

REVIEW ESSAY

Mapping Patterns and Trends in Uncontested Elections Research (1965–2024)

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Abstract

This article explores patterns and trends in 111 prior studies regarding uncontested elections and their implications for the quality of democracy from 1965 to 2024 in the Scopus database. Since the first article was published in 1965, the topic has attracted noteworthy academic attention, especially in the last decade. Although the number of publications yearly fluctuates, scholarly interest remains consistent, with an average of 40.94 citations per document. Most research comes from the United States, but contributions from other countries such as Canada, Japan, and Germany are also remarkable. In sum, I provide a comprehensive insight into the development of uncontested elections, the significant contributions of various authors, and the thematic trends that have developed over time. 44 questions identified as future research directions open opportunities for further exploration to understand the factors supporting or hindering competitive elections.

Keywords: Bibliometrix; Democracy; Elections; Uncontested; VOSviewer

Introduction

General elections are the main foundation of representative democracy, serving as the core mechanism allowing the people to elect their representatives fairly and competently. In democratic ideals, competitive elections reflect the diversity of political opinions and choices available to society (Clawson & Oxley, 2020). However, in some cases, elections can occur without competition, commonly termed “uncontested elections”, “silent elections”, “non-competitive elections”, or “walkover elections” where a candidate can be elected without competing with other candidates (White, 1985).

Uncontested elections refer to a situation where only one candidate is running for a political position, with no challengers from other parties or even from his/her internal party (Squire, 1989). As a result, there is no direct electoral competition (Fisher, 1981; Foster, 1977; Lloyd, 1965). This phenomenon can be observed in various local, regional, and national political contexts and spans legislative and executive elections, whether in democratic or non-democratic regimes. Due to its potential implications for the quality of democracy, uncontested elections have drawn considerable attention from political researchers and practitioners.

In the last few decades, as confirmed by Kouba & Lysek (2023), uncontested elections have been more dominant in local-scale executive and legislative elections. Countries like the U.S., Japan, and Italy have experienced steady and alarming growth in electoral events at levels with no incumbent challengers. It can be influenced by various factors, ranging

from the dominance of certain political parties (Kostroski, 1973), lack of political participation from the community (Kouba & Lysek, 2023), complex election rules (Kouba & Lysek, 2023), and very high campaign costs (Adams et al., 2010; Alexander, 2021). The situation is prone to causing various negative implications for democracy, including problems with legitimacy, political representation, voter participation, and the quality of elected government (Konisky & Ueda, 2011; Wrighton & Squire, 1997).

Research on uncontested elections began to receive academic attention in the mid-20th century. In the 1960s, with the wave of democratization that hit many countries, interest in the study of elections and their mechanisms increased (Shin, 1994). However, despite efforts to strengthen a more open and competitive electoral system, there are still many cases where elections take place without competition (Norris, 2018). It sparked academics to explore the causes and impacts of this phenomenon. The literature on uncontested elections has grown over time. In the 1970s and 1980s, research focused more on case studies in different countries, exploring how and why uncontested elections occurred. These studies often identified the role of dominant political parties and power structures that hinder the emergence of political competition (Cox et al., 2020; Daly & Jones, 2020). A comparative approach was adopted in research on uncontested elections in the 1990s and early 2000s. Comparative studies identify general patterns and relate the incident to other factors, such as economic development, political stability, and local political culture (Joseph, 1999). Such an approach provides broader insight into the conditions that support or hinder competitive elections.

Today, uncontested elections remain a focal point for scholars due to their profound implications for democratic quality. Multiple theoretical frameworks have been proposed to explain them, with many academics attributing it to a complex interaction between political, social, and economic factors in democratic or authoritarian regimes. The absence of competition indicates deeper structural problems within the political system, whether it is a lack of resources for opposition candidates, internal party dynamics that inhibit the candidacy of rivals, or broader societal conditions that favour incumbents. These elections often reflect power imbalances, where dominant political actors utilize institutional and economic advantages to limit genuine political contestation. The prevalence of uncontested elections can, therefore, serve as a barometer for evaluating the overall health of democracy, as these elections often exhibit fundamental flaws in representation, accountability, and citizen engagement.

Despite its long history and severe implications for the quality of democracy, research on uncontested elections remains scattered and lacks a comprehensive systematic mapping. No synthesis effort integrates these findings to understand the overall progress of the field, identify key trends, and steer future research agendas. This article fills the gap by systematically reviewing the literature on uncontested elections from 1965 to 2024 using a bibliometric analysis. *Bibliometric* is an approach that cultivates quantitative data from academic literature to analyze research trends, publication patterns, and individual-institutional contributions in specific fields (Hood & Wilson, 2001) to understand how the topic of uncontested elections has been studied and developed over time.

I ask three research questions: (1) What has been the historical evolution of studies on uncontested elections over the past six decades regarding publication volume, thematic focus, and geographical coverage? (2) What are the prominent patterns and clusters emerging in the knowledge network on uncontested elections based on co-citation and co-word analysis? (3) Do any knowledge gaps emerge, and what are the directions for future research development?

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it is the first attempt to comprehensively map the progress of research on uncontested elections using a

bibliometric approach. Second, identifying trends and patterns in the literature helps integrate scattered findings and build a complete grasp of the phenomenon. Third, the resulting knowledge gap analysis can steer future research agendas more systematically. This article also has essential practical implications. A better understanding of the dynamics of uncontested elections can help policymakers design appropriate electoral reforms to promote healthy political competition. Amidst the global decline in the quality of democracy, such a comprehension becomes even more crucial to maintaining the vitality of the democratic process.

Literature Review

The complexity of uncontested elections lies in their diverse practices and the non-uniformity of their substance, which often depends on the prevailing electoral system and local political dynamics. The definition of uncontested elections demands a much more complex and in-depth understanding than simply seeing it as a situation where only one candidate is contesting. The variations in the meaning of uncontested elections depend heavily on the prevailing electoral system and patterns of state organization, reflecting the diverse dynamics of democracy (Przeworski, 1991).

The intricacy of electoral systems, especially in proportional systems and multi-member districts, requires us to explore the various nuances of electoral competition (Sartori, 2016). Each electoral system has unique mechanisms and contexts that shape the interpretation of “non-competitive elections” differently. Elections that are technically “not fully competitive” can take many forms. For example, in a proportional system, a district can have a single list of formally competing candidates but, in practice, have very similar characteristics to an uncontested election (Cox, 1997). It can happen when the number of candidates is slightly more significant than the seats available or when political structures systematically limit meaningful political participation (Lijphart, 1994).

In democracies with open political competition, uncontested elections appear as a marginal phenomenon and are considered an anomaly. However, in systems with tighter power control, they can become a systemic part of political practice (Schedler, 2002). Political history, democratic culture, institutional structures, and local political power constellations will determine how uncontested elections are understood and practiced (Huntington, 1991). Such variations reflect the complex realities of electoral democracy, where competition does not always mean actual competition (Beetham, 2005). An electoral system can be formally competitive but substantively restrictive. Structural barriers to independent candidates, unequal access to political resources, or the dominance of a particular party can result in electoral conditions that are nominally competitive but practically lack meaningful competition (Boix, 1999).

The study of uncontested elections insists a more nuanced and contextualized approach. A comprehensive approach should consider the diversity of electoral systems and country-specific contexts, recognizing that the definition of “uncontested” is not a static concept but rather a dynamic phenomenon shaped by the complexities of local and global politics. Scholars present diverse views on uncontested elections. Some argue that they are a regular occurrence in the political landscape (Miller & Listhaug, 1990), while others consider them an anomaly threatening the democratic process (Kouba & Lysek, 2023). In a democratic political system—where freedom of choice and alternative options are fundamental principles—the absence of electoral competition is often seen as a critical issue that could undermine the very foundations of democracy by limiting voter choice and diminishing legitimacy (Beaulieu, 2014). However, several academics contend that uncontested elections reflect political stability or high public trust in a particular candidate or political party (Hermet, 1978; Miller & Borrelli, 1991). Consequently,

uncontested elections sit at the crossroads between being a natural outcome of political dynamics and challenging democratic ideals.

Uncontested elections are not necessarily a negative thing but rather a common occurrence in many countries, including significant democracies such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. While uncontested elections can raise concerns about the health of political representation, several reasons explain why they are commonplace and, in some contexts, even seen as natural and harmless. Uncontested elections depict the existence of political stability and strong public support (Ekman, 2009), rational decisions of opposition parties (Skigin, 2023), the influence of safe districts (Abramowitz, 1991; Kennedy, 2017), efficiency of political resources (Lay et al., 2017), integrity and public trust (Gandhi, 2015), prevention of social and political conflict (Knutsen et al., 2017), and respect for incumbent performance (Hirano & Snyder Jr., 2014).

