

**The other way around:  
Investigating the ‘reverse wave of de-democratization’ hypothesis.**

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Section 1: Democracy and democratization

Panel 1.1: The other way round? Investigating the “reverse wave hypothesis”

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**Abstract:** During the past two decades, the debate on regime change has focused on the causes, patterns, challenges and even consequences of the transitions occurred during the third wave of democratization. Despite the quantitatively rich body of literature produced in these years of intensive research, it is rare to find studies on opposite processes of de-democratization. Recent events in several parts of the world – from the MENA region to the former Soviet bloc, and even among more consolidated Western democracies – highlight the need to know more about the phenomenon. To start filling this gap, our paper addresses two basic but urgent questions. What is de-democratization? Where, when and how many cases suffered from this syndrome in the last fifteen years? The paper concludes by outlining an agenda for future research on the topic.

## **Introduction**

Since the publication in 1991 of Huntington's seminal work on the 'third wave', research on democratization has been conducted within the framework sketched by this fascinating metaphor. During the past two decades, research on democratization took four main directions. Scholars studied the causes, modalities, challenges and consequences of democratization. These broad questions and the answers they received, however, are also indicative of a progressive change in the approach toward the actual nature and meaning of third wave regime transitions. After an initial overtly optimistic view of the future of democracy, in particular, a more realistic and even sceptical attitude spread among scholars and policymakers, whereas the most recent years were characterized by a marked pessimism about worrisome signs of democratic recession. Slowly but steadily, the idea of a third reverse wave of de-democratization is gaining momentum

Despite its gloomy message – something that clearly no-one would like to materialize – there are some reasons to welcome this latter phase in the debate on democracy and democratization. First, talking about de-democratization should not be seen as the attempt to catch attention by means of sensationalistic titles. Nor is it an over-alarmist way to read recent and ongoing events – from the breakdown of a longstanding South-American democracy such as Venezuela, to the interruption and inversion of democratization in Russia and its neighbours, from the failure of the Arab spring, to successful China as the resurgence of a plainly non-democratic model of inspiration for developing countries, including the several signals of crisis that democracy display even in Western countries. De-democratization and the idea of a democratic rollback rather represent an alternative lens through which to observe these and several other less evident recent episodes and underlying processes. An interpretative key to advance our knowledge of political change at large. Second, investigating the 'reverse wave of de-democratization' hypothesis does not mean to reiterate uncritically a single question, the one that Freedom House addresses each year in its report. Quite the contrary, de-democratization as a new strand of the debate implies the adoption of a more analytical, though less ambitious, approach aimed first of all at putting concepts, evidences and questions into order. Only after having defined and mapped de-democratization, we think, it will be possible to analyse this phenomenon, to understand if it actually represents a syndrome of this historical phase, and eventually to find an appropriate therapy.

About forty years after Linz's seminal work on democratic breakdown, we would like to revive comparative politics interest in this line of inquiry. Following a review of the relevant literature, the paper pursues two main goals. On the one hand, we provide a more systematic definition of de-democratization. In its current status the notion is underspecified. It represents a loose 'umbrella-concept' covering a broad and heterogeneous set of phenomena ranging from outright authoritarian regime changes to comparatively minor events, such as declining civil and political freedoms, loss of democratic quality, interruptions of ongoing democratic transitions, decaying democratic legitimacy, dissatisfaction with democratic institutions. These alternative 'extensions' of de-democratization need systematization through a better framed formulation of the concept's 'intension'. Then we turn to empirical evidence. After conceptualization, to assess if the 'reverse wave of de-democratization' hypothesis is empirically grounded – which, again, is not an issue that we address explicitly in this paper – we should proceed through the following intermediate steps. First, an operationalization and measurement of each form that de-democratization may take have to be defined. Second, these 'rules' should be applied to reality, which in our case refers to a comprehensive sample of developing and developed countries observed through the last fifteen years. We accomplish these tasks in the third section of the paper, whereas in the fourth section we provide some graphical evidence of de-democratization and a non-definitive list of such episodes classified by type. We conclude outlining an agenda for future empirical research on the topic, identifying a few broad lines of inquiry and formulating some more specific research questions.

## **1. Literature review: From democratization to de-democratization**

During the past two decades, research on democratization took four main directions. Scholars studied the causes, modalities, challenges and consequences of democratization. The evolution of the debate has been beaten by the parallel evolution in the 'mood', or 'attitude', of scholars and IO and NGO practitioners, first and foremost those that found in the Journal of Democracy an arena for dialogue. The debate shifted from an over-optimistic view of the future, to a more realistic and even sceptical account of recent transitions, to a plainly pessimistic analysis of ongoing events.

Starting from the late 1980s, facing the surprising pace of the so-called 'third wave of democratization' (Huntington 1991) that, region after region, was overwhelming the

developing world, scholars studied the causes and modalities of recent democratic transitions. The emphasis was on agency (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Przeworski 1991) – i.e. the choices made by the relevant actors and their interactions – rather than structure. This led to a radical revision of the traditional sequence theorized by the preconditionist approach inspired by modernization theory: socioeconomic development, in particular, was no longer seen as a prerequisite of democratization. This change in the interpretative paradigm is symbolic of a more general trust in the future of democracy. Even if it probably was not “the end of history” announced by Fukuyama in a 1989 article on *The National Interest*, the early 1990s did represent the end of a specific historical phase and the beginning of “the democratic moment” (Platter 1991).

Demo-optimism was short-lived and in few years gave way to more sober questions about “democracy’s future” (Platter and Diamond 1994): “how far” in particular “can free government travel?” (Sartori 1995). The answer, we soon realized, was far from obvious. The analysis of the “challenges of consolidation” (Haggard and Kaufman 1994) shed light on the “dangers and dilemmas” (Schmitter 1994) that newly democratic countries were facing. Authors cautioned against the “illusions about consolidation” (O'Donnell 1996) that could be drawn from few successful cases, highlighted the complex balance between the different societal arenas that should be achieved to make democracy “the only game in town” (Linz and Stepan 1996), while others called attention again on socioeconomic development as a factor for enduring democracy (Przeworski et al. 1996).

