considerable diversity and yields two type of results. First, regarding regime dynamics from 1990 to 2023, we observe that Azerbaijan and Belarus experienced sustained downward regime trajectories, whereas Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and, to a lesser degree, Ukraine, experienced gradual improvements in their democratic quality. In Georgia and Moldova, this improvement is reflected in an oscillating upward movement. Second, our results confirm greater volatility in the intermediate zone between liberal democracies (absent in our region of interest) and closed autocracies. Most movement (and alternation between regime stasis and change) occurs in the group of electoral autocracies. The analytical implication of these findings suggests that EA stasis should be studied independently, rather than subsumed under episodes of autocratisation. The practical implication calls for specific attention to countries displaying high dynamics, oscillating between EA stasis, upturns, downturns, and even regime transitions to an electoral democracy.

In addition, temporal analysis of regime states corroborates previous research, indicating that electoral democracies, unlike liberal democracies, remain highly unstable polities (Diamond 2002). Reassuringly, based on LDI data, we find only three cases of ED stability in the EU's eastern neighbourhood throughout 1990-2023: Moldova (1995-1997), Ukraine (2008-2009), and Georgia (2020-2022). Considering that Moldova and Ukraine regressed subsequently to EA, and Georgia is likely to experience an ED downturn in 2024, it is crucial that external actors committed to supporting democracy, such as the EU, along with domestic like-minded forces, remain highly vigilant against any attempts to undermine democratic gains in ED settings. Specifically, in the EU's eastern neighbourhood, the situation the EU has faced since the early 1990s involves the potential transition of target countries from authoritarian regimes to democracies. For countries emerging from an authoritarian state, the expectation was that their regimes would progress to ED and then to LD (it is quite rare for an authoritarian country to leap directly from EA to LD). Our findings indicate that it is a misconception (for both domestic actors and democracy promoters) to assume that reaching the state of ED is sufficient and that the trajectory to LD will follow automatically. We demonstrate that achieving the state of ED requires a careful analysis of the remaining flaws that could cause a country to revert back to EA.

Another takeaway from our study is that effective democracy support in a target country must be tailored to consider: (a) its position on the autocracy-democracy continuum; (b) its static or dynamic nature, and if the latter applies, (c) the direction, and kind of regime change. For example, based on the most recent regime states we identify in the EU's eastern neighbourhood, external democracy promoters would need to adopt differentiated approaches for cases experiencing CA stasis (Azerbaijan in 1995-2023 and Belarus in 2022-2023); EA stasis (Ukraine in 2020-2021); ED downturn (Armenia in 2020-2023); ED stability (Georgia in 2020-2022); and ED upturn (Moldova in 2019-2022). CA and EA stasis, as well as ED downturn, stability, and upturn, represent regime states that differ not only in degree but also in the kind of regime change.

"One size fits all" approaches have long been outdated and proven ineffective. Our framework provides the basis for more informed and precisely targeted policy actions. We argue that such a regime-sensitive approach is essential when selecting instruments for target countries. As is often the case in area studies, the first insight is that countries within a specific region are not a homogeneous group with completely similar traits. This is even more true for regime transformations. As observed in the EU's eastern neighbours, regime transformation is highly diverse and yields a high dynamism that other frameworks do not capture. Our approach is able to detect regime dynamics much more accurately, thus laying the foundation for the next step, namely the precise identification of the factors driving these movements. To do so effectively, we provide a consistent framework.

Among existing limitations of this study, at least three issues deserve further attention. First, given the rules imposed to identify contiguous no change, negative and positive change sets, the algorithm devised for temporal analysis of regime states may leave unreported yearly changes that are impactful, but do not settle as contiguous trends. However, we circumvent this challenge in two ways. If such an impactful yearly change leads to a regime transition, then such a change is captured as a transition year. We also allow for transparency and report such individual yearly changes with HPD intervals with both LDI and EDI data. Second, the rule imposed to identify no change sets may underreport transformations that can slowly and incrementally accumulate from yearly insignificant contiguous changes. We use the same two ways to

account for this possibility. We make sure that our algorithm reports any transition years and allow for transparency with HPD intervals. Third, given the restricted regional focus on the EU's eastern neighbourhood, our empirical strategy should be adapted to handle cases of abrupt regime changes (regressions or progressions across $2 \leq n \leq 3$ thresholds in *a single* year). These are rare events but have occurred in specific historical contexts, such as during and shortly after WWII. While our framework can account for all logically possible regime states, we acknowledge the possibility of alternative empirical strategies to apply it to the study of regime dynamics at the global level. Here, the scope for empirical creativity remains virtually limitless. Future work should tap into this boundless creativity.

