

# Making Sense of Democratic Backsliding

## An Internship with the Center on Global Democracy

Mutty Un | Department of Global Development, Cornell University

### About the Center on Global Democracy

*“The Center on Global Democracy tackles the fundamental questions facing democracies, serving as a hub for research and learning to strengthen democratic institutions. Through targeted research and public engagement, we aim to reverse democratic declines and bolster democracy worldwide.”*

As part of their aim, the Center created a dataset called the Democratic Attack and Resistance Events dataset that is driven by seeking a deeper understanding of the patterns of democratic backsliding and the effective actions of resistance. It complements other prominent democracy and regime measurement tools and democracy indices like the Varieties of Democracy, Economist Democracy Index, and Freedom House Score.

Event_ID	Day_Start	Month_Start	Year_Start	Attack_Narrative	Root_Action	Instigator_Name	Instigator_1	Instigator_2	Instigator_3	Target_Name	Target_Space	Target_Action	Attack_Veracity	Attack_Type
A1	21	April	2016	A switch to a "neutral"...	High Court (Supreme or Consti...	High Court (Supreme or Consti...	Democracy	Democracy	Democracy	Democratic Part...	Legislative	6	High	Abuse
A2	6	November	2017	The State Great Khural (...)	Parliament	Parliament	Legal	Legal	Legal	Media/Free pres	Media	6	High	Abuse
A3	27	March	2018	Officials have diverted re...	SME development fund officials	SME development fund officials	Burea...	Minister	Minister	Mongolian Small	Bureauc...	3	High	Abuse
A4	28	March	2019	The president dismissed 48	Mongolian parliament	Mongolian parliament	Legal	Political	Judiciary	Judiciary	Judiciary	2	High	Abuse
A5	28	March	2019	The president dismissed 48	President Khurelsaihan Battuga	President Khurelsaihan Battuga	Execut...	Execut...	Chief Justice of t...	Judiciary	Judiciary	1	High	Abuse
A6	2020	The government introd...	Government	Government	Government	Government	Legal	Media	Free press	Media	11	High	Abuse	
A7	2021	In January police charge	Police	Police	Police	Police	Police	Citizen	Civil Lib...	Civil Lib...	2	Moderate	Abuse	
A8	2021	The Democratic Party (D...	Democrat...	Democrat...	Democrat...	Democrat...	Execut...	Execut...	Elections	Executive	1	High	Abuse	
A9	2021	President Battuga Khali AB	Execut...	Execut...	Battuga Khaltmaa	Battuga Khaltmaa	Execut...	Execut...	Mongolian Peop...	Political	2	High	Abuse	
A10	2021	President of Mongolia B...	Execut...	Execut...	Battuga Khaltmaa	Battuga Khaltmaa	Execut...	Execut...	Mongolian Parla...	Executive	7	High	Abuse	
A11	2021	On presidential inaugura...	Police	Police	National Police Agency	National Police Agency	Police	Police	Civil activists	Civil Lib...	2	High	Abuse	
A12	2021	National Police Agency t...	Police	Police	National Police Agency	National Police Agency	Police	Police	Twitter User	Civil Lib...	2	High	Abuse	
A13	2021	The draft Law on Associ...	Government	Government	Government	Government	Legal	Legal	NGOs	Civil Soc...	1	Moderate	Abuse	
A14	2022	An individual who initiate	Police	Police	Police	Police	Police	Citizen	Civil Lib...	Civil Lib...	2	Moderate	Abuse	
A15	2022	Following a peaceful stu...	Police	Police	Police	Police	Police	Mongolian protes	Civil Lib...	Civil Lib...	4	High	Abuse	
A16	2022	A journalist was detain...	Police	Police	Police	Police	Police	Journalist	Media	Media	7	High	Abuse	
A17	2022	The activist Munkhbayar	The Primary Criminal Court of Ba	The Primary Criminal Court of Ba	The Primary Criminal Court of Ba	The Primary Criminal Court of Ba	Judiciary	Police	Munkhbayar Ch...	Civil Soc...	2	High	Abuse	
A18	2022	Investigation Departmen	General Intelligence Agency	General Intelligence Agency	General Intelligence Agency	General Intelligence Agency	Military	Subpheral Dupes	Civil Soc...	Civil Soc...	2	Moderate	Abuse	
A19	2022	Discrepancies were uncl...	Erdene-Javan Tsgol JSC execu	Erdene-Javan Tsgol JSC execu	Erdene-Javan Tsgol JSC execu	Erdene-Javan Tsgol JSC execu	Burea...	Burea...	Erdene-Javan T...	Bureauc...	3	High	Abuse	
A20	2022	No War movement leade	Political party	Political party	Political party	Political party	Legal	Legal	E. Ochbayr	Civil Soc...	2	High	Abuse	
A21	2023	The State Great Khural (...)	Parliament	Parliament	Parliament	Parliament	Legal	Legal	Citizens	Civil Lib...	2	High	Abuse	
A22	2023	The individual O. Barzra	Prosecutors/Judge	Prosecutors/Judge	Prosecutors/Judge	Prosecutors/Judge	Legal	Legal	O. Barzragh	Civil Lib...	2	Moderate	Abuse	
A23	2023	An audit revealed that to...	Ministry of Education and Scien	Ministry of Education and Scien	Ministry of Education and Scien	Ministry of Education and Scien	Burea...	Burea...	Education Loan	Bureauc...	3	High	Abuse	
A24	2023	The law on Reduction of	Parliament	Parliament	Parliament	Parliament	Legal	Legal	Citizens of the G	Civil Lib...	5	High	Abuse	
A25	2024	The journalist Bayarmaa	Police	Police	Police	Police	Police	Bayarmaa Ayurz	Media	Media	7	High	Abuse	
A26	2024	The journalist Unurtsats	The Criminal Court of First Instan	The Criminal Court of First Instan	The Criminal Court of First Instan	The Criminal Court of First Instan	Legal	Legal	Unurtsats Nar	Media	7	High	Abuse	
A27	2024	Police disrupted a protes	Police	Police	Police	Police	Police	Mongolian protes	Civil Lib...	Civil Lib...	3	High	Abuse	
A28	2024	The State Great Khural (...)	Parliament	Parliament	Parliament	Parliament	Legal	Legal	Citizens	Civil Lib...	3	High	Abuse	
A29	2025	Police raided the newsp...	Police	Police	Police	Police	Police	Noonog news co	Media	Media	3	High	Abuse	
R1	2016													
R2	2019													
R3	2020													
R4	2020													
R5	2021													
R6	2021													
R7	2021													
R8	2023													
R9	2023													
R10	2025													

