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ARTICLE

Behind the Throne: Regime support coalitions around the world, 1789-2020

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Abstract
All regimes require supporters to govern and survive. We discuss the concept of a 'regime support group' and present and validate measures from an extensive dataset recording different features of such groups. This Regime Support and Opposition Groups (ReSOG) dataset covers approximately 2,000 political regimes from almost 200 countries, across 1789–2020. Drawing on the knowledge of about 1,000 country experts, we estimate the size and main geographical location of regime support coalitions and key opposition actors. We also map the social basis of regime support coalitions and opponents, using a 14-category scheme covering various social groups. These data provide a unique quantitative history of the social underpinnings of regimes in the modern era. Using them, we show and discuss the broadening of support coalitions over time, especially in autocracies, the rise of major urban groups, and the relative decline of rural elites in politics, globally.

Keywords: regime support coalition; support group; opposition group; democracy; autocracy

Introduction

Rulers of modern states hold formal titles such as President, King, or General Secretary. But, in most countries, even exhaustive lists of those holding high formal political offices only partially answer the question: Who really holds power? All leaders who formally head states or governments – even the most powerful ones – rely on coalitions of social groups that underpin these leaders, or even the wider regime that they lead (for example, Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Geddes et al 2018; Svolik 2012). In this article, we focus on the groups that support and maintain the current political regime in power. These regime support groups are typically mirrored by opposition groups who would like to overthrow the incumbent regime and erect a new one. The struggle between the social groups supporting and opposing regimes makes history, immortalized in Marx and Engels' (1848) proclamation that the 'history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles'.

While few historians or social scientists subscribe to such a strong statement, Marx and Engels have not been alone in highlighting the key roles that social groups – equipped with different interests and power resources – have played in shaping political institutions, economies, and societies. Which groups hold the reins of power and which groups are willing and able to mobilize

against the current regime are often invoked as core explanatory factors behind democratization, to mention one important outcome. Regimes backed by wealthy and powerful landowners are supposedly more likely to remain autocratic (for example, Moore 1966; Boix 2003; Ansell and Samuels 2015), whereas countries where the opposition mobilizes urban middle and working classes are more likely to experience democratization (Lipset 1959; Rueschemeyer et al. 1992; Collier 1999). Thus, the history of democratization can, in part, be written as old regime-support coalitions being overthrown and replaced by new ones. And, socioeconomic classes are not the only social groups that matter for political development. Several studies highlight the role of social groups distinguished by geographic, ethnic, linguistic, or other salient markers in engendering specific institutional changes or even large-scale social transformations (for example, Giddens 1979; Rokkan 1970; Tilly 2004). Recent large-n studies find more specific patterns following this broader notion; Bormann (2017), for example, finds that ethnically more inclusive autocracies are more likely to democratize.

Still, we are far from achieving a full understanding of how, why, and when different social groups become influential regime supporters and thereby shape political and societal development. Especially, the lack of direct measures of regime support group characteristics that are comparable across multiple countries and have extensive time series has impeded our understanding of this matter. So far, the most common approach to addressing the 'who rules' question, is measuring individuals occupying formal positions such as heads of state or governments (Goemans et al. 2009) or cabinet ministers (Nyrup and Bramwell 2020). While important and powerful actors, they are not the only relevant ones. An alternative way to measure 'who rules' is to use proxies like regime type (for example, a military regime indicates that military officers rule: Geddes et al. 2018) or party composition of government (Mattes et al. 2016). Yet another approach is to rely on structural proxies, such as urbanization or measures of land or income inequality, to capture the preferences and capacities of particular groups of regime supporters and opponents (Boix 2003; Ansell and Samuels 2015). Yet, these are inevitably distant proxy measures of the identity and other characteristics of the actors in power. Hence, several of the theoretical propositions on democratization referenced above (and many others) remain to be *directly* tested in a quantitative cross-country set-up. And, for those propositions supported by in-depth case studies, we still need to evaluate how general or context-sensitive the influence and roles played by particular social groups truly are.

We take a new approach to the question of 'who rules?' by discussing the concept of a 'regime support group', and by measuring various characteristics of such groups – as well as 'regime opposition groups' – in the new, cross-country Regime Support and Opposition Groups (ReSOG) dataset. ReSOG is global in scope and spans modern history from 1789–2020. Its measures include the size, geographical location, and social group composition of regime support and opposition groups.[1] These features, we contend, are potentially important for how politics works and how policies are formed across different regime types, geographical regions, and historical periods. Specifically, the social identities (be it class, ethnicity, or other politically salient markers) or numerical size of the groups that support or oppose the regime make up core components of theories explaining different phenomena, such as welfare state development (Esping-Andersen 1990; Korpi 2006), economic development (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Gallagher and Hanson 2015), interstate war (Lenin 1999; Angell 1938), and democratization (Moore 1966; Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). With ReSOG, we hope to enable researchers to conduct more comprehensive and precise large-n tests of these and other theories than has hitherto been possible.

[1]Whenever we use the shorthand 'support groups' or 'support coalitions' to describe our data or concepts underlying them, we refer to *regime* support groups and regime support coalitions (likewise for regime opposition groups), and not groups supporting or opposing the particular leader or their ruling coalition (c.f., Svolik 2012; Mattes et al. 2016; Schulz and Kelsall 2021).

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To illustrate, in a companion paper (Knutsen et al. 2024), we discuss and test how not only the *size* (c.f., Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair 2022; Gallagher and Hanson 2015) of regime support coalitions, but also their *heterogeneity* influence regime survival and breakdown. We find evidence that heterogeneous support coalitions comprising multiple social groups enhance regime survival, especially by reducing threats from regime outsiders via revolutions or civil wars (see also Roessler 2011; Slater 2010). In another paper (Wig et al. 2024), we use ReSOG data on support group identity to adjudicate between classic (capitalist peace and imperialism) theories indicating that business elites, when empowered, have belligerent (for example, Lenin 1999) or pacifying effects (for example, Angell 1938). In a third paper (Rasmussen et al. 2024), we revisit debates on the social origins of welfare states (Baldwin 1990; Esping-Andersen 1990; Korpi 1983, 2006), showing that regimes supported by the urban working classes expand welfare programmes – even coverage in such programmes for other social groups – more than other regimes. Yet, these three papers only scratch the surface concerning theoretical debates and research questions that the ReSOG data can inform.

We surmise that the reasons why no one has yet attempted a similar type of data collection as ReSOG (but see, for example, Mattes et al. 2016; Schulz and Kelsall 2021; Svolik 2012) is partly the difficulty and partly the expenses of collecting measures that are comparable across countries and over time for such nebulous (but important) concepts. We are under no illusions that our measures are flawless, and we will address several reliability and validity issues. Still, we will also detail how we have constructed informative measures by drawing on the in-depth knowledge of around 1000 country experts and the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem; Coppedge et al. 2020) infrastructure for collecting and processing data. While inevitably imperfect, we hope and believe that these data can help social scientists study various research questions on determinants or outcomes of regime support and opposition group constellations.

In Section II, we briefly discuss relevant existing datasets. In Section III, we discuss core concepts. In Section IV, we present ReSOG's variables, describe how they were collected, and discuss validity and reliability characteristics. In Section V, we put (some of) the data to use and describe notable patterns and historical trends in regime support- and opposition group characteristics across 1789–2020.

For instance, we show that while autocracies, on average, have smaller and less socially diverse regime support coalitions than democracies, autocratic coalitions display considerable variation in size. This variation is only partly explained by differences in autocratic regime institutions, suggesting that previous practices of using such institutions to proxy for coalition size introduces considerable measurement error. Concerning historical trends, we showcase the rise of the urban working and middle classes, and the relative decline of rural elites in politics, throughout modern history, albeit at different points in time for different geographical regions. We also show how support coalitions have increased in size and social diversity over time, especially for autocracies throughout the twentieth century. Hence, while modern autocracies are not accountable to the population via truly competitive multi-party elections, they have broadened their power base, shifting their political support from small, powerful elites to encompass more, or more populous, social groups. These findings illustrate how the ReSOG data offer valuable insights into comparative, historical developments in political power constellations.

Existing datasets

Cross-country datasets on democracy or other institutional features have become increasingly abundant over the last few decades. By contrast, cross-country data with long-time series on the actors who maintain and populate these institutions, or who oppose and challenge them, remain relatively sparse. This, we believe, is not because the characteristics of these core actors are generally less relevant than institutions to explain politics. Instead, the scarcity of data, we believe,

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is partly due to actor-centric characteristics being harder to measure precisely, especially in a consistent and comparable manner across countries and time. Indicatively, when cross-country measures of relevant political actors have been proposed, proxies capturing institutional features such as executive constraints (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003), presence of military regimes (Mattes et al. 2016), or party composition of governments (Mattes et al. 2016) are used in the operationalization. So, while, for example, the excellent and extensive (1919–2018) Changes in Source of Leader Support (CHISOLS) dataset by Mattes et al. (2016) has clear conceptual links to our ReSOG data,[2] the measures are dissimilar. Another notable difference is that Mattes et al.'s (2016) measures pertain to the supporters of leaders, whereas our measures pertain to support groups behind regimes. Also, Svolik's (2012) Ruling Coalitions data, focusing on autocracies, centres on leaders, for example registering their main institutional affiliations prior to assuming office (for instance with the judiciary, royal family, or Communist party) and affiliations with former leaders.