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Supplemental Material

Appendix A: Descriptive Statistics of Global LDI and EDI Scores

In Appendix A, we present descriptive statistics of global LDI and EDI scores for the period 1990-2023. We input from this table the mean and standard deviations for both LDI (v2x_libdem) and EDI data (v2x_polyarchy).

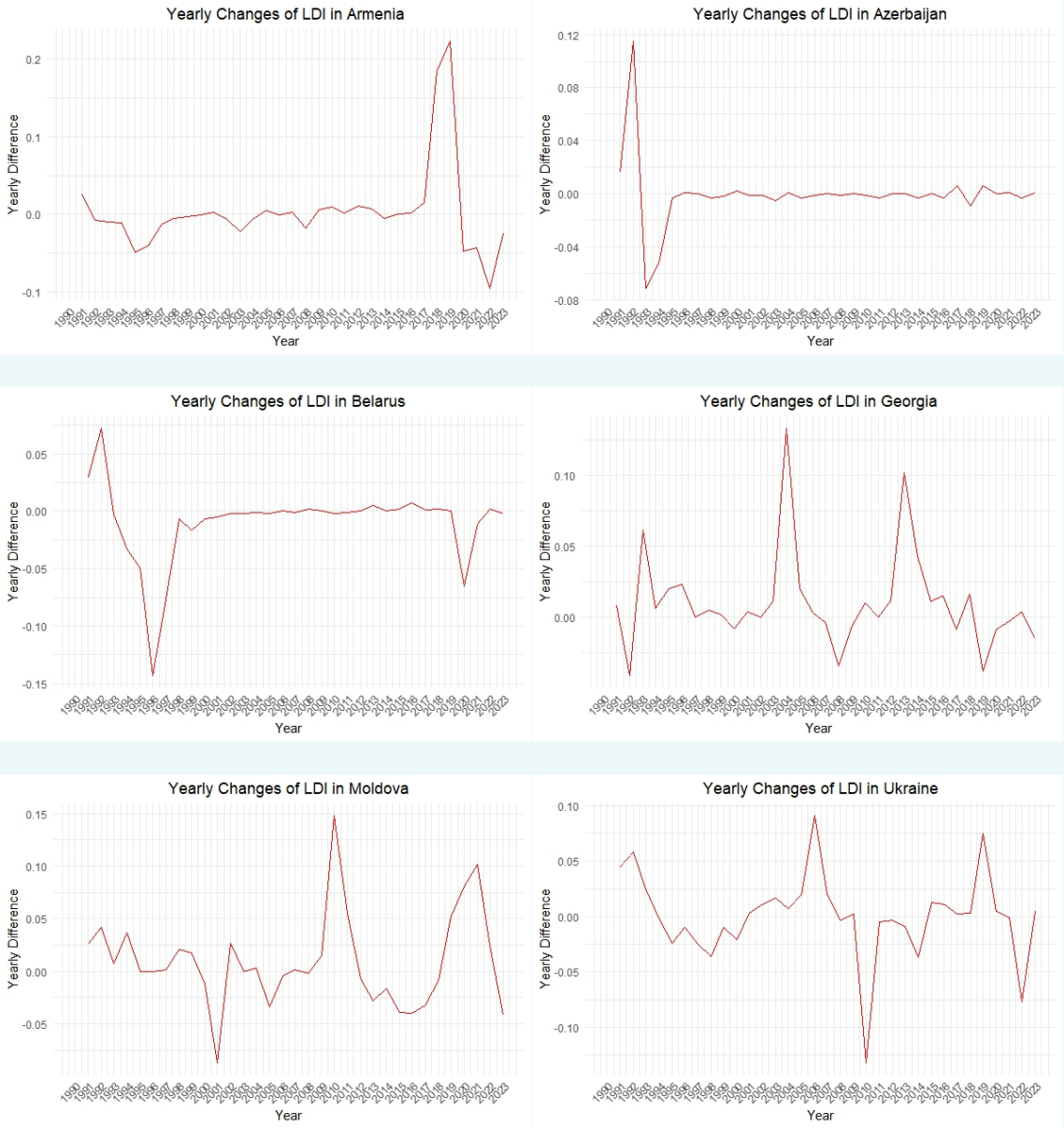
Table A: Global LDI and EDI (1990-2023)

