# Who Concedes Electoral Defeat? Democratic Norms in Comparative Perspective

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**Abstract**

Recent high-profile refusals to concede electoral defeat have raised concerns that democratic norms are eroding. Yet we know surprisingly little about post-election concessions in comparative perspective. This article introduces the first global dataset on post-election concessions to examine who concedes, when concessions occur, and what these patterns reveal about democratic norms. Covering 1,073 national elections in 140 countries from 1980 to 2024, we show that incumbents who lose are more likely to concede than non-incumbent losers. We also find that concessions are more common in democracies than in autocracies, and that they are most likely in elections decided by moderate victory margins. Contrary to concerns about democratic backsliding, concession rates in democracies have remained stable. Instead, the largest changes occur in autocracies, where rising concession rates more plausibly reflect the consolidation of electoral authoritarianism than the diffusion of democratic norms. This contradiction highlights the danger of interpreting potential symptoms of democratic backsliding without considering underlying regime type.

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# 1 Introduction

Public concessions of electoral defeat have long been regarded as one of democracy's most visible norms. Yet recent elections have raised doubts about its durability. Following the 2020 United States presidential election, Donald Trump spent months disputing the results and never clearly conceded defeat, culminating in the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. Two years later in Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro never explicitly acknowledged his defeat, and his supporters subsequently stormed government buildings in the capital. These episodes have fueled broader concerns, prominent in debates over democratic backsliding, that the norm of publicly conceding electoral defeat may be eroding.

Conceding defeat plays a critical role in democratic politics. A defining feature of democracy is that "parties lose elections" (Przeworski 1991, p. 10), and peaceful alternation in power depends not only on winners assuming office but also on losers accepting the outcome. Voter perceptions of electoral fairness often hinge on how defeated candidates respond to election results. As Corcoran (1994, p. 115) observes, "the concession has become an integral, legitimating feature of a presidential election." Yet despite growing interest in democratic norms and their erosion (Goldstein 2022; Helmke and Rath 2022; Valentim 2024), we know surprisingly little about how often concessions occur, who concedes, or whether concession behavior is actually changing over time.

More generally, recent scholarship has debated whether the world is experiencing a period of democratic decline (Treisman 2023; Little and Meng 2024*a*; Levitsky and Way 2024; Riedl et al. 2024). These debates have highlighted a number of prominent refusals to concede, but the absence of systematic data has made it difficult to assess whether such cases reflect broader patterns or exceptional events. If recent concerns about democratic backsliding extend to concession behavior, we would expect refusals to concede to become more common in democracies, especially among incumbent leaders.

To evaluate whether concession behavior is changing over time, we introduce the first global

dataset on post-election concessions. Covering national presidential and parliamentary elections from 1980 to 2024, the dataset allows us to examine who concedes, when concessions occur, and what these patterns reveal about democratic norms. This provides a systematic measure of one of democracy's most visible norms, allowing scholars to evaluate aggregate patterns of concession behavior rather than relying on isolated, high-profile cases.

We code whether the top-placing losing candidate publicly conceded defeat and whether the concession clearly acknowledged the electoral outcome. National elections provide a natural setting for this analysis because they typically produce a clear runner-up whose response to defeat is especially consequential. Because our coding is based on candidates' observable public statements rather than expert assessments, it provides a measure of norm compliance that requires minimal coder discretion. The dataset includes 1,073 elections (718 presidential and 355 parliamentary) across 140 countries. In roughly two-thirds of elections, we observe a clear concession.

The data reveal three findings that challenge conventional wisdom about post-election concessions. First, there is no evidence that concession behavior has declined in democracies. Losing candidates in democracies are significantly more likely to concede than those in autocracies; within democracies, concession rates have remained stable over the entire period, and strong concessions have approached 100 percent of elections in recent years. Strong concessions are even more common—and similarly stable over time—in parliamentary elections, roughly 80 percent of which take place in democracies.

Second, contrary to accounts emphasizing incumbents' unwillingness to relinquish power, incumbent losers are significantly *more* likely to concede than non-incumbent losers. This pattern holds even in close elections where one of the candidates is the incumbent, providing more credible evidence that the relationship is not driven solely by differences across elections. Recent high-profile refusals to concede in democracies appear to be exceptions rather than evidence of a broader trend.

Third, a slight overall increase in the prevalence of concessions has been driven by autocracies. For

most of the period we study, the modal outcome in autocratic elections was a refusal to concede. Beginning around 2000, however, the share of strong concessions rose substantially, and in recent years losing candidates in autocracies have conceded more often than not.

The data also shed light on the conditions under which candidates concede. The likelihood of a concession follows a nonlinear relationship with the margin of victory: concessions are most common when the winning margin falls between 5 and 15 percentage points, declining both in very close elections, where losers may hope to overturn the result, and in landslide elections, which are disproportionately likely to be manipulated. One concern about prominent cases of refusals to concede is that they may set a precedent that makes future concessions less likely. However, we find little evidence that violations of this norm become self-reinforcing over time.

Taken together, these findings suggest that concessions primarily reflect the quality of elections and the incentives facing losing candidates. In democracies, elections are generally free and fair, and losing parties expect to compete again, making concessions routine. Their stability therefore reflects the stability of these underlying political conditions rather than being driven by a self-reinforcing norm. In autocracies, by contrast, rising concession rates are best understood as a consequence of the consolidation of electoral authoritarianism. As incumbents have shifted from election-day fraud toward pre-election manipulation that weakens or co-opts the opposition (Bermeo 2016; Arriola, Devaro and Meng 2021; Ong 2022), the candidates who remain on the ballot are increasingly those with incentives to accept the outcome.

More broadly, our findings point to an important methodological lesson: the same observable political behavior can have very different implications for democracy depending on the context in which it occurs. We therefore highlight the danger of interpreting apparent symptoms of democratic backsliding without considering the underlying level of democracy in a country (see Baron et al. 2024, for a related discussion of event-based measures of democracy). The democratic significance of a concession depends on the quality of the election itself. Following a free and fair election, concessions reinforce democratic legitimacy and facilitate peaceful transfers of power.

Following a manipulated election, however, concessions may instead legitimize authoritarian rule. Conversely, refusing to concede after a fraudulent election may be a reasonable response rather than a violation of democratic norms.

At the aggregate level, concession rates have risen over time—a pattern that, taken at face value, might suggest that democratic norms are strengthening globally. Disaggregating the data by regime type reveals a very different picture. Most losing candidates in democracies concede, and concession rates have remained remarkably stable over time. The increase in concession rates is driven overwhelmingly by autocracies, where opposition candidates increasingly accept the results of elections that are often neither free nor fair. Given the global prevalence of electoral authoritarianism in the post-Cold War era, scholars should pay close attention to underlying regime type when drawing inferences about democratic indicators.

Our study highlights the value of measuring democratic norms through observable political behavior. Existing measures of democracy often rely on expert assessments of political practices. By contrast, concession statements are directly observable behaviors that can be systematically compared across countries and over time. Observable measures offer a key advantage over expert judgments by capturing what political actors actually do rather than how observers evaluate political systems. In doing so, our study responds to calls for better measures of democracy, particularly along non-institutional dimensions (Munck and Verkuilen 2002; Little and Meng 2024*b*), and contributes new empirical evidence to debates about democratic backsliding and democratic resilience (Svolik 2020; Brownlee and Miao 2022; Treisman 2023; Levitsky and Way 2024; Riedl et al. 2024; Grillo et al. 2024).

Finally, the dataset itself constitutes a central contribution of this study. By producing the first global dataset of post-election concessions, we provide a systematic measure of one of democracy's most visible norms. Although theories of democratic backsliding place considerable weight on the strength or erosion of democratic norms, empirical research has been constrained by the absence of comparable cross-national measures of norm compliance. Our data address this gap by

coding concession behavior from observable public statements in every contested national election worldwide over more than four decades. Beyond the questions examined here, the dataset provides a foundation for future research on democratic norms, opposition behavior, post-election conflict, and democratic resilience.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Because the primary contribution of this study is a new measure of democratic norm compliance, we begin by introducing the dataset and explaining the advantages of measuring concessions through observable political behavior. We then develop a set of theoretical expectations, derived from the existing literature, about when candidates should concede electoral defeat. Finally, we use the new data to evaluate these expectations and consider what concession behavior reveals about democratic norms and democratic backsliding.

# 2 Data

We coded information on concessions for all national elections where the chief executive is at stake from 1980 to 2024. This includes direct presidential elections, as well as parliamentary elections in systems where the executive is chosen by the legislature.[1] The dataset only records the final round of elections in runoff systems (primaries and first rounds are not included).

To be included in the dataset, we require that the election have at least two candidates or parties running. In elections where only one candidate ran unopposed or all opposition candidates boycotted the election there is no one to give a concession. We also dropped elections that were annulled before the candidate could concede. However, beyond these minimal requirements, we code whether candidates concede for all elections, regardless of whether that election was free or fair.

The resulting dataset includes 1,073 election observations in 140 countries: 718 presidential elections (in 107 countries) and 355 parliamentary elections (in 33 countries). The average country in the dataset held around 8 contested elections from 1980 to 2024, although the number has in-

[1]We use the NELDA dataset to identify election observations from 1980 to 2020 (Hyde and Marinov 2012), and the IFES election database for election observations from 2021-2024.

creased significantly over time. This is especially true in the post-Cold War period, as electoral authoritarianism is now the dominant form of autocracy. From 1980-1990, there was an average of 15 contested elections per year. In the post-Cold War period, there is now an average of 27 contested elections per year.

To code our concessions variables, we collected publicly available concession speeches, written statements, press conference transcripts, and contemporaneous media reports describing candidates' post-election responses. Because national elections receive extensive domestic and international news coverage, concession behavior could typically be identified from major news outlets (e.g., Associated Press, Reuters, New York Times, Al Jazeera, BBC, and leading national newspapers), even when original speech transcripts were unavailable. In most cases, concession behavior was reported by multiple independent news outlets, allowing us to verify coding decisions across sources. The online appendix will include the original source material used to code each election, including quotations from concession statements, the news outlet or official source, publication date, and URL where available.

