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To cite this article: Antonino Castaldo & Alessandra Pinna (2019): After competitive authoritarianism hybrid regime legacies and the quality of democracy in Croatia, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, DOI: [10.1080/14782804.2019.1651698](https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2019.1651698)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2019.1651698>



Published online: 12 Aug 2019.



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# After competitive authoritarianism hybrid regime legacies and the quality of democracy in Croatia

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## ABSTRACT

The impact of ‘authoritarian legacies’ on successor democracies has been widely researched with reference to every type of non-democratic regime. However, scant attention has been devoted to hybrid regimes legacies, despite the growing relevance acquired by these regimes in the last decades. This paper deals with the legacies of Levitsky and Way’s Competitive Authoritarian model, evaluating their impact on successor democracies through an analysis of the Croatian case. The research shows that the legacies of the Tudman’s regime significantly affected the Quality of Democracy in Croatia. The innovative capacity of the former regime and the continuous nature of the transition explain this relevant impact, only partially moderated by the influence of important international actors (EU).

## KEYWORDS

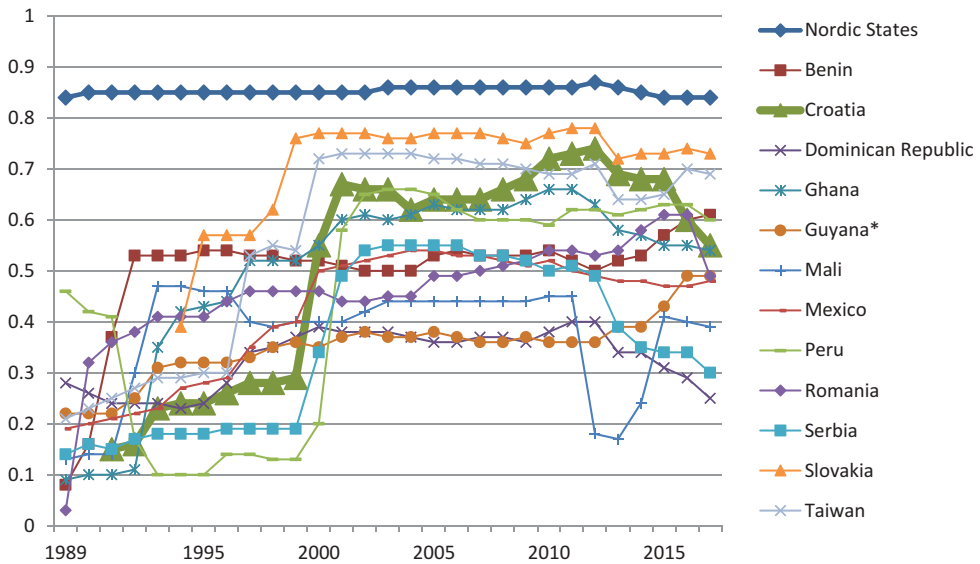
Authoritarian legacies; hybrid regimes; competitive authoritarianism; quality of democracy; Croatia

## Introduction

Since Kirchheimer’s *confining conditions* (1965), the impact of ‘authoritarian legacies’ on successor democracies have been widely researched with reference to every type of non-democratic regime. However, almost no attention has been devoted to hybrid regimes, despite the growing relevance of this phenomenon. Hence, the main goal of this research is to address this gap with the aim of attracting the attention of the literature on a topic that deserves greater consideration. Therefore, we elaborate a general and flexible framework that provides preliminary evidences regarding the relevant impact hybrid regime legacies may have on successor democracies.

Since it appears to be among the most promising types of hybrid regime, we decide to deal with Levitsky and Way (L&W)’s Competitive Authoritarian (CA) model (2010). In their analysis, L&W show how fifteen out of thirty-five CA cases transitioned to democracy by 2008. However, none of them established a high-quality democracy (Figure 1). Is there a role played by CA legacies in these processes? What are their consequences for the quality of successor democracies? Which factors may contribute to explain their role?

Due to the scant attention of the literature, we have found hardly any hypothesis regarding the role of hybrid regime legacies in democratization processes. The only, partial, exception is represented by Levitsky and Way (2010), which, in the last chapter of their book on linkage, leverage and the democratization of post-cold war CA regimes, introduce the distinction between rotten-door and hard-door transitions and identify the organizational power of the incumbent as the main factor explaining the impact of CA legacies on regime outcomes. According to these authors, only in rotten-door transitions (low organizational power) legacies of former CAs have a relevant influence on successor regimes. Here, our goal is twofold. On one hand, we claim that the organizational power of the incumbent is an



**Figure 1.** Post-CA democracies according to the V-DEM Liberal Democracy Index (1989–2017).

Source: V-DEM Dataset available at [www.v-dem.net](http://www.v-dem.net).

Note: Both Freedom House and Polity IV consider Guyana a democratic country since 1993.

insufficient predictor of the role played by CA legacies in democratization processes. On the other, we aim at specifying and adding nuances to this hypothesis claiming that if we overcome L&W's dichotomy regarding regimes outcomes (democracy/non-democracy) adding the Quality of Democracy (QoD) to the equation, even in those cases in which L&W consider CA legacies marginal (hard-door transitions) they actually matter and deserve to be studied because of their impact on the QoD.

To test these claims we examine the Croatian case, which according to L&W's model should be among the least affected by CA legacies. If the latter and their influence over the QoD can be detected in this *crucial case* then these outcomes may be even more probable in countries with less favourable conditions. This research contributes to both established and emerging fields of research. First, the literature on authoritarian regimes and their legacies, with a focus on the CA model. Second, the broad literature on democratizations, with specific regard to the QoD and the factors explaining its level. In this regard, the paper may contribute to the debate on the democratic crisis, which has recently emerged as a key topic in democratization studies (Castaldo 2018a).

