

# Autocratic Elections: Stabilizing Tool or Force for Change?

Carl Henrik Knutsen<sup>1</sup>, Håvard Mokleiv Nygård<sup>2</sup>, and Tore Wig<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science, University of Oslo

<sup>2</sup>Peace Research Institute Oslo

## Abstract

Do elections reduce or increase the risk of autocratic regime breakdown? We address this contested question by distinguishing between election events and the institution of elections. We propose that elections stabilize autocracies in the long term, but at the price of short-term instability. Elections are conducive to regime survival in the long run because they improve capacities for co-optation and repression, but produce short-term instability because they serve as focal points for regime opposition. Drawing on data from 259 autocracies across 1946–2008, we show that elections increase the short-term probability of regime failure. The estimated effect is retained when accounting for the endogeneity of autocratic elections – this is critical, since some autocrats may (not) hold elections because of perceived effects on regime survival. We also find that this destabilizing effect does not operate in the long-term. In fact, we find some, although not as strong, evidence that elections stabilize autocratic regimes in the medium- to long-term, despite their destabilizing immediate effects. These temporal effect patterns are present for both executive and legislative elections, and they are robust to using different measures, control variable strategies, and estimation techniques. However, in line with expectations, both effect patterns are much clearer for multi-party autocratic elections than completely uncontested elections.

To be presented at APSA 2016 General Meeting, Philadelphia; forthcoming in *World Politics*.

## 1 Introduction

Elections are a hallmark of democracy. Nevertheless, a large share of dictatorships worldwide regularly holds elections,<sup>1</sup> while employing a range of tactics to ensure that these elections are not truly contested.<sup>2</sup> This pattern has spawned a large literature on the causes and effects of autocratic elections, with two closely related questions at its core: Why do some dictatorships hold elections, and how do autocratic elections affect regime survival? The answers to the latter are strikingly mixed, as many prominent studies underline the stabilizing effects of autocratic elections, whereas others highlight their de-stabilizing effects. Elections may allow dictators to co-opt rivals, gain legitimacy, deter opposition, and learn about regime/opposition strength and standing in the broader population.<sup>3</sup> Yet, they may also cause the downfall of dictatorships. The regime might lose at the ballot box to a coordinated opposition,<sup>4</sup> or elections can trigger protests, popular revolutions, and coup d'états.<sup>5</sup>

Building on these insights – but making a critical distinction between elections as *events* and the *institution* of elections – we present an encompassing argument that clarifies this fascinating issue. We emphasize that autocratic elections alleviate opposition collective action problems, and are therefore detrimental for regime survival *in the short-term*. But, electoral institutions also facilitate processes that bolster the repressive and co-optive capacities of autocratic regimes, possibly enhancing survival *in the longer run*. While election *events* are destabilizing just before or after an election, these destabilizing mechanisms do not operate in the long-term, and are countervailed by other stabilizing effects of electoral *institutions*.

Elections held more than 30 years ago in two neighboring countries illustrate this double-edged nature of autocratic elections. On July 4 1982, general elections were held in Mexico, then ruled by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). The presidential election was, as expected, won by the PRI with 74.4% of the vote, with the runner-up, the National Action Party (PAN), capturing only 16.4%. This was only one among many elections where different opposition parties were allowed to compete and often gained numerous seats in legislative elections. However, the PRI notoriously used these institutionalized elections to co-opt and deter opponents. Indeed, electoral institutions are widely considered a crucial component behind the

---

<sup>1</sup>Miller 2013.

<sup>2</sup>See, e.g., Levitsky and Way 2010; Schedler 2006, 2013.

<sup>3</sup>See, respectively, Gandhi 2008; Schedler 2002; Magaloni 2006; Little 2012.

<sup>4</sup>Bunce and Wolchik 2010.

<sup>5</sup>See, respectively, Beaulieu 2014; Tucker 2007; Wig and Red 2014.

longevity of the PRI regime.<sup>6</sup>

In March that same year, an election was held across the border in Guatemala. One plausible interpretation of Guatemalan history is that this election contributed to the immediate downfall of the regime: The election was expectedly won by the hand-picked regime candidate, General Rodriguez. The Guatemalan security services explicitly anticipated the *weeks following election day* to carry increased risks to the military regime, and widespread allegations of electoral fraud did ensue, setting off a spiral of protest and violence threatening the country with civil war.<sup>7</sup> On March 23, officers instigated a coup to ‘restore order’, removing the incumbent dictator Lucas Garcia and consolidating power.

These two cases exemplify our argument. In Mexico, the 1982 election was part of the larger electoral-institutional framework that contributed to consolidating PRI’s rule over the long-term by allowing more effective co-optation and repression. In Guatemala, the 1982-election may have spurred a process involving opposition collective action, eventually inducing a coup. In PRI-Mexico, elections brought long-term stability, whereas in Guatemala the 1982-election may have triggered breakdown. However, a second plausible interpretation of events in Guatemala is that the 1982-election had little *direct* effect on the breakdown: The coalition backing the incumbent was perhaps vulnerable even before the election – Garcia’s decision to handpick Rodriguez may have stirred up internal opposition within the army.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, we cannot know that the election, *as such*, induced the coup. Rather, the election could just follow a wider process of instability ending in breakdown. If so, this highlights a crucial threat to pinpointing the causal effects of elections; namely that elections are (partly) endogenous to regime (in)stability. We explicitly handle this issue in our empirical analysis, and find support for the hypothesized short-term effect of elections on regime breakdown even when accounting for elections being endogenous.

Our explanation for this persistent result emphasizes the role of elections in increasing the potential for coups and popular revolutions stemming from election-triggered coordination and mass mobilization. The central ingredient is information. Interactions between dictators, their supporting coalitions, and the opposition are bedeviled by information problems.<sup>9</sup> Incumbents may be unsure of the opposition’s strength and resolve, while the opposition faces internal

---

<sup>6</sup>E.g., Magaloni 2006. On the central role of PRI-Mexico in the literature, see Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; these experiences have arguably helped shape the more general notion of elections as stabilizing tools for autocrats.

<sup>7</sup>See Wig and Rød 2014.

<sup>8</sup>See, e.g., Millett 1985, 109.

<sup>9</sup>Myerson 2008; Svobik 2012.

collective-action problems arising from citizens' inability to signal to each other when, and for how long, they are willing to mobilize against the regime.<sup>10</sup> We suggest that elections alleviate these information issues by serving as coordination devices. Elections are *focal points*, allowing diverse challengers to mobilize around one mass event (the election). Electoral mobilization, in turn, can trigger an information cascade, wherein the opposition can signal strength and resolve. This can result in a) the opposition mobilizing a revolution building on their election-triggered coordination, b) non-incumbent elites staging a coup drawing on popular support from the recently mobilized opposition, or c) the dictator's former support-coalition staging a coup to preempt a) or b).<sup>11</sup>

The main contribution of this paper is empirical; we provide the first comprehensive large-n tests explicitly distinguishing between long-term and short-term effects of elections on autocratic regime durability. Using data from 259 autocratic regimes (115 countries; 1946-2008), we find robust evidence that elections destabilize these regimes in the short-term. But, the stabilizing aspects of electoral institutions likely serve as a countervailing impetus as time passes. Accordingly, we find no evidence that elections destabilize regimes in the long run. To the contrary, we find some, admittedly less robust, evidence that elections correspond with increased survival probability after the turbulent post-election period has passed. Corroborating our theoretical expectations, further tests show that this pattern is much clearer for multi-party autocratic elections than for uncontested elections. The identified time dynamics parallel those uncovered for how time since regime inception affects regime breakdown. Bienen and van de Walle document that the risk of a leader losing power, especially in dictatorships, declines over time,<sup>12</sup> and similar results are found in more recent work on regime consolidation.<sup>13</sup> We identify short- and long-term effects of elections on regime breakdown *net of* regime age/duration, suggesting a separate relevant dynamic. While our conclusion on the destabilizing short-term effect mirrors those of some previous in-depth case studies, for example on elections and the Color Revolutions in post-Soviet states, it contrasts with other studies and prominent theoretical arguments highlighting the predominantly stabilizing impact of elections.

Our analysis explicitly tries to address the endogeneity of electoral institutions. Holding elections are, at least sometimes, a function of autocrats' strategic calculations. For example,

---

<sup>10</sup>Kuran 1995; Weingast 1997.

<sup>11</sup>See also Casper and Tyson 2014; Wig and Rød 2014.

<sup>12</sup>Bienen and van de Walle 1991, 1992.

<sup>13</sup>Svolik 2012, 2015.

autocrats may be hesitant to adopt elections if their position is already precarious – inducing a negative selection-bias whereby unstable regimes are less likely to hold elections. Conversely, dictators may consider elections (costly) tools for survival and adopt them exactly when perceiving grave threats, inducing the opposite bias. In both eventualities, elections are endogenous to regime stability. However, elections might also result from more exogenous forces, such as external pressure to hold elections by powerful international actors.<sup>14</sup> We exploit this latter fact, using the international diffusion of elections to instrument for elections in a given country. Even when doing so, we find that autocratic elections (likely) cause increased probability of regime failure in their immediate aftermath. Since our instrumental-variables design is no panacea, we evaluate its sensitivity to identifying assumptions, estimating how big the endogeneity-bias must be for our results to disappear. The short-term destabilizing effect is very robust to such potential confounding, whereas the long-term stabilizing effect is far less robust. While threats to causal inference remain, we consider this to be the, to date, most convincing large-n evidence of a short-term destabilizing effect of elections. Interestingly, when only studying democratizing regime changes, we also find some suggestive evidence that autocratic elections reduce the probability of democratization in the short-term, but may increase it in the longer term.

After presenting relevant literature in Section 2, we specify our argument on how the effect of elections on regime breakdown changes over time in Section 3. We present and discuss the data in Section 4, and the empirical analysis in Section 5. In sum, our analysis finds that elections make autocracies more likely to break down in the short term but not in the long term, and several specifications even suggest that elections correspond with increased regime stability in the long run.

## **2 Literature review**

Although different dictators can be motivated by different objectives, a key goal for many, if not most, is to remain in power.<sup>15</sup> Thus, autocrats and their allies will evaluate their actions and policy choices based on whether they enhance or reduce their survival chances. Decisions on whether to hold elections or not – and whether these elections should allow for multiple parties – should not be qualitatively different (although such choices are often taken under strong

---

<sup>14</sup>As, e.g., in Africa in the 1990s, see Bratton and van de Walle 1997.

<sup>15</sup>Wintrobe 1998; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003.

institutional and other constraints). Thus, explanations of autocratic elections presume elections are held because dictators *believe* elections help them retain power.<sup>16</sup> The literature has further assessed *why* elections may stabilize autocracies, and various studies suggest they do so by affecting *cooptation, legitimacy, or information*.

First, several authors propose that elections and electoral institutions neutralize groups that could otherwise pose a threat to the regime.<sup>17</sup> Co-optation through electoral institutions can be targeted at (external) opposition actors and at potential threats within the regime.<sup>18</sup> Elections can be used to co-opt threats directly – by offering well-performing opposition groups and individuals spoils through legislature seats<sup>19</sup> – or more indirectly – by boosting the *credibility* of autocrats’ promises to share power.<sup>20</sup> Such strategies may, however, require effective institutional apparatuses for successful implementation, and Seeberg reports that elections only stabilize autocracies in high-capacity states.<sup>21</sup>

Others focus on legitimacy, stressing that elections, even when far from free and fair, provide authoritarian regimes with measures of popular acceptance and recognition of their authority.<sup>22</sup> Although multi-party autocratic elections are rigged, opposition parties openly competing *might* provide authoritarian regimes with some legitimacy in the wider population, and even (non-competitive) elections without opposition parties may serve a legitimizing role, as noted in studies of Soviet elections.<sup>23</sup> Election-induced legitimacy can also enhance the regime’s international standing, and, for instance, increase aid flows and other benefits from outside actors,<sup>24</sup> which can be used to bolster regime survival.

Finally, elections entail mechanisms for sending and receiving informative signals.<sup>25</sup> Elections signal regime *strength* or *weakness* to potential challengers, enabling more efficient regime–opposition bargaining to avoid costly armed conflicts. For example, mobilizing supporters nationwide and the security apparatus around election time sends a costly signal of regime strength. By rolling out impressive electoral campaign machinery and whipping up

---

<sup>16</sup>See Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009.

<sup>17</sup>Geddes 2006; Gandhi and Przeworski 2006, 2007; Gandhi 2008; Magaloni 2006, 2010; Magaloni and Kricheli 2010; Svobik 2010; Wright 2011; Wright and Escriba-Folch 2012; Boix and Svobik 2013.

<sup>18</sup>See, respectively, Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Boix and Svobik 2013.

<sup>19</sup>Gandhi and Przeworski 2006, 2007.

<sup>20</sup>Magaloni and Wallace 2008; Svobik 2012; Boix and Svobik 2013.

<sup>21</sup>Seeberg 2015.