For each presidential election observation, we code our core variable about whether the top-placing losing candidate (who received the second-highest vote share) conceded. For parliamentary elections, we look at the leadership of the party which won the most seats among those who did not enter the governing coalition. In either case, our concession variable is coded as follows:

- **Strong concession**: These are instances where the top-placing losing candidate clearly acknowledges their loss without any ambiguity. For example, in the 2000 Mexico election, the top losing candidate, Francisco Labastida (PRI), conceded immediately after official results were released, stating "The citizens made a decision that we must respect; I will set an example." [2]

- **Weak concession**: These are instances where the top-placing losing candidate makes some

[2]Los Angeles Times. July 3, 2000. "Mexico's Ruling Party Loses Presidency in Historic Election"

statement accepting that they have lost, but their statements are ambiguous or inconsistent. The most common instances of weak concessions include candidates who acknowledge defeat but question the validity of the results or raise concerns about the election process. Following the 2004 Afghanistan election, the losing candidate, Yunus Qanuni, agreed to accept the verdict of the electoral commission while maintaining that there had been "irregularities in the election," stating, "We don't want to boycott it... We want to see this electoral process through. And we appreciate the honor and the will of the Afghans."[3]

- **No concession**: These are instances where the losing candidate refused to concede, usually by making a statement denying the results of the election. For instance, in the 2015 Belarus election, the losing candidate, Tatsyana Karatkyevich, stated "I do not recognize the results of the election."[4] There are some observations where we do not have an explicit refusal to concede, but the losing candidate challenged the results in court. For instance, following the 2020 election in Togo, the losing candidate, Agbéyomé Kodjo, petitioned the Constitutional Court to annul the election results on the grounds of fraud.[5] We code these types of observations to also be instances of no concession.

- **Missing Data**: For around 10% of elections we could not find any information on post-election concession outcomes. The missing observations tend to be farther back in time and mostly in authoritarian countries. Missing data is distinct from no concession observations. For missing data observations, we could not find evidence on whether the candidate conceded or not. For no concession observations, we do have evidence that the losing candidate refused to concede.

Based on this data, we create two versions of our concessions variable. STRONG CONCESSIONS is a dummy variable that takes a value of 1 for a strong concession and 0 otherwise. ANY CON-

[3]Reuters, reported in RFE/RL. October 11, 2004. "Afghan Presidential Contender To Accept Probe Verdict."

[4]RMF24. October 12, 2015. "Białoruś: Opozycyjna kandydatka nie uznaje wyniku wyborów prezydenckich."

[5]Constitutional Court of Togo, Decision EP-008/20, March 3, 2020

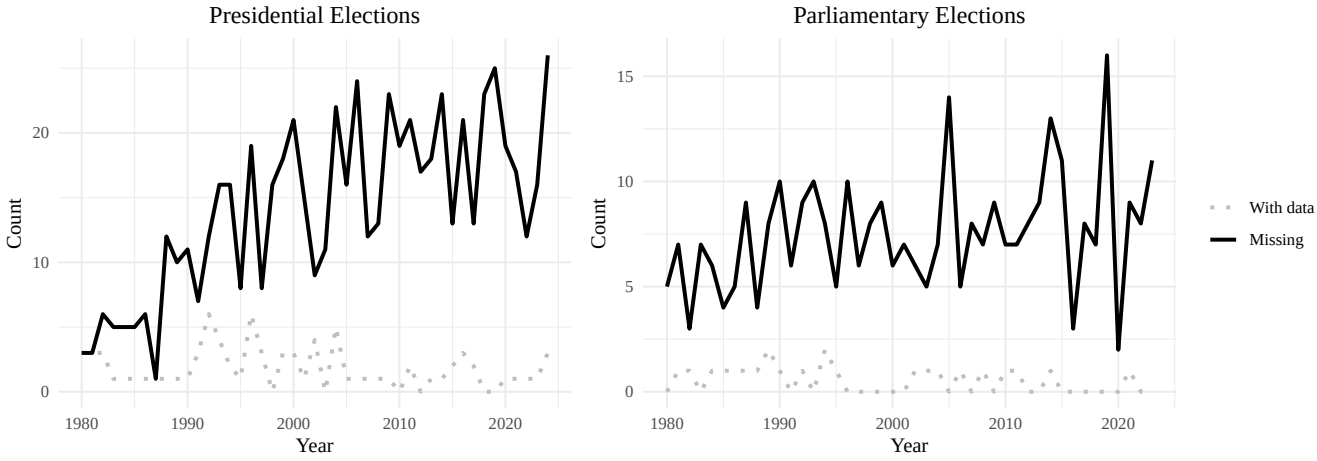
CESSIONS is a dummy variable that takes a value of 1 for a strong or weak concession, and 0 otherwise.

Our data expand on existing datasets of electoral contestation in several ways. Democratic norms are inherently difficult to measure because they concern patterns of appropriate political behavior rather than formal institutions alone. Existing cross-national measures typically rely on expert assessments of whether political actors respect these norms. Our approach instead measures one of democracy's most visible norms through directly observable behavior: whether the primary losing candidate publicly concedes electoral defeat. Because our coding is based on explicit public statements, it requires minimal coder discretion and provides a transparent, replicable measure of norm compliance that can be systematically compared across countries and over time. The data also allow us to evaluate theories of electoral concessions, including the role of candidate characteristics such as incumbency and vote share.[6]

We code candidate concessions in all countries with contested national elections, in contrast to existing studies that focus on subsets of democracies prior to 2012 (Chernykh 2014; Hernandez-Huerta 2020). By expanding our coverage worldwide to include hybrid regimes and autocracies, we are able to examine a wider range of differences in electoral systems and country characteristics across regime types. In addition to our wider spatial coverage, we also collect data up until 2024, allowing for connections to debates about the purported decline of democracy in recent years.

[6]Our approach differs from expert-coded measures such as V-Dem's `v2elaccept` variable, which asks experts to assess whether losing parties and candidates accepted election results. The V-Dem coding guidelines require experts to evaluate, among other things, whether "some" versus "many" opposition candidates conceded and whether those candidates represented the "main opposition or were relatively insignificant" (Coppedge et al. 2020). By contrast, our measure identifies the primary losing candidate using official election results and codes whether that candidate publicly conceded defeat based on observable statements.

**Figure 1: Count of elections with concession data (solid) and without (gray dotted), for presidential (left) and parliamentary (right) elections.**




## 2.1 Basic Patterns

Figure 1 plots our election observations over time, for presidential (left) and parliamentary elections (right). The black line plots the number of election observations where we do have concession data, and the gray dotted line plots the missing data where we were not able to code concession outcomes. There has been an overall increase in the number of contested elections over time, reflecting both post-Cold War democratization trends as well as the rise of electoral authoritarianism in recent decades. The number of parliamentary elections has exhibited a more modest increase over time. We are able to code concession data on most elections, particularly after 2005.

Figure 2 shows within-country variance in concession rates. For this graph, we included 129 countries from our sample where we have data on concessions for at least four elections. For each country, we computed the rates of strong concessions (shaded in dark green) and weak concessions (shaded in light green) among the election observations for which there is concessions data.

Within this sample, there are 18 countries that have always had a strong concession following all elections where we have data. In 6 countries (including the United States),[7] the loser always

[7]We code Trump in 2020 as offering a weak concession. This is a tricky case as he often made claims about election fraud and pursued legal challenges to overturn the election results. However, he eventually acknowledged that a new administration would take office while continuing to

