New Data on Autocratic Regimes

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Abstract

When Islamic extremists, hoping to oust the secular regime first established by Gamal Abdel Nasser, assassinated Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, he was quickly succeeded by Hosni Mubarak, another military officer and dominant party official from within Sadat’s inner circle. The regime continued, controlled by the same leadership group. But not all authoritarian leadership transitions follow this pattern. When Zine Ben Ali, the dictator of Tunisia until January 2011, fled the country after weeks of protests, military and civilian elites who had until a few weeks before supported his rule, cooperated to move the country smoothly toward democracy. In contrast, the Shah of Iran’s ouster by similar protests resulted in the seizure and consolidation of power by a radically different autocratic regime led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. These examples illustrate the three possible outcomes when a dictator dies or is overthrown. Social scientists have investigated transitions to democracy, as in Tunisia, but not transitions from one autocracy to another, as in Iran, and not why the ouster of leaders sometimes destabilizes dictatorships but at other times does not. We have not systematically investigated these topics because we have lacked data to identify and analyze autocracy-to-autocracy transitions. In this paper, we introduce a new data set that provides transition information for the 280 autocratic regimes (in 110 countries with more than a million population) in existence from 1946 to 2010. The data set also identifies how regimes exit power, how much violence occurs during transitions, and whether the regimes that precede and succeed them are autocratic. This essay explains the data set and suggests practical applications for how it can be used. We show how these data differ from currently available data sets and how using data that reflect the usual meaning of the concept regime can change the answers to basic questions about transition. We then present a number of simple examples to highlight the data set’s practical utility. We show, for example, preliminary evidence that democratization is more likely after non-violent autocratic collapses than after violent ousters accomplished via insurgency, popular uprisings, or coups.

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When the leader of an autocratic regime loses power, one of three things happens. Someone from the incumbent leadership group replaces him, and the basic rules that define the regime persist. The incumbent leadership group is replaced by democratically elected leaders. Or the incumbent leadership group loses control to a different group that replaces it with a new autocracy following different basic rules. Some scholarship exists on the first kind of transition and a great deal on the second, but almost none on the third or on the reasons that some autocratic breakdowns lead to democratization while others result in new forms of autocracy. Yet in the nearly 65 years since World War II, about 45% of leadership changes in autocracies have led to regime change. More than half of regime changes involve transitions from one autocracy to another.

The reason few studies have focused on these subjects is the difficulty of observing and “measuring” autocracy-to-autocracy transitions. As country-level empirical measurements go, leadership changes and democratic transitions are straightforward, but autocracy-to-autocracy transitions are not. One needs to identify the particular groups and institutions on which the new leader’s power depends and whether they differ from those of the previous leader. These things are not easily observable for large numbers of cases. This article introduces a new data set, the Autocratic Regimes Data Set,¹ that uses hitherto uncollected information to identify all autocratic regime breakdowns between World War II and 2010 in countries with populations greater than one million. The data are in the form of 4587 country-year observations. Using them, one can observe transitions from autocracy to new autocracy (as well as transitions to and from democracy, also available using existing data). The data set identifies the exact start and end dates of autocratic regimes, and whether democracy or autocracy precedes them (for country-years after 1946) and succeeds them. It also provides information about how the outgoing regime collapsed (e.g., ousted by coup, popular uprising, election loss) and whether the transition was violent.

The new data make it possible to systematically address a variety of previously difficult questions. Among these is the question raised by the Arab spring: in what circumstances is the ouster of a dictator likely to lead to democratization rather than renewed autocracy or the breakdown of order? As the Arab spring unfolded, activists and journalists responded with exuberance at the prospect of democratization in countries long oppressed by autocratic rule. Observers with longer memories, however, worried about whether the ferment would lead to democracy, future instabil-

¹Available along with a detailed codebook that explains the rules used for coding, at http://dictators.la.psu.edu.
ity, or reinvigorated dictatorship, as happened after the Shah of Iran was ousted. The data set we introduce makes possible the first steps toward answering this question. Although it is impossible to make meaningful predictions about what will happen in a single country, e.g., Libya next year, our data do make it possible to establish base odds on the likelihood of democratization in a country like Libya in terms of its income, oil wealth, kind of outgoing dictatorship, and amount of violence during the collapse. In what follows, we describe the new data and show some examples of how they can be used to answer interesting and policy-relevant questions.

Consistent with standard political science usage, we define a regime as a set of basic formal and informal rules for choosing leaders and policies. These rules determine the group from which leaders can be drawn and who influence policy. The history of Iran illustrates our use of this concept and how our data set differs from others used to analyze transitions. Since 1925, two successive autocratic regimes governed Iran, with no democratic interludes. The first, the monarchy, lasted until 1979, and the second retains power today. Despite the continuity of autocratic governance, the two autocratic regimes in Iran bear little resemblance to each other and demand quite different policy responses. The first was led initially by Reza Shah Pahlavi, and then by his son, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. In this regime, the Shah made basic decisions about domestic politics, foreign policy and the oil industry in consultation with a small group of advisers he chose. Following the Iranian revolution in 1979, a new set of actors seized power, ending the monarchy and establishing a new type of dictatorship, a theocracy with a clerical Supreme Leader at the helm. Most of those who had held powerful positions under the Shah were arrested or fled into exile, and a new elite of clergy and Republican Guard leaders occupied decision-making positions. Since 1979, this inner circle has dominated Iranian foreign and domestic policy. While this regime has been in force, there have been two Supreme Leaders, Ruhollah Khomeini, in power from 1979 until his death in 1989, and Ali Khamenei, who has ruled since, but the basic rules for determining who can rise to top leadership positions and who determines how much influence other politicians can exercise have not changed.

This brief summary of modern Iran’s experience with dictatorship highlights some important points. The first point is that multiple autocratic leaders can rule during the duration of a single autocratic regime. In Iran’s monarchic dictatorship, Reza Khan was ousted and replaced by his son. Today’s theocratic dictatorship has also had two leaders; the regime survived the death of its
founder, Khomeini. Autocratic regimes often last well beyond the tenure of any single ruler.

The second point is that a single, continuous autocratic time period – or spell – can conceal multiple, consecutive autocratic regimes. Though Iran has been autocratic for its entire independent history, two distinct autocratic regimes have governed it since 1925. Each of these regimes has featured a unique set of elites, rules for determining policies, and methods of leadership selection, and as a result, elites in each regime have made very different domestic and international policy choices. In the first, for example, only male descendants of Reza Shah Pahlavi were eligible to be leaders, while in the second only high-level ayatollahs are. Autocratic spells, in other words, can include successive autocratic regimes. This occurs because democracy is not the only potential outcome when dictatorships collapse. In Iran, the monarchy fell in 1979, to be replaced by a subsequent autocratic regime.