Questions on the fate of young democracies were the prelude to a phase of demo-realism, if not scepticism, about the actual meaning of the third wave of democratization in general. Democratic consolidation was not the natural endpoint of any transition from authoritarian rule, contrary to early expectations. Upon closer examination, indeed, for many of these transitions it was not even clear if they ever had a democratic direction (Carothers 2002). With some delay, the “fallacy of electoralism” to which Schmitter and Karl alerted (1991) years before, became manifest. Analysts started referring to several third wave transitional and transitioned countries as “hybrid regimes” (Diamond 2002) or, more specifically, to plainly non-democratic electoral and/or competitive forms of authoritarian rule (Schedler 2002; Levitsky and Way 2002).

Disenchantment about the ultimate outcomes of the third wave of democratization soon transformed in outright demo-pessimism. The idea of a democratic rollback started looming large on the horizon. Early alarm bells rang in the late 1990s, when Diamond questioned about the end of the third wave (1996) and saw in the military’s seizure of power in Pakistan

the signal of a possible future reverse wave of de-democratization (2000). Starting from the mid 2000s, references to a similar event have become more frequent and pressing. The shift from the still vague “worrisome signs” noted by Puddington in the 2005 Freedom House report, to the definitely explicit “pushback against democracy” he denounced two years later (2007) was only the beginning of an escalation. In subsequent years, Diamond announced the “resurgence of the predatory state” (2008), Freedom House claimed that “the erosion accelerates” (Puddington 2010) and that democracy was “under duress” (Puddington 2011). According to the research institute, 2014 represented the eighth consecutive years of global decline in freedom. Similar accounts can be found in the annual reports of the Economist Intelligence Unit.<sup>1</sup> The peak has been reached when, to celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Journal of Democracy dedicated the first issue of 2015 to the decline of democracy, benefitting from the contribution of some of the most renowned scholars in the field, including Diamond, Schmitter, Levitsky and Way.

## **2. What is de-democratization?**

The 2015 special issue that the Journal of Democracy dedicated to the decline that democracy is currently experiencing represents our point of departure, with one important caveat. Scholars agree that “by the final years of the twentieth century, the measurements of democratic progress in the world had essentially reached their peaks” (Platter 2014: 13). Diamond does not hesitate to describe the last ten years “as a period of at least incipient decline in democracy” (2015: 142) and the world as being “in a mild but protracted democratic recession” (2015: 144). Yet analysts are reluctant to interpret the current period as a phase of political development that goes in a diametrically opposite direction. And with some reasons. Defined paraphrasing Huntington as “a group of transitions from [democratic to nondemocratic] regimes that occur within a specified period of time and that significantly outnumber transitions in the opposite direction during that period” (1991: 15), an outright “third reverse wave of de-democratization” is not under way, to date. While the era of democratic transitions seems to be over, the frequency of democratic reversal has increased and a fourth wave represents an unlikely scenario in the near future, clear and prevailing trends of de-democratization are not discernible at present. A global democratic recession

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<sup>1</sup> Reports can be download from <http://www.eiu.com/home.aspx>.

remains a “myth” (Levitsky and Way 2015), which is why scholars rather tend to refer to a period of “stagnation” (Merkel 2010) or “crisis” (Schmitter 2015).

Technically speaking, talking about a “third reverse wave of de-democratization” is probably incorrect. Several scholars more qualified than us have already discussed the issue with rather inconclusive results, and we would unlikely be more successful. Yet, as any theoretical paradigm, the “democratization by waves” model is useful insofar it eases the interpretation of reality. Twenty years later, we think it still does. Reality is more complex than what the waves metaphor can tell us and does not fit perfectly into this pre-existing framework. Yet it would be an even worse mistake to overlook/reject/brand as an unnecessary alarm a phenomenon that – for frequency of episodes, number of countries involved, and the importance of some of them – is unequivocally protagonist of our time. Hence, while the assessment of the ‘third reverse wave’ hypothesis is not the most urgent issue in the research agenda, ‘de-democratization’ does deserve attention, especially considering the relative novelty of the phenomenon and the lack of scholarship on its current dynamics. Most importantly, we can hardly assess if the reverse wave hypothesis is well grounded, before having defined de-democratization and clarified the range of empirical cases to which the notion applies.

In its current status de-democratization represents an underspecified concept. It represents a loose umbrella-concept covering a broad and heterogeneous set of phenomena. Browsing the literature, outright cases of democratic breakdown are often conflated together with a plurality of comparatively minor events. This underbrush of supposed evidences of de-democratization includes processes that may indiscriminately affects full, partial and non democratic regimes, such as the decline of civil and political freedoms, and several others that are regime-specific but still vague and only remotely associable under a single label. The latter range from the emergence of threats to democratic stability, to the absence of political reforms in authoritarian societies; from the failure of new democracies to consolidate, to the entrenchment of authoritarian rule after a period of crisis; from the performance and legitimacy crisis of many old and new democratic regimes to the economic and geopolitical success of some authoritarian countries; from the loss in leading established democracies of the will and self-confidence to promote democracy effectively abroad, to the forceful reaction against domestic democratic movements in a rising number of dictatorships. The list is further extended by all those episodes that signal the difficulties/obstacles faced by non-democratic countries with recent records of democratic improvements to sustain further progress.

In other words, while still in its infancy, the concept of de-democratization is at serious risk of conceptual stretching (Sartori 1970) and, as a consequence, of losing analytical power. To avoid this, we proceed as follows. Starting from the above broad constellation of meanings and understandings, together representing the ‘background concept’ (Adcock and Collier 2001), we define de-democratization as any event or process affecting democracy or democratization in a negative way. We stick to a procedural and dichotomous definition of democracy, as a regime that regularly holds universal suffrage multiparty competitive elections that are conducted according to the principles of freedom and fairness. Democratization, in turn, is the process of political change whereby an authoritarian country, i.e. a non-democracy, moves toward democracy, through a more or less progressive path and with no prior assumption about its successful completion. Non-democratic regimes are democratizing (or transitional) to the extent that in the past years they have introduced liberalizing measures, including both procedural reforms, e.g. multipartitism; and/or more substantial reforms, e.g. the protection of civil and political rights.

This is an admittedly general definition of de-democratization, that still lacks the necessary level of specification to be useful in empirical research. To systematize it, we trace a few coordinates and identify the main forms that de-democratization may take. De-democratization is a phenomenon that might be characterized by different magnitudes and result in either major or minor outcomes. De-democratization is a process that may unfold in either a gradual or abrupt way, thus qualifying either as a continuous or dichotomous concept, depending on situations. De-democratization is a syndrome that might affect democracies, but also non-democratic regimes that are experiencing a process of political liberalization. De-democratization, finally, can occur in three main varieties.