Statistic	v2x_libdem	v2x_polyarchy
Min	0.0050000	0.0130000
1st Qu.	0.1440000	0.2600000
Median	0.3440000	0.4950000
Mean	0.3909928	0.5005609
3rd Qu.	0.6330000	0.7550000
Max	0.8970000	0.9220000
Standard Deviation	0.2690750	0.2675259

Appendix B: Yearly Changes of LDI in the EU's eastern neighbourhood

In Appendix B, we illustrate the annual changes in the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) for the EU's eastern neighbours from 1990 to 2023, highlighting the year-over-year differences in the index values. The red line represents the yearly differences, with positive values indicating improvements and negative values indicating declines in the LDI.

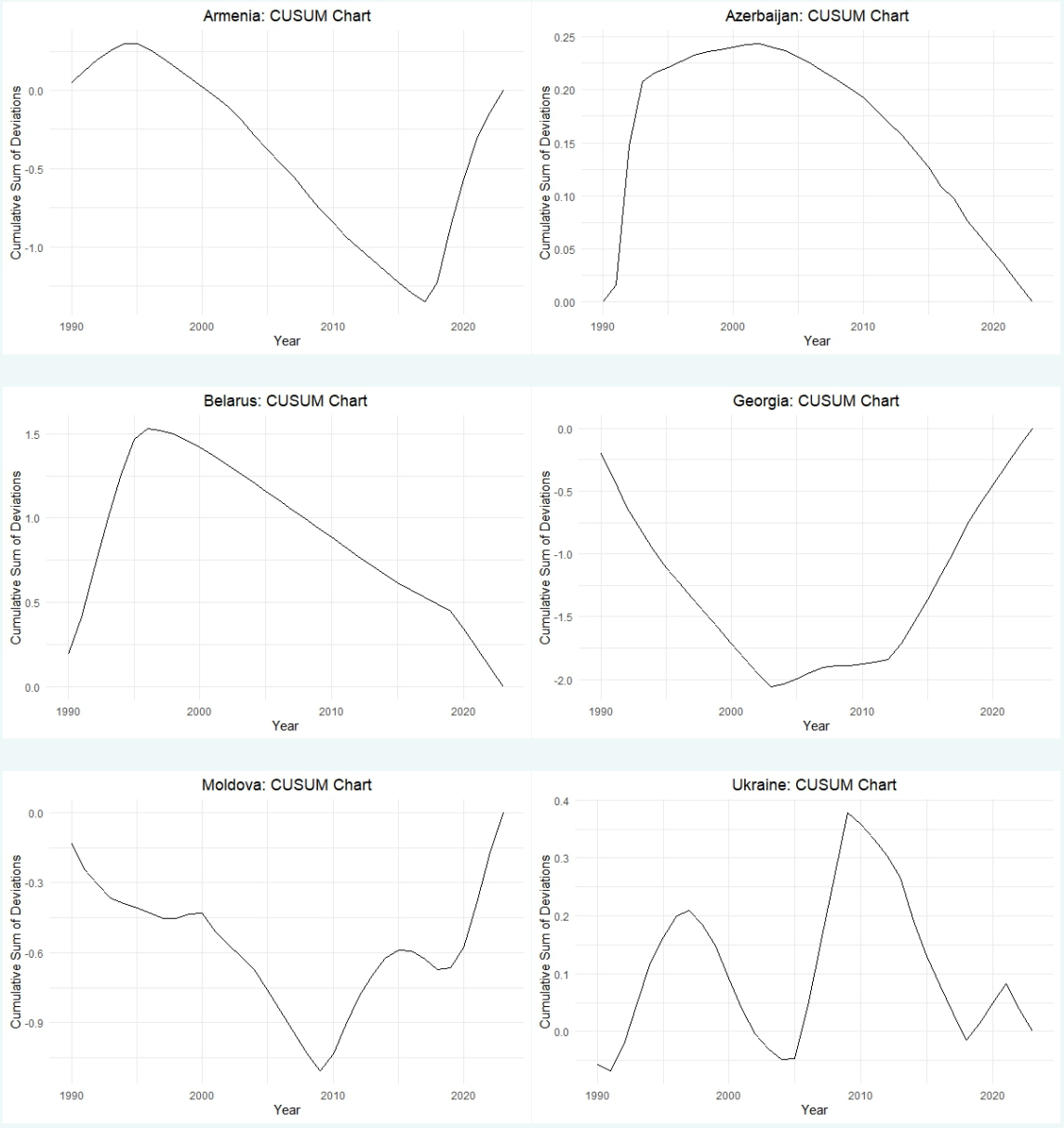
Figure B: Yearly Changes in LDI (1990-2023)