## The role of the past in democratization studies: a brief overview of the literature on authoritarian legacies

Kirchheimer already envisaged the role played by autocratic legacies when he argued that the path toward democracy is affected by *confining conditions*, namely authoritarian structures, values and orientations that survived the transition (1965). Since then, the international literature has widely focused on this topic. In 1982, a book edited by Herz drew the first comprehensive conclusions on the legacies of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, while the volume edited by Larsen (1998) is among the most relevant comparative researches on the legacies of Fascism in Europe. Both Linz and Stepan (1996) and Bernhard and Karakoc (2007) underline the role played by the nature of previous regimes in the consolidation of democracy, highlighting that totalitarian legacies impose a greater burden for the development of democratic civil societies than do authoritarian legacies. Karl and Schmitter (1991) stressed the relevance of two authoritarian legacies: the *Guerilla question*, typical of Latin American military regimes, which relates to the reestablishment of civilian control

over armed forces, and the *Nomenklatura question*, more frequent in post-communist democratizations, regarding the renovation of state structures (i.e. public administration).

The literature focused also on historical legacies related to phenomena preceding autocratic regimes (i.e. previous experiences with democracy, socio-economic or cultural features) (Pridham 2000). For example, according to Huntington (1991), past democratic experiences make democratizations more likely: institutions, collective actors and individual leaders may constitute ‘carriers’ of experiences and memories established during the first democratic regime. Recently, Pérez-Liñán and Mainwaring (2013) tested the same argument for Latin American cases.

Important studies have focused on the role of collective memories, the ‘Politics of the Past,’ and, in particular, of transitional justice as the way new democracies deal with their authoritarian past (i.e., former political elites and repressive institutions): the path chosen may affect the legitimation and quality of successor democracies (Costa Pinto and Morlino 2011; Raimundo 2015).

The role played by the past has been widely researched in post-communist democratizations. In 1992, Jowitt predicted that Leninist legacies would be relevant in Eastern European democratizations. According to Pop-Eleches (2007), different features of the communist experience, whether cultural, economic, or political, explain different aspects of democratization in post-communist countries. Other researches focused on more specific aspects. For example, communist legacies have affected protest activity (Bernhard and Karakoc 2007), political party development (Grzymala-Busse 2002), and voting behaviour (Wittenberg 2006).

The main goal of this general, and by no means exhaustive, overview was to show the presence of an important lacuna in the literature on authoritarian legacies, which dealt with every type of non-democratic regime but neglected the new hybrid forms of regime that have become a consolidated reality in the past three decades. Moreover, in the last twenty years many new democracies emerged from hybrid regimes (i.e. the fifteen cases listed by L&W): hence, it is possible to analyse the former looking for legacies of the latter, and to assess their impact on the QoD.

### **Competitive authoritarian legacies and the quality of democracy**

According to Hite and Morlino ‘authoritarian legacies encompass all behavioural patterns, rules, relationships, social and political situations, and also norms, procedures and institutions, either introduced or strongly and patently strengthened by the immediately preceding authoritarian regime’ (2004, 26). We should stress that ‘strongly and patently strengthened’ refers to any factor that the authoritarian regime incorporates in its defining features and/or behaviours, giving new meanings to elements originated before the regime was established. This broad definition is adopted because disentangling the impact of authoritarian and historical legacies at the empirical level is often very complex, and the selection of the Croatian case is helpful in this respect since the Tuđman’s regime represents a departure from the previous communist political system.

Our goal is here to focus on the impact of hybrid regime legacies on successor democracies. The reasons to focus on a specific type of hybrid regime (CA) are manifold. The literature on these kind of regimes is still not settled and there is confusion about the defining features of this concept and its empirical referents: for example, it is not clear if illiberal democracies should be included in this broad category. Moreover, other hybrid regime types are either rare or poorly operationalized. On the contrary, CA is based on a well-grounded conceptual structure and provides a detailed list of over three-dozen indicators, making it easier to identify legacies. The number of cases analysed (thirty-five) and the emergence of new cases in Latin America (Levitsky and Loxton 2013), Africa (Bogaards and Elischer 2016), and the Turkish case (Esen and Gümüşçü 2016; Castaldo 2018b) demonstrate the growing relevance of CAs. There is a list of successful democratizations so that the population of this research is clearly identifiable. Finally, here is present a rare hypothesis to deal with regarding the impact of CA legacies on successor regimes.

To isolate the legacies more related to the CA model, we present now its defining features. Levitsky and Way (2010) evaluate CAs along three dimensions: elections, civil liberties, and the playing field. In

the former, major opposition candidates are rarely excluded, opposition parties can campaign publicly, and there is no massive electoral fraud. However, manipulation of voter lists, falsification of results and intimidation of oppositions are not unusual. CAs formally guarantee and partially respect civil liberties. However, all government critics may be harassed through surveillance and blackmail, 'legal' persecution for defamation or corruption, and occasional arrest or exile. Finally, CAs show an uneven playing field. Incumbents politicize state institutions (i.e. judiciary, security forces) and deploy them against opponents. The government's abuses of state institutions generates a resource disparity so severe as to hinder the opposition's capacity to compete on equal footing. CAs also control the media to limit oppositions' access to voters and weaken their political campaigns (Ibid.).

On the grounds of this description, we can isolate, deductively, the legacies that CAs may transfer to successor democracies. According to L&W, the core of this model is unfair competition, determined by the incumbent's abuse of state powers, which allows the rulers to gain a significant advantage vis-à-vis the oppositions (Ibid.). These kinds of abuses materialize in a specific mode of governance, characterized by the forms of electoral manipulation, violation of civil liberties and strategies intended to skew the playing field adopted by former CAs. To be clear, we do not claim that this mode of governance is exclusive of CA regimes since their hybrid nature makes them share many features with other regime types. However, we do claim that the presence of the features characteristic of this mode of governance in post-CA democracies is directly linked to, and greatly influenced by, previous CAs.