Snapshot of Democratic Attack and Resistance Events Dataset, Mongolia

### Responsibilities and Output

During my internship at the CGD, I helped construct a detailed dataset tracking democratic backsliding and resistance events across countries such as Mongolia, North Macedonia, and Indonesia. Using a structured codebook, I systematically coded each event by date, actors involved, scope, and magnitude, while noting whether resistance occurred and its effectiveness. This involved carefully reviewing multiple sources such as academic articles, NGO reports, and media coverage, to verify accuracy. I

then entered data consistently into a shared database, ensuring comparability across countries and over time. The dataset complements broader democracy indices by capturing specific processes often overlooked in aggregate measures.

However, I did not undertake this ambitious task alone. I worked alongside an international team of 8 colleagues, 4 based at Cornell and 4 hailing from various Global Hubs from around the world including the University of Edinburgh, National Taiwan University, and University College London. Together, we compiled a dataset that could be used in both quantitative and qualitative research to describe patterns of democratic backsliding and resistance to it. This dataset will be the most comprehensive and fine-grained dataset of its type and will serve as the primary data source for Professor Rachel Reidl and Paul Friesen's upcoming book.

### Reflections and Development



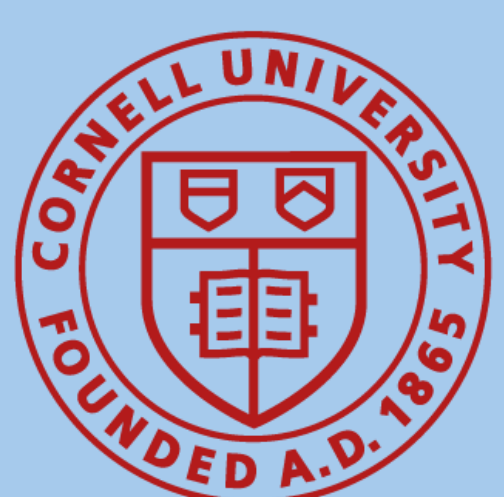
I realized that research is not always glamorous; it often involves slow, meticulous work like coding events and building datasets. This process can feel tedious, but it is foundational. Breakthroughs emerge not from shortcuts, but from patience and precision, enabling pressing questions to be answered with greater clarity.

Though our tasks sometimes felt repetitive, our camaraderie and team spirit helped us stay on track. Morning work sessions were followed by team lunches, creating a space to support each other and connect. This team-oriented flow reminded me that even mundane work becomes meaningful when grounded in teamwork and trust.



The relationships I forged throughout this internship was easily the highlight of my summer. As a "host" student, I wanted to play my part in ensuring that these students felt welcomed, maximized their learning, and was able to explore Ithaca and Cornell. Although it was hard to say goodbye, I know that these friendships are lifelong ones.

Looking ahead, this experience gave me a great insight into what graduate school and a career in research looks like. I understood the value of relationship building and the importance of collaboration. This experience set the expectations of the work environment I want in the future. I feel more prepared to embark on the next chapter of my academic and professional career.



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Public Policy



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