The dataset that is arguably closest to ReSOG is Schulz and Kelsall's (2021) recent Political Settlements Dataset (PSD). PSD originated independently from ReSOG and was collected in parallel. PSD contains numerous expert-coded variables trying to capture, inter alia, the size and composition of 'Leader Blocs', and political threat levels posed by particular social groups. There are conceptual and methodological differences also between PSD and ReSOG. PSD builds more explicitly on the theoretical framework by Mushtaq Khan (for example, 2010), where political settlements are 'understood as relatively stable combinations of power and institutions' (Schulz and Kelsall 2021, 4) and focuses on the ruling coalition's cohesion and its relative strength versus the opposition. As for CHISOLS and Svolik's Ruling Coalition data, PSD pertains to coalitions behind leaders rather than regimes. The theoretical framework underlying PSD is based on experiences from developing countries, reflected also in its scope; PSD covers forty-two Global South countries with time series ranging from 1946 or independent statehood to 2018. Hence, there are major differences between PSD and ReSOG not only in the number of characteristics coded (PSD has far more variables), but also in country coverage and time series (ReSOG has a global and longer historical scope). In Section IV, we return to similarities and differences between the datasets and discuss convergent validity tests.

Another alternative to measuring social groups in regime support coalitions by using a comprehensive, multi-dimensional categorization (class, urban-rural, religion, etc., as in ReSOG), is to focus on one dimension. Notably, researchers have studied the ethnic composition of regimes and their supporters using the pathbreaking Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) data (Cederman et al. 2010; Vogt et al. 2015). EPR considers groups marked by ethnicity. The core EPR dataset registers more than 800 'politically relevant' groups, globally, across 1946–2021, coding groups' exclusion from or inclusion in power. Associated EPR datasets provide additional information, including geographic settlement patterns and cleavages dividing groups.

'Regime support group' and other key concepts

A prerequisite for understanding our notion of a 'regime support group' is to define 'regime'. We hew closely to one conventional, and quite flexible, definition (following, for example, Geddes et al. 2014) and define a political regime 'as the set of formal and/or informal rules that are essential for choosing political leaders and/or maintaining political leaders in power' (Coppedge et al. 2022b: 135). Hence, a regime change is defined as a substantial change in these rules (for a longer conceptual and operational discussion, see Djuve et al 2020). This regime definition includes both democracies, where rules ensuring free and fair multi-party elections are core for selecting and deselecting leaders, and autocracies, where rules for selecting leaders vary greatly but do not entail free and fair elections.

[2]CHISOLS codes change in leader coalitions, but not directly who makes up the coalitions.

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Against this background, we define a regime support group as a 'group of individuals who are supportive of the existing regime, and, *if* it were to retract support would substantially increase the chance that the regime would lose power' (Coppedge et al. 2022b, 135). There are two components to this definition, both of which are necessary, and jointly sufficient, conditions for being considered a regime support group, a) that the group backs the current regime and b) that this backing is impactful in terms of maintaining the regime in power. The first condition entails a preference, at least at the time being, for keeping the country's current regime. This could result from a range of underlying motivations, such as strong ideological affinity, expected material gains from the regime's policies, or beliefs that likely alternative regimes would adversely affect the group's interests. All these factors may vary over time. This is reflected in our new measures where support group status and other features can be coded as time-varying within a regime's lifespan (although, empirically, between-regime variation substantially exceeds within-regime variation; Appendix IV).

The second condition entails that the group has access to some relevant power resources, be they weapons, potential to mobilize large-scale collective action, financial resources, or politically relevant knowledge. Further, these resources must be used actively to ensure the current regime's stability or could be mobilized for this end, if needed (for example, if a coup or revolution materializes). Alternatively, they could, under a potential scenario, be used to destabilize the regime if the group so wanted. In other words, regime support groups must be able to meaningfully influence regime survival and if they were to retract their support, this would increase the risk of regime breakdown.

We should clarify the distinction between those who rule (leaders and their governments) and the regime (the formal and informal rules for leader selection) since this is crucial to understanding how support groups are often differently constituted in democracies and autocracies. In democracies, the formal rules that govern selection to office are typically clearly spelled out in the constitutional and electoral procedures. The government does not constitute the rules for selection into office, creating a clear separation between those who govern and the regime. In many autocracies, however, those who rule are often constitutive of the informal rules that determine selection into office. In many military regimes, the informal rules that make up the regime are inherently tied to the particular ruling junta's preferences; the informal leader selection rule is 'who does the junta prefer'? If a new junta takes power, it becomes a new regime. Hence, supporting the military junta is the same as supporting the informal rules that govern leader selection (that is, the regime). This key nuance means that coding support groups in autocracies, in practice, often pertain to coding who supports and maintains the ruling group in power, while in democracies it pertains to whose support is critical for upholding an existing set of institutions.

Yet, in both autocracies and (especially) democracies, there are typically several regime support groups at any given point in time, making up what we refer to as the regime support coalition. And even if all are relevant, some groups may be more influential for the regime's survival probability than others (as reflected in ReSOG coding also the *most important* support group). Support group identities presumably vary systematically across regime types. In personalist regimes such as Assad's Syria or Husseinite Iraq, the support group often consists of members of the clan or ethnic group of the dictator (Alawites in Assad's Syria, Sunnis from Tikrit in Hussein's Iraq). In many autocratic monarchies, the aristocracy and agrarian elites have been key support groups. In modern, developed democracies, there are typically many regime support groups, but one important one (whose retraction of support would put the democratic regime at risk) is the urban middle class.

Hence, when regimes change, so often do the support groups. Consider, for example, the nature of pre-revolutionary France in early 1789. The incumbent regime was the *L'ancien régime*, the absolutist monarchy under the Bourbon dynasty. The most important social group in terms of supporting the regime and maintaining it in power, according to the ReSOG data, was the aristocracy. After the regime change(s) happening with the French Revolution, the aristocracy was

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no longer a support group, but other groups, such as the urban middle classes, took on this role (see Appendix X). Changes in support groups (with or without regime change) may also be spurred by other, less abrupt developments, such as demographic shifts, economic changes altering the relative power resources of some groups, or ideological trends.

To complement the measurement of regime support groups, we wanted to map the key *opposition* groups that contest for power and are outside the support coalition. We define a key opposition group as 'a group of individuals (mobilized or not) who both want to and who could, under favorable circumstances, be able to remove the existing political regime' (Coppedge et al. 2022b, 135). Also, this definition centres on the group's preference for regime change *and* its (potential) ability to bring it about. As for support groups, opposition groups may differ in importance due to their differential likelihood of successfully toppling the regime, should they choose to act.[3] Further, at any point in time, we may distinguish between 'dormant' and 'mobilized' opposition groups, where the latter 'include a significant share of individuals who explicitly and actively mobilize against the regime' (Coppedge et al. 2022b, 142).[4]

We end our conceptual discussion and segue into discussing ReSOG measures by noting that further specifications of all definitions, exemplifications, and clarifications of key terms are provided in the (V-Dem) codebook (Coppedge et al. 2022b). This reflects the close link between the concepts we are interested in measuring and ReSOG's indicators. Yet, to achieve high validity, we must ensure that country experts who do the actual coding have similar concepts in mind. All these definitions, clarifications, and exemplifications were, therefore, shown to all experts, before and during the coding. We also take further steps to fix the ideas of expert coders, as detailed in the next section.

ReSOG: Measures, data collection process, and reliability and validity

ReSOG's contents

ReSOG comprises twelve original variables, all included in V-Dem's 'Regimes survey'. The variables are listed alongside their country coverage, time series, and aggregation method (from expert to country level) in Table 1. Five variables pertain to regime support groups, six to regime opposition groups, and one scores the most powerful social group in a country. Four support group variables (*Regime support groups*, *Most important support group*, *Support group size*, *Support group main location*) were part of the Historical V-Dem data collection (Knutsen et al. 2019). All twelve ReSOG variables are included in the latest versions of the contemporary V-Dem coding, which started in 1900. Hence, the maximum time series in V-Dem v.12 (Coppedge et al. 2022a) extends from 1789–2020 for four variables, and eight variables are coded from 1900–2020.

Let us dwell on the fourteen social group answer categories listed in Table 2, which recur for eight ReSOG variables on the identity of (most important) support groups, opposition groups, or most powerful groups. For illustration, Figure 1 maps the most important support group variable, globally, in 2000. The categorization scheme is intentionally multi-dimensional (as described to expert coders) with potentially overlapping categories, aiming to capture several relevant types of social groups emphasized by different literatures. Dimensions pertain, for example, to the urban-rural divide and class divisions, but we also include categories to capture historically salient groups

[3]Distinguishing – both conceptually, and especially empirically – between regime support and opposition groups is not always clear-cut, present co-optation strategies. Some powerful groups, originally opposing the regime, may be co-opted to the extent that they start supporting the regime and actively aid its continuation. We expand on this tricky issue in Appendix V.

