

## The Nexus Between the Rise of Autocratisation and the Deeper Level of BRI Engagement

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**Abstract :** The global landscape is witnessing a disconcerting surge in democratic backsliding, engendering concerns over the rise of autocratisation. This research demonstrates the intricate relationship between a nation's domestic propensity for autocratic governance and its trade relations with China. Giving prominence to Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments, this study adopts a rigorous neorealist framework to discern the complexities of nations' economic interests amidst an anarchic milieu and how these interests may transcend steadfast adherence to democratic principles. The burgeoning bipolarity in the international political setting serves as a backdrop to our inquiry. To operationalise our hypothesis, we conduct a large-scale 'N' study, encompassing a comprehensive global dataset comprising countries' democracy indicators, total trade volume with China, and cumulative Chinese BRI investments over a substantial temporal expanse. By meticulously examining BRI signatories', we aim to ascertain the potential accentuation of democratic backsliding among these nations. To test our empirical underpinning, we will validate our findings through cogent case studies. Our analysis adds to the scholarship on multifaceted interactions between trade dynamics and democratic governance within the fabric of the international political landscape. In its culmination, the paper addresses the question- has the erstwhile grandeur of bipolarity resurfaced in the contemporary global panorama? Concurrently, we explore the nexus between the ascendant wave of autocratisation as a by-product of the Beijing Consensus? Pertinent to policymakers, our discoveries stand poised to furnish a comprehensive grasp of the manifold implications arising from the deepening entanglements with China under the auspices of the BRI.

**Keywords :** democracy, autocracy, china, belt road initiative, international political economy

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