Appendix C: Cumulative Sum of Deviations

In Appendix C, we present the Cumulative Sum of Deviations (CUSUM) for the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) in the EU's eastern neighbourhood from 1990 to 2023. The CUSUM chart tracks the cumulative sum of deviations of the LDI from its mean value, highlighting significant shifts and trends over time. By cumulating deviations from the mean, the CUSUM chart accentuates periods of sustained improvement or decline, reflecting critical events that impact regime dynamics in a given national context.

Figure C: Cumulative Sum of Deviations (1990-2023)



Appendix D: Regime States in EU's eastern neighbourhood
(LDI Point Estimates, Lower and Upper Bounds)

In Appendix D, we report 18 iterations (3 for each case) of temporal analysis of regime states in EU's eastern neighbourhood based on the point estimates (PE: v2x_libdem) and Highest Posterior Density (HPD) intervals: lower bound (LB: v2x_libdem_codelow) and upper bound (UB: v2x_libdem_codehigh), as reported in Coppedge et al. (2024a). In this way, we account for uncertainty in LDI data.

Armenia

Table D1: LDI PE

Years	Regime state	Change
1992, 1993	EA stasis	No change
1994, 1995, 1996, 1997	EA downturn	Negative
1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002	EA stasis	No change
2004, 2005, 2006, 2007	EA stasis	No change
2013, 2014, 2015, 2016	EA stasis	No change
2017, 2018, 2019	Progression to ED	Positive
2020, 2021, 2022, 2023	ED downturn	Negative

Table D2: LDI LB

Years	Regime state	Change
1992, 1993	EA downturn	Negative
1995, 1996, 1997	EA downturn	Negative
1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002	EA stasis	No change
2004, 2005, 2006, 2007	EA stasis	No change
2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016	EA stasis	No change
2017, 2018, 2019	Progression to ED	Positive
2020, 2021, 2022, 2023	Regression to EA	Negative

Table D3: LDI UB

Years	Regime state	Change
1991	Progression to ED	Positive
1993	Regression to EA	Negative
1994, 1995, 1996, 1997	EA downturn	Negative
1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002	EA stasis	No change
2004, 2005, 2006, 2007	EA stasis	No change
2013, 2014, 2015, 2016	EA stasis	No change
2017, 2018, 2019	Progression to ED	Positive
2020, 2021, 2022, 2023	ED downturn	Negative

Azerbaijan

Table D4: LDI PE

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992	Progression to EA	Positive
1993, 1994	Regression to CA	Negative
1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002,	CA stasis	No change

Years	Regime state	Change
2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023		

Table D5: LDI LB

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992	Progression to EA	Positive
1993, 1994	Regression to CA	Negative
1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023	CA stasis	No change

Table D6: LDI UB

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992	Progression to EA	Positive
1993, 1994	Regression to CA	Negative
1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023	CA stasis	No change

Belarus

Table D7: LDI PE

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992	Progression to ED	Positive
1994, 1995, 1996, 1997	Regression to EA	Negative
1999	Regression to CA	Negative
2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019	CA stasis	No change
2020, 2021	CA downturn	Negative
2022, 2023	CA stasis	No change

Table D8: LDI LB

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992	EA upturn	Positive
1993	Progression to ED	Positive
1994, 1995, 1996, 1997	Regression to EA-CA	Negative

Years	Regime state	Change
2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019	CA stasis	No change
2021, 2022, 2023	CA stasis	No change

Table D9: LDI UB

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992	Progression to ED	Positive
1994, 1995, 1996, 1997	Regression to EA	Negative
1999, 2000	EA downturn	Negative
2001	Regression to CA	Negative
2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016	CA stasis	No change
2017	Progression to EA	Positive
2018, 2019	EA stasis	No change
2020, 2021	Regression to CA	Negative
2022, 2023	CA stasis	No change