<sup>22</sup>E.g., Schedler 2002; Levitsky and Way 2010.

<sup>23</sup>See Karklins 1986, 449.

<sup>24</sup>Van de Walle 2002; Beaulieu and Hyde 2009.

<sup>25</sup>Zaslavsky and Brym 1978; Karklins 1986; Magaloni 2006; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Wright 2008; Cox 2009; Blaydes 2011; Fearon 2011; Malesky and Schuler 2011; Cheibub, Hays and Savun 2012; Little 2012; Wig and Rød 2014; Miller 2014.

popular support, the regime credibly signals to (1) the opposition that armed confrontations are futile and (2) internal elites that coups will be opposed by numerous supporters. Further, allowing the opposition to compete and organize in elections – albeit under tight control – enables regimes to gauge opposition strength, and thereby more efficiently adjust and target concessions and repressive measures.<sup>26</sup> Multi-party autocratic elections also allow citizens to credibly signal dissatisfaction, and ruling parties often respond to negative electoral shocks by increasing education and social spending.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, various studies on *electoral institutions*, such as legislatures and parties, point to stabilizing net effects. Gandhi and Przeworski find that autocracies that ‘institutionalize sufficiently’ (i.e., have the predicted number of parties given opposition strength) are more durable.<sup>28</sup> Magaloni and Wallace find that autocracies with parties last longer, citing this as evidence for a stabilizing effect of elections.<sup>29</sup> Boix and Svobik report that *legislatures* increase autocratic survival prospects.<sup>30</sup> These results corroborate the stabilizing-elections proposition. But, three issues – all of which are addressed in our empirical analysis – remain.

First, these contributions do not directly study elections, but associated phenomena such as legislatures and parties.<sup>31</sup> This is problematic, since these institutions also tap into other factors, such as opposition organization (opposition parties) or how institutionalized power-sharing arrangements are (legislatures). Second, these studies – as almost all existing studies in this field – fail to deal sufficiently with elections being *endogenous* to (unobserved) pressures against the regime, and the subsequent choices made by autocrats.<sup>32</sup> Third, these studies do not distinguish between the long-term and short-term effects of elections on regime durability.<sup>33</sup>

Then again, there is no consensus on whether or not elections, *on net*, stabilize autocracies. Hadenius and Teorell find that multi-party autocracies are less durable than other autocracies.<sup>34</sup> Several studies find that autocratic elections may induce democratization.<sup>35</sup> For instance, Lindberg highlights that holding repeated elections, although manipulated and lacking in competitiveness, may eventually induce learning and the formation of norms conducive to

---

<sup>26</sup>See Little 2012.

<sup>27</sup>Miller 2014. In non-competitive elections, vote abstention can serve as a signal, see Karklins 1986.

<sup>28</sup>Gandhi and Przeworski 2007.

<sup>29</sup>Magaloni and Wallace 2008.

<sup>30</sup>Boix and Svobik 2013; Svobik 2012.

<sup>31</sup>But, see Seeberg 2015.

<sup>32</sup>Pepinsky 2014.

<sup>33</sup>But, see Schuler, Gueorgiev and Cantu 2013.

<sup>34</sup>Hadenius and Teorell 2007; Teorell 2010.

<sup>35</sup>E.g., Hadenius and Teorell 2007; Brownlee 2009; Miller 2012, 2013.

substantive democratization.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, inconsistent regimes – i.e. those mixing autocratic and democratic institutions – are shorter-lived than consistently democratic *and* consistently autocratic regimes,<sup>37</sup> and they experience civil war more frequently.<sup>38</sup> One common way to mix autocratic with nominally democratic institutions is through autocracies introducing multi-party elections with a minimum semblance of competition. However, Knutsen and Nygård show that such ‘Competitive Authoritarian’ institutional combinations do not explain why mixed regimes, in general, are more fragile.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Brownlee does not find Competitive Authoritarian regimes to be particularly unstable autocracies, nor any clear net effect of autocratic elections on regime stability.<sup>40</sup>

Why do these results not point clearly to a stabilizing effect of autocratic elections, given the arguments reviewed above? Arguably, there are countervailing mechanisms through which elections – and, again, particularly multi-party elections – may destabilize autocracies. Empirically, autocratic elections in which the opposition displays strength substantially increase the risk of post-election coups.<sup>41</sup> A strong opposition performance in a multi-party autocratic election signals a non-negligible probability of a successful popular revolt, inducing elites to instigate preemptive coups. More generally, the risk of violence, including civil war and repression by the regime to counter potential threats, increases around elections.<sup>42</sup> Elections are also often followed by (potentially regime-challenging) protests,<sup>43</sup> and even threats of such collective action may lead autocrats to abstain from (obviously) manipulating elections, or to leave office should they lose.<sup>44</sup> Experimental studies report that elections make individuals more likely to engage in various forms of collective action,<sup>45</sup> and case studies, for instance on the fairly recent Color Revolutions, indicate that anti-regime protests following (flawed) autocratic elections have been instrumental in bringing regimes down.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup>Lindberg 2006.

<sup>37</sup>Gurr 1974; Gates et al. 2006; Epstein et al. 2006; Goldstone et al. 2010; Knutsen and Nygård 2015.

<sup>38</sup>Hegre et al. 2001; Goldstone et al. 2010.

<sup>39</sup>Knutsen and Nygård 2015. On Competitive Authoritarianism, see Levitsky and Way 2002, 2010.

<sup>40</sup>See, respectively, Brownlee 2009 and Brownlee 2007. However, Schedler 2013 finds that the more particular strategies regimes employ to retain power depend on being ‘Hegemonic’ or ‘Competitive’, with the former relying more on repression and electoral fraud and the latter on subtler strategies such as media censorship.

<sup>41</sup>Wig and Rød 2014.

<sup>42</sup>Cederman, Gleditsch and Hug 2013; Davenport 1997; Hafner-Burton, Hyde and Jablonski 2014.

<sup>43</sup>Beaulieu 2014.

<sup>44</sup>Magaloni 2010.

<sup>45</sup>This includes contentious collective action such as protests and riots, see Baldwin and Mvukiyehe 2015.

<sup>46</sup>Thompson and Kuntz 2004; Tucker 2007; Bunce and Wolchik 2010; Levitsky and Way 2010; Baev 2011.



### 3 The dynamic effects of elections on autocratic survival

In sum, extant research suggests that elections could impact on the survival chances of autocratic regimes through different channels. Some seemingly carry a negative effect on autocratic survival, others a positive; the current lack of consensus on the net effect of elections is therefore understandable. The effect may well be conditional – Seeberg finds a positive net association between elections and autocratic survival, but only in high-capacity states.<sup>47</sup> However, there is another important factor conditioning the effect of autocratic elections, about which the previous literature has been insufficiently clear, namely the passage of *time*.<sup>48</sup> We expect that autocratic elections are dangerous to regimes in their immediate proximity. But, if the regime can ‘ride out the storm’, its survival will be bolstered long-term. We test this empirically, but first provide the argument motivating the analysis.

#### FIGURE 1

Our expectations stem from the observation that the election-related mechanisms that supposedly de-stabilize regimes work with a short time-lag, and concern the electoral event, while most stabilizing mechanisms work with far longer lags. Figure 1 foreshadows our implications, by displaying the expected temporal dynamic. The left panel shows how the *current* probability of breakdown – in a *hypothetical* regime – spikes close to election day, and is very high immediately thereafter, before falling below its initial level. This is compared to a counterfactual regime without elections, and a constant probability of breakdown. The right panel reports the resulting differences between these two regimes, in cumulative probabilities of having broken down before or at a particular date. If the point in time whereafter the short-term effect is outweighed by the long-term is not too far removed from the election, even moderately patient regimes might prefer holding elections despite their short-term destabilizing effect.

#### 3.1 Short-term instability

The discussion above pointed towards a cluster of mechanisms through which elections may reduce autocratic survival prospects. We note that these were all related to elections improving the (short-term) prospects for the opposition to organize anti-regime collective action (which, in turn, increases chances of successful revolutions or coups). Lab- and field experiments show that

---

<sup>47</sup> Seeberg 2014.

<sup>48</sup> One notable exception is an unpublished paper by Schuler, Gueorgiev and Cantu 2013. This paper makes a similar theoretical distinction between the short- and long-term effects of elections, and while their design and empirical analysis differ from ours on several accounts their results mainly point in the same direction as our core results.

elections induce individuals to participate in various types of collective action, including ‘contentious’ collective action,<sup>49</sup> and this could endanger autocratic regimes.

Importantly, even manipulated elections can yield informative signals on the popularity and capacity of the incumbent regime and on the strength of opposition groups. Regarding the latter, the revelation of opposition strength can manifest itself in rallies, large electoral turnout, mass electoral protests, or riots. Further, elections in which incumbents perform worse than expected provide informative signals of regime popularity, which matters for reducing different types of risks to the regime, including the risk of being ousted by a military coup.<sup>50</sup> Sometimes – because the regime misjudges opposition strength or crafty opposition strategies – authoritarian incumbents even lose elections outright, despite trying to rig them.<sup>51</sup> This clearly signals regime weakness, thereby lowering expected costs of challenging the incumbent, while increasing the incumbent’s expected costs of fighting back.<sup>52</sup> More generally, elections are frequently followed by election-related protests.<sup>53</sup>

Still, autocratic regimes may persist, despite being widely unpopular, simply because it is difficult for regime opponents to organize effective collective action.<sup>54</sup> It is virtually impossible for any single opposition member to bring down the incumbent, unless effectively coordinating with other individuals. Such coordination is made difficult by restrictions on freedoms of speech, media and association in autocracies,<sup>55</sup> preventing dissidents from assembling and communicating. While crucial for success, coordination also affects the costs participants face, since acting in large crowds reduces chances of being detected and punished by the regime.<sup>56</sup>

Hence, collective action problems are perhaps *the* critical obstacles to overcome for effectively contesting autocratic regimes through revolutionary uprisings.<sup>57</sup> Coup d’états may be related to *less difficult* collective action problems, due to fewer instigators and tighter bonds between them.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, organizing successful coups also requires co-operation and impeccable coordination from all involved actors, which may include officers from various groups in the armed forces as well as party elites and other elite groups.<sup>59</sup> Hence, not only

---

<sup>49</sup>E.g., Baldwin and Mvukiyeye 2015.

<sup>50</sup>See, e.g., Nordlinger 1977.

<sup>51</sup>See Bunce and Wolchik 2010; Howard and Roessler 2006; Magaloni 2010.

<sup>52</sup>Cheibub, Hays and Savun 2012.

<sup>53</sup>Beaulieu 2014.

<sup>54</sup>E.g., Kuran 1989.

<sup>55</sup>Møller and Skaaning 2013.

<sup>56</sup>DeNardo 1985; Weede and Muller 1998; Tullock 2005.

<sup>57</sup>Acemoglu and Robinson 2006.

<sup>58</sup>Houle 2009.

<sup>59</sup>See Luttwak 1968.

revolutions but also coups may – to paraphrase Kuran – require a ‘spark’ for the prairie fire’ to start.<sup>60</sup> Economic crises can serve as such sparks.<sup>61</sup> But, also elections can serve as ‘focal points’,<sup>62</sup> as suggested by various case studies.<sup>63</sup> First, elections constitute easily identifiable focal points around which expectations of different opposition actors – who otherwise cannot freely communicate – can converge. When ‘first movers’ among the opposition can coordinate, a collective-action logic may generate further ‘snowballing’, as probability of success increases and cost of participation decreases in the number of participants.<sup>64</sup> Beissinger notes that the 1989 electoral campaign in the Soviet Union ‘became a lightning rod for oppositional mobilization’, thus undermining the communist party and precipitating regime breakdown.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Tucker highlights how such mechanisms were vital in the Color Revolutions in Serbia, Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan in the early 2000s, focusing on the role of major electoral fraud:

For once, the entire country is experiencing the same act of abuse simultaneously; in the language of the collective action literature, major electoral fraud provides an obvious focal point for action. People no longer have to choose whether to react alone. Especially as crowds grow, individuals know that they will only be one of many, many people protesting, and thus much less likely to be punished individually.<sup>66</sup>

In certain instances, elections provide an extra boost to opposition collective action by revealing information about the regime’s inherent weakness.<sup>67</sup> This may change opposition members’ assessments of costs and benefits of challenging the regime – and, importantly, also the expectations on how others view these costs and benefits. Pop-Eleches and Robertson note that,

authoritarian regimes are generally low information environments with few reliable sources of information on the strength of current incumbents and their opponents. Periodic elections, however, provide the incumbent leadership, other key domestic elites and members of the opposition with the opportunity to update information on the relative strength of the incumbent coalition and alternatives.

---

<sup>60</sup>Kuran 1989.

<sup>61</sup>Empirically, revolutions, coups, regime-elite splits, and regime breakdowns spike immediately after economic crises; see, respectively, Knutsen 2014; Powell 2012; Reuter and Gandhi 2011; Przeworski and Limongi 1997; Kennedy 2010.