However, in many cases, uncontested elections are also considered a deviation from democracy that contradicts the basic principles of an ideal democratic system. Elections that do not involve serious competition indicate distortions in the democratic process and, if persistent, can undermine political legitimacy and reduce public participation, which should be the cornerstone of democracy. Some of the reasons why uncontested elections are considered harmful and can be an abnormality in a democratic system are because they reduce the essence of political competition, heighten the potential for abuse of power, reduce political participation, contaminate political accountability, become an indicator of injustice or imbalance in the political system, perpetuate oligarchy and elite power, ignore public dynamics and aspirations, negate public debate and policy innovation, and trigger the prevalence of voter apathy (Kouba & Lysek, 2023; Lay et al., 2017; Norris, 2017).

In summary, uncontested elections represent a complex interplay between electoral systems, political dynamics, and institutional structures. While some scholars highlight their potential to symbolize stability and public trust, others emphasize their detrimental effects on democracy, including reduced accountability and participation. The nuanced perspectives presented in the literature underscore the need for contextualized approaches that account for the specific political, economic, and cultural conditions in which uncontested elections occur.

Methods

This bibliometric analysis presents a comprehensive picture of prior research on uncontested elections for almost six decades, from January 1965 to September 2024. I employed several steps: database selection, search criteria and keyword determinations, and data extraction. These steps warrant that all relevant studies are identified and thoroughly analyzed. Scopus, one of the world's largest and most trusted bibliographic databases, is used for my analysis. It contains millions of articles from thousands of international scientific journals covering various scientific disciplines (Adilansyah et al., 2024; Firmansyah & Hidayat, 2024; Hidayat, 2024).

Once the database is selected, the next step is determining the search criteria and keywords for relevant literature. The search criteria were determined to capture all publications relating to uncontested elections from 1965 to 2024. The selected keywords depicted various aspects of the topic and were designed to ensure that the search accommodated all possible term variations of previous authors. The primary keywords were "uncontested elections", "silent elections", "uncompetitive elections", "unopposed candidates", and "walkover candidates". In addition to these keywords, additional search phrases such as "election without competition", "single candidate elections", and "uncontested political races" were also employed to warrant broader coverage. I then

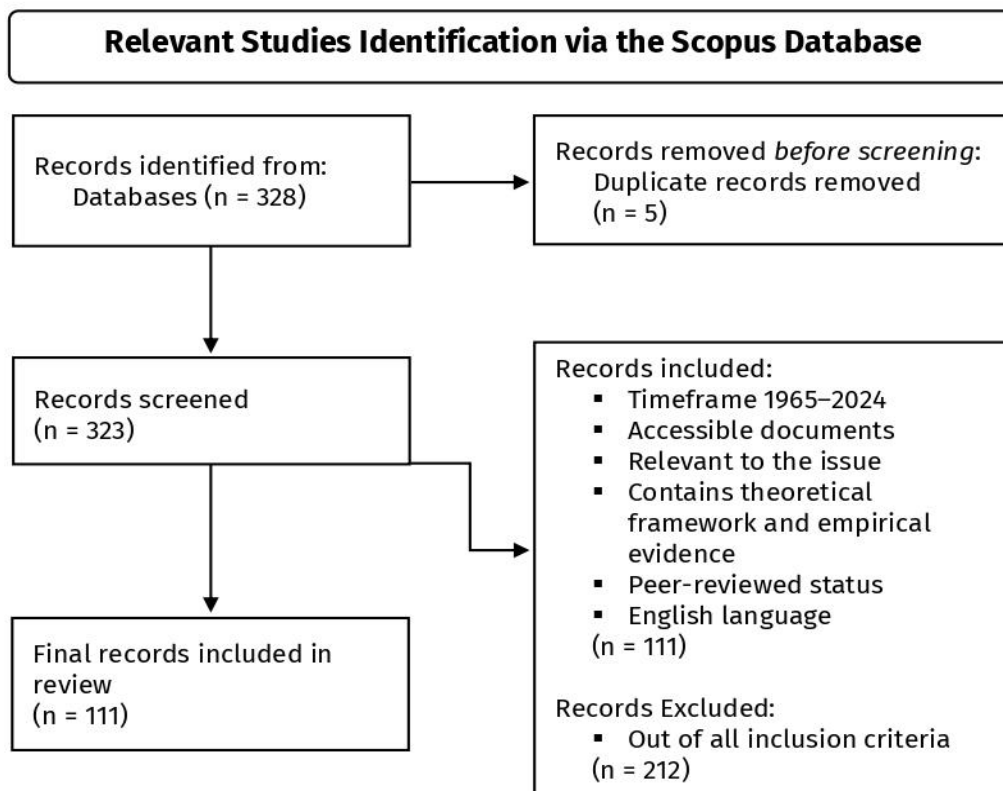
inspected relevant article titles, abstracts, and keywords to ensure results focused on uncontested elections.

Figure 1 presents several filters that are applied to improve the accuracy and relevance of search results. This filter encompasses publication year restrictions from 1965 to 2024, accessible documents pertinent to the issue, theoretical framework and empirical evidence, peer-reviewed status, and the English language. By applying these filters, searches become more focused, ensuring that only literature relevant to the topic is identified and analyzed. 328 documents were found in the Scopus database, but only 111 were interrelated. The next step is the data extraction process, which involves collecting and organizing relevant bibliometric data from each article found. The extracted data has critical information that will be used for further analysis.

Data processing was done with the help of two bibliometric software. The first is VOSviewer, which visualizes bibliometric maps, analyses citation networks, and identifies research clusters based on keywords (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). The second one is Bibliometrix RStudio, which analyses trends, collaboration between researchers, and the scientific impact of publications through various bibliometric metrics (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Combining these two software helps automate the data extraction and analysis process so that the results are more structured and ready for further analysis.

From the processed data available, I then elaborated on the core details of the dataset, the number of publications per year, citation patterns, geographical distribution, most popular keywords, co-citation of cited authors, citation map of documents, and others. These systematic approaches provide a deep and comprehensive understanding of the trends and patterns of research on uncontested elections over almost the last six decades. I also identify several future research directions in the research issue.

Figure 1. Literature search flowchart.



Source: author's own elaboration.

Results

This section presents research production data on uncontested elections, including primary information about the dataset, annual scientific output, country scientific production, most popular keywords, and co-citation of cited authors. These data provide a comprehensive overview of research progress, noteworthy contributions from various authors and countries, and thematic patterns or trends that have developed over time.

Primary Information About the Dataset

The research dataset on uncontested elections covers various aspects that illustrate the dynamics of scholarly publications and the development of knowledge on this topic over a long period, from 1965 to 2024. Table 1 presents 111 documents from 55 different sources, including journals, conference papers and reviews, which form the foundation of the literature on uncontested elections. These data offer a rich insight into the topic, reflecting how prominent themes in uncontested elections have evolved and how researchers and academics have contributed to deepening our understanding of the phenomenon.

Since 1965, the number of publications on uncontested elections has grown steadily at about 1.88% per year. Although the phenomenon is not considered very common in the global political context, it remains an exciting and outstanding topic for political and social researchers. In almost six decades, the research has evolved, reflecting the development of political contexts in different countries and changes in research methods and theoretical approaches used to understand uncontested elections. The average age of the documents is 14.5 years, which suggests that older research remains relevant and is referenced by more recent studies. It also indicates that some crucial or seminal studies continue influencing further research on uncontested elections.

These documents are highly impactful, with the average number of citations per document reaching 40.94. Research on uncontested elections has a strong relevance in political and social studies and influences a range of other studies outside of the topic. The 5,694 references reflect the breadth of literature I have consulted in constructing my arguments. It provides evidence that the study of uncontested elections is rooted in a specific context and linked to the broader literature on democracy, political participation and electoral mechanisms.

Looking at the content of these documents, the use of “Keywords Plus” and “Author’s Keywords” provides insight into specific themes and keywords that appear frequently in all papers. Keywords Plus, generated from the citation analysis, includes 83 keywords, while the Author’s Keywords, which are directly provided by the authors in all reviewed literature, reach 188. It shows that the topic of uncontested elections is related to a wide range of concepts identified by researchers and also underscores the citation relationships between studies. Using keywords helps map the research field and identify frequently occurring issues and themes likely to be the main focus of scholarly discussion.

In terms of author contributions, the dataset notes that 163 authors have contributed to this literature, with 49 of them being single authors. While collaboration is standard, research on uncontested elections is also often conducted by individuals, which may reflect the nature of the topic and allow exploration through in-depth research and individualized analysis. Of the 111 documents, 58 were written by single authors, stipulating that the research is accessible to academics working alone without extensive team collaboration. Nonetheless, an average of 1.73 authors per document indicated moderate collaboration within the field. International collaborations account for 8.108% of the total documents, depicting that while uncontested elections are often local or country-

specific, some cross-border research is conducted through the cooperation of academics from different countries.