Figure 1 presents the frequency with which autocracy-to-autocracy transitions have occurred since World War II, with democratic transitions included as a frame of reference. Transitions from one autocracy to another are common historically, as the figure shows, but the political science literature has paid them little attention. Autocratic breakdown leads to democracy more often now than in earlier decades, but transitions to subsequent autocracy still occur frequently. This means that if we want to know things like the base odds that Bashar al-Asad’s ouster would lead to democratization in Syria, we need to use data that include both democratizations and ousters that result in new dictatorships. Ignoring this latter type of transition eliminates over half of all autocratic collapses from analyses, thus biasing conclusions about both autocratic collapse and regime transition.

As this discussion makes clear, there are at least three ways of thinking about autocratic political survival – leader survival in office, regime duration, and continuous autocratic spell – and two outcomes of interest when discussing transitions from autocratic rule – democracy and subsequent autocracy.

Existing data enable scholars to test theories about the duration of autocratic leaders’ tenure or the likelihood of transitions to democracy, identified as the ends of autocratic spells. Scholars interested in evaluating theories of autocratic regime survival, however, have been forced to use proxies

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2 Some observers consider the Mossadegh period in the 1950s democratic, and indeed, it might have led to democratization under a constitutional monarchy in different circumstances. It did not, however, and the Shah retained his ability to choose governments and open or close the political system at will.
Figure 1: Autocratic Transitions and Democratic Transitions

to capture essential concepts because no publicly accessible data existed to measure either regime survival or transitions to subsequent autocracy.\(^3\) These proxies introduce systematic measurement error into the analysis: the use of autocratic leadership tenures underestimates the survival of autocratic regimes (because regimes often survive the ouster of individual leaders), while the use of spell data overestimates regime duration (because spells ignore autocracy-to-autocracy regime transitions).

The differences among leader tenure, regime duration, and continuous years of autocracy (spells) determine which data set is appropriate for testing a particular theory. Theories often imply expectations that could be tested using one or two of these ways of measuring autocratic survival but not all of them. Standard ideas about the political effects of economic performance, for example, lead us to expect that high growth would lengthen leaders’ tenure in office and prolong autocratic regime duration. High growth would not necessarily be expected to lengthen autocratic spells, however, because long autocratic spells can be caused either by successive unstable dictatorships or by long periods of stable authoritarianism, and we would only expect growth to be associated with the latter. Nevertheless, one of these measures has often been used as a proxy for another, without careful thought about whether the proxy was appropriate.

\(^3\)The only other data set of which we are aware that classifies the beginnings and ends of autocratic regimes is that collected by Hadenius and Teorell (2007). Their codings, however, identify changes to and from multipartyism as regime change, blurring the concept of regime with the modification of formal institutional characteristics while the same group of elites continues to rule.
The Autocratic Regimes Data Set improves analysts’ ability to test arguments using theoretically appropriate measures. The data set identifies the exact start and end dates of autocratic regimes by noting the pivotal political events that mark changes in the most basic rules for choosing leaders and policies and transfers of power from one kind of group to another. This makes it possible for scholars to assess the chronology of other key political events – like military coups, terrorist attacks, or protests – that occur during the same calendar year as the transition. The data set also incorporates codings of the autocratic regime type, as classified by Geddes (2003) and updated to 2010, which categorize regimes as personalist, dominant-party, military, monarchic, oligarchic, indirect military, or hybrids of these.

Scholars can use the data to disaggregate the transitions we identify by different characteristics (i.e., violent/non-violent, transitions via election vs. coerced transitions, domestic-led/foreign-led), enabling them to test hypotheses about whether these characteristics lead to different outcomes. Separate codes for mode of transition and violence enable assessment of how violence itself affects the likelihood of democratization, for example, rather than assuming that all “irregular” ousters are violent, as some scholars have in the past.

In what follows, we explain the key measures included in the Autocratic Regimes Data Set, present a number of simple examples using the data to show how regimes differ from leaders and spells, and offer suggestions for how the data can be applied to existing and new research questions. The aim is to improve the way we think about autocratic regimes, leader tenures, and transitions, in turn enhancing theoretical understanding of autocratic political survival, the empirical precision with which we examine it, and the policy advice we give.

Measuring Autocratic Regimes

We begin by explaining the key measures included in the Autocratic Regimes Data Set, along with the criteria used to compile them. The data set identifies 280 autocratic regimes during the period from 1946 to 2010. We consider for inclusion independent countries with more than one million inhabitants as of 2009. Country-years are coded as autocratic; democratic; ruled by a provisional government charged with conducting elections as part of a transition to democracy; not independent; occupied by foreign troops, where the occupier governs it or exerts major influence.
on how it is governed; ruled by multiple governments, none of which controls most resources of the state, or no government at all. Thus, in contrast to the Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland (2010) data set (which we discuss in greater detail in what follows), autocratic in our data set is not a residual category, and periods of anarchy and provisional government can be excluded from analyses if the researcher wishes.

The data set identifies the start and end dates of autocratic regimes. To define the start dates, we use a number of coding rules. A span of a year is coded as autocratic if any of the following occurred:

- An executive achieved power through undemocratic means and, with his inner circle, established new rules for choosing leaders and policies. “Undemocratic” refers to any means besides direct, reasonably fair, competitive elections in which at least ten percent of the total population was eligible to vote; or an indirect election by a body, at least 60 percent of which was elected in direct, reasonably fair, competitive elections; or constitutional succession to a democratically elected executive. The start date is the date the executive achieved power.

- The government achieved power through competitive elections (as described above), but subsequently changed the formal or informal rules, such that competition in subsequent elections was limited. The start date is the date of the rule change or action (e.g., the arrest of opposition politicians) that crossed the threshold from democracy to autocracy.

- Competitive elections were held to choose the government, but the military prevented one or more parties that substantial numbers of citizens would be expected to vote for from competing and/or dictates policy choice in important policy areas. The start date is the date when these rules take effect, usually the first election in which popular parties are banned.

As long as the basic rules for choosing leaders and policies remain unchanged, successive years are coded as part of the same regime. Autocratic regimes end when any of the following occur:

- A competitive election for the executive, or for the body that chooses the executive, occurs and is won by a person other than the incumbent or someone allied with the incumbent; and

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4 This data set is available at: [https://netfiles.uiuc.edu/cheibub/www/DD_page.html](https://netfiles.uiuc.edu/cheibub/www/DD_page.html).
the individual or party elected is allowed to take office. The end date is the election, but the end is only counted if the candidate or party elected is allowed to take power.