**Figure 2: Proportion of Concession Category by Country**

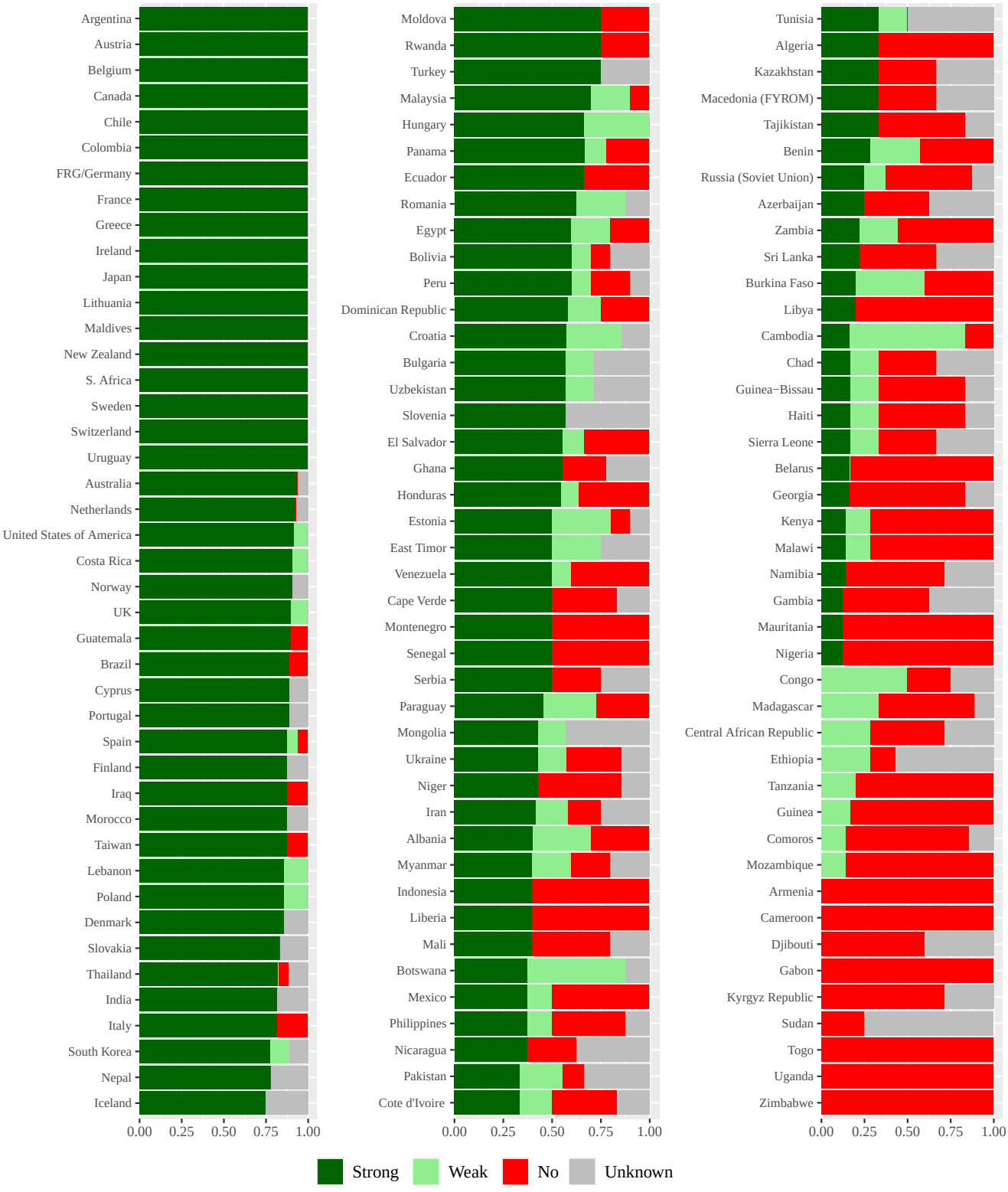
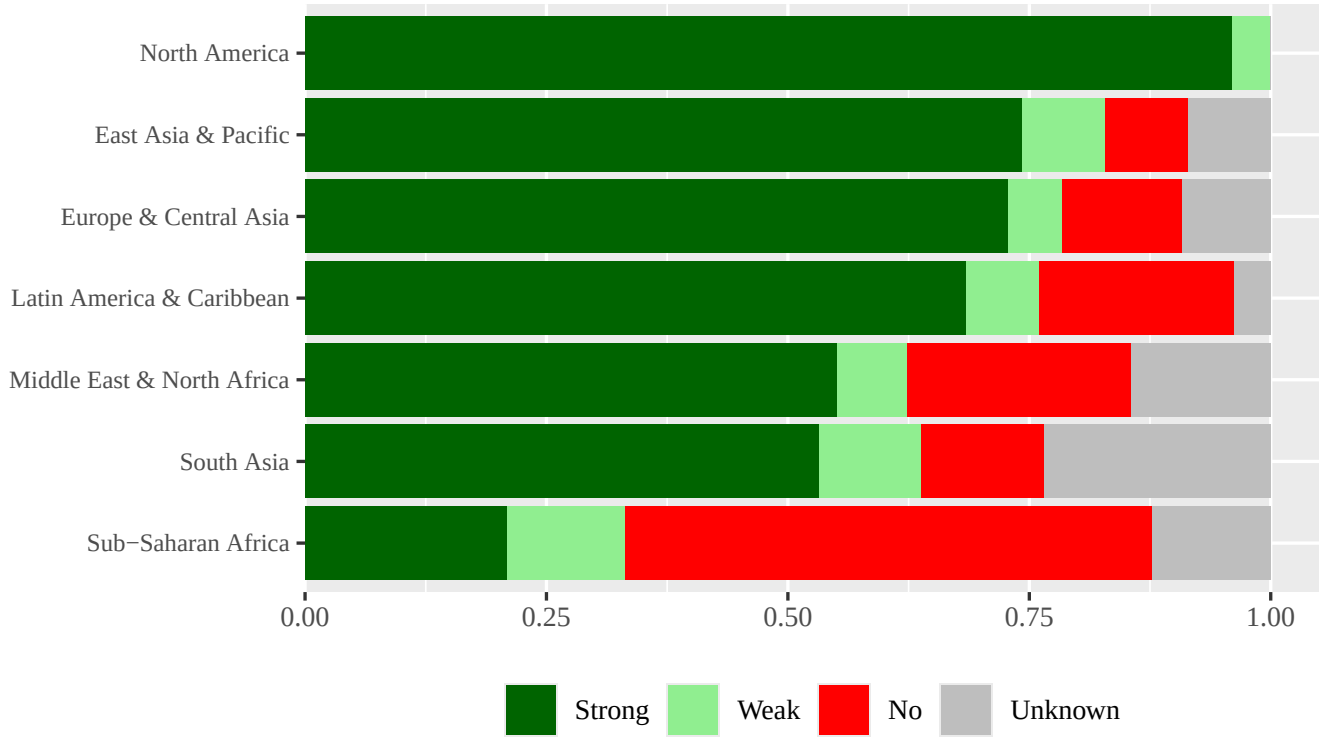


**Figure 3: Proportion of Strong (dark green) and Weak (light green) Concessions by Region**




concedes, but some of the concessions are weak. Conversely, in 6 countries the loser always refuses to concede in all elections where we have data (these countries are mostly in Africa or former USSR). However, for most countries, there is some heterogeneity across elections, with a mix of strong, weak, and no concessions.

Next we show concession trends by region (Figure 3). In North America, all elections have at least a weak concession and nearly all are strong. In the East Asia & Pacific, Europe & Central Asia, and Latin America & Caribbean there is a refusal to concede in about 10-20% of elections, but strong concessions are still by far the modal outcome. In the Middle East & North Africa and South Asia strong concessions occur in about half of elections. The major outlier is Sub-Saharan Africa, where losers refuse to concede in over half of elections.

dispute the legitimacy of the election (Washington Post, January 7, 2021). Given the ambiguity of these statements, the weak concession category fits best. Since our main analysis uses strong concessions as the dependent variable, results would not change if we instead coded this case as a "no."

**Figure 4: Type of Concessions Over Time (5 Year Moving Average)**

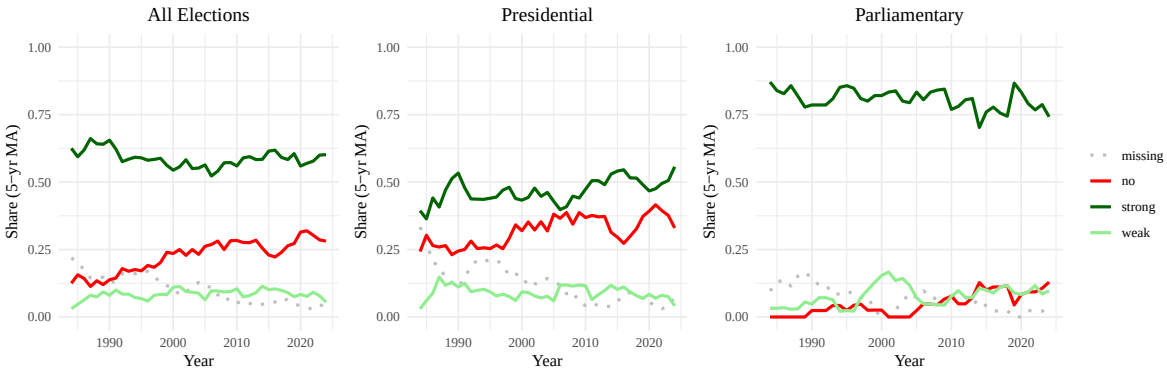


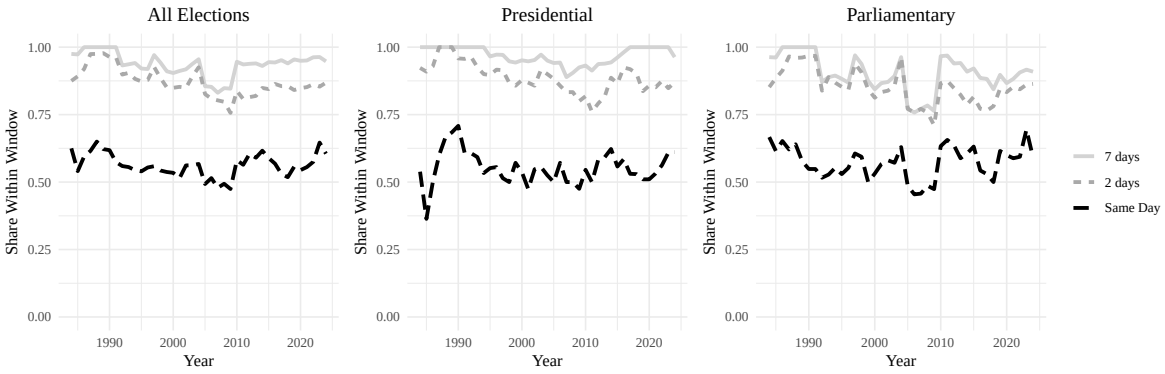

Figure 4 illustrates trends in concession behavior over time. The left panel shows the percentage of elections in each concession category (strong, weak, and no concession) for the full sample, while the middle and right panels present the same trends for presidential and parliamentary elections, respectively.[8] From 1980 to 2024, the rate of strong concessions has been relatively stable over time, typically around 60%. Strong concessions have increased slightly over the past 20 years. The rate of weak concessions has also been stable over time, though they are much more rare, comprising about 10% of cases and even fewer in recent years. Parliamentary elections have much higher strong concession rates compared to presidential elections, and the rate is reasonably stable across time. Presidential elections generally exhibit fewer strong concessions and more refusals to concede, though the general increase in strong concessions in the past 20 years is driven by this group.

Finally, we also collected data on the number of days to concede (Figure 5). The left panel shows the proportion of strong concessions that took place on election day, within two days of election day, and within a week of election day (patterns are similar for weak concessions), for all elections.[9] Almost all strong concessions occur within a week of the election, and in fact, most occur

[8]Since there is considerable variance in what kinds of countries hold an election in a particular year, we plot a five-year moving average of each group. For example, the points plotted for the year 2000 are the average of elections in our sample from 1996-2000.

[9]Sometimes the winner is not announced on election day and it is reasonable for the losing candidate to not concede right away. We do not have comprehensive data on the number of days it took for the ballots to be counted; however, most election results are called within a week.

**Figure 5: Timing of Concessions Over Time (5 Year Moving Average)**




within two days. In recent years the share occurring on the same day has risen sharply, perhaps due to improved counting technology. The middle and right panels again break down presidential and parliamentary elections. Concessions tend to happen slightly later in parliamentary systems, likely because the process of coalition formation often takes some time to play out.

# 3 Who Concedes?

In this section, we examine when concessions are more likely to occur. We first outline some theoretical expectations regarding the types of candidates and conditions that are likely to correlate with concessions before presenting our empirical findings.

## 3.1 Theoretical Expectations

Existing scholarship suggests that concession behavior should vary according to four broad factors: regime type, whether the losing candidate is an incumbent, electoral competitiveness, and past concession behavior. We summarize these expectations and the conditions under which candidates are expected to concede electoral defeat.

