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Book Part — Published Version

Introduction to the Case Studies

Provided in Cooperation with:

WZB Berlin Social Science Center

Suggested Citation: Roberts Lyer, Kirsten; Saliba, Ilyas; Spannagel, Janika (2023) : Introduction to the Case Studies, In: Roberts Lyer, Kirsten Saliba, Ilyas Spannagel, Janika (Ed.): University Autonomy Decline: Causes, Responses, and Implications for Academic Freedom, ISBN 978-1-0033-0648-1, Routledge, London, pp. 33-37, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003306481-5>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/266359>

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3 Introduction to the Case Studies

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Part I of this book conceptually developed the argument that university autonomy is a fundamental requirement for academic freedom to be enjoyed by researchers and students. However, it is loosely defined, and suffers from a lack of agreement over the basis and scope of academic freedom, and the fundamental purpose of universities themselves.

Building on these concepts, and the methodology explained in detail below, this second part of the book features five descriptive country case studies investigating developments of academic freedom in Bangladesh, India, Mozambique, Poland, and Turkey (up to summer 2021, and spring 2022 in the case of Poland). The objective of the five country case studies is to deepen and broaden the understanding of the state of academic freedom in individual countries through in-depth description and analyses. Moreover, the case studies enable a comparison of trends, similarities, and differences across various countries.

Part III of this book will address the question of how university autonomy develops and interacts with other components of academic freedom on the basis of eight such country studies – those included in the present book and three previously described cases from Brazil (Hübner Mendes, 2020), Egypt (Saliba, 2020), and Russia (Kaczmarska, 2020), which were part of an earlier publication (Kinzelbach, 2020), as well as quantitative evidence from the AFI data.

The following case studies provide a qualitative, structured – and thus easily comparable – in-depth analysis of countries’ current state and recent developments of academic freedom, including university autonomy. Each of the country case studies can thus also serve as a standalone reference for scholars or practitioners seeking background information on a particular country.

3.1 Case Study Approach and Guidelines

Two authors of this book contributed to developing research guidelines for country case studies on academic freedom (Kinzelbach et al., 2020). Using these guidelines for the case studies in the present book ensures comparability both between them and with previously published studies, thus contributing to a growing body of qualitative case studies covering developments in academic freedom in different country contexts across the globe.¹

Beyond the main characteristics of the reviewed country's higher education system and its makeup, the case studies each provide an analysis of (i) the legal protection of academic freedom, (ii) institutional autonomy and governance, (iii) freedom to research and teach, (iv) exchange and dissemination of academic knowledge, (v) campus integrity, (vi) subnational and disciplinary variation, and (vii) any efforts made to protect or promote academic freedom at home or abroad.

While rigid in their structure, the guidelines nonetheless allow authors to address context-specific aspects and developments in each case as needed. In particular, authors were encouraged to highlight and expand on certain aspects that they deem most relevant in their specific country case. In the end, these research guidelines were developed to encourage and facilitate more qualitative case studies on the situation of academic freedom in countries across the world. In terms of methods and data, the guidelines provide ample room for various approaches depending on the availability and access to data. As a supplement to the guidelines, Janika Spannagel's (2020) inventory of existing data sources on academic freedom, published in the same book as the aforementioned guidelines, advises case study authors in their choice and presentation of available data sources and collection methods for their country study.

3.2 Case Selection Rationale

This book seeks to investigate how a decline in university autonomy relates to academic freedom more broadly. To pre-select relevant cases for further qualitative analysis (cf. Seawright and Gerring, 2008, p. 296), the Academic Freedom Index (AFI) dataset was utilized (see more detail in Chapter 1.2). To focus on the causes and consequences of recent declines in institutional autonomy, countries were identified that, according to the AFI's sub-indicator on institutional autonomy (named *v2cainsaut_osp*), displayed a significant decline within the previous ten years.² Based on the latest V-Dem data available at the time of case selection (version v10, released in spring 2020), this list included 15 countries or territories with such significant declines between 2009 and 2019 (V-Dem 2020).³ Three of these countries had already been covered by the previously published case study collection (Kinzelbach, 2020) – Brazil, Egypt, and Russia – and are drawn upon for the comparative analysis in [Part III](#) of this book. Of the remaining 12 potential cases, five countries were selected – Bangladesh, India, Mozambique, Poland, and Turkey – based on qualitative criteria. Since one of the central objectives of this book is to contribute to theory-building around a decline in university autonomy as a component of academic freedom, a relatively diverse selection of countries was chosen.

The underlying assumption of this approach is that if common patterns can be found between these countries, then hypotheses can be formulated that might be generalized to other contexts with severe declines in university autonomy (cf. George and Bennet, 2005, pp. 19–22). Future studies can use

validity testing approaches and add additional cases to further test the hypotheses (Leuffen, 2011, p. 149).

While all the selected countries have a significant recent decline in university autonomy in common,⁴ they differ with respect to their political regimes, higher education sector, geographic location, development status, as well as their starting levels of academic freedom. For instance, there are significant discrepancies regarding the starting points on the AFI's aggregated score between Poland – scoring near the top of the scale in the 2000s – and Turkey and Bangladesh, which were already below the global average. These different starting points serve to increase the confidence in the external validity of potential similarities cutting across the cases, meaning that such findings might be applicable to a wider group of cases.