<sup>62</sup>See, e.g., Fearon 2011.

<sup>63</sup>E.g., Tucker 2007; Levitsky and Way 2010; Baev 2011.

<sup>64</sup>Kuran 1989; Lohmann 1994.

<sup>65</sup>Beissinger 2002, 86.

<sup>66</sup>Tucker 2007, 541. See also Thompson and Kuntz 2004.

<sup>67</sup>Kuran 1995.

When the new information reveals unanticipated regime weakness (or opposition strength), it can lead to serious challenges to the status quo.<sup>68</sup>

*Even if* elections trigger mass mobilization, this offers an incomplete account of how they trigger regime breakdown. How can we postulate a *causal* effect of the election itself when the regime weakening may precede the decision to hold an election? In some cases elections have happened to coincide with, or even follow, a regime-collapse despite seemingly playing no independent causal role. The elections following breakdowns of the Argentinean military regime after the failed Falklands war or the negotiated transition and subsequent referendum on the Pinochet regime in Chile are likely examples.<sup>69</sup>

We argue that elections can have causal effects on breakdown through either spurring popular revolts, or through triggering coups. *First*, election-induced mobilization can spur a revolution when new information revealed by the electoral mobilization – about regime weakness and opposition strength – encourages opposition groups to mount a full-blown insurgency. *Second*, protests can trigger coups if they reveal crucial information that incentivizes potential coup-plotters to act.<sup>70</sup> Electoral mobilization may inform military officers (and others) about public opinion, and coup plotters are presumably less hesitant to overthrow an unpopular incumbent than a popular.<sup>71</sup> Potential coup-plotters among the elites may decide that removing an unpopular dictator experiencing (post-electoral) mass-uprisings is preferable to risking a full-blown popular revolution. Witnessing electoral mass-mobilization, coup-plotters will, as noted, also update their beliefs concerning the regime’s popularity and act because they believe they have strong popular support in their endeavors, which lowers the expected costs of staging a coup. In sum, elections provide different government challengers with time-limited ‘windows of opportunity’ for changing the regime.

Our argument also implies that elections in contexts with a greater scope for opposition collective action should also more strongly induce short-term regime instability. Hence, competitive autocratic elections (i.e., multi-party elections with a minimum of competition) should be more destabilizing than non-competitive ones. Still, even uncontested or perfectly rigged elections – given their political nature and, importantly, their time-limited character – might serve as focal points enabling individuals to coordinate and challenge the regime. In our

---

<sup>68</sup>Pop-Eleches and Robertson 2011,6-7.

<sup>69</sup>McCoy and Hartlyn 2009, 59-60. In our empirical tests, we investigate the sensitivity of our results to the inclusion of such cases.

<sup>70</sup>Casperand Tyson 2014; Wig and Rød 2014.

<sup>71</sup>Nordlinger 1977.

baseline analysis we therefore include uncontested elections. If anything, this should attenuate results, biasing against our hypothesis. Additional tests, separating between multi-party and other autocratic elections, corroborate this.

### 3.2 Long-term stability

If elections trigger instability, why do many autocrats (at least consent to) hold them? Are they simply ill informed, or even irrational? As the literature review indicated, this is not necessarily so. Rather, autocratic elections are associated with different mechanisms that have one common feature, namely that they may boost the regime's long-term capabilities of mitigating threats. More specifically, we identify three mechanisms that could carry *long-term benefits* on regime survival.

*First*, because they reveal information about where opposition is located, contested – but also, to some extent, uncontested – autocratic elections may improve opportunities for targeted cooptation *and* targeted repression.<sup>72</sup> Regarding targeted co-optation, elections can provide valuable information on the areas in which regimes may gain the most from distributing private goods and services as well as local public goods in order to obtain support.<sup>73</sup> Elections also often culminate in distributing seats in (multi-party) legislatures, which provide a forum for negotiation and a mechanism through which the opposition (or even ruling-party mavericks) can achieve policy concessions and positions over the coming years.<sup>74</sup> Legislatures provide incumbents with venues for revealing credible information to the ruling coalition, e.g. about the true state of the economy,<sup>75</sup> and for monitoring and sanctioning delegate behavior (thereby incentivizing political actors to follow the regime).<sup>76</sup> Further, the willingness to hold elections credibly signals that the autocrat does not intend to fully monopolize power, particularly when elections involve filling legislature seats with opposition-party candidates (or providing different ruling-party factions with independent power bases). This reduces the incentives of different actors to work towards overthrowing the regime.<sup>77</sup>

*Second*, regimes must build organizational capacity to conduct successful authoritarian elections – organizing elections involves activating and coordinating numerous pro-regime actors

---

<sup>72</sup>Magaloni 2006; Blaydes 2011; Karklins 1986; Malesky and Schuler 2011.

<sup>73</sup>Blaydes 2011.

<sup>74</sup>Gandhi 2008.

<sup>75</sup>Myerson 2008.

<sup>76</sup>Malesky, Schuler and Tran 2012.

<sup>77</sup>Magaloni and Wallace 2008; Svobik 2012; Boix and Svobik 2013.

within the party, the bureaucracy, and the security apparatus.<sup>78</sup> Elections can function as training or capacity building devices, where different regime supporters improve co-optive or repressive capabilities, and such increases in capacity should expectedly not be reverted shortly after the election.

*Third*, the long-term survival of regimes depends on whether, and how intensively, citizens (and other relevant actors, such as neighboring states and major powers) inherently prefer alternative regimes over the incumbent. This determines how much effort and resources these potential enemies would willingly expend to remove the regime. If the regime is largely construed as ‘legitimate’, it can employ less effort and resources to retain power. Elections – especially if not unequivocally identified as manipulated – may increase domestic and international legitimacy, thereby improving long-term survival capacity.<sup>79</sup>

Properly measuring the long-term effect of elections is, of course, difficult; should we measure time since the last election, time since the regime’s first election, or the cumulative count of elections held? The answer depends, in part, on what theoretical mechanisms we believe are more relevant. For instance, signaling effects should likely dissipate after a handful of years and particularly after the next election (which provides a new signal). In contrast, the building-organizational-capacity mechanism could last longer. Thus, we test alternative measures below, although ‘time since last election’ is our baseline.

In sum, autocratic elections may increase probability of regime breakdown close to the election, but bolster regime survival in the years ahead. The latter effect may even dominate the increased short-term risk, inducing many dictators to consider elections as tools for retaining power. Whether an autocrat has the incentives to hold elections or not then depends on how much (s-)he values the long-run increase in survival probability versus the short-run reduction (i.e., the autocrat’s ‘discount factor’). We deal more thoroughly with foresighted autocrats having incentives to hold elections in some contexts, but not others, below. These considerations imply that elections do not occur randomly in autocracies, further implying that empirically estimating the *causal effects* of elections requires more elaborate identification strategies. If our argument is correct, autocratic elections should increase the probability of *regime breakdown* in the short-term, but increase it long-term, also when adjusting for elections potentially taking place in particular contexts where regimes are more or less entrenched in power.

---

<sup>78</sup>Magaloni 2006. See also Zaslavsky and Brym 1978.

<sup>79</sup>Schedler 2002, 2006. However, the Soviet Communist Party even considered local elections, where the sole party candidate routinely obtained 99% of votes, as ‘legitimizing the leadership in the mass mind’, Jacobs 1970, 62.

## 4 Data

Our argument addresses the calculations and decisions that the ruler and central supporters make to perpetuate their stay in power. Whether the current ruling elite is replaced by an opposition that subsequently holds free and fair elections, *or* by an opposition instituting a new dictatorship is less relevant here. What mainly counts from the current ruling elites' perspective are the chances of being replaced, not *who* replaces them. We are consequently concerned with how autocratic elections affect the longevity of the current 'ruling coalition'.<sup>80</sup> Hence, we avoid the typical strategy of coding regime changes from (changes in) democracy measures.<sup>81</sup> For many purposes, this is sensible, and our results are, indeed, robust to employing a measure drawing on changes in the Polity Index. Yet, such measures do not capture all relevant instances of what we theoretically construe as regime changes, leaving out changes between distinct regimes that are about equally undemocratic (such as the Shah and Ayatollah in Iran-1979).<sup>82</sup>

Instead, we use the recent dataset on authoritarian regimes from Geddes, Wright and Frantz.<sup>83</sup> With some exceptions (e.g. for some newly independent countries) these authors follow Przeworski et al. when separating democracies from autocracies.<sup>84</sup> Thus, our regime observations are, per definition, regimes *not* holding truly contested elections where the opposition has a fair chance of winning power (through constitutionally mandated turnover) after defeating incumbents at the ballot box. Our sample includes regimes not holding elections (our results are, however, robust to excluding these regimes) and regimes holding various kinds of elections (and we further distinguish them below) that are not free and fair. Separating autocracies according to who controls access to offices and policy-making, Geddes et al. distinguish between autocratic monarchies, single-party-, military-, and personalist regimes. Crucially, their coding of *regime failures*, our dependent variable, captures failures resulting in democratization, changes between different *types* of autocracies, *and* changes between regimes of the same 'autocracy type' but with different ruling coalitions, such as the (Personalist) Kabila regime replacing the (Personalist) Mobutu regime in Zaire/Congo in 1997. Hence, our dependent variable accounts for the distinct identity of a regime's ruling coalition, which corresponds with our theoretical

---

<sup>80</sup>Svolik 2012.

<sup>81</sup>See, e.g., Przeworski et al. 2000; Kennedy 2010; Teorell 2010.

<sup>82</sup>Svolik 2012. See also Geddes, Wright and Frantz 2014.

<sup>83</sup>Geddes, Wright and Frantz 2014.

<sup>84</sup>Przeworski et al. 2000; Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland 2010.

argument and captures different relevant types of regime breakdowns.<sup>85</sup>

For elections, we rely on the National Elections across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA) dataset.<sup>86</sup> These data include extensive information on all national legislative and executive elections globally, covering 1945-2011. We test an array of specifications, varying the modeling of temporal effect-patterns and what *type* of autocratic elections – e.g., multi-party vs completely uncontested; only executive vs all elections – we include. For our baseline models, we register whether an executive election, as coded by NELDA, occurred that year. Below we discuss theoretical reasons for expecting clearer effects from executive elections, but the main reason for only including executive elections in the baseline is methodological. Separating long-term from short-term effects is harder when using our measurement strategy and including non-executive elections, which magnifies multicollinearity issues. But, even our baselines capture many legislative elections, since they are often concurrent with executive, *and* our results are robust to including all non-executive elections.

To model short and long-term effects of elections we create two decay functions. Decay functions are widely used in economics and physics to model processes where effects dissipate at varying rates,<sup>87</sup> and have also been used in political science.<sup>88</sup> Decay functions are given by  $N_t = N_{t-1}2^{\left(\frac{-t}{\tau}\right)}$ , where  $t$  is time, and  $\tau$  is the average time it takes for the effect to halve, conventionally called the ‘half-life’ parameter. We specify two functions with different half-life parameters, allowing us to differentiate long-term from short-term effects. Both decay functions register the proximity of an election, in years, but the effects *halve* at different speeds. The short-term version (*ElecShortTerm*) is operationalized as  $2^{-\left(\frac{\text{years since election}}{1}\right)}$ , while the long-term (*ElecLongTerm*) is  $2^{-\left(\frac{\text{years since election}}{8}\right)}$ . The effect of an election as measured by *ElecShortTerm* is reduced to 25% of original size after two years, and 3% after five years. In contrast, *ElecLongTerm*’s effect remains at 84% after two years and 65% after five years. We test several alternative decay-function specifications, varying the ‘half-life’ parameters (Appendix Table A.14). We also test a simpler dummy-variable set up, coding dummies for

---

<sup>85</sup>Naturally, ensuring reliable regime coding is difficult. It is difficult to precisely measure who controls decision making and who constitutes the ruling coalition. Hence, questionable decisions will occur despite coders’ best efforts. Sometimes it is unclear whether a new ruler has a sufficiently distinct coalition to constitute also a *new regime*. For example, it can be particularly hard to adjourn whether a coup constitutes a regime change or not; the coup makers will often introduce formal and/or informal changes to how policies and decision-makers are selected, but will in some rare instances only yield a minor change in an existing regime, such as replacing one puppet-dictator with another. Illustratively, Geddes et al. do not code Guatemala-1982, discussed in the introduction, as regime change. (Our results remain stable when re-coding Guatemala-1982.)

<sup>86</sup>Hyde and Marinov 2012.

<sup>87</sup>For a textbook treatment, see Serdyuk, Zaccai and Zaccai 2007.

<sup>88</sup>E.g., Hegre et al. 2001.



election years and for regimes having held elections within the past 5 years, to capture, respectively, short-term and long-term effects.