Georgia

Table D10: LDI PE

Years	Regime state	Change
1992	Regression to CA	Negative
1993	Progression to EA	Positive
1995, 1996	EA upturn	Positive
1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002	EA stasis	No change
2003, 2004, 2005	EA upturn	Positive
2006, 2007	EA stasis	No change
2009, 2010, 2011	EA stasis	No change
2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016	Progression to ED	Positive
2020, 2021, 2022	ED stability	No change

Table D11: LDI LB

Years	Regime state	Change
1993	Progression to EA	Positive
1995, 1996	EA upturn	Positive
1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002	EA stasis	No change
2003, 2004, 2005	EA upturn	Positive
2006, 2007	EA stasis	No change
2009, 2010, 2011, 2012	EA stasis	No change
2013, 2014, 2015	Progression to ED	Positive
2020, 2021, 2022	ED stability	No change

Table D12: LDI UB

Years	Regime state	Change
1992	Regression to CA	Negative
1993	Progression to EA	Positive
1995, 1996	EA upturn	Positive
1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002	EA stasis	No change
2003, 2004, 2005, 2006	Progression to ED	Positive
2008	Regression to EA	Negative
2009, 2010, 2011	EA stasis	No change
2012, 2013, 2014, 2015	Progression to ED	Positive
2020, 2021, 2022	ED stability	No change

Moldova

Table D13: LDI PE

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992	EA upturn	Positive
1994	Progression to ED	Positive
1995, 1996, 1997	ED stability	No change
1998, 1999	ED upturn	Positive
2000, 2001	Regression to EA	Negative
2003, 2004	EA stasis	No change
2006, 2007, 2008	EA stasis	No change
2009, 2010, 2011	Progression to ED	Positive
2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017	ED downturn	Negative
2019, 2020, 2021, 2022	ED upturn	Positive

Table D14: LDI LB

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992, 1993, 1994	EA upturn	Positive
1995, 1996, 1997	EA stasis	No change
1998, 1999	Progression to ED	Positive
2000, 2001	Regression to EA	Negative
2003, 2004	EA stasis	No change
2006, 2007, 2008, 2009	EA stasis	No change
2010, 2011	Progression to ED	Positive
2015, 2016, 2017	Regression to EA	Negative
2019, 2020, 2021, 2022	Progression to ED	Positive

Table D15: LDI UB

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992, 1993, 1994	Progression to ED	Positive
1995, 1996, 1997	ED stability	No change
1998, 1999	ED upturn	Positive
2000, 2001	ED downturn	Negative
2003, 2004	ED stability	No change
2005	Regression to EA	Negative
2006, 2007, 2008	EA stasis	No change
2009, 2010, 2011	Progression to ED	Positive
2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017	ED downturn	Negative
2019, 2020, 2021, 2022	ED upturn	Positive

Ukraine

Table D16: LDI PE

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992, 1993	EA upturn	Positive
1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000	EA downturn	Negative
2002, 2003	EA upturn	Positive
2005, 2006, 2007	Progression to ED	Positive
2008, 2009	ED stability	No change
2010	Regression to EA	Negative
2011, 2012, 2013	EA stasis	No change
2015, 2016	EA upturn	Positive
2017, 2018	EA stasis	No change
2020, 2021	EA stasis	No change

Table D17: LDI LB

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992, 1993	EA upturn	Positive
1997, 1998, 1999, 2000	EA downturn	Negative
2001, 2002	EA stasis	No change
2005, 2006, 2007	EA upturn	Positive
2008, 2009	EA stasis	No change
2011, 2012	EA stasis	No change
2013, 2014	EA downturn	Negative
2015, 2016	EA upturn	Positive
2017, 2018	EA stasis	No change
2020, 2021	EA stasis	No change

Table D18: LDI UB

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992, 1993	Progression to ED	Positive
1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000	Regression to EA	Negative
2001, 2002	EA stasis	No change
2005, 2006, 2007	Progression to ED	Positive
2008, 2009	ED stability	No change
2010	Regression to EA	Negative
2011, 2012	EA stasis	No change
2013, 2014	EA downturn	Negative
2015, 2016	EA upturn	Positive
2017, 2018	EA stasis	No change
2020, 2021	EA stasis	No change

Appendix E: Regime States in EU's eastern neighbourhood
(EDI Point Estimates, Lower and Upper Bounds)

In Appendix E, we report 18 iterations (3 for each case) of temporal analysis of regime states in EU's eastern neighbourhood based on the point estimates (PE: v2x_polyarchy) and Highest Posterior Density (HPD) intervals: lower bound (LB: v2x_polyarchy_codelow) and upper bound (UB: v2x_polyarchy_codehigh), as reported in Coppedge et al. (2024a). In this way, we account for uncertainty in EDI data.

