WORKING PAPER

A New Lexicon for Authoritarianism Studies: Interscalar Authoritarianism

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RESISTANCE

Resisting InterScalar Authoritarian Networks and Coalitions

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Abstract

In this paper, we propose an interscalar approach for studying how authoritarianism is promoted, spread, strengthened and embedded. We contend that we are currently experiencing an authoritarian momentum in which even long-established liberal democracies are under threat. Scholars have responded to this by developing a rich stream of work on autocratisation, democratic backsliding, and authoritarian resilience. While we have gained enormous insights into the inner workings of authoritarian and autocratising regimes, we argue that we should complement the dominant perspective that is still regime-bound and country-specific. Building on the emerging but still disconnected scholarship on local, transnational, and practice-based approaches to authoritarianism, we propose that political scientists should update their geographical understanding of regime-transforming phenomena and understand authoritarianism as a fundamentally interscalar phenomenon. That is, authoritarian ideas, practices and technologies are shaped and spread through the interaction and mutual influence of local, national, and transnational actors and processes. The purpose of this paper is to lay out the main ideas of interscalarity, a concept that we borrow from human and urban geography, and show how a "scalar turn" can open a new research agenda for the study of contemporary authoritarianism. Interscalar authoritarianism provides a theoretical framework, a methodological approach, and an analytical angle that, we argue, can expand our understanding of the complexly interwoven drivers of the current authoritarian momentum and provide new insights into how the authoritarian spread can be resisted and democratic resilience conceptualised and realised.

01

Introduction

The current global authoritarian momentum is often visualised in country maps, showing a progressively (albeit not compactly) shrinking of democratic space as authoritarian regimes and autocratising democracies have grown over the past twenty years (Nord et al. 2026). Yet, while these maps and the country-year data they are based on give us a sense of the scope of the issue, its global spread, and its progression within any individual country, they are limited when it comes to explaining why and how authoritarianism is advancing globally. Building on growing trends in authoritarianism and autocratisation scholarship that critique default methodological nationalism in regime studies (Schwedler 2021; Koch 2022; Glasius 2023a),[1] we argue that contemporary authoritarianism is a fundamentally interscalar phenomenon. That is, the drivers and the modalities of its spread cannot be fully understood without paying attention to the co-constitutive interaction and blurred lines between local, national, and transnational actors and processes of transformation. The aim of this paper is to introduce the concept of interscalarity, borrowed from human and urban geography, into the spatial lexicon of political scientists, and to point to the new research agendas that a "scalar turn" would open up for scholars interested in understanding and countering the spread of authoritarianism.

To begin with an illustrative example of our main empirical puzzle, consider Serbia's descent into electoral authoritarianism. Mainstream literature explaining this political process heavily emphasizes the role of President Aleksandar Vučić and the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). Analysts frequently highlight how Vučić's highly personalized leadership, combined with a dominant governing coalition, leverages its parliamentary majority to block debate and erode constitutional checks and balances. Simultaneously, the regime maintains tight control over the media landscape, framing the political opposition and civil society organizations (CSOs) as "traitors," fueling nationalist grievances, and marginalizing dissenting voices. Additionally, such explanations often incorporate the concept of state capture, which is further reinforced by a "stabilitocracy trap", i.e. a dynamic wherein the European Union prioritizes regional stability over democracy when dealing with a pivotal Western Balkan actor like Serbia.

1 For an early critique of methodological nationalism, see Wimmer and Schiller (2002).

However, this conventional framework, while empirically accurate, captures only a fragment of the broader picture. By treating the nation-state or the incumbent as the sole units of analysis, mainstream accounts obscure the complex, inter-scalar networks of actors, interests, and processes that operate both below and beyond the formal boundaries of the state. Autocratization in Serbia is not merely a domestic project. It is sustained by a non-state-bound geography of authoritarian forces and enabling transnational agents. A prime example of this multi-layered entanglement is the rapid expansion of Serbia's digital surveillance infrastructure. Today, Belgrade possesses one of the most extensive surveillance apparatuses in Europe, constructed through fragmented procurement contracts issued across local and national authorities, ranging from the coercive state apparatus to transport authorities, municipal governments, and public hospitals. Rather than relying solely on centralized decree, this infrastructure was assembled piecemeal by leveraging technology from the Chinese corporation Huawei, Israeli spytech companies, and domestic software firms. This diffuse, intrusive capability is systematically deployed to intimidate political opponents, journalists, and civil society.[2] The regime's consolidation of power relies also on a sophisticated convergence of domestic patronage and global enabling forces. This includes Chinese capital injection, Russian-backed information warfare, and strategic "genderwashing" to project a progressive facade to international audiences (Lončar 2024). Crucially, this trajectory is actively facilitated by Western complacency (Soyaltin-Colella 2023), most visibly demonstrated by the European Union's efforts to secure Serbia's vast lithium deposits. Despite widespread domestic environmental protests, the EU has signed a lithium deal that actively encourages a mining project spearheaded by the British-Australian multinational Rio Tinto (Stuehlen and Anderl 2024). Recent investigations further expose how the German government and its automotive industry have directly insulated Vučić to protect these resource supply chains, even funding a long-term economic advisor who has shadowed the President for over a decade.[3] Importantly, the resistance to these autocratizing dynamics mirrors the very network structure of the regime itself. Activists, independent journalists, and civil society organizations do not operate in domestic isolation; they actively organize across scales, forging fluid local, national, and transnational alliances to counter this multi-faceted authoritarian ecosystem (Draško et al. 2020; Tomini et al. 2023).

This complex, multi-layered picture is not specific to Serbia alone. Zoom in on any context where

2 BIRN 2024 on the Serbian government's use of facial recognition technology to monitor opponents; BIRN 2025 on the spread of unregulated surveillance technology in both the public and private sector in Serbia; Amnesty International's report on Serbia as a "Digital Prison"; Wired on Huawei's Safe City project in Belgrade; BIRN 2026 on growing procurement of increasingly intrusive surveillance technology.