The theoretical framework laid out above does not offer specific expectations for the exact *functional form* of the relationship between time since an election and the risk of regime breakdown. To ensure that our results are not an artifact of the decay- or dummy variable set-up, we test additional specifications. These include models that assume *no* specific functional form, both models using an extended lag-structure ( $t-1$  to  $t-10$ ) of the election marker and flexible Generalized Additive Models (GAMs) (see Section 5).

We control for different variables that expectedly affect regime durability and correlate with elections:<sup>89</sup> These include log GDP per capita;<sup>90</sup> income level may impact on autocratic regime survival,<sup>91</sup> but also the capacity to organize elections. We further control for one-year (lagged) GDP per capita growth; economic crises, as elections, expectedly reduce short-term survival probability through serving as focal points for opposition collective action.<sup>92</sup> We also control for alternative sources of co-optation and effective repression, which expectedly impact on regime durability and the necessity of organizing elections. Natural resource revenues are particularly helpful for autocrats wanting to stay in power; they are more easily monopolized than other revenues, and can be utilized for co-optation or for investing in repressive capacity.<sup>93</sup> We therefore include  $\frac{\text{Oil+gas+coal+metals revenues}}{\text{GDP}}$ .<sup>94</sup> Military size is a traditional proxy for repressive capacity. Yet, large militaries may sometimes nurse instigators for coup d'états. Regardless, we control for  $\frac{\text{military personell}}{\text{population}}$ .<sup>95</sup> Autocracies likely survive shorter in neighborhoods dominated by democracies, and we control for average regional Polity score in the region.<sup>96</sup> We account for time dependence and control for regime age – younger regimes are typically more fragile<sup>97</sup> – by including *regime duration*, *regime duration*<sup>2</sup> and *regime duration*<sup>3</sup>.<sup>98</sup> We also control for region- and decade-fixed effects in most models, and democracy level in some models.<sup>99</sup>

To assess robustness, we test models dropping, for instance, the military size or regime

---

<sup>89</sup>Appendix Section A.1 displays descriptive statistics for all variables.

<sup>90</sup>From Maddison 2007.

<sup>91</sup>E.g., Kennedy 2010.

<sup>92</sup>Acemoglu and Robinson 2006.

<sup>93</sup>Ross 2001; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2009.

<sup>94</sup>From Haber and Menaldo 2011.

<sup>95</sup>From Singer 1988.

<sup>96</sup>Gleditsch 2002. We employ the eightfold regional classification from Miller 2013.

<sup>97</sup>Svolik 2012.

<sup>98</sup>Following Carter and Signorino 2010.

<sup>99</sup>Level of democracy arguably affects regime durability, Knutsen and Nygård 2015. But, democracy measures are endogenous to holding (even autocratic) elections; controlling for democracy thus risks inducing post-treatment bias.

duration variables (which might induce post-treatment bias if they are partly consequences of elections). We also test more extensive models controlling, e.g., for the regime dummies from Geddes et al. to further mitigate omitted variable bias.<sup>100</sup>

## 5 Empirical analysis

### Baseline models

Descriptive statistics (see Appendix Section A.1) suggest that elections could be very destabilizing in the short term. Whereas only 10% of the almost 4000 autocratic country-years in our full sample are executive election years, 35% of the 199 regime breakdowns are. (Counting all elections, the respective numbers are 22% and 50%). Still, such patterns may exist for various reasons, and we try out different models to test more stringently for any relationship.

We start out with a simple baseline specification, a Logit model with the regime failure dummy from Geddes et al. as dependent variable, incorporating the election decay functions and controls listed above as independent variables. Positive coefficients imply a higher probability of regime breakdown (negative association with regime survival). Our results are very similar for Cox proportional hazard survival models, but we employ the Logit as baseline since it is easily extended to the GAM and IV-probit models employed later.

Table 1 displays this baseline specification (Model 1), run on 3893 observations from 115 countries for 1946-2008 (199 regime failures, listed in Appendix Table A.3). As expected, the short-term decay function, *ElecShortTerm*, is negative and with a p-value far below 0.01. Meanwhile, *ElecLongTerm* is positive, and precisely estimated with a logit coefficient of 0.93 and standard error of 0.37. As hypothesized, the period right after an election is associated with increased risk of regime failure, while the risk declines substantially over time. If Model 1's estimates are correct, elections – and the time that has elapsed after the most recent election – are substantively important in explaining autocratic breakdown. When holding all other variables in Model 1 at their means, the point estimates indicate that *risk of regime breakdown is 5 times higher during election years*, compared to when the last election was five years ago. Hence, Model 1 indicates that autocrats trade off short-term instability for long-term stability when holding elections.

Regarding our controls, results are also mostly as expected. Autocratic regimes are more

---

<sup>100</sup>Geddes, Wright and Frantz 2014.

likely to fail in democratic regions, and less likely at higher income levels and growth rates. A larger military is associated with lower probability of regime failure, whereas the resource dependence result is less clear.

Model 2 introduces an alternative, simpler specification for separating long-term from short-term effects, dropping the decay functions and rather including a dummy scored 1 if the autocracy experiences an election-year, and another dummy registering whether elections were held within the past five years. While the point estimate has the expected sign, the latter dummy is statistically insignificant and does therefore not yield support for the expected long-term effect. In contrast, the short-term effect has  $p < 0.01$  and is substantively large: When setting all other variables to their means, Model 2 predicts the probability of regime failure is 7 times higher during election years than non-election years. In sum, the risk of regime failure clearly increases in election years, while the risk is at least not increased by having experienced an election in the past five years.

#### TABLE 1

Models 3-8 exemplify that the regime-destabilizing short-term result is robust and that the stabilizing long-term result appears in many plausible specifications. Model 3(4) shows that the results are basically unchanged when adding region and decade dummies. Model 5(6) further adds a democracy index,<sup>101</sup> and, if anything, the results become even stronger. Notably, also the 5-year dummy turns statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) in Model 6. Finally, Model 7(8) replicates Model 5(6) when also including non-executive elections. The mechanisms detailed in the theoretical discussion suggest that, e.g., presidential elections are more destabilizing in the short run than mid-term elections. Since the executive is the most powerful actor in most autocracies, executive elections should be particularly salient events and conducive to serve as focal points. The opposition might also find it easier to coordinate around one candidate standing against an (unpopular) incumbent autocrat, than around many candidates/parties running on different platforms. However, results are robust to including non-executive elections, except for the 5-year dummy in Model 8 (again) barely turning statistically insignificant at 10% (see Appendix Section A.2 for Models 1-4 including non-executive elections). Results turn slightly stronger when including non-executive elections only for regimes without executive elections – where including non-executive elections do not present the same collinearity issues for separating short-

---

<sup>101</sup>SIP, from Gates et al. 2006, draws on measures of executive recruitment and executive constraints from Polity and participation indicators from Vanhanen 2000. SIP is preferred to the Polity Index here because it avoids using indicators that are clearly endogenous to processes of political instability, see Vreeland 2008.

and long-term effects – such as former Communist regimes. Below, we present further evidence suggesting that executive and legislative elections, surprisingly, do not seem to systematically differ on short- or long-term effects. We sum up this section by noting that autocratic elections, in general, are seemingly related to lower risk of regime breakdown in the long term (although this is not entirely robust), and clearly related to higher risk of breakdown in the short term.

As an extension, we note one finding of particular interest to democracy scholars. This relates to models employing *democratization* as dependent variable, but otherwise retaining our set-up. We report and discuss these models more carefully in Appendix Section A.6, but, overall, the direction of the results is analogous to what we find when studying all types of autocratic regime breakdowns and not only those preceding a democratic regime. More specifically, the coefficients of these models also suggest a clear destabilizing short-term effect and a stabilizing long-term effect of autocratic elections. While there are methodological issues with these tests – mainly related to the low number of democratization events included, as discussed in Appendix Section A.6 – autocratic elections thus *seem to* correspond with higher probability of democratization in their immediate aftermath, but lower in the longer run, at least when employing the categorical coding of democratization events from Geddes et al. (2014). This does not necessarily preclude the possibility that elections may induce gradual liberalization in autocracies over time,<sup>102</sup> and we note that more careful testing is needed before we can draw firm conclusions on exactly how democratization chances are affected by autocratic elections.

### **Robustness tests and extensions**

We subjected our main findings (using autocratic regime breakdown as dependent variable) to various robustness tests, and also probed whether these results hold up when only considering certain types of elections. While some particularly interesting tests are presented in Table 2, most are reported in the Appendix. For example, the results are retained when using alternative estimation techniques, including Cox survival models. The results are robust to applying alternative parameters for the decay functions, and to using quite different functional specifications to capture short- and long-term effects. While *ElecShortTerm* and *ElecLongterm* correlate at .73, one might still be concerned that these coefficients are sensitive because of multi-collinearity. We tested specifications dropping either *ElecShortTerm* or *ElecLongterm*. This yields similar results only for *ElecShortTerm*. However, the changed coefficient for

---

<sup>102</sup>See discussions in Lindberg 2006, 2013; Bogaards 2013.

*ElecLongTerm* is very likely due to omitted variable bias, as it now also captures the strong short-term effect right after elections. Reassuringly, *ElecLongTerm* retains its expected sign and significance when paired with the election year dummy.

Measuring regimes and their breakdown is inherently difficult since changes in informal rules and/or substantial change of the ruling coalition are hard to observe. An instructive case is Guatemala-1982 from our introduction. This is not coded as a regime change in the GWF data, while we think it could be coded as such given that the ruling coalition underwent a fairly substantial change.<sup>103</sup> To investigate whether our results withstand such sensitive codings, we tested whether they are driven by cases where the regime coding can be questioned or where breakdown occurred close to elections, but in-depth studies suggest other causes of the breakdown.<sup>104</sup> The results are retained when recoding or dropping notable cases, and, more generally, Jackknife estimations show that the results are stable when omitting any individual country from the sample.

Moreover, results are not sensitive to the particular controls included. For instance, including military size may induce post-treatment bias, as autocratic regimes could increase military spending in election years if they anticipate the increased short-term risk to breakdown. Nevertheless, results remain substantively similar when omitting military size. Results are also retained when we, for instance, drop resource dependence or the duration controls, or when adding controls such as urbanization, foreign aid dependence, public spending, or trade openness to account for potential omitted variable bias. Model 1, Table 2 includes the autocratic regime type dummies from Geddes et al., with dominant party regimes as reference category (all models in Table 2 adjust on Model 3, Table 1). Given the literature on how different *types* of autocracies systematically differ in regime longevity – and in propensities for holding elections – Model 1 is an important robustness test.<sup>105</sup> While we find that party-regimes and monarchies are less prone to break down than personalist and military regimes, controlling for regime type barely changes our core results.

## TABLE 2

Another potential issue relates to how we measure the long-term effect of elections. As suggested in Section 3.2, proximity to the *last* election should properly capture important long-term mechanisms related to the regime signaling strength and obtaining information about the

---

<sup>103</sup>The group in power changed from the Institutional Democratic Party (PID) to a group of junior military officers.

<sup>104</sup>We thank Anonymous Reviewers for highlighting potentially problematic cases.

<sup>105</sup>E.g., Geddes 1999; Hadenius and Teorell 2007.

opposition. However, other long-term mechanisms, such as elections building organizational capacity, are perhaps better captured by measures of the regime's entire electoral-institutional history. We constructed and tested different such measures, and Models 2 and 3 in Table 2 exemplify that the stabilizing long-term effect is retained when doing so. Model 2 substitutes *ElecLongTerm* with a variable counting number of elections held under the autocratic regime. Model 3 includes a variable capturing time since the regime held its *first* election.<sup>106</sup> Both measures display a negative coefficient statistically significant at 5%. A long history of electoral institutions thus corresponds with regime stability, and the destabilizing short-term effect is robust.<sup>107</sup>

The Appendix displays that results also hold up when, for instance, omitting all autocratic regimes not holding elections; when excluding elections held under a previous regime; or, when omitting young ( $\leq 4$  years) regimes, which are often particularly fragile.<sup>108</sup> Further, we control for the regime's first election potentially having particular effects on survival,<sup>109</sup> but our results are retained.

As discussed, our argument should pertain more strongly to multi-party autocratic elections than single-party/single-candidate elections. Model 4, Table 2 shows results for a model only counting *de jure* contested elections from NELDA as elections.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, while standard errors increase, both coefficients increase substantially in size (cf. Model 3, Table 1; *ElecShortTerm* by more than 60 percent, and *ElecLongTerm* more than triples) and are clearly distinguishable from zero. We will return to the differential effects of contested and uncontested autocratic elections.

We tested models employing alternative operationalizations of the dependent variable. For instance, results hold up when employing a regime-change measure based on changes to the Polity Index. Further, our baseline includes regime changes associated with elections choosing a new government after a dictator has agreed to step down and does not run; this could exaggerate the short-term effect. Examples are military regimes that voluntarily step down after some period

---

<sup>106</sup>This model uses fewer observations because all regime years prior to first election are missing.