Armenia

Table E1: EDI PE

Years	Regime state	Change
1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997	Regression to EA	Negative
1998, 1999	EA upturn	Positive
2000, 2001	EA stasis	No change
2002, 2003, 2004	EA downturn	Negative
2005, 2006, 2007	EA stasis	No change
2013, 2014, 2015, 2016	EA stasis	No change
2017, 2018, 2019	Progression to ED	Positive
2020, 2021, 2022, 2023	ED downturn	Negative

Table E2: EDI LB

Years	Regime state	Change
1991	Progression to ED	Positive
1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997	Regression to EA	Negative
2002, 2003, 2004	EA downturn	Negative
2005, 2006	EA stasis	No change
2015, 2016	EA stasis	No change
2017, 2018, 2019	Progression to ED	Positive
2020, 2021, 2022, 2023	ED downturn	Negative

Table E3: EDI UB

Years	Regime state	Change
1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997	Regression to EA	Negative
1998, 1999, 2000	EA upturn	Positive
2002, 2003, 2004	EA downturn	Negative
2005, 2006	EA stasis	No change
2015, 2016	EA stasis	No change
2017, 2018, 2019	Progression to ED	Positive
2020, 2021, 2022, 2023	ED downturn	Negative

Azerbaijan

Table E4: EDI PE

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992	Progression to EA	Positive
1993, 1994	EA downturn	Negative
1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003	EA stasis	No change
2004	Regression to CA	Negative

Years	Regime state	Change
2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023	CA stasis	No change

Table E5: EDI LB

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992	Progression to EA	Positive
1993, 1994	Regression to CA	Negative
1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003	CA stasis	No change
2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023	CA stasis	No change

Table E6: EDI UB

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992	Progression to EA	Positive
1993, 1994	EA downturn	Negative
1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003	EA stasis	No change
2005, 2006, 2007	EA stasis	No change
2008	Regression to CA	Negative
2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017	CA stasis	No change
2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023	CA stasis	No change

Belarus

Table E7: EDI PE

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992	Progression to ED	Positive
1993, 1994	ED stability	No change
1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001	Regression to EA	Negative
2002, 2003, 2004, 2005	EA stasis	No change
2006	Regression to CA	Negative
2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012	CA stasis	No change
2013	Progression to EA	Positive
2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019	EA stasis	No change
2020, 2021	Regression to CA	Negative

Table E8: EDI LB

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992	Progression to ED	Positive
1993	Regression to EA	Negative
1995, 1996, 1997, 1998	EA downturn	Negative
2000, 2001	Regression to CA	Negative
2002, 2003, 2004	CA stasis	No change
2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012	CA stasis	No change
2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019	CA stasis	No change
2020, 2021	CA downturn	Negative

Table E9: EDI UB

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992	ED upturn	Positive
1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001	Regression to EA	Negative
2002, 2003, 2004	EA stasis	No change
2005, 2006	EA downturn	Negative
2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012	EA stasis	No change
2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019	EA stasis	No change
2020, 2021	Regression to CA	Negative

Georgia

Table E10: EDI PE

Years	Regime state	Change
1994, 1995	EA stasis	No change
1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003	EA stasis	No change
2004	Progression to ED	Positive
2005, 2006, 2007	ED stability	No change
2008	Regression to EA	Negative
2010	Progression to ED	Positive
2012, 2013, 2014	ED upturn	Positive
2018, 2019	ED downturn	Negative
2020, 2021, 2022	ED stability	No change

Table E11: EDI LB

Years	Regime state	Change
1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003	EA stasis	No change
2005, 2006, 2007	EA stasis	No change
2009, 2010, 2011, 2012	EA stasis	No change
2013, 2014	Progression to ED	Positive
2020, 2021, 2022	ED stability	No change

Table E12: EDI UB

Years	Regime state	Change
1994, 1995	EA stasis	No change

Years	Regime state	Change
1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003	EA stasis	No change
2004	Progression to ED	Positive
2005, 2006, 2007	ED stability	No change
2009, 2010, 2011	ED stability	No change
2012, 2013, 2014	ED upturn	Positive
2019, 2020	ED downturn	Negative
2021, 2022	ED stability	No change