Regarding document type, most publications are journal articles, totalling 98 articles. It reinforces the view that scholarly journals are the primary medium for disseminating research on uncontested elections. In addition, 1 conference paper and 12 reviews are recorded in the dataset, reflecting the diversity of publication formats used to address the topic. Conference papers and reviews also show a recognized depth of research and comprehensive analysis in formats other than journal articles.

Table 1. Core details of the dataset.

| Description | Results |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Timespan | January 1965–September 2024 |
| Sources | 55 |
| Documents | 111 |
| Annual Growth Rate % | 1.88 |
| Document Average Age | 14.5 |
| Average citations per doc | 40.94 |
| References | 5694 |
| Keywords Plus (ID) | 83 |
| Author’s Keywords (DE) | 188 |
| Authors | 163 |
| Authors of single-authored docs | 49 |
| Single-authored docs | 58 |
| Co-Authors per Doc | 1.73 |
| International co-authorships % | 8.108 |
| article | 98 |
| conference paper | 1 |
| review | 12 |

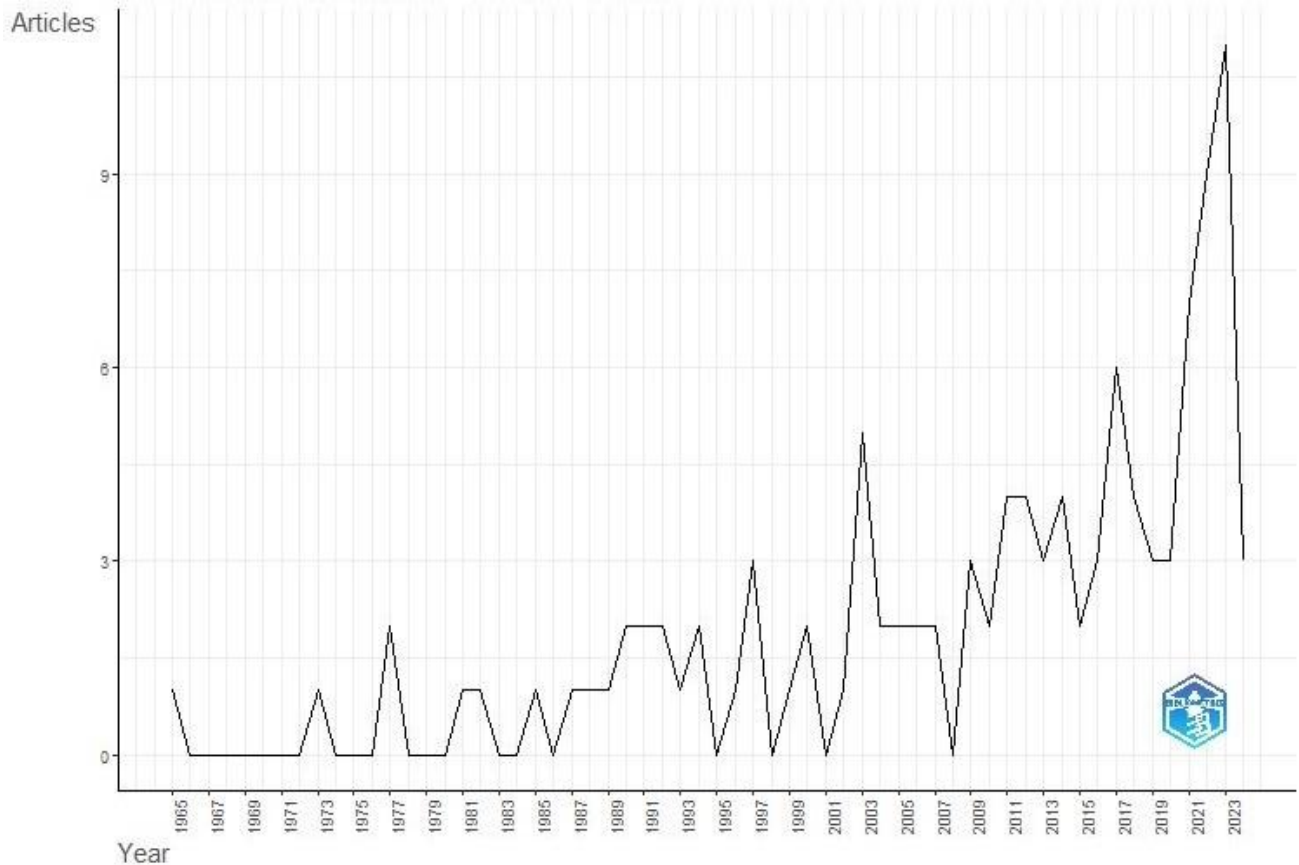
Source: Biblioshiny using RStudio.

The above dataset provides a rich picture of how uncontested elections have been studied for almost six decades. With steady growth in the number of publications, significant contributions from single authors and international collaborations, and a high average of citations per document, research on this topic has strong academic relevance and makes an essential contribution to the political and social literature. The involvement of researchers from different backgrounds and the diverse types of publications also demonstrate that uncontested elections are a multidimensional issue that can be understood from various analytical and methodological perspectives.

Annual Scientific Output

The annual scholarly production in the study of uncontested elections shows a fluctuating but interesting developmental dynamic from 1965 to 2024. Figure 2 below reflects how academic attention to the topic has changed, from a slow initial phase to valuable growth in recent decades.

Figure 2. Annual scientific output (1965–2024).



Source: Biblioshiny using RStudio.

Lloyd (1965) published a seminal article examining the phenomenon of uncontested seats in U.K. general elections from 1852 to 1910, presenting detailed data on their patterns and impact on the distribution of seats between the Liberal and Conservative Parties. The decline in uncontested seats, particularly after the Second Reform Act (1867) and the Third Reform Act (1884), was driven by expanded electorates, fairer seat redistribution, and increased electoral competition. Before these reforms, informal agreements among political parties often resulted in uncontested seats, but rising voter turnout and legislative changes transformed the system. Lloyd highlights the shift from elite-controlled elections based on patronage to a more competitive political environment shaped by effective party organization, particularly by the Conservative Party. By 1910, solid party structures and broader popular participation had dramatically reduced uncontested seats, marking an outstanding transformation in the U.K.'s political and social landscape.

After a single publication in 1965, no articles were published for the next few years (1966–1972). Uncontested elections may have been outside the centre of researchers' attention or that the lack of available empirical data limited research in this area. Publication resumed in 1973 with a single article. Although there was no consistent increase during the 1970s, some turning points are worth noting. 2 articles were published in 1977, and this trend continued with minor fluctuations into the 1980s. The decade of the 1980s saw a steadier increase in scientific production. 1 article was published in 1981, and in the following years, the number continued to grow, reaching a peak in 1990 with 2 articles.

The 1990s saw annual fluctuations, with scholarly production occasionally increasing and decreasing but tending to maintain a relatively constant trend. During this decade, the number of articles ranged from 1 to 3 yearly, with peak years occurring in 1990, 1991, 1992, and 1997, where 2 articles were published. While it does not represent a noteworthy spike,

the stability in publications over the decade reflects researchers' continued interest in uncontested elections.

A more considerable trend began to emerge when entering the 21st century. In the early 2000s, although there were some years with only 1 or 2 articles published, such as 2000 and 2002, subsequent years saw a substantial increase in scholarly production. 2003 recorded 5 articles, a massive increase over the previous decade. Since then, the positive trend has continued, with publication rates stabilizing between 2 and 5 articles each year until the end of the 2000s decade.

The decade of the 2010s was a prominent period for the progress of uncontested elections studies. The number of articles published increased significantly, with a peak in 2017 when 6 articles were published. It marks a shift in academic attention, where the topic is increasingly seen as an essential issue in the study of politics and democracy. This increase can be related to global political changes and uncontested elections gaining more attention in modern democracies.

The most remarkable increases occurred in the last three years. In 2021, 7 articles were published and 9 articles in 2022. There was an outstanding spike with 11 articles, and it becomes the highest number in the historical data of uncontested election studies, suggesting that academic interest in the topic is at its peak. These growths have been influenced by the changing global political context, where uncontested elections have become spotlighted in many countries as part of more comprehensive discussions about democracy, political participation and electoral legitimacy. The year 2024 showed a steady trend, with 3 articles published, continuing the momentum from previous years. While fewer than in 2023, this figure reflects a solid and sustained interest in the phenomenon among academics.