The first is the *breakdown of a democratic regime* (DRB), i.e. an outright change of regime from democratic to non-democratic. Democratic breakdown is, by definition, a major outcome of de-democratization, although it may occur in either a gradual or sudden way, and be the consequence of events of different magnitude. These range from a military coup to the adoption of formal and/or informal measures aimed at skewing the electoral playing field and consolidating the incumbent’s advantage in ways that prevent alternation in power. A second form of de-democratization is the *loss of democratic quality* (DQL). The quality of a democracy refers to how well a country achieves/fulfils/realizes the democratic principles of “liberty and equality of citizens through the legitimate and correct functioning of its institutions and mechanisms” (Morlino 2011: 195). Morlino (2004; 2011; see also Diamond and Morlino 2005) identifies three different meanings of quality to analyse how “good” a

democracy is. When quality is understood in terms of *procedure*, it refers to the correct functioning of the established procedural aspects of a representative democracy. *Content* quality indicates democracy's capacity to allow citizens, associations and communities to enjoy liberty and equality, even in different forms and degrees. Finally, quality in terms of *result* refers to the legitimation of a democratic regime, or the degree to which citizens are satisfied by the way democracy works in their country (Morlino 2011: 194-197). Loss of democratic quality thus represents a minor instance of de-democratization that affects only democracies. The process does not result in a regime change and tends to unfold gradually. Third, de-democratization may even act on regimes that do not fulfil minimum democratic standards but are at some point of a more or less protracted process of transition to democracy. The *interruption of a democratic transition* (DTI) is a minor form of de-democratization that does not involve an outright regime change, but either *stagnation* (with the potential, but not inevitable, subsequent installation of a hybrid regime) or *reversal*. Likewise, it may unfold in either a progressive or sudden way, as a consequence of events of different magnitude, similar to those that may be responsible of other forms of de-democratization.

So defined, the concept of de-democratization covers a rather broad range of empirical cases, that however does not include state failure, which should not be equalized to democratic breakdown; the worsening of freedom in a stable full authoritarian regime, which is not a case of reversal of a democratic transition; the poor socioeconomic performance of a democratic regime, which cannot be considered as the loss of democratic quality (even if it can indirectly influence the legitimacy of democratic institutions); nor those signals of authoritarian resurgence such as the economic success of some authoritarian countries or the increase of their geopolitical weight.

### **3. Measuring de-democratization**

We now turn to the operationalization and measurement of de-democratization.

The first form of de-democratization is the breakdown of a democratic regime (DRB). It is considered a major outcome of this process and it is represented by an outright change of regime from democratic to non-democratic. It is a dichotomous event, though it may occur after a gradual erosion of freedom for opposition forces and reduction of competitiveness of electoral institutions. To measure DRBs, we identify all country-years in which a political

regime can be defined an electoral democracy according to Freedom House.<sup>2</sup> In line with the dichotomous and procedural definition that we have presented in the previous section, Freedom House assigns the status of “electoral democracy” to those political regimes that meet certain minimum standards of political rights and hold regularly free and fair multiparty elections. Then, we create a dummy variable named *Democratic Regime Breakdown* (DRB) that assumes value 1 every year in which a country experiences a regime change from democratic to non-democratic.

The second form of de-democratization we have highlighted is the loss of democratic quality (DQL). Differently from DRB, DQL can be considered a minor outcome of process of de-democratization because it does not result in a regime change. It is a rather the outcome of a gradual process of erosion of the quality of democratic institutions present in a country. For each type of democratic quality described above, Morlino (2011) identifies different dimensions and sub-dimensions and uses several indicators to operationalize them. For the sake of simplicity, in this study we focus just on one specific aspect of procedural, content and result quality, respectively.

Regarding the procedural quality of a democracy we look at the level of free and fair electoral competition among different political actors. We measure the level of competition of political regimes with the Polity IV ‘polity2’ scale.<sup>3</sup> This index is one of the most commonly accepted indicators of the level of democracy, understood in procedural terms, by the international academic community. More precisely, the Polity IV index consists of six component measures that record key qualities of executive recruitment, constraints on executive authority and political competition and participation. It is a 21-point scale that ranges from -10 (institutionalized autocracy) to +10 (institutionalized democracy). To identify episodes of loss of democratic-procedural quality we focus on electoral democracies and for each country we compute the annual difference in the Polity score. Then, we build a dummy variable named *Democratic Quality Loss – Procedural* (DQL\_PROC). Following the same coding rules used by Polity IV investigators, DQL\_PROC takes value 1 every country-year in which the Polity score at time  $t$  is at least 1 point lower than its score at time  $t-1$ , but this difference is sufficient to change the status of the political regime from full democracy (Polity score comprised between +7 and +10) to partial democracy (Polity score comprised between +1 and +6). Moreover, DQL\_PROC also assumes value 1 for those countries that at time  $t$  receive a

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<sup>2</sup> Data and documentation are available on [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org).

<sup>3</sup> Data and documentation are available on <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polityproject.html>.

Polity score at least 3 points lower than the score at time  $t-3$ . DQL\_PROC records a 0 when changes are exactly of the same magnitudes, but in the opposite direction.

To operationalize the loss of democratic-content quality we rely on the Civil Liberties component of the Freedom in the World index developed by Freedom House.<sup>4</sup> Since 1973 Freedom House evaluates the protection of political rights and civil liberties in each country around the world. Regarding civil liberties Freedom House experts consider, among others, freedom of expression and belief and associational and organizational rights. Civil liberties spans on a 7-point scale that varies from 1, representing countries enjoying a wide range of civil liberties, to 7, indicating those political systems with few or no civil liberties. Once again, we first compute the annual difference in the Civil Liberties score of each electoral democracy. Then we create a dummy variable named *Democratic Quality Loss – Content* (DQL\_CONT) that assumes value 1 for those electoral democracies that display at time  $t$  a Civil Liberties score at least 1 point lower than the score at time  $t-1$ . DQL\_CONT takes value 0 every time an electoral democracy experiences an increase in its Civil Liberties score.