**Regime Type.** One of the primary reasons losing candidates refuse to concede is the claim that the election was not free and fair (Schedler 2002; Simpser 2013; Beaulieu 2014; Higashijima 2022). Accusations of fraud are likewise central to related post-election outcomes such as protest (Hyde and Marinov 2014; Little, Tucker and LaGatta 2015) and violence (Von Borzyskowski

2019). In electoral autocracies, opposition candidates are often especially vocal in disputing results in the hope of attracting international attention and pressure for democratization (Levitsky and Way 2010; Donno 2013). We therefore expect higher rates of concessions in democracies than in autocracies.

At the same time, there are reasons to expect concessions even in elections that are not free and fair. In electoral autocracies, opposition elites are sometimes rewarded with cabinet posts or other forms of patronage for accepting results (Arriola, Devaro and Meng 2021), and some candidates are permitted to run precisely because they pose no genuine electoral threat. Where incumbents rely on pre-election manipulation to weaken or co-opt their strongest challengers (Bermeo 2016), the candidates who remain on the ballot may therefore have little interest in contesting the outcome. This logic implies that concession rates in autocracies can rise even as elections become no freer or fairer.

Election quality also shapes the normative implications of concessions. When losing candidates concede following a free and fair election, concessions reinforce democratic legitimacy and facilitate peaceful transfers of power. By contrast, when opposition candidates concede after a manipulated or fraudulent election, concessions may instead legitimize authoritarian rule. In this sense, the nominally democratic practice of conceding can be normatively harmful when elections are not free or fair. An implication of this discussion is that analyses of aggregate concession rates across countries or over time should distinguish between free and fair elections and those that are not.

**Margin of Victory.** Another variable that could be related to concessions is the margin of victory. Autocratic regimes often ensure that they win with overwhelming vote margins, in order to portray an image of domination (Magaloni 2006; Higashijima 2022). We should expect that elections with a large margin of victory were likely not free and fair, therefore losers will be less likely to concede in order to contest the results (Schedler 1998).

However, if the margin of victory is very small, losers may want to contest the election and urge

a recount.[10] Alternatively, losers may also strategically contest close elections in an attempt to extract concessions, such as cabinet seats, from the winner (Hernandez-Huerta 2020). Altogether, these theories suggest that the margin of victory may have a non-monotonic relationship with the likelihood of concessions. We will flexibly estimate the relationship of these variables in the empirical section.

**Whether the loser is an incumbent.** We might also expect incumbency status to play an important role in the likelihood of conceding. Recent scholarship has identified the violation of norms by incumbent leaders as a key mechanism by which democratic backsliding occurs (Waldner and Lust 2018; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2019). Autocratic incumbents may also have added incentives to reject election results, since they generally have institutional tools, such as the courts, at their disposal (Shen-Bayh 2018). According to this logic, incumbents who lose should be less likely to concede compared to non-incumbents who lose, especially in recent years.

On the other hand, recent scholarship on electoral manipulation would predict the *opposite* relationship between incumbency and concessions. Autocratic incumbents have increasingly shifted away from election-day violations (such as ballot-box stuffing) to pre-election day strategies of manipulation, including controlling the media, institutional rigging, or repressing the opposition (Chernykh 2014; Simpser and Donno 2012; Hyde and O'Mahony 2010). Executives who would not have conceded in the event of an electoral loss take steps prior to election day to ensure that they will be the winner. As a result, when we observe an incumbent candidate lose, that election was more likely free and fair.

In new or transitioning democracies, the opposition may be reticent to concede if they feel uncertain about the quality of the election. For these kinds of regimes, it may be the case that incumbents who lose are more likely to concede because they have better information about the election and,

[10]In the 2000 U.S. election, Al Gore initially conceded to George W. Bush on election night, but rescinded his concession after razor-thin vote margins in Florida triggered a statewide recount. Over a month later, Gore conceded following the Supreme Court decision that ruled in favor of Bush. This is the only observation in our dataset where a candidate rescinded a concession. We code Gore's concession as occurring on December 13, following the court ruling.

therefore, feel more certain about the results. Moreover, in democracies, there is often pressure placed on losing incumbents to publicly concede as part of a peaceful transition. These arguments predict that incumbents who lose should be more likely to concede, and our empirical analysis will allow us to adjudicate between these two competing hypotheses.

**Past concession behavior.** Finally, as discussed at the outset, conceding elections is often cast as an important norm of democratic behavior (Corcoran 1994). While defining and measuring norms is notoriously tricky (e.g., Bicchieri 2005; Helmke and Levitsky 2012; Goldstein 2022), under some conceptions it can be costly to break the norm, e.g., if doing so triggers a negative reaction from others. If so, and if whether a concession happens in a given election affects the strength of this norm moving forward, this suggests a potential causal pathway where concessions make future concessions more likely. Conversely, a refusal to concede may "normalize" this behavior make future concessions less likely (see Valentim 2024). In the empirical analysis, we assess this prediction by proposing a test that distinguishes norm creation from typical autocorrelation by looking at the sequence of past concessions.

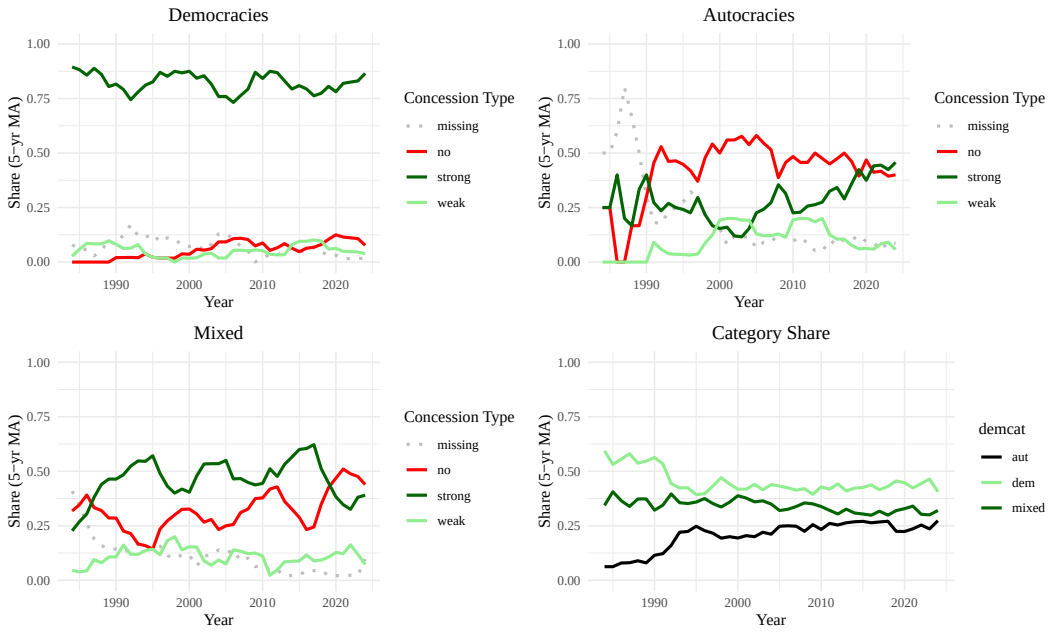
## 3.2 Empirical Findings

We now present our empirical findings. Since our main aims are descriptive, we primarily present simple bi-variate comparisons in the main text and include multivariate regression analysis in the Appendix.

**Regime Type.** Figure 6 plots the rates of different concession types over time by regime type. To measure regime type, we use data from Boix, Miller and Rosato (2013).[11] To capture differences between consolidated democracies and emerging democracies, we divide countries into three categories based on whether Boix, Miller and Rosato (2013) categorize them as democratic for all

[11]Updated data through 2020 for the coding rules in Boix, Miller and Rosato (2013) are available at `https://sites.google.com/site/mkmtwo/`. For 2021 to 2024 observations, we use data from Clarke, Meng and Paine (2026), which codes the following democracies as breaking down after 2020: El Salvador, Tunisia, and Burkina Faso.

**Figure 6: Time trends by regime type**




years in which a contested election is held, autocratic for all of these years, or a residual category of "mixed" countries which are classified as democratic for some election years but autocratic for others. Our general presumption is that elections in always democratic countries will tend to be more free and fair.

The top left plots the share of each concession for countries which are always coded as democratic in each election year, the top right does the same for countries which are always coded as autocratic each year, the bottom left shows countries which are "mixed", and the bottom right plots the share of elections in each category.

In democracies, strong concessions are consistently the modal category. While there are some fluctuations over time, the share of strong concessions has generally increased and has approached 100% in recent years.

As expected, the rate of concession is much lower in autocracies. For most of the time frame a refusal to concede was the typical outcome. However, starting around 2000, the share of strong concessions has sharply risen in this category. In fact, in recent years, the share of strong con-

cessions has surpassed no concessions in autocratic elections. As hinted above, this likely reflects autocracies doing a better job of ensuring a compliant opposition rather than holding more fair elections.[12] So, we should be hesitant to attribute the overall increase in strong concessions to improved democratic norms. The 2024 Russian presidential election is illustrative: all three losing candidates accepted the results and publicly praised the outcome. In fact, "opposition" may be too strong of a word for these candidates, one of whom, Leonid Slutsky, said himself that "A vote for Slutsky and LDPR is absolutely not a vote against Putin."[13] Consistent with the co-optation logic outlined above, candidates who accept defeat in such settings may be rewarded for doing so, while those who would contest the results are often kept off the ballot altogether.

The bottom left shows that the picture among mixed regimes is more volatile, with no clear increase or decrease in strong concessions or refusal to concede. For most years, elections in the mixed category have had slightly higher rates of strong concessions compared to no concessions, although this trend was reversed between 2015 to 2024.

We may be concerned that these trends are affected by changing shares of election in each category (democracy, autocracy, or mixed). However, as the bottom right panel of Figure 6 shows, the share of elections in each category has been relatively constant starting around 1990, albeit with a recent uptick in the mixed category. Appendix Section A.2 shows similar trends using alternative measures of election quality.

**Margin of Victory.** In addition, we use data on the margin of victory from Marx, Pons and Rollet (2024) as a second approach to gauge the competitiveness of the election. For this and all subsequent analysis using margin of victory we subset to presidential elections, as the difference in vote/seat shares among leading parties has a less clear interpretation in systems where parties must form coalitions (see, e.g., Laver and Schofield 1998).

[12]Recall that to get in our sample there must be some opposition. So one possibility is that this reflects a shift from no opposition at all to a token opposition who will claim elections are fair.

[13]"Russia's Far-Right LDPR Nominates Leader for 2024 Presidential Race" Moscow Times, Dec 19 2023.