[4]In Appendix V, we discuss potential selection biases when coding 'explicit and active opposition groups' (also pertaining to coding efforts of opposition mobilization such as NAVCO; see, for example, Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Dworschak 2023). Briefly, coders may be more attentive to mobilization efforts that successfully oust the regime and fail to capture unsuccessful ones, especially if they peter out without high-profile repression efforts by the regime. Given this potential selection bias, we advise against directly interpreting the magnitude of correlations between active opposition and, for example, regime breakdown, especially absent credible identification strategies, as causal effects.

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Table 1. Variables included in ReSOG

Variable name	Question	**Aggregation method** (from multiple expert scores to country-score)	Countries	Years
Regime support groups	Which groups do the current political regime rely on in order to maintain power? (14 categories, multiple selection)	Mean for each category	194	1789-2020
Regime most important support group	Which (one) group does the current political regime rely on most strongly in order to maintain power?	Mode	195	1789-2020
Regime support groups size	In total, how large is the percentage share of the domestic adult (18+) population that belongs to the political regime's supporting groups?	Bayesian IRT model	195	1789-2020
Regime support location	In which geographic area do the support groups for the current political regime mainly reside?	Mode	195	1789-2020
Regime opposition groups	Which groups include noteworthy opposition actors – that is, individuals (mobilized or not) who both want to and who could, under favourable circumstances, be able to remove the existing political regime? (14 categories, multiple selection)	Mean for each category	179	1900-2020
Explicit and active regime opposition groups	Which (if any) groups include a significant share of individuals who explicitly and actively mobilize against the regime in a particular year?	Mean for each category	179	1900-2020
Regime most important opposition group	Which (one) group constitutes the greatest threat to the current regime?	Mode	179	1900-2020
Regime opposition groups size	In total, how large is the share of the domestic adult (18+) population that are noteworthy opposition actors to the current political regime?	Bayesian IRT model	179	1900-2020
Regime opposition location	In which geographic area do groups opposing the current political regime mainly reside?	Mode	179	1900-2020
Strongest pro-regime preferences	Which (one) group has the strongest pro-regime preferences, irrespective of the group's resources and capabilities for affecting the regime's hold on power?	Mode	179	1900-2020
Strongest anti-regime preferences	Which (one) group has the strongest anti-regime preferences/antipathy against the current regime, irrespective of the group's resources and capabilities for affecting the regime's hold on power?	Mode	179	1900-2020
Most powerful group in affecting regime duration and change	Irrespective of its stance toward the regime (pro-, anti-, or neutral), which one group is the most important for affecting the current regime's chances of staying in power?	Mode	179	1900-2020

Note: See V-Dem Codebook, v.12, pp.138–147 for details on question clarifications, answer categories, measurement level, and variable-specific rules for dealing with 'ties' (that is, two modal categories).

occupying key roles in the state (military and civil servants) and groups primarily described by their ethnic or religious affinity. Hence, we prioritized comprehensiveness and capturing several relevant groups (in different contexts) rather than having a categorization scheme that follows one organizing principle with mutually exclusive categories.

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Table 2. ReSOG's fourteen social group categories

Group nr	Group
0	The aristocracy, including high-status hereditary social groups and castes
1	Agrarian elites, including rich peasants and large landholders
2	Party elites (of the party or parties that control the executive)
3	Business elites
4	The state bureaucracy
5	The military
6	An ethnic or racial group(s)
7	A religious group(s)
8	Local elites, including customary chiefs
9	Urban working classes, including labour unions
10	Urban middle classes
11	Rural working classes (for example, peasants)
12	Rural middle classes (for example, family farmers)
13	A foreign government or colonial power

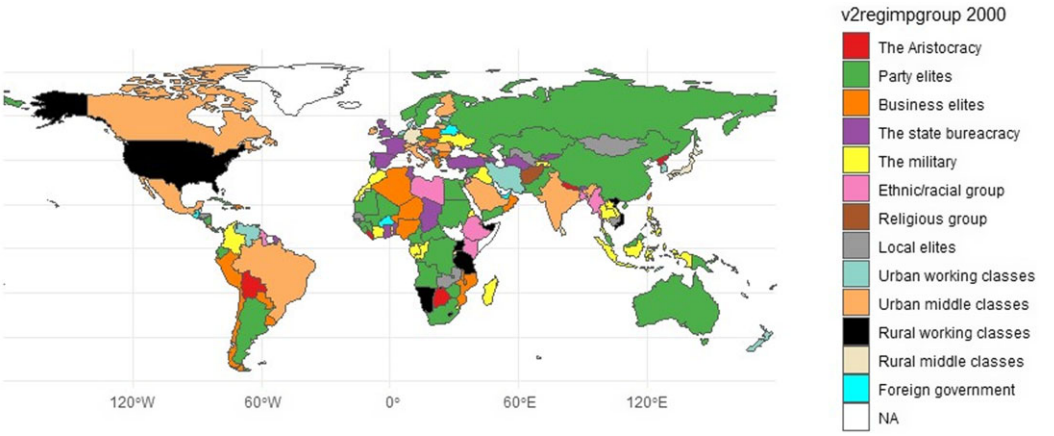

Figure 1. Mapping the most important support group variable (*v2regimpgroup*) in 2000.

Moreover, we do not require that these groups act as unitary actors for being registered as regime support or opposition groups. For example, in our description to expert coders for regime opposition groups, we note that experts shall register those groups that 'include noteworthy opposition actors – that is, individuals (mobilized or not) who both want to and who could, under favorable circumstances, be able to remove the existing political regime.' Hence, a particular group (say 'the military') might register both as a regime support group (for example, army officers supporting the current regime and its junta) and an opposition group (for example, naval officers planning a coup to replace the current junta with another one).

Collecting and processing the data

Around 1,000 country experts have coded ReSOG variables, whereof more than 100 are historical experts, typically political historians or political scientists who have researched eighteenth-century politics for the country in question. Most 'contemporary country experts' have coded their country from 1900–2020, whereas historical experts coded their polities from the start of the time series to 1920 (to ensure twenty years of overlap with contemporary experts). For additional details, see Knutsen et al. (2019) on historical coders and Coppedge et al. (2022) for post-1900 coding. The ambition is to have at least five experts per country question for the 1900–2020

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period.[5] Since there are fewer potential historical experts in most countries, the protocol for historical coding sets additional requirements and quality controls for recruitment and higher remuneration for additional coding time, to compensate for the fewer experts.

We take several measures to clarify the relevant concepts and (regime) units to be coded. This is especially important since we want to measure complicated concepts and because partially overlapping concepts referred to by different, but resembling, terms exist (such as leader's ruling coalition or winning coalition). Hence, we cannot guarantee that all experts have the same reference in mind when coding; some might misunderstand and code; for example, the leader's ruling coalition rather than the regime's support coalition, as we define it. This could result in measurement error and higher uncertainty for some countries and regimes. For instance, if differences between the leader's ruling coalition and the regime's support coalition are smaller in personalist dictatorships than in democracies, and some experts confuse the concepts, the induced errors are larger for democracies. While we cannot remove such errors entirely in a project where about 1,000 experts code, we do present all experts with initial clarifications of the underlying units (regimes) and core concepts (regime support and opposition groups) once they start the online survey. Moreover, all questions come with explicit definitions of key terms, detailed clarifications for questions and answer categories, and even illustrative examples. We refer readers to the V-Dem codebook (Coppedge et al. 2022, 138–147; see also Appendix I), which contains the same definitions, clarifications, and examples that experts view when coding.

Perhaps most importantly, we display, for all experts, the pre-coded data on the identity and start and end dates of the regime as well as the process through which the regime ended (see Djuve et al. 2020 for a presentation of these pre-coded data on more than 2,000 regimes). We do so to ensure that all experts know what we regard as the regime unit that should be considered when they code characteristics of regime support and opposition groups. This clarification is especially important for ensuring consistency during times of civil war or other types of divided territorial control. It also serves to remind experts of, and concretize, the more abstract point that we – in democracies – are not considering the supporters or opponents of the specific government, but instead which groups support/oppose and are important for maintaining/replacing the wider democratic system. This point on how to code democracies is also made explicit to coders in separate question clarifications.

Yet, since experts will inevitably disagree on the relevant support and opposition groups in many cases, even if they accept our definition of what the regime unit is, we need rules for aggregating across coders. The aggregation methods for translating expert scores into country scores, listed in Table 1, are question-specific. For example, when asking experts about the most important opposition group, we opt for the modal category – that is, the category chosen by most country experts for a country year – with ties being decided by which category has the highest score on the regime opposition group question. For this latter question, which is a multiple selection question with fourteen social group categories, we aggregate by taking the mean across experts. To exemplify, if there are five experts, and three consider the urban working class to be an opposition group and two experts do not, the country year aggregate will be $(3*1 + 0*2)/5 = 0.6$. In the next section, we discuss how to interpret this aggregate score and discuss transformations of the original measures.