Moldova

Table E13: EDI PE

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995	Progression to ED	Positive
1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000	ED stability	No change
2002, 2003, 2004	ED stability	No change
2005, 2006	Regression to EA	Negative
2007, 2008	EA stasis	No change
2009, 2010, 2011	Progression to ED	Positive
2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017	ED downturn	Negative
2019, 2020, 2021	ED upturn	Positive

Table E14: EDI LB

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992, 1993, 1994	Progression to ED	Positive
1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000	ED stability	No change
2001, 2002	Regression to EA	Negative
2005, 2006	EA downturn	Negative
2007, 2008	EA stasis	No change
2009, 2010, 2011	Progression to ED	Positive
2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017	Regression to EA	Negative
2019, 2020, 2021	Progression to ED	Positive

Table E15: EDI UB

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995	Progression to ED	Positive
1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000	ED stability	No change
2001, 2002	ED downturn	Negative
2005, 2006	Regression to EA	Negative
2007, 2008	EA stasis	No change
2009, 2010, 2011	Progression to ED	Positive
2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017	ED downturn	Negative
2019, 2020, 2021	ED upturn	Positive

Ukraine

Table E16: EDI PE

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992	Progression to ED	Positive
1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000	Regression to EA	Negative
2001, 2002, 2003, 2004	EA stasis	No change
2005, 2006, 2007	Progression to ED	Positive
2008, 2009	ED stability	No change
2010, 2011	Regression to EA	Negative
2013, 2014	EA downturn	Negative
2015, 2016, 2017, 2018	EA stasis	No change
2019, 2020	Progression to ED	Positive
2021, 2022	Regression to EA	Negative

Table E17: EDI LB

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992, 1993	EA upturn	Positive
1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001	EA downturn	Negative
2005, 2006, 2007, 2008	Progression to ED	Positive
2010, 2011	Regression to EA	Negative
2013, 2014	EA downturn	Negative
2015, 2016	EA stasis	No change
2018, 2019, 2020	EA upturn	Positive
2021, 2022	EA downturn	Negative

Table E18: EDI UB

Years	Regime state	Change
1991, 1992, 1993, 1994	Progression to ED	Positive
1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001	Regression to EA	Negative
2005, 2006, 2007, 2008	Progression to ED	Positive
2010, 2011	ED downturn	Negative
2013, 2014	Regression to EA	Negative
2018, 2019, 2020	Progression to ED	Positive
2021, 2022	Regression to EA	Negative

Appendix F: Findings of Alternative Accounts on Regime Transformation in the EU's eastern neighbourhood

In Appendix F, we present, for comparison purposes, the findings of two influential studies in the comparative politics literature regarding regime transformation in the EU's eastern neighbourhood.

Table F1: Autocratisation Episodes in EU's eastern neighbourhood

Country	Period	Type of autocratisation
Armenia	1993-1998	Democratic erosion
Armenia	2002-2008	Started in autocracy
Azerbaijan	1994-1994	Started in autocracy
Belarus	1995-2005	Democratic erosion
Moldova	2000-2006	Democratic erosion
Moldova	2012-2017	Democratic erosion
Ukraine	1997-2002	Democratic erosion
Ukraine	2010-2015	Military coup

Source: Lührmann and Lindberg (2019)

Table F2: Episodes of Regime Transformation in EU's eastern neighbourhood

Country	Period	Outcome
Armenia	1992-1997	Democratic breakdown
Armenia	1998-2000	Reverted liberalisation
Armenia	2001-2008	Regressed autocracy
Armenia	2010-2019	Outcome censored
Azerbaijan	1991-1993	Reverted liberalisation
Azerbaijan	1994-1994	Regressed autocracy
Belarus	1995-2006	Democratic breakdown
Georgia	1993-2005	Democratic transition
Georgia	2006-2010	Preempted democratic breakdown
Georgia	2011-2015	Deepened democracy
Moldova	1994-1998	Democratic transition
Moldova	2000-2005	Democratic breakdown
Moldova	2006-2011	Democratic transition
Moldova	2012-2018	Averted regression
Ukraine	1991-1996	Democratic transition
Ukraine	1997-2004	Democratic breakdown
Ukraine	2005-2007	Democratic transition
Ukraine	2008-2017	Democratic breakdown

Source: Maerz et al. (2021)

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