In summary, scholarly production on uncontested elections has experienced fluctuating but progressive growth. After an initial period of relative quiet, attention to the topic began to increase, particularly in the late 1990s, and continued to surge notably in the decade from the 2010s to the 2020s. The increase in the number of articles published reflects the recognition of the importance of uncontested elections in political discourse and increased academic efforts to understand the implications of this phenomenon in the context of democracies and electoral systems worldwide.

Country Scientific Production

There are varying levels of scholarly production on uncontested elections in different countries. The scientific production data of countries, as presented in Table 2, may not directly reflect the quality or significance of the research conducted. However, they explain how much these countries contribute to the scientific literature on the topic. The analysis provides an overview of the geographic distribution of scientific research on uncontested elections and how noteworthy each country's contribution is to the global scientific literature on the topic.

Table 2. Country scientific production (1965–2024).

| Country | Documents | Citations | Total Link Strength |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|---------------------|
| United States | 65 | 3346 | 14 |
| Russia | 11 | 375 | 10 |
| Finland | 3 | 54 | 4 |
| Italy | 4 | 193 | 4 |
| Germany | 4 | 44 | 3 |
| Netherlands | 2 | 4 | 3 |

| | | | |
|----------------|---|-----|---|
| United Kingdom | 9 | 108 | 3 |
| Norway | 3 | 150 | 2 |
| Belgium | 1 | 26 | 1 |
| Canada | 5 | 59 | 1 |
| Hungary | 1 | 20 | 1 |
| Ireland | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Japan | 3 | 23 | 1 |
| Sweden | 1 | 8 | 1 |
| Turkey | 1 | 67 | 1 |
| Australia | 2 | 5 | 0 |
| Brazil | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Cyprus | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| Czech Republic | 2 | 4 | 0 |
| France | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Ghana | 1 | 6 | 0 |
| Hong Kong | 1 | 6 | 0 |
| Indonesia | 3 | 15 | 0 |
| Poland | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| Spain | 1 | 47 | 0 |

Source: author's own elaboration using the VOSviewer software.

The United States tops the document count, with 65 studies addressing uncontested elections. This high interest from American researchers is strongly related to the country's unique electoral system, which is often characterized by issues of representation, political participation, and the impact of less intense competition in certain districts. The large number of papers from the U.S. also reflects academic concern with inequality of political access and its impact on stable democracies.

In Europe, attention to elections is undeniably evident in countries such as Russia, the U.K., Italy, Germany, Finland and Norway. Russia has 11 documents demonstrating the high academic interest in political stability and less competitive electoral processes in a country with strong political influence from specific actors. The U.K., with 9 documents and other European countries such as Germany and Italy (4 documents each), show that the issue of uncontested elections remains an essential part of European political research. In these countries, attention focuses on factors such as proportional electoral systems, the influence of the main political parties and the challenges of promoting healthy political competition.

Canada has 5 documents and shows moderate academic attention to uncontested elections. The focus is on political dynamics in specific regions or remote areas of Canada where political competition is low. Similarly, studies from Australia, Japan, Indonesia, and Poland, which have 2 to 4 documents each, illustrate how the issue of uncontested elections in the Australian, Asian, and Central European regions is becoming a concern for academics.

On the other hand, some countries, such as Belgium, Brazil, Turkey and Spain, have only 1 document each. The few studies from these countries may indicate that uncontested elections still need to be a significant issue in academic discourse or local politics. It could also be due to differences in political systems, where uncontested elections are less common or are not considered a severe threat to the prevailing democratic process.

Countries such as Ireland and France, with only 1 document each, display the same phenomenon. Research in these countries is limited due to different political dynamics or because the academic focus is more on other issues in their electoral systems. Apart from

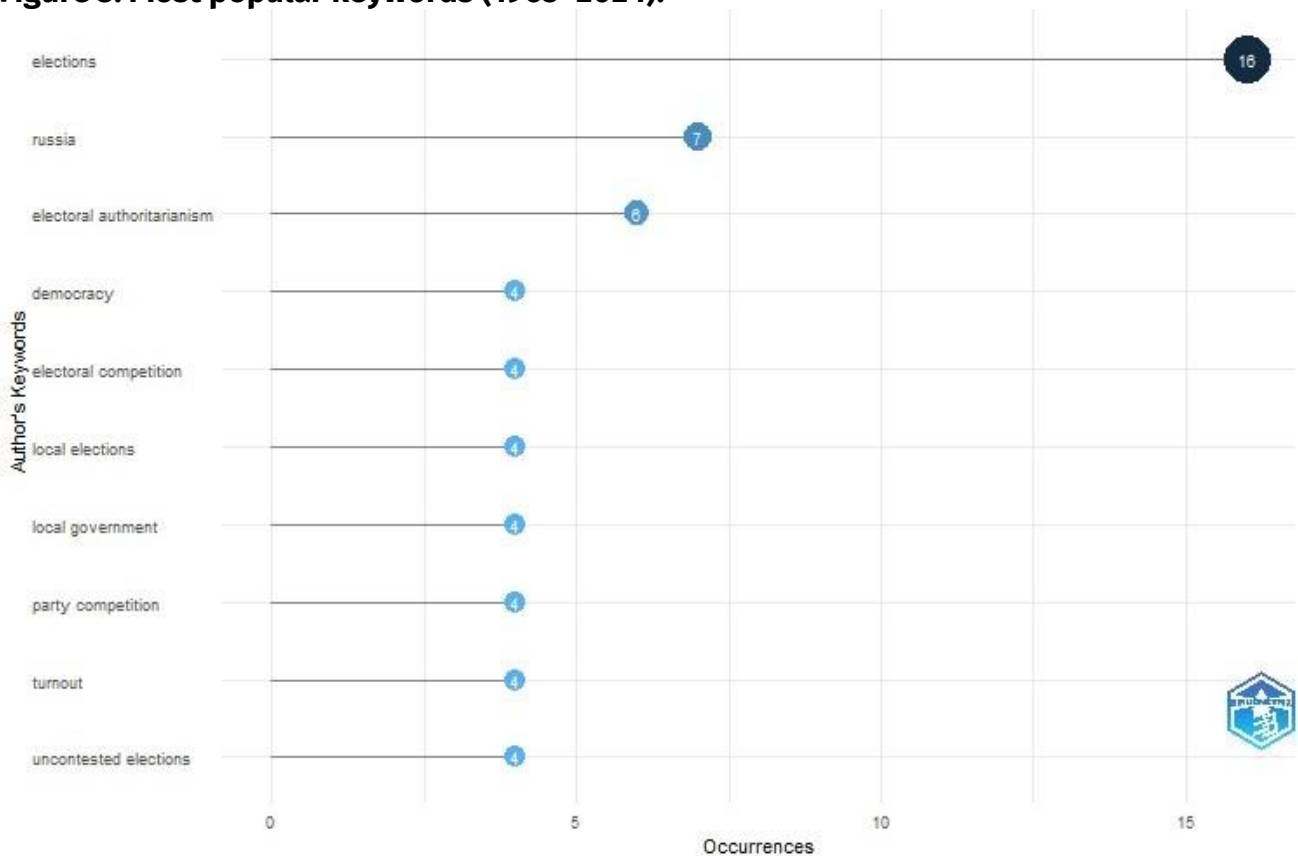
Japan and Indonesia, only Hong Kong has research documents on uncontested elections in Asia. With 1 document, research in Hong Kong highlights how the unique political context and relationship with China affects elections and political competition in the region.

In summary, initial studies on uncontested elections concentrate solely on the U.S. because of its complex democratic system and unique electoral dynamics. These early studies were likely triggered by a desire to understand aspects such as low turnout in certain elections or a lack of political competition in some areas of the U.S., often influenced by the dominance of a particular party or the role of incumbents. However, in subsequent developments, the focus began to expand to other countries, including Russia, the U.K., Canada, and several European and Asian countries. This broadening of research hub demonstrates the growing global academic interest in understanding how uncontested elections play out in different political contexts. More recent studies look beyond the U.S. to consider local dynamics, such as the influence of dominant parties in Russia, proportional systems in Europe, or the challenges of encouraging political participation in countries with unique electoral systems. Their expanded geographical scopes provide a richer comparative perspective, allowing scholars to see how local factors influence the existence and impact of uncontested elections in various political systems worldwide.

Most Popular Keywords

In research on uncontested elections, keyword analysis provides insight into how different topics relate and how often they appear together in the literature. As shown in Figure 3, there are 10 most prominent words from 188 author keywords in 111 papers.

Figure 3. Most popular keywords (1965–2024).



Source: Biblioshiny using RStudio.