For the regime support and opposition groups size variables, which are the only two variables originally at an ordinal measurement level, with experts scoring them on five-category scales, we use V-Dem's measurement model for aggregation (see Pemstein et al. 2022; Coppedge et al. 2020).

[5]Appendix Figure A3 plots the numbers of experts coding each observation for Regime support groups (25,743 country years; 1789–2020) and Regime opposition groups (18,424 country years; 1900–2020). The mean numbers of coders are, respectively, 4.9 and 5.6 and the median is 5 for both variables. For Regime support groups, around 25 per cent of (almost exclusively pre-1900) observations only have one expert, whereas the maximum number of experts is seventeen (Italy, 1900–1919).

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This Bayesian IRT model draws on different pieces of information, including experts coding hypothetical cases in anchoring vignettes, to anchor expert scores and make them more comparable. The model ultimately produces country-time estimates on a latent interval scale along with uncertainty estimates.

ReSOG's variables contain rich information about political systems across countries and times that should be of interest to social scientists studying various topics. Notably, this goes also for derivative measures that may easily be constructed from the twelve original variables. To exemplify, we can easily construct derivative measures of so-called 'cross-class coalitions' (see, for example, Esping-Andersen 1990; Luebbert 1991), to capture coalitions (be it as regime opponents or in the support coalition) that include actors from two or more economic classes. Still, we should note that many group categories are rather broad and may miss more subtle changes in the coalitions supporting or opposing regimes. Take 'ethnic or racial group(s)'; a regime could initially be supported by several, large ethnic groups and later lose support from most of them. While our support coalition size measure could capture an associated reduction in numbers, the specific support group dummy would regardless be coded '1'.[6] Hence, ReSOG's measures alone cannot give a complete description of the coalitions supporting or opposing regimes, and using information also from complementary datasets could enrich descriptions. For example, EPR data could capture additional nuances in coalition developments by tracking changes in supporting ethnic groups.

Validation and reliability assessments

We ran convergent validity tests using other data sources. The first is the ongoing *Paths to Power* data collection by Nyrup et al. (2023) on the occupational, educational, and social background of cabinet ministers – a small but important subset of support coalition members – globally after 1966. In Appendix III, we use aggregated versions of their individual-level measures for comparisons against relevant ReSOG regime support group measures, typically finding moderately strong, positive correlations.

Second, we already discussed Schultz and Kelsall's (2021) rich dataset, and one variable well suited for comparing against ReSOG's regime support coalition size measure is Leader Block as a percentage of the population (LB per cent). Yet, the latter measures the size of the coalition behind the leader rather than the regime. Moreover, it differs from our measure by asking coders to only assess who supports the regime rather than requiring both support *and* that this support is effective in enhancing the leader's/regime's grip on power. Thus, ReSOG's measure is more demanding, and we, therefore, expect typically lower scores on the regime support coalition size measure than on LB per cent. Given these conceptual differences, we also expect far from a perfect correlation, but a modestly strong positive one.

Indeed, this is what we find, and, reassuringly, the correlation is quite persistent across time for around 30–40 countries with data on both measures. Figure 2 shows scatterplots with best-fit lines for 1960 ($r = .44$), 1980 ($r = .50$), 2000 ($r = .52$), and 2018 ($r = .56$), the last year of Schultz and Kelsall's data. Overall, the fit between the two measures is about as we expected – fairly strong but with several outliers. Notably, several countries with intermediately sized support coalitions have quite high LB scores. These are (presumably) autocracies with popular leaders (hence the high LB per cent scores), albeit with a smaller set of powerful backers that are key for keeping the regime afloat. One example is the single-party, majority Hutu-dominated Habyarimana regime in 1980-Rwanda, which had an LB score of 62 per cent. Yet, the regime received a middling 0.40 support group size score (the 1980-median score, globally, was 0.77), indicating that the key supporters

[6]Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq is one such example (we thank a reviewer for highlighting it). Hussein's regime relied on ethnic support, but the group dwindled over time, from a relatively large one including most Sunni tribes to a much smaller one relying mainly on supporters from Saddam's hometown (Tikritis).

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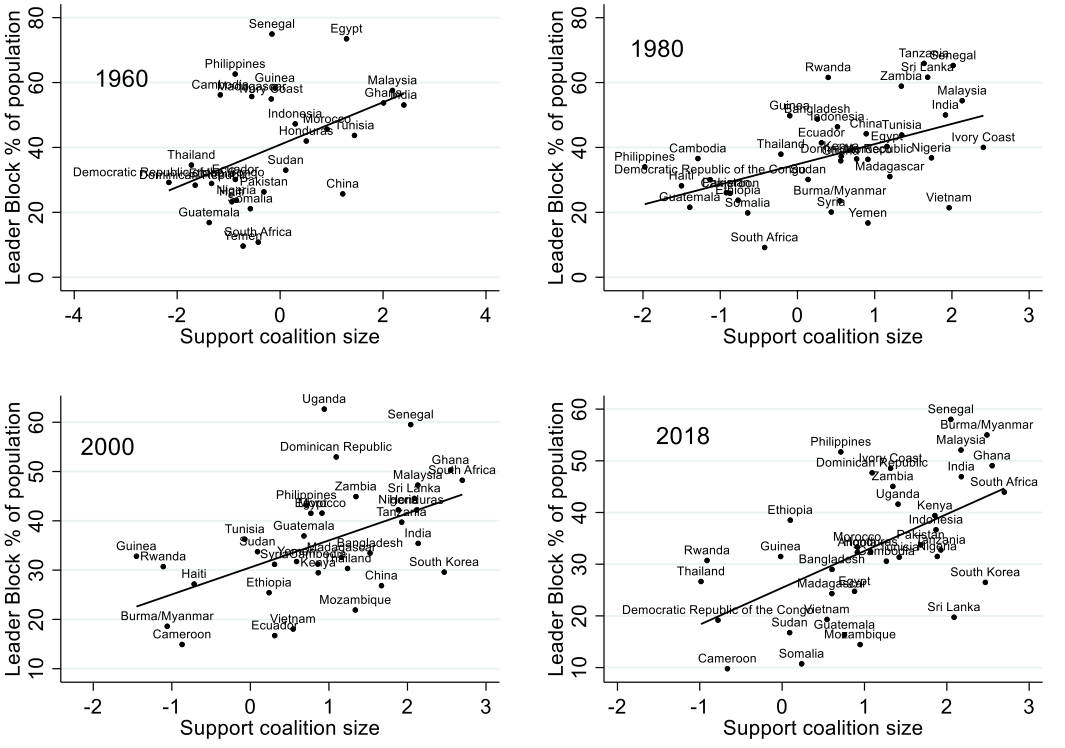

Figure 2. Convergent validation: Scatterplots with best-fit lines for four selected years for our regime support coalition size measure (x-axis) and Leader Block as a percentage of the population from Schultz and Kelsall (y-axis).

effectively keeping the regime in power were fewer than the popular majority. (The support groups coding indicates that party elites and military officers were among the support groups.) Another example is Museveni's electoral authoritarian regime in 2000-Uganda; Museveni was re-elected with 69 per cent of votes in 2001, close to his LB score of 63 per cent. Yet, the support group size score of 0.94 was below the median global score (1.20) that year, suggesting a more concentrated set of core supporters maintaining the regime in power.

Third, assuming that there is typically more consistency in the presence of particular regime support groups during a regime's tenure than before and after regime changes, we use data on regime units from Geddes et al. (2014) and groups of connected leaders (with similar coalitions) from CHISOLS (Mattes et al. 2016) for validation. As expected, we find substantially more between-regime than within-regime variation in regime support groups. We refer to Appendix IV for results. Here we also separately display within- and between-regime variance for autocracies, democracies, and very stable democracies. In Appendix X, we present country examples showing both between- and within-regime developments in regime support groups size and support group identities.

