

Abstract

This thesis examines the phenomenon of autocratisation, analysing its key drivers, mechanisms, and consequences across different political and institutional contexts. While the unprecedented number of elections in 2024 initially appeared to reaffirm democratic resilience, a closer examination reveals an ongoing third wave of autocratisation, characterized by democratic backsliding and the systematic erosion of institutional checks and balances. Challenging the assumptions of democratic inevitability, this study confirms that democracy is neither absolute nor irreversible; rather, it is increasingly fragile in the face of executive aggrandizement, weakened horizontal and vertical accountability, and the manipulation of electoral processes.

Through a comparative analysis of Türkiye, Tunisia, and Israel, this research highlights distinct yet interconnected patterns of autocratisation. In Türkiye, a gradual process has seen democracy hollowed out from within, as the ruling AKP entrenches its dominance through electoral manipulation, the suppression of opposition, and the voiding of the legislative and judicial branches. Tunisia, once celebrated as the lone democratic success of the Arab Spring, has undergone a rapid reversal, with President Saied dismantling democratic institutions through a self-coup and autocratic legalism. Israel, historically the MENA region's most stable democracy, exhibits signs of democratic erosion through executive overreach and attempts to weaken judicial independence. Despite differing historical and institutional contexts, these cases reveal common autocratic strategies, including the targeting of the judiciary, horizontal and vertical accountability, and electoral processes to consolidate power and use it without oversight, while maintaining a democratic façade.

This thesis contributes to the growing literature on democratic decline by offering a systematic framework for understanding modern autocratisation, which increasingly occurs through legal and procedural means rather than abrupt coups. It underscores the urgent need for institutional safeguards, strengthening democratic pillars of oversight and accountability, as well as civil society resilience. As democracy faces mounting internal and external pressures, this research calls for renewed scholarly and policy efforts to defend democratic integrity in an era of growing autocratic regression.