Autocratic Revolving Doors: The Return of Authoritarian Elites to Democratic Cabinets

Accepted at Perspectives on Politics

DOI: 10.1017/S1537592724002883

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Abstract:

Which autocratic elites are more likely to return to cabinet in democracy? Elites' incentives are at the core of the explanations of why, how and when democratization happens, yet existing studies on elites' post-democratization trajectory is mostly anecdotal, case study-based, region specific or based on aggregate, slow moving structural variables. This paper offers a novel theory and systematic empirical evidence of autocratic revolving doors that explain which former autocratic elites are more likely to return to cabinet positions under democracy. Using a demand and supply logic of cabinet formation, the paper proposes that the return of former autocratic elites to cabinet is explained by the need of cabinet leaders for ministers with policymaking experience, and to appease old autocratic elites and their interests. More specifically, the theory proposes that the political experience and the characteristics of the position political elites held under autocracy explains which of them are more likely to meet these objectives and return to cabinet in democracy. These theoretical propositions receive support in a quantitative analysis using a novel measure of returning elites for 13,572 former autocratic elites from 72 new democracies between 1966 and 2020.

Introduction

What happens to autocratic elites after democratization? More specifically, which autocratic elites are more likely to return to cabinet positions under democracy? The comparative democratization literature has provided extensive explanations of why, when and how democratization happens (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Ansell and Samuels 2014; Boix 2003; Schmitter and O'Donnell 1986). The vast majority of these explanations put (autocratic) elites at the core of their explanations (Albertus and Menaldo 2014, 2018; Collier 1999; Diamond 1999; Schmitter and O'Donnell 1986), but they mostly use slow-moving, structural variables (such as inequality, GDP/capita, political culture) or institutional variables (presidentialism/parliamentarism, inherited constitutions, etc.) to infer the incentives, roles and consequences of political elites during and after democratization. This aggregated approach prevents us from examining which autocratic elites are replaced, whether and when they remain connected to political power, and how democratization shapes their political trajectory. Given that elites are the most immediate, significant and preeminent explanatory variable in this literature (Diamond 1999; Huntington 1993), this is a major gap in our understanding of autocratic elites' trajectory after transitions.

This puzzle is best illustrated by the trajectories of two former cabinet members during Brazil's military dictatorship, Jarbas Passarinho and Joao Paulo Velloso. They entered the cabinet of the military regime around the same time (Passarinho in 1967 and Velloso in 1970), held multiple cabinet portfolios and positions (three each), and spent a similar amount of time in cabinet during the military dictatorship (i.e. 8 years).[1] However, only Passarinho was part of the core group of individuals that exerted power during Brazil's military dictatorship. Despite similar autocratic cabinet careers, Passarinho returned to cabinet under democracy as Minister of Justice (1990-1992) under the Collor administration, while Velloso never made a return to democratic politics.[2] Passarinho's return was driven by president Collor's need to appease and

build consensus with former autocratic elites in the Congress (Power 2010). The paper proposes that Passarinho's example is illustrative of the two mechanisms that explain which former autocratic elites are more likely to return to democratic cabinet: credibility within former autocratic elites' circles to represent their interests under democracy, and experience in running state institutions acquired as a senior member of the autocratic cabinet. More generally, understanding the return of autocratic elites to democratic cabinet is important because their return is associated with increased inequality (Albertus and Menaldo 2014), lower democratic quality and institutional weakness (Albertus and Menaldo 2014; Power 2010), and anti-democratic practices (Albertus and Deming 2021; Power 2010).

Against this background, this paper offers a novel theory of which former autocratic elites are more likely to return to cabinet positions under democracy. Former autocratic elites are those individuals that occupied cabinet positions in an autocracy that gave them the power and organizational capacity to run the government with broad policymaking influence (Albertus 2015).[3] This includes all individuals who occupied leadership positions (president, prime-minister, vice-president/prime-minister, etc.), cabinet (i.e. ministerial) level positions, but also appointed leadership of key institutions in a regime (such as secretaries of state, junior ministers, attorney general or chief justice, Central Bank governors, United Nations representatives or US ambassadors, etc.). Individuals in these positions generally wield power on behalf of the autocrat and are part of the inner circle of power in an autocracy (Gandhi 2008; Svolik 2012; Albertus 2019; Nalepa 2022).[4] The phenomenon of returning autocratic elites to democratic cabinet is defined as autocratic revolving doors.[5] This paper seeks to explain which of these former autocratic elites are more likely to return to democratic cabinet through a demand and supply logic.

Cabinet formation in democracies is a highly political process under which positions get assigned as a means to reinforce or secure the support of various constituents and societal

groups, and to transfer material and symbolic rents to political allies (Carboni 2023). On the demand side, leaders of cabinets in new democracies need to reward political allies, to provide goods and services to their constituents, and to appease surviving autocratic elites. To achieve this, they need cabinet members with political experience that can run institutions, as well as produce and implement policies. Moreover, in new democracies, the appeasement (or not) of old authoritarian elites is considered one of the key dilemmas of democratization (Ang and Nalepa 2019; Huntington 1993) as they can derail the democratization process (Diamond 1999; Power 2010). Thus, leaders of democratic cabinet need to trade-off between these demands. On the supply side, cabinet leaders need to select from a pool of former autocratic elites that can help them meet these demands. Former autocratic elites selected for democratic cabinet positions need to have both policy and political experience of running state institutions, while also have the capacity to signal to former autocratic elites (and their networks) that their interests will be protected under democracy (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Albertus and Menaldo 2018; Karl 1987). The theory proposes that the variation in political experience elites gained under autocracy and the characteristics of the cabinet positions (i.e. being part of the core, time in office and prestigiousness of the portfolio) they held under autocracy allows us to explain the demand and supply logic that drives autocratic revolving doors in new democracies.

The observable implications of the theory are tested using a timeseries cross-sectional, elite-level dataset of 13,572 former autocratic cabinet members using the WhoGov data (Nyrup and Bramwell 2020) for 72 new democracies (that were autocracies at any point between 1966 and 2020) across 101 different democratic spells (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014). The empirical analysis uses a novel measure of autocratic revolving door at the elite-democratic spell level. This new measure captures whether a former autocratic cabinet member returned as a senior cabinet member (i.e. full minister, president, vice-president, prime minister) at any point after a transition to democracy. The independent variables measure whether elites were

part of the core group of cabinet members in an autocracy, the number of years they spent in an autocratic cabinet, and whether they held a prestigious portfolio (i.e., Finance and Budget, Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, or Defence and National Security). The results (estimated via logistic regression) offer strong support for the theory. More specifically, elites that were part of the core and which held a prestigious portfolio in an autocratic cabinet are more likely to return to cabinet under democracy. In turn, the results indicate that individuals who spent more time in an autocratic cabinet are less likely to return to democratic cabinet positions. The results are robust to alternative model specifications, estimation strategies, and potential confounding factors due to observed or unobserved factors.

This paper brings several contributions to the existing literature on democratization, authoritarian legacies, and revolving door politics. Firstly, it offers a novel theory of autocratic revolving doors with testable observable implications at the elite-level. This theory complements existing explanations of revolving doors dynamics from advanced democracies (Alexiadou 2016; Eggers and Hainmueller 2009) and goes beyond existing explanations focusing on the trajectory of political leaders (Baturo 2016). Secondly, it provides systematic and generalizable empirical evidence of which autocratic elites are more likely to make a democratic comeback. It complements the evidence of elites' trajectory from Latin America (Albertus 2019; Albertus and Deming 2021; 2022) as the region has had very distinct democratization dynamics (Hagopian and Mainwaring 2005) that do not fit existing theoretical accounts (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013). Thirdly, the paper provides a novel measure of autocratic revolving doors that allows for systematic empirical tests of existing explanations about how and when autocratic elites survive democratization. This novel measure allows scholars of democratization to further unpack the conditions under which democratization can be considered a blank slate (Riedl et al. 2020) and what the potential consequences are of autocratic elites' comeback to democratic politics. Moreover, it opens up the possibility of

more fine-grained testing of propositions from modernization theory that focus on elites' incentives post-democratization (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Ansell and Samuels 2014; Boix 2003; Haggard and Kaufman 2012).

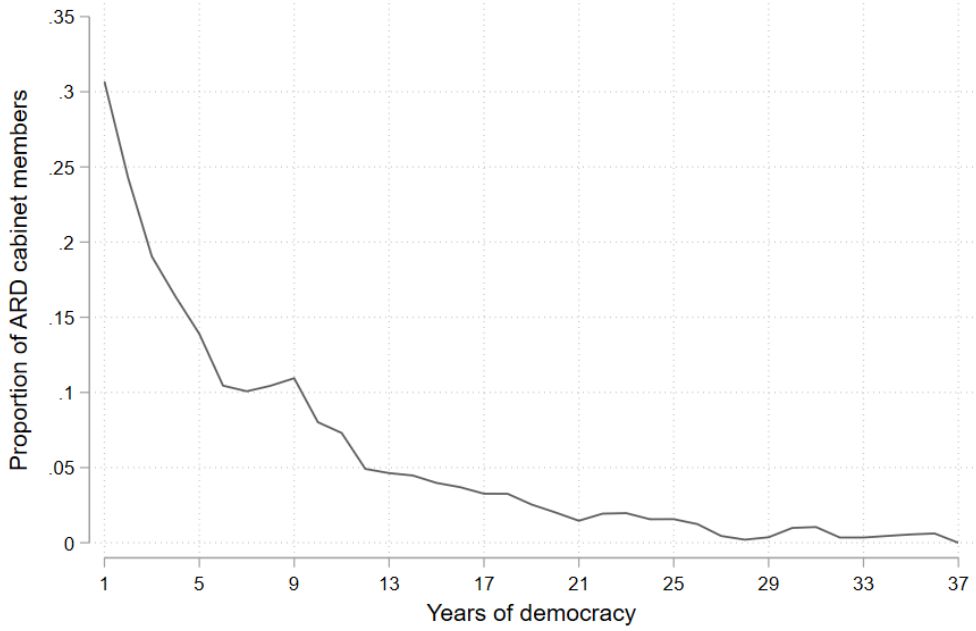
Autocratic revolving doors in new democracies

Autocratic revolving doors is the phenomenon through which former autocratic elites return to cabinet positions after a democratic transition. This builds on the concept of revolving doors from advanced democracies in which cabinet members continue to play a prominent role in politics, business, or civil society after leaving office, very often by leveraging the connections and experience they gained while in office (Braun and Raddatz 2010; Theakston and De Vries 2012). In this context, autocratic revolving doors captures the movement of political elites that occupied positions in an autocratic cabinet to democratic cabinet positions (i.e. minister, prime-minister, president, etc.) after the transition. While being a cabinet member may be the "apex of a political career" (Blondel 1991: 153), it turns out that the political careers of autocratic elites do not finish after democratization or after they have left office (Schlesinger 1966: 118). Paradoxically, democratization allows former autocratic elites to reach another apex of their political career as it opens the possibility for certain elites to return to a cabinet position in democracy. The theory developed in this paper aims to explain this phenomenon.