In the following, we consider variations in and estimated reliability of coder-level scores. Yet, before doing so, we highlight that the uncertainty pertaining to support and opposition group characteristics, as indicated by varying degrees of expert agreement, is an important part of the knowledge that we produce and report. Take, for example, ReSOG's regime support group measure, and consider the 'military officers' category. Experts are in full agreement, for example, that the military was part of the regime support coalition in Myanmar in 2002 (score 1) or that it was not part of it in Norway in 2016 (score 0). Experts were, however, not in full agreement on whether Mobutu's regime in Zaïre in 1980 included the military in the support coalition, though

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the 0.75 score means that three of four experts held this belief. For yet other countries, such as France-1946 or Saudi Arabia-1997, experts were equally split (0.5 scores) on whether or not the military was in the regime support coalition.[7] Such middling scores may not *necessarily* reflect poor validity – they may reflect an intermediate degree of political influence for the group (here military), with experts having different thresholds for registering groups as sufficiently important for maintaining regime stability.[8] Yet, at the very least, expert disagreement tells us something about the certainty with which we can make strong claims on the presence or absence of these often hard-to-observe features of regime support coalitions.[9]

To further assess measurement validity and reliability, we explore, more systematically, the correlates of uncertainty and expert-coder disagreement, focusing on the regime support coalition size variable. First, we follow McMann et al. (2022, 438) and 'assess systematic determinants of respondent disagreement in a regression framework [. . .] where the dependent variable is the standard deviation of measurement model-adjusted ratings among respondents for each country and year'. These regressions, presented in Appendix Table A1, include up to 25,975 country-year observations, and we assess different covariates. First, we include the number of coders for each observation as a covariate; expectedly, uncertainty in country-year aggregate scores drops as this number increases. Second, we include support coalition size (linear and squared terms), as size might be harder to code precisely for smaller, intermediate, or larger coalitions. Next, we include a linear time trend and a dummy for whether the observation is coded by Historical V-Dem, anticipating that coalitions of the distant past are harder to code precisely. We also include geographic region-fixed effects and ln GDP p.c. (from Fariss et al. 2022), expecting that coalition size is harder to code in poorer countries. Further, we include a democracy dummy from Skaaning et al. (2015) and ln population, impartial administration, and freedom of expression from V-Dem. We anticipate that smaller countries with partial administrations and poor protection of free speech are harder to code accurately.

Some of these factors correlate with the uncertainty measure. Notably, smaller countries have more uncertain codings (Appendix Table A1), as one might expect if smaller countries are less well-documented in various sources. However, further scrutiny suggests that much of this association comes from smaller countries having fewer V-Dem expert coders; in multivariate regressions, we find no robust direct effect of population size. Indeed, there aren't too many robust correlates of uncertainty in support coalition size scores, especially once controlling for alternative factors. Uncertainty does not depend, systematically, on income, impartial administration, free expression, or democracy.[10] Surprisingly, there is no robust relationship with the year being coded either, although the bivariate correlation is sizable and the negative time trend coefficient indicates

[7]Readers may use similar mean aggregation for experts on ReSOG's 'most important group' questions, originally aggregated by modal expert scores, to obtain extra information about the uncertainty of codings. Descriptive statistics suggest ample cross-coder disagreement and thus higher uncertainty, overall, in these variables, indicating that it is inherently hard to rank which among several support or opposition groups is *the* most important one. Moreover, disagreement is considerably higher for opposition groups than support groups, especially in democracies. Hence, readers and dataset users should take particular care when assessing and interpreting country aggregate scores for the most important opposition group in democracies.

[8]Users may want to triangulate such middling scores by checking experts' 'most important regime support group' scores; if many experts code an intermediate-score support group also as 'most important', high uncertainty seems a more plausible interpretation than middling influence.

[9]V-Dem experts also register their own subjective confidence for each observation. This measure is incorporated – alongside cross-coder disagreement and other pieces of information (Pemstein et al. 2022) – when constructing country-year scores and uncertainty estimates for support and opposition group size with the V-Dem measurement model. However, self-reported confidence is not heavily weighted in the measurement model (they are only included as weights on the priors, which are relatively weak; Pemstein et al. 2022). Moreover, these self-reported estimates only display moderate correlations with other reliability measures (Marquardt et al. 2019), reflecting, for example, that many experts who report close to 100 per cent confidence are not very reliable according to other metrics. Hence, we do not weigh expert scores by self-reported confidence when aggregating country-level scores for, for example, regime support groups. (Also, simple means or modes of expert scores give more easily interpretable measures).

[10]For most variables, especially income level and democracy, bivariate correlations are also negligible (Appendix Table A1).

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that recent years have more certain codings. The lack of strong correlations is reassuring since their presence could have suggested systematic biases with lower-quality coding of particular groups of observations. Yet, in specifications including a squared coalition size term, we find clear indications that intermediately sized coalitions are associated with less uncertainty than larger and smaller ones. Also, there are some indications of regional differences, with Latin American coalitions having higher uncertainty than Eastern European ones. (This pattern is not replicated for Opposition group size). Finally, the strongest pattern is that having more expert coders per observation systematically reduces uncertainty. As displayed in Figure A.3, the median number of experts per observation has increased to five in V-Dem's v.12, thereby enhancing reliability relative to previous releases.

Varying expert numbers also explain differences in measurement errors for other ReSOG variables (Appendices VIII-IX). Hence, dataset users should note that there are generally fewer expert coders for the regime opposition group variables than for the support group ones (coded also for V-Dem v.9-v.10). Overall, reliability and validity may therefore be higher for the latter ReSOG variables. We also highlight that users wanting to, for example, describe country-specific trends or run regressions should inspect accompanying information on expert coder numbers and consider excluding post-1900 observations (at least in robustness tests) with, say, <4 coders. Appendix VIII reproduces descriptive figures from the next section after making this restriction, but the global trends that we consider remain fairly similar.

Next, we shift focus from the country-year level to the country-year-coder level, treating every expert score as an observation. This allows us to assess not only the relevance of country-level factors but also expert-level characteristics for reliability. The tests in Table A2 use different measures of expert-level reliability in the regime support coalition size coding. These include the i) absolute distance between the expert's score and the mean score for that country year, ii) so-called beta scores from V-Dem's measurement model, with high scores implying high expert reliability for the particular variable, and iii) experts' own (0–100) confidence rating in their scores (which can vary by year). In addition to including most country-level measures from above, we add information from V-Dem's post-questionnaire survey on experts' sympathy with two core principles of democracy (electoral and liberal), reported primary motivation for coding, satisfaction with the V-Dem coding process, and time spent on coding.

Few country-level factors are systematically related to the expert-level uncertainty measures. The exception is higher reliability in democracies than autocracies for all three outcome measures. Among the coder-level covariates, (self-reported) time spent on the coding task is not related to reliability. Sympathy with principles of democracy is mostly insignificant as well. By contrast, experts who were more satisfied with the coding experience provided scores that deviated less from the mean and obtained higher (reliability) beta scores. Finally, the main motivation for coding is correlated with reliability. Experts who report that 'being a part of the V-Dem network provides benefits for my reputation' or that V-Dem data 'is a valuable tool for scholars and policy makers' are generally more reliable, according to different metrics, than those motivated by money (reference category).

Finally, one reliability issue resulting from expert disagreement requires attention: in some instances, scores may change for countries from one year to the next *even if* there are no political changes, but due to the sets of experts being dissimilar for the two years. Such changes are particularly likely in 1900 (due to the inclusion of several contemporary experts) and to a lesser extent in 1920 (the last year of coding for the fewer historical experts). Another issue pertains to country-level heterogeneity. It might, for example, be that experts coding largely stable democracies apply different thresholds than those coding countries with more varied or autocratic regime histories when coding, say, which groups could 'under hypothetical 'favorable conditions', be capable of removing the regime' and thus qualify as regime opposition groups. Dataset users should be aware of these features when presenting and interpreting descriptive statistics, and we strongly advise accounting for breaks in the time series. We also strongly advise accounting for

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temporal and country-level heterogeneity (for example, via year- and country-fixed effects) when using ReSOG data in regression analysis.

Patterns and trends in support and opposition group characteristics

To showcase the variety of descriptive insights that can be gained from using the ReSOG data, we selected several patterns and trends that we find important and interesting, and which speak to important questions in the wider literature. We first consider cross-regime differences in more abstract support coalition characteristics such as size and heterogeneity. Thereafter, we discuss historical developments in the inclusion or exclusion of particular social groups.

The size and heterogeneity of support and opposition groups

We begin by considering one theoretically interesting measure that can be constructed from the original data pertaining to the support coalition's heterogeneity. This heterogeneity measure is straightforward: It relies on dichotomized versions of the fourteen support group variables – each scored 1 if half or more of country experts agree the group in question is a support group (that is, when the original score for the support group category in question is $\geq$0.5). For the final heterogeneity measure, we then sum up the number of support groups across these fourteen derived dummies for each country-year observation.[11]

Figure A3 (top plots) shows histograms for the number of support groups for 6,454 democratic- and 18,637 autocratic observations. The democracy-autocracy categorization is based on a dummy variable scored 1 (democratic) if the regime scores $\geq$4 on Skaaning et al.'s (2015) Lexical Index of Electoral Democracy (v.6.3), implying that democracies are regimes with contested multi-party elections. The histograms reveal that democratic regime support coalitions include more social groups than autocratic ones when averaging across the entire historical period. The modal number of support groups is four for democracies and one for autocracies, whereas their respective medians are five and three.

Yet, the histograms also reveal considerable variation in support coalition heterogeneity within the regime types. Of the autocracies, 16 per cent have more than five support groups – examples being Mexico 1930–1988 under the PRI and Austria 1848–1918 under the Habsburg Monarchy. Some democracies are listed with few support groups. For example, late 1980s Thailand is only registered with the state bureaucracy and military as support groups, and Botswana 1966–1979[12] with only agrarian elites and business elites (although rural working classes and party elites came very close to reaching the 0.5-threshold, with 0.43 scores for both groups).[13]

Let us now turn to the measures on regime support groups size and opposition groups size, originally coded on ordinal scales ranging from 0, 'Extremely small (About 1 per cent of the population or less)' to 4, 'Large (More than 30 per cent'). The country-expert scores are

[11]In Appendices VII-VIII, we assess how sensitive the fourteen dummies *and* the aggregated heterogeneity measure are to small alterations in operational rules or expert composition. First, we consider sensitivity to adjusting the majority-of-experts (0.5-score) threshold. Second, we construct alternative measures leaving one expert coder out, when aggregating country scores, and assess sensitivity. In general, the measures are quite robust.