The 10 most relevant keywords become essential aspects of uncontested election studies. The word “elections” occurs 16 times the most frequently, indicating that the issue of elections is central to the discussion, particularly in understanding the context in which elections become uncontested or occur without significant competition. Uncontested elections are considered a phenomenon that reduces the quality of democracy as they minimize the options for voters.

“Russia” appears 7 times, indicating that the country is a prime example in the study of uncontested elections. Russia is often used as a case study to explore how less competitive elections can be used as a tool for the ruling authority to maintain power. It is closely related to the “electoral authoritarianism” concept, which appears 6 times. The term describes the practice of authoritarianism in electoral systems, where elections are held but do not meet the standards of fair competition. Such a system allows the regime to maintain formal legitimacy while limiting actual political participation, a feature in Russia and other countries (Romanov et al., 2023; Saikkonen, 2016).

The keywords “democracy” and “electoral competition”, which appear 4 times each, highlight a critical issue that has also been highlighted in previous studies, namely how electoral competition serves as a significant element of democracy. The presence of competitive elections is one of the pillars of a healthy democratic system, as this competition allows a change of power and representation that better reflects the people’s will. However, in uncontested elections, the competition is often weakened or even eliminated, raising concerns about the quality of democracy in countries that experience the phenomenon.

Furthermore, the terms “local elections” and “local government”, which appear 4 times each, indicate that local-level elections have attracted previous researchers’ attention. Elections at the local level, such as those for regional heads or city councils, are often less competitive than national elections due to the dominance of specific figures or parties in the region. This focus on local elections is important because it allows researchers to understand how uncontested electoral patterns can occur at the micro-scale and affect the functioning of local government.

“Party competition” also appears 4 times, showing that inter-party competition is a primary factor in keeping elections dynamic. In countries with uncontested elections, inter-party competition is often dampened by various mechanisms, whether through strict regulation, government control, or even intimidation tactics that prevent opposition parties from running. When party competition is limited, democracy is jeopardized because voters are deprived of a diverse set of alternatives.

Finally, the keyword “turnout” appears 4 times, indicating that voter participation is also frequently discussed in this context. Low voter participation in elections can undeniably reflect people’s apathy or distrust of the political process. When elections are not competitive, voters may feel their vote will not make a difference, potentially reducing overall participation. It triggers further discussion on the relationship between low levels of competition in elections and low voter turnout.

These keywords thus provide a comprehensive overview of the various aspects considered in the study of uncontested elections, from democracy and electoral competition to their impact on voter participation and the quality of local governance.

Co-Citation of Cited Authors

The co-citation of cited authors provides a foundation for understanding the intellectual networks and academic influence between researchers. When two or more authors are frequently cited together in articles, it indicates a conceptual or theoretical affinity in their

work. Such co-citation patterns reflect the dominant schools of thought or scholarly schools within a field.

I set 22 citations as the minimum because the research domain had more than three thousand authors. The final analysis identified 23 authors. Figure 4 shows the network of authors who have jointly cited other writers. The research displays a two-cluster solution in diverse colours.

The green lines cluster includes authors who focus on research that often links uncontested elections to the context of electoral authoritarianism and how authoritarian-leaning political systems use elections as a means to retain power without real competition. Studies by Gandhi (2015), Magaloni (2010), and Schedler (2002) highlight how authoritarian regimes use elections to maintain legitimacy while controlling the outcome. They investigate strategies of opposition containment and institutional manipulation that preserve regime stability without opening up any space for real competition.

Case studies in Jordan by Lust-Okar (2006) and in Russia by Golosov et al. (2016), Reuter & Robertson (2012), Reuter et al. (2016), and Szakonyi (2022) make considerable contributions to understanding uncontested elections in authoritarian or autocratic states. The prevailing political systems in both countries allow for uncontested elections so that regimes can ensure their power continuity and legitimacy. Moreover, Besley et al. (2010) underscores the consequences of uncontested elections on the birth of public policies that hinder economic growth in the United States. There is also a strong link between low political competition and income growth. Lack of political competition in a state is associated with anti-growth policies: lower capital spending, higher taxes, and a reduced likelihood of using right-to-work laws.

Meanwhile, the red lines category includes authors who focus on the conduct of elections in a democratic context and issues related to electoral competition and voter behaviour. Downs (1957) explores how voters are less motivated to participate in non-competitive elections. His rational voter theory is particularly relevant in understanding the phenomenon of low turnout in elections where the outcome is predictable before the event.

The studies of Ansolabehere et al. (2010), Cox et al. (2020), Hirano & Snyder Jr. (2014), Niemi et al. (1991), and Squire (1989, 2000) focus on electoral dynamics in democratic systems, particularly in the United States. They explore how different levels of competition in local and national elections impact voter turnout and political representation. Jacobson's (1989) and Niemi et al.'s (1991) research enriches the comprehension of legislative election dynamics and voter behaviour at the local level.

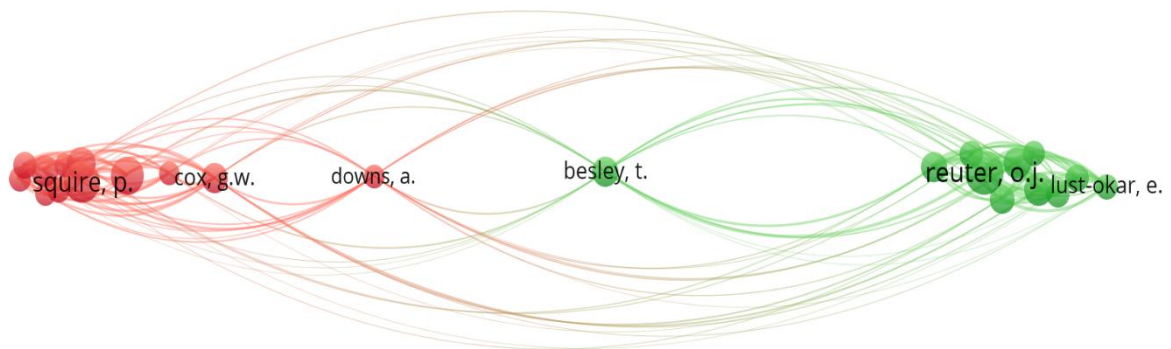
Hogan (2003a, 2003b) and Gross & Breaux (1991) analyze how electoral competition at the local level is affected by factors such as party structure and voter demographics. They see that local elections can result in minimal contestation in specific situations if one party or candidate has strong dominance. Moreover, Carey (2018) examines how electoral rules and system design affect competition in elections. The findings confirm that specific electoral systems can limit or encourage higher levels of competition.

Both categories provide complementary perspectives on the study of uncontested elections. Green lines focus on how authoritarian regimes use uncontested elections to perpetuate power and political stability, with theoretical approaches that include electoral authoritarianism, regime stability and democratic transitions. Meanwhile, red lines focus more on the democratic context, where uncompetitive elections are seen as a phenomenon related to voter behaviour, electoral system design and their impact on political representation.

The interaction between the two clusters is reflected in the co-citation patterns that show a productive theoretical and methodological dialogue. Researchers from the green

lines tend to cite fundamental works from the red lines to build arguments about electoral manipulation and political strategy in authoritarian regimes. Conversely, the red lines utilize insights from the green lines' comparative studies to enrich the understanding of variations in democratic practices. Such linkages result in a more comprehensive grasp of uncontested elections as a complex phenomenon involving institutional aspects, the behaviour of political actors, and broader political system dynamics. This co-citation pattern also indicates the evolution of a mature field of study, where various theoretical and methodological perspectives complement each other in building a solid corpus of knowledge.

Figure 4. Co-citation of cited authors (1965–2024).



Source: author's own elaborations; visualized using the VOSviewer software.

Discussion

This section explores country-based issues, overarching trends in uncontested election studies, and future research directions. First, country-based issues in uncontested elections studies are outlined generally to find out how political characteristics, power structures and local cultures affect electoral competition in different parts of the world from 1965 to 2024. Next, prior studies' overarching trends demonstrate several prominent themes or patterns. Finally, future research directions are outlined to emphasize the significance of a more in-depth study of the dynamics of uncontested elections and their implications for political systems.

Country-Based Issues

The study of uncontested elections has become a remarkable political science topic covering various countries with different political contexts. This phenomenon describes a situation in which elections occur without alternative candidates or adequate competition, causing the democratic process to tend to be distorted. Each country has specific factors that cause such a situation, ranging from authoritarian political systems that control election results to the dominance of major parties that hinder access to other candidates.

The United States has shown consistent and in-depth attention to the issue of uncontested elections, as evidenced by the number of studies conducted since its inception. Research in the U.S. explores various factors that contribute to uncontested elections. One of them is the impact of incumbent advantage, electoral district systems that reinforce the dominance of certain parties, and voter behaviour influenced by the perception of the absence of competition. Studies by Jacobson & Kernell (1982), Abramowitz (1991), and Squire (2000) underline the significance of electoral competition in

maintaining the health of democracy. In addition, academic works of Brunell et al. (2012) and Hall (2014) highlight how changes in electoral structures, especially at the local level, can inhibit political competition and strengthen incumbents, thus affecting voter turnout.