3 https://balkaninsight.com/2026/06/25/lithium-before-democracy-a-serbian-strongman-and-his-german-shadow/bi/

authoritarianism is taking hold, democracy is eroded, or illiberal populism is growing and you will find variegated and geographically interwoven authoritarian drivers, enablers, and modes of entrenchment that go "below, above or beyond the state" (Glasius 2018, 523). Our main argument in this paper is that to make sense of these complex geographies of contemporary authoritarianism, and thus to fully understand its drivers and modalities, we need to update our current conceptual toolbox. Building on emerging, but disconnected, developments in authoritarianism scholarship – what we call the local, transnational, and practice turns – we argue that regime scholarship is ripe for a scalar turn. Building on long-stablished notions in human geography, a scalar turn allows regimes scholars to see space (and particularly the way power circulates in and across it) as socially constructed and contested, rather than made of pre-given, isomorphic units of analysis and/or divided into separate and easily distinguishable "levels". We build on this to propose a new concept, interscalar authoritarianism, which we define as the relational property through which contemporary authoritarian power and the localised authoritarian ecosystems it generates are co-constituted and operate in/across space.

A local turn, a transnational turn, and a practice turn have all started – albeit separately – to challenge the default state-bound geography of comparative politics on which current understandings of the authoritarian momentum are typically based. The local turn has put more emphasis on sub-national phenomena and has emphasized the local microfoundations of authoritarian rule (Giraudy et al. 2019; Le Galès 2021; Tomini et al. 2025). The transnational turn has gone in the opposite direction and has significantly expanded our knowledge on how authoritarian rule either unintentionally diffuses or is intentionally promoted across national borders and via transnational networks of authoritarian, illiberal, reactionary, or otherwise anti-democratic influence and exchange (Tansey 2016; Yakouchyk 2019; De Orellana and Michelsen 2019; McEwen and Towns 2025). Lastly, the practice turn has moved away from the dominant (formal-)institutionalist perspective and has expanded our knowledge about concrete authoritarian actions and interactions by both state and non-state actors (Pepinsky 2020; Glasius 2023a).

While these three turns are already pushing at the boundaries of standard regime scholarship's conceptualisations of space, they remain piecemeal and disconnected. In this paper we build on these recent advances in authoritarianism studies and bring them into communication with more established spatial debates in human geography, particularly the concepts of "scale" and interscalarity. We argue that leveraging these more nuanced spatial concepts will allow political scientists to update our standard geographical toolkit (country-cases, levels of analysis, levels of government) and allow us to tackle the new questions posed by the thickly networked nature of the contemporary authoritarian challenge. We offer this new research agenda as a complement to existing comparative politics studies and discuss the methodological implications for scholars who want to embrace an interscalar perspective on contemporary political transformations.

02

Three “turns” in the study of authoritarianism

Concerns about the global decline of democracy are mounting among scholars, policymakers, and citizens alike. Yet despite a growing body of research, we still lack a comprehensive understanding of how contemporary authoritarianism spreads – and how it can be countered. The phenomenon has been much studied—but remains elusive. We know that a wide range of countries have moved away from democracy, authoritarian states are becoming more entrenched, and both new and advanced democracies are eroding (Ambrosio and Tolstrup 2019; Wejnert 2025; Nord et al. 2026). Meanwhile, authoritarian narratives increasingly resonate with democratic citizens, fuelled by shifting perceptions and growing disillusionment with democratic governance (Mauk 2020; Malka et al. 2022; Wuttke et al. 2022). Authoritarianism is advancing not only through institutional change but also via the transnational diffusion of authoritarian ideas (Abrahamsen et al. 2024) and practices (Glasius 2023a). Widespread and globally networked attacks against gender and reproductive rights (Graff and Korolczuk 2022; Roggeband and Krizsan 2024) and academic freedom (Wilson and Kamola 2021), and the development and spread of ever more intrusive digital and analogue technologies that enable surveillance, repression, and disinformation (Michaelsen and Ruijgrok 2024; Roberts and Oosterom 2025) point to the territorially interconnected nature of the phenomenon. Yet, how these dynamics interact to constitute today’s authoritarian threat remains unclear.

We see a tension in current trends in the study of the contemporary authoritarian surge. On the one hand, the evidence of the overall trend of authoritarian entrenchment and democratic unravelling is largely based on country-based assessments. Developments in each individual country are tracked and interpreted, and it is their sum that makes the trend. Moreover, keystone cases like the currently autocratizing US or Hungary where Viktor Orbán’s autocratizing government has recently been defeated, serve as models to identify explanatory patterns, authoritarian “playbooks” and potential sources of democratic resilience. On the other hand, however, a growing if disconnected set of scholarship has been pointing to the growth in size, resources, and impact on authoritarian trends of transnational reactionary networks, and of non-state actors like corporations, tech companies, think tanks, social media influencers, churches, and a wide array of foundations and private interests (Cupać and Ebetürk 2020; Darian-Smith 2022; Sanders and Jenkins 2022; Dall’Agnola

2024; Allen et al. 2024; Palestini and Kaltwasser 2025). This troubles the primary focus on the national level and the related set of actors and institutions (parties, executives, voters), and points instead to multiple ways in which contemporary authoritarian trends escape the neat boundaries of the state. In other words, regime scholars know that there is an authoritarian trend because we have been tracking state-level regime transformations, but we are also increasingly aware that a much wider array of actors and processes are involved in shaping those transformations. Without discounting the insights that can be gleaned through state-based comparisons, there seems to be an emerging need to update our geographical approach to understand both the drivers of the authoritarian surge (why it happens in each specific context and why it happens as a trend) and the modalities of its entrenchment (how it happens).

Much of the current scholarship on contemporary authoritarianism is located within comparative politics. This typically relies on the nation-state and its formal institutions, be it political parties, parliaments, judiciary, and the administration, to explain characteristic features and patterned behavior that lead to authoritarianism's entrenchment and spread (Gandhi 2008; Svolik 2012; Gerschewski 2023; Wolf forthcoming). The state serves as the major theoretical reference point that structures comparative and in-depth case studies. The theoretical focus on the nation-state also translates into the methodological realm. Routinely, it guides case selection procedures in which either regime episodes are singled out and compared over meaningful periods of time (Maerz et al. 2024) or whole national trajectories are compared with each other. Major data collection efforts like the V-Dem project as the currently most prominent example rely on a country-year matrix and organize their data around country-years as the data container. In result, most of the empirical studies in the latest renaissance of comparative authoritarianism rely on country-year patterns, and focus on actors that operate within the boundaries of the country – often parties and electorates, but also institutions and bureaucracies, and some non-state actors like civil societies and business cronies.