**Figure 7: Margin of Victory and Strong Concessions, with a Lowess Smoother (Presidential Only)**

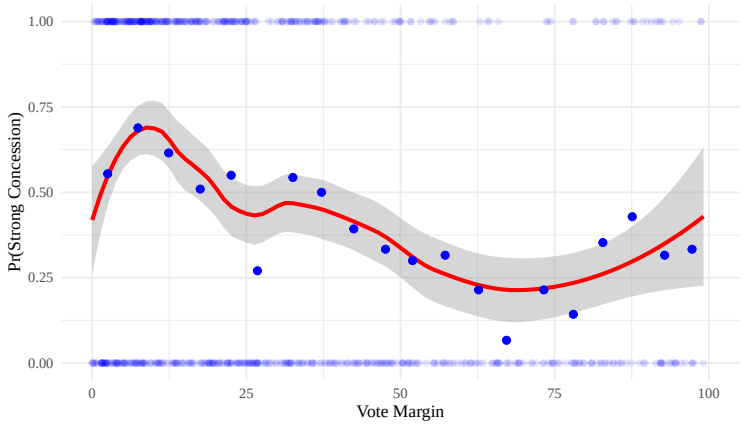
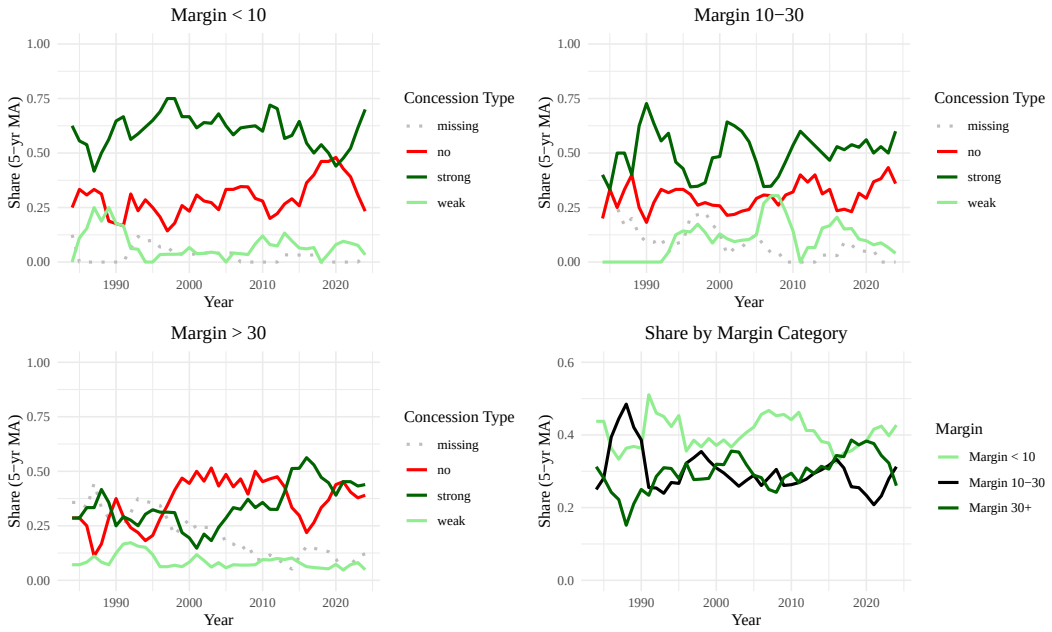



Figure 7 plots the relationship between the margin of victory and a strong concession, with solid blue dots representing the average for each 5% bin of margin, and a lowess smoother in red to flexibly estimate the relationship between these variables. Starting on the left, we see that the probability of a strong concession rises sharply as the margin goes from around 0% to 10%, likely reflecting the fact that very close elections may be ones that can potentially be overturned. After peaking around 10%, the probability of a strong concession steadily declines, likely because these are generally more fraudulent elections with more for the opposition to object to. A final interesting twist is that from a margin of around 70% to 100%, the probability of a strong concession rises again, perhaps because elections with such an extreme margin are more likely to feature a token opposition which is only allowed to run precisely because they do not threaten the incumbent.

To look at how margin of victory intersects with trends over time, we divide elections into three categories: elections that are relatively close (where the margin of victory is less than 10%), which we assume are generally more free and fair; elections with a medium margin of victory (10%-30%); and "blowout" elections where the margin is above 30%, which we assume are generally not free or fair. As with regime type, we plot a five-year moving average of the share of each concession category, and then a moving average of the share of elections in each category in a

**Figure 8: Time Trends by Margin Category (Presidential Only)**



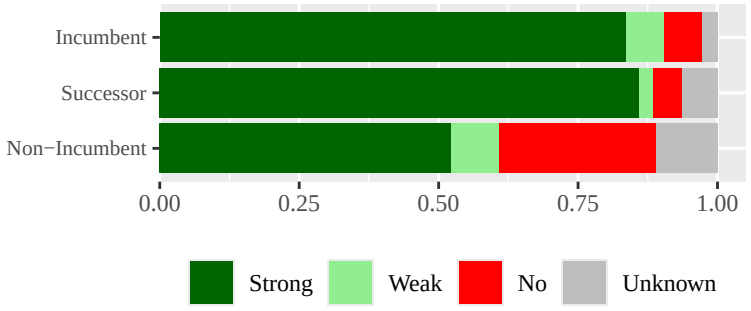

separate plot.

Figure 8 shows these trends. Among elections that are close (top left) and have a medium margin (top right), the share of strong concessions bounces around a fair amount for most of the time frame, and increases sharply for recent elections (particularly with a medium margin). Blowout elections (bottom left) show a more steady increase in strong concessions over time, especially from 1995 to 2010.

When comparing the share of elections by margin categories (bottom right), the clearest trend is that there are fewer medium margin elections, which is also the category where strong concessions are most common. It would appear that strong concessions are becoming more common for all margins, though this is somewhat attenuated by the fact that fewer elections are delivering the kinds of margins where strong concessions are most frequent.

The patterns by margin of victory also help explain why concession rates have risen in autocracies over time. As discussed above, strong concessions have become more common in elections decided by overwhelming margins—precisely the types of contests most likely to involve token or

**Figure 9: Distribution of concessions by incumbent/successor status**




co-opted opposition rather than genuine electoral competition. This finding is consistent with our interpretation that rising concession rates in autocracies do not reflect improvements in democratic norms or election quality. Instead, they appear to stem from changes in the nature of electoral authoritarianism, where incumbents increasingly secure victory through pre-election manipulation that weakens or excludes credible challengers, leaving opposition candidates with few incentives to contest the outcome.

**Whether the loser is an incumbent.** Another important driver of concessions may be the identity of the loser. In the main text we focus on whether the loser was the incumbent leader or a successor; in the appendix we present patterns on characteristics like gender and ideology where the results are mixed.

Figure 9 shows the complete distribution of our concession category variable by incumbent/successor status. Losing candidates who are the incumbent or successor (depicted in red) concede at much higher rates than losers who do not have incumbency status (depicted in blue). Non-incumbent losers concede about half the time, while incumbent and successor losers concede over 90% of the time. Weak concessions are rare among both groups.

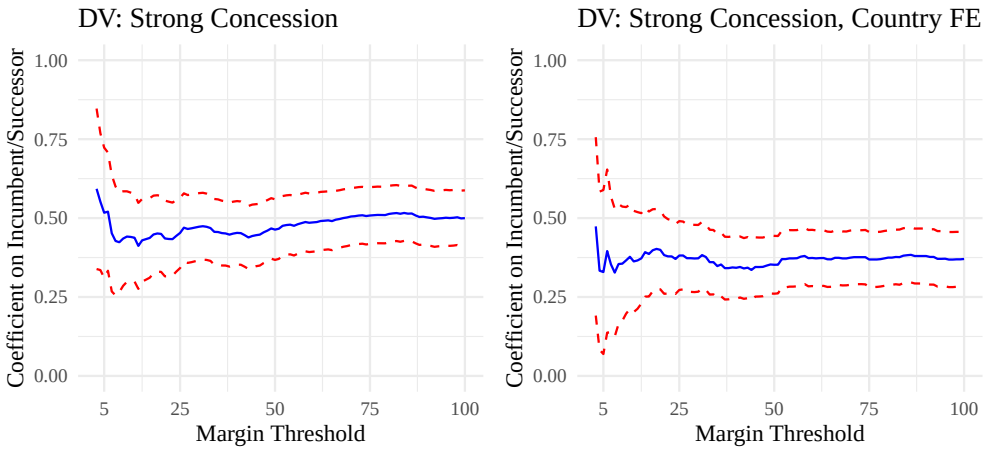
As discussed earlier, it may be the case that losing candidates refuse to concede at higher rates when incumbents win because sitting incumbents can more easily rig elections, in which case the opposition (correctly) cries foul. Indeed, incumbents rarely lose in autocracies. Our data show that the incumbent or successor lost in only 6 percent of the autocratic election observations.

This finding stands in sharp contrast to recent accounts of democratic backsliding, which often emphasize incumbent leaders' willingness to violate democratic norms in order to remain in office. If these accounts reflected the modal pattern, we would expect losing incumbents to be especially reluctant to concede defeat. Instead, we find the opposite. This pattern is nevertheless consistent with recent scholarship showing that incumbents increasingly rely on pre-election engineering—such as media control, candidate exclusion, and institutional manipulation—rather than election-day fraud to secure victory. As a result, incumbents who are unwilling to relinquish power often prevent themselves from losing in the first place. By the time we observe an incumbent actually lose, that election is disproportionately likely to have been sufficiently competitive and credible that conceding is the expected response. This result suggests that widely discussed cases such as Donald Trump in 2020 or Jair Bolsonaro in 2022 are highly consequential outliers rather than representative examples of incumbent behavior. More generally, the results underscore the importance of distinguishing between highly visible cases and aggregate patterns when evaluating the state of democratic norms.

**Incumbency Status in Close Elections.** While our primary aims are descriptive, one set of questions where we can get some causal leverage is on how losing candidate characteristics affect the probability of concession by focusing on close elections where the two candidates vary on the characteristic in question. In general, the kinds of elections where the incumbent might lose in the first place are fundamentally different compared to elections where the incumbents never lose (Hyde and Marinov 2012). One way to mitigate this problem is focusing on close elections where one of the top two candidates was the incumbent (or successor). However, the concerns raised by Marshall (2024)—that this kind of design does not cleanly identify the causal effect of *winning* candidate characteristics—also apply to losing candidates. In particular, the quantity estimated does not cleanly isolate the effect of the trait in question, but the trait plus any compensating differentials that ensure the election remains close.