Russia is also a country with many studies on uncompetitive elections, particularly in the context of electoral authoritarianism. Several studies highlight that elections in Russia are often used as a tool to legitimize authoritarian regimes without offering fair competition. Elections in Russia are tightly controlled to ensure the victory of the ruling party or government-backed candidates, creating the illusion of democracy without providing a real opportunity for the opposition. The government control local and national elections to maintain political stability while minimizing competitive participation (Harvey, 2022; Langenohl & Schmäing, 2020; Minaeva et al., 2023; Northmore-Ball & Tertychnaya, 2023; Szakonyi, 2022).

Research in the U.K. tends to explore uncontested elections in local elections and 19th-century political history, as shown by Lloyd (1965) and Foster (1977). These studies highlight how dominant parties maintain power in a particular area by minimizing competition from political opponents. In addition, Coats & Dalton (1992) observed that in some contexts, elections without competition can occur due to the dominance of a political culture that discourages active political participation from minority groups or small parties.

In Poland, the study of uncontested elections is more recent and is mainly related to political transitions and democratization challenges. Lewis (1990) examined electoral dynamics in the post-Soviet period and how the transition to full democracy was disrupted by old political practices that limited competition. The research continues with Mazurkiewicz's (2021) analysis of local elections, which are often characterized by the dominance of major parties that prevent the emergence of alternative candidates.

Research in China by He (1996) and Fang & Hong (2020) focuses on the limitations of electoral competition in a one-party political system. Elections in China are often limited to local-level elections, with candidates selected and organized by the ruling party. Uncontested elections in China are an effective tool of political control for the Chinese Communist Party, limiting popular choice and maintaining political stability.

Australia has several studies of uncontested elections, particularly in local and regional elections. Sharman (2003, 2013) highlights that elections in rural areas often need more competition due to the dominance of major parties or candidates with strong support in the local community. It leads to low turnout and choice for voters.

In Jordan, Lust-Okar (2006) examined elections in a semi-authoritarian political system where the government controls elections to limit the role of the opposition. In this system, elections become a means of displaying political stability in the eyes of the international community. However, with actual competition, the role of the political opposition remains strong.

Knutsen et al. (2017) show that elections without competition in countries such as Egypt and Venezuela reinforce authoritarian control. Although elections are held, government control of the electoral process is so strong that alternative candidates often have no real chance of winning. Elections here are more of a formality aimed at maintaining an image of political legitimacy before the public and the international community.

Indonesia provides an interesting case study of uncompetitive local elections. Lay et al. (2017), Purwaningsih & Widodo (2021), and Yakub et al. (2022) explore the phenomenon in the context of regional head elections, where the dominance of incumbents or the influence of local political dynasties often leads to low levels of competition. These studies highlight that elite control over local resources can hinder independent candidates or political opponents from competing fairly.

Studies in Japan, such as those by Suzuki & Han (2019), highlight how Japan's stable political system often results in uncompetitive elections in several areas. The dominance of particular parties or political forces in certain regions severely limits the intention of opposition candidates to compete in the election. As a result, there are not enough candidates running for mayoral and local council elections.

Other European countries such as Germany, Italy and Spain have a limited number of studies but show similar patterns in uncompetitive elections, especially at the local level. Curto-Grau et al. (2018) in Spain, Lueders (2022) in Germany, and Perez-Vincent (2023) in Italy investigate how the influence of major parties in local elections often precludes the opportunity for healthy competition, especially in certain areas with a history of solid political dominance.

In Latin America, Skigin (2023) in Argentina and Hott & Menezes-Filho (2024) in Brazil highlight that elections without competition can result from political systems that favour loyalty to the dominant party. In some cases, this is driven by a robust political culture and a lack of financial support for alternative candidates, which leaves voters without a diverse range of electoral choices.

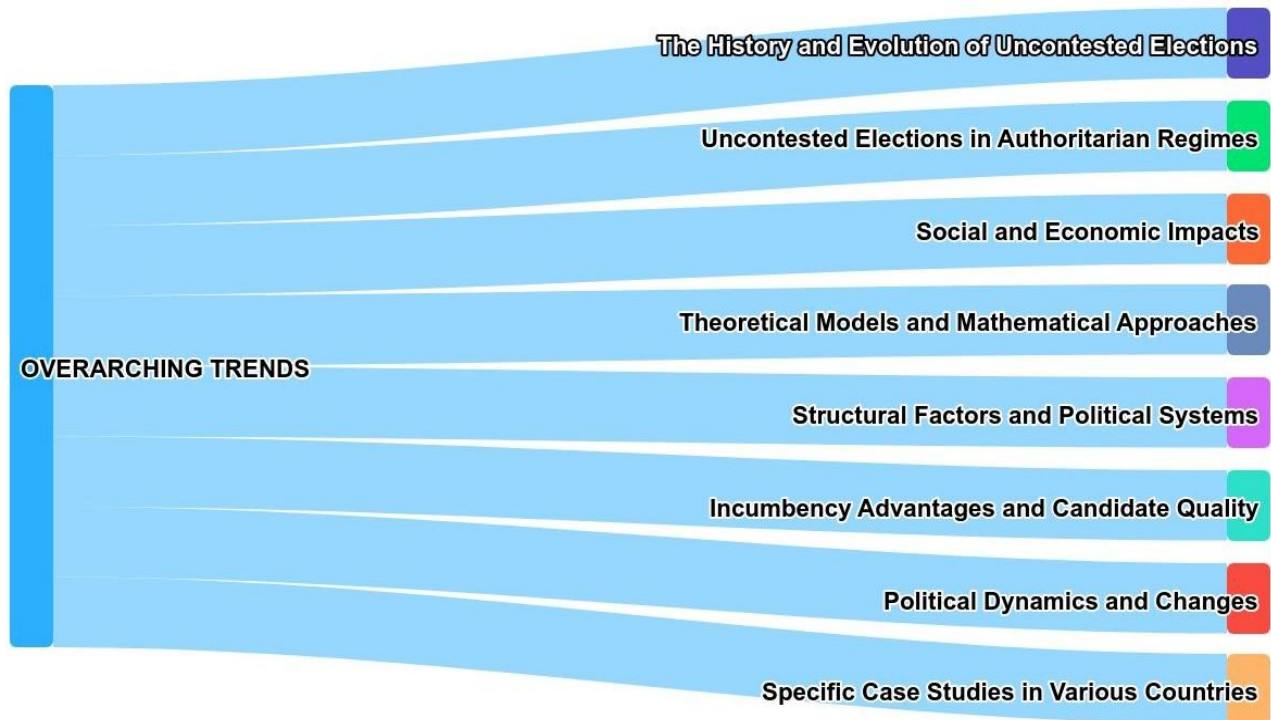
In summary, studies of uncontested elections in different countries show considerable variations in the factors that lead to low levels of political competition. In authoritarian countries such as Russia, China, and Jordan, uncontested elections are often a tool for maintaining political stability and power. Meanwhile, in democratic countries such as the U.S., U.K., and Japan, this phenomenon is often caused by local political dominance, incumbency advantage and lack of access to new candidates. These studies provide deep insights into how political systems, cultures and economic structures can shape uncompetitive electoral processes worldwide.

Overarching Trends in Uncontested Elections Research

Research on uncontested elections has developed remarkably from 1965 to 2024. Referring to the data processed by VOSviewer and Bibliometrix RStudio software, especially concerning the temporal dynamics, keywords occurrence, and co-citation of cited authors, I manually formulated 8 overarching trends in prior studies over nearly 6 decades, as presented in Figure 5. These trends represent several emerged dominant topics as previous researchers have used multiple perspectives to explore that issue in diverse countries.

When these aspects are analyzed together, some essential connections can be seen about how uncontested elections research has developed linearly and through complex networks of influence, collaboration and paradigm shifts. Research themes and intellectual influences have developed through a rich process of interaction and influence between frequently co-cited papers. When researchers co-cite previous work, it creates an intellectual base that forms the foundation for new themes, resulting in continuity and relevance in follow-up research. In addition, dynamics in knowledge development are often characterized by complex interactions between different ideas and concepts from researchers worldwide. New ideas do not just emerge in isolation but develop through diffusion and adoption within the research community. In an interconnected community, new concepts are absorbed, modified, or even replaced by more relevant concepts according to the context of time and space.

Figure 5. Research trends (1965–2024).



Source: author's own elaboration.