While this approach has yielded valuable insights, its theoretical and methodological state-centrism fails to account for the complex geographies of contemporary authoritarianism. This is increasingly captured by three sets of scholarship that, while disconnected and not internally coherent, all point to ways in which the contemporary geography of authoritarianism is more complex than the colour-coded maps we often use. Scholars and practitioners are starting to recognise the thick interrelations that shape contemporary authoritarianism. We are indeed witnessing the beginnings of a "triple turn" (local, transnational, and practice) in authoritarianism studies.

An emergent local turn in regime studies emphasizes the importance of including sub-national

dynamics and local-national relations in our understanding of how political regimes operate, persist, and transform (Giraudy et al. 2019). Scholars in particular have noted: that political regimes, both democratic and authoritarian, are not internally homogenous but constituted, and ultimately shaped, by sub-national regimes, localised governance practices, and territorial inequalities (Gervasoni 2010; Giraudy 2015; Rodríguez-Pose 2018; Ward 2025; see also Bermeo 2022, 158); that significant political transformations (democratization, autocratization) can happen at sub-national level, constituting non-linear, "decoupled" forms of regime trajectories (Pérez Sandoval 2025); and that anti-authoritarian resistance is also localised and often has a clear urban dimension (Tomini et al. 2025). More generally, a local turn in regime scholarship becomes necessary in a context of growing localized protests and contestation, heightened urbanization, growth of territorial inequalities, and territorially decentralized governance (Le Galès 2021). This growing attention to the local brings scholars of authoritarianism a step closer to engaging with urban geography and its debates on the politics of scale. Our paper helps make this further step and clarifies what is to be gained by it.

Alongside this local turn, authoritarianism scholarship is also experiencing a transnational turn. As the authoritarian surge is experienced across the globe, a growing line of literature investigates the transnational diffusion of authoritarianism. Some of this scholarship focuses on state actors (China, Russia, Gulf monarchies or so called "authoritarian middle powers") and their role in promoting authoritarianism (Yakouchyk 2019; Rogers 2022; Desroisiers and Cheeseman 2026). Others emphasize the role of transnational networks and non-state actors in the diffusion of authoritarianism as an ideological project (Abrahamsen et al. 2024). Scholars note how illiberal narratives, disinformation campaigns, and technologies circulate across borders, while authoritarian actors learn from and support each other (Enyedi and Stanley 2025). A parallel scholarship focusing more closely on transnational financial flows shows how transnational corruption networks and transnational infrastructure for shielding wealth play a crucial role in strengthening and stabilizing authoritarian regimes (Cooley and Heathershaw 2019), points to the colonial origins of this transnational infrastructure (Koram 2022), and its links to transnational repression (Furstenberg et al. 2021). The growth of illiberal transnational networks is also coming under increased scrutiny, and gender scholars have set the trend on this. There is growing recognition that anti-gender politics – attacking reproductive rights, LGBTQI+ communities, and "gender ideology" – is not only central to contemporary autocratic politics (Grzebalska and Pető 2018; Roggeband and Krizsan 2024) but is also part of a "global anti-gender movement" (Graff and Korolczuk 2022) made up of extensive networks of think tanks, churches, international organisations, transnational money flows, as well as local and national activists and politicians (Cupać and Ebetürk 2020; Sanders and Jenkins 2023; Corrêa et al. 2024; McEwen and Towns 2025; Narayanaswamy and McEwen 2026). Digital authoritarianism has recently become another

central concern, spurring its own sub-scholarship, interested in surveillance and information manipulation technologies and how they are produced and deployed across regime types (Deibert 2019; Michaelsen and Ruijgrok 2024; Sombatpoonsiri 2024; Di Salvo 2025; Roberts and Oosterom 2025). The increasing power of Big Tech and the cross-border nature of digital repression and AI-driven disinformation make this a global challenge (Kreps and Kriner 2023; Dall'Agnola 2024; Altman 2026) that is decidedly not state bound and involve the central role of transnational non-state actors and business interests (Zuboff 2019; Saglam 2024; Fisher and Hassan 2025; Yilmaz et al. 2025).

Finally, a practice turn is also notable, which sees authoritarianism in the actions of a multiplicity of state and non-state actors rather than a self-contained regime type (Glasius 2018). Authoritarian practices are centered on the struggle over accountability and operate outside the state/non-state and inside/outside binaries (Glasius 2023a). Seen through the lenses of practice, authoritarianism stops being confined to specific regime types and instead can be present across any regime and can be exercised by a multiplicity of actors, including non-state actors, acting at different scales, like for instance multinational corporations (Glasius 2023b). A related scholarship on non-state-bound "authoritarian innovations" adds to this practice turn by pointing to ways in which authoritarianism can transform and adapt to a changing domestic and international political ecosystem (Curato and Fossati 2020; Pepinsky 2020). At the forefront of this turn and prefiguring the need to approach authoritarianism through a scalar lens, Natalie Koch (2022) has argued that "authoritarianism has a spatiality" and thus it "must be investigated by accounting for the many scales at which it is produced, enacted, and imagined".

This line of reasoning has brought some scholars to directly challenge the "inside-outside binary of national territoriality" and instead point to "multi-scalar authoritarian practices" involving a variety of interconnected actors (Gurol et al. 2024). In a similar vein, political economists have emphasize that, beyond ideological aims, non-state-bound logics such as capital accumulation (Gonzalez-Vicente 2024) and the expansion and maintenance of energy and extractive infrastructures (Jenss and Schuetze 2024) are key to democratic erosion and authoritarian diffusion. Others have more directly pointed to authoritarianism's globally interconnected geographies, arguing that authoritarian power is "inherently multiscalar" (Piletić 2024) or "rhizomatic" (Ndjio 2024).

Taken together, these lines of scholarship show that many of the mechanisms underpinning today's authoritarian threat are not state-bound (cf. Tomini 2021; Riedl et al. 2023). This poses a distinct challenge for the comparative regime scholarship, as the explanations about how authoritarianism rises or ebbs might not be found (at least not solely) in between-country differences. The challenge, we propose, resides specifically in the geographical complexity of contemporary authoritarianism,

which requires scholars to make sense of (a) processes that take place in different geographical locations – for instance, autocratisation episodes in multiple countries, or the growth of invasive surveillance technologies across multiple cities, and authoritarian networks that link actors or locales in different geographical locations; (b) processes whose source and manifestations cut across multiple and interwoven scales – for instance, the simultaneous and interacting emergence of localised activation of an anti-abortion group outside a healthcare clinic, national-level parties campaigning on "anti-gender" rhetoric, the growing visibility of transnational anti-gender networks, and the proliferation of anti-gender and manosphere influencers across social media; and (c) how these variously located and scaled processes, happening at the same time, interact to shape how contemporary authoritarianism works and spreads.