The return of autocratic elites after democratization has been observed in contexts as diverse as Tunisia (Carboni 2023), Kenya (LeBas and Gray 2021), the Philippines and Indonesia (Buehler and Nataatmadja 2021), Brazil (Power 2010), or the former communist countries of Eastern Europe (Pakulski, Kullberg, and Higley 1996). Data on the return of former autocratic elites to democratic cabinets shows that autocratic revolving doors are the norm rather than the exception. A total of 68 out 72 former autocracies have had at least one former elite occupying a cabinet position in the new democracy between 1966 and 2020.[6] While only 7.5% of all autocratic elites are able to return to a democratic cabinet, they occupied

these positions for over 55% of all new democratic country-years. As Figure 1 below shows, autocratic revolving doors seem to be a very sticky phenomenon as it can take up to 37 years for new democracies to have a cabinet free of former autocratic elites.[7] On average, it takes about 10 and a half years for a new democracy to have a cabinet free of former autocratic elites, and they spend about the same amount of time in office (approx. 3.3 years) as cabinet members of established democracies.[8] Given the scale and frequency of autocratic revolving doors, there are still several gaps in existing literature that prevent us from gaining a more nuanced understanding of what explains this phenomenon.

Figure 1. Proportion of former autocratic elites in democratic cabinets since transition.



Elites' behaviour and their incentives post-democratization has long been the focus of the vast literature on democratization and democratic consolidation (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Albertus 2019; Albertus and Menaldo 2014, 2018; Ang and Nalepa 2019; Ansell and Samuels 2014; Bermeo 1992; Boix 2003; Collier 1999; Haggard and Kaufman 2012; Huntington 1993; Nalepa 2022; Przeworski 1991; Schmitter and O'Donnell 1986). Elites receive a central explanatory role in existing research (Albertus and Menaldo 2018; Collier 1999; Diamond 1999; Huntington 1993), but the literature uses mostly slow-moving, structural

level indicators (such as inequality, GDP/capita, GDP growth or political culture) or institutional variables (presidentialism/parliamentarism, inherited constitutions, etc.) to infer the incentives, roles and consequences of political elites during and after democratization. While useful in understanding the structural determinants of democratization and democratic consolidation, it limits our ability to understand which elites are more likely and better placed to survive democratization and continue their political career. Understanding which of these elites are more likely to return can be consequential for democracy as they bring with them institutional and political practices that may be undemocratic, and result in decreased political accountability and increased clientelism (Albertus and Menaldo 2018; Power 2010). For example, in Brazil former autocratic elites have come in the way of transitional justice for human rights violations that took place during the military dictatorship (Pinheiro 1998). Similarly, Loxton (2018) documents how the election of former dictators as presidents under democratic spells in Dominican Republic, Madagascar and Nicaragua were followed by democratic reversals as a direct result of their actions while in office.[9]

Most explanations of autocratic actors' adaptation to democratic politics focus on how political parties reinvent themselves as democratic competitors (Flores-Macías 2018; Grzymala-Busse 2002, 2018, 2020; LeBas 2018; Loxton 2018; Loxton and Mainwaring 2018; Loxton and Power 2021; Riedl 2018; Slater and Wong 2018, 2013; Ziblatt 2017) and the ways in which autocratic elites use constitutions to protect their interests (Albertus and Menaldo 2018; Negretto 2006). The autocratic successor party literature highlights a puzzling tension between having an authoritarian inheritance (Loxton 2018) (or an usable past - see Grzymala-Busse 2002, 2020), and having authoritarian baggage (Loxton 2018) (or a need to break with the past - see Grzymala-Busse 2018). The former captures resources that can be used by autocratic actors to succeed and thrive under democracy, therefore making their return more likely. The latter captures liabilities (in front of voters and political opponents) that stem from

having supported an autocratic regime and its policies (Nalepa 2010), therefore reducing the likelihood of return for autocratic actors. The findings of this literature highlight that - for autocratic successor parties - the benefits of the authoritarian inheritance trump the liabilities of authoritarian baggage (Loxton 2018). This paper advances this debate on the trade-offs of an autocratic past by examining which characteristics of a former autocratic elite's cabinet position allows them to navigate this trade-off and become politically successful under democracy.

However, most of the literature discussing the reappearance of parties or individuals as democratic players (Loxton and Mainwaring 2018; Loxton and Power 2021) relies on evidence aggregated at the country-level (Albertus and Menaldo 2014, 2018), uses case studies and anecdotal evidence (Buehler and Nataatmadja 2021; LeBas and Gray 2021; Loxton and Power 2021), and is concerned with explaining the trajectory of former dictators (Baturo 2016; Debs 2016). One exception is the work of Albertus (2019) who shows that inheriting an authoritarian constitution increases the likelihood of autocratic elites returning and reduces the likelihood of punishment in the context of Latin America. More recently, Albertus and Deming (2022) show that autocratic elites' pre-existing networks before the installation of autocracy, shapes their ability to avoid punishment and return to positions of influence after democratization in Latin American democracies. Similarly, Nalepa (2022) examines how transitional justice initiatives shape political elites' fates after democratization at the country-level.

While this literature is extremely compelling in its theoretical explanations and empirical evidence, it still has several gaps. Firstly, we lack an understanding of what makes some former autocratic elites more likely to reappear at the forefront of democratic politics. Is this solely driven by the ability of outgoing elites to game democracy in their favor (i.e. design a constitution before the transition) (Albertus 2019)? Or do elites' experience, networks and skills allow some of them to leverage their autocratic past, even in the absence of a gamed

democracy in their favor? Similarly, are all autocratic elites equally likely to return to cabinet under democracy or are certain elites more likely (than their peers) to make this return? Secondly, it is not entirely clear the extent to which the ground-breaking work of Albertus and Deming (2021; 2022) can be generalized beyond the context of Latin America as the countries of this region share a common history of colonialism, militarism, and inequality in wealth and income that is different from other regions (McSherry 2012). Moreover, existing research (Hagopian and Mainwaring 2005; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013) shows that standard theories of modernization do not hold in the case of Latin America due to its regional and temporal specificities. For example, the average rate of cabinet positions occupied by former autocratic elites (4.1%) in new democracies of Latin America is less than half of the global average (10%) for the time period 1966-2020.[10] Thus, we need additional evidence that complements the findings from the Latin American context (Albertus and Deming 2021; 2022) to draw generalizable inferences on the phenomenon of autocratic revolving doors.

Finally, cross-national research on the fates of elites after democratization only considers those elites that have been in office one year prior to transition (Albertus 2019; Albertus and Deming 2021; Nalepa 2022). While giving us an insight into the determinants of returning autocratic elites, these findings may suffer from selection bias. Elites that are in office prior to the transition may be sitting ducks, selected to take the fall of the regime, while the more influential elites choose to withdraw temporarily such that they can re-invent themselves after transition. An example of this phenomenon is Kamel Morjane, who was the Minister of Defence and of Foreign Affairs for almost 6-years under the former autocratic leader of Tunisia, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Once it became clear that Ben Ali was isolated and unable to hold power, on the 13th of January 2011, Morjane asked publicly for Ben Ali's ouster and then resigned (Wolf 2023). Through this move, he tried to create some distance between him, the protests and the regime in an "attempt at authoritarian regeneration" (Wolff 2023: 197).

The following day, he was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs in the care-taker government, which he had to leave two-weeks later at the pressure of the protesters (The Guardian 2011). Alternatively, elites that are in power prior to the transition may see the fall coming and choose to stay in cabinet to game democracy in their favor. Establishing the direction of the selection bias may be difficult without additional observational insights, but the data used in this paper indicates that 463 out of the total 1017 autocratic elites (that return to democratic cabinet) were not in office the year prior to the transition. Then, by only considering elites that were in office only the year prior to the transition, we risk under-estimating how many autocratic elites make a comeback in new democracies.

A theory of autocratic revolving doors

Autocratic revolving doors are explained through a demand and supply logic that drives cabinet formation in new democracies. This is generally a highly political process under which cabinet positions are assigned to individuals based on the weight of the constituency they represent to secure and reinforce their support, but also to offer rewards to political allies (Carboni 2023), wherein the individuals in cabinet are representative of various constituencies and interest groups (Arriola 2009; Arriola, DeVaro, and Meng 2021).

On the demand side, constituencies and interest groups demand access to cabinet positions and its associated material and reputational benefits in exchange for their support of the leader. For example, in Brazil access to cabinet positions is used by party leaders as a token of prestige in local constituencies (Power 2010), but also as a mean to obtain funds for their constituencies (Mauerberg Jr, Oliveira, and Guerreiro 2023). To reward voters and their constituencies, cabinet leaders need cabinet members with expertise/capacity in policymaking so they can deliver public goods, services and benefits (De Mesquita et al. 2003). However, in new democracies, in addition to rewarding voters, cabinet leaders also need to assuage the concerns of former autocratic elites that democracy jeopardizes their interests (Albertus and

Menaldo 2014, 2018). Since democratization rarely dismantles the support and interest networks of autocratic elites (Riedl et al. 2020; Albertus and Menaldo 2018; Carboni 2023), the demand for access to political power and protection of the interests of former elites is quite strong, as they still have enough influence and power to derail the democratization process (Diamond 1999; Power 2010).

On the supply side, these various interest groups supply individuals from which leaders select individuals for cabinet positions. Cabinet leaders need to select competent ministers that can implement policies and deliver public goods to reward constituencies. At the same time, some ministers need to represent the interests of former autocratic elites to ensure their support and prevent them from derailing democracy (Diamond 1999; Power 2010). Bringing ministers without experience may hamper efforts of ensuring bureaucratic efficiency (Weber 2019) and lead to inadequate delivery of public goods (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003), while bringing former autocratic elites in cabinet may lead to a faulty democratic playing field, in which policy making follows the interests of a minority (Nalepa 2022).

The theory of autocratic revolving doors in the paper focuses on developing observable implications on how the demand side of cabinet formation – rewarding constituents and appeasing networks of autocratic elites – explains the supply side – which former autocratic elites are more likely to be part of a democratic cabinet.[11] We can accomplish this by examining how the autocratic cabinet experience and the characteristics of the position elites held under autocracy impacts their likelihood to be part of a democratic cabinet. The main assumption behind this explanation is that the time spent as an autocratic cabinet member allows elites to develop or strengthen their negotiation and policymaking skills, and build support networks and political capital that can be used under democracy (Grzymala-Busse 2020). The ability of autocratic elites to navigate politics and complex situations in the absence of formal rules and in the presence of impending violence in autocracies (Svolik 2012) makes them well prepared

for the more peaceful and predictable nature of democratic politics. Thus, former autocratic elites will have the policymaking and negotiation skills required to run state institutions and implement policies, while also having access and credibility within existing autocratic elites' networks. This happens because the individuals that occupied a cabinet position in an autocracy have had the power and organizational capacity to run the government with broad policymaking influence (Albertus 2015). They generally wielded power on behalf of the autocrat by making and implementing policies (Albertus 2015), were invested in the survival of the regime (Svolik 2012), and had access to the inner circle of power in autocracy (Albertus 2019; Gandhi 2008; Nalepa 2022).

Below I discuss the three autocratic cabinet characteristics that systematically explain which former autocratic elites are more likely to return to democratic cabinet, followed by two descriptive examples (from Tunisia and Brazil) to illustrate the logic of the argument.