- The government is ousted by a coup, popular uprising, rebellion, civil war, invasion, or other coercive means, and replaced by a different regime (defined, as above, as a government that follows different rules for choosing leaders and policies). The end date is the date of the ouster, death, resignation, flight, or arrest of the outgoing regime leader.

- The ruling group markedly changes the basic rules for choosing leaders and policies such that the identity of the group from which leaders can be chosen or the group that can select major policies changes. The end date is the date on which a major rule change occurs.

Though most regime beginnings and ends are easy to identify and uncontroversial, some require consideration of context. Coups that replace a current military leader with another, for example, may be either leader changes or regime transitions and can be difficult to classify. If the leader’s successor is from within the same inner circle as the ousted leader, we code a leadership change, not a regime change; if the successor has a different support base (e.g., relies on the support of a different ethnic group), we consider the transition a regime change. This is because the group from which leaders can come and that influences policy choices changes with the leader. We rely on extensive publicly available coding rules to adjudicate such cases.

That being said, most of the time, the start and end dates of regimes are easy to identify. When a monarchy is overthrown in a coup led by military officers, for example, it is clear that the identity of the group from which leaders can come is no longer members of a ruling family, but rather high ranking military officers. In this example, the coup that ousts the monarchy identifies both the end date of the first regime and the beginning of the second.

In addition to identifying the start and end dates of regimes, the data set provides information on the type of coalition in power, according to the classifications identified by Geddes (2003). These classifications have been used by a number of studies, examining areas such as international war (Weeks, 2008; Peceny, Beer and Sanchez-Terry, 2002; Frantz and Ezrow, 2011), civil war (Gurses

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5Because we use the date of the election, not the date of leadership transition that results from the election (e.g. the inauguration date), the year of democratic transition in our data set may be different from the transition year in data sets, such as Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland (2010), that date democratic transition as the change in the leader. For example, we code the December 1989 Chilean election in which the opposition candidate won as the transition to democracy, rather than the inauguration of the winning candidate, which occurred in March 1990.
and Mason, 2010), repression (Davenport, 2007), protest (Ulfelder, 2005), economic sanctions (Escribà-Folch and Wright, 2010), and foreign aid (Wright, 2009). Autocratic regimes included in the data set are identified as personalist, dominant-party, military, monarchic, oligarchic, indirect military, or hybrids of these categories. As defined by Geddes (2003), these codings refer to whether control over policy, leadership selection, and the security apparatus is in the hands of one party (dominant-party dictatorships), a royal family (monarchic dictatorships), the military (military dictatorships), or a narrower group centered around an individual dictator (personalist dictatorships). Oligarchy refers to regimes in which leaders are chosen through competitive elections but less than ten percent of the total population is enfranchised. Indirect military rule refers to regimes in which formal political leaders are chosen through competitive elections, but the military either prevents parties that would attract large numbers of votes from participating or controls the selection of important cabinet ministers. Though these regime classifications have existed for some time, this data set is the first to make them publicly available in a format that is easily accessible for scholars.

Figure 2 shows the frequency of the different autocratic regime types across time. Dominant-

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6The public data set suggests one way to collapse these categories to four (military, monarchy, party, personalist). The data set also identifies democratic country-years. Thus scholars can use this data set for a complete universe of post-WWII country-year, grouped into, for example, five categories: democracy, military dictatorship, party dictatorship, personalist dictatorship, and monarchy.

7Here and throughout we group party-hybrids and oligarchies with dominant-party dictatorships and military-personalist hybrids and indirect military regimes with military dictatorships.
party dictatorships were the most common type for most of the period, but following the end of the Cold War declined in number by about half. Military dictatorships, though far less common than dominant-party dictatorships, also appear to have peaked at the height of the Cold War and dropped in its aftermath. Both of these developments most likely reflect the strategic support of dictatorships in various regions of the world to advance U.S. and Soviet geo-political agendas. The proportion of personalist dictatorships, by contrast, has increased steadily throughout the period, such that these regimes now rival dominant-party regimes as the most prevalent form of autocracy. The number of monarchies has remained stable for the past 50 years or so, reflecting the fact that the monarchies that survived the first decades after World War II have been quite durable.

It is worth noting that these regime classifications capture something different from the degree of democraticness or repressiveness. To illustrate this, Figure 3 shows how they map onto one of the most commonly used measures of democraticness, combined Polity scores (described in detail in the sections that follow). The figure shows that there are some regimes that we classify as dictatorship that receive fairly high combined Polity scores (as represented by the outliers in the graph. Combined Polity scores vary a lot both within each regime type and across them. Monarchies typically receive the lowest scores, followed by dominant-party dictatorships. Military

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8This graph does not show the handful of cases in the data set that score higher than 6 on the Polity scale, for example Botswana under the rule of the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) and Taiwan during the 1990s under the Kuomintang (KMT).
and personalist dictatorships receive comparable combined Polity scores, both of which are usually somewhat higher than those in other types of dictatorship. This probably says more about what the creators of Polity scores chose to measure than it does about anything else.

We include a number of additional measures in the data set. For those regimes that collapsed during the time period under consideration, we code whether the loss of power was violent, based on the reported number of deaths during the transition event. We also code the mode of transition, that is, whether the outgoing autocratic regime lost power by losing an election, military coup, popular uprising, insurgency, or elite-determined rule changes. We also classify the government prior to and following each regime (where relevant) as democratic or autocratic.

In the two sections that follow, we use a number of simple examples to illustrate the differences between: 1) autocratic leaders and autocratic regimes, and 2) autocratic regimes and autocratic spells. We do so by comparing how our data set matches up with existing ones that measure autocratic leaders and autocratic spells. Because the regime classifications we include in the data set are linked to differences in how dictatorships and their leaders fall from power (among other things), we incorporate them in these examples. Through these examples, we emphasize that autocratic leaders, regimes, and spells are different concepts, each appropriate for use in some studies but not others. We close each section with a few practical applications of our data set, showing how it can be used to unearth new insights about autocratic political survival and expand the range of implications under consideration in existing research.