<sup>107</sup>The Appendix displays models jointly including, e.g., the count of elections and *ElecLongTerm*, and both variables are consistently negative and sometimes significant. One interpretation, in line with our comprehensive theoretical argument, is that the different proposed long-term mechanisms (pertaining mainly to time since last election *or* to the entire electoral-institutional history) operate simultaneously.

<sup>108</sup>Svolik 2012.

<sup>109</sup>For example, opposition actors may need to learn from previous election experiences before effectively challenging the regime; e.g., Beissinger 2002.

<sup>110</sup>Operationalized as an election where multiple parties are technically legal. Non-legal barriers may, however, still make elections *de facto* uncontested.

of time (see Geddes, 1999), and arrange elections in order to orderly select a new civilian government. While the autocrat's decision to not run in an election might sometimes stem from anticipating dire consequences from staying on and holding elections – meaning that they could be relevant instances following our argument – we did test models re-coding such breakdown years *or* excluding all observations for regimes ending this way. To identify such instances, we used Geddes et al.'s coding of transition modes. Model 5, Table 2 is one such model only recoding the breakdown year. *ElecShortTerm* remains sizeable and highly significant, and also *ElecLongTerm* retains its expected sign and is weakly significant. More generally, all models recoding breakdown years associated with elections where the incumbent did not run *or* excluding all regime observations for regimes ending in this type of scenario, reveal very large and robust short-term coefficients. Hence, our findings are not driven by elections being planned and held in regimes where the incumbent, for some reason, has already decided to step down.<sup>111</sup>

### **Investigating more complex temporal patterns**

Next we allow regime failure to be a more complex function of proximity to an election. Critically, we examine potential functional form specifications that could yield better fits to the data, possibly revealing effect-patterns that go *against* our theoretical argument.

To inductively test this, we fit flexible GAMs that place no *a priori* restrictions on what shape the effect of time since election has on regime failure. The specifications above risk smoothing over *local* effects, i.e. relevant spikes or declines in the risk of regime failure over time since the election. GAMs are designed to uncover such patterns, without completely abandoning parsimony. GAMs strike a balance between fitting a model ignoring all local effects, i.e. estimating the global mean effect, and a (less efficient) model with dummy variables for all different values of the independent variables, which would uncover any and all local effects, but could severely over-fit to the data.

GAMs use model-selection algorithms to find the function that yields the best fit to the data, with the fewest number of parameters,<sup>112</sup> essentially letting the data decide how proximity to an election relates to regime failure. More specifically, GAMs allow for non-linearities in effects by

---

<sup>111</sup>The short-term effect often, but not always, holds up also when excluding all autocratic regime breakdowns associated with subsequent *democratization* (as operationalized by GWF), while the long-term effect retains its sign but often loses statistical significance. However, we note that excluding democratization years substantially reduces the number of breakdowns, making it more difficult to obtain precise estimates, and that most autocratic breakdowns succeeded by democratization are relevant for our theoretical argument.

<sup>112</sup>Hastie and Tibshirani 1990; Hastie, Tibshirani and Friedman 2009; Beck and Jackman 1998.

fitting loess regression curves or spline curves with two or more degrees of freedom (df). One way to think of this is as scatter-plot smoothing. Imagine a scatter plot of two variables. A simple regression fits the straight line that minimizes the sum of mean squared errors. This line captures the general trend well, but glosses over potentially interesting local effects. Alternatively, one can fit a curve that perfectly follows every point in the plot. This strategy – analogous to fitting a regression with dummy variables for every independent variable value – will not uncover general patterns, but will find every nook and cranny of the relationship. GAMs fit a line somewhere in between these extremes, and its shape depends on the number of df we allow for in the model-selection algorithm. As df decrease, the GAM line increasingly resembles the linear regression line. In the Appendix we report GAMs using different df, but our baseline uses 4, thereby allowing the effect of time since election on regime failure to *change direction* (i.e., to varyingly increase or decrease) four times.

Following Wood,<sup>113</sup> we define our GAM thus:

$$g(\mu_i) = f(\text{TimeSinceElection}_i) + X_i\beta + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

with

$$\mu_i \equiv E(Y_i) \text{ and } Y_i \sim \text{some exponential family distribution}$$

where  $i$  indexes countries.  $f(\text{TimeSinceElection})$  is the smoothed effect of time since last election,  $X$  is a  $n$  by  $k$  matrix of data,  $\beta$  is a  $k$  by 1 vector of (linear) parameters to be estimated,  $\epsilon$  is a  $n$  by 1 vector of disturbances.

Since interpreting GAM coefficients is complicated, we graph the main result on the temporally varying effect of elections (estimates are in Appendix Table A.14). Figure 2 shows how the effect of an election on risk of regime failure depends on time since an election (measured in years), based on the GAM including similar controls to Model 1, Table 1.

## FIGURE 2

Intriguingly, this model again yields the expected pattern, and does so very clearly. The effect on regime failure is positive and large right after an election, while turning negative as time passes. More specifically, this model estimates that the long-term stabilizing effect

---

<sup>113</sup> Wood 2006.



dominates the destabilizing short-term effect after about six years, indicating that even autocratic regimes with modestly long time horizons could benefit from holding elections. However, the estimated point in time whereafter the long-term effect dominates the short-term varies somewhat with the specification. For example, an otherwise similar GAM including also non-executive elections suggests that it is closer to four years than six, and GAMs allowing for more df also estimate the timing of when the long-term effect starts dominating to be closer to the election. Indeed, very flexible Logit regressions including dummies for all years from the election year to ten years after suggest that the main drop-off in the short-term effect happens from the election year to the next. Without putting too much trust in exact point estimates, these results help explain the ‘Paradox of authoritarian elections’,<sup>114</sup> i.e. why autocrats gamble on holding elections at all, given the many regimes that have fallen immediately after such elections.

To further illustrate, Figure 3 shows the predicted probability of regime failure over time since last election – calculated by setting all other variables at their mean, and then simulating from the posterior density<sup>115</sup> – based on the GAM in Figure 2. The probability of regime failure is highest in the election year ( $> 0.04$ ), thereafter falling rapidly – the probability is almost reduced by a factor of three after 7 years – before slowly leveling out. In sum, also when letting the data ‘decide’ the functional form, we find our hypothesized pattern.<sup>116</sup>

### FIGURE 3

These results may, however, mask interesting variation since we incorporate quite different *kinds* of elections. Most importantly, the argument behind the increased short-term probability of breakdown highlighted the role of elections in serving as focal points for *opposition coordination* of collective action. Although completely uncontested elections may serve as such focal points – due to the time-limited and political nature of election events – the short-term effect should be stronger for multi-party elections with some contestation. The long-term stabilizing effect should expectedly also be clearer after multi-party elections, because some long-term mechanisms – e.g. related to elections as devices for gathering information about opposition strongholds – should be more prominent when there is some contestation.

---

<sup>114</sup>Seeberg 2015.

<sup>115</sup>Following Imai, King and Lau 2014.

<sup>116</sup>This is also robust to making different changes to the GAM, such as including decade and region dummies.

## FIGURES 4 AND 5

Hence, we again distinguish (*de jure*) contested from uncontested autocratic elections using NELDA data. Figure 4 shows the effects of proximity to contested (upper panel) and uncontested elections (lower panel) from GAM models otherwise similar to Figure 2. The pattern detected for the aggregated analysis is recovered only for contested elections, while proximity to uncontested elections does not have the hypothesized effect-pattern. There are far fewer uncontested than contested elections, making it harder to precisely estimate effects. Yet, there are strong empirical indications that our theorized dynamic effect on regime survival operates only for contested elections.

Finally, we use the GAM set-up to distinguish between executive and legislative elections. We noted earlier that executive elections might expectedly be *more* destabilizing, short-term, than (purely) legislative elections. To assess this, Figure 5 shows results for executive (upper panel) and legislative elections (lower panel), respectively. Perhaps surprisingly, the two effects are strikingly similar, and replicate the overall pattern. Both executive and legislative elections are associated with increased short-term and reduced long-term probability of breakdown. However, it is admittedly quite hard, in practice, to separate the effects of executive and legislative elections in our country-year setup, since they are often held concurrently. For example, 98 % of all presidential elections are held contemporaneously as a legislative election. Hence, we regard the results embedded in Figure 5 only as suggestive evidence on the similarities between executive and legislative elections.

However, the fact that legislative and presidential elections are often held together may not be due to coincidence, or even to concurrent elections reducing administrative costs. Rather, if our theoretical argument is correct, and autocrats *suspect* the short-term destabilizing effects of elections, they have strong incentives to not arrange elections every year or second year. It would be preferable to simultaneously organize different elections at *one point in time* to avoid multiple high-risk time periods. Holding concurrent elections, say, every fifth year still allows autocrats to reap the long-term stabilizing effects of elections, while limiting ‘undesirable’ effects related to election events serving as focal points for opposition coordination.

### **Addressing endogeneity**

Based on the results so far we cannot plausibly infer that autocratic elections *cause* short-term

instability and long-term stability. The reason is that choices related to holding elections – both concerning whether the regime should implement (or discontinue) the *institution of elections*, and the *timing of particular elections* – may be endogenous to unobserved factors also affecting regime stability.<sup>117</sup> Elections may be held due to a combination of dictators’ strategic calculations relating to domestic stability and other factors such as external influences/international pressure. Dictators who hold beliefs regarding the stabilizing or de-stabilizing effects of elections may systematically attempt to hold (or postpone) elections in some situations. For example, if many dictators *think* that elections are stabilizing, both short- and long-term, they may systematically try to hold elections exactly when their position is threatened. This might, in turn, generate the observed pattern that elections are immediately followed by breakdowns. Although the regularized intervals (4-5 years) of elections in many autocracies should mitigate this alternative mechanism, we want to exclude it, and other sources of endogeneity bias, to investigate the causal impact of elections more carefully.

We therefore run Instrumental Variables Probit (IV-probit) models, treating (proximity to) autocratic elections as endogenous. To obtain consistent estimates of any causal effect, we must identify instruments that are fairly strongly correlated with the endogenous independent variable and not directly related to regime failure. We exploit the fact that elections can be partly driven by outside (international) forces to identify valid instruments of elections. Drawing inspiration from the literature on how regimes and particular institutions affect economic outcomes,<sup>118</sup> we construct different instruments tapping variation among neighboring countries, and globally, in the propensity of autocracies to hold elections.

While *some* variation in autocratic elections is likely due to strategic choices, not *all* is. To achieve identification, we aim to capture such non-strategic variation with our instruments. The underlying notion is that variation in neighboring (and other) autocracies holding elections relate to the probability that a given autocracy will hold one. This can come from different kinds of institutional spill-over effects from neighbors or regional powers, such as non-strategic emulation stemming from various cognitive heuristics,<sup>119</sup> or from international-political trends affecting the ‘typical’ institutional make-up of autocracies. Further, these international sources of variation in whether elections are held (domestically) should not impact *directly* on the domestic regime’s durability, once controlling for the other covariates. The IV-probit models therefore add the

---

<sup>117</sup>See Pepinsky 2014.

<sup>118</sup>Persson and Tabellini 2003; Knutsen 2011; Huber, Ogorzalek and Gore 2012; Acemoglu et al. 2014.

<sup>119</sup>Weyland 2005.

baseline controls, including region and decade dummies to address unobserved region and time-specific factors potentially affecting durability and correlating with our instruments. However, there is one potential caveat with the exclusion restriction; the following causal pathway could induce correlation between our instruments and dependent variable:

*Neighbor autocratic election* → *Neighbor instability* → *Domestic instability* → *Domestic autocratic election*

To exclude this from contaminating our results, we test models controlling for two proxies of regional instability – the share of (other) autocracies in the region that broke down that year/the last 5 years.

We first treat the short-term effect as endogenous, using IV-Probit models with different instrument sets. Table 3 displays second-stage results from 10 such models, where *Election year* is the endogenous regressor in odd-numbered models and *ElecShortTerm* in even-numbered. We discuss below why we put relatively more faith in Models 7-10, but start out with the sparser Models 1-2. These models include only one instrument corresponding closely with the notion of neighborhood diffusion, namely share of a country’s neighboring autocracies that hold elections in a given year (*NeighbShareElec*). *NeighbShareElec* has the expected positive sign in the first-stage (see Appendix Table A.26), although it is only a moderately strong instrument.<sup>120</sup> This induces high standard errors in the second-stage estimates. Thus, the t-values for the estimated effects on regime breakdown are only 1.5 for *Election year* and 1.9 for *ElecShortTerm*, despite point estimates being far larger than the (highly significant) estimates from corresponding (regular) probit models.