Autocratic cabinet positions and revolving doors

The first characteristic of an autocratic cabinet position that shapes autocratic revolving doors is whether an individual has been part of the core of government in an autocratic regime. The core group of elites are the ones with executive decision-making power, that dictate the policies of an autocracy, and which use the country's strategic resources to govern (Albertus 2015). In autocracies, the individuals in these positions are the leaders of (and strongly embedded in) the regime's support networks (Arriola 2009). A core position also allows them to develop contacts and relations with other elites at various levels and acquire the deal-making and negotiation skills necessary for wielding power in an autocracy. Under autocracy, these skills are developed in a fine balancing act of power sharing in which elites want to prevent becoming too powerful such that they threaten the dictator and get removed (often violently) (Svolik 2012), but still influential enough to pursue their own interests and implement regime policies.

This includes the most senior positions of an autocratic cabinet such as cabinet ministers, prime ministers, presidents, vice presidents, vice prime ministers, members of the politburo and members of a military junta[12] (Nyrup and Bramwell 2020). This core group excludes more junior cabinet autocratic positions such as secretaries of state, junior or deputy ministers, attorney general or chief justice, Central Bank governors, United Nations representatives or US ambassadors. While this more junior (i.e. non-core) group of individuals are still important in autocratic governance, they are not essential for regime survival, and they can be replaced more easily by the dictator. However, purges of the core group of elites may backfire and increase the likelihood of leader removal (Angiolillo and Matthews 2024; Baturo and Olar 2024).

In comparison to their more junior cabinet peers, core cabinet members have experience in running important state institutions, mobilizing support for their own interests and political agenda (Albertus and Menaldo 2018), and have private information about the state strategic resources and other actors in society (Nalepa 2010, 2022). These positions also give these elites more visibility within society, which makes it more difficult for them to obfuscate their autocratic past under democracy (Loxton 2018). Thus, core elites have more credibility within the autocratic interest groups that usually survive democratization. These autocratic interest groups prefer elites from the core group in democratic cabinet because they can trust these individuals share the same material interests, and that they have the skills and knowledge to defend these under democracy. Thus, selecting cabinet members that were part of the core autocratic ruling groups assuages the fears of the redistributive potential of democracy for former autocratic elites and their interest groups (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Ansell and Samuels 2014).

Put simply, their presence in cabinet positions is a reassurance for and meets the demands of old autocratic elites' that their interests will be protected under democracy, and the

changes in governance rules will not jeopardize their access to state resources. Similarly, their experience in running important state institutions is beneficial for cabinet leaders in allowing them to implement their own policy goals, therefore having the skills to meet the demands for the delivery of public goods to voters. For example, when Rached Ghannouchi formed the caretaker government in Tunisia, after the ouster of Ben Ali in January 2011, he nominated ministers that had been part of Ben Ali's cabinet on the argument that their "great expertise was needed in this phase…so they can put in place this ambitious programme of reform" (Wolff 2023: 208). In turn, elites outside of the core group might be less of a reassurance for autocratic interest groups since their junior position carried lower levels of responsibility for the regime and they might not be able to signal an equally strong commitment to defend autocratic elites' interests under democracy. Moreover, their more junior positions might not give credibility to their abilities as policy makers. Thus, we expect that:

Hypothesis 1: *Autocratic elites that were part of the core cabinet in autocracies are more likely to return as cabinet members in democracies compared to those autocratic elites that were never part of the core cabinet.*

The second characteristic that shapes autocratic revolving doors is the number of years an individual has been a cabinet member in an autocracy. This serves as a proxy for elites' ability to navigate politics and their embeddedness in autocratic elites' networks. Autocratic politics can be a perilous line of work because political agreements are informal, and there are no institutions to enforce power-sharing and violence is the ultimate arbiter of political conflicts (Svolik 2012). Very often, autocratic politics resembles a game of musical chairs in which the leader rotates the cabinet members to prevent them from developing strong bases and networks of support that could potentially threaten leaders' position in power. For example, the former autocratic leader of Tunisia, Ben Ali, was so concerned with ministers conspiring against him that he tried to prevent having key ministers – Defense, Interior and Foreign Affairs – meet

without him (Wolff 2023). Then, being able to navigate and survive (politically) in such a perilous environment creates extremely robust individuals with usable political skills. Moreover, more time spent in an autocratic cabinet also increases the amount of private information these individuals can leverage in democratic politics because they know "where the bodies are hidden" (Ang and Nalepa 2019). A lengthier time in autocratic cabinets also increases elites' credibility within elites' circles. This credibility helps as former autocratic elites (outside of the cabinet) are more likely to trust that these individuals will protect their interest when selected for cabinet. Similarly, a longer time in cabinet also equates to a longer list of contacts that former autocratic elites can use to leverage favors and wield power. These attributes, acquired through a longer time in office, allows these elites to position themselves in a way that makes them valuable coalition members of governments in new democracies. Put simply, the number of years spent in an autocratic cabinet highlights a strong commitment to autocratic elites' interests, but it also signals policy making abilities that can be useful for leaders of democratic cabinets, therefore meeting the demands of cabinet formation in new democracies. Thus, we expect that:

Hypothesis 2: *Autocratic elites with longer tenures in autocratic cabinets are more likely to make a return to cabinet in new democracies than those with shorter tenures.*

Finally, the prestige of the portfolio an individual has held under autocracy also impacts their return to cabinet in new democracies. The prestigiousness of a cabinet portfolio is defined by control over policy, visibility of the position and access to strategic resources (Krook and O'Brien 2012). The most prestigious portfolios are the ones of Finance, Foreign Affairs, Home/Internal Affairs and Defense. This conceptual category captures all individuals that had responsibilities in these policy areas in a cabinet ranging from full ministers to deputy ministers or heads of governmental agencies (e.g. Central bank, chief justices, head prosecutors, heads of army or intelligence, etc.). Dictators generally cannot rule alone, and they face a loyalty-

competence trade-off when deciding who to co-opt as cabinet members (Gueorguiev and Schuler 2016; Zakharov 2016) as they fear that elites may amass too much power at the expense of the leader (Svolik 2012). Individuals with more prestigious cabinet portfolios are more likely to be purged in the event of a failed coup because they have access to strategic resources through which they can attempt to remove the leader (Bokobza et al. 2020). This indicates that cabinet positions in an autocracy are not merely window dressing in which individuals are used interchangeably (Gandhi 2008), and it is plausible that having access to a more prestigious portfolio might shape individuals' networks of support, policymaking skills and access to strategic resources.

There are a couple of ways in which cabinet portfolios' prestige shapes elites cabinet return in democracies. Firstly, a more prestigious cabinet position requires individuals to develop a set of specialized skills that allows them to implement policies required to keep the government running. This experience provides individuals with the opportunity to position themselves as competent and experienced politicians that understand the inner workings of state bureaucracy, and whose expertise is required to keep the institutions working after democratization. Moreover, given their expertise, leaders of democratic cabinet know that these individuals have policy making and implementation skills that can help leaders achieve their policy goals. Their selection in cabinet reassures voters that the government can deal with political problems such as the state of the economy, public order or social injustice since these individuals have the required policy experience. These elites can meet the demands of cabinet in new democracies. Secondly, the selection of these individuals in cabinet also signals to elite networks that their interests will be protected under democracy since the prestigious positions placed them at the core of various interest networks under autocracy. This gives these elites private information about the strategic resources of the state, and a list of contacts among elites interested in maintaining political influence and power under democracy. Thus, we expect that:

Hypothesis 3: *Autocratic elites that held more prestigious cabinet portfolios (i.e., budget/finance, foreign affairs, and internal/home affairs) are more likely to return as cabinet members in new democracies compared to autocratic elites that never held these portfolios.*

However, we expect a different outcome for previous holders of the Defense, Military and National Security portfolio. This position requires individuals to use states' resources to repress potential dissent and keep citizens from organizing against the regime (Svolik 2012). The best way to deal with individuals responsible for human rights violations has been a key question in the literature on transitional justice and democratization (Dancy and Thoms 2021; Huntington 1993). More generally, individuals with a portfolio aimed at using repression against potential or would-be opponents are more likely to be targeted by transitional justice measures (Dancy et al. 2019; Nalepa 2022). If they avoid punishment, their past becomes a political deadweight that reduces their ability to use leverage in making a return to a cabinet position in democracy. Moreover, individuals with training in the use of violence and background in the military always have the option of returning to the barracks, rather than face the scrutiny of civilian political life (Debs 2016; Geddes 1999). These arguments lead to the final hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: *Autocratic elites that held a defense, military and national security cabinet portfolio in an autocracy are less likely to return as cabinet members in new democracies compared to elites that held other types of portfolios.*

A theoretical tension emerges from the above explanations as full ministers with the Defense, Military and National Security portfolios would also be considered as part of the core group of governing elites. Therefore, for these individuals we have contradicting expectations (i.e. *positive* for the core position and *negative* for the defense portfolio) regarding their likelihood of being selected for cabinet under democracy.[13] The theory is agnostic whether one

of these characteristics should trump the effects of the other, but this possibility is being examined as an empirical extension in the analysis section of the paper.

Illustrating the logic of the theory

Two examples (from Tunisia and Brazil) illustrate the logic of the theoretical argument. The first example is the one of Kamel Morjane, who served as Minister of Defence (August 2005 – January 2010) and Minister of Foreign Affairs (January 2010 – January 2011) in the autocratic cabinet of Tunisia's Zine El Abidine Ben Ali who ruled between 1987 and 2011. During the protests that brought down Ben Ali in January 2011, Kamel Morjane strategically resigned his cabinet position on the 13th of January 2011 "hoping he would naturally emerge as one of the key leaders once the turmoil was under control" (Wolff 2023: 197). His appointment in the care-taker government the next day was presented as being based on his superior political experience and high profile. According to Morjane, the Prime Minister Ghannouchi insisted that he "cannot have a minister who doesn't know anybody and who isn't known to anybody" (Wolff 2023: 209). After a very short stint (i.e. two-weeks) as Foreign Minister in the care-taker-government and a failed presidential candidacy during the 2014 elections, Kamel Morjane returned as Minister of Public Services - the country's main employer - in November 2018 as part of a larger cabinet reshuffle through which Prime Minister Youssef Chahed looked to assert and consolidate his power vis-à-vis the incumbent president (Amara 2018). Moreover, Morjane's appointment to the cabinet had the role of luring back the nostalgic supporters of Ben Ali from the Sahel region (Ghanmi 2018) as Prime Minister Chahed was looking to build support for the upcoming presidential elections of 2019. Morjane's return was facilitated by the presence of the Nidaa Tounes party in government, a party that was funded by former high-level authoritarian officials that were part of Ben Ali's government to reinvent themselves as democratic actors. Morjane then joined a cabinet filled with former elites from the Ben Ali era, the most prominent being the Minister of Education,

Hatem Ben Salem, and the Minister of Finance, Ridha Chalghoum (Bobin and Haddad 2018), both propagandists for the former regime.[14] The return of Morjane, and the broader reshuffle that included former elites of the Ben Ali era, were defended on the grounds that the social and economic stagnation, and acute security challenges can only be solved by individuals with skills and solid experience in state institutions (Amara 2018; Bobin and Haddad 2018).