1 Autocratic leaders and autocratic regimes

Since the establishment of Communist rule in China in 1949, the country has had five leaders: Mao Zedong, Hua Guofeng, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and currently Hu Jintao, with Xi Jingping due to become the next General Secretary and President. Leaders have come and gone, but the regime has remained intact. Using leader tenure as a proxy for regime survival is akin to asserting that the British democratic regime would fall if David Cameron did. For dictatorships, the same logic holds. Though it is true that in some regimes – particularly personalist dictatorships – the leader and the regime are virtually synonymous (as in Uganda under Idi Amin), this is far from true in many dictatorships, where intra-regime leadership turnover is common.
Because our data include the start and end dates of autocratic regimes, we are able to illustrate exactly how leader tenure and regime duration differ from each other. We do so by comparing our regime data to leadership data from the Archigos (Goemans, Gleditsch and Chiozza, 2009) and Svolik and Akcinaroglu (2007) data sets, each of which code the entry and exit dates of political leaders, the latter for autocratic leaders only. Figure 4 displays this information, plotting leadership and regime failure rates per year by type of dictatorship. Because some autocratic leaders are subject to term limits, we also include leader failure rates from Svolik and Akcinaroglu that exclude term limited leaders (a useful feature of this data set). We limit the sample to the country-years that we classify as autocratic.\(^9\) The figure shows how leadership failure rates (excluding those due to natural death or foreign invasion) compare with regime failure rates. The bars labeled Archigos, Svolik, and Svolik (no term limits) refer to measures of leader tenure. The number inside each bar is the probability that the leader will be ousted or the regime will end in any particular year.

As would be expected, the rates are similar for personalist dictatorships, where one-man rule is the norm. Though cases of intra-regime leadership succession sometimes occur in personalist dictatorships – as in the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua – they are less common than in other kinds of autocracy. In monarchies, leader failure rates are about double regime failure rates, though

\(^9\)Because the date for regime failure and leader exit can differ in the different data sets due to minor differences in coding rules, we extend the regime data forward (after a regime transition) in some cases to ensure that the analysis captures the leadership exit for leaders in power when the regime collapses.
both are very low (about 5% and 2%, respectively). Dominant-party dictatorships exhibit a similar trend, though leadership turnover is a bit higher than in monarchies, leading to even greater disparity between leader and regime failure rates. In military dictatorships, leader failures rates are the highest, ranging from about 16% to about 20% depending on the data set used. Regime failure rates are lower (about 13%), though still high compared to those in other kinds of autocracy.

Though the size of the gap between leader and regime failure rates differs across type of dictatorship, regime failure rates are lower than leader failure rates in all types. In fact, the average time to leader ouster is about seven years in the Archigos data set, half the average for regime duration. The data show that dictatorships persist after the fall of the dictator about half of the time, indicating that leadership turnover can and often does occur within the duration of a single autocratic regime, just as it does in democracies. This means that using leader survival data as a proxy for regime survival will underestimate the durability of autocratic regimes by about 50 percent. More important, it will underestimate it more for some types of autocracy and some time periods than for others, which may further bias results.

Practical application: Leader fate and regimes

Several recent theories have used dictators’ expectations about their possible fates after leaving office to help understand their decisions about things as varied as holding elections (Cox, 2010) and starting wars (Debs and Goemans, 2010). The research indicates that the risk of costly post-exit outcomes causes leaders to behave differently than they would otherwise (Debs and Goemans, 2010; Goemans, 2000; Chiozza and Goemans, 2011). Here, we explore how the new data set can be used to inform our understanding of the fates of autocratic leaders after leaving office. We show that combining leader exits in stable regimes with leader exits that accompany regime breakdown obscures relationships of interest. We examine differences in the post-exit fates of autocratic leaders using the Archigos data set, which identifies whether leaders are exiled, imprisoned, or killed immediately after leaving office. This information is presented in the left portion of Figure 5, according to autocratic regime type.

First, it is worth pointing out that the Geddes regime classifications correspond with very dif-

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10 The number of monarchies in our data set is fairly small, with 12 collapsing at some point during the period and seven still in power today. Because of this small sample size, we make few inferences about monarchical transitions in the examples that follow.
different trends in how leaders fare after leaving power.\textsuperscript{11} In personalist dictatorships, most leaders (69\%) face exile, imprisonment, or death after they leave office; in dominant-party dictatorships, by contrast, significantly fewer (37\%) do. Leaders in monarchies and military dictatorships lie somewhere in between. How leaders are treated when they fall from power depends on the type of dictatorship, the implications of which could be explored in future research.

We next look at the post-exit fates of leaders whose regimes fall with them, again by regime type.\textsuperscript{12} The right portion of Figure 5 shows the same information as the left, but includes only those leaders who lost office at the same time their regimes collapsed. We see that for all of the regime categories except military dictatorship, the percentage of leaders who face a costly outcome upon their departure from office is higher when the regime falls than when it survives their ouster. The difference is particularly stark for monarchies, where leaders face a strong chance of exile, imprisonment, or death if the regime goes down with them; this risk decreases by nearly half when the regime persists in their absence. The removal of living monarchs is of course unusual in stable regimes, so any conclusions have to be quite tentative, but when a ruling family decides to replace

\textsuperscript{11}How leaders fall from power also affects their post-exit fates (Goemans, 2008). Constitutional ousters are far more likely to yield an outcome that is “good” for leaders, whereas unconstitutional ousters (like coups) are more likely to lead to the leader’s exile, imprisonment, or death. Such leadership transitions are also correlated with regime type, with constitutional turnover occurring about 65\% of the time in dominant-party dictatorships, compared to 27\% of the time in personalist dictatorships and 46\% of the time in military dictatorships.

\textsuperscript{12}Again, we have taken care to reconcile the different dates of regime failure and leadership exit. See FN 9.
Table 1: Democratic Transitions Protect Dictators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incumbent Leader Post-Exit Fate</th>
<th>After Transition to Autocracy</th>
<th>Democracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jail</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exile</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OK/Natural Death</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Column percentages reported. Incumbent leader at the time of the regime collapse event. Sources: Geddes, Wright and Frantz (2012) and Goemans, Gleditsch and Chiozza (2009).

a monarch, they have been unlikely to arrest or kill him. For dictators in other types of autocracy, bad fates are also more likely when the regime is ousted too. This makes intuitive sense because if the regime persists, those who are most likely to determine the ex-leader’s fate are his erstwhile allies, but if the regime falls, his fate falls into the hands of enemies.

The data set also enables us to dig a bit deeper into how the post-exit fates of leaders vary depending on whether the succeeding regime is democratic or autocratic. Table 1 shows the post-exit fates for leaders whose regimes were followed by a subsequent autocracy compared to those whose regimes democratized. The likelihood of a “good” fate – where leaders are not exiled, imprisoned, or killed – is more than twice as high when a democratic transition occurs as when a new autocracy replaces the old one. While democracy affords protections to former dictators after the fall of all types of autocracy, Figure 6 shows that democratization after party-based autocratic rule increases the chance of a good fate from 36% to 80%. For military regimes this figure rises from 37% to 63%. Thus the odds of the leader surviving a transition in these contexts are substantially better if the dictatorship democratizes than if it falls to new dictatorship. While democracy also protects the former incumbent in personalist regimes – raising the chances of a good fate from 16% to 36% – democratic transitions still entail a substantial risk for ousted personalist leaders.