We now turn to the hypothesis regarding CA legacies that L&W introduce at the end of their book published in 2010. In this masterpiece, they present the ultimate version of their general theory, which includes the defining features of CA regimes, the linkage and leverage theory regarding the role played by the international dimension in democratization processes, and the framework explaining why CA regimes emerged in the 1990s democratized in the following decade or became stable or unstable CAs. In their final chapter, L&W focused also on CA legacies, proposing the hypothesis according to which the organizational power of the incumbent is the main factor explaining their strength and impact on regime outcomes. In what follows, we partly challenge partly specify this hypothesis. On one hand, we claim that the factor they select is an insufficient predictor of legacies' strength and direction of influence. Then, we provide an alternative set of factors that is better equipped to explain the degree of influence CA legacies have on successor democracies. On the other hand, we try to specify L&W's hypothesis going beyond their distinction between democratic/non democratic (CA or fully authoritarian) regime outcomes: basically, we add the QoD to the equation, claiming that even in those cases where they should be less relevant according to L&W (hard-door transitions), CA legacies matter and contribute to the establishment of low-quality democracies.

Regarding the determinants of the strength of CA legacies, L&W elaborate the distinction between rotten-door and hard-door transitions. In the former, the low organizational power of the incumbent allows even weak oppositions to trigger regime change. However, democratization is complex due to: (a) extreme state weakness; (b) unfavourable power distribution as a result of missing counterweights to state power: civil society is weak as well as political oppositions because of the likely disintegration of former ruling parties; (c) little elite turnover: political oppositions are colonized by experts in authoritarian politics coming from CAs; (d) small institutional change with much of the former regime structures left intact 'including weak and corrupt electoral and judicial authorities, state monopolies on the electronic media, politicized bureaucracies and security agencies, and repressive libel and/or internal security laws' (Levitsky and Way 2010, 355).

A high organizational power of the incumbent leads to a hard-door transition. Strong regimes may endure even against robust oppositions. If the latter succeed, democratization is expected thanks to: (a) state effectiveness; (b) favourable power distribution: civil societies are robust and political oppositions are strengthened by the survival of former ruling parties; (c) extensive elite turnover: since defections from the former elite are less probable, regime outsiders will be in charge of the new government, disrupting old corruption and patronage networks; (d) robust

institutional change: strong ruling parties, believing to be viable even after the transition, adopt reforms that level the playing field (Ibid.).

In our opinion, there are several possible flaws in L&W's argument. For example, as suggested by a recent study (Loxton and Mainwaring 2018) the survival of former ruling parties constitutes an asset for high-quality democracies only if their change is genuine, otherwise they will represent carriers of potentially negative legacies. Moreover, an extensive elite turnover will be achieved mainly at the executive level, because the survival of former ruling parties will guarantee the continuity of most of CA political elites. Hence, the state's effectiveness, intended as a democratic precondition that is not directly related to the CA regime, may be the only factor highlighted by L&W that plays a role in explaining differences between hard- and rotten-door transition outcomes.

Building on the literature on authoritarian legacies a different set of factors accounting for the strength of CA legacies is adopted:

- durability;
- innovative capacity;
- type of transition;
- influence of the international dimension (Hite and Morlino 2004; Grilli di Cortona 2011).

Durability is related to the span of time of the previous regime. The more an autocracy lasts the more it can affect society, politics and the state, raising the chances to hand down stronger legacies to new democracies. A few years correspond to a brief duration (i.e. Greece), while long-lasting regimes are those that lasted for a generation (15–20 years) or more; those in the middle are classified as regimes of medium duration (Ibid.). Although hybrid regimes are a recent phenomenon, enough time has passed to have a fair variance on this factor.

The innovation capacity relates to the degree of transformation and stabilization of institution, norms, praxes, often symbolized by a new constitution, as well as the capacity of penetration of society and state structures implemented by autocratic regimes. Hence, the more a regime shaped the political reality, cancelled or modified old state structures and praxes or created new ones, and penetrated the socio-economic dimension, the more the chances to pass on stronger legacies (Ibid.). The CA's innovative capacity refers mainly to the mode of governance mentioned above: the more violations of elections, civil liberties and the level playing field a CA implements, the stronger this mode of governance will be.<sup>1</sup>

A continuous and pacific transition led by the former elite has more chances to allow the passing of authoritarian legacies respect to a discontinuous and traumatic transition where old elites and institutions are wiped out (Di Cortona Pietro 2011; Hite and Morlino 2004). Here, CAs show a more likely pattern. Since many democratic institutions and norms already exist, the changes needed to install a democracy will be limited and the transition will likely take place through elections, with a possible cooperation between the ruling elite and the opposition. In turn, these processes will tend to favour continuities with the past.

Finally, the international dimension represents the fourth factor. If external actors actively support democratization, the passing on of strong legacies may be less likely (Di Cortona Pietro 2011). For example, the EU conditionality that was applied on Eastern European countries influenced the way they dealt with previous regime legacies (Pop-Eleches 2007).

These variables are interconnected. First, if the innovative capacity is high, then even a short-lived autocracy generates strong legacies, while if the former is low, a regime will need to last longer to have an impact. Second, a continuous transition enhances the relevance of the regime innovative capacity, while a discontinuous transition reduces it (Hite and Morlino 2004). Finally, if external actors actively support democratization then the other three variables have a weaker impact on the strength of authoritarian legacies.

While these factors are related to the capacity of influence of CA legacies, they do not say much about the mechanisms of transmission through which these legacies are passed on to successor regimes. In this regard, the path dependence literature may be helpful when it tries to explain continuities and discontinuities in political phenomena. When institutions, norms, and praxes have been institutionalized, they are resistant to change and actors tend to adapt and behave accordingly. Hence, actors' choices are constrained by decisions and structures established in the past (Pierson and Skocpol 2002). For example, the lack of a constitutional reform will leave a number of authoritarian institutions fully operational in the new democracy. A different perspective states that past events can push relevant actors to move in exactly the opposite direction, establishing discontinuities with the past<sup>2</sup> (Pierson 2000): in this case, political learning processes represent crucial transmission mechanisms. It is also important to underline that key elites and institutions, like former ruling parties (Loxton and Mainwaring 2018) or functional elites, may act as effective 'carriers' of values, norms, and praxes when they represent direct continuities with the past (Huntington 1991). For example, if judges hired and socialized during CAs keep their position in successor regimes they may represent carriers of undemocratic praxes like discrimination against minorities, political oppositions, journalists, etc. which will impact negatively on the democratic rule of law. Paradoxically, even former oppositions may constitute important carriers of this mode of governance, since they could have been socialized with authoritarian praxes and resort to some of them once in power.