The second example that illustrates the logic of the theory comes from Brazil, that was under military rule between 1964 and 1985. More specifically, Jarbas Passarinho was appointed as Minister of Justice in 1990 by Fernando Collor de Melo, Brazil's first democratically elected president after the 1985 democratic transition. Collor ran on an antiparty populist platform with the support of the ARENA/PDS coalition, composed mostly of former autocratic elites (i.e. ex-arenistas). He entered into an informal agreement with them in which they support his candidacy – mostly because they feared the prospective redistribution of wealth under a Luis Inacio Lula da Silva presidency – and he would reward them with control of government ministries, access to state resources, and the prestige of having the support of the President (Power 2010). However, Collor reneged on this agreement after winning the election and aimed to maximize his autonomy by governing above the parties and the law (Power 2010; Weyland 1993). He appointed ministers from a variety of sources in his cabinet: the private sector, universities, moderate labour unions, the centrist PMDB party and only a few went to the ARENA/PSD. He even offered cabinet positions to the opposition PSDB party (Weyland 1993).

Collor's quick decrease in popularity - due to his failed economic policies - and the failure in the 1990 gubernatorial elections forced him to rethink the governing strategy that alienated his allies in Congress. To build support within Congress with the ex-arenistas, Collor appointed Jarbas Passarinho as Minister of Justice in October 1990, whose main mission was to build a supraparty coalition in Congress drawing on his extensive contacts within the

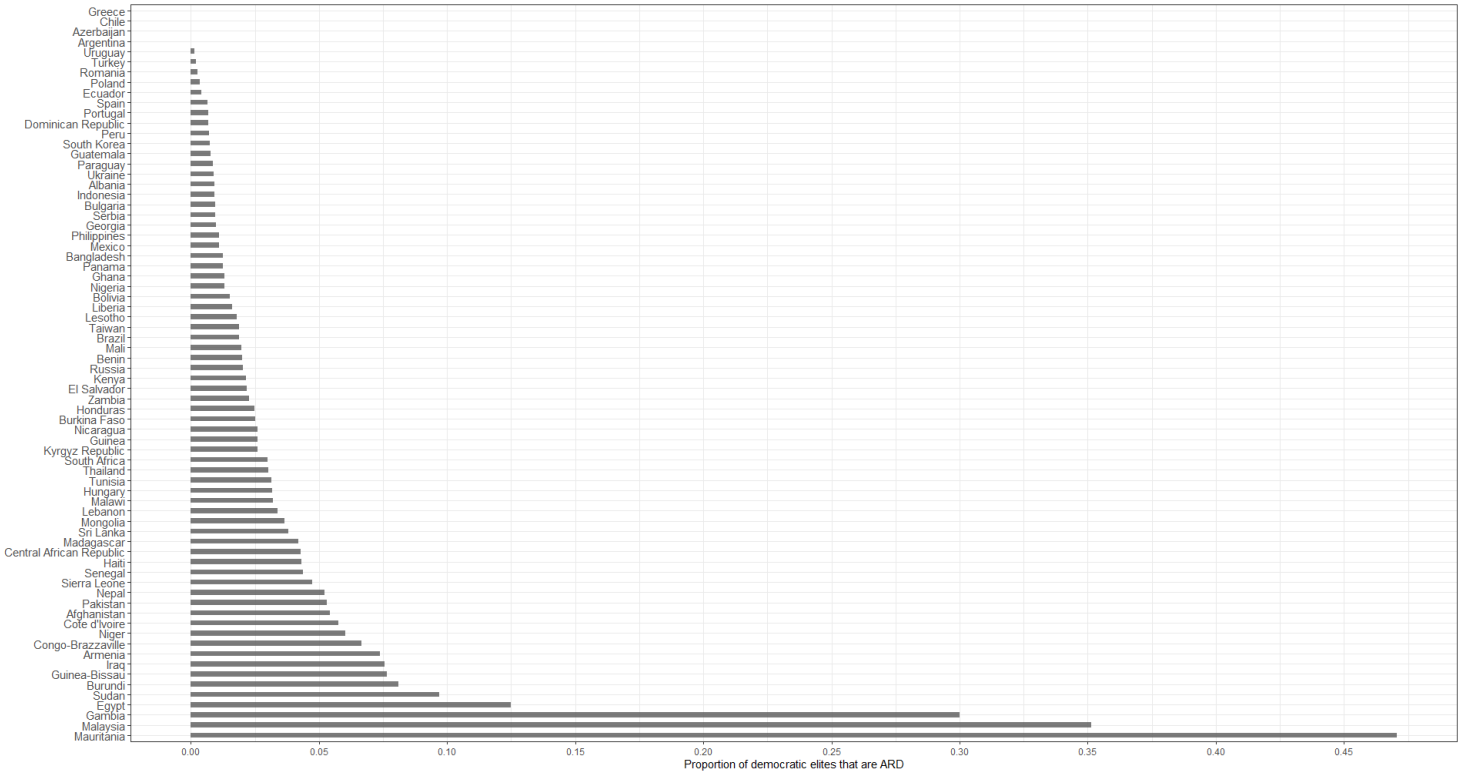
autocratic network (Power 2010). Collor selected Passarinho for this task as he was a widely respected veteran of the military who held three different cabinet portfolios under the military dictatorship (Labour, Education and Social Security), was one of signatories of the notorious AI-5 decree which instituted military rule (Gaspari 2016) and was the leader of the amnesty bill that President Figuereido passed for the members of military before the transition (Duffy 2007). The main request of the ex-arenistas for participation in the supracoalition was that they "sit at the table where decisions are made" (Power 2010: 194). The supracoalition was inaugurated in February 1991 along with the new legislature, yet the ex-arenistas used the first opportunity to impeach and remove Collor from office due to corruption allegations in 1992, despite his late attempts to obtain their support by bringing into cabinet former autocratic elites such as Pratini de Moraes and Angel Calmon de Sa. Reflecting upon his reliance on ex-arenistas for support, Collor admitted one cannot govern in Brazil without their support because they are professionals that know how to wield power (Power 2010: 195).

Research Design

To test the theoretical expectation, I build a dataset of 13,572 individual autocratic elites using data on cabinet members and ministers from the WhoGov dataset (Nyrup and Bramwell 2020) that occupied a cabinet position in an autocracy that democratized at some point between 1966 and 2020. The regime data used to build this dataset is the updated version of the Geddes et al. (2014) data on political regimes from Chin et al. (2021). The full dataset covers a total of 72 former autocracies with 101 different democratic spells. The dataset considers all individuals that occupied a cabinet position in a country that has been an autocracy at some point during 1966 and 2020 and which has democratized at least once in that period, allowing them the opportunity to return to democratic cabinet.[15] The sample does not include countries that never democratized in this period (i.e. China, North Korea, etc.), nor countries that have been continuously democratic over the same period (i.e. Japan, Italy, United Kingdom, etc.).

The dataset does not include cabinet elites in new democracies that never occupied a cabinet in an autocratic government. Then, each autocratic elite enters the sample once there was a transition to democracy and exits once they return as a member in a democratic cabinet. The comparison is only between elites that have been part of an autocratic cabinet at some point in countries that democratized at least once during the study period.

Figure 2. Proportion of cabinet elites in democracies that have also occupied a cabinet position in autocracies, 1966-2020.



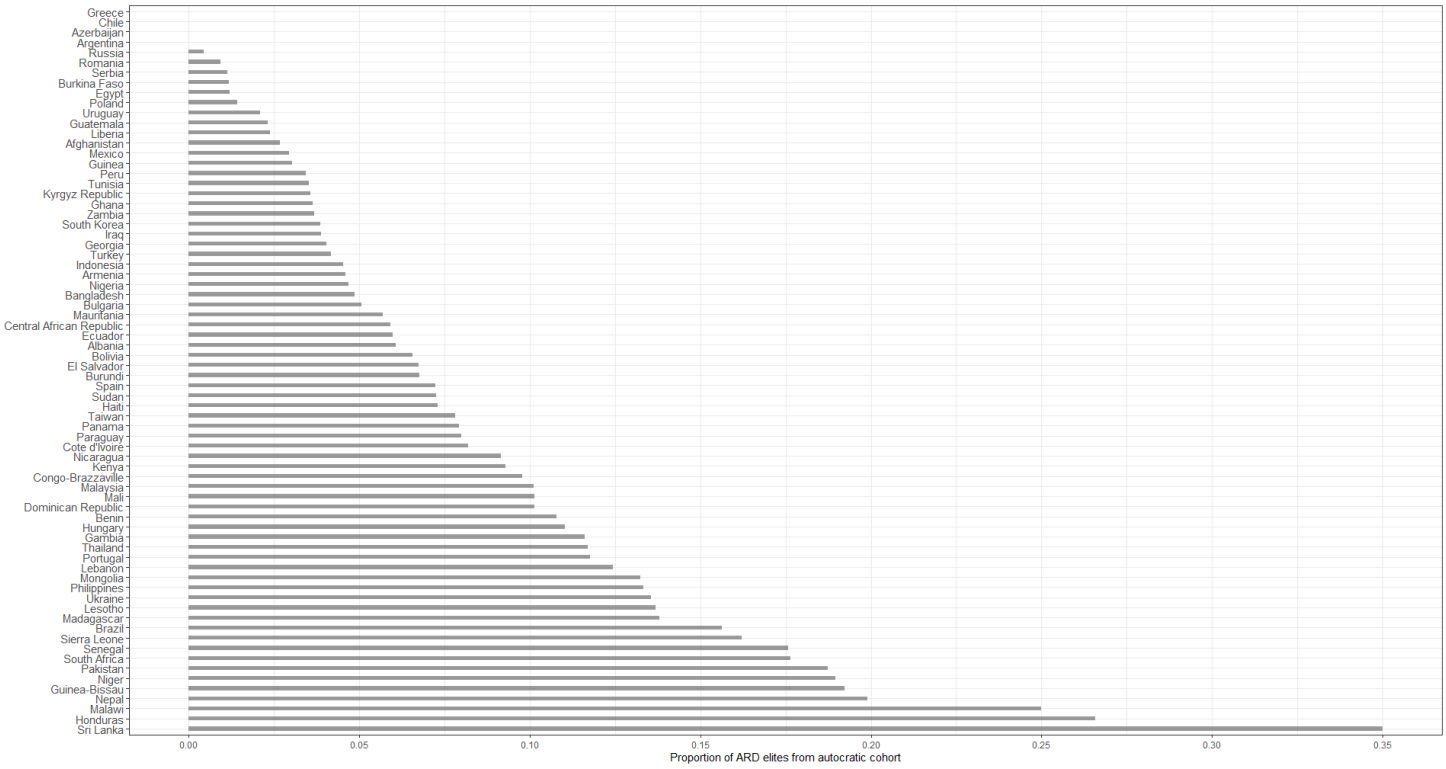
The analysis uses two different data structures of this dataset for the analysis. The first version of the dataset has a cross-sectional (CS) structure with the unit of analysis at the elite-democratic spell level. This unit of analysis is chosen as the paper is interested in comparing which former autocratic elites are more likely to return to democratic cabinet conditional on their role in an autocratic cabinet. The second version of the dataset has a timeseries cross-section (TSCS) structure with the unit of analysis at the elite-democratic spell-year. The TSCS data structure allows me to account for potential aging effects at the elite level, but also for how time dependency can act as an unobserved confounder for elites' ability to leverage their

past and return to democratic cabinet. Figure 2 above shows the proportion of elites that occupied a cabinet position in a democracy that have also been part of an autocratic cabinet between 1966 and 2020[16] from the total number of elites that were in office in democracies.