Personalist leaders most likely encounter costly fates even after democratic transitions because their regimes lack institutions (like a professionalized military or well-developed party) that persist after regime change and could potentially provide protection and guarantees for them upon their departure from office. The likelihood of facing arrest or death after ouster may explain why leaders of personalist regimes less frequently negotiate their transitions out of power.

In sum, departing leaders are more likely to suffer costly fates during transitions to subsequent
autocracy than transitions to democracy. The reason behind this may lie in the fact that the leader of the old regime poses a threat to the new one (Debs, 2011). Should the leader survive the transition period, a dictatorship will be more likely to address the threat posed by the leader with brute force than a democracy will. The greater likelihood of punishment after ouster by a new dictatorship also suggests that autocrats facing challenges from insurgencies or popular protests (which increase the chance of transition to a new autocracy, as shown below) might be more likely to try to rally support by attacking a neighbor than would dictators whose greatest fear is losing an election.

Our data set makes possible more nuanced investigation of this and other aspects of authoritarian decision making thought to be affected by dictators’ expectations about their future.

The evidence presented here shows that the likelihood that autocratic leaders will face post-exit punishment varies depending on whether the regime ends as well. The data also reveal that leadership transitions take place within constitutional guidelines about 60% of the time when they occur during the lifespan of a regime, a number that drops to 37% if the leadership transition occurs during regime collapse. This is not inconsequential, given the weight of recent evidence indicating that whether leadership transitions are likely to be constitutional or not affects how leaders behave, ranging from the likelihood they will repress (Escribà-Folch, 2011) to their willingness to end

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13Indeed, a number of studies have shown that dictatorships are more likely to use repression than democracies. See, for example, Davenport (2007), Poe and Tate (1994), Hathaway (2002), Vreeland (2008), Debs (2011), Conrad and Moore (2010).
wars (Quiroz Flores, N.d.). A number of studies have shown that the risk of unconstitutional ouster increases the likelihood that leaders will provoke conflict as a means of “gambling for resurrection” (Chiozza and Goemans, 2011; Goemans, 2008; Debs and Goemans, 2010). The new data make possible multiple new avenues for expanding the theoretical and policy implications of these studies.

2 Autocratic regimes and autocratic spells

An autocratic spell refers to the consecutive calendar years in which a country is ruled by some form of dictatorship. In other words, it is the length of time that a country is not democratic, regardless of any other characteristics of rule. Spells only end when a democracy interrupts them.

Researchers are not usually interested in autocratic spells per se. Rather, they use data that code country-years as democratic or not, without regard to the beginnings and ends of autocratic regimes, and thus end up equating autocratic regimes with autocratic spells in their analyses. This is unproblematic if the purpose of the research is to investigate the effect of some characteristic on the likelihood of democratization, but it leads to bias if the purposes of the research include investigation of autocratic survival or what happens after autocratic breakdown. Because spell data have been used fairly often as proxies for regime survival, we discuss the intricacies of the two major data sets that measure them, Polity and Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland (2010) (CGV), in some detail here.

The Polity data set is perhaps the most commonly used data set to capture spells. Polity scores measure the “qualities of democratic and autocratic authority in governing institutions” (Polity IV Project 2009). They identify characteristics, such as the competitiveness of elections and executive constraints, without regard to the identity of the leadership group or the informal rules that limit leadership to particular groups. Spells are typically identified by combined Polity scores, which aggregate autocratic and democratic Polity scores, generating a 21-point scale that ranges from -10 to 10 (see Polity IV (2010) for more on this).

With combined Polity scores, the length of the spell usually corresponds to the length of time during which a country is consecutively coded autocratic, meaning that its combined Polity scores fall below 6 or 7, the typical thresholds used for defining democraticness. Some studies further
differentiate between whether countries are autocratic or anocratic; the former usually consist of countries with combined Polity scores ranging from -10 to -6, and the latter of countries with combined Polity scores ranging from -5 to 5. Some studies instead use the Polity Durable variable (e.g. Smith (2004)), which identifies the years in which combined Polity scores increase or decrease by three points or more. Using Polity Durable, the length of the spell corresponds to the length of time until a country’s combined Polity score moves three points from one year to the next. Spells computed using the Polity Durable variable will be significantly shorter than those using the combined Polity score threshold because 3-point jumps in a given year are very common in the Polity data.

Though Polity scores provide information about a country that can inform regime classifications, the scores are not themselves regime classifications. Polity scores measure regime characteristics, but they do not identify the group that selects leaders and implements policy changes and thus do not identify many of what would be called regime changes in standard usage. For example, most scholars view the transfer of power from Milton Obote to Idi Amin in Uganda as a regime change. Both regimes were autocratic, but the individuals who held power and controlled policy dramatically altered in terms of ethnic composition and party vs. military institutional organization. Because executive power was relatively unconstrained under both leaders, however, the combined Polity scores associated with their tenures are similar. Using comparable combined Polity scores as a proxy for a regime would miss the 1971 Ugandan regime change and lump the regimes under Obote and Amin as one single, continuous regime.

At the same time, using combined Polity scores can also lead to counting as regime changes country-years in which an observer with a standard understanding of the word regime would say that no change had occurred. For example, most observers see Mexico as controlled by the same regime from the revolution until the Partido Revolucionario Institucional’s (or PRI’s) loss of presidential elections in 2000. Yet Mexico’s combined Polity score under the PRI changed between 1976 and 1977, moving it from the category of autocracy to the category of anocracy. This increase in Mexico’s combined Polity score is uncontroversial and corresponds with a series of political reforms that were implemented in 1977. Yet few scholars would assert that the pre- and post-1977 periods in Mexico represent two distinct regimes. The group of individuals who held power and exercised control over policy remained the same: the party elite of the PRI. Looking at movements
up and down the Polity spectrum may be appropriate for measuring increments of democraticness, but doing so to identify regime changes will miss critical autocracy-to-autocracy transitions, and occasionally denote regime changes in instances in which a stable autocracy has initiated reforms. Use of the Polity Durable variable does not avoid these pitfalls. With this measure, Iran’s 1979 revolution would be considered an episode of democratization, because the country’s combined Polity scores increased so much at this time. Yet few of us view the post-1979 Iranian government as democratic.