With regard to the second part of our discussion of L&W's hypothesis, which is related to the impact of CA legacies on regime outcomes, these authors basically refer to a binary distinction between democratic/non democratic (CA or fully authoritarian) regimes: due to the passing of strong CA legacies rotten-door transitions will more likely lead to non-democratic outcomes while in hard-door transitions legacies of former CAs will have no impact favouring the establishment of stable democracies. Our aim here is to add nuances to this thesis, claiming that if we disentangle the concept of stable democracy through the adoption of the QoD framework (a regime exhibits democratic features to a greater or lesser extent) we may find out that CA legacies are not irrelevant even in hard-door transitions. Hence, for this purpose we adopt Morlino's definition of QoD (2010), which identifies eight dimensions of this concept: five procedural (rule of law, electoral accountability, inter-institutional accountability, participation, and competition); two referred to content (freedom and equality) and one to result (responsiveness). However, past authoritarian legacies do not have the same influence on all these dimensions: for example, in South European cases only four out of eight QoD dimensions were affected (Morlino 2010). The same is true here. If we consider the specific CA mode of governance, which regards peculiar violations of elections, civil liberties and the playing field, the following can be identified as the empirical sectors that are more probably affected: elections, media, judiciary, public administration, and corruption. Consequently, CA legacies will be more likely in the following QoD dimensions: rule of law, inter-institutional accountability, competition, electoral accountability, and freedom (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Evaluating the impact of competitive authoritarian legacies on the quality of democracy.

CA dimensions	Most affected sectors by CA mode of governance	Most affected QoD dimensions	NIT dimensions
Elections	Elections	Competition Electoral accountability	Electoral process
Civil liberties	Judiciary Public administration Corruption	Inter-institutional accountability Rule of law	National democratic governance Local democratic governance Judicial framework Corruption
The playing field	Media	Freedom	Independent media

To detect the impact of CA legacies on the QoD, the following three-step research strategy is applied. First, the CA regime will be analysed, focusing on its duration and the innovative capacity in the key dimensions of elections, civil liberties and the playing field. The peculiar aspects of the CA mode of governance, which may be transferred to successor democracies, will be emphasized. Then, the continuous/discontinuous nature of the transition will be detected. Finally, the analysis of the post-transition phase will be centred on the aforementioned sectors more connected with the key CA dimensions (Table 1). In each of them, we evaluate continuities linked to the CA mode of governance, the transmission mechanisms that favoured those continuities and their impact on the related QoD dimensions. Because of its relevance (Loxton and Mainwaring 2018), the former ruling party is also analysed. The role of the international dimension in the post-transition phase will be emphasized.

The level of democracy in the sectors where CAs have a greater impact will be measured through the Nation in Transit (NIT) Democracy Index, which runs from 1 (most democratic) to 7 (least democratic) and attempts to capture the quality of democracy evaluating several dimensions (Table 1).

The empirical analysis will focus on the Croatian case. In Figure 1, CA cases that democratized by 2008 are reported.<sup>3</sup> Since the focus here is on the QoD, the more demanding V-DEM Liberal Democracy Index has been used: 0.5 represents the liberal democracy threshold. The Nordic States value constitutes the benchmark for a high-quality democracy. As the figure shows, none of the post-CA cases reached high levels of democratic quality; however, Croatia emerges as one of the best performers. According to L&W, Croatia should be among the least affected by CA legacies since it was characterized by a medium-high organizational power of the incumbent and went through a hard-door transition. Moreover, it was intensely linked to the West and constantly targeted by the EU conditionality. Finally, Croatian CA represents a departure from the previous communist regime, making easier to disentangle CA legacies from communist and historical legacies. In conclusion, all these factors make Croatia an almost perfect example of *crucial case*: if CA legacies and their influence on the QoD can be detected in this case then these outcomes may be even more likely in other less favourable post-CA democracies.

### **Tuđman's competitive authoritarian regime: durability and mode of governance**

Throughout the 1990s, Tuđman and his Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) dominated Croatian politics. War and ethnic conflicts created permissive conditions for the emergence of the CA (Levitsky and Way 2010). According to L&W the organizational power of the HDZ regime was medium-high (Ibid.).

During these years, election unfairness was evident due to the instrumentalization of electoral regulations, which were changed before every competition (Kearns 1998; Kasapović 2008). Moreover, electoral manipulations were not unusual: outdated voter registers, intimidation at polling stations, governmental control over the electoral commission, etc. (Čular 2000).

With regard to civil liberties, the harassment of media, NGOs and political oppositions was not rare. The Croatian government interfered with the work of both editors and journalists (Lani and Cupi 2002). In fact, the Agency for Reconstructing and Development had the goal of reorganizing – even making use of purges – the entire media sector that, in Tuđman's opinion, was still too influenced by the past communist era. Broadcasting licenses were allocated by a packed Committee of Telecommunications. Press printing and distribution were provided by two monopolistic state agencies which granted worse conditions to opposition publications (Nizich, Markić, and Laber 1995). The government hampered the circulation of free information by retaining the ownership of the sole Croatian news agency, *Hina*, and keeping in place libel laws; in 1999 there were six hundred civil-libel suits and more than three hundred criminal-defamation prosecutions (Committee to Protect Journalists 2000). To keep NGOs under control, the Law on Association – approved in 1997 – attributed supervisory and punitive powers to the government, and increased taxation on financial contributions to NGOs (Nations in Transit (NIT)



1998; Pusić 1998). The harassment of political oppositions was carried out through intimidations, secret services infiltrations and violent actions, such as what occurred to the 1997 presidential candidate Gotovac (OSCE 1997).