Democratic quality in terms of result is measured by the level of citizens' satisfaction with democracy. The higher the level of satisfaction with democracy, the higher the degree of responsiveness of a political system (Morlino 2011). Several different surveys submit to their respondents the following question: "On the whole are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied with the way democracy work in [country]?" This question is commonly considered as an indicator of how and how much political authorities satisfy citizens' demands (Easton 1965). Relying on different surveys, such as Afrobarometer, Arab Barometer, Asian Barometer, Eurobarometer and Latinobarometro, we measure the percentage of people that answer "very satisfied" and "fairly satisfied" for each country-year available. Then, we record all those cases in which a country between time  $t$  and time  $t-3$  suffers at least a 10-point fall in the percentage of satisfied people. The dummy variable *Democratic Quality Loss – Result* (DQL\_RES) assigns value 1 to all these cases, and value 0 to all the opposite situations in which a country between time  $t$  and time  $t-3$  increases the percentage of satisfied citizens of ten points or more.

The last form of de-democratization is represented by the interruption of a democratic transition. Differently from the previous types of de-democratization, transition interruptions affects political regimes that do not fulfil minimum democratic standards. Among these countries we identify those regimes that have initiated a process of transition to democracy.

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<sup>4</sup> Data and documentation are available on [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org).

To assess the presence of a transition we rely on two different indicators already described. The Polity IV index, that is developed based on a procedural definition of democracy, and the Freedom in the world index (FH), that stems from a more substantial notion of democracy. More precisely, for each non-democracy we compute the difference between the Polity IV score at time  $t$  and its score at time  $t-3$ . We replicate this operation with the FH index. We record an episode of democratic transition any time this difference is at least equal to three points according to Polity IV or at least equal to two points according to FH. Then we look at the outcome of these democratic transitions. The dummy variable *Democratic Transition Interrupted* (DTI) assumes value 1 for those cases in which the outcome of the transition after five years from its beginning is not the instauration of an electoral democracy. DTI assigns value 0 to all countries that within the same time span conclude a successful transition. We further distinguish between cases of stagnation, i.e. countries whose level of democracy increases and then stalls, and cases of reversal, i.e. countries whose level of democracy increases and then starts to decline.

#### **4. Evidences of de-democratization**

To map de-democratization, we collect data for 193 developed and developing countries, observed from 1990 and 2014. Data sources are those indicated in previous section. We then use our brand new indicators of de-democratization and its main variants to illustrate by means of graphs and table how the phenomenon has unfolded during the past years. In Figure 1 a line graph plots the number of regime changes per year in the 1990-2014 period. The solid line indicates the number of transitions to democracy, while the dashed line displays the number of breakdowns of electoral democracies (DRB). The former are included in the graph in order to compare how the trend of democratizations and de-democratizations has changed during the last 25 years.

Figure 1 about here

As expected, at the beginning of the nineties the number of democratizations was clearly higher than the number of DRB with a peak of eight cases in 1992. This is mostly due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the successful transitions of its former Eastern European members, and the openness to multipartism of several sub-Saharan African regimes.

However, Figure 1 also highlights that the number of democratic transitions decreases, though not constantly, especially after 2000 and it has nevermore reached the peak of the early nineties. At the same time the dashed line shows an opposite trend for DRBs. Whereas in the nineties the number of DRBs is quite limited, never going beyond two, after 2000 it becomes much more consistent, reaching the peak of four episodes of regime breakdowns in 2003, 2007 and 2010. Table 1 shows that the episodes of DRB go from 13 in 12 countries in the 1990-1999 period, vis-à-vis 40 episodes of democratic transitions in 38 countries, to 34 in 28 countries after 2000. In the 2000-2014 period the number of democratizations is equal to the number of de-democratizations. As evidenced by the table, the major part of DRBs listed in the 2000-2014 period occurred after 2006. 21 episodes (in 20 countries) of DRB, corresponding to about 62% of the total cases of regime breakdown since 2000, occurred in the last nine years.

Table 1 around here

Preliminary evidence indicates that DRB, what we have defined as the major outcome of a de-democratization process, has become a significant phenomenon after 2000, at least in quantitative terms.

Concerning the loss of democratic quality, Figure 2 plots the average level of Polity score, i.e. our indicator of procedural quality, among electoral democracies in the 1990-2014 period.

Figure 2 about here

Although the range of variation of Polity score is very limited (about one point) the graph in Figure 2 depicts an initial decrease in the average level of Polity score in the 1990-1999 period, followed by a constant increase after 1999 that continues until 2010, when it starts to decrease again. The 1990-2014 path followed by the average Polity score does not indicate a clear decreasing trend in the procedural quality of electoral democracies. However, according to the first row of Table 2, which reports the number of episodes of loss of procedural quality (DQL\_PROC) since 2000, we have detected eight cases occurred in six countries in the last 15 years.

Table 2 about here

Four countries experienced a decrease of at least three points in the Polity score within three consecutive years in 2000-2005 period, and four countries suffered from an episode of DQL\_PROC in the subsequent 2006-2014 period.

The number of (minor) episodes of de-democratization increases if we consider democratic quality in terms of content, represented by the level of civil liberties enjoyed by citizens. Figure 3 plots the annual average level of FH Civil Liberties score among electoral democracies in 1990-2014 period. Again, the trend shows a constant increase in the average FH Civil Liberties level (meaning less civil liberties) until 1994, followed by a sharp, though small in magnitude, decrease (meaning more civil liberties) until 2004. Starting from 2005 the trend is more unstable, with two little peaks in FH Civil Liberties score in 2007 and 2013, respectively.

Figure 3 about here

However, the second row of Table 2 indicates the presence of 26 countries that experienced an episode of DQL\_CONT between 2000 and 2014. Eight episodes occurred in the 2000-2005 period, while 18 countries experienced a case of DQL\_CONT between 2006 and 2014. While only about the ten percent of electoral democracies experienced a DQL\_PROC after 2000, 42 percent of them experienced a DQL\_CONT. 69 percent of total DQL\_CONT episodes occurred since 2006.

Figure 4 displays the yearly average share of citizens of electoral democracies that feel satisfied with the way democratic process works in their countries, i.e. our indicator of democratic quality in terms of result, between 1990 and 2014. The graph depicts an initial decrease in this percentage until the minimum level of 32.7 percent of satisfied people in 1996, followed by a sharp increase until the maximum level of 63.6 percent of satisfied citizens reached in 1999. However, after 1999 this proportion decreases again and presents some fluctuation in the last eight years but without reaching the 1999 peak.