The second data set that captures autocratic spells is the CGV data set, which codes whether countries are autocratic or not, and, if so, classifies the type of dictatorship, according to whether the leader is civilian, military (measured as having ever worn a uniform), or monarchic. Thus, for example, the CGV data set codes as military all autocracies led by men who have ever been officers. In our data set, regimes are only coded as military when dictators govern in collaboration with the rest of the officer corps. This means that the Ugandan dictatorship led by Idi Amin from 1971 to 1979 is coded as military by CGV but personalist in our data set because Amin marginalized the military from highest level decision making.

It is important to emphasize that though the CGV data set provides these classifications, it does not offer the start and end dates of individual regimes. Start and end dates are inferred when a civilian-led regime, for example, follows a monarchy, as in the Iran example at the beginning of the paper. Periods of rule by successive men wearing uniforms, however, sometimes obscure regime changes. As an example, Bolivia was governed by men who wore or had worn uniforms from 1964 to 1979, but standard understandings of the word regime would not consider this period a single military regime. In late 1964 General René Barrientos, supported by a populist faction of the military, seized power in a coup; he quickly created a civilian party to support himself, civilianized the regime by creating alliances with civilian social groups and appointing civilians to important government posts, and was elected president in 1966. This regime was led by a military man but based on an alliance between a faction of the military and important civilian interest groups. When Barrientos died in 1969, General Alfredo Ovando, commander-in-chief of the army, seized power from Barrientos’ constitutional successor in order to impose government by a junta of top military officers, ushering in a short period of collegial military rule without explicit links to civilian groups. Collegial military rule ended in 1971 when Colonel Hugo Banzer, an exiled
ex-officer supported by a right-wing faction of the military and two of Bolivia’s main political parties, seized power and established a regime under his personal control. In our data set, the military-civilian alliance established under General Barrientos from 1964 to 1969 is coded as one regime, the period of collegial military rule led by Bolivia’s commanding officers from 1969 to 1971 is coded as a second regime, and the government of ex-Colonel Banzer is coded as a third. Using the leader’s identity as military as the only basis for identifying regime beginnings and ends would miss these kinds of regime changes, which are common in lower income countries.

There are also regimes in which the top leader is at one time an officer and at another time a civilian. In Mexico, for example, General Manuel Avila Camacho was followed as president by his hand-picked successor and fellow dominant-party stalwart, the civilian lawyer and former Interior Minister Miguel Aleman. If the CGV leader coding is used as a proxy for regime ends, then we would inappropriately code the dominant-party regime in Mexico as two regimes, one military and the other civilian, but led by the same dominant party. There are also a number of other instances of party-based regimes led by current or former officers for part of the time, including the post-1981 period in Communist Poland led by General Wojciech Jaruzelski.

Because our data include the start and end dates of autocratic regimes, we are able to explore how regimes and spells differ from each other by comparing our data to the Polity and CGV data. We calculate Polity autocratic spells by looking at the time until an autocratic country (those with combined Polity scores of 6 or lower) reaches a score of 7. We find that the average duration of a Polity autocratic spell is around 28 years, nearly double the duration of an average autocratic regime (around 14 years).\textsuperscript{14}

The CGV data set also includes measures of the number of consecutive years in which a country has been ruled by the same type of autocratic leader (civilian, military, or monarchic). If the same type of leader is in power, one continuous spell will be inferred. The average duration of an autocratic spell using the CGV data is about 15 years, a year longer than with our data. When we disaggregate by type, however, we see a more nuanced picture. The left portion of Figure 7 compares the CGV spell data with our measures of dominant-party and monarchic regimes, while the right portion compares it with our measures of military and personalist regimes. We see that

\textsuperscript{14}The Polity Durable variable has the opposite effect, given its sensitivity to small (three point) changes in combined Polity scores. Using this measure, the average time until regime change is only about eight years, nearly cutting in half the duration of regimes as we typically define them.
the spell durations match closely with the durations of dominant-party and monarchic regimes. This is because it is rare for one dominant party regime to follow another and unheard of for one monarchy to follow another, so using spells as proxies for regimes works well for these kinds of autocracy. This is not true when looking at military and personalist regimes, however, which are less durable than the spell data indicate because one regime with a military leader can follow another, as can successive dictatorships with civilian leaders but different ethnic or regional bases of support. When we compare the duration of military regimes in our data set with autocratic military spells in the CGV data set, we see that these regimes last about seven years on average in our data set, but about 12 years in the CGV data set. This occurs because multiple military dictatorships can come and go within the same autocratic military spell, as in the Bolivian example above, so long as the leadership position is held by a man who wears or once wore a uniform.

These examples show that the duration of autocratic spells is usually longer than that of autocratic regimes. This can be important not so much because we care how long autocracies last, but because we want to understand why they collapse and why their collapses are sometimes violent and other times negotiated, sometimes result in democratization and other other times in renewed autocracy, and so on. In order to carry out careful investigations of these and related questions, we need to identify correctly when regimes, in the standard political science sense of the word, end. Yet, when combined Polity or CGV data are used, a substantial number of regime
ends are omitted from analysis (and when Polity Durable is used many changes that are not regime breakdowns in standard political science usage are included in the analysis). The omitted authoritarian breakdowns are not randomly distributed across autocracies, levels of development, and other characteristics but rather disproportionally involve military and personalist dictatorships in poorer countries, which adds to the bias introduced into analysis by omitting a substantial number of regime changes.

**Practical application: What happens after regime collapse?**

As Figure 1 above shows, more than half of autocratic breakdowns have resulted in a subsequent dictatorship, illustrating that when autocracies collapse, democratization is neither the only nor even the most common outcome. This fact has implications for how we study many central questions in comparative politics and international relations. For example, theories link economic performance to autocratic survival, but analysts have sometimes used democratization (that is, spell data) as a proxy for autocratic collapse, leading to underestimates of autocratic vulnerability to economic crisis (Przeworski et al., 2000). Efforts to explain whether and how foreign policy tools, such as economic sanctions and military intervention, influence autocratic survival have also often assessed only their effect on the probability of democratization (see, for example, Pickering and Peceny (2006)). Both academics and policy-makers, however, want to know not only whether such policies are likely to bring about democratization, but also whether foreign-induced autocratic regime collapse might lead to a new dictatorship or a failed state. Our new data make it possible to assess these possibilities.

We begin this section with descriptive data on the type of incumbent autocratic regime and the frequency of transitions to show that the baseline probability of democratic transition, given regime collapse, varies considerably across autocratic regime types.