During the 1990s, the playing field was unbalanced in Tuđman's favour. The state politicization was consistent because of widespread practices of cronyism and nepotism. In the first half of 1990s, mass dismissals of public servants and new appointments were implemented on the basis of ethnic identity and party loyalty (Bejaković 2002; Malenica 2005). The HDZ abused state resources, heavily contributed to make corruption widespread, and used insider privatization to dominate access to private-sector finance. The domination of Tuđman's culture of illegality generated a fertile ground for the spread of corruption (Ramet 2010; Nations in Transit (NIT) 1998). Privatizations contributed the most to the unbalanced access to resources because they were managed through the state-run Privatization Fund and favoured businessmen close to the regime (Ramet 2010; Kearns 1998; Bičanić 1993). Tuđman's goal was to create a nouveau riche stratum of two hundred families who would assume ownership of a large portion of the country's economy (Ramet 2011), thanks to their personal connections with the leader and in exchange of financial and political support for the HDZ. With regard to access to media, national radio and television stations were controlled by the government and biased in its favour. The *Croatian Radio-Television* (HRT) was controlled due to the appointment procedures of its board of directors, which was selected by the parliament (Nations in Transit (NIT) 1998), and many private television stations were run by HDZ allies (Fisher 2006). During electoral campaigns, public media eclipsed opposition parties allotting them only insignificant space.<sup>4</sup> Access to the law was clearly unbalanced. At the beginning of the 1990s, Tuđman dismissed numerous judges of the communist era (1,300), replacing them with inexperienced but loyal personnel. Moreover, the selection of members for the High Judicial Council, which appointed all judges, was heavily politicized: while, formally, the selection procedure involved the Parliament and other institutions, in 1994 the thirteen members were selected by an informal committee set up by Tuđman (Dolenec 2013).

The aforementioned characteristics underline a consistent concentration of power, evident if the role played by para-institutional committees is considered. Tuđman established many such bodies, which were used to bypass parliament, emasculate the executive and concentrate power in his hands and those of his allies (Kasapović 2008). Hence, institutional accountability was absent and political power was informalised and personalized, with important decisions taken in 'informal party coteries' (Kasapović 2008, 61).

In conclusion, the Tuđman regime was medium in term of duration, having lasted for a decade during the 1990s. Moreover, it established new relevant institutions, norms and above all praxes, which coagulated in a peculiar mode of governance able to impose important shortcomings in two out of four indicators related to 'elections' and 'civil liberties' and in all three indicators included in the 'level playing field' dimension (Levitsky and Way 2010, 369); its innovative capacity is then evaluated as medium-high.

## **Democratic transition: between continuity and change**

At the end of the 1990s, the interaction among the extended decline of the regime's legitimacy, the disunity and fragmentation of the HDZ due to the worsening of Tuđman's physical conditions, and the support of the international dimension pushed oppositions to unify establishing the *Šestorka* alliance, which cooperated with the ruling party in order to formulate a new electoral law (Nations in Transit (NIT) 1998). The opposition victory in the free and fair 2000 parliamentary and presidential elections propelled the end of the Croatian CA. Despite opposition involvement, the regime controlled the transition, facilitating continuities in personnel, institutions and praxes. Notwithstanding the *Šestorka* internal fragmentation, and the resistance to change of former CA elites and institutions, which prevented the adoption of a brand new constitution, the 'January

government' reforms established a democracy in Croatia, and even the electoral victory of the former ruling party in 2003 did not overturn this result; in fact, full EU membership was granted to Croatia in 2013.

## Post-transition phase: quality of democracy and competitive authoritarian legacies

### Media

The 2000 elections marked the beginning of significant improvements in media freedom. Thanks to the Law on HRT and the amendments to the Law on Telecommunications passed in 2001, hard-line HRT directors were replaced, marking a positive discontinuity related to the media elite. Moreover, the HRT's third channel was privatized (Freedom of the Press, FoP, 2002; European Commission, EC 2004). Despite that, some forms of political control on the HRT governing body were still present in the legislative framework, and a number of legal, political and economic obstacles still hampered private broadcasters (EC 2002). Although a variety of newspapers, radio and television broadcasters existed, the media were still afflicted by several CA legacies: intolerance and hate speech were still present (Peruško 2007); authorities occasionally resorted to censorship (FoP 2003); journalists continued to be exposed to threats and violence (FoP 2004); and journalists lacked professional standards and training (European Commission (EC) 2002).

According to the *Croatian Journalist Association* and *Reports without Borders*, since the HDZ took office in 2003 the legal framework worsened, political interference increased, and cases of intimidation and physical violence raised (FoP 2005). The 2004 Law on Media, which stipulated the obligatory revelation of sources when public interest was in danger, was ambiguously defined so that abuses heavily affected investigative journalism. According to the law, libel remained a crime as during the 1990s (NIT 2005). Political interference on media was still present at the end of the 2000s insofar as the appointment procedure of the HRT board was, as in the Tuđman regime, not transparent and many small broadcasters were owned by local governments (FoP 2008). Journalists covering Balkan wars, organized crime, corruption and economic scandals were vulnerable to political pressure, censorship and violence (FoP 2009). The 2013 criminal code prescribes substantial fines for 'shaming' and 'insult,' recalling the treatment suffered by journalists during the Tuđman era (NIT 2015). The EU conditionality on this sector was comparatively weak while some positive democracy assistance actions have been implemented by the US (EUR/ACE 2001). Although positive, international support did not produce significant improvements in this sector.