03

The scalar turn

The three turns summarised above demonstrate that there is a widespread and growing acknowledgment of these challenges. Yet, while the geographical complexity of contemporary authoritarianism is becoming better recognised, much research remains siloed, treating local, national, and transnational dynamics as distinct levels of analysis. We argue, however, that these levels are fundamentally interconnected. Without a proper understanding of how this interconnection works, we lack a clear sense of the transmission belts through which contemporary authoritarianism advances; of the mechanisms through which authoritarian ideas, institutions, technologies, and policies gain traction in disparate contexts; of the local, national, and transnational actors that shape them; and of the reasons why they are appealing to growing numbers of citizens even in long-established democracies.

The three "turns" discussed above show that the default state-bound geography of regime scholarship is no more sufficient. However, these new emerging approaches to the study of contemporary authoritarianism have not yet coalesced into a conceptual framework capable of capturing the phenomenon's spatial complexity. We suggest that to achieve this we need a scalar turn.

Human geography had its own scalar turn in the 1980s (Brenner 2019), when – in the context of globalization and the thickening of interactions across, below, and above the usual units of analysis – scholars started noting and debating how processes such as uneven economic development and urbanisation were shaped by (and in turn reshaped) the intersection of local, national, and transnational forces with significant repercussions for the spatial organization of statehood and power (Smith 1992; Sassen 2008a, 2008b; Smith 2010; Brenner 2019). This line of inquiry built on a longer tradition, since Lefebvre's ([1974] 2013) groundbreaking work started treating space not as a fixed category that exists "out there" but as something that is produced through political, economic, and social processes. While this basic intuition gave rise to multiple conceptions of scale and debates on the most appropriate ways of conceiving of and studying it (Brenner 2001; Jones et al. 2017), there has been an overall convergence among human geographers on the understanding that "scales and the units making them up are not fixed, but are an emergent property of complex dynamic natural and social systems" (Sheppard and McMaster 2004, 263). In other words, space – where power and resources are accrued and deployed, who gets to do

what where – is not a pre-political, a-historical feature but is part of (and crucial to) politics.

While its definition is contested in human geography (Sheppard and McMaster 2004; Jones et al 2017), scale is often distinguished from other spatial categories such as place, territory, and network, by being conceived as a vertical ordering of social, economic, and political practices (Brenner 2004, 9). If scale is indeed about "verticality" why not use the much more familiar concept of "levels" instead? After all this is a much more common concept in political science, as political scientists routinely speak methodologically of “levels of analysis” as much as substantially of “multi-level governance”, say in the European Union. We see three main advantages to using scale and consequently a scalar approach over a language of levels and multi-level analysis: one epistemological (to do with how we approach the study of authoritarianism), one ontological (to do with how we understand the nature of authoritarianism), and one analytical (to do with the kinds of questions we ask about contemporary authoritarianism).

The first advantage of embracing a scalar turn in the study of authoritarianism is epistemological. Political scientists often take geographical levels as a fixed and predetermined analytical category, they start with a list of clearly identifiable "bounded spaces of differing size" that are hierarchically nested in each other (Leitner 2004, 238) like “Russian dolls” (Brenner 2004, 10), often corresponding to the administrative hierarchy within nation-states. Studies can then be located within this predefined and analytically bounded local, regional, national, or international level. Even “multi level governance” approaches that focus on the interaction between these levels tend to take them as largely pre-given. The constructivist scalar turn in human geography instead takes issue with assumptions of fixity and draws attention to the dynamic processes through which scales and relations among scales are constructed and reconstructed over time as a result of socio-political processes. They see scale as socially produced and contested, “both the realm and outcome of social relations and struggles for control over social, political, economic, and geographic space” (Leitner 2004, 238; see also Swyngedouw 2004b; Brenner 2001, 604).

This processual and constructivist understanding of scale that highlights their inherent fluidity and malleability have profound implications. First it suggests that the array of salient scales in any given empirical context is not pregiven. New scales may be created such as the supranational scale of the European Union or the less clearly bordered scale of tech companies’ political and policy influence, just as others may disappear, all but in name, over time. More importantly, salience of scales with respect to each other as well as hierarchies among them in shaping social and political processes may also shift over time and are subject to ongoing power struggles and contestation (Sheppard and Master 2004, 261).

Therefore, deciding what scale(s) are relevant to understand a certain phenomenon – where the phenomenon of interest is "operational" – is not an obvious exercise (Sheppard and McMaster 2004).[4] Neil Smith, one of the first and foremost theorists of scale, argues that "scale may be a choice, therefore, but different methodological choices of scale can generate radically different assertions about reality" (Smith 2004, 195). Similarly, Swyngedow (2004, 131–32) argued that "Starting analysis from a given geographical scale seems to me, therefore, to be deeply antagonistic to apprehending the world in a dynamic, process-based manner." Thinking of social and political phenomena through the lens of scale, therefore, is not simply a synonym of choosing a different "unit of analysis" or "level of analysis". Rather, it requires the scholar to remain open to the possibility that the scale at which a phenomenon is most easily observable is not necessarily the (only) scale at which it is produced and is "operational" (cf. Sassen 1991, 2019). In other words, the scale at which a phenomenon takes place cannot be assumed but must be studied: urbanisation is visible at the sub-national level (in cities) but is shaped by national policies and global capitalist transformations, and in turn shapes them for instance by requiring increasing amounts of resources (construction materials, energy, food) that are extracted elsewhere and reshape social, political, and environmental conditions in places that are very far from the cities – is this a local, national, or global phenomenon? Where (at what scale) should it be studied? Analogous questions, we argue, must be asked of authoritarianism.

While some of our reference scholarship uses "multiscalar" interchangeably with "interscalar" (Brenner 2019), we prefer interscalarity to signal the scalar turn's focus on the malleability and relationality of scales. A "multiscalar" approach that studies each of the scales on its own (and thus equates them to "levels") can be useful to highlight how the local and the transnational are also important in a field of study that has tended to be methodologically nationalist. However, it does not get to the core of the matter: the ecosystems that allow authoritarianism to thrive and spread involve actors located in and different scales forming both locally contextual and geographically dispersed and multi-layered coalitions, making the line between the local, the national, and the transnational blurred and contested. To capture this, we need an interscalar approach. The metaphor of a "compound lens" makes this distinction clear. While a multiscalar (or, more correctly, multi-level) approach would use each lens individually and separately (the subnational, national, and transnational lens) to yield insights into the phenomenon studied, an interscalar approach is one in which we combine and cement the three lenses together. Telescopes

4 Even in the more positivist side of geographic enquiry, scholars noted the problem of the "modifiable areal unit problem" whereby studies of the same question taking different scalar resolutions "can result in remarkably different empirical findings" (Sheppard and McMaster 2004, 6–7). Sheppard and McMaster refer to the ecological fallacy as an expression of this quandary in statistical sciences.

and microscopes rely on such compound lenses – we deploy our interscalar lens similarly to gain a new focal length and perspective on contemporary authoritarianism.