Employing more instruments to increase first-stage predictive power may reduce uncertainty for the second-stage estimates. Thus, we estimate models including additional instruments created to capture exogenous institutional spill-over effects from neighboring autocracies or other autocracies globally. Models 3-6 add six other such instruments.<sup>121</sup> Models 3-4 are otherwise similar to Models 1-2, whereas Models 5-6 also add the regional breakdown controls to further

---

<sup>120</sup>The t-values of *NeighbShareElec* are 3.3 (Model 1) and 2.9 (Model 2) and Cragg-Donald Wald F-statistics are, respectively, 11.5 and 9.0. Due to the under-developed specification tests for IV-probit models, we follow standard practice and conduct all specification tests on structurally similar 2SLS models. The relatively weak instruments might also yield concerns of weak-instrument bias. Yet, calculations of maximal potential bias from the Stock-Yogo weak ID test critical values (e.g., F=9.0 for 15% maximal IV relative bias for Model 1) suggest that the IV-probit models should still be clearly less biased than our baseline models, given that the exclusion restriction holds; IV estimates are biased *towards* those yielded by OLS, in proportion to the weakness of the instrument.

<sup>121</sup>These are: Share of neighboring autocracies with election last 5 years; number of elections in neighborhood in given year; dummy scoring > 1 election in neighborhood; number of neighboring autocracies; share of autocracies globally with election year; share of autocracies globally with election last 5 years.

relieve concerns about the exclusion restriction by blocking the above discussed potential causal pathway via regional instability. Indeed, both *Election year* and *ElecShortTerm* are significant (5%) in Models 3-4, and *Election year* remains significant at 5% and *ElecShortTerm* at 10% when including regional instability controls in Models 5-6. The clearer results relative to Models 1-2 stem from reduced standard errors, as *Election year* and *ElecShortTerm* actually decrease slightly in size. Nonetheless, Models 3-6 are not optimal specifications either: Sargan tests on the exclusion restriction yield p-values that are low or modestly high (Sargan p-values increase when controlling for the regional breakdown pathway in Models 5-6, as expected). Further, Stock-Yogo weak ID tests still suggest the instrument set is only modestly strong, and the first-stage regressions reveal that many instruments are statistically insignificant while others are negatively signed, contrary to expectations.

### TABLE 3

Thus, we tested specifications *only* employing instruments that consistently have the expected sign and are significant (at 5%) first-stage predictors of *Election year* and *ElecShortTerm* in Models 1-6. Together with *NeighbShareElec*, the instrument measuring share of autocracies globally with an election year satisfies these criteria.<sup>122</sup> Models 7-8 leave out the neighboring instability controls, whereas Models 9-10 include them. Indeed, Models 7-10 outperform 1-6 on both instrument F-values and the Sargan test.<sup>123</sup> Hence, Models 7-10 *could* provide us with consistent estimates of the short-term causal effect of elections on regime breakdown. Corroborating the main result from above, these models show substantially large and positive coefficients for both *Election year* and *ElecShortTerm*. Further, *Election year* is significant at 5% in Model 7 and has  $p=0.06$  in Model 9, whereas *ElecShortTerm* is consistently significant at 5%.

Regarding robustness, otherwise similar FE2SLS models yield somewhat stronger results on the short-term effect of elections than IV-Probit models, and so do more parsimonious IV-Probit models dropping region and decade dummies.<sup>124</sup> Still, the significance of the short-term effect depends on the exact sub-set of instruments. Moreover, the instruments are never very strong – suggesting the difficulty of predicting exactly when autocratic regimes hold elections – and it is,

---

<sup>122</sup>Appendix Table A.25 shows similar models including a third instrument (> 1 neighboring autocracy with election year), which is consistently positive and significant at 10%.

<sup>123</sup>Both instruments also remain positive, though the significance of *NeighbShareElec* is weakened from Models 1-6.

<sup>124</sup>We also tested biprobit models for the dummy-variable set-up, since both the endogenous independent and dependent variables are binary. These models yield even stronger support for our hypotheses than the IV-probit models.

naturally, impossible to verify that the exclusion restriction is satisfied. Furthermore, IV models identify Local Average Treatment Effects (LATE); meaning that we are only identifying the effect for autocracies whose elections are predicted by international trends and spill-over effects. While we have no immediate grounds for believing so, these cases might not be representative of all electoral autocracies.

We should thus not draw too strong inferences from the IV results alone, although they go some way in alleviating concerns about endogeneity biases driving the substantial short-term correlation between autocratic elections and regime collapse. To further assuage concerns that the IV models do not adequately handle the ‘no-omitted-confounders assumption’ underlying a causal interpretation, we perform causal sensitivity tests.<sup>125</sup> These simulate our baseline estimates under different omitted-variable/endogeneity scenarios, and provide estimates of *how big* the confounding from unobservables must be, in practice, for our estimates to become indistinguishable from zero. These tests (see Appendix) indicate that such confounding must be related to ‘positive selection’ (i.e., more stable autocracies holding elections more frequently) *and* explain about 50% of the joint variance in treatment and outcome for the conclusion of a negative short-term *effect* to be incorrect. This further suggests that a causal short-term effect on regime breakdown is more likely than not.<sup>126</sup>

We also tested IV-probit models where the long-term, rather than short-term, effect of elections is modeled as endogenous. These models consistently replicate the sign identified by logit models above. However, the estimated long-term effect falls short of statistical significance in most (though not all) specifications.<sup>127</sup> Appendix Table A.20 reports IV-probit models based on analogous instrumentation strategies to the models in Table 3, but where the instruments measuring neighborhood and global share of autocracies with elections pertain to the last 5 years, which is theoretically more appropriate when instrumenting for the long-term effect. While these models consistently report the expected sign, standard errors are large and the long-term coefficients are statistically insignificant. Hence, there is no clear evidence from our IV models of a long-term causal effect of elections on regime stability.

---

<sup>125</sup>Blackwell 2014.

<sup>126</sup>The same cannot be said for the long-term effect, as modest departures from the no-omitted-confounders assumption and ‘negative selection’ (more unstable regimes hold more elections) generate null results.

<sup>127</sup>For instance, some IV-probit models using only share of neighboring autocracies with an election year report statistically significant effects.

## 6 Conclusion

Observant readers of newspapers – with no knowledge of the political science literature on autocratic elections – might wonder why non-democratic leaders hold elections at all. Elections are often immediately followed by large-scale protests, violence and coup attempts, as illustrated by fairly recent events in countries as different as Egypt and Venezuela. The simple answer that we propose is that many autocratic leaders, at least those that are not too myopic, accept the increased short-term risk of being ousted in exchange for an improved grip on power in the long run. Autocratic elections affect regime survival through various mechanisms. Whereas many stabilizing mechanisms expectedly work with a quite long time-lag, the destabilizing are more immediate.

Our empirical analysis provides nuanced insights into how autocratic elections affect regime breakdown. Our analysis leaves no doubt that autocratic elections are associated with an increased probability of regime breakdown in their immediate aftermath. This result is robust to various specification changes, such as altering the set of control variables, measuring the timing since an election in different ways, and including or excluding “questionable observations” such as regimes ending with an election where the incumbent does not run. Our further analysis indicates that this correlation may not solely be due to autocrats systematically opting to hold elections whenever their regime is threatened (for instance, because of a vocal, organized opposition demanding political liberalization). There is seemingly a causal effect of elections on autocratic breakdown in the short-term. However, if the regime is able to survive the immediately increased risk, our analysis also provides indications– though results are not as unequivocal – that elections are associated with autocratic regime stability in the longer run.

## References

- Acemoglu, Daron and James A. Robinson. 2006. *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Acemoglu, Daron, Suresh Naidu, Pascual Restrepo and James A. Robinson. 2014. "Democracy Does Cause Growth." Cambridge, MA.: NBER Working Paper No. 20004.
- Baev, Pavel K. 2011. "A matrix for post-Soviet 'color revolutions': exorcising the devil from the details." *International Area Studies Review* 14(2):3-22.
- Baldwin, Kate and Eric Mvukiyehe. 2015. "Elections and Collective Action: Evidence from Changes in Traditional Institutions in Liberia." *World Politics* Early View:1-36.
- Beaulieu, Emily. 2014. *Electoral Protest and Democracy in the Developing World*. Cambridge University Press.
- Beaulieu, Emily and Susan D. Hyde. 2009. "In the Shadow of Democracy Promotion: Strategic Manipulation, International Observers, and Election Boycotts." *Comparative Political Studies* 42(3):392-415.
- Beck, Nathaniel and Simon Jackman. 1998. "Beyond Linearity by Default: Generalized Additive Models." *American Journal of Political Science* 42(2):596-627.
- Beissinger, Mark R. 2002. *Nationalist mobilization and the collapse of the Soviet State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bienen, Henry and Nicolas van de Walle. 1991. *Of time and power: leadership duration in the modern world*. Stanford University Press.
- Bienen, Henry and Nicolas van de Walle. 1992. "A Proportional Hazard Model of Leadership Duration." *The Journal of Politics* 54(3):685-717.
- Blackwell, Matthew. 2014. "A Selection Bias Approach to Sensitivity Analysis for Causal Effects." *Political Analysis* 22(2):169-182.
- Blaydes, Lisa. 2011. *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bogaards, Mathijs. 2013. "Reexamining African Elections." *Journal of Democracy* 24(4):151-160.
- Boix, Carles and Milan W. Svobik. 2013. "The Foundations of Limited Authoritarian Government: Institutions, Commitment, and Power-Sharing in Dictatorships." *Journal of Politics* 75(2):300-316.
- Bratton, Michael and Nicholas van de Walle. 1997. *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brownlee, Jason. 2007. *Authoritarianism in and Age of Democratization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brownlee, Jason. 2009. "Portents of Pluralism: How Hybrid Regimes Affect Democratic Transitions." *American Journal of Political Science* 53(3):515-532.
- Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce and Alastair Smith. 2009. "Political Survival and Endogenous Institutional Change." *Comparative Political Studies* 42(2):167-197.
- Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson and James D. Morrow. 2003. *The Logic of Political Survival*. Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press.
- Bunce, Valerie J. and Sharon L. Wolchik. 2010. "Defeating Dictators: Electoral Change and Stability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes." *World Politics* 62(1):43-86.



- Carter, David B. and Curtis S. Signorino. 2010. "Back to the Future: Modeling Time Dependence in Binary Data." *Political Analysis* 18(3):271-292.
- Casper, Brett Allen and Scott A Tyson. 2014. "Popular Protest and Elite Coordination in a Coup d'etat." *The Journal of Politics* 76(02):548-564.
- Cederman, Lars-Erik, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch and Simon Hug. 2013. "Elections and Ethnic Civil War." *Comparative Political Studies* 46(3):387-417.
- Cheibub, Jose Antonio, Jude Hays and Burcu Savun. 2012. "Elections and Civil War in Africa." University of Illinois: Unpublished manuscript.
- Cheibub, Jose, Jennifer Gandhi and James Vreeland. 2010. "Democracy and dictatorship revisited." *Public Choice* 143(1-2):67-101.
- Cox, Gary W. 2009. "Authoritarian Elections and Leadership Succession, 1975-2004." APSA 2009 Toronto Meeting Paper.  
URL: [http://politics.as.nyu.edu/docs/iO/6931/Cox\\_Paper.pdf](http://politics.as.nyu.edu/docs/iO/6931/Cox_Paper.pdf)
- Davenport, Christian. 1997. "From ballots to bullets: an empirical assessment of how national elections influence state uses of political repression." *Electoral Studies* 16(4):517-540.
- DeNardo, James. 1985. *Power in Numbers. the Political strategy of Protest and Rebellion*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Epstein, David L., Robert Bates, Jack Goldstone, Ida Kristensen and Sharyn O'Halloran. 2006. "Democratic Transitions." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(3):551-569.
- Fearon, James D. 2011. "Self-Enforcing Democracy." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 126(4):1661-1708.  
URL: <http://qje.oxfordjournals.org/content/126/4/1661.abstract>
- Gandhi, Jennifer. 2008. *Political institutions under Dictatorship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gandhi, Jennifer and Adam Przeworski. 2006. "Cooperation, Cooptation and Rebellion Under Dictatorships." *Economics and Politics* 18(1):1-26.
- Gandhi, Jennifer and Adam Przeworski. 2007. "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats." *Comparative Political Studies* 40(11):1279-1301.
- Gandhi, Jennifer and Ellen Lust-Okar. 2009. "Elections under Authoritarianism." *Annual Review of Political Science* 12:403-422.
- Gates, Scott, Havard Hegre, Mark P. Jones and Havard Strand. 2006. "Institutional Inconsistency and Political Instability: Polity Duration, 1800-2000." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(4):893-908.
- Geddes, B. 2006. "Why Parties and Elections in Authoritarian Regimes?" Revised version of a paper prepared for presentation at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington DC, 2005.  
URL: <http://www.daniellazar.com/wp-content/uploads/authoritarian-elections.doc>
- Geddes, Barbara. 1999. "What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 2:115-144.
- Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright and Erica Frantz. 2014. "Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set." *Perspectives on Politics* 12(2):313-331.
- Gleditsch, Kristian S. 2002. *All International Politics is Local: The Diffusion of Conflict, Integration, and Democratization*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Goldstone, Jack A., Robert H. Bates, David L. Epstein, Ted Robert Gurr, Michael B. Lustik,