Dependent variable

The paper leverages data on cabinet members and ministers from WhoGov (Nyrup and Bramwell 2020) to generate a novel measure of autocratic revolving doors for the period 1966 and 2020. The WhoGov dataset contains information on cabinet members in 177 countries based on the Chiefs of Staff and Cabinet Members of Foreign Governments directory compiled by the CIA, which was originally compiled to be used by US Government officials. The high degree of confidence in the data accurately capturing cabinet members comes from the fact that it was compiled by CIA-affiliated personnel with country insight. Precisely, it contains a list of names and positions for each country-year which allows us to see who and when an individual elite was part of the cabinet, and what position they held.

Figure 3. Autocratic cohorts and returning elites in new democracies, 1966-2020.



The dependent variable takes a value of 1 when an individual that was part of the cabinet in an autocracy reappears as a core cabinet member (such as a full minister, prime-minister, president or vice-president) in a democracy, and 0 otherwise.[17] We have a total of 1,017 individual elites that return to democratic cabinet (7.49 %) from a total of 13,572 former autocratic elites. Figure 3 below shows the proportion of each autocratic country cohort (i.e. the total number of individuals that were cabinet members in autocracies) that returned to democratic cabinet in each country that democratized during the study period.

Independent variables

The independent variables used to test the hypotheses were operationalized from the same dataset as above. Precisely, Hypothesis 1 is tested using a binary measure that captures whether an individual has been part of the core group of government in an autocracy, which includes senior positions such as cabinet ministers, prime ministers, presidents, vice presidents, vice prime ministers, members of the politburo and members of a military junta (Nyrup and Bramwell 2020). Then, this variable allows us to compare autocratic elites that occupied these positions (i.e. equals 1) and those that occupied more junior positions (equals 0) such as secretaries of state, junior ministers, Central Bank governors, etc. Next, Hypothesis 2 is tested using a variable measuring the number of years an individual has been part of the cabinet in an autocracy. Finally, Hypotheses 3 and 4 are tested using binary variables capturing the type of portfolio an individual held while in an autocratic cabinet. Precisely, the variable testing Hypothesis 3 captures whether an individual has held a Foreign Affairs, Budget or Internal Affairs portfolio, while the variable for Hypothesis 4 captures whether an individual has held the portfolio for National Defense, Military Affairs or Security. These variables capture all individuals that had responsibilities in these policy areas in an autocratic cabinet, regardless of their position's seniority (i.e. core position or not). Individuals that have been head prosecutors, members of the Central bank, head of the army or of the intelligence service are coded as

holding these types of portfolios despite not occupying a minister position. An example of this coding for the National Defense, Military Affairs or Security portfolio (i.e. Hypothesis 4) would be Oleksandr Yakymenko, the head of Ukraine's Security Service between 2013 and 2014 who was responsible for repressing the Maidan pro-democracy protests of 2014. Two binary variables code the portfolios held by cabinet members, with one variable capturing prestigious portfolios such as Foreign Affairs, Budget or Internal Affairs, while the second captures only individuals that held the National Defense, Military Affairs or Security. These variables take a value of 1 if individuals held any of these portfolios, and 0 if they held any other portfolio or position within an autocratic cabinet. This coding allows us to compare which elites are more likely to return to cabinet conditional on the portfolio they had under autocracy (as a proxy for their policy making abilities) and independent of whether they were part of the core of government.

Control variables

Several control variables are included to account for alternative explanations of autocratic revolving doors. Firstly, the model includes a variable measuring whether the country adopted a new constitution after democratization as inherited autocratic constitutions have a positive effect on the ability of autocratic elites to avoid punishment and return to prominence in Latin American democracies (Albertus 2019; Albertus and Menaldo 2018). Secondly, the Cold War period may have offered better opportunities for elites to return in new democracies, while also reducing the propensity of new democracies to rely on human rights prosecutions or transitional justice measures to deal with the past (Albertus 2019; Ang and Nalepa 2019). The analysis accounts for the potential differential effect of the Cold and post-Cold War era on elites' ability to return to power during each democratic spell (Albertus 2019).

Thirdly, the model accounts for the previous regime type based on the typologies proposed by Geddes et al. (2014).[18] The inclusion of these regime type variables is important

as regime type might impact the type of cabinet position certain individuals occupy, their ability to strategically select themselves into particular positions or the extent to which the regime institutionalizes and creates networks of former regime insiders willing to support each other post-transition. For example, elites emerging from personalistic dictatorship might have weaker political networks or not as much political capital since the previous leader has accumulated most power and their role could have been mostly window-dressing. In contrast, single-party regimes are characterized by high levels of co-optation, which in turn creates a larger network of individuals interested in protecting the autocratic status quo (Svolik 2012). Then, individuals emerging from these regimes might have stronger networks on which they can rely to return to power. Further, elites from former military dictatorship might be more likely to be targeted by transitional justice mechanisms as there would be a collective responsibility for past human rights abuses, despite not holding the very portfolio responsible for these actions. Fourthly, the model also accounts for the gender of each elite as democratization increases the participation of female politicians in cabinet (Nyrup, Yamagishi, and Bramwell 2023). The model also accounts for level of economic development (GDP/capita and GDP growth) and population size (natural log) (source: World Bank) as structural conditions might impact the ability of elites to leverage their autocratic past.

Finally, the TSCS models account for time dependency by including measures of years since the transition and the amount of time since the individual has left office. The inclusion of this latter variable is done for two reasons: (1) some individuals may already be old when they enter office in an autocracy, and they simply die before they can make a return; (2) the private information individuals hold and their connection to networks may be diluted as more time passes since they have left office.[19] The WhoGov data contains information on the birth year and death year for cabinet members allowing us to account for the age of each elite, but only 20.6% of all individual elite observations have information on their birth year. One of main

purposes of this paper is to produce generalizable findings into the determinants of autocratic revolving doors, and using a variable with such a level of missingness would induce potential selection bias. In the robustness test section, we use alternative measures to account for potential aging effects of elites (including the heavily missing age variable), with the main results remaining substantively identical.[20]

Data and Estimation Strategy

The return of autocratic elites is treated as an onset variable. The CS models, the unit of analysis is at the elite-democratic level and the time varying variables (i.e. GDP/capita, GDP growth and population size) are included as averages for the entire democratic spell. In the TSCS models, the unit of analysis is at the elite-democratic spell-year and all variables are observed at this level, thereby varying from year to year. The time varying variables (i.e. GDP/capita, GDP growth and population size) are lagged one time period.[21] The hypotheses are tested using logistic regression models with democratic-spell fixed effects for two reasons. Firstly, democratic spell unobserved heterogeneity (e.g., state capacity, culture, etc.) might impact elites' ability to leverage their access to resources, networks, and can also impact a society's capacity to break away from its authoritarian past. Secondly, the inclusion of democratic spell fixed effects allows us to explain within elite variation, as the focus of the paper is on examining which elites are more likely to come back to democratic politics.

Empirical Results

Table 1 below summarizes[22] the results of the regression analysis[23], while Figures 4 and 5 present the substantive effects of each variable. Models 1 and 2 estimates the effect of autocratic cabinet position characteristics on autocratic revolving doors in the cross-sectional (CS) data format, while Models 3-5 estimate the same effects using the time-series cross-section (TSCS) data format that allow us to model the potential confounding effect of time since transition and exit from office. Since the results in the models are substantively identical,

the interpretation and presentation of the substantive effects will be done on the fully specified Model 2 as the focus is on explaining within elite variation.

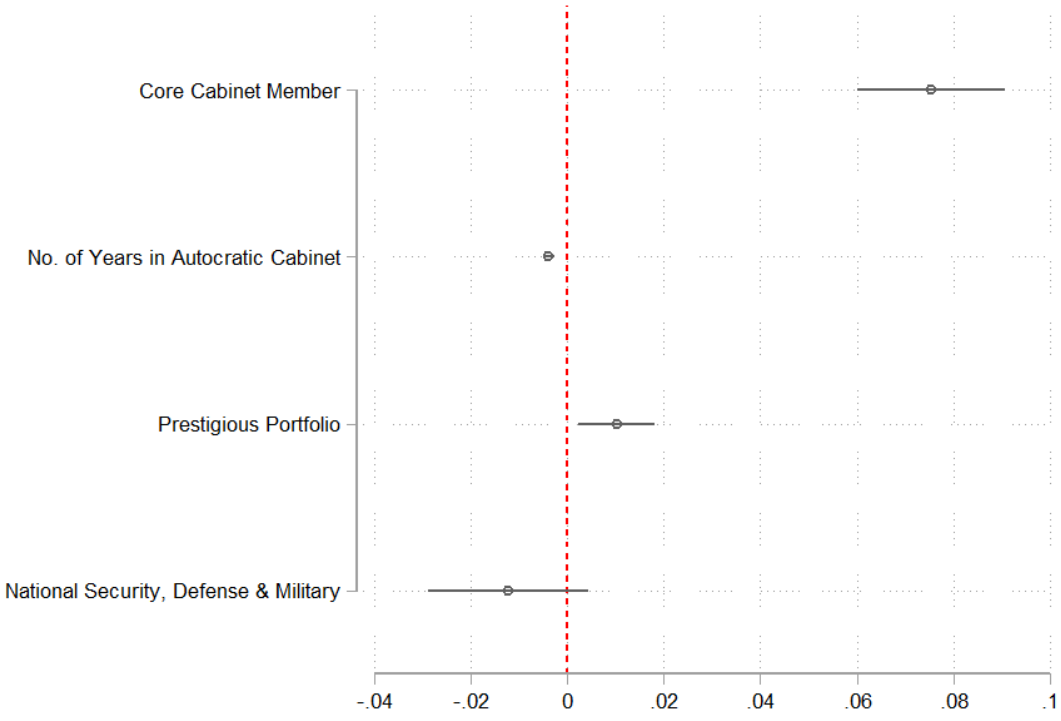
Table 1. Autocratic revolving doors and return to office in new democracies, 1966-2020.