The problem of the "operational scale" of a phenomenon becomes particularly crucial as the phenomena studied by social scientists increasingly escape the boundaries of "standard units of analysis" (Ong and Collier 2005, 3) and "Not even local politics is necessarily local" (Le Galès 2021, 345). Other sub-disciplines have started to rethink their scalar choices – with public policy scholars, e.g., calling for "extending the limits of our geographical imagination" (Ball 2016, 549; see also Peck and Theodore 2015), and political economists also rethinking the boundaries and scales of their discipline to account for "complex interdependencies" (Hsueh 2025). Political scientists are in this respect behind the curve (Hacker and Pierson 2014; Le Galès 2021). Our interscalar lens offers a much-needed angle to ask new questions about contemporary drivers of authoritarianism that are at the same time tr contextually localised and transnationally, inter-contextually interdependent. In this sense, it offers a second advantage, which is ontological, in that it expands and nuances our understanding of the very nature of the authoritarian phenomenon we wish to study.

Indeed, a scalar turn shifts our analytical emphasis from authoritarianism as a state-bound phenomenon to the "intrinsic relationality" of geographical scales (Brenner 2004,8) and how this relationality is core to capturing the very nature of contemporary authoritarianism. Unlike the multi-level approach that emphasizes actions and processes occurring at separate levels, albeit in combination or interaction with each other, scalar approaches start with the assumption of interdependencies and interconnections and seek to both unpack and reconstruct the "upward, downward, and transversal links" among geographical scales (Brenner 2004, 10). In that sense, it is a holistic approach that suggests that phenomena are fundamentally constituted through their geographical interwovenness. Differently from units of analysis, which can be studied in their discreteness and/or comparability with other similarly scaled units, the chosen scale is not assumed to be the discrete container of the phenomenon of interest. Instead, the scale at which a phenomenon (or a specific manifestation of it) is observed is assumed to be a constituent part of the whole – and it is studied as such, as a way to see interconnections.

This relational perspective led scholars of scale to question the rigid conceptions of scalar hierarchies, whereby the smaller scales (local, sub-national) are nested within ever larger territorial scales and hierarchically subordinate to the next (higher) level (Jones et al. 2017). In other words, not only epistemologically but also ontologically, the operational scale of a given phenomenon does not necessarily correspond to a pre-given "level of government". For example, the emergence of global mega-cities and their expansion created global-city regions as a new

scalar reality (Scott 2001) yet such a scale is rarely enshrined as a distinct formal-administrative level of governance. On the contrary, often there emerges jurisdictional conflicts or coordination problems among different levels of administration to regulate and shape accumulation and distribution at that scale. Focusing on these scalar conflicts allowed geographers to rethink the nature of urbanization and its attendant processes of political-economic accumulation, distribution, dispossession, extraction, and mobility.

Although there is an ongoing debate over whether this relational perspective ultimately implies the need for adopting an entirely horizontalist ontology (Marston 2004; see also Jones et al. 2017), even the more structuralist political economic vein in scalar approaches takes a much more complex and fluid conception that sees hierarchies as dynamic and politically contested outcomes of (re)hiearchization processes in comparison to a more traditional concept of stable nestedness prevalent in political science (MacKinnon 2011). For example, illustrative of a relational yet structuralist perspective, Brenner argued in his study of state restructuring under neoliberal globalization that "emergent scalar architecture of globalizing, neoliberalizing capitalism is more complex, tangled, eccentric, and volatile than the nationalized interscalar arrangements of the postwar, Fordist-Keynesian period. There is no longer a single, privileged scale of political-economic organization, and emergent scalar configurations do not overlap with one another in neatly isomorphic, congruent patterns" (Brenner 2004, 12; see also Jessop 2002, 179; Brenner 2019).

While this debate is far from resolved, taken in its entirety it points to the fundamentally relational nature of interscalar relations (Smith 1992; Swyngedouw 1997; Sheppard and McMaster 2004; Jessop 2009; MacKinnon 2011; Sassen 2013; Brenner 2019). The contribution of an interscalar lens, as discussed in more depth in the next section, is not to resolve once and for all the question of how scales of authoritarianism are related, but to allow us to see how these relations evolve to shape the contemporary authoritarian challenge. It is not sufficient to consider local, national and transnational challenges to democracy separately – it is their interaction that shapes the nature of contemporary processes of authoritarian surge and democratic resistance.

Finally, a third advantage of this approach is analytical, as it allows political scientists to ask a new set of questions about authoritarianism, to do with the socio-political production of scale as a key substantive axis of politics. Scale is not a neutral container in which politics takes place, instead political conflicts and struggles among state and non-state actors partially take place through and over the scales at which power and resources are accrued. Scholars that see these “scalar configurations” as the “outcome of sociospatial processes that regulate and organize social power relation” (Swyngedow 2004, 132) have therefore focused on how scale – understood as

sociospatial arrangements of power – is rearticulated and transformed (Swyngedow 2004, 141). Political conflicts (about who gets what, when, and how) are often disputes over scale, that is, over where (at what scale) decisions are made and resources accrued. The question is, therefore, how these disputes occur and when they successfully rearticulate scale. Seen this way, a scalar turn in authoritarianism studies is also an avenue for asking new questions on how the "politics of scale" sustains or undermines political authoritarian projects.