- Monty G. Marshall, Jay Ulfelder and Mark Woodward. 2010. "A Global Model for Forecasting Political Instability." *American Journal of Political Science* 54(1):190-208.
- Gurr, Ted Robert. 1974. "Persistence and Change in Political Systems, 1800-1971." *American Political Science Review* 68(4):1482-1504.
- Haber, Stephen and Victor Menaldo. 2011. "Do natural resources fuel authoritarianism? A reappraisal of the resource curse." *American Political Science Review* 105(1):1-26.
- Hadenius, Axel and Jan Teorell. 2007. "Pathways from Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 18(1):143-156.
- Hafner-Burton, Emilie M., Susan D. Hyde and Ryan S. Jablonski. 2014. "When Do Governments Resort to Election Violence?" *British Journal of Political Science* 44(1):149-179.
- Hastie, Trevor and Robert Tibshirani. 1990. *Generalized additive models*. London: Chapman and Hall.
- Hastie, Trevor, Robert Tibshirani and Jerome Friedman. 2009. *The Elements of Statistical Learning: Data Mining, Inference, and Prediction*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Hegre, Havard, Tanja Ellingsen, Scott Gates and Nils Petter Gleditsch. 2001. "Toward a Democratic Civil Peace? Democracy, Political Change, and Civil War, 1816-1992." *American Political Science Review* 95(1):33-48.
- Houle, Christian. 2009. "Inequality and Democracy: Why Inequality Harms Consolidation but Does Not Affect Democratization." *World Politics* 61(4):589-622.
- Howard, Marc and Philip G. Roessler. 2006. "Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(2):365-381.
- Huber, John D., Thomas K. Ogorzalek and Radhika Gore. 2012. "Democracy, targeted redistribution and ethnic inequality." New York: Columbia University. Working Paper.
- Hyde, Susan D. and Nikolay Marinov. 2012. "Which Elections Can Be Lost?" *Political Analysis* 20(2):191-210.
- Imai, Kosuke, Gary King and Olivia Lau. 2014. *logit.bayes: Bayesian Logistic Regression for Dichotomous Dependent Variables*. In *Zelig: Everyone's Statistical Software*. URL: <http://gking.harvard.edu/zelig>
- Jacobs, Everett M. 1970. "Soviet local elections: What they are, and what they are not." *Soviet Studies* 22(1):61-76.
- Karklins, Rasma. 1986. "Soviet elections revisited: Voter abstention in noncompetitive voting." *American Political Science Review* 80(2):449-469.
- Kennedy, Ryan. 2010. "The Contradiction of Modernization: A Conditional Model of Endogenous Democratization." *The Journal of Politics* 72(3):785-798.
- Knutsen, Carl Henrik. 2011. "Democracy, Dictatorship and Protection of Property Rights." *Journal of Development Studies* 47(1):164-182.
- Knutsen, Carl Henrik. 2014. "Income Growth and Revolutions." *Social Science Quarterly* 95(4):921-937.
- Knutsen, Carl Henrik and Håvard Mokleiv Nygård. 2015. "Institutional characteristics and regime survival: Why are semi-democracies less durable than autocracies and democracies?" *American Journal of Political Science* 59(3):656-670.
- Kuran, Timur. 1989. "Sparks and Prairie Fires: A Theory of Unanticipated Political Revolution." *Public Choice* 61(1):41-74.

- Kuran, Timur. 1995. *Private Truths, Public Lies: The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification*. MA: Harvard University Press.
- Levitsky, Steven and Lucan A. Way. 2002. "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 13(2):52-65.
- Levitsky, Steven and Lucan A Way. 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lindberg, Staffan I. 2006. *Democracy and Elections in Africa*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.
- Lindberg, Staffan I. 2013. "Confusing Categories, Shifting Targets." *Journal of Democracy* 24(4):161-167.
- Little, Andrew T. 2012. "Elections, Fraud, and Election Monitoring in the Shadow of Revolution." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 7(3):249-283.
- Lohmann, Susanne. 1994. "The Dynamics of Informational Cascades: The Monday Demonstrations in Leipzig, East Germany, 1989-91." *World Politics* 47(1):41-101.
- Luttwak, Edward. 1968. *Coup d'Etat: A Practical Handbook*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Maddison, Angus. 2007. *Contours of the World Economy 1-2030. Essays in Macroeconomic History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Magaloni, Beatriz. 2006. *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Magaloni, Beatriz. 2010. "The Game of Electoral Fraud and the Ousting of Authoritarian Rule." *American Journal of Political Science* 54(3):751-765.
- Magaloni, Beatriz and Jeremy Wallace. 2008. "Citizen Loyalty, Mass Protest and Authoritarian Survival." Paper prepared for the conference on *Dictatorships: Their Governance and Social Consequences*, Princeton University, April 25-26, 2008.
- Magaloni, Beatriz and Ruth Kricheli. 2010. "Political Order and One-Party Rule." *Annual Review of Political Science* 13(1):123-143.
- Malesky, Edmund J. and Paul Schuler 2011. "The Single-Party Dictator's Dilemma: Information in Elections Without Opposition." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 35(4):491-530.
- Malesky, Edmund J., Paul Schuler and Anh Tran. 2012. "The Adverse Effects of Sunshine: A Field Experiment on Legislative Transparency in an Authoritarian Assembly." *American Political Science Review* 106(4):762-786.
- McCoy, Jennifer and Jonathan Hartlyn. 2009. *Democratization by Elections: A New Mode of Transition*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press chapter The Relative Powerlessness of Elections in Latin America.
- Miller, Michael K. 2012. Democracy by Example? Why Democracy Spreads When the World's Democracies Prosper. In *International Studies Annual Convention 2012*.
- Miller, Michael K. 2013. "Democratic Pieces: Autocratic Elections and Democratic Development since 1815." *British Journal of Political Science* FirstView:1-30.
- Miller, Michael K. 2014. "Elections, Information, and Policy Responsiveness in Autocratic Regimes." *Comparative Political Studies* OnlineFirst:1-37.
- Millett, Richard. 1985. "Guatemala: Progress and Paralysis." *Current History* 84(503):109.
- Meller, Jergen and Svend-Erik Skaaning. 2013. "Autocracies, democracies, and the violation of civil liberties." *Democratization* 20(1):82-106.

- Myerson, Roger. 2008. "The Autocrat's Credibility Problem and Foundations of the Constitutional State." *American Political Science Review* 102(1):125-139.
- Nordlinger, Eric A. 1977. *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Government*. Englewood-Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Pepinsky, Thomas. 2014. "The Institutional Turn in Comparative Authoritarianism." *British Journal of Political Science* 44(3):631-653.
- Persson, Torsten and Guido Tabellini. 2003. *The Economic Effect of Constitutions*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Pop-Eleches, Grigoire and Graeme Robertson. 2011. "Elections, Information and Political Change in the Post-Cold War Era." Working Paper.  
URL: <http://www.princeton.edu/gpop/biographyhtml>
- Powell, Jonathan. 2012. "Determinants of the Attempting and Outcome of Coup." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56(6):1017-104.
- Przeworski, Adam and Fernando Limongi. 1997. "Modernization: Theory and Facts." *World Politics* 49(2):155-183.
- Przeworski, Adam, Michael E. Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub and Fernando Limongi. 2000. *Democracy and Development. Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Reuter, Ora J. and Jennifer Gandhi. 2011. "Economic Performance and Elite Defection from Hegemonic Parties." *British Journal of Political Science* 41(1):83-110.
- Ross, Michael. 2001. "Does Oil Hinder Democracy." *World Politics* 53(April):325 -61.
- Schedler, Andreas. 2002. "The Menu of Manipulation." *Journal of Democracy* 13(2):36-50.
- Schedler, Andreas. 2006. The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism. In *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, ed. Andreas Schedler. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Schedler, Andreas. 2013. *The Politics of Uncertainty: Sustaining and Subverting Electoral Authoritarianism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schuler, Paul, Dimitar D. Gueorguiev and Francisco Cantu 2013. "Risk and Reward: The Differential Impact of Authoritarian Elections on Regime Decay and Breakdown" *Mimeo*, The University of Arizona.
- Seeberg, Merete B. 2014. "State capacity and the paradox of authoritarian elections." *Democratization* 21(7):1265-1285.
- Seeberg, Merethe B. 2015. The Contingent Effect of Authoritarian Elections. PhD thesis Aarhus University.
- Serdyuk, Igor N, Nathan R Zaccai and Joseph Zaccai. 2007. *Methods in molecular biophysics: structure, dynamics, function*. Cambridge University Press.
- Singer, J David. 1988. "Reconstructing the correlates of war dataset on material capabilities of states, 1816-1985." *International Interactions* 14(2):115-132.
- Svolik, Milan W. 2010. "Contracting on Violence: The Moral Hazard in Authoritarian Repression and Military Intervention in Politics." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 57(5):765-794.
- Svolik, Milan W. 2012. *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Svolik, Milan W. 2015. "Which Democracies Will Last? Coups, Incumbent Takeovers, and the

- Dynamic of Democratic Consolidation.” *British Journal of Political Science* FirstView:1-24.
- Teorell, Jan. 2010. *Determinants of Democracy: Explaining Regime Change in the World, 1972-2006*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thompson, Mark R. and Philipp Kuntz. 2004. “Stolen Elections: The Case of the Serbian October.” *Journal of Democracy* 15(4):159-172.
- Tucker, Joshua A. 2007. “Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Colored Revolutions.” *Perspectives on Politics* 5(3):535-551.
- Tullock, Gordon. 2005. *The Social Dilemma of Autocracy, Revolution, Coup D’Etat, and War*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.
- Van de Walle, Nicolas. 2002. “Africa’s Range of Regimes.” *Journal of Democracy* 13(2):66-80.
- Vanhanen, Tatu. 2000. “A New Dataset for Measuring Democracy, 1810-1998.” *Journal of Peace Research* 37(2):251-265.
- Vreeland, James Raymond. 2008. “The Effect of Political Regime on Civil War: Unpacking Anocracy.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52(3):401-425.
- Weede, Erich and Edward N. Muller. 1998. “Rebellion, Violence and Revolution: A Rational Choice Perspective.” *Journal of Peace Research* 35(1):43-59.
- Weingast, Barry R. 1997. “The Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law.” *American Political Science Review* 91(2):245-263.
- Weyland, Kurt. 2005. “Theories of Policy Diffusion: Lessons from Latin American Pension Reform.” *World Politics* 57(2):262-295.
- Wig, Tore and Espen Geelmuyden Rod. 2014. “Cues to Coup plotters: Elections as coup triggers in dictatorships.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* Online First:1-26.
- Wintrobe, Ronald. 1998. *The Political Economy of Dictatorship*. Cambridge: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wood, Simon N. 2006. *Generalized Additive Models: An Introduction with R*. New York: Chapman & Hall/CRC.
- Wright, Joseph. 2008. “Do Authoritarian Institutions Constrain? How Legislatures Affect Economic Growth and Investment.” *American Journal of Political Science* 52(2):322-343.
- Wright, Joseph. 2011. “Electoral Spending Cycles in Dictatorships.” Unpublished manuscript. URL: <http://www.personal.psu.edu/jgw12/blogs/josephwright/ESC1.pdf>
- Wright, Joseph and Abel Escriba-Folch. 2012. “Authoritarian Institutions and Regime Survival: Transitions to Democracy and Subsequent Autocracies.” *British Journal of Political Science* 42(2):283-309.
- Zaslavsky, Victor and Robert J Brym. 1978. “The Functions of Elections in the USSR.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 30(3):362-371.

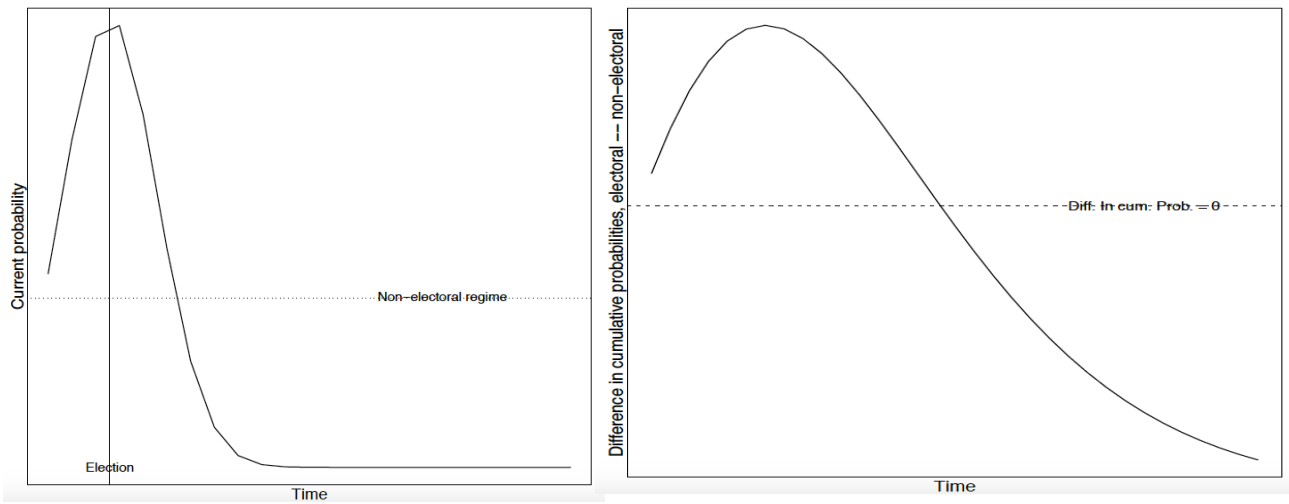


Figure 1: Expected dynamic effect of autocratic election on regime survival. Current probabilities of regime breakdown for regimes with and without election (left) and difference in cumulative probabilities (regime with election – regime without election) (right). The flat dotted line in the left panel simulates the regime without election, and the flat dotted line in right panel represents the where the difference in cumulative probabilities equals 0).