	Cross-Sectional Data		**Timeseries-Cross Sectional Data**		
VARIABLES	(1) Autocratic Revolving Doors	(2) Autocratic Revolving Doors	(3) Autocratic Revolving Doors	(4) Autocratic Revolving Doors	(5) Autocratic Revolving Doors
<u>Autocratic cabinet position:</u>					
Core Cabinet Member	1.242***	2.140***	1.184***	1.225***	1.215***
	(0.147)	(0.218)	(0.143)	(0.157)	(0.157)
No. of Years in Autocratic Cabinet	-0.140***	-0.107***	-0.150***	-0.108***	-0.108***
	(0.0138)	(0.0162)	(0.0137)	(0.0136)	(0.0136)
Prestigious Portfolio	0.313***	0.291**	0.302***	0.252***	0.255***
	(0.0883)	(0.114)	(0.0827)	(0.0885)	(0.0889)
National Security, Defense & Military	-0.283	-0.345	-0.241	-0.261	-0.262
	(0.178)	(0.239)	(0.169)	(0.182)	(0.182)
Female	--	0.423**	--	--	0.0865
		(0.164)			(0.128)
New constitution in democracy	--	-2.223***	--	--	-0.720***
		(0.496)			(0.217)
Cold War	--	-1.328**	--	--	-0.168
		(0.639)			(0.221)
<u>Previous regime type:</u>					
Military	--	-61.13***	--	--	-3.793
		(5.043)			(2.563)
Single party	--	-16.87***	--	--	-1.824**
		(1.531)			(0.762)
Personalistic	--	5.226***	--	--	-2.317***
		(0.857)			(0.661)
Log GDP/capita t-1	--	-10.16***	--	--	1.764***
		(0.936)			(0.444)
GDP growth t-1	--	-2.768	--	--	-2.457***
		(4.052)			(0.634)
Log population size t-1	--	-35.32***	--	--	0.820
		(1.899)			(1.109)
Years since transition	--	--	--	-0.112***	-0.163***
				(0.0154)	(0.0317)
Years since autocratic cabinet exit	--	--	--	-0.185***	-0.184***
				(0.00825)	(0.00824)
Constant	-4.425***	436.1***	-5.953***	-4.272***	-23.82*
	(0.352)	(18.31)	(0.347)	(0.528)	(12.46)
No. of elites	12,949	12,923	12,949	12,648	12,622
No. of countries	68	68	68	67	67
No. of democratic spells	91	91	91	89	89
Observations	15,943	15,909	200,668	195,990	195,408

Standard errors in parentheses: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Firstly, the results indicate that elites that occupied a core cabinet position in an autocracy are more likely to return as cabinet members in democracy. The average marginal effect of this first variable is 7.5 percentage points, and it is by far the largest of all the other variables explaining autocratic revolving doors. This result offers support to the first proposition of the theory (Hypothesis 1) that emphasizes how being part of the inner core of elites that govern in an autocratic cabinet allows them to develop political skills, become embedded in interest group networks, and gain access to private information which they can leverage under democracy to continue their political career.

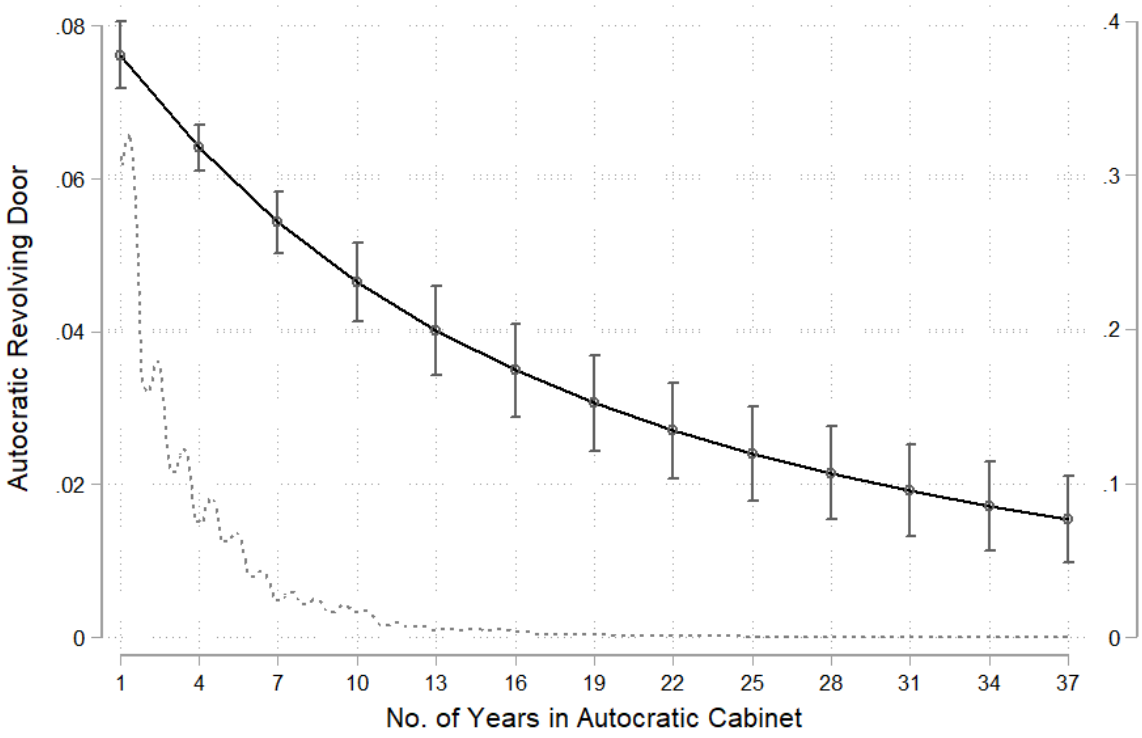
Figure 4. Average marginal effects of autocratic cabinet position on autocratic revolving doors in new democracies, 1966-2020.



Secondly the results in Figures 4 and 5 show that an increased tenure in autocratic cabinet reduces the likelihood that elites return to democratic cabinet. The average marginal effect for this variable is substantively small, about 0.003 percentage points (Figure 4). However, the predicted probabilities plot shows that the probability of returning to democratic cabinet is highest for individuals that spent a shorter period of time in an autocratic cabinet and

decreases with more time spent in an autocratic cabinet. This finding contrasts with the propositions behind Hypothesis 2. One possible explanation for this finding is that there might be a trade-off between the ability to leverage the skills and resources to return to democratic cabinet versus the potential public outcry of such a move. In other words, individuals with more time spent as cabinet members in autocracies may be in a better position to leverage information and skills to return to office, but such a move may be politically costly for democratic actors since the public might recognize and punish more easily such officials. To investigate the

Figure 5. Predicted probabilities of autocratic revolving doors conditional on time in autocratic cabinet, 1966-2020.

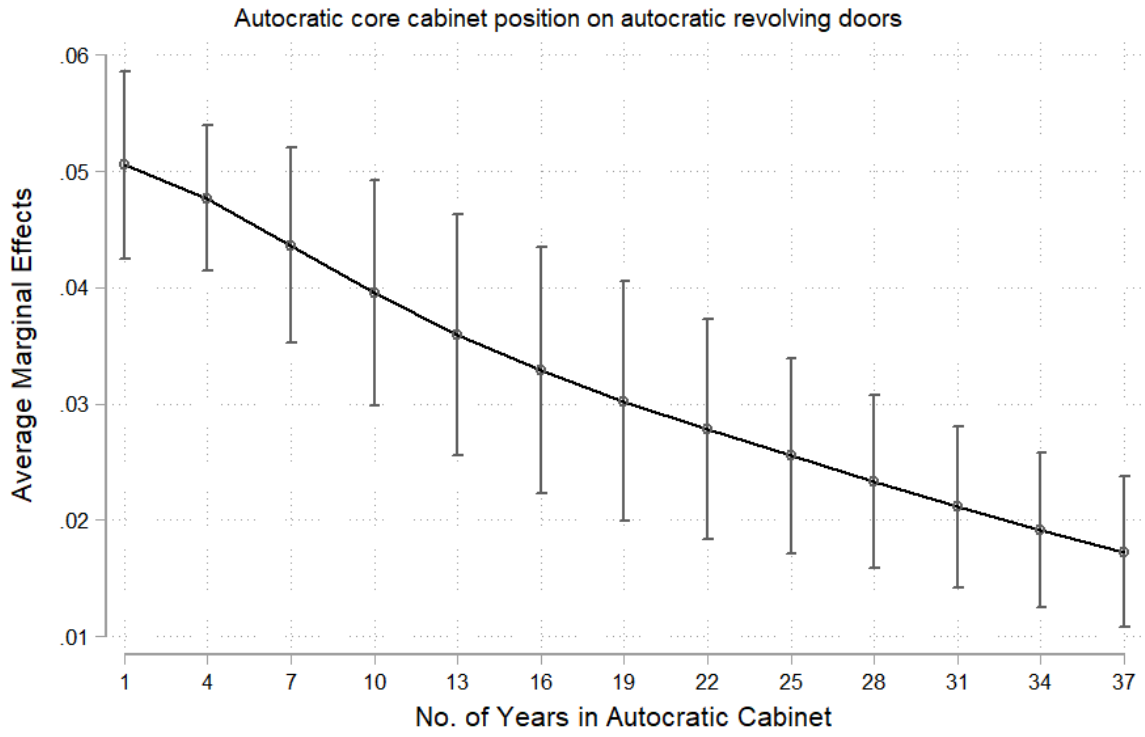


Note: The dashed line and the scale on the left shows the kernel density of the variable measuring the number of years elites have been in autocratic cabinet.

potential for this, Figure 6 below estimates the average marginal effects[24] of being part of the autocratic core cabinet and the number of years one has spent in an autocratic cabinet. The average marginal effect is highest when individual elites spent less time in core cabinet

positions and their probability of return decreases with each extra year spent in an autocratic cabinet.

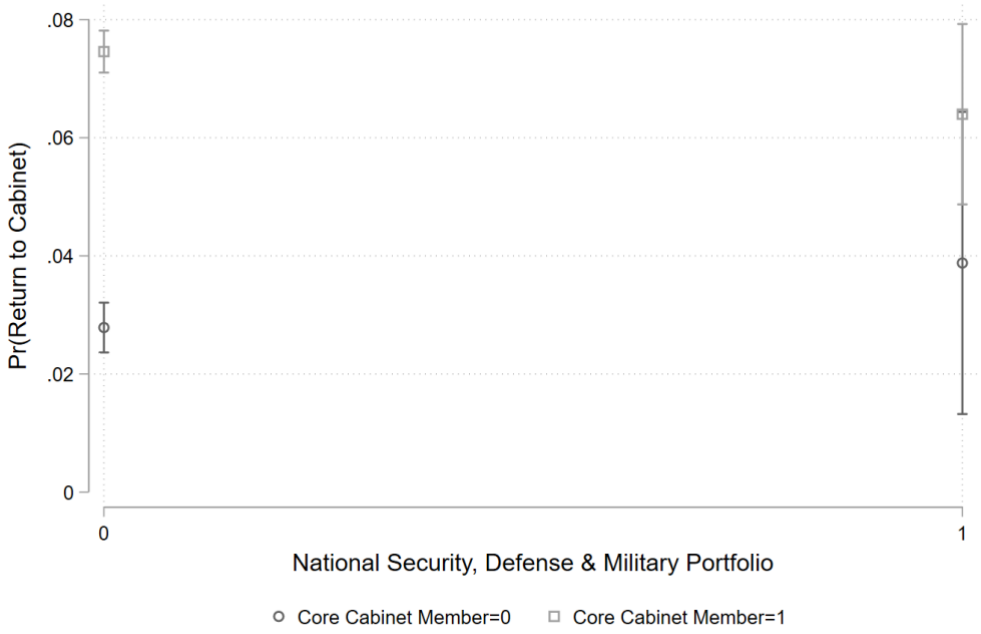
Figure 6. Average marginal effect of core autocratic cabinet position conditional on time in autocratic cabinet, 1966-2020.