The graphs in Figure 3.1 show the institutional autonomy scores for the five countries covered in the following case studies, based on the newest available V-Dem data (v12). The black line depicts the actual aggregated score, while the

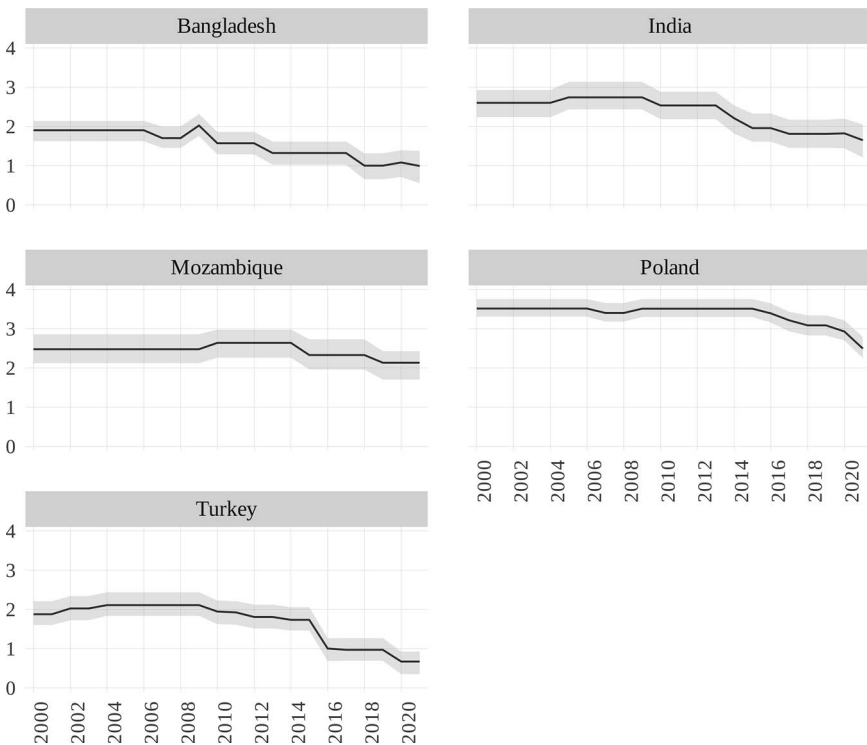


Figure 3.1 Institutional autonomy 2000–2021 in five countries selected for study. The grey area represents the confidence bounds of the data.

Data source: V-Dem (2022); v12.

grey shaded area around the black line visualizes the confidence bounds of these scores. Although the starting points differ significantly between the cases, the trend of a significant and continuous decline in institutional autonomy is present in all cases.

Case study authors and reviewers were selected based on their expertise and publications on academic freedom issues in the countries studied. Most authors and reviewers are either from or reside within the country whose case they have analysed or reviewed. All have been or still are active in the higher education system of the respective country. The review process was designed to ensure scientific standards and high quality of the case studies. The case studies are arranged in alphabetical order in this part of the book.

In the case study on Bangladesh, Mubashar Hasan, an adjunct fellow at the University of Western Sydney, Australia, and Nazmul Ahasan, a freelance journalist and researcher currently working with the Investigative Reporting Program at UC Berkeley, USA, find a decline in university autonomy that originates in an ongoing process of autocratization and rampant government inference in the higher education system. For India, Niraja Gopal Jayal, political scientist at King's College London and previously based at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, observes a growing politicization of appointments in administrative and academic positions driven by increased governmental control over universities, which undermines university autonomy and academic freedom. In the Mozambique case study, Nelson Zavale, an associate professor of sociology at Eduardo Mondlane University, Mozambique, and Fulbright Scholar at UC Berkeley, finds that university autonomy is restricted by political appointments and a lack of resources in an increasingly authoritarian context. In the case of Poland, Marta Bucholc, sociologist at the University of Warsaw and Université Saint-Louis Bruxelles, concludes that the main threat to academic freedom originates from the conservative ruling party, which is systematically undermining university autonomy and reclaiming the academic freedom discourse. Finally, in Turkey, Olga Selin Hünler, associate professor at the Department of Psychology, Acıbadem University, İstanbul, observes that the government's repressive backlash against academia after the failed coup attempt in 2016 has severely negatively affected university autonomy and academic freedom.

Notes

- 1 For this book, the guidelines were modified slightly to add a sub-question concerning efforts to promote academic freedom.
- 2 'Significant decline' is a decline that, between 2009 and 2019, was larger than 0.5 points on the 0–4 scale of *v2cainsaut_osp* and surpassed the confidence bounds of the respective estimates of the variable. For further information on V-Dem's estimates, see Coppedge et al. (2022).
- 3 Bahrain, Bangladesh, Benin, Brazil, Egypt, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Lithuania, Mozambique, Poland, Russia, Turkey, Uganda, and Yemen.
- 4 Using the v12 version of the V-Dem data (published in March 2022, including data up until 2021), the decline observed for Mozambique on institutional autonomy for the period since 2009 is not significant anymore as the confidence bounds now

overlap slightly due to retroactive adjustments (though the net decline is still over 0.5 points). Such adjustments are not uncommon in the V-Dem data as additional expert coders contribute their expertise to updates of the dataset. The case remains nevertheless relevant for purposes of the book as the case study author also confirmed that the institutional autonomy did in fact decline noticeably during the relevant period.

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