Figure 4 about here

The trend shown in Figure 4 is well supported by the number of similar episodes(DQL\_RES) experienced by electoral democracies between 2000 and 2014. As evidenced by the third row of Table 2, in the time period analysed there have been 59 episodes of DQL\_RES, measured as a ten points fall in the proportion of satisfied citizens occurred in three consecutive years.

These 59 episodes occurred in 52 countries, indicating that there are several electoral democracies that have experienced more than one episode of DQL\_RES. Considering that almost 84 percent of electoral democracies between 2000 and 2014 experienced at least one episode of DQL\_RES, we can state that very few countries have been immune to a loss in terms of political responsiveness. Not surprisingly, more than 60 percent of cases of DQL\_RES occurred after 2006, with negative peaks in the average percentage of satisfied citizens in 2008, 2011 and 2013. With the explosion in the US of the financial crisis in the summer of 2008 and its diffusion in Europe and other areas around the world as a sovereign debt crisis since 2010, even several mature and full democracies have experienced a DQL\_RES.

The last potential outcome of a process of de-democratization to be analysed is what we have called a democratic transition interruption. De-democratization process can also affect countries that do not fulfil the minimum standard of electoral democracy but are experiencing a phase of political liberalization and/or transition to democracy. DTI indicates a process of transition that does not result in the instauration of an electoral democracy. Table 3 reports 32 cases of DTI experienced by 31 countries in the 2000-2014 period. 22 out 32 episodes (69 percent) of DTI result in a stagnation of the level of democracy (measured with the Polity IV index and/or the Freedom in the World index) after five years from the beginning of transition, and other ten (31 percent) are cases of progressive deterioration in the level of democracy. Whereas in 31 countries the process of transition to democracies has been successful, resulting in an outright regime change (as reported in the first row of Table 1), in other 31 countries this process has been interrupted and did not result in the instauration of an electoral democracy.

The Appendix located at the end of the paper reports several tables and figures that complete the preliminary analysis of the phenomenon of de-democratization in the different forms we have conceptualized. More precisely, Table A1 reports the absolute number of cases of de-democratization, being them DRB, DQL\_PROC, DQL\_CONT, DQL\_RES or DTI, occurred each year between 2000 and 2014. For every country in our sample, in turn, Table A2 lists all the years and/or time periods in which an episode of de-democratization occurred. Finally, we present the maps of five different geographical regions (Africa, Asia, Europe, Ex-USSR/Central Asia/Middle East and Latin America) indicating the form of de-democratization, if any, experienced by each country of the area. Countries are coloured in white if they have experienced no episode of de-democratization. A scale of greys indicates instead the specific form of de-democratization. The lightest grey refers to countries that have

experienced an episode of DTI, the medium grey indicates countries having experienced at least one episode of DQL (being it DQL\_PROC and/or DQL\_CONT and/or DQL\_RES), and, finally, the darkest grey indicates electoral democracies that experienced a regime breakdown (DRB). Africa is the continent with the highest number of countries having experienced a DRB and the highest number of electoral democracies that collapse into a form of non-democratic regime. It is followed by Asia and the area including post-soviet countries of Central Asia and the Middle East political regimes. Europe, i.e. the regions with the highest proportion of electoral democracies, suffered only from episodes of DQL, even though only few European political regimes have been immune to this minor form of de-democratization. Latin America instead also presents some episodes of DRB, including the extremely relevant case of Venezuela that lost its status of electoral democracy in 2008.

## **Conclusions**

With scholars engaged in understanding the causes, modalities, challenges and consequences of recent democratic transitions, de-democratization, i.e. all those processes that go in the opposite direction, has received little attention during the past twenty-five years. This paper claims the need, and urgency, to fill this gap. This is not to ring unnecessary alarm bells, in the mere attempt to have an audience. Analysts have already clarified that we are not experiencing an outright reverse wave of de-democratization. Nor have we been able to present empirical evidence that rejects similar conclusions. Yet the fact itself that scholars have recently addressed the issue, and the increasing frequency of publications on the topic, demonstrates that de-democratization is a relevant phenomenon of this historical phase.

If we really want to avoid the risk of a self-fulfilling prophecy (something that happened twice in the last century, by the way), we should understand the phenomenon in its current dynamics. We surveyed the existing literature and realized that, since the publication in 1978 of Linz and colleagues' study on the breakdown of democratic regimes during the first and second reverse wave, we have made little progress in that sense. First things first, we focused our efforts in conceptualizing de-democratization, accounting for the different shapes it may take. Then we measured it, to map recent episodes that should be labelled and studied as cases of de-democratization. Yet we have only started laying the foundations for a debate on the subject. Given the current lack of theoretical knowledge and shortage of empirical analysis, the agenda for future research on de-democratization is likely to be particularly rich.

The strategy we followed to identify these cases is only tentative and need refinement. Likewise, the evidence we presented is only preliminary. Hence conceptualization, measurement, and mapping of de-democratization are issues far from being exhausted (Hogstrom 2014). The most urgent questions that should be addressed obviously refer to the causes of de-democratization. This line of inquiry covers democratic failure (Diskin et al. 2005; Kapstein and Converse 2008; Mainwaring and Linan 2013) and, more generally, the determinants of the stability or instability of newly democratic regimes (Wright 2008; Denk and Anckar 2014; Svulik 2015). But attention should also be paid to other forms of de-democratization. In this regard, a useful distinction might be the one between endogenous and exogenous factors. Likewise we should investigate if specific types of democracy – e.g. presidential vs. parliamentary; consolidated vs. young; etc. – are more frequently associated with de-democratization and/or specific forms of this syndrome. Along the same line of inquiry, the “consequences of the consequences” of democratization deserve attention: Is the ability/inability of democratic governments to deliver material goods to citizens a key to interpret de-democratization? Even more interesting than the causes, are the patterns of de-democratization. A fuller understanding of the phenomenon requires an in-depth analysis of its current dynamics – how does de-democratization unfold? – and a comparison with past experience.

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Tab 1. Number of regime changes in different time periods.

Type of regime change	1990-1999	2000-2014	2000-2005	2006-2014
Democratization	40 (38 countries)	34 (31 countries)	14 (14 countries)	20 (20 countries)
De-democratization	13 (12 countries)	34 (28 countries)	13 (12 countries)	21 (20 countries)

*Source:* Freedom House – Electoral Democracies data.