Thirdly, former autocratic elites that held a prestigious portfolio in an autocracy (i.e., foreign affairs, budget or internal affairs increases) are about 1 percentage point more likely to return to office in democracies (Figure 4). These results lend support to Hypothesis 3, and to the more general argument that these specialized positions allow elites to market themselves as experienced politicians that can run state institutions. Fourthly, Hypothesis 4 does not receive support as holding a national security portfolio in an autocratic cabinet does not seem to affect the probability of returning to senior cabinet position in a democracy. While these elites might still have a higher probability of being punished for overseeing efforts to repress dissidents and violate human rights (Huntington 1993; Nalepa 2022), this data does not allow us to investigate this pathway of return.[25] Finally, Figure 7 below examines the theoretical

tension of the theory regarding the opposite expectations for individuals that occupied a core positions (i.e. *positive*) and those that have also been in charge of the national security portfolio (i.e. *negative*). The results from Figure 7 indicate that holding the national security portfolio seems to trump the benefits of being part of the core of government as core cabinet members have a higher likelihood of return compared to non-core cabinet members when they did not hold the national security portfolio. However, this difference between core and non-core cabinet members disappears if they held the national security portfolio, providing some support for the political deadweight this portfolio brings to former autocratic elites.

Figure 7. Average marginal effect of core autocratic cabinet position conditional holding the national security portfolio in an autocracy, 1966-2020.



Robustness tests

One potential confounding factor for elites' ability to leverage their autocratic past and return to office in democracy might be explained by an aging effect. Certain elites simply do not return to democratic office because they are too old by the time the transition occurs, they may have died or are unfit or uninterested in rejoining politics (due to old age). Given that about 52% of the data on elites' birth year and death year is missing in the WhoGov data, the

main analysis proxied this aging effect by accounting for the number of years since an elite left office and the number of years since the transition. Generally, elites that return to democratic cabinet tend to have left their autocratic cabinet position at a slightly younger age (i.e. 53 years old) than those that never return (i.e. left autocratic office at 55 years old).[26] Two robustness checks are performed to ensure the results are not driven by this potential aging effect. Firstly, models from Table 1 are re-estimated by accounting for the average age of cabinet members while individual elites were in cabinet, as autocratic leaders prefer a cabinet which is similar in age to them (Berton and Panel 2017). Secondly, the models are re-estimated accounting for the age of the elite (despite the level of missingness in the data). The main results reported in the paper remain substantively identical.[27]

The analysis above uses democratic-spell fixed effects to account for unobserved heterogeneity to explain variance in elites' likelihood of returning to democratic cabinet positions. It aims to explain which elites are more likely to make a comeback, not when they are more likely to do so. However, there is strong disagreement in the literature as to whether fixed or random effects are more appropriate for modelling unobserved heterogeneity (Clark and Linzer 2015). The trade-offs in bias between fixed and random effects are more pronounced for rare events data because random effects yield a biased estimator if the predictors and unit effects are corelated, while fixed effects induce sample selection and marginal effects bias because it leaves out units that do not experience the event (Cook, Hays, and Franzese 2020: 93). While theoretical considerations indicate that a fixed effects estimation strategy is preferable, the logit model may still run into the incidental parameter problem and produce biased estimates when fixed effects are used. Then, the paper re-estimates the models from Table 2 using a penalized maximum likelihood model with democratic-spell fixed effects which uses a penalty score function that produces superior estimates to conventional models with fixed, pooled or random effects (Cook, Hays, and Franzese 2020).[28] The results reported

in Table 2 remain virtually unchanged as the effects of the main independent variables on autocratic revolving doors have the same signs and levels of statistical significance.

One potential driver of these results would be the self-selection of elites into particular positions due to their characteristics (i.e., education, social class, ethnic group, wealth, etc.), which in turn would also make them more capable of engineering a return to office in democracies (Gandhi 2008), independent of the position they have occupied in autocracy. Yet, existing theories of elite selection in autocracies point to the fact that elites' participation in power-sharing agreements tends to be quasi-random as autocracies are characterised by chaos and uncertainty in the first few years of being established (Geddes et al. 2018). Once the dictator establishes its power, elites' ability to influence their position vis-à-vis the dictator is further diminished as they may have very little to say as to which portfolio they hold. The dictator's control over appointments, ability to reshuffle elites and exclude them from power seem to be more consequential for cabinet composition than elites' strategic positioning based on their characteristics (Arriola, DeVaro, and Meng 2021; Meng 2020). Moreover, existing work points to a strong counter-selection mechanism as dictators are concerned about recruiting high-capacity elites (Lee and Schuler 2019; Gueorguiev and Schuler 2016) into strategic positions since they pose a higher threat to dictator survival (Bokobza et al. 2020). This literature indicates that (theoretically) it is unlikely that the effect of autocratic cabinet position's characteristics on authoritarian revolving doors is driven by self-selection based on elites' characteristics.

Two different empirical strategies are used to account for the potential self-selection of elites into particular autocratic cabinet positions. Firstly, I use newly coded data on elites' background prior to achieving autocratic office from the Paths to Power data by Nyrup et al. (2024). I use coarsened exact matching (Iacus, King, and Porro 2011) to match elites on pre-treatment characteristics (i.e. prior to autocratic office) such as education level, prior political

experience, class background, occupation and belonging to a political family.[29] Despite a reduced sample due to missing data, the results reported above remain identical with one exception: once we use the matched sample, the effect of holding a prestigious portfolio becomes statistically insignificant.

Secondly, I use several regime level measures to account for the potential that elites might self-select into particular positions given the regime rules of selection into the cabinet. These factors include average levels of reshuffles while in office, the number of positions an individual held in an autocratic cabinet, or the type of regime in which they were a member of the cabinet. Reshuffle levels[30] capture the share of individual elites that have been moved to a different position (from the previous year) in an autocratic cabinet (without being removed). A higher rate of reshuffles is indicative of a leader who is more powerful vis-à-vis his allies, but also a lower likelihood of elites self-selecting in particular cabinet positions based on their individual characteristics. A more powerful leader will be able to reshuffle elites at will to prevent elites from building bases of support, almost rendering their positions irrelevant. Next, the number of positions one occupied in an autocratic cabinet is indicative of an individual's higher commitment to the leader and the survival of the regime, but also of lower influence over which position they occupy. More simply, elites have a stronger preference over being part of the cabinet rather than over which position they occupy. Finally, the type of regime at the time when an elite has been in office is indicative of whether elites might self-select in particular positions (Geddes et al. 2018). In a personalistic dictatorship, elites may have very little ability to dictate which position they occupy in a cabinet given the leader's consolidation of power. In contrast, in a single-party regime, elites might be in a better position to self-select into particular positions given the predictability of institutional avenues for promotion into leadership positions (Magaloni 2006; Svolik 2012). Similarly, in a military regime, selection into cabinet is very much dependent on coming from the military corps, therefore reducing the

ability of non-military elites to accede to cabinet. Accounting for these alternative explanations (i.e., reshuffle rate while in office, number of previous positions and regime type at time of cabinet membership) does not change the main results reported in the paper[31], except for the effect of holding a prestigious portfolio. Once we account for the number of positions an individual elite held in an autocracy, the positive effect of holding a prestigious portfolio become statistically insignificant.

Existing research indicates that elites may seek to game democracy and guide the transition process to ensure their interests are protected so they can still access state resources after the transition (Albertus and Menaldo 2018; Karl 1987). Then, some elites may self-select into office prior to the transition to ensure they can control the democratization process. I have done several robustness checks to mitigate the risk that the results are driven by self-selection into cabinet. Firstly, I re-ran the main analysis by excluding from the sample those elites that entered an autocratic cabinet during the transition year (see Table A12). Secondly, I re-ran the same analysis and kept in the sample only the individuals that have exited autocratic cabinet (at least) the year prior to the transition (See Table A13). In these analyses, the number of years an individual has spent in an autocratic cabinet becomes statistically insignificant, while the one for prestigious positions (except Security and Defense) drops to the 90% confidence level. Furthermore, the effect of holding the Security and Defense portfolio is negative and statistically significant in all these models. The effect of core cabinet positions remains unchanged. Finally, I adopt a more flexible approach to examine whether the results might be driven by elites' self-selection in office. More specifically, I generate a measure of how many years prior to the transition an elite has entered the autocratic cabinet ranging from 0 (entry during the transition year) to 46 years prior to the transition. I include this measure as a covariate in the regression models. The coefficient of this variable changes between negative and positive, and also changes its statistical significance depending on the model specification

(see Table A14). The effect of the main independent variable remains identical to the ones reported in Table 1, except for the variable measuring number of years in cabinet. This variable's coefficient flips between positive and negative based on whether the model controls from time since exit from office and the number of years since the transition.

Elites also make pacts prior to or during the transition to protect their interests under democracy and remain in positions of influence (Slater and Wong 2013). Then, it is entirely plausible that elites with a high prestige portfolio or that have been part of the cabinet for longer may be involved in a pact to protect their interests in democracy. For example, Venezuela's democratic transition of 1958 was the results of an elite pact that established the future rules of governance, which led to the establishment of a de facto two-party system in which political elites would alternate who was in power (Coppedge 1997). Accounting for whether the transition event (and subsequent democracy) was the result of an elite pact[32] does not change the results reported in the main analysis, while this variable's coefficient is positive in the cross-sectional analysis and negative in the timeseries cross-sectional analysis.[33]

Next, the analysis accounts for the extent to which new democracies adopted measures of transitional justice, such as truth commission, lustration laws or purges to deal with their autocratic past (Ang and Nalepa 2019; Nalepa 2022).[34] The main results reported in the analysis remain virtually identical when accounting for these explanations. The robustness tests also account for a potential diffusion or network effect of returning autocratic elites. More specifically, a higher number of former autocratic elites might spark a cascade of returns by other such elites due to their prior mutual history of autocratic power-sharing. Then, accounting for the number of former autocratic elites that were cabinet members in a democratic spell (for the CS data) or in the previous year (in the TSCS data) does not alter the main results.[35]

The theoretical argument does not distinguish between whether elites return to cabinet by appointment or by election as this would have complicated further the theoretical

framework. Given the importance of the distinction, I generated two proxies for appointed and elected positions using information from WhoGov (Nyrup and Bramwell 2020) and V-Dem (Coppedge et al. 2019). More precisely, I considered all the individuals that were coded as leaders to be elected if V-Dem coded the Head of State as being directly elected (there were only two elected Heads of Government in the data). The rest of the elites returning to cabinet were coded as being appointed. I re-estimated the models from Table 1 with appointment and election into cabinet as main dependent variables. The results presented in the paper remain largely identical, except for time spent as part of an autocratic cabinet which has a positive effect on the likelihood of returning to elected office, and negative on cabinet appointments. Table A23 and A24 in the Online Appendix report these results.[36]

Conclusion and discussion

This paper provides novel theoretical propositions and empirical evidence on the phenomenon of autocratic revolving doors. The main argument proposes that cabinet formation in new democracies follows a demand and supply logic. On the demand side, cabinet leaders need to reward political allies, provide goods and services to their constituents, and appease surviving authoritarian elites. On the supply side, they need to choose from elites with experience in running state institutions and implementing policy. Then, selecting into cabinet former autocratic elites allows them to meet these goals. More specifically, selecting former autocratic elites into cabinet signals to autocratic elites that their interests will be protected under democracy, while also giving the cabinet individuals with policymaking experience. Based on this logic, the paper developed observable theoretical expectations on how the characteristics of the autocratic cabinet experience impacts elites' return to democratic cabinet. These expectations were tested using an original measure of autocratic revolving doors, showing that elites who were part of the core cabinet of government in autocracies are more likely to return to important executive positions in democracies (e.g., president, prime-minister,

vice-president, etc.). Moreover, a longer tenure in an autocratic cabinet seems to reduce the ability of elites to return to democratic cabinet, while the effect of having held a prestigious portfolio seems to be more context dependent.