The left panel of Figure 8 shows the baseline probability of democratic transition, given autocratic collapse, by incumbent regime type. It shows that only in military dictatorships is democratization more likely than transition to subsequent autocracy (Geddes, 1999, 2003). Personalist dictatorships are the least likely to democratize. Though dominant-party regimes are more likely to democratize than personalist dictatorships, a dominant party’s loss of power is more likely to
result in subsequent autocracy than in democracy.\textsuperscript{15} Historically, intervening in military dictatorships with the intention of destabilizing them might have been a worthwhile strategy for other governments interested in fostering democratization. However, in other dictatorships such a strategy has been less likely to yield democratic transitions, instead facilitating the emergence of new autocratic regimes.

The right panel shows the same baseline probabilities of democratic transition, after autocratic collapse, using only data from 1990 to 2010, that is, post-Cold War. While the prospects for democratization are much higher for all dictatorships during the past two decades, the pattern across autocratic regime types remains unchanged: military dictatorships are the most likely to democratize, given regime collapse, while personalist dictatorships are the least likely. Put bluntly, these baseline democratization rates suggest that if autocracies collapse during the Arab Spring of 2011-12, we should expect the chances of democratization to be better in autocracies where the dominant party and the military hold significant power, such as Egypt and Tunisia, than in personalist dictatorships, such as Libya and Yemen.

This descriptive data, of course, cannot tell us why these patterns exist. We do not know if democratization is least likely after regime collapse in personalist dictatorships because of some

\textsuperscript{15}Because there are only two instances of a monarchy democratizing during the period (Nepal in 1991 and again in 2006), we exclude monarchies from this figure.
structural factor that gave rise to personalist rule in the first place; or if personalist rule transforms domestic institutions, such as the military and political parties, or civil society such that the prospects of democratization fall over time; or if personalist regimes are simply less likely to collapse in a manner that is conducive to democratization because their leaders resist negotiation over transition.

While we have lots of data, albeit of varying quality, on structural factors such as income, education levels, ethnicity, and inequality, we have less data on how autocracies collapse. There is a large literature in comparative democratization that focuses on precisely this latter question, but it has not been carefully tested (Huntington, 1991). Further, a growing literature in comparative politics builds on the Meltzer and Richard (1981) model of taxation and government size to focus on the redistributive foundations of political regimes (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006; Boix, 2003; Houle, 2009; Freeman and Quinn, 2012). Central to these theories of democratization is the credible threat of violent overthrow of the dictatorship as an incentive to incumbents to negotiate transitions to democracy. Yet to date, there has been no systematic data to assess how violence, negotiations leading to elections, or other modes of transition influence the prospects for democratization relative to the likelihood of transition to a new autocracy.

Our data set codes two variables that will further research on how autocratic collapses affect the likelihood of democratization. First, we code a variable that assesses the level of violence during the regime collapse event. This variable takes one of four categorical values: 0 for no deaths, 1 for 1-25 deaths, 2 for 25-1000 deaths, and 3 for more than 1000 deaths. With this information, we examine the baseline probability of democratic transition, given regime collapse, for violent and non-violent regime failures (shown in the left panel of Figure 9). Non-violent regime collapses are not only more prevalent than violent ones, but they are also more likely to result in democratic transitions. This finding suggests that democracy was a more likely outcome after the recent autocratic collapse in Tunisia, where the level of violence was moderate, than after those in Libya or Yemen or the one that may happen in Syria, all of which would be coded in our highest violence category.

16Note that in models of democratization such as Boix (2003) and Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) the motivating action that prompts elite agreement to democratize is the credible threat of revolutionary overthrow, not the realization of violent revolution.
While this evidence concurs with recent analysis of the relative success of non-violent campaigns to achieve political goals (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2008), it does not conclusively show that non-violent transitions are more likely to lead to democracy because we do not control for other factors – such as structural characteristics of society or incumbent regime characteristics – that may explain both the chances of democratic transition and the level of violence during regime collapse. Without the kind of data we show here, however, we cannot begin to answer such questions.

Second, our data set codes a variable for the means of autocratic regime collapse. This variable uses information from the observed regime collapse event to describe how the regime ended. This variable includes the following options for how autocracies end: losing competitive elections; ouster by popular uprising or mass demonstrations; ouster by military coup; defeat by insurgents; ouster by foreign invasion; or basic rule changes made by insiders that, for example, introduce universal suffrage in a previously oligarchic regime.

In the right panel of Figure 9, we collapse these categories into two: coerced transitions and non-coerced transitions. Foreign invasions, coups, uprisings, and ouster by insurgents, revolutionaries or combatants fighting a civil war comprise the former, while elections and rule changes that strip the incumbent leader of his power constitute the latter. Pacted transitions to democracy, such as the Spanish transition after Francisco Franco died, would fall into the non-coerced category, while revolutionary regime transitions such as the Cuban and Iranian Revolutions fall into the coerced category, as do transitions accomplished via coups even if no violence occurs during the coup.\textsuperscript{18} The pattern for coerced regime failures is even stronger than for violent collapses: fewer than one in five coerced regime collapses result in democratic transition, while nearly three-quarters of non-coerced collapses end in democracy. Again, while these patterns do not tell us why coerced regime collapses are unlikely to yield democracy, the data on the mode of regime collapse is necessary to investigate that question and others about how countries democratize.

Finally, the patterns in Figure 9 vary considerably across different autocratic contexts. For ex-

\textsuperscript{18}This coding focuses on the regime collapse event and not on the conflict context in which the regime collapse takes place. Thus both coerced and non-coerced regime collapses can occur during civil wars. For example, the transition from direct to indirect military rule that occurred during the civil war in El Salvador is coded as uncoerced because military leaders agreed to this transition, which preserved their ability to control the aspects of policy most central to them; they were not ousted by insurgents. By definition, the collapse is coerced if a group of combatants in the civil war ousts the incumbent regime.
ample, Figure 10 shows the likelihood of coerced versus non-coerced regime transitions, given the type of outgoing dictatorship. As the figure makes clear, coercion contributes to most oustings of personalist and monarchic dictatorships. Peaceful regime transitions are rare for these types of dictatorship. Military dictatorships exhibit a different pattern, with non-coerced transitions occurring more frequently than coerced ones.

This evidence corresponds with what we know about regime transitions from past research. Military dictatorships are more likely to negotiate their transitions, rather than cling onto power at all costs (Geddes, 2003), making it less likely that their transitions out of power will be violent and more likely that they will democratize. As we noted above, personalist dictators and monarchs are more likely to face exile, arrest, or death after they are ousted, so they have good reasons resist negotiation if they think they can hold onto power. We also know that personalist dictatorships have limited prospects for successful future political careers after regime failure (Geddes, 2003), though some have managed it. Refusal to negotiate or reneging on past negotiated agreements, however, increases the likelihood that the opposition will eventually resort to force, as has happened recently in Libya and Yemen. Such coercion – especially when coupled with the institutional vacuum typical of personalist dictatorships – reduces prospects for democratization.