### Judicial system

In 2000, many shortcomings inherited from the CA were present: political influence over the judiciary, inefficient organization of courts, large backlog of cases, and lack of qualified staff. A reorganization of the sector was in the opposition's pre-electoral program. However, once in office the Šestorka faced several difficulties that delayed the adoption of a reform strategy and its operational plan until, respectively, 2002 and 2003 (EC 2004). As Malenica (2005) asserted, the weak Croatian judicial system did not improve because the governmental attitude toward the reform was indecisive and compromised instead of resolute and penetrating. The new government abandoned its purpose of renovating judicial personnel, allowing those appointed during the CA to keep their positions (Ibid.). Moreover, in 2004 a scandal implicating the HDZ Justice Minister unveiled the praxis inherited from the CA to hire court apprentices according to party connections (NIT 2005). Hence, former political and functional elites survived to the transition acted as crucial mechanisms of transmission of praxes adopted during the 1990s, which affected negatively the democratic rule of law and the overall QoD level.

While all problems have been addressed through the adoption of many reforms of the sector, only some of them have been at least partially solved (Castaldo and Pinna 2017). Despite some

advances guaranteed by new appointment procedures and disciplinary proceedings, the judiciary is still subject to political interference and informal and corrupt networks set up in the 1990s are not sufficiently dismantled. The Glavaš trial represents a good example. As soon as he left the HDZ in 2005, he was investigated for the killings of Serbian civilians in Osijek dating back to 1991 and was sentenced to ten years in prison in 2009: the timing suggests that the State Prosecution Office may have been influenced by the government (Dolenec 2013).

The EU devoted great attention to this sector, asking for the adoption and implementation of a reform regulating reorganization of the court system, training of judges and prosecutors, full execution of court rulings and the reduction of backlog of cases. Despite positive compliance with EU demands, significant challenges remain: problems of court decisions enforcement, survival of corruptive praxes, and insufficient judiciary independence from political power (NIT 2016).

### **Public administration**

Even after the transition, Croatian public administration was still cumbersome, politicized, inefficient and vulnerable to corruption (NIT 2005). The lack of professionalism was certainly a legacy of the Tuđman regime because after the 1992–1993 purges, the personnel were appointed according to political and nepotistic criteria (Malenica 2005). Brussels conditioned EU integration to the adoption of new measures on recruitment, promotion and training of personnel. In 2001, the Račan government adopted the Law on Civil Servants and Public Employees, but the measure was too vague with respect to recruitment and promotion criteria (EC 2004). In 2005, the parliament adopted the Law on Civil Service and the Decentralization Program and in 2008–2009, the State Administration Reform Strategy (2008–2011) (EC 2005, 2009). The new provisions represented a step forward in strengthening the sector, but many shortcomings are still present because of a piecemeal implementation of reforms: lack of meritocracy, high politicization, weak decentralization, inadequate anticorruption measures and unsatisfactory employment of national minorities (EC 2007, 2012).

With respect to the military and security forces, most of the problems that emerged since 2003 were related to the intelligence service. In 2003–2004, the Counter Intelligence Agency violated the individual freedom of some journalists, as used to do during the 1990s. Hence, according to the new provisions adopted in 2006 the intelligence activities were put under the control of the parliament and other two *ad hoc* civilian bodies (EC 2006). Despite the improvements, security services continue to violate intermittently individual privacy rights for political purposes, as they have done during Tuđman's regime (NIT 2008, 2015; EC 2009).

### **Corruption**

During the 1990s, corruption helped the HDZ to skew the playing field in its favour. In 2001, the January government established two anticorruption bodies: a financial police unit and an autonomous prosecution service within the state's attorney office (USKOK) (NIT 2001; European Commission (EC) 2002). However, these bodies were not adequately staffed and financed (EC 2003). In March 2002, the parliament adopted the National Program for Fighting Corruption, but its nature was mostly normative. Furthermore, Croatia ratified international agreements and conventions on corruption. Despite the improvements adopted in the following years, as the 2008 Public Procurement Law, the results have been disappointing (Transparency International 2006; EC 2006, 2007, 2008; NIT, 2016).

The HDZ victory in the 2003 elections may have favoured the continuity of corruptive praxes and networks established during the CA.<sup>5</sup> According to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's 2005 Transition Report, Croatian level of corruption in 2005 was higher than in 2002. During the 2000s most of the efforts to fight corruption have targeted, with few exceptions (Ramet 2010; NIT 2010), mid- and low-level actors. The climax was reached in 2011 when former Prime Minister Sanader was sentenced to ten years in prison for accepting a bribe of five million Euro (NIT 2013;

Castaldo and Pinna 2017). A number of investigations of executives of state enterprises and the Customs Administration anticipated this trial: public prosecutors suspected that Sanader favoured them in business deals with the government in exchange for illegal funds for him and the HDZ (Dolenec 2013). Moreover, just five weeks before the 2011 elections, USKOK began investigating HDZ's 'black funds', which were profits accumulated illegally through fixed public tenders with party or government-affiliated companies and then used in party-related activities (NIT 2012). These events underline the existence of a para-institutional network of power relations infused with corruption and crime that penetrated diverse aspects of state and society and constitute evidence that corruptive networks and praxes of the 1990s remained present in the 2000s, representing a striking example of a CA legacy undermining the Croatian QoD.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the recent achievements, including the indictment of Zagreb mayor Bandic in 2014, presently corruption is still widespread. Moreover, it seems that the pace of anticorruption efforts has slowed since Croatia's successful EU accession (NIT 2015): all anti-corruption reforms were stimulated by the need to comply with EU requests. Recent developments confirm this statement: Sanader was released in 2015 after the Constitutional Court and Supreme Court overturned his conviction on procedural grounds (NIT 2016).

### **Former ruling party**

The HDZ's survival after the transition represents a crucial CA legacy both at the elite and institutional level. Most of the CA national and local elites remained in politics, constituting a relevant continuity with the past. For example, Prime Minister Sanader held the position of HDZ MP from 1992 and vice-minister of foreign affairs in 1993–1995 and 1996–2000; Prime Minister Kosor was HDZ MP from 1995, vice-president of the parliament in 1995–2000 and vice-president of the HDZ in 1995–1997 and 2002–2009.