These findings have important normative implications for democratic consolidation. Normatively, existing research seems to converge over the idea that the return of the old guard is bad for democracy as the return of autocratic elites is associated with increased inequality (Albertus and Menaldo 2014), lower democratic quality and institutional weakness (Power 2010; Albertus and Menaldo 2018), anti-democratic practices (Power 2010; Albertus and Deming 2021) or lower commitment to human rights (Moravcsik 2000; Pinheiro 1998). However, there is only scant empirical evidence on the consequences of returning autocratic elites as most evidence comes from the Latin American context (Albertus and Demming 2022) or case study research (Power 2010). Anecdotally, there are also examples when former autocratic elites have been at the forefront of prodemocratic decisions. For example, Poland's rapid economic growth (GDP doubled), new constitution (1997), and accession to NATO and the European Union has happened during tenure of Aleksander Kwaśniewski, who was the product of the Polish communist nomenclature, and a former minister of Youth and Sport between 1987 and 1989. Similarly, Romania's "Snagov Declaration" of 1995, that charted its path towards EU and NATO membership (Radwan 2016), was signed during the presidency of Ion Iliescu, once minted to be Ceaușescu's heir, a former member of the Communist Politburo and cabinet, and whose legacy is mostly associated with the repression of protests during the 1989 revolution and the 1990 pro-democracy movements (Luft 2009). While these may be exceptions to the ways in which former autocratic elites can undermine democracy, we still have a limited understanding of what the consequences are of autocratic revolving doors. Future research should investigate more thoroughly what are the social, political and economic consequences of returning autocratic elites.

The findings of this paper have further implications for future research on democratization processes and authoritarian legacies. Firstly, the natural extension of the theoretical framework on autocratic revolving doors should be the incorporation of structural-level explanations (e.g., inequality, electoral rules, conflict, etc.) and international-level explanations (e.g., diffusion, international authoritarian actors, international alliances, etc.) alongside the individual level explanations. For example, individual characteristics may matter greatly for outcomes when elites have a high degree of autonomy (i.e., no appointed leader successor), but may matter little when constraints are severe (i.e., leadership rotation rules or institutionalized party) (Krcmaric, Nelson, and Roberts 2020). Secondly, the rules of cabinet formation may matter when former autocrats need to get elected into cabinet. One such avenue would be to examine whether certain types of democracies (i.e. presidential, semi-presidential, parliamentary) have different rates of autocratic revolving doors. Specifically, in the presidential system the leader may have more unilateral power to bring in these elites into cabinet (following the logic of this paper), while under parliamentary democracies, bringing these elites back might require more complicated bargaining between various political groups.[37] Finally, the literature on newly democratic citizens' preferences for democratization shows that not all democratic citizens' value democracy equally (Dinas and Northmore-Ball 2020; Neundorf, Gerschewski, and Olar 2020), thereby creating conditions under which elites with an autocratic past would be preferred by voters. However, we still lack an understanding of how voters evaluate candidates with an autocratic past as most evidence on voters' preferences comes from established democracies (Kirkland and Coppock 2018). Future research should supplement existing explanations of autocratic revolving doors with observational and experimental evidence of the conditions under which voters may select candidates with an autocratic past.

This paper brought several theoretical and empirical contributions to the literature on democratization, authoritarian legacies and revolving doors politics. Firstly, it provided a novel theory of autocratic revolving doors that explains how the characteristics of autocratic cabinet positions matter and determine autocratic elites' ability to make a return to political office in democracies. This theory complements existing theories on revolving doors in democracies (Alexiadou 2016; Eggers and Hainmueller 2009). Secondly, the paper provides novel empirical evidence of autocratic elites' political trajectories post-democratization, evidence that goes beyond the case of Latin America (Albertus and Deming 2021) and that goes beyond the focus on the trajectory of political leaders (Baturo 2016; Escribà-Folch and Krcmaric 2017). Finally, the paper offers a novel measure of autocratic revolving doors that allow us to disaggregate the pathways through which autocratic elites make a return to democratic politics. Moreover, this novel measure of autocratic revolving doors opens up the possibility of evaluating claims on elites' incentives post-democratization (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Ansell and Samuels 2014; Boix 2003; Haggard and Kaufman 2012) and their consequences for democratic consolidation (Albertus and Deming 2021; Riedl et al. 2020).

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Endnotes:

[1] This is calculated based on WhoGov data (Nyrup and Bramwell 2020) used in the empirical analysis.

[2] Age difference is unlikely to explain this difference as Passarinho was born in 1920 and died in 2016, while Velloso was born in 1931 and died in 2019.

[3] The "former autocratic elites concept" used throughout the paper refers to this group of individuals.

[4] The paper acknowledges that there may be other elites and informal institutional arrangements in which decisions are being made in autocracies. However, these might be too context specific to be comparable over time and space. Thus, by focusing on the individuals that were in cabinet

level positions we obtain a systematic, observable and comparable sample of autocratic elites across countries (see Nyrup and Bramwell 2020; Nalepa 2022).

[5] I would like to thank the reviewers for pushing me to reconceptualize the theoretical explanations that explain autocratic revolving doors. Their suggestions and feedback have been useful in achieving this.

[6] Also, this is probably a conservative estimate of autocratic revolving door as the data only captures return to national cabinet position in democracies, and misses return to regional or local politics, legislative position, or members in national or private companies. The author is currently collecting a comprehensive dataset of autocratic elites' faiths under democracy that goes beyond their return to cabinet positions.

[7] In Table A22 and Figures A7-A10 of the Online Appendix I show how time since transition mediates the effect of each explanatory factor.

[8] This is calculated using the data of the empirical analysis (see below).

[9] It should be noted that these individuals were elected to office as the leaders of successor autocratic parties. As Loxton (2018) also mentions, this makes it unclear the extent to which the democratic reversals experienced by these countries could be explained by the actions of the individual and/or of the successor party being in power. Future research should examine more systematically whether the returning autocratic elites or the successor party being in power at the same time provides a stronger explanation of the observed democratic reversals.

[10] This difference is statistically significant using a two-sample t-test with equal variance.

[11] The focus of the paper is on explaining which of the former autocratic elites make a return to cabinet under democracy. Explaining the choice between new vs old elites for cabinet formation in new a democracy is a substantively and empirically important question, but that goes beyond the scope of this paper. The author of this paper is currently in the process of

working on this but including more theoretical propositions or empirical tests addressing this question would derail from the main purpose of the present paper.

[12] Non-core autocratic elites are those individuals that have occupied more junior positions such as secretaries of state, junior ministers, vice-ministers, ambassadors to the UN/US, Central Bank governors. This is based on the coding provided by WhoGov which is clarified in the article by Nyrup and Bramwell (2020).

[13] I would like to thank one of the reviewers for raising this possibility and asking for more clarification on this issue.

[14] See Bobin and Haddad (2018) and Ghribi (2016).

[15] In the Online Appendix I report additional analysis based on alternative measures of democratization. In Table A18 I replicate the findings for countries that have been democratic for at least 4 years. In Table A19 I replicate the findings using an alternative measure of democratization (v2xregime) from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) (Coppedge et al. 2021). In Table A20 I replicate the findings for a sample of new democracies whose democracy score increased by at least .20 points on the Polyarchy index from V-Dem after the transition. Finally, in Table A21 I replicate the findings using a sample of democracies with an average Polyarchy score above .6 for the entire democratic spell.

[16] This is calculated by dividing the number of former autocratic elites that returned to office in a new democracy by the total number of individual elites that occupied a cabinet position in democracies.

[17] This variable is treated similar to the onset of an event.

[18] The reference category for these variables are regimes that either combined some of these characteristics and would not fit perfectly within one category, oligarchies (e.g. South Africa) or monarchies (e.g. Nepal).

[19] This is calculated by subtracting the year in which they exited autocratic office from the year in which they return, or from 2020 for non-returning elites.

[20] See Table A4 of the Online Appendix.

[21] The main results remain substantively identical between the CS and TSCS models.

[22] The main independent variables are included without and with control variables to show that the effects are not driven by the choice of control variables or model specification. In Tables A1 and A2 in the Online Appendix each main independent variable is included incrementally in the models for the same reasons. The results remain substantively identical.

[23] The full estimation sample is comprised of only 12,949 individual elites from 68 countries and 91 individual democratic spells as some countries and spells drop out due to collinearity induced by the fixed effects (i.e. no returning elites).

[24] For the fully specified model of the interaction between core autocratic cabinet position and number of years in cabinet, see Table A3 in the Online Appendix. This relationship does not hold for holders of prestigious portfolios (see Models A3.2 and A3.2, and Figures A1 and A2).

[25] The author is currently in the process of collecting additional data on the different post-office pathways of former autocratic elites. Given the extent of the data collection, this information is not currently available in a format that would allow empirical tests.

[26] This difference is statistically significant using a t-test with equal variance.

[27] The age of each elite is included only in the TSCS as it can vary only within this data structure. See Table A4.

[28] See Table A6 in the Online Appendix for the full results.

[29] See page 7 in the Online Appendix for more information on the measurement of each variable based on the Paths to Power dataset (Nyrup et al. 2024). See Tables A7 and A8 for the results of the matched samples in the cross-sectional and timeseries cross-sectional models.

[30] This is calculated using the WhoGov data by capturing the percentage of positions which have a different individual occupying them from year to year. Then, this yearly measure is averaged out for the time each individual elite has occupied a position in an autocratic cabinet. Its values range from 0 to 1, with a mean of 0.16 and a standard deviation of 0.12.

[31] See Tables A9, A10 and A11 in the Online Appendix for the full results.

[32] This is captured using data from Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) as they capture whether elites or a new leader changed the rules defining which interest get represented in the regime and how policy decisions are made, thereby leading to democratization. See Section 1.4 of their codebook.

[33] See Table A15 in the Online Appendix.

[34] This variable captures the difference between positive and negative actions aimed towards each type of transitional justice mechanism. The time frame for this analysis stops in 2016 as this is the last year for which data is available. These variables are included as democratic spell averages for the CS data, and at the elite-democratic-spell year for the TSCS data. See Table A16 in the Online Appendix for the full results.

[35] See Table A17 in the Online Appendix.

[36] This analysis has been done at the request of the reviewers and it is largely exploratory. Introducing this distinction in the theoretical framework would have complicated even further the empirical analysis as I believe the data generating process behind appointments and election (to cabinet) are quite different. The space constraints of a journal article prevent me from fully unpacking this theoretically and empirically, but I believe this to be a fruitful avenue for future research.

[37] I would like to thank one of the reviewers for suggesting this avenue of future research.