Applied to our question—whether incumbents are more likely to concede when they narrowly

**Figure 10: Coefficient on incumbent loser predicting concessions for elections where the margin of victory in the last round is below a given threshold.**




lose—the concern is that the typical incumbent who barely loses may be different than the typical non-incumbent who barely loses on other characteristics. For example, in a context with a large incumbency advantage, barely losing incumbents may be less competent than barely losing challengers. We see no obvious reason why these types of effects would confound the effect of incumbency *on concessions*, though it is important to flag the possibility.

Figure 10 shows the coefficient on the loser being the incumbent or successor without country fixed effects (left panel) and with country fixed effects (right panel). In both panels, we restrict the sample to elections where one of the top two candidates was the incumbent/successor and where the margin of victory in the final round was below a threshold (x axis).[14]

In general, the coefficients on the loser being the incumbent are even more positive for elections where one candidate is the incumbent, and this result seems to hold even when restricting to elections that are relatively close (down to a margin of 3%). The point estimates do not change too much as a function of the margin threshold, though, unsurprisingly, the standard errors get quite large once the threshold for inclusion gets below around 10%.

On the whole, this provides reasonably strong evidence that incumbents who lose are more likely

[14]There are 151 elections where the incumbent/successor was not one of the top two candidates, which are cases where either no incumbent/successor ran, or they came in third place or lower.

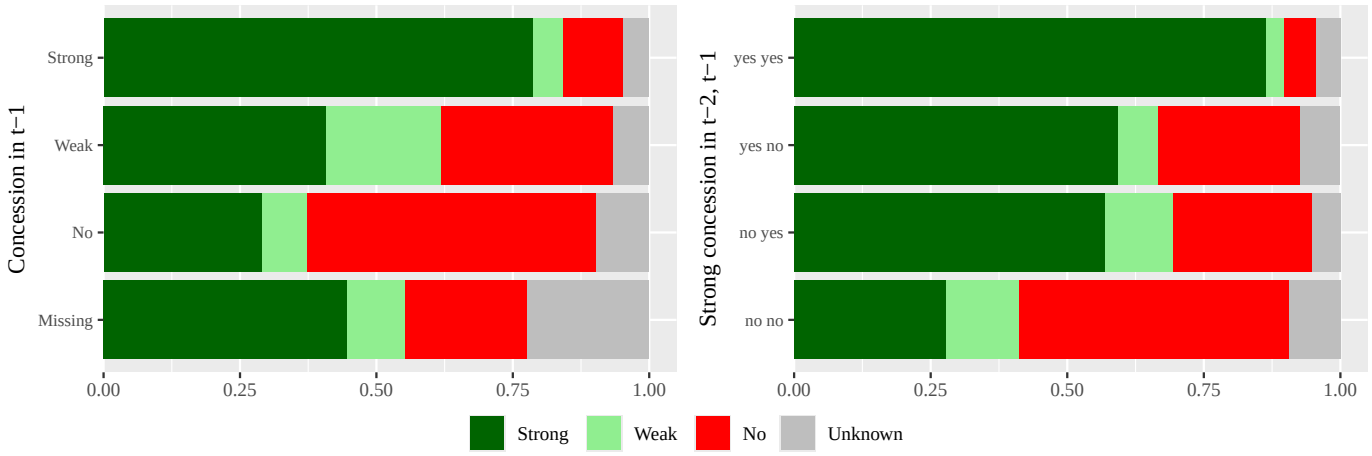
to concede holding all else equal.

**Past concession behavior.** Finally we examine whether past concessions create a norm for future elections. The left facet of Figure 11 provides a first cut at this question by looking at the distribution of concession category as a function of what happened in the previous election. Unsurprisingly, strong concessions tend to be followed by strong concessions, and refusals to concede by refusals to concede. Following a weak concession, there is a roughly equal split among a transition to a strong concession, weak concession, and refusal to concede. Following an election where we have no data, the distribution of concession categories is not dramatically different than the overall distribution, which can be seen as evidence that the cases we can't code are likely not too different from ones we can code (other than a lack of media coverage).

Of course, the correlation between past and current behavior could be driven by many factors, rather than one election setting a norm that is typically followed in the next. To further explore this possibility, in Figure 11, we examine concession rates based on concessions in the previous *two* elections. The figure plots the predicted probability of a strong concession as a function of whether there was no strong concession in the last two elections ("no no"), a strong concession two elections ago but not in the previous election ("yes no"), etc. If all that matters is whether there was a concession in the previous election (i.e., this sets a norm), the main difference would be between the "yes yes" and "no yes" cases vs. the "yes no" and "no no" cases. Put another way, if the "yes no" pattern means that the norm of conceding was broken in the previous election, we may expect concession rates in this case to be closer to the "no no" case (where likely no norm was set in the first place) than the "no yes" case (where a norm may have recently been set).

However, this is not what we find: the probability of a strong concession is highest when there was a strong concession in both preceding elections, followed by the cases of one concession (but only marginally different based on the order), followed by no strong concessions. The simplest explanation of this pattern is that what matters is relatively constant country characteristics, not norms that depend on what happened in the last election. To the extent that norms have a causal

**Figure 11: Probability of a strong concession as a function of concessions in the previous two elections**




impact on concession behavior, it must be the case that a longer history matters rather than just what happened in the previous election, perhaps because it takes several election cycles of concessions to set a norm. Another possibility is that while conceding fair elections can broadly be considered a democratic norm, violating the norm is not costly enough to deter losers who have strong incentives to reject the results.

# 4 Conclusion

This paper examined concession behavior following 1,073 national elections in 140 countries worldwide from 1980 to 2024. The data reveal several findings that challenge conventional wisdom about democratic norms and democratic backsliding. Losing candidates in democracies concede at substantially higher rates than those in autocracies, and concession rates in democracies have remained remarkably stable over more than four decades. Contrary to concerns about democratic backsliding, we find little evidence that the norm of conceding is eroding within democratic regimes. Instead, changes in concession behavior have mostly occurred in autocracies, underscoring that the meaning of a concession depends critically on the political context in which it occurs.

The paper's most surprising finding is that incumbents who lose are substantially more likely to

concede than non-incumbent losers. This finding runs counter to recent accounts emphasizing incumbent leaders' willingness to violate democratic norms in order to remain in office. Instead, it is consistent with recent scholarship showing that incumbents increasingly rely on pre-election engineering rather than election-day fraud to secure victory. By the time we observe an incumbent actually lose, that election is disproportionately likely to have been sufficiently competitive and credible that conceding is the expected response. This contrast also helps explain why concession rates have risen in autocracies: rather than reflecting stronger democratic norms, they are more consistent with the consolidation of electoral authoritarianism, in which co-opted or token opposition candidates increasingly accept the outcomes of manipulated elections rather than the diffusion of democratic norms.

Beyond these substantive findings, the paper makes a broader contribution to the measurement of democratic norms. Contemporary theories of democratic resilience and democratic backsliding place considerable weight on informal norms, yet cross-national measures of norm compliance have largely been absent. Existing indicators typically rely on expert assessments of political behavior. Our dataset instead provides a transparent measure based on candidates' observable public statements. We hope these data will facilitate future research not only on electoral concessions, but also on how democratic norms emerge, persist, and erode over time.

More broadly, our findings illustrate the importance of distinguishing between highly visible events and aggregate trends. Much of the recent concern about the erosion of concession norms has been driven by Donald Trump's response to the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Because the American presidency occupies an unusually influential position in global politics, there were legitimate concerns that his refusal to offer a clear concession would encourage similar behavior elsewhere and signal a broader erosion of democratic norms. Yet our comparative evidence suggests that this feared diffusion has not occurred. Concession rates in democracies have not declined, nor do we observe a wave of democratic incumbents following Trump's example. This does not diminish the significance of these events or the risks posed by norm violations in influential democracies.

Rather, it demonstrates the value of systematic comparative data for distinguishing exceptional events from broader democratic trends.

**Competing interests:** The authors declare none.

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# A Appendix

## A.1 Multivariate Analysis

We present statistical analyses to evaluate factors that are correlated with presidential concessions from 1980 to 2024. We split our independent variables into three buckets: candidate characteristics, election characteristics, and country characteristics. For candidate characteristics, "loser" refers to the top-placing loser. Unless otherwise noted, data are hand-coded by the authors with a team of research assistants using a combination of the IFES election database and Wikipedia and cross-checked against existing datasets such as NELDA. Appendix Section A.3 presents summary statistics for all variables, including concession outcomes, candidate, election, and country characteristics.

**Candidate Characteristics:**

- Loser incumbent: Dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if the loser was the incumbent.
- Loser successor: Dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if the loser was a member of the ruling party (but not the incumbent).
- Loser female: Dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if the loser is female.
- Loser left: Dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if the loser had a left-leaning ideology.
- Loser right: Dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if the loser had a right-leaning ideology.

**Election characteristics:**

- Margin of victory: Vote percentage between the winner and top placing loser in the final round. Data from Marx, Pons and Rollet (2024) up to 2023, and from IFES for more recent elections.
- First election: Dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if this election was the first multi-party election in the country.

- Single round election: Dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if the election occurred in single round. This can be because the country does not use a runoff system or because the winner prevailed in the first round of a runoff system.
- Previous strong concession: Dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if the top-placing losing candidate in the previous election conceded clearly (i.e. strong concession), and a 0 otherwise. The first election for each country in this dataset has a missing value.
- Previous weak concession: Dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if the top-placing losing candidate in the previous election conceded with ambiguity (i.e. weak concession), and a 0 otherwise. The first election for each country in this dataset has a missing value.

**Country characteristics:**

- Democracy: Dummy variable from Boix, Miller and Rosato (2013) that takes a value of 1 if the country is a democracy, and 0 otherwise.[1]
- GDP per capita. Data from Fariss et al. (2022).
- Population (logged). Data from Fariss et al. (2022).
- Cold War: Dummy variable that takes a value of 1 for years 1980-1990 and 0 otherwise.
- Post-conflict: Dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if the election took place within 3 years of a civil war (as coded by Davies et al. (2024)) in the country, and 0 otherwise.