Tab 2. Number of cases of loss of democratic quality after 2000.

<b>Form of democratic quality</b>	<b>2000-2014</b>	<b>2000-2005</b>	<b>2006-2014</b>
Procedural (competition) *	8 (6 countries)	4 (4 countries)	4 (4 countries)
Content (civil liberties) °	26 (26 countries)	8 (8 countries)	18 (18 countries)
Result (satisfaction with democracy) §	59 (52 countries)	23 (23 countries)	36 (34 countries)
Total	93 (84 countries)	35 (35 countries)	58 (56 countries)

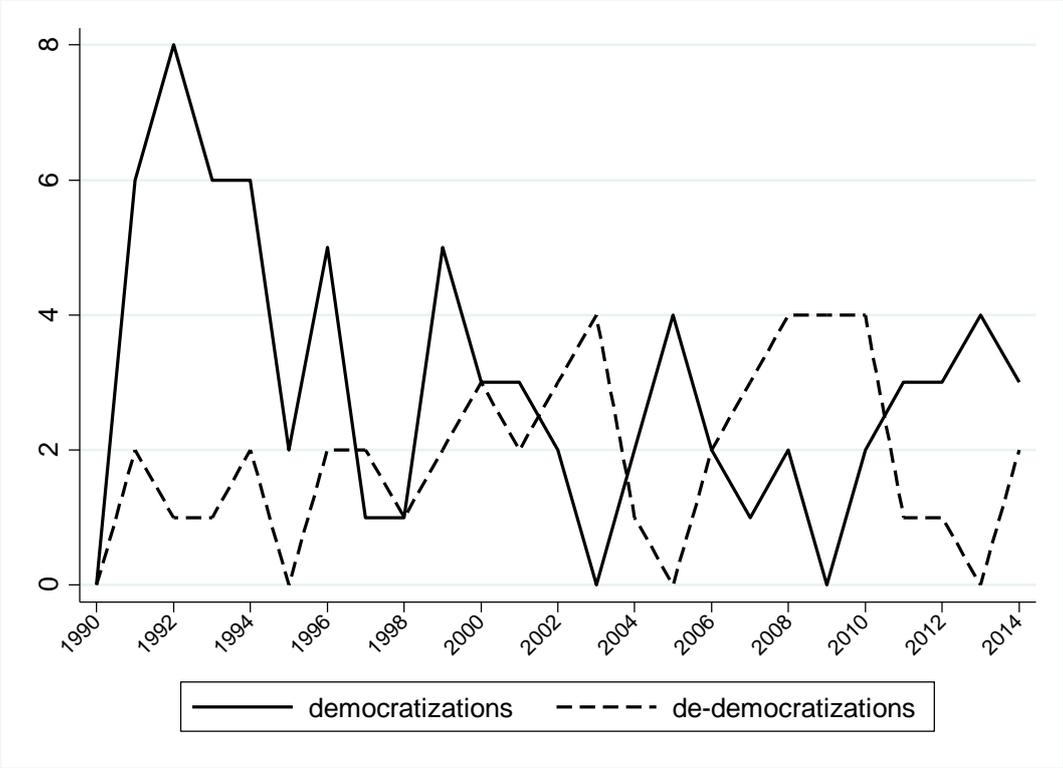
*Source:* \* Polity IV; ° Freedom House – Freedom in the World; § Afrobarometer; Arab Barometer; Asian Barometer; Eurobarometer Latinobarómetro.

Tab 3. Number of transition interruptions after 2000.

<b>Outcome of transition interruption</b>	<b>2000-2014</b>	<b>2000-2005</b>	<b>2006-2014</b>
Stagnation	22 (21 countries)	11 (11 countries)	11 (11 countries)
Reversal	10 (10 countries)	6 (6 countries)	4 (4 countries)
Total	32 (31 countries)	17 (17 countries)	15 (15 countries)

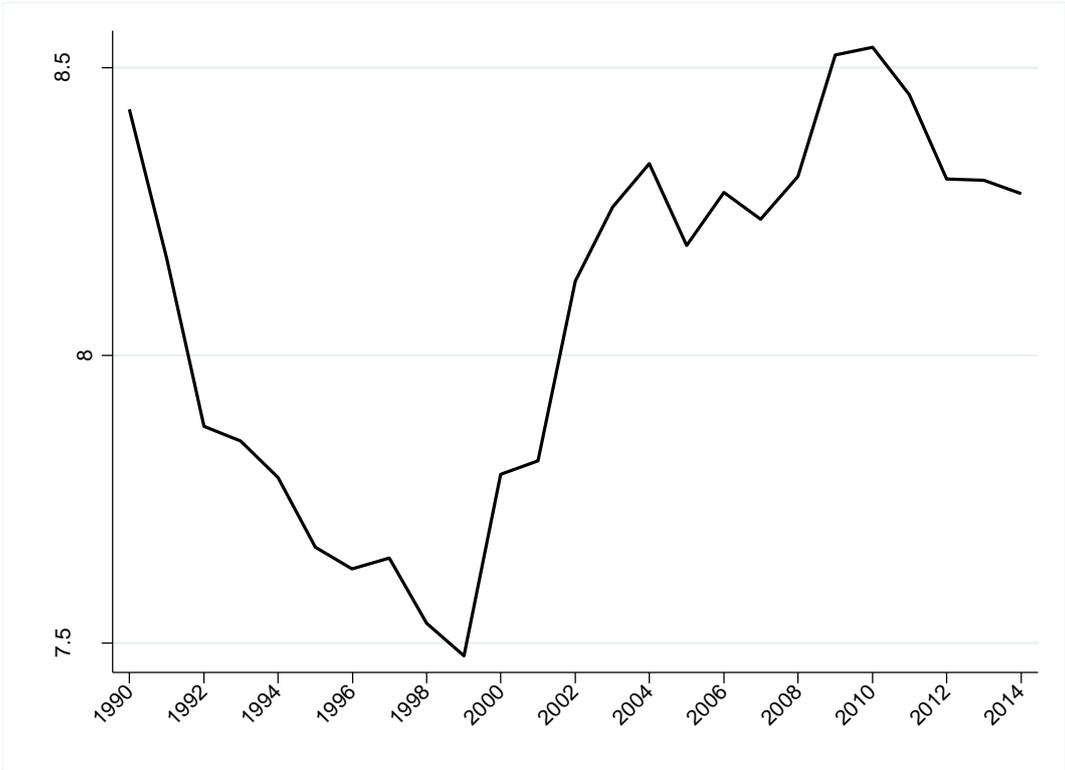
*Source:* Polity IV and Freedom House – Freedom in the World.