[12]The regime coding of Botswana, which did not experience government turnover after decolonization in 1966 (until late 2024) but where obvious election manipulation was also absent, has been contested (see Knutsen and Wig 2015). Whereas Skaaning et al. (2015) and Boix et al. (2013) code Botswana as democratic, Cheibub et al. (2010) and Geddes et al. (2014) code it as a (dominant party) autocracy.

[13]Appendix Figures A5-A6 reveal regime-type differences also for *which group* is coded as the most important one for maintaining the regime in power. Among their top five groups, only party elites are common. The five most important support groups for autocracies are The military (19 per cent), Aristocracy (17 per cent), Foreign government or colonial power (14 per cent), Party elites (12 per cent), and Agrarian elites (9 per cent). For democracies, the five top groups are Party elites (21 per cent), Business elites (16 per cent), Urban middle classes (14 per cent), Urban working classes (10 per cent), and Civil Servants (8 per cent).

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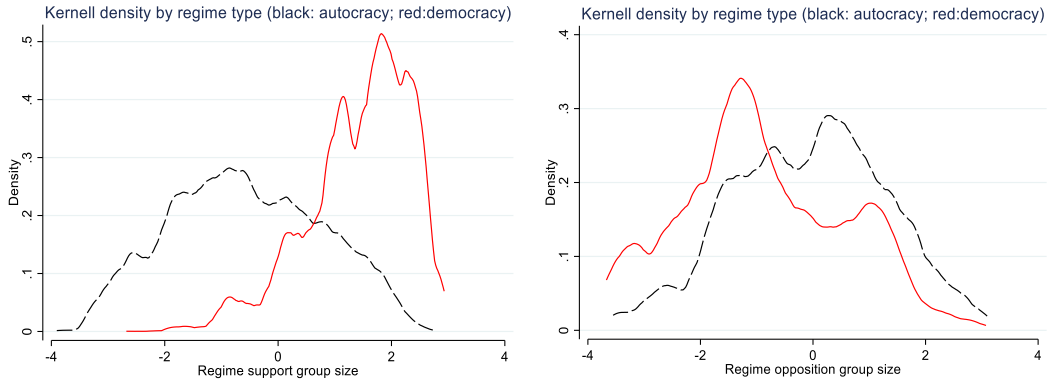

Figure 3. Kernell density functions: Distribution of regime support groups size (left) and regime opposition groups size (right), by regime type. All years and countries included.

subsequently aggregated and transformed into latent interval scales by V-Dem's measurement model. The resulting variables extend empirically from -3.9 to +2.9 (support groups size) and -3.8 to +2.1 (opposition groups size). The Kernell density plots in Figure 3 display distributions of scores for all coded observations, broken down by regime type.

Figure 3 (left plot) shows that, in general, regime support groups size is higher in democracies than autocracies, with means of, respectively, 1.4 and -0.6, and medians of 1.6 and -0.6. Further, regime opposition groups size is generally lower in democracies than in autocracies. For regime opposition groups size (right plot), the variation is relatively large and not too different between the two regime categories. For support groups size, however, autocracies display a much larger variation, with a variance of 1.8, compared to 0.8 for democracies (the latter variation stems, inter alia, from including several low-suffrage competitive regimes under the minimalist democracy definition).[14] Whereas 6 per cent of autocracies have higher scores than the democratic median of 1.6 – and a few autocracies such as Putin's Russia from 2004–2008 and Malaysia from 1958–2017 have scores exceeding 2 – numerous autocracies have very low scores.

There are plausible reasons why autocracies vary so much in regime support coalition size. As highlighted in the autocratic politics literature, autocracies are very heterogeneous in terms of how power is organized, who wields power, and in linkages between the regime and different population groups (for example, Svolik 2012; Geddes et al. 2018). These insights have spurred several efforts to categorize autocracies into types (for example, Wahman et al. 2013; Geddes et al. 2014) and the resulting regime categorizations have even explicitly been used as proxies for differences in the size of coalitions supporting the leader (Bueno de Mesquita et al 2003; Mattes et al. 2016). For example, it is widely assumed that dominant-party autocracies have much broader coalitions than military regimes. With our new support coalition size measure, we can assess this assumption empirically.

Indeed, when considering regime support groups size scores across Geddes et al.'s categories – as reconstructed by Anckar and Fredriksson (2019), who code autocracy type back to 1800 – we find evidence that dominant party regimes have much larger regime support coalitions than the other autocracy types. The mean score for dominant party autocracies is 0.9 whereas the mean score is 1.4 for democracies and -0.2 for all other autocracies. Among the other autocracy types, personalist regimes have generally higher scores (mean of 0.0) than military regimes (-0.3) and autocratic monarchies (-0.3). Hence, the broad patterns in our data follow commonly invoked

[14]The bivariate correlation between V-Dem's suffrage indicator and support groups size is 0.62. Mean support groups size scores are, respectively, 0.8 and 1.6 for democracies with <75 per cent and ≥75 per cent of the adult population having voting rights in parliamentary elections.

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assumptions about differences in coalition size across different autocracy types.[15] Also when separating closed and electoral autocracies, we find that electoral autocracies have larger (*and* more heterogeneous) regime support coalitions.[16]

However, Figure 4 shows that assumptions tying different autocracy types to differences in coalition size are simplifying. For all four autocracy categories, there is considerable variation. For instance, more than 10 per cent of military regime observations have higher support groups size scores than the median dominant party regime – the military regime in Egypt under Nasser in the 1950s and 60s, for example, had a support groups size score of about 1.3. This score might be indicative of decolonization being associated with the emergence of relatively inclusionary autocracies that sprung up globally in opposition to imperialism.[17] By contrast, various nineteenth-century military regimes in Bolivia operated with very narrow coalitions, scoring well below -2 for example in the 1820s–30s. For dominant party regimes, one small-coalition regime is the Afghan one during the Soviet invasion in the 1980s (scores around -1.1), whereas a quintessential large-coalition regime is China in the 2000s (around 1.7). Hence, our data suggest that researchers should take caution before using existing autocratic regime-type categorizations to proxy for coalition size.[18]

As for opposition groups size, Figure 4 (bottom graph) shows a similar picture of general differences between the regime type categories. The largest mean opposition groups size score is for military regimes – incidentally, also the shortest-lived regime type (Geddes et al. 2014) – and the smallest mean is registered for autocratic monarchies – incidentally, the longest-lived autocracies. Yet, as for support coalition size, there is vast within-category variation.

Further assessments show that at any point in modern history, there have been notable cross-country differences in support coalition features. For support coalition size, the between-country variance (1.2) is only slightly lower than the over-time variance within countries (1.3). For example, in 1790, France had a support groups size score of about 0, and its regime support groups (according to our dichotomized variables) included Agrarian elites, Business elites, Urban middle classes, and Rural middle classes. In the Ottoman Empire in the same year, the support groups size score was -2.1, and only the State bureaucracy reached the threshold for registering as a support group. In 2020, democratic Belgium was among the countries with the largest number of support groups (10 out of 14), whereas autocratic Eritrea (Military) and Turkmenistan (Local elites) registered only one each.

The ReSOG data also reveals notable historical trends. There is a substantial increase in average regime support coalition size over time. For example, the mean support groups size score was -1.1 among the sixty countries with data in 1789, whereas the corresponding number, for 176 countries with data, was 1.1 in 2020. Figure 5 (top graph) shows that the increase was gradual but consistent

[15]Also, in line with common assumptions, ReSOG's 'most important support group' coding finds that the modal categories are party elites for dominant party regimes, the aristocracy for autocratic monarchies, and military officers for personalist and military regimes.

[16]These patterns hold up for Lührmann et al.'s (2018) Regimes of the World (RoW) categorization and Skaaning et al.'s Lexical Index (categories 0-1 vs. 2-4) coding of closed and electoral autocracies. For RoW, averages are -0.7 on size and 2.4 on the number of groups for closed autocracies, 0.3 and 3.5 for electoral autocracies, and 1.7 and 4.9 for democracies. For the Lexical index, averages are -0.7 and 3.1 for closed autocracies, -0.3 and 3.8 for electoral autocracies, and 1.6 and 4.7 for democracies.

[17]We thank a reviewer for this observation. Indeed, Egypt had the highest support groups size score in its history under Nasser (Appendix X). When considering sixty countries that decolonized in Sub-Saharan Africa, MENA, and Asia in the twentieth century and remained autocratic five years post-independence, support groups size scores, on average, increased by 1.7 (from -1.3 to +0.4), comparing five years prior to five years after independence.