Part of the geography scholarship on the "politics of scale", building on Marxist theory, has been particularly interested in modes of capitalist production and how their transformations lead to the rescaling of accumulation and regulation regimes as "spatial fixes" to periodic capitalist crises (Harvey 2001; Smith 2010; Brenner 2019).[5] Yet, within these structural transformations, different types of actors (corporations, governments, unions, activists) have been found to enact different "scalar strategies" to extract advantages, protect themselves, or otherwise further their agendas. For instance, social movements may engage in "scale jumping" to push a local issue into the international arena (Smith 1992; Brenner 2019), or the "scale bending" (Smith 2004; Jones et al 2016) that takes place when actors at a particular scale appropriate political functions traditionally associated with other scales, such as the recent attempts at transnational city diplomacy by municipalities. Both elite and grassroots actors engage in "scaling-up or down" decision-making and regulatory authority.[6] For instance, when their political rivals capture local office, national incumbents may scale-up fiscal and regulatory powers, like Erdoğan did after the 2019 local elections in Turkey (Köse and Penpecioğlu 2026). Both social movements (Riofrancos 2017) and private capitalist interests (Swyngedouw 2004a) may also push for down- or up-scaling of decision-making, regulation, and enforcement authority to shape distributive outcomes in their favour.

Scalar rearticulation and scalar strategies can be a useful – and so far largely untapped – analytical way to look at contemporary authoritarianism, too, which is shaped – for instance – by the uneasy alliance between domestic nationalisms and a global authoritarian project (Abrahamsen et al. 2024), but also, depending on the constellation of power relations in any given context and issue, by strategies of "scaling up" or "scaling down" authority and resources to bolster authoritarian coalitions. An interscalar approach can open the way to new questions on these and other scalar strategies that shape authoritarianism's spread and contestation – including identifying ways in which pockets of localised resistance can be rescaled to hit at key nodes of the interscalar coalitions that sustain national and global authoritarianism.

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5 For a critique of this scholarship as overly focused on capitalism see Blakey (2021).

6 For a survey of the scholarship on scalar strategies and practices, see MacKinnon (2011).

04

What is Interscalar Authoritarianism, and what it is not?

While the concept of "scale" is beginning to surface in regime studies scholarship (Holloway and Manwaring 2023),[7] it does so only occasionally and without sufficient engagement with what taking the politics of scale seriously would mean for the concepts, questions, and methods that we apply to the study of political regimes and authoritarianism in particular. Moreover, local, transnational, and practice-oriented approaches each illuminate only a part of the contemporary authoritarian phenomenon; taken separately, however, they cannot explain the overall picture and how these parts fit together, how they mutually reinforce one another, or how they jointly produce effects that no single level of analysis could generate alone. To remedy this, we propose the concept of interscalar authoritarianism (IA).

We define interscalar authoritarianism (IA) as the relational property through which contemporary authoritarian power is constituted and operates in/across space. Its constitutive elements, i.e. ideas, institutions, practices, technologies, and material resources, do not reside at any single and fixed territorial scale but are assembled through the interaction and mutual co-constitution of actors and processes that cross, connect, and actively reshape the scalar organisation of political life. We use terms such as local, national, and transnational not as fixed containers but as provisional empirical reference points that are themselves objects of authoritarian politics. In other words, scales are not "pre-given" arenas within which authoritarianism operates, but are themselves the outcomes of political struggle that authoritarian actors seek to exploit and reorganise. IA is not a regime type, nor a bundle of practices, or a normative ideal-type. It is a property of how authoritarian power is constituted and operates that is at the same time spatial, relational, and dynamic. Several elements of this definition should be unpacked.

First, the object of our definition of IA is power relations, not states, regimes, institutions, practices, or ideas. This is a key specification, since much of the literature on comparative authoritarianism takes the nation-state and its formal/informal institutions as the default unit of analysis. Building

7 These instances are still few, and in some cases use "scale" in a way akin to "level" (Kneuer and Datts 2020).

on the practice turn (Glasius 2018), IA shifts the object of analysis from the state as self-contained regime type to the relations through which authoritarian power is assembled, sustained, but also contested. This means that IA involves actors and "nodes" that are also located in contexts classified as democracies, it includes non-state actors, and it can operate partly or entirely outside the formal institutions of any given nation-state and of recognised levels of governance.

We draw from political and human geography (Brenner 2001; Blakey 2021) to define the space in which these power relations can be observed (their "operational scale") as fundamentally interscalar, that is, shaped by the interactions between actors and processes that operate at and across the local, the national, and the transnational. The novelty of our concept lies in where IA sits in the broader landscape of concepts used to study authoritarianism (see Table 1). Answering this question requires both placing IA in relation to existing concepts and specifying what IA is not. We can organize these rivalling concepts from the most concrete to the most general. At the most concrete level, we have authoritarian practices, defined as specific actions through which accountability relationships are undermined. Glasius (2018, 2023) introduced this concept to define actions that negate or subvert accountability. Practices can operate across regime types, meaning that even in formal democratic regimes authoritarian practices can be observed. Still, IA is not equivalent to authoritarian practices: IA is a property of the relational configuration within which those practices are embedded. It allows to understand a locally deployed practice, for example the use of facial recognition technology to monitor opposition, as a "node" in an interscalar authoritarian network that involves private technology suppliers, national security services, local enforcement agencies, and foreign states providing support. IA captures the geographical dimension of the phenomenon in a way that a focus on practices alone cannot.

One step up sit authoritarian regimes, which is the standard unit of analysis in comparative regime studies and represents the formal/informal macro-level configurations of power that define the political system of a given country at a given time. IA is not a "new" regime type since it does not have the objective of classifying political systems or create new typologies of authoritarian regimes. Regime typologies remain useful for characterising the overall institutional configuration of national political systems. IA complements and complicates such classifications, addressing a different question: not what kind of regime a given country has, but how authoritarian power in a specific political regime is co-constituted and interrelated with transformations in different locales (for instance autocratisation taking place elsewhere) and at different scales (for instance transnational reactionary networks or corporate interests). In this way, IA does not substitute itself to comparative regime studies but can contribute to our understanding of how political regimes are sustained and transformed, drawing attention to an additional set of regime-defining actors and processes operating and interacting below, above, and beyond the state.