Figure 1. Yearly number of regime changes (democratization and de-democratization), 1990-2014.



Source: Freedom House – Electoral Democracies dataset.

Figure 2. Average level of Polity score among electoral democracies (1990-2014).



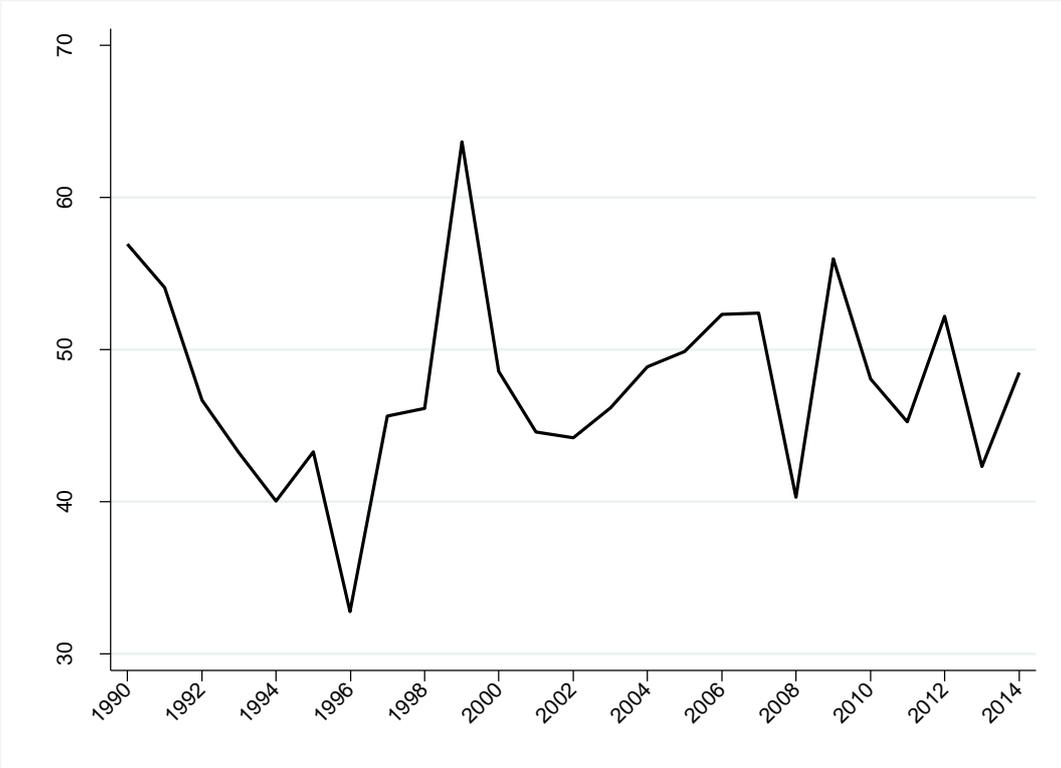
Source: Polity IV.

Figure 3. Average level of Civil Liberties (Freedom House) in electoral democracies (1990-2014).



Source: Freedom House- Freedom in the World Index.

Figure 4. Average people satisfied with democracy in electoral democracies (1990-2014).



Source: Afrobarometer; Arab Barometer; Asian Barometer; Eurobarometer Latinobarómetro.

## Appendix

Table A1. Number of episodes of de-democratization per year (2000-2014).

Year	Regime Breakdown	Loss democratic quality - procedure	Loss democratic quality - content	Loss democratic quality - result	Democratic transition interruption - stagnation	Democratic transition interruption - reversal
2000	3	2	3	6	1	5
2001	2	1	3	8	2	0
2002	3	0	1	4	3	1
2003	4	1	0	5	2	2
2004	1	0	0	0	1	0
2005	0	0	1	2	3	0
2006	2	0	4	4	0	0
2007	3	2	4	2	1	0
2008	4	0	2	0	1	1
2009	4	0	2	7	3	0
2010	4	1	2	12	2	0
2011	1	0	1	4	0	0
2012	1	0	1	1	1	1
2013	0	0	2	4	2	0
2014	2	1	0	0	0	0

*Source:* Freedom House – Electoral Democracies data; Polity IV; Freedom House – Freedom in the World; Afrobarometer; Arab Barometer; Asian Barometer; Eurobarometer Latinobarómetro.

Table A2. List of episodes of de-democratization between 2000-2014 for every countries.

Country	Regime Breakdown	Loss democratic quality - procedure	Loss democratic quality - content	Loss democratic quality - result	Democratic transition interruption - stagnation	Democratic transition interruption - reversal
Afghanistan						2002-2009
Albania						
Algeria					2004	
Angola						
Argentina				2001-2002; 2007-2008		
Armenia	2003					
Australia						
Austria				2003-2006		
Azerbaijan						
Bahrain					2001-2002	
Bangladesh	2007	2014				
Belarus						
Belgium				2009-2010		
Benin						
Bhutan						
Bolivia				2000-2001		
Bosnia and Herzegovina						
Botswana				2012-2014		
Brazil				2013		
Bulgaria				2010-2013		
Burkina Faso					2000-2001	
Burundi	2010					
Cambodia						
Cameroon						
Canada						
Cape Verde						
C.A.R.	2001; 2008		2007			
Chad						
Chile				2011		
China						
Colombia			2008	2001; 2011-2013		
Comoros						
Congo Dem. Rep.					2003-2006	
Congo Rep.						1999-2006
Costa Rica				2003-2005; 2011-2013		
Cote d'Ivoire					2010-2014	1999-2002
Croatia				2009-2013		
Cuba						
Cyprus				2011-2014		
Czech Republic				2010-2012		
Denmark				2002-2003		
Djibouti	2002					
Dominican Rep.			2013	2010-2011		
Ecuador		2000; 2007		2000-2004		
Egypt					2005	
El Salvador				2000-2001		
Equatorial Guinea						2000-2002
Eritrea						
Estonia				2010-2013		
Ethiopia						
Fiji	2000; 2003					
Finland				2000-2007		