As a former CA institution, after the 2000 elections the HDZ was overcome by many internal transformations and splits (NIT 2002). Initially, the HDZ kept its authoritarian attitude, hindering the Račan government's reformatory efforts through both obstructionism in parliament and the opposition of party members occupying key positions in the judiciary, state media and local agencies. In 2002, HDZ President Sanader reformed the party, supporting a moderate conservative and pro-European orientation (NIT 2003). These changes were crucial in order to keep Croatia above the democratic threshold, since the renewed HDZ ruled the country in 2003–2011, and came back to power in 2016. However, these reforms did not touch many informal praxes that, as has emerged so far, had a negative influence over many sectors of the Croatian democracy. A reformed but not completely changed HDZ represented an effective transmission mechanism of formal and informal norms, praxes, values and institutions established during the 1990s, which survived the transition and had a negative influence on the Croatian QoD.

### **Elections**

Since 2000, elections in Croatia have been evaluated as free and fair. However, some minor shortcomings have been underlined by domestic and international observers. After the 2003 parliamentary elections, OSCE did voice serious concerns about the country's legislative framework for elections and the absence of a permanent electoral administration (OSCE 2003). While the 2005 presidential elections were considered free and fair (NIT 2006; GONG 2005), some shortcomings were noticed and in order to solve them the NGO Citizens Organized to Monitor Elections (GONG) (2005) advised the establishment of a permanent and independent State Electoral Commission (SEC), the creation of a central voter register and the adoption of a new law regulating party funding. The government complied with the first recommendation in 2006 and with the other two issues in 2007 (EC 2006, 2007). Overall, the successive parliamentary (2007, 2011, 2015, 2016) and presidential elections (2010, 2014–2015) complied with democratic standards. However, both

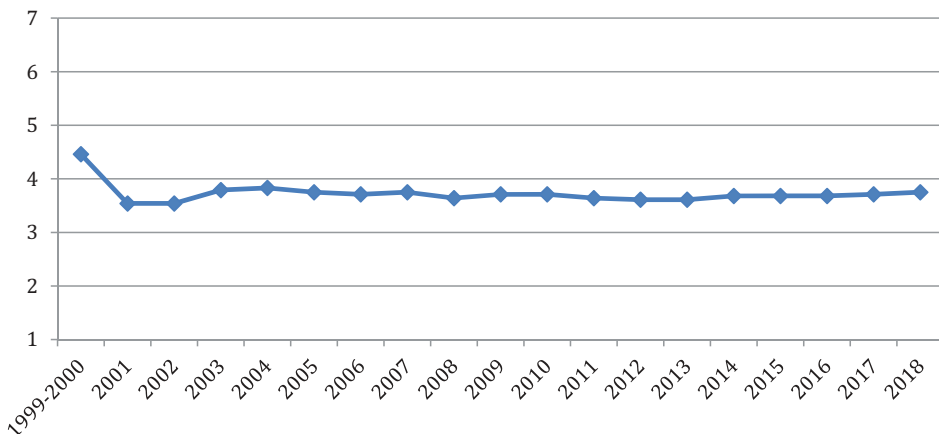
domestic and international observers expressed concerns about irregular party campaign financing, SEC's insufficient sanctioning powers, the unbalance of voters in electoral units, and the updating of voter registration lists (GONG 2007, 2010; OSCE 2008, 2010; NIT 2012, 2016). Despite the aforementioned problems, some of which have been solved during the last years, elections in Croatia allowed for the peaceful alternation in power in 2003, 2011 and 2016. Hence, two key points can be underlined: the presence of CA legacies in this crucial sector have been marginal because of the extensive scrutiny exercised by both national and international actors (GONG, OSCE, EU, etc.); the negative effects of CA legacies found in other sectors was not so severe as to impede or hinder dramatically a free and fair competition.

## Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to approach an increasingly relevant gap in the literature regarding the role hybrid regime (CA) legacies may have in democratization processes. Thanks to the analysis of the Croatian *crucial case* we enriched L&W's hypothesis, demonstrating that if the QoD is considered CA legacies matter and play a relevant role even in hard-door transition cases. In fact, despite the medium-high organizational power of the Croatian CA regime and the hard-door transition, just a 'semi-consolidated democracy' or low-quality democracy was established in Croatia since 2000, and stabilized it in the following years (Figure 2).

The empirical analysis demonstrated that many shortcomings that contributed to lower the QoD level in post-CA Croatia represented CA legacies that could be traced back to some of the distinctive features of the mode of governance consolidated during the Tuđman's regime. This finding emerges also in the disaggregated NIT index presented in Figure 3. The worst components (Independent Media, Corruption and Judicial Framework) are those where CA legacies had a greater impact: with scores constantly above the 4.00 threshold, these sectors go beyond even the Semi-Consolidated Democracy type, falling within the Transitional and Hybrid Regime class.

The new set of factors (durability, innovative capacity, type of transition, and international dimension), and the interactions among them, performed well in explaining the strength of CA legacies and their consequent impact on the Croatian QoD. The just mentioned outcomes were favoured by the prevailing continuous nature of the transition. In fact, the process leading to the electoral transition was completely managed by the ruling party. Moreover, the weakness of the new ruling coalition and the strong opposition of a still unreformed former ruling party prevented a radical departure from the past. Hence, path-dependence mechanisms were able to operate, for