[18]Geddes et al. (2014) also separate pure versus hybrid (for example, 'dominant party–military') autocracies. Hybridity could possibly relate to the presence of several groups (for example, party elites and military), and more groups in general, throughout the regime's tenure, but also changing support group composition within the regime's lifespan. Yet, the ReSOG data do not display larger or more heterogeneous coalitions, or more within-regime variation, in Geddes et al.-coded hybrid regimes than in autocracies coded as pure types.

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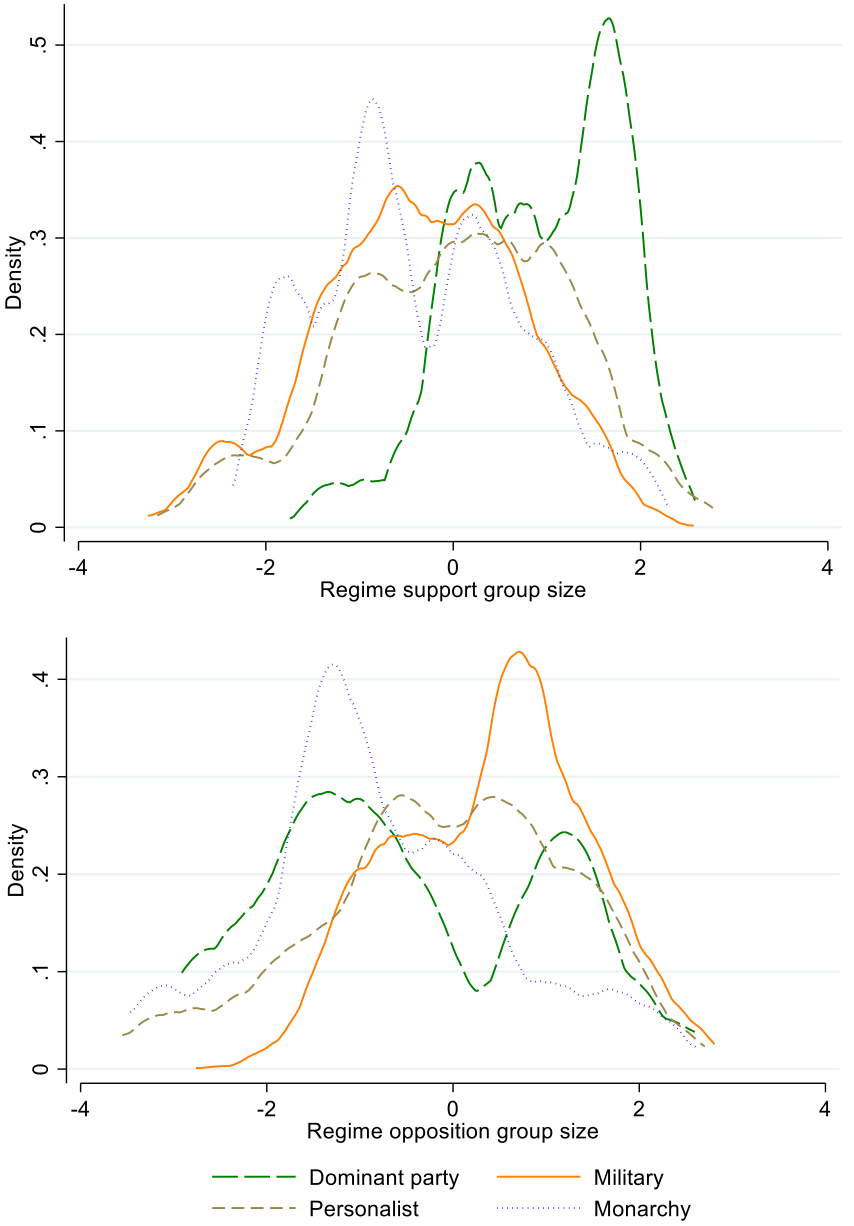

Figure 4. Distribution of regime support groups size (top) and regime opposition groups size (bottom), by autocratic regime type. Kernell density functions. Only countries coded as one of the autocracy types (back to 1800) by Anckar and Fredriksson are included.

from 1789–1900, and the drop in the global average in 1900 is related to the expanded sample including about fifty African and Asian colonies with generally small regime support coalitions. The increasing trend resumed after WWI and continued at a much faster pace after the Second World War to the 1980s. After 1990, the mean support group size has basically stagnated.[19]

[19]By contrast, the global mean for opposition groups size was similar in 1996 (-0.42) and 1900 (-0.41), with few notable developments in between, except an increase during the Second World War.

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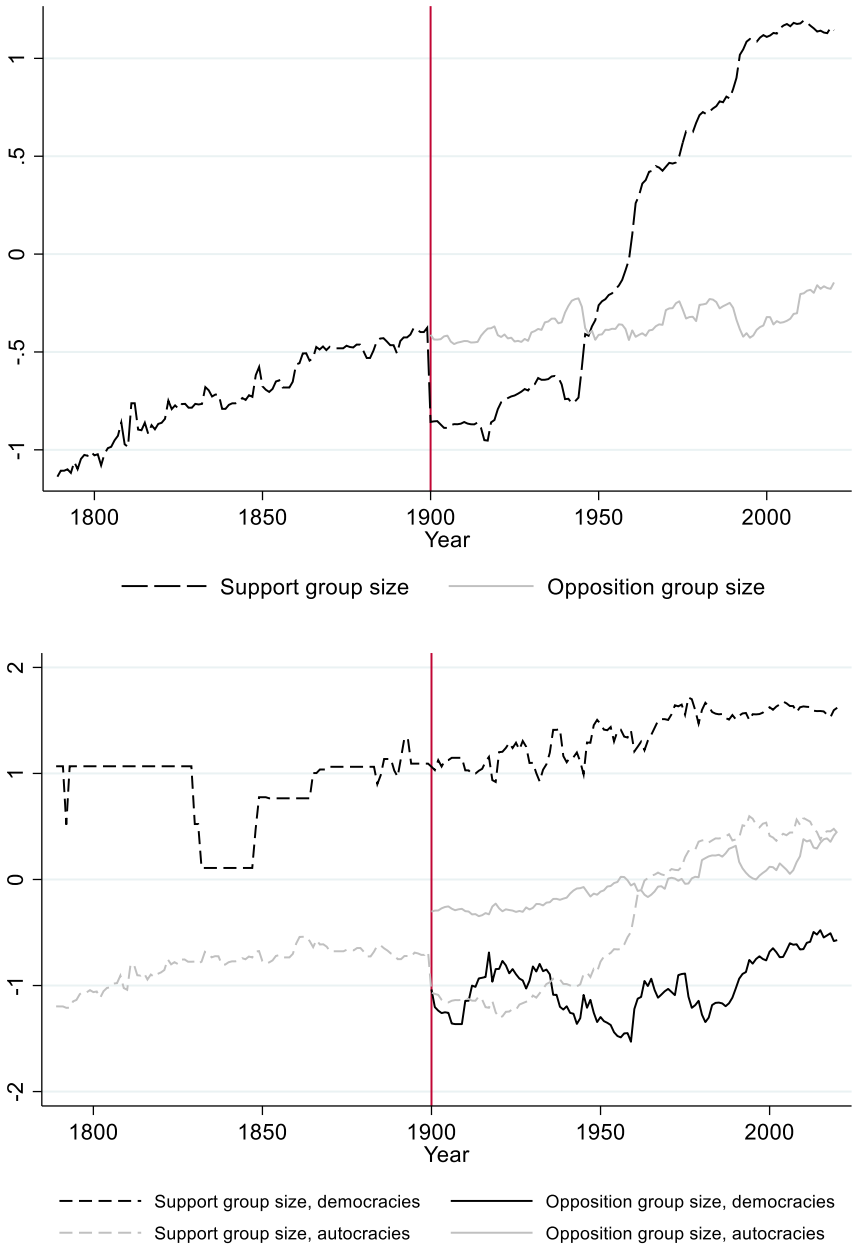

Figure 5. Global averages of regime support- and opposition groups size. Top: Means for all countries with data. Bottom: Means by regime type, using a dummy based on LIED (contested elections) to distinguish democracies from autocracies. Vertical line for 1900 marks year with the expansion of V-Dem sample to include approximately fifty African and Asian colonies.

Further investigation of the increase from 1900–1990 indicates there were two main contributing factors to the trend.[20] First, the large increase in the share of democracies globally,

[20]A third (albeit smaller) contributing factor is the increased support coalition size in democracies over time. The mean score in democracies increased from around 1.1 in 1900 to around 1.6 in 1975; this was a period during which most competitive electoral regimes expanded suffrage, both to relatively poor male citizens and (often later) to women.

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from around 11 per cent in 1900 to around 46 per cent in 1990, contributed substantially. Democracies have had considerably larger coalitions than autocracies across the entire time period, especially prior to 1960. In 1900, for example, the mean score for democracies was around +1 and the mean score for autocracies was around -1. In 2020, the difference had shrunk from 2.1 to 1.2 points but was still considerable.