Table 1

Concept	Analytical object	Unit of analysis	Level of analysis	Key question	Limitation
Authoritarian practices	Specific actions undermining accountability	Actor-level actions	Local or national	What do authoritarian actors do?	Lack of structural context for practices
Authoritarian regime	Specific actions undermining accountability	Nation-state	National	What type of regime is this country?	State-bound: ignores sub- and transnational logics
Authoritarian diffusion	Cross-national spread of authoritarian norms and values	Country dyads and networks	National: between states and/or between actors	How do authoritarian norms and values spread?	Assumes national units as pre-constituted containers
Interscalar authoritarianism	Relational property of authoritarian power	Geographical configurations of network of actors & processes	Multiple, interconnected, and determined by the empirical flow of power rather than pre-established geographical boundaries	How is authoritarian power assembled and spread?	Requires complex multi-method and multi-scale research designs

Beyond regimes, a further set of concepts has emerged to capture the cross-national spread of authoritarian norms and values: authoritarian diffusion, learning, gravity, and related ideas (Tansey 2016; Weyland 2017). IA is not equivalent to authoritarian diffusion and cognate terms. Diffusion scholarship analyses how authoritarian norms, ideas and values, or institutions spread from one national unit to another. IA makes a different claim: that authoritarian power is not firstly constituted at the national level and then diffused outward to another country, but is also from the very beginning assembled through interscalar relations. Cross-country diffusion is only one mechanism through which IA operates, but it does not exhaust all of them.

Consider the example of the second Trump administration, characterised by authoritarian values that are fueled by and contribute to an international network of right-leaning political leaders, implementing authoritarian practices through agencies like ICE, with the support of technology firms (such as Palantir) that provide the digital infrastructure for those practices and actively bid to provide them to other governments, and figures like Elon Musk who command both economic power and media platforms (X, former Twitter), where reactionary influencers and bot farms – some based in foreign authoritarian countries – spread disinformation. No single concept from the existing toolkit (not "authoritarian regime", not "authoritarian practice", not "diffusion") adequately captures the relational configuration at work here. IA allows us to see how local enforcement practices, national executive power, and private and transnational economic and technological resources are assembled into a coherent yet changeable and contextually embedded, mutually reinforcing authoritarian formation.

Within this semantic field, IA operates therefore on a different analytical axis altogether. Rather than describing the actions of specific actors, the institutional configuration of a national system, or the cross-national propagation of authoritarian models and norms, IA describes the relational properties through which authoritarian power is assembled and spread across scales. In this perspective, IA is less like a new point on an existing ladder and more like a different epistemological approach to understand authoritarianism: it does not replace the existing concepts but reframes them by making their interscalar structure visible. Therefore, IA allows to connect the other concepts without collapsing into any of them: authoritarian practices gets their full meaning only when they are understood in relation to the scalar dynamics within which they are embedded (as per the example before, a local surveillance practice which is also a node in a transnational technology supply chain); how authoritarian regimes emerge and survive can be fully explained only if their interscalar structure is made explicit (e.g. the long-term survival of Viktor Orbán's illiberal system in Hungary depended on transnational ideological networks while also fuelling and founding them, as well as on EU financial flows, and the scalar politics of EU-member state relations, industrial relations, and EU party politics); authoritarian diffusion

comes into better focus not simply as a process that happens between self-contained nation-state units, but one that is explained by the interscalar networks that already connect them. In other words, IA does not replace but rather integrates and reframes existing concepts and allows us to "connect the dots" between levels of analysis that existing frameworks treat as separate.

Interscalarity is at the same an alternative lens to look at regime transformations and a reflection of contemporary changes in authoritarian politics. As an alternative ontological, epistemological, and analytical lens, interscalarity focuses our attention on the spatial interactions that constitute (and trouble) the bounded units that are usually the starting point of political science (and especially comparative regime studies) scholarship. As such it is deployable across time and can help us rethink the history of regime transformations to include geographical interactions (e.g. to do with capital, ecology, empire, culture…) that exceed the territorial boundaries of the nation-state.[8] Interscalarity, however, also refers to the specific character of contemporary authoritarianism in the 21st century, whereby technological, communications, capitalist, and environmental transformations are thickening cross-border and inter-scale interactions, in ways that make interscalarity not only a fruitful analytical lens but also an increasingly central empirically constitutive feature of contemporary authoritarian trends.

8 Timothy Mitchell's (2023) rewriting of Western democracies' history as geographically intermeshed with and historically dependent on an undemocratic Middle East is perhaps an example of this possibility. The growing field of transnational history studies (including on historical fascism) also point to this possibility (Alcalde 2020).

05

How to study Interscalar Authoritarianism

If authoritarian power today is interscalar it cannot be understood at a specific level of analysis (most often, the country-level) but through geographies of power that are at the same time contextually embedded and geographically diffused. If this is the case, how can we get a methodological handle on it? Since we define IA as a relational concept, how do we recognise it empirically? We propose three objects of study that a research agenda on IA can focus on: actors, channels, and strategies. While different methodologies can be employed, we also propose site-based (as opposed to case-based) research as a particularly suitable methodological approach to studying IA.

The first object of study that the scholar interested in IA must focus on is actors within interscalar relations. Actors that shape interscalar authoritarianism formations are extremely diverse, and include both actors that themselves operate inter-scalarly (e.g. big tech companies) and actors whose realm of action is more territorially bound, for instance a small-time local building contractor that is part of an authoritarian patronage system operates only very locally, but is nonetheless involved in the interscalar formations of accumulation, exploitation, and dispossession that produce and sustain authoritarian politics and plays an essential role in their local transmission and embedding. These different actors constitute the “dots” or the “nodes” of interscalar authoritarianism. We can identify four main categories of actors that an interscalar authoritarianism research agenda could account for: state actors such as executives, bureaucracies, security services, and local governments that are central but no longer the only or the primary nodes of authoritarian power. What is distinctive in the interscalar perspective is the attention to how state actors at different levels (local, national, federal/supranational) relate to one another and to non-state actors in ways that are not reducible to a simple hierarchy. Transnational political actors, such as authoritarian or populist political parties acting as external sponsors or supporters of authoritarian projects, international organisations that provide legitimacy or resources, diasporas, transnational party organisations, transnational reactionary networks such as NatCon or CPAC, and political foundations are a second set of actors that can all play a key role as both connectors across scales and as sources of ideological justifications and material resources. Economic actors, such as multinational corporations (e.g. fossil fuel and tech companies), financial institutions, transnational criminal networks, and domestic oligarchs with cross-border interests, often offer the material resources of interscalar authoritarian structures; but also economic actors with more

localised interests (as in the example above). The logic of action of this set of actors is likely to differ from that of state and political actors, in that their goals have to do with securing and maximising profit often by shaping policy, regulations, and procurement practices, rather than winning elections or otherwise gaining direct political power (Hacker and Pierson 2015). Civil society and media actors, such as think tanks, churches, online influencers, social movements, journalists, and media companies can also be key nodes in interscalar power configurations. Their role is particularly important in the ideational dimension: the production and diffusion of authoritarian frames, narratives, and norms, as well as its contestation.