France				2003	
Gabon					2009
Gambia	2002				
Georgia	2003; 2008	2007	2007		
Germany					
Ghana					
Greece				2010-2014	
Guatemala				2001-2003	
Guinea					2010-2013
Guinea-Bissau	2003; 2010				
Guyana			2005		
Haiti	2000; 2010				
Honduras	2009			2013	
Hungary			2011	2009-2012	
India					
Indonesia			2013		
Iran					
Iraq					2003-2006
Ireland				2010-2013	
Israel			2000		
Italy			2008	2010-2014	
Jamaica			2001		
Japan					
Jordan					2003-2008
Kazakhstan					
Kenya	2007			2006	
Kuwait					
Kyrgyzstan	2000				2005-2011
Laos					
Latvia			2010	2009-2010	
Lebanon					2005
Lesotho				2009	
Liberia	2001		2000		
Libya	2014				
Lithuania				2005-2012	
Luxembourg					
Macedonia				2010	
Madagascar	2009				
Malawi			2002	2006	
Malaysia					2003-2004; 2008
Mali	2012		2007		
Mauritania	2008				2009
Mauritius			2006		
Mexico			2006	2001-2003; 2007-on	
Moldova					
Mongolia					
Montenegro					
Morocco					
Mozambique	2009				
Myanmar					2008-2014
Namibia					
Nepal	2002				
Netherlands				2002-2005	
New Zealand					
Nicaragua	2011		2009	2000; 2003- 2005	2013
Niger	2009		2007		
Nigeria	2006		2000-2001		
North Korea					
Norway					
Oman					

Pakistan						
Panama				2001-2005		
Papua New Guinea						
Paraguay				2000-2002		
Peru				2001-2004; 2013		
Philippines	2007					
Poland				2010-2012		
Portugal				2010-2013		
Qatar						
Romania				2013-2014		
Russia	2004					
Rwanda					2001-2003	
Saudi Arabia						
Senegal				2009		
Serbia		2003				
Sierra Leone						
Singapore						
Slovakia				2010-2014		
Slovenia				2005-2013		
Solomon Islands						
Somalia					2012	
South Africa				2003		
South Korea						
South Sudan						
Spain				2009-2013		
Sri Lanka	2010		2006			
Sudan						
Suriname						
Swaziland						
Sweden				2002-2003		
Switzerland						
Syria						
Taiwan			2009			
Tajikistan						1998-2003
Tanzania					1997-2002	
Thailand	2006; 2014					
Timor-Leste			2006			
Togo					2007-2009	
Trinidad & Tobago			2001			
Tunisia						
Turkey			2012	2006-2007; 2010		
Turkmenistan						
Uganda					2002-2005	
Ukraine		2000; 2010	2010			
United Arab Emirates						
United Kingdom				2002-2003		
USA						
Uruguay				2001-2003		
Uzbekistan						
Venezuela	2008	1999-2001	2000	2001-2003	2013	
Viet Nam						
Yemen					2002-2003	2012-2014
Zambia				2006		
Zimbabwe					2009-2013	1999-2001

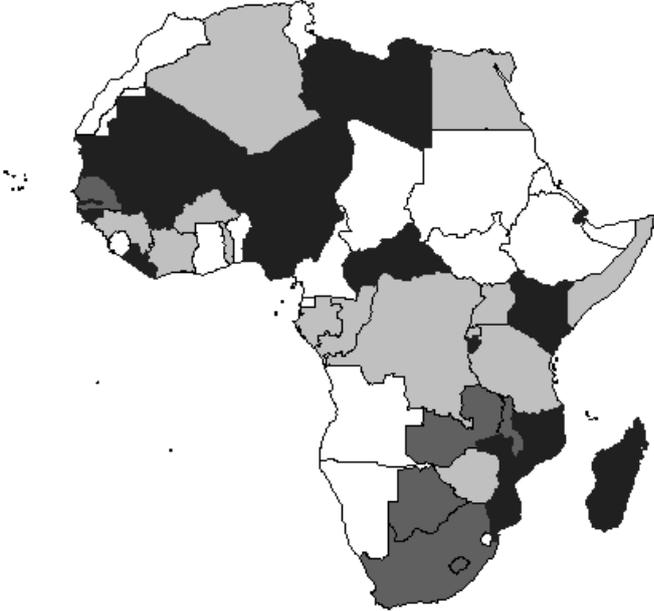
*Source:* Freedom House – Electoral Democracies data; Polity IV; Freedom House – Freedom in the World; Afrobarometer; Arab Barometer; Asian Barometer; Eurobarometer Latinobarómetro.

Figure A1. Regional maps of de-democratization, 2000-2014

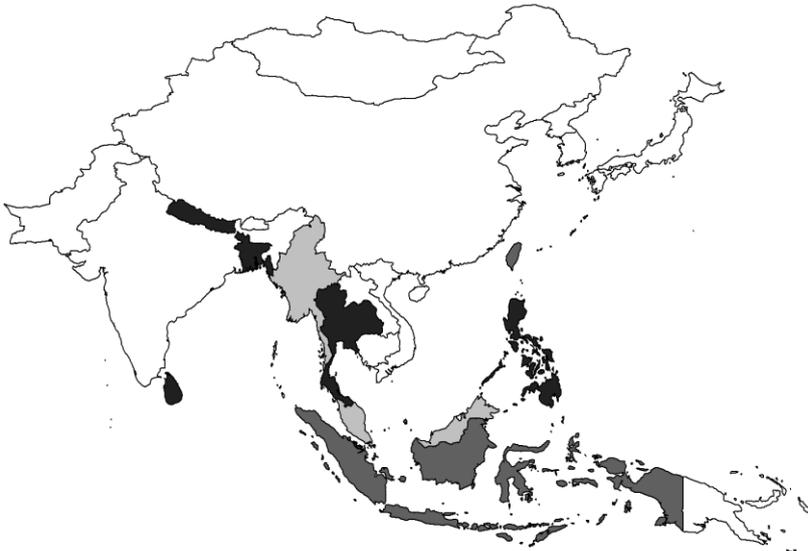
Legend

- no episode
- transit interruption
- loss dem quality
- dem breakdown

Africa



Asia



Europe



Ex-USSR / Central Asia / Middle East



Latin America