For all regressions, we use ordinary least squares (OLS) with country clustered robust standard errors. All the models in the main text use STRONG CONCESSION as the dependent variable, although we include robustness checks using ALL CONCESSIONS as the dependent variable in Appendix Section A.3. We include models with country fixed effects and various control variables. In the following sections, we present the regression results separately for candidate, election, and country characteristics. The regression tables use the presidential sample. Re-estimating

[1]This data is available until 2020. For observations from 2021-2024, we use the value of the democracy dummy from the year 2020.

the candidate-characteristics models on the parliamentary sample yields a strong positive association between democracy and concessions; the coefficient on the loser being the incumbent remains positive but is smaller and not statistically significant, consistent with concession rates being high across the board in parliamentary systems. Summary statistics for the parliamentary sample are reported in Table A.2.

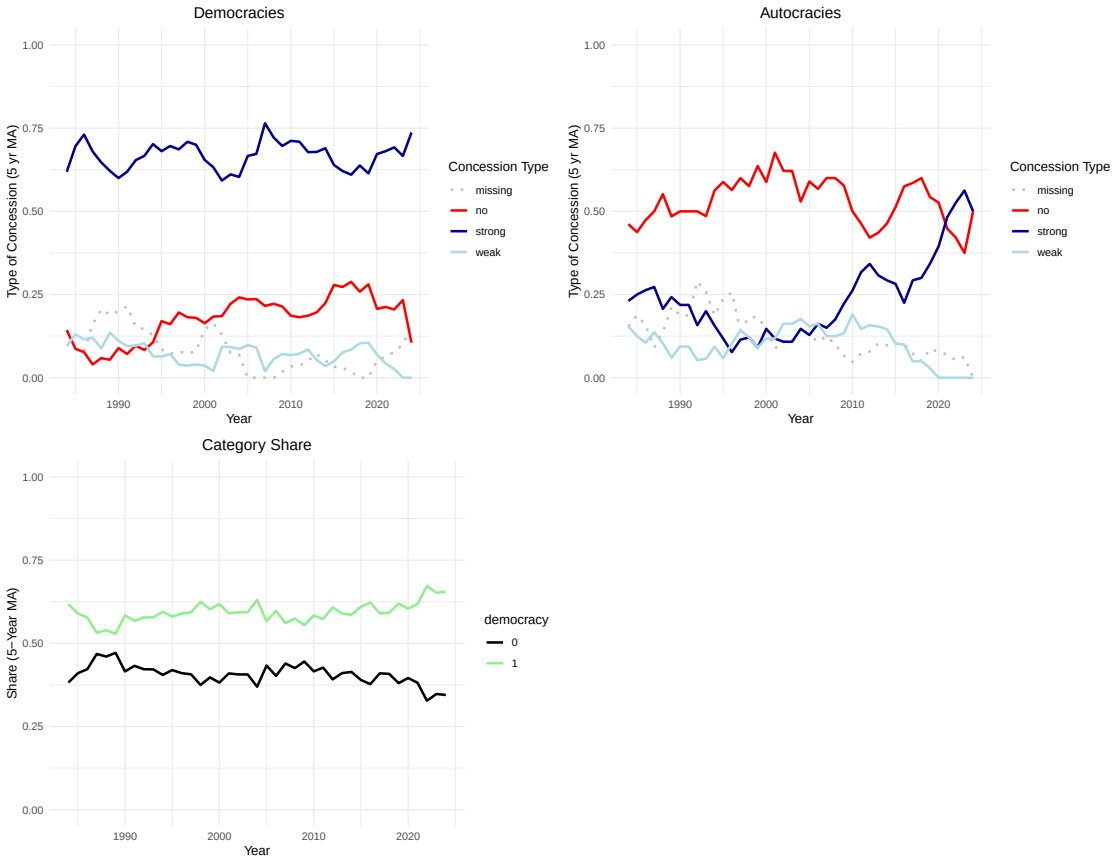
## A.2 Alternative measures of Free and Fair elections

In the main text we subset elections by whether the country is coded as democratic by Boix, Miller and Rosato (2013) in all election years, no election years, or some election years. Figure A.1 shows the same graph subset by whether the country is coded as democratic by this source in the year of the current election. The general patterns are similar: the trend of strong concessions within democracies is relatively flat, while they increase from 2000 onward in autocracies. The share of presidential elections held within democracies also slightly increases in this time window.

Figure A.2 shows a similar graph, but subset by the tercile of V-Dem's "Elections free and fair" variable (`v2elfrfair`). Here the rise in strong concessions among the least democratic elections (first tercile) is more modest, but it rises from below 10% to around 20% in recent years (albeit with a recent dip). Among the second tercile there is not a strong trend through most of the time window, but then a sharp increase in the last 5-10 years. Among the most democratic elections, there is a general increase though with some dips along the way.

The share of elections in each category is quite steady for most of the time period, albeit with a sharp shift from the third to second tercile in the end of the time window.

**Figure A.1: Share of concessions and share in each category by democracy status in election year**




## A.3 Additional Empirical Results

**Figure A.2: Share of concessions and share of each category by V-Dem "Free and Fair" tercile**

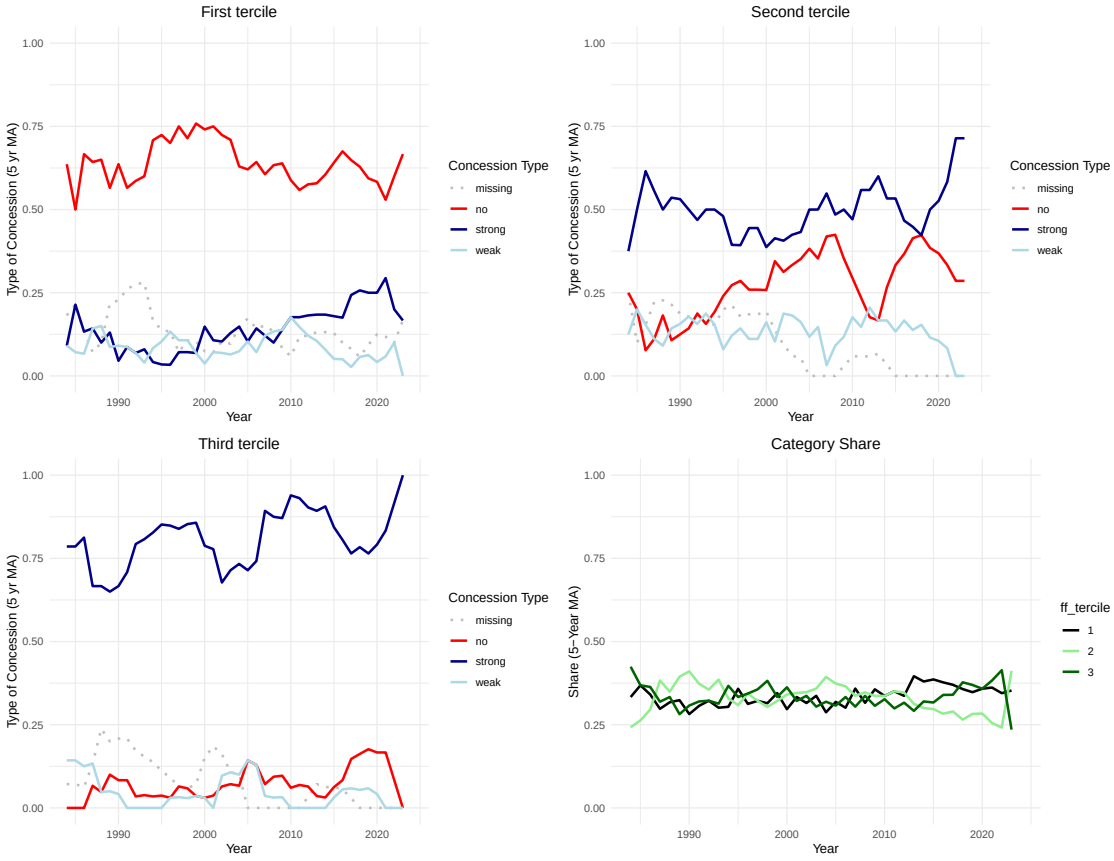


**Table A.1: Summary Statistics (Presidential Elections)**

| | N | Mean | SD | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strong concession | 629 | .5421304 | .4986184 | 0 | 1 |
| Weak concession | 629 | .0922099 | .2895522 | 0 | 1 |
| No concession | 629 | .3656598 | .481998 | 0 | 1 |
| Missing | 712 | .116573 | .3211364 | 0 | 1 |
| Days to concede | 382 | 3.513089 | 12.16331 | 0 | 170 |
| Loser incumbent | 712 | .0842697 | .2779871 | 0 | 1 |
| Loser successor | 712 | .0674157 | .2509169 | 0 | 1 |
| Loser female | 707 | .0777935 | .268036 | 0 | 1 |
| Loser left | 688 | .369186 | .4829355 | 0 | 1 |
| Loser right | 688 | .4026163 | .4907815 | 0 | 1 |
| Margin | 712 | 29.16872 | 26.28559 | -2.1 | 99.13 |
| First election | 712 | .0730337 | .2603747 | 0 | 1 |
| Single round | 712 | .6615169 | .4735264 | 0 | 1 |
| Previous strong | 607 | .4777595 | .4999171 | 0 | 1 |
| Previous weak | 607 | .0840198 | .2776463 | 0 | 1 |
| Democracy | 701 | .5920114 | .4918119 | 0 | 1 |
| GDP per capita | 712 | 11.20261 | 12.24381 | .4348074 | 72.88905 |
| Population (logged) | 712 | 7.040678 | 1.436834 | 3.196996 | 10.462 |
| Cold war | 712 | .113764 | .3177477 | 0 | 1 |
| Post-conflict | 712 | .244382 | .4300223 | 0 | 1 |

Notes: The margin of victory was negative for two election observations (US in 2000 and 2016) due to the winner of the electoral college losing the popular vote.