The second object of study are the interscalar channels through which these actors interact. Key resources, that can be ideological, economic, technological, or organisational, but also informal, personal, familial and/or clan-based, are diffused and exchanged across scales to sustain authoritarian power. They constitute the "connections" that link together the "nodes" of interscalar authoritarianism. This makes IA empirically traceable by looking at the flows that connect authoritarian actors: for example, financial transfers between transnational networks and national parties or local reactionary political entrepreneurs; export of surveillance technologies from one country or company to another; the cross-border circulation of anti-gender narratives from religious organisations to political actors or local mobilisation campaigns. Tracing these flows, their origin and destination is the second necessary empirical task in research within the IA framework.

Finally, the third object of study are the scalar strategies and practices that different actors put in action. The multiple, connected actors that IA helps reveal are not static units of analysis but engage in the active redefinition or circumvention of scales as an instrument of power. This third step is what really defines an interscalar authoritarianism approach in contrast with a simple multi-level analysis. From an empirical point of view, several strategies and practices can be in place, and there is not enough existing research along these lines to give an exhaustive list of possible strategies akin to those analysed in human geography, such as scalar jumping, rescaling, and scalar mismatch exploitation (Smith 1992, Brenner 2019). Based on scraps of existing evidence, we can point to strategies of authoritarian that work by redesigning the formal structures of multi-level governance (MLG) and/or change the way power flows through them. For example, in Russia, the central government has progressively eliminated the autonomy of oblasts, introducing direct controls and appointments by the federal government (Reuter and Robertson 2012). These are perhaps the most studied but by far the only scalar strategies that have reshaped contemporary authoritarianism. Indeed, in other cases, scalar strategies can create new authoritarian ecosystems by introducing new formal territorial formations that introduce exceptions to existing MLG and rights (as for instance the "special economic zones" in Cambodia). In others still they do not

involve any formal change in MLG rules but exploit local states of exception and more informal power arrangements as those brought in by extractive industries (like the "sacrifice zones" for instance in the so-called Lithium Triangle in Latin America (Riofrancos 2025)), or by the real estate investment flows also the related kleptocracy networks that develop around urban development and other mega-projects (as for instance detailed by Mattioli (2020) in the Skopje construction boom). In other still, actors might exploit influence channels with ambiguous territoriality (e.g. transnational networks) to reshape local political arenas. While not changing formal governance institutions, these strategies offer ways of contesting and redesigning how power and resources flow and accrue, who gets to do what where, and even the basic rights that citizens enjoy.

Therefore, while we offer interscalarity as a conceptual tool to rethink how we approach the study of authoritarianism (what we call, the scalar turn), this turn also points to specific empirical strategies that will help interested scholars to operationalise IA. Different methodological tools can then be deployed to enquire into different aspects of the IA puzzle. For instance, scholars could map the actors involved in driving specific processes of interest and identify patterns through configurational methods such as QCA, therefore bridging more traditional country-based comparative analysis with an IA sensibility. Network analysis could also be deployed to identify actor constellations and the channels operating in a specific case. Process tracing approaches could be used to identify the mechanisms of scalar politics and trace how actors deploy scalar strategies and with what effects. Together, they provide the empirical anchor that allows IA to function not only as a descriptive framework but as a generator of testable hypotheses about the conditions under which interscalar authoritarian formations consolidate, expand, or are successfully resisted.

Overall, interscalarity is grounded on a politics of space that requires an equally grounded research approach. We suggest, therefore, that a particularly promising methodological approach is to "site" rather than (only or primarily) "case" the study of interscalar authoritarianism. As Thea Riofrancos (2021, 108) explains, "sites offer a view of the general not because they are cases of it, but because they are constitutive of it". A site is analytically productive because it is a node in a wider ecosystem that exceeds the usual boundaries of units of analysis in comparative politics. Site-based analysis offers a combination of qualitative techniques (ethnography and participant observation, inductive process tracing, interviews, focus groups, document analysis) to piece together how a certain process unfolds in a specific location. It is geared towards the inductive uncovering of actors and processes from the ground up, and it is particularly useful for phenomena whose geography is complex and interscalar (Riofrancos 2021, 2025). This approach is also supported by the well-established tradition of multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995), and recent debates on how to deploy it in political science (Both et al. 2025) as part of a broader disciplinary shift away from default case-based comparison and towards a stronger centering of ethnographic sensibility (Simmons and Smith 2017, 2021).

06

Conclusions: A new lexicon for authoritarianism studies

In this paper we have argued that the study of authoritarianism needs a scalar turn. Building on human geography's debates on scale we have proposed Interscalar Authoritarianism as a new approach to the study of contemporary authoritarianism and its spread. As we discussed above the basic premise of interscalarity is that the local, the national, the transnational are not empirically separate domains: they are deeply interconnected, and it is in their interconnection that much of the challenge of contemporary politics lies. This approach fundamentally differs from standard multi-level frameworks. A multi-level approach does not grasp the fact that the ecosystems that allow authoritarian power to thrive and spread involve actors located across all scales forming geographically complex coalitions, making the line between the local, the national, and the transnational blurred and contested. Instead, interscalarity refers to the process by which scales are themselves produced, contested, and reorganised through political action that cuts across them. IA therefore refers to an understanding of authoritarian power that focuses not on specific actors or bounded territorial units but on how power is exercised in ways that simultaneously draw on multiple scales and actively reshape them.

While our proposed scalar turn offers a new lexicon for the political scientist to address the challenges of contemporary authoritarianism, the difference is not only or merely terminological: it implies an epistemologically distinct way of analysing and understanding authoritarian power, it points to an ontologically distinct understanding of the problem of authoritarianism as non-state-bound and fundamentally relational across scales, and offers a distinct analytical focus on the ways in which actors negotiate, contest, and transform the spatial configurations that determine where power and resources are accrued and controlled.

Our proposal builds on recent developments in authoritarianism studies – what we call the local, transnational, and practice turns. Each of these turns pushes at the frontiers of regime studies' default state-bound approach, revealing one aspect of geographical complexity that needs addressing. While allowing for variation in methods and thematic focus, Interscalar Authoritarianism offers a conceptually coherent way of bringing these developments together into a common research agenda.

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RESISTANCE: Resisting InterScalar Authoritarian Networks and Coalitions is a Horizon Europe project that develops an innovative framework for understanding contemporary authoritarianism as an interscalar phenomenon.

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