Though it is perhaps unsurprising that coercion is associated with new dictatorship more often than with democracy, it is nonetheless worth noting that more than a third of opposition move-
ments used force to dislodge autocratic incumbents. This fraction is even higher for personalist dictatorships, where violent transitions are the norm. Nearly all transitions from one personalist dictatorship to another are forced, but so are about two thirds of transitions from personalist rule to democracy. We see developing a better understanding of when coercion will contribute to democratization as a fruitful topic for future research.

The simple examples presented here point to the importance of including both democratic and autocratic outcomes in studies aimed at understanding regime change, as well as in analyses of events like the Arab Spring and assessments of appropriate foreign policy choices in different situations. Despite the frequency of autocracy-to-autocracy transitions, they have typically been ignored by scholars and policy makers. Rather, we have tended to assume that when autocracies fall, democracies will result. Yet we know that during the last “spring” in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, not all Communist breakdowns led to democratization. Belarus, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan are notable but not the only examples. With the new data set, scholars can now assess the factors that help predict which autocratic breakdowns are likely to be succeeded by democracy and which are not, improving our understanding and aiding policy makers in decisions about how to respond to instability and potential breakdown in countries with autocratic government.

Figure 10: **Coerced Regime Collapses, by Incumbent Autocratic Regime Type**
Conclusion

Despite optimism regarding the demise of autocracy as a form of government after the Cold War, about a third of the world’s countries and many of its people are currently ruled by autocratic governments.\textsuperscript{19} To understand what is likely to destabilize contemporary autocracies and whether their destabilization is likely to lead to democracy, the reimposition of autocratic rule, or future instability and violence, we need data that measure autocratic regime and transition characteristics as well as existing data on underlying causal factors.

In the past decade, scholars have created a number of data sets to make the investigation of the causes of regime transition easier. Among the best, the CGV data set provides scholars with empirical tools for assessing which countries in the world are democratic, in a manner more sophisticated than using thresholds of combined Polity scores, as scholars have done for some time. The Svolik and Akcinaroglu and Archigos data sets, which code how and when leaders leave office (the former exclusively in dictatorships), are also very valuable resources for studying autocratic political behavior.\textsuperscript{20} These new data sets make it possible for scholars to address questions that deal with a number of important issues, such as the effectiveness of sanctions in pressuring autocratic leaders to change their behavior (Escribà-Folch and Wright, 2010).

The data set we introduce here adds to what has been available in several ways. Most importantly, it identifies start and end dates for regimes, in the standard political science usage of that term: the set of basic rules that determine who influences the choice of leaders – including identity of the group from which leaders can be selected – and policies. In addition, it provides new data on how autocracies collapsed (if they did), how much violence accompanied the transition, and whether democracy followed autocratic breakdown. The data set also allows analysts to distinguish periods of autocratic government from periods of provisional government and warlordism, which is not possible in other available data sets. It identifies all country-years from 1946 to 2010 as democratic, autocratic, provisional, foreign occupied, or lacking a central government. Finally, it includes updated regime-type classifications as identified by Geddes (2003), used by several scholars in the past decade, but never made publicly available before. These classifications spec-

\textsuperscript{19}In our data set, there were 54 dictatorships in power as of 2010. The Chinese autocratic regime alone governs around one fifth of the world’s people.

\textsuperscript{20}Hyde and Marinov (2012) also have a new data set of use to scholars in this field, which codes national elections and the extent to which they are rigged or fraudulent.
ify whether dictatorships are personalist, dominant-party, military, monarchic, oligarchic, indirect military, or hybrids of these, linking the autocratic regime start and end dates with the type of group in power. As we show in a number of the practical applications of the data presented in this essay, the classifications are associated with different political outcomes, such as the frequency of intra-regime leadership turnover and the fates of leaders after losing office. The availability of these measures opens the doors for a variety of potentially fruitful inquiries.

As is always true, which data are “better” depends on what theory is being investigated. When testing theories, we need to think about what precisely the theory implies about observable human behavior and then use data appropriate for testing those implications. Some theories imply that individual leaders will survive longer in office. For example, Bueno de Mesquita and Smith (2010) argue that revolutionary threats increase the likelihood of autocratic leader ouster. Such a theory should be tested using data that identify the start and end dates that mark the tenure of individual leaders (e.g., Archigos or Svolik and Akcinaroglu). Other theories, however, have implications for systems of government, that is regimes, not individual leaders. For example, Ulfelder (2005) posits that some types of autocracy are more vulnerable to breakdown in the face of contentious collective action than are others. Theories about regime transition should be tested using data that identify the start and end dates for regimes. In the past, analysts interested in autocratic regime collapse have had few options but to use leader tenure or continuous years of autocracy as proxies for regime, even though doing so introduces bias into analyses. The new data provide an alternative to those proxies.

To illustrate the usefulness of the new data for addressing issues of interest to social scientists and policy makers, we have included some simple graphs and tables showing relationships that could be investigated. To start, we show that more than half of autocratic breakdowns result in new autocracy rather than democratization. We also show that many autocratic regimes survive the ouster of particular dictators, and that dictators ousted as their regimes collapse are more likely to be exiled, jailed, or murdered than those ousted while the regime survives. The fate of ousted leaders is also likely to be worse when their own regime’s collapse is followed by new autocracy rather than democracy. Finally, we show that democratization is more likely to follow some kinds of autocracy than others and that violent transitions and transitions imposed by coercion are associated with a lower probability of democratization. The bivariate relationships shown suggest
areas of research that the new data could facilitate.

Gaining a better understanding of the conditions that foster the demise of autocratic regimes is important for policy makers and academics alike. As recent events in the Middle East have illustrated, when we talk of the prospects for “regime change” in countries governed by dictatorship, we are usually referring to more than the ouster of a particular leader. Beyond the leader, “regimes” encompass a set of elites who weigh in on policy and play a key role in leadership. Although some factors, like economic difficulty, contribute to both leader and regime ouster, in some situations regime elites can save themselves by ousting a particular leader. This is a standard feature of authoritarian politics. It may have been what the military and other Egyptian elites intended when they pushed Hosni Mubarak out. The frequency and effectiveness of this standard authoritarian maneuver, however, is just one of many things that cannot be investigated unless we can distinguish regime survival from the tenure of particular leaders.

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