**Figure 2.** NIT Democracy Index (aggregated), Croatia (1999–2018).

Source: Freedom House, *Nation in Transit (NIT) reports 1999–2018*

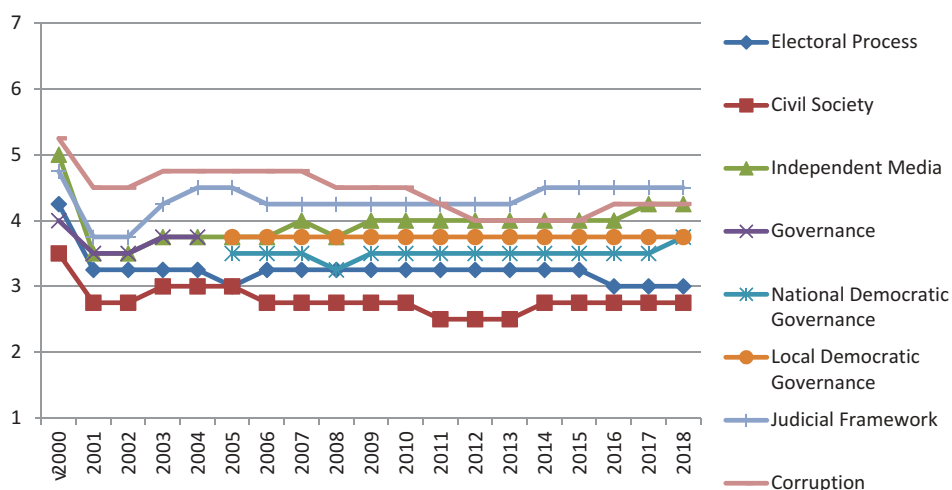


Figure 3. NIT Democracy Index (disaggregated), Croatia (1999–2018).

Source: Freedom House, *Nation in Transit* reports 1999–2018

example, at the normative level since a new constitution was never adopted, leaving in place important CA norms. Moreover, potential carriers of CA formal and informal legacies were abundant after the transition, representing other crucial mechanisms of transmission of CA legacies: beyond the former ruling party, which was again in power in 2003–2011 and after 2016, most of the functional elites hired during the 1990s kept their positions, resisted the implementation of some democratic reforms and perpetuated old praxes.

All of these factors, favouring continuities with the past, allowed for many relevant innovations implemented by the former regime to survive the transition despite the CA regime lasting only ten years. The empirical analysis of post-transition Croatia exposed the peculiar features of a mode of governance inherited from the former CA regime, which consisted of recurring examples of incumbents showing intolerance for criticism coming from independent government bodies, opposition parties, independent media, and NGOs, as well as attempts to get a competitive advantage through the politicization of the state, the use of corruptive practices and the pressures on judiciaries and public media to adopt a prone position vis-à-vis the political power. Surviving multiple changes of government, it is possible to assume that this mode of governance became a consolidated feature of the new political system.

The role played by the international dimension helped counterbalance the combined effect of the innovative capacity of the former CA regime and the prevailing continuous nature of the transition. For instance, the EU was the main driver for change and partial moderation of the former ruling party, which played a crucial role in keeping Croatia above the democratic threshold as it ruled the country in the formative years of the new Croatian democracy. Second, the scrupulous supervision of the electoral process by international actors (EU and OSCE) strategically contributed in keeping elections sufficiently free and fair, as demonstrated by the NIT election component, which is the second best performer in Figure 3. Third, the constant scrutiny and push for reforms in the other sectors during the accession process contributed to moderate the impact of many relevant CA legacies, despite that in some sectors the outcomes were mixed.<sup>7</sup>

A number of final considerations emerges from the analysis of the Croatian case. In a recent essay, Nancy Bermeo (2016) stressed the recent diffusion of softer and gradual forms of democratic backsliding, which led to the rise of more moderate autocracies in which democratic ideas and institutions (i.e. elections, parties, legislatures, etc.) would persist and bring about change if the incentive structure that triggered the democratic backsliding is modified. The Bermeo's argument could be translated as

follows: moderate forms of transition will allow legacies of the previous democratic regime to persist and hinder the consolidation and strengthening of the new autocracy; a new set of conditions could favour a re-democratization process. The Croatian case followed the same logic, although in the opposite direction: a continuous transition from a moderate authoritarian regime favoured the transmission of CA legacies, which burdened the new democratic regime, making it a plausible candidate for democratic backsliding if there are important changes in the conditions that triggered the democratization process. The presence of an actual democratic backsliding in Croatia goes beyond the aims of this paper, but we can conclude that this case support the thesis according to which, in the last decades, there has been an increase in cases of transition, whether democratic or authoritarian, that resulted in moderate and fragile political regimes, characterized by greater fluidity and hybridity respect to the past, and that are incapable of consolidating the specific features of a given regime type, strengthening the relevance hybrid regimes, defective democracies and their legacies will acquire in the upcoming future.

## Notes

1. Levitsky and Way (2010) provide these data in the appendix of their book, and in the description of each case.
2. Discontinuous legacies may strongly affect new democracies, like the denazification process in Germany after World War II (Castaldo 2014; Castaldo and Di Sotto 2011).
3. Three cases that regressed to autocracy are not included: Nicaragua (hard-door transition) and Macedonia and Ukraine (rotten-door transitions). The twelve remaining cases are divided as follow: Croatia, Dominican Republic, Ghana, Guyana, Mexico, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Taiwan are hard-door transitions; Benin, Mali, Peru are rotten-door cases.
4. During the 1997 presidential campaign, the main HRT evening news program, *Dnevnik*, devoted to Tuđman 90% of the presidential elections' coverage (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) 1997).
5. Only in 2010, the government changed the constitution in order to affirm that privatization crimes committed during the Homeland war do not have an expiration date (NIT 2011).
6. '[...] analysts suggest that large national companies, both state-owned and semiprivate [...] are hiding parallel internal networks that are [...] closely connected [...] to the government. [...] the general system of public tenders remains nontransparent, noncompetitive, and awarded mostly through pre-established arrangements and political connections' (NIT 2008).
7. '[...] the EU has had little experience or expertise in using its leverage to bolster the rule of law and the fight against corruption among candidate states since these anchors of competent governance are addressed only indirectly by the existing *acquis communautaire*.' (Vachudova 2014, 123).

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Matthijs Bogaards, Alessandro Cama, Marcelo Camerlo, Luís De Sousa, Erica Harris, Andrés Malamud and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán for their feedback on earlier drafts of this paper. Any remaining mistakes are alone our responsibility.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Funding

This work was supported by the Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia [SFRH/BPD/101442/2014,UID/SIC/50013/2013].

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