**Table A.2: Summary Statistics (Parliamentary Elections)**

| | N | Mean | SD | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strong concession | 332 | .864 | .343 | 0 | 1 |
| Weak concession | 332 | .081 | .274 | 0 | 1 |
| No concession | 332 | .054 | .227 | 0 | 1 |
| Missing | 355 | .065 | .247 | 0 | 1 |
| Days to concede | 302 | 7.192 | 30.575 | -6 | 354 |
| Loser incumbent | 355 | .259 | .439 | 0 | 1 |
| Loser female | 340 | .068 | .252 | 0 | 1 |
| Loser left | 335 | .382 | .487 | 0 | 1 |
| Loser right | 335 | .448 | .498 | 0 | 1 |
| First election | 355 | .093 | .291 | 0 | 1 |
| Previous strong | 300 | .883 | .322 | 0 | 1 |
| Previous weak | 322 | .068 | .253 | 0 | 1 |
| Democracy | 347 | .804 | .398 | 0 | 1 |
| Population (logged) | 320 | 7.642 | 1.390 | 4.698 | 11.866 |
| Cold war | 355 | .237 | .426 | 0 | 1 |

Notes: Concession outcome variables are computed among coded (non-missing) observations. The loser successor and single-round indicators are not defined for parliamentary elections, and the margin of victory is omitted because vote-share margins are less comparable in systems with coalition formation (see main text). Negative values of days to concede indicate concessions made before final results were announced; long delays typically reflect extended coalition formation.

**Table A.3: What types of losing candidates are more likely to concede? (Full results)**

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| DV: | Strong concession | Strong concession | Strong concession |
| Loser incumbent | 0.238** | 0.267** | 0.265** |
| | (0.0785) | (0.0897) | (0.0896) |
| Loser successor | 0.410*** | 0.351*** | 0.342*** |
| | (0.0574) | (0.0737) | (0.0725) |
| Loser female | 0.193** | 0.0410 | 0.0158 |
| | (0.0614) | (0.0564) | (0.0549) |
| Loser left | 0.0159 | -0.0909 | -0.0804 |
| | (0.0564) | (0.0509) | (0.0509) |
| Loser right | 0.155** | -0.0444 | -0.0521 |
| | (0.0537) | (0.0550) | (0.0548) |
| Margin | | | 0.00161 |
| | | | (0.00146) |
| First election | | | 0.00481 |
| | | | (0.0841) |
| Single round | | | 0.00404 |
| | | | (0.0561) |
| Democracy | | | 0.217* |
| | | | (0.0833) |
| GDP per capita | | | 0.00124 |
| | | | (0.00386) |
| Population | | | -0.0487 |
| | | | (0.107) |
| Cold War | | | -0.0447 |
| | | | (0.0880) |
| Post conflict | | | 0.0288 |
| | | | (0.0776) |
| Country FE | No | Yes | Yes |
| Observations | 610 | 610 | 603 |
| R-squared | 0.094 | 0.537 | 0.558 |

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered by country.
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

**Table A.4: What types of losing candidates are associated with all concessions (weak or strong)?**

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| DV: | All concession | All concession | All concession |
| Loser incumbent | 0.286*** | 0.259** | 0.221** |
| | (0.0607) | (0.0805) | (0.0781) |
| Loser successor | 0.341*** | 0.254** | 0.227** |
| | (0.0558) | (0.0785) | (0.0790) |
| Loser female | 0.140* | 0.00766 | -0.0174 |
| | (0.0547) | (0.0490) | (0.0505) |
| Loser left | 0.0219 | -0.0594 | -0.0539 |
| | (0.0501) | (0.0497) | (0.0473) |
| Loser right | 0.125* | -0.0426 | -0.0502 |
| | (0.0502) | (0.0543) | (0.0528) |
| Country FE | No | Yes | Yes |
| Election-level controls | No | No | Yes |
| Country-level controls | No | No | Yes |
| Observations | 610 | 610 | 603 |
| R-squared | 0.080 | 0.499 | 0.523 |

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered by country.
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

**Table A.5: What election characteristics are associated with strong concessions? (Full results)**

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DV: | Strong | Strong | Strong | Strong | Strong | Strong |
| Margin 5-15% | 0.176** | 0.214*** | 0.223*** | 0.219*** | 0.231*** | 0.233*** |
| | (0.0612) | (0.0566) | (0.0597) | (0.0610) | (0.0500) | (0.0534) |
| Margin 15+% | -0.0362 | 0.0559 | 0.163** | 0.155** | 0.182*** | 0.162*** |
| | (0.0604) | (0.0503) | (0.0554) | (0.0558) | (0.0436) | (0.0445) |
| First election | -0.230** | -0.179 | -0.0312 | 0.132 | -0.0140 | 0.123 |
| | (0.0818) | (0.194) | (0.0933) | (0.186) | (0.0832) | (0.186) |
| Single round | -0.166** | -0.122** | -0.0706 | -0.0376 | 0.00722 | 0.0395 |
| | (0.0509) | (0.0433) | (0.0584) | (0.0642) | (0.0594) | (0.0659) |
| Previous strong | | 0.370*** | | -0.0855 | | -0.112 |
| | | (0.0549) | | (0.0689) | | (0.0658) |
| Previous weak | | -0.0372 | | -0.119 | | -0.144 |
| | | (0.0822) | | (0.0940) | | (0.0870) |
| Loser incumbent | | | | | 0.254** | 0.149 |
| | | | | | (0.0866) | (0.0967) |
| Loser successor | | | | | 0.325*** | 0.306*** |
| | | | | | (0.0693) | (0.0716) |
| Loser female | | | | | 0.0203 | 0.00237 |
| | | | | | (0.0583) | (0.0573) |
| Loser left | | | | | -0.0716 | -0.0686 |
| | | | | | (0.0481) | (0.0537) |
| Loser right | | | | | -0.0368 | -0.0363 |
| | | | | | (0.0531) | (0.0591) |
| Democracy | | | | | 0.210** | 0.245** |
| | | | | | (0.0787) | (0.0905) |
| GDP per capita | | | | | 0.00251 | 0.00472 |
| | | | | | (0.00376) | (0.00442) |
| Population | | | | | -0.0662 | -0.0950 |
| | | | | | (0.107) | (0.133) |
| Cold War | | | | | -0.0590 | -0.0997 |
| | | | | | (0.0875) | (0.117) |
| Post conflict | | | | | 0.0191 | -0.00954 |
| | | | | | (0.0787) | (0.0892) |
| Country FE | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Observations | 629 | 548 | 629 | 548 | 603 | 526 |
| R-squared | 0.084 | 0.205 | 0.509 | 0.538 | 0.576 | 0.589 |

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered by country.
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

**Table A.6: What election characteristics are associated with all concessions (weak or strong)?**

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DV: | All | All | All | All | All | All |
| Margin 5-15% | 0.156*** | 0.152*** | 0.0909* | 0.114* | 0.0912* | 0.122* |
| | (0.0442) | (0.0425) | (0.0434) | (0.0468) | (0.0448) | (0.0484) |
| Margin 15+% | 0.109 | 0.0504 | 0.0227 | 0.0752 | -0.0125 | 0.0483 |
| | (0.0757) | (0.0788) | (0.0899) | (0.104) | (0.105) | (0.120) |
| First election | -0.0767 | 0.0119 | 0.120 | 0.276 | 0.115 | 0.247 |
| | (0.0761) | (0.159) | (0.0829) | (0.182) | (0.0787) | (0.177) |
| Single round | -0.218*** | -0.172*** | -0.130* | -0.0746 | -0.0641 | -0.0195 |
| | (0.0503) | (0.0458) | (0.0650) | (0.0675) | (0.0667) | (0.0691) |
| Previous strong | | 0.318*** | | -0.0933 | | -0.108* |
| | | (0.0497) | | (0.0544) | | (0.0516) |
| Previous weak | | 0.0392 | | -0.218** | | -0.237** |
| | | (0.0744) | | (0.0682) | | (0.0708) |
| Country FE | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Candidate-level controls | No | No | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| Country-level controls | No | No | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| Observations | 629 | 548 | 629 | 548 | 603 | 526 |
| R-squared | 0.102 | 0.200 | 0.490 | 0.526 | 0.522 | 0.549 |

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered by country.
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

**Table A.7: What country characteristics are associated with strong concessions? (Full results)**

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| DV: | Strong concession | Strong concession | Strong concession |
| Democracy | 0.389*** | 0.229** | 0.217* |
| | (0.0467) | (0.0821) | (0.0833) |
| GDP per capita | 0.0132*** | 0.00417 | 0.00124 |
| | (0.00189) | (0.00386) | (0.00386) |
| Population | -0.0118 | -0.0345 | -0.0487 |
| | (0.0180) | (0.111) | (0.107) |
| Cold War | 0.0788 | -0.0621 | -0.0447 |
| | (0.0578) | (0.0861) | (0.0880) |
| Post conflict | 0.0969 | 0.0583 | 0.0288 |
| | (0.0555) | (0.0773) | (0.0776) |
| Loser incumbent | | | 0.265** |
| | | | (0.0896) |
| Loser successor | | | 0.342*** |
| | | | (0.0725) |
| Loser female | | | 0.0158 |
| | | | (0.0549) |
| Loser left | | | -0.0804 |
| | | | (0.0509) |
| Loser right | | | -0.0521 |
| | | | (0.0548) |
| Margin | | | 0.00161 |
| | | | (0.00146) |
| First election | | | 0.00481 |
| | | | (0.0841) |
| Single round | | | 0.00404 |
| | | | (0.0561) |
| Country FE | No | Yes | Yes |
| Observations | 622 | 622 | 603 |
| R-squared | 0.318 | 0.515 | 0.558 |

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered by country.
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

**Table A.8: What country characteristics are associated with all concessions (weak or strong)?**

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| DV: | All concession | All concession | All concession |
| Democracy | 0.365*** | 0.211* | 0.209* |
| | (0.0512) | (0.0834) | (0.0853) |
| GDP per capita | 0.0104*** | 0.00150 | -0.00119 |
| | (0.00147) | (0.00307) | (0.00346) |
| Population (logged) | -0.00132 | -0.00998 | 0.0201 |
| | (0.0172) | (0.109) | (0.116) |
| Cold War | 0.0736 | -0.0492 | -0.0446 |
| | (0.0487) | (0.0588) | (0.0631) |
| Post-war | 0.0914 | 0.0583 | 0.0238 |
| | (0.0535) | (0.0715) | (0.0742) |
| Country FE | No | Yes | Yes |
| Election-level controls | No | No | Yes |
| Country-level controls | No | No | Yes |
| Observations | 622 | 622 | 603 |
| R-squared | 0.259 | 0.489 | 0.523 |

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered by country.
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05