Second, Figure 5 (bottom) shows that the average support coalition's size in autocratic countries trended considerably upwards, especially from around 1920 to the 1980s. The mean score in autocracies was -1.1 in 1900 and 0.4 in 1980. This trend has corresponded with several notable developments in autocracies, including the increased spread of multi-party elections (Miller 2015) as well as parliaments and regime parties (for example, Frantz 2018). Interestingly, the mean *number* of support groups in autocracies has not changed considerably during the same period (Appendix Figure A.4).

The historical rise of some regime support groups and the decline of others

We now turn to charting the social identity of regime support groups over time. We find clear indications that the types of social groups that regimes have drawn support from to stay in power have changed during modern history, with the replacement of certain (less numerous) elite groups in several countries by more populous social groups such as the urban working classes. We will discuss how much of this trend is related to regimes becoming more democratic. Yet, also some consistently autocratic countries experienced such changes. One notable example is Russia/the Soviet Union, which has remained autocratic throughout the entire period. Still, the Tsarist regime, which according to our data had a support groups size score of 0.2 in 1900 and relied on support from the aristocracy, agrarian elites, the state bureaucracy, and the military, was replaced, eventually, by the Bolshevik regime. Throughout the 1960s, for example, the latter regime had a support coalition size of 1.8 and counted party elites, the state bureaucracy, the military, urban working classes, and rural working classes among its support groups. Not only had the number of regime supporters expanded, but the coalition's composition had changed so that old elite groups mainly located in the countryside had been exchanged with non-elite groups, including the working classes residing in the cities.

The demise of these specific (rural) elite groups as core regime supporters is not restricted to Russia. Figure 6 shows that it is a global phenomenon and that the gradual demise of the aristocracy and agrarian elites has coincided with the historical rise to power of major urban groups. The figure shows time trends in the global means of the (dichotomized) regime support group categories for the aristocracy, agrarian elites, urban middle classes, and urban working classes. About 75 per cent of the regimes at the time of the French Revolution included the Aristocracy in their support coalitions, but this share rapidly declined to around 50 per cent in 1848, the 'Year of Revolution'. With the counter-revolution removing several liberal regimes already from 1849, the share temporarily bounced back in the 1850s, before once again descending from the 1860s. It gradually declined to below 10 per cent in the 1980s, where it has stayed since.

Agrarian elites followed a slightly different trajectory, with an increasing trend from 1789 (included in around 50 per cent of support coalitions) until the 1880s (around 60 per cent). This increase is mainly driven by developments in Latin American countries, where agrarian elites became even more prominent powerbrokers during the nineteenth century. From the 1880s onwards, however, agrarian elites have become increasingly rare as support coalition members (the drop in 1900 is mainly due to the changing sample, with around fifty Asian and African colonies added). Over the last forty years, this rural elite group has entered in fewer than 10 per cent of regime support coalitions, globally.

Two urban non-elite groups, namely the urban middle and urban working classes, have trended in the opposite direction. Presumably, these groups' rise to power has been driven by the

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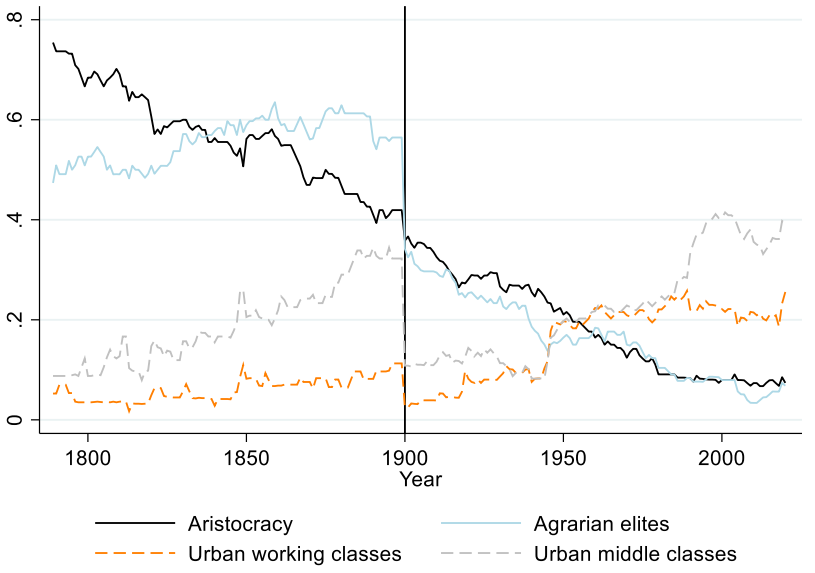

Figure 6. Share of regimes, globally, with the group included in the support coalition, based on dichotomized support group measures. The vertical line marks the year (1900) with a large expansion of the V-Dem sample to include approximately fifty African and Asian colonies.

urbanization and industrialization of economies from the late eighteenth century and the democratization of many political systems (often achieved exactly through these two groups revolting; see, for example, Dahlum et al. 2019). In 1789, fewer than 10 per cent of support coalitions included the urban working classes, and the same applied to the urban middle classes. By 2020, around 25 per cent of the world's regime support coalitions included urban workers and around 40 per cent of the urban middle classes.

Still, there are some interesting differences between these two groups' trajectories: The urban middle classes started being incorporated as regime support groups earlier than the urban working classes; the percentage share of countries where the urban middle classes were included increased from below 10 per cent in 1789 to about 35 per cent in 1899. (The drop in 1900 is once more related to the expanded sample, which was dominated by Western European and American countries pre-1900). By contrast, the urban working class share only increased by around 5 per cent from 1789–1899, with the single notable short-term increase coming in 1848.

From 1900 to the mid-1980s, however, the increase was relatively larger for the urban working classes, leading to the two groups' global means being relatively close towards the end of the Cold War. Thereafter, the global mean for the urban working classes stagnated, whereas the urban middle classes were included in the support coalitions in numerous countries in the 1990s. Around 2000, the urban middle classes were present in about twice as many support coalitions as the urban working classes, and while their global means have converged a little recently, most of the difference has been retained.

Behind these global trends, there is considerable cross-regional heterogeneity. Figures A8-A13, depicting these regional trends, are presented and discussed in Appendix VI. Notably, the trends of aristocratic and agrarian elite decline as well as the rise to power of the urban middle and working classes started earlier in some regions, especially Western Europe and North America, than in others. In the MENA region the aristocracy scores in the twenty-first century are almost similar to those in the nineteenth century.

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Conclusion

Cross-national measures with extensive time series coverage of political institutions and regime types have become abundant over the last three decades. Similar measures of the actors undergirding or opposing these institutions have been fewer. We have presented the new ReSOG dataset on characteristics of the social groups that support or oppose the regimes in power. ReSOG is collected via V-Dem's comprehensive 'Regimes survey', drawing on the knowledge of about 1000 country experts. The resulting twelve variables cover 202 historical and contemporary polities, with the longest time series extending from 1789 to 2020. In this article, we discussed the contents of these data, how they were collected, and their reliability and validity characteristics.

Further, we put the ReSOG data to use by presenting descriptive analyses of important cross-country patterns and trends. We emphasized how different autocratic regime types correlate with support coalition size in ways assumed by previous studies (for example, dominant party regimes, on average, have larger coalitions than military regimes), but also documented considerable heterogeneity within autocratic regime categories. We also discussed how regime support coalitions have increased in size across modern history, especially in autocracies. Further, we showed how the previous dominance of agrarian elite groups in regime support coalitions has steadily – and quite dramatically if we consider the entire span of modern history – waned globally. During the same time span, the urban middle- and working classes have gradually taken a more prominent political role, although the urban middle classes have clearly outpaced the urban working classes since the Cold War ended. These are important descriptive insights, but still only a subset of the insights that can be gained from using ReSOG measures.

Finally, let us return to our motivation for collecting these data, despite the underlying concepts being inherently hard (and costly) to measure: We expect that who rules or who mobilizes opposition against the current regime matters considerably for several important outcomes. Different social groups have very different interests and capabilities, and the characteristics of the groups supporting and opposing the regime may thus shape politics and policymaking in both democratic and autocratic regimes, across developed and less developed countries, and across different time periods. This is indicated by the numerous theories – explaining everything from democratization to war-making to welfare state development – that centre on the identities, geographic location, or the number of regime supporters and opponents as crucial *explanantia*. By using measures from ReSOG, such theories can now be assessed with much more comprehensive data than has hitherto been possible. We hope that many researchers will use our new data to assess existing theories invoking characteristics of regime supporters and regime opposition or to be inspired by the data to develop and test new such theories.

Supplementary material. There are two files with supplementary materials associated with this article, which can be found on the journal webpage alongside this article. *S1: ReSOG Codebook*, contains the first online appendix. This includes the entire Regimes Survey section of the V-Dem (v.12) codebook. *S2: Additional analyses and discussions* contain Online Appendices II-X, referred to in the paper.

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123424000656

Data availability statement. Replication data for this paper can be found at: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/Y5TZ5B

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