The first trend, *the history and evolution of uncontested elections*, focuses on the evolution and historical context of uncontested elections in various regions and periods. Early studies such as those by Lloyd (1965) and Foster (1977) examined the history of uncontested elections in England in the 19th century, providing insight into how the practice developed in particular contexts. Fisher (1981) and Caramani (2003) continue the study by highlighting the resurgence of uncontested elections and their impact on local political dynamics. As such, this trend examines the historical patterns and rise of uncontested elections in specific contexts to provide a fundamental understanding of the phenomenon.

The second trend, *uncontested elections in authoritarian regimes*, concentrates on the use and impact of uncontested elections in maintaining or challenging authoritarian governments. Research by White (1985) and Knutsen et al. (2017) shows how uncontested elections were used in authoritarian regimes such as the Soviet Union and other authoritarian states to preserve political stability and control the opposition. Lueders (2022) provides evidence from East Germany, emphasizing the responsiveness of elections in a closed system. Thus, this trend explores how uncontested elections are used in authoritarian contexts to control political opposition and perpetuate regime stability and how these elections can also serve as a tool for change.

The third trend, *social and economic impacts*, centers on the social and economic consequences of uncontested elections, including their impact on the accountability of elected officials and the effectiveness of legislative performance. Studies by Konisky & Ueda (2011) and Little (2017) explore the social and economic impacts of uncontested elections, including their effects on legislative performance and the accountability of elected officials. Nordström (2024) extends it by analyzing the performance of legislators in Japan. Thus, this trend illustrates the consequences of the phenomenon on various social and economic aspects, emphasizing the importance of competition in politics to ensure accountability and good performance of elected officials and economic decisions that benefit society.

The fourth trend, *theoretical models and mathematical approaches* rests on developing theoretical frameworks to explain the events and consequences of uncontested elections. Research by Eguia (2006) and Buchler (2007) seeks to build theoretical models to understand the phenomenon of uncontested elections, highlighting these models' economic and political implications. Crutzen & Sahuguet (2018) explore the causes and consequences of uncontested primary elections. Thus, this trend builds and tests mathematical models to understand the incentives and outcomes associated with uncontested elections, highlighting issues such as social suboptimality and the strategic behaviour of candidates and parties.

The fifth trend, *structural factors and political systems* comes in contact with research on how structural factors such as barriers to entry and term limits influence the prevalence of uncontested elections. Coats & Dalton (1992) and Prier & Wagner (2009) examine how structural factors such as political entry barriers and term limits influence the likelihood of an uncontested election. Perez-Vincent (2023) adds to the study of barriers to entry in local politics in Italy. In doing so, this trend investigates the impact of the structure of political and electoral systems on the occurrence of uncontested elections. It reveals how barriers to participation in elections and other institutional factors shape electoral competition.

The sixth trend, *incumbency advantages and candidate quality* centralizes on the role of incumbency advantages and candidate quality in uncontested elections. Carson et al. (2007) and Hirano & Snyder Jr. (2014) examine the relationship between candidate quality, incumbent advantage, and uncontested elections. Geras (2023) examines the influence of party rules on congressional nominations. Thus, this trend explores how the advantages held by incumbents and the quality of candidates influence the likelihood of non-contestation in elections and the implications this has for political representation.

The seventh trend, *political dynamics and changes*, rivets on how uncontested elections reflect or drive changes in political and regime dynamics. Lewis (1990) and Kouba & Lysek (2023) show how uncontested elections reflected or influenced changes in political dynamics in Poland and Czechia. Mazurkiewicz (2020) evaluates uncontested elections at the local level in Poland. As such, this trend looks at the broader political implications of uncontested elections, including links to regime stability and change, shifts in party competition, and the crisis of political representation.

The eighth trend, *specific case studies in various countries*, focuses on an in-depth examination of uncontested elections in specific national contexts. Research by Lay et al. (2017) in Indonesia and Ellinas & Katsourides (2021) in Cyprus provides in-depth case studies of uncontested elections in specific local contexts. Sharman (2003) examines the evolution of party competition in Australia. Thus, these trends provide a detailed analysis of the unique factors influencing uncontested elections in different countries, thereby contributing to a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon across political landscapes.

Early studies of uncontested elections tended to take a historical perspective, centering on the chronology of emergence and emerging patterns of uncontested elections in particular local or national contexts. In this phase, a descriptive approach was dominant, where the focus was primarily on documenting the historical facts without much in-depth explanation of the causal factors or wider consequences that could arise.

However, as the discipline has evolved, contemporary research now covers a much broader range of aspects. These aspects are from the analysis of the function of uncontested elections in maintaining the stability of authoritarian regimes to the socio-economic impact of a lack of political competition to the development of theoretical models that explain the behaviour of political actors in uncontested elections. These new

trends confirm that the understanding of uncontested elections has evolved, no longer limited to their history but also their structural, social, and political impacts.

The evolution of the discipline underscores how research on uncontested elections has adapted to changing political and social contexts and how researchers have used new approaches to understand the phenomenon more deeply. Such transformations show that the field is increasingly relevant in highlighting essential aspects such as incumbency advantage, economic and social impacts, and regime change dynamics in uncontested elections.

In more detail, based on the frequency of keyword occurrence, there are 3 prominent topics in uncontested elections research: elections, electoral authoritarianism, and Russia. Each topic has a frequency of occurrence and temporal progression that gives an idea of how the research focus has changed over time.

The topic of elections has the highest frequency of occurrence at 16 times, indicating that elections as a democratic process foundation are the main focus of the study. The term began to appear crucially in 2011, marking increased attention to the deviances of maintaining integrity and competition in elections. Its appearance in the median of 2017 and the third quartile of 2022 indicates that the study of elections continues to evolve in the context of the challenges faced by countries, both democratic and authoritarian. Research during this period has often addressed how uncontested elections impact voter turnout, electoral fairness, and the legitimacy of elected governments.

The topic of electoral authoritarianism appeared 6 times between 2016 and 2023. It refers to the phenomenon where authoritarian regimes use elections to maintain power without offering genuine political competition. With the first quartile in 2016, the topic became remarkable as the study of semi-authoritarian countries grew, particularly in regions experiencing democratic backsliding. The median point in 2020 and the rise to 2023 signal that the topic has received increasing attention in the last decade, especially as many countries hold elections but continue to restrict the freedom of opposition candidates, creating the illusion of democracy. Studies on electoral authoritarianism often link this practice to a government control strategy to minimize the risk of power change.

The topic "Russia" appears 7 times and has been the focus of research in the context of tightly controlled elections by the state. Russia came to the fore around 2016, which marked an increased interest in how the Russian government maintains political power through elections that are not fully competitive. By the median of 2022, research on Russia focused on authoritarianism practices involving control over candidates, limited political participation, and the ruling party dominance in each election. The high frequency in the period 2016 to 2022 suggests that elections in Russia are often exemplary in the study of non-competitive elections where the government is highly ambitious to ensure outcomes that favour political stability through an electoral mechanism that appears democratic but is controlled tightly by them.

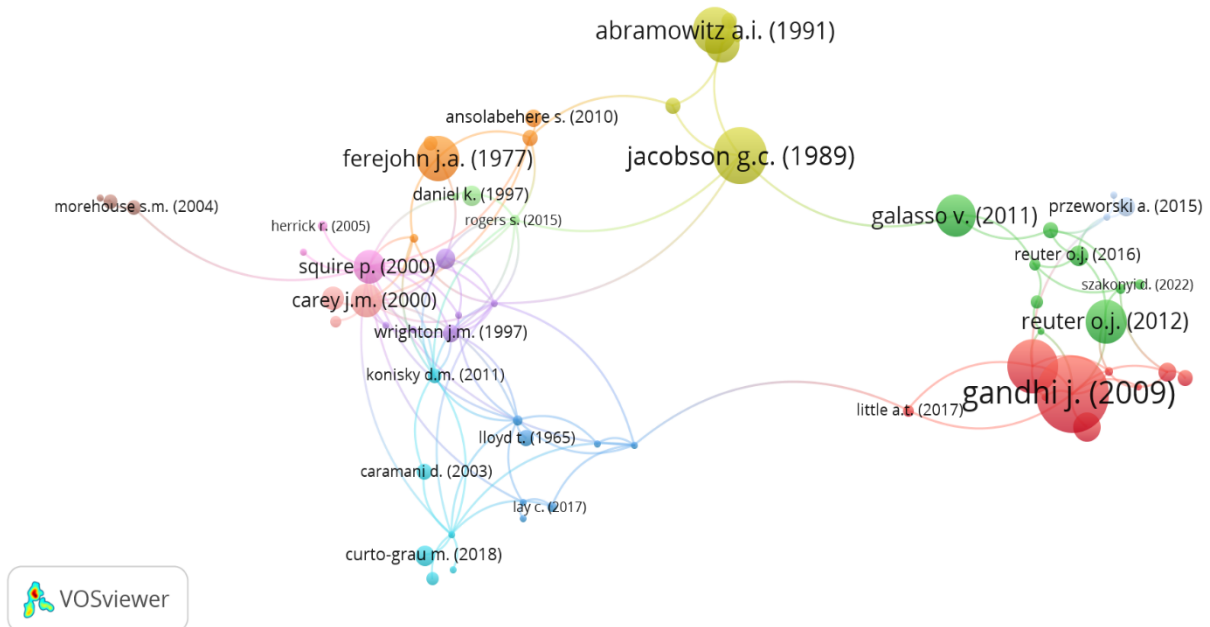
Overall, the above trends suggest that the prominent topics in uncontested elections research have evolved with the global dynamics of democracy and political stability challenges. Each topic is relevant to understanding how states manage political competition within an electoral framework to retain power and create a sense of legitimacy in authoritarian political systems.

Future Research Directions

To identify future research directions, I adopted specific steps from Bahoo (2020) and Bahoo et al. (2021). The first one is to review the top ten cited articles. These articles were selected for their outstanding contributions to the field of study and their ability to create citation maps, as shown in Figure 6. This map helps identify emerging research trends and

understand how various studies are related. I then can see the network of relationships between diverse studies, identify the topics often discussed, and comprehend patterns and dynamics in uncontested elections research. It helps identify areas that have been widely explored and find gaps that still require further research.

Figure 6. Citation map of documents (1965–2024).



Source: author's own elaborations; visualized using the VOSviewer software.

The second step is to review all influential articles and trends over the past seven years (2017 to 2024). Ensuring the research reflects the latest developments and innovations in uncontested elections is essential. By focusing on influential articles and the latest trends, I can stay up-to-date with the latest discoveries and new methodologies. This step also helps understand the major concerns of the research community and how various innovations are being implemented in current studies.

The third step was reviewing other study sample articles to avoid top citation bias. Reviewing all articles in the study sample ensured that less well-known but still relevant and meaningful research was also considered in the analysis. Articles not highly cited may still contain noteworthy contributions that should be noticed. This way, I can obtain a more comprehensive and comprehensive picture.

The final step is to convert the potential research agenda into research questions. Potential research agendas discovered during the literature review process are converted into specific research questions. These questions were then filtered to exclude those other researchers who had already researched. It helps identify unfilled gaps and areas that require further research. By establishing clear and focused research questions, I can design relevant future studies that can contribute to the understanding and development of uncontested elections.

This systematic process resulted in 44 future research questions listed in Table 3. By following these steps, I can identify future research directions that are relevant, innovative, and potentially impact their field of study. These steps help ensure that the research not only keeps up with the latest developments but also fills existing knowledge gaps and pushes the boundaries of understanding in uncontested elections.

Table 3. Future research directions.

| Paper | Approach | Questions |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Gandhi & Lust-Okar (2009) | Literature Review | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Variations in authoritarian electoral structures significantly affect participants' behaviour, but what is the impact of more specific electoral rules, such as the use of independent candidates, on electoral coalition formation? 2. How do staggered election effects affect voter and incumbent behavior? 3. How do different levels and structures of elections affect the behavior of citizens, candidates, and incumbents in broader comparative studies? 4. How do authoritarian elections affect policy outcomes such as economic growth and war? Do these effects vary across regime types? 5. What is the impact of elections on other social and political forces in different regime types beyond influencing the emergence of elite-community conflict, social movement strategies, tribal organization, and gender representation? |
| Jacobson (1989) | District-Level and Aggregate Time-Series Analysis | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. How can the role of strategic politicians in the context of different countries or systems of government affect election outcomes? 7. To what extent do specific campaign strategies impact candidate electability, especially using voter data and modern media? 8. How does the development of voter behavior and candidate strategies change, particularly with the influence of evolving social and economic factors? 9. Are there considerable similarities or differences in electoral patterns between the U.S. House elections and smaller local elections? |
| Lust-Okar (2006) | Case Study | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. How does the role of elections in authoritarian regimes affect the stability and legitimacy of the regime? 11. What factors shape voter behavior in authoritarian elections, particularly in the context of the distribution of patronage over policy? 12. Why and how do candidates choose to participate in elections despite constraints on political freedom? 13. How do state elites manage electoral competition to retain power without blatant manipulation? 14. Is the role of political parties in elections under authoritarianism crucial enough to influence outcomes, or is it limited to personalistic groupings? 15. How can implementing democracy promotion programs be adjusted to reduce patronage |

| | | tendencies in authoritarian electoral systems? |
|----------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Shin (1994) | Literature Review | 16. How can the choice of particular strategies and tactics affect the consolidation of democracy in new countries? 17. How noteworthy is political elites' role in the transition to democracy compared to mass involvement? 18. How do certain social and economic factors affect the sustainability of democracy in different cultural contexts? 19. Is a procedural or substantive approach more effective in measuring the quality of democratic consolidation? 20. What is the relationship between the type of democratic transition and the type of political system that emerges in different countries? |
| Abramowitz (1991) | Case Study | 21. How can public funding increase competition in US House elections? 22. Why does more lavish campaign spending by incumbent candidates tend to reduce electoral competition? 23. Is there a difference in the effectiveness of campaign spending between incumbent and challenger candidates in winning votes? 24. How can changes in campaign policy affect the chances of challenger candidates? |
| Ferejohn (1977) | Case Study | 25. How does voter behaviour affect the reduction of competition in congressional elections? 26. Is there a direct relationship between redistricting and decreased electoral competition? 27. How does campaign finance control by incumbents affect competition in congressional elections? 28. Can changes to district structure increase competition in the future? |
| Reuter & Robertson (2012) | Case Study | 29. How did the dynamics between central and regional governments affect the stability of authoritarian regimes in Russia? 30. Does the appointment mechanism of governors impact the performance of local governments in authoritarian regimes? 31. How do patronage relationships in subnational appointments affect the loyalty of local elites to the center? 32. What are the implications of the appointment system for the potential for future democratic reform? |
| Galasso & Nannicini (2011) | Literature Review | 33. How does a party's strategy of placing high-quality candidates affect election outcomes in competitive regions? |

| | | |
|----------------------|--|--|
| | | 34. Do large campaign expenditures impact the quality of candidates elected in highly competitive areas? |
| | | 35. How does the quality of candidates correlate with their parliamentary attendance? |
| | | 36. Does the high quality of candidates affect voter turnout in competitive elections? |
| Carson et al. (2007) | Case Study | 37. How does candidate quality affect the sustainability of incumbent gains in different electoral contexts? |
| | | 38. Does the relationship between personal vote and candidate quality strengthen the incumbent's position? |
| | | 39. How do campaign history factors affect the development of incumbent advantage? |
| | | 40. How does redistricting affect the dynamics of candidate quality and winning chances? |
| Joseph (1997) | Comparative and Theoretical Perspectives | 41. How have the dynamics between domestic and international forces affected the democratization process in African countries? |
| | | 42. Is the pattern of democratic transition in Africa different from other regions, and what are the reasons for this? |
| | | 43. How did economic factors affect the consolidation of democracy in post-1989 African countries? |
| | | 44. What is the role of non-state actors in strengthening the democratic process in Africa? |

Source: author's own elaboration.

Conclusion

This article presents a comprehensive mapping of patterns and trends in prior studies of uncontested elections over the past six decades, revealing the primary dynamics, contributions and significant shifts in academic attention to the phenomenon affecting the quality of democracy. The overarching trends confirm that previous research was initially focused on the historical and evolutionary aspects of uncontested elections in specific local contexts. However, attention shifted to studies of elections in authoritarian regimes, socio-economic impacts, and theoretical models to explain them. Several researchers have increasingly underscored how the phenomenon indicates democratic stability or dysfunction in different countries, particularly in the United States, Russia and some European countries.

Uncontested elections reflect temporary political stability or widespread support for a particular candidate and signal deep-seated problems in the political system, such as low political participation and the loss of fair competition. The dominance of a particular party, the complexity of electoral rules and high campaign costs have emerged as the main factors driving the phenomenon. Over the period studied, academic interest in uncontested elections has remained consistent with increasing publications, especially in the last decade.

This mapping provides an in-depth insight into the development of uncontested elections research, the critical contributions of various authors, and the thematic trends that have emerged over time. The 44 future research questions open opportunities for further exploration to understand the factors supporting or hindering competitive

elections. The findings enrich academic knowledge and provide practical implications for policymakers in formulating effective policies to increase competition in elections and strengthen political accountability mechanisms.

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