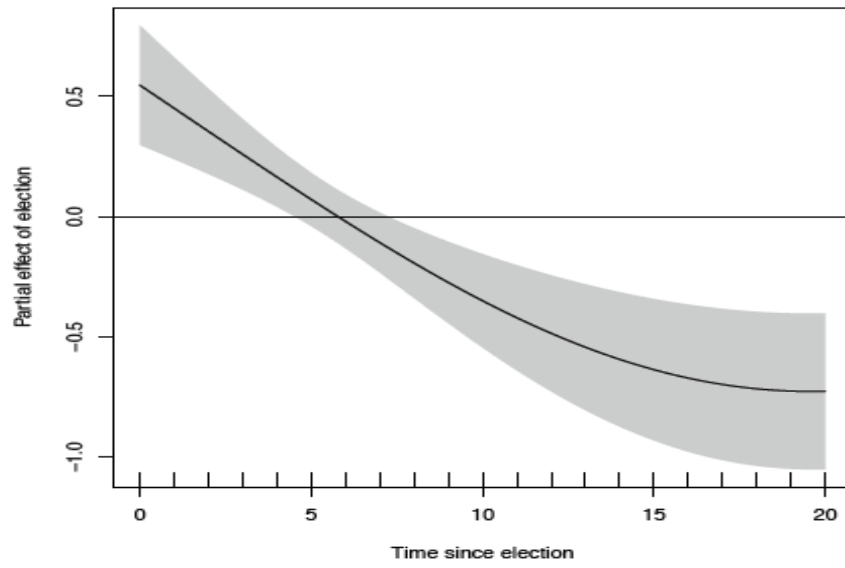


Figure 2: Years since election and the effect of election on regime failure, estimated from a GAM model with 4 degrees of freedom for years since election.

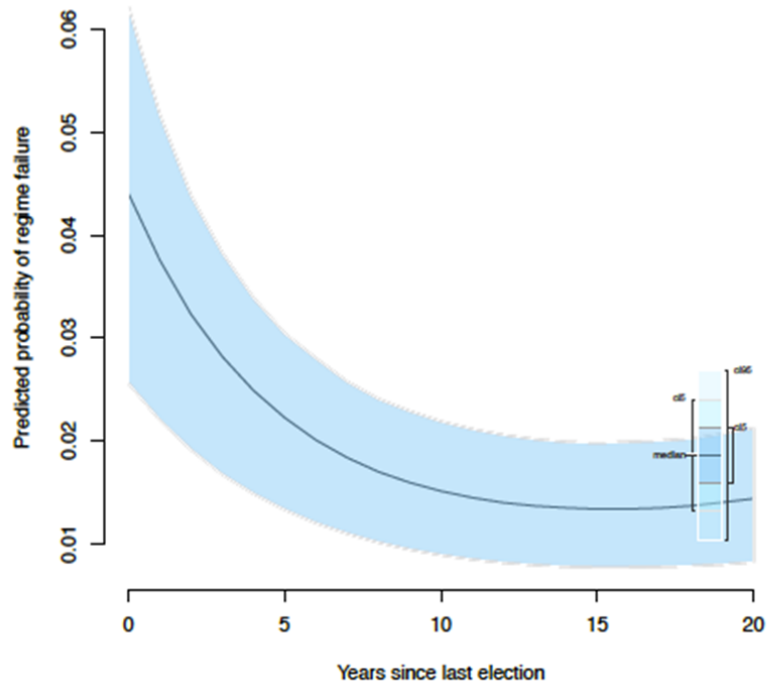


Figure 3: Predicted probability of regime failure (based on GAM in Figure 2) for autocracy holding election at  $t = 0$  and with mean score on all other variables. Years since election on x-axis.



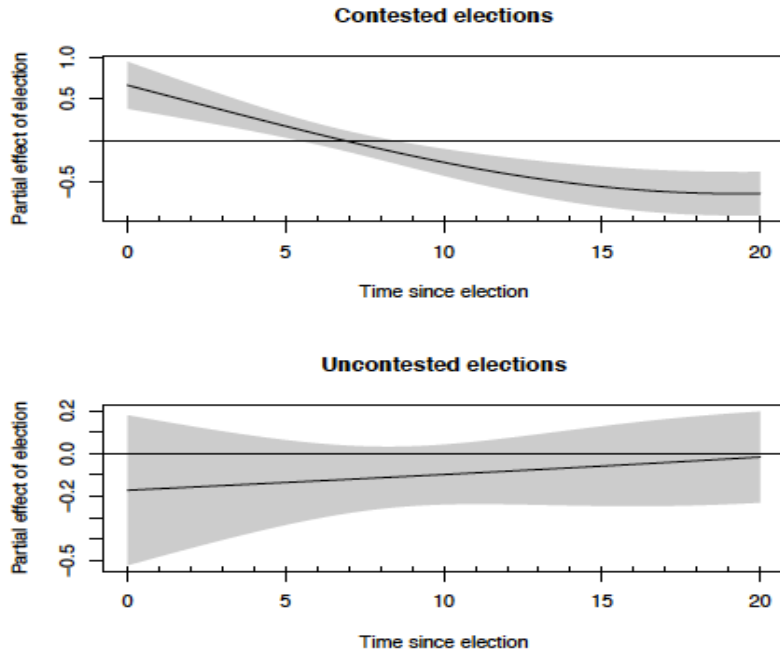


Figure 4: Years since election and effect of election on regime failure; contested vs. uncontested elections

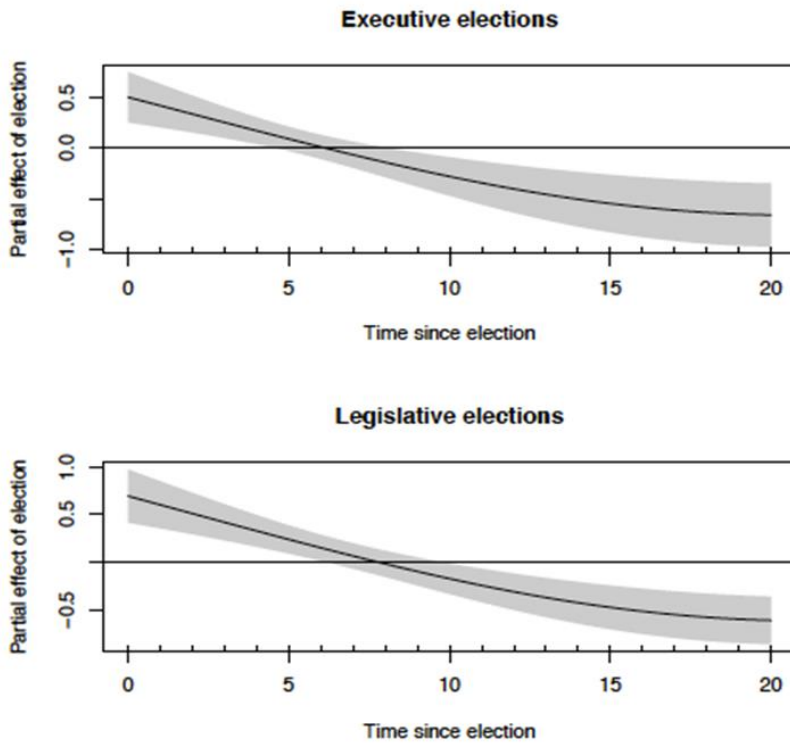


Figure 5: Years since election and effect of election on regime failure; executive vs. legislative elections

Table 1: Logit models on short- and long-term effects of elections on regime failure; 1946–2008

	Executive elections				All elections			
ElecShortTerm	2.108*** (0.304)		2.202*** (0.316)		2.411*** (0.377)		2.328*** (0.385)	
ElecLongTerm	-0.931** (0.374)		-1.407*** (0.425)		-2.053*** (0.528)		-2.495*** (0.743)	
Election		1.696*** (0.197)		1.681*** (0.200)		1.706*** (0.234)		1.473*** (0.201)
Election 5 year		-0.097 (0.192)		-0.285 (0.207)		-0.521** (0.261)		-0.487 (0.305)
Region Polity	2.568*** (0.461)	2.593*** (0.468)	4.774*** (0.934)	4.711*** (0.934)	3.931*** (1.142)	3.751*** (1.140)	3.421*** (1.138)	3.398*** (1.141)
ln(GDP per capita)	-0.227** (0.100)	-0.227** (0.101)	-0.522*** (0.140)	-0.530*** (0.141)	-0.774*** (0.171)	-0.762*** (0.172)	-0.759*** (0.168)	-0.768*** (0.170)
GDP per capita Growth	-0.030*** (0.009)	-0.031*** (0.009)	-0.025*** (0.009)	-0.027*** (0.010)	-0.002 (0.012)	-0.005 (0.012)	-0.001 (0.012)	-0.001 (0.012)
Military size	-0.284** (0.131)	-0.263** (0.128)	-0.264* (0.148)	-0.257* (0.146)	-0.352* (0.195)	-0.333* (0.188)	-0.327* (0.190)	-0.343* (0.191)
Resource dependence	-0.006 (0.008)	-0.007 (0.008)	-0.0003 (0.008)	-0.00003 (0.008)	0.009 (0.008)	0.009 (0.009)	0.009 (0.008)	0.010 (0.008)
Duration	-0.049*** (0.016)	-0.050** (0.023)	-0.035** (0.016)	-0.030* (0.017)	-0.041** (0.019)	-0.033* (0.019)	-0.036* (0.019)	-0.032* (0.019)
Duration <sup>2</sup>	0.001** (0.0004)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001** (0.0003)	0.001 (0.0004)	0.001* (0.0004)	0.001 (0.0004)	0.001* (0.0004)	0.001 (0.0004)
Duration <sup>3</sup>	-0.00000 (0.00000)	-0.00000 (0.00001)	-0.00000 (0.00000)	-0.00000 (0.00000)	-0.00000 (0.00000)	-0.00000 (0.00000)	-0.00000 (0.00000)	-0.00000 (0.00000)
Democracy level (SIP)					2.504*** (0.338)	2.438*** (0.337)	2.446*** (0.350)	2.369*** (0.350)
Constant	-1.588** (0.712)	-1.868*** (0.716)	0.320 (1.156)	-0.149 (1.151)	2.489* (1.455)	1.654 (1.430)	2.808* (1.445)	1.834 (1.406)
Region dummies			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Decade dummies			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	3,893	3,893	3,893	3,893	3,710	3,710	3,710	3,710
Log Likelihood	-705.133	-695.581	-688.357	-680.153	-501.341	-496.338	-501.723	-495.351
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,432.266	1,413.162	1,422.715	1,406.306	1,050.683	1,040.675	1,051.447	1,038.703

Notes: \* p<0.1; \*\* p<0.05; \*\*\* p<0.01

Logit regressions with Geddes-Wright-Frantz (GWF; 2014) regime failure as dependent variable.

Table 2: Robustness tests: Logit models on short- and long-term effects of elections on regime failure; 1946–2008

	Control reg. type runs	Alternative long-term measures	Multi-party elec. only	Excl. no incumbent	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
ElecShortTerm	2.103*** (0.320)	1.547*** (0.209)	1.944*** (0.280)	3.629*** (0.768)	1.512*** (0.334)
ElecLongTerm	-1.223*** (0.441)			-4.371*** (1.011)	-0.776* (0.441)
Region Polity	5.290*** (0.946)	4.693*** (0.944)	1.659 (1.496)	5.936*** (1.580)	4.502*** (0.965)
ln(GDP per capita)	-0.419*** (0.144)	-0.555*** (0.141)	-0.524** (0.235)	-0.706*** (0.244)	-0.516*** (0.146)
GDP per capita Growth	-0.027*** (0.010)	-0.025*** (0.010)	-0.083*** (0.016)	0.020 (0.020)	-0.029*** (0.010)
Military size	-0.164 (0.154)	-0.212 (0.141)	-0.294 (0.226)	0.064 (0.280)	-0.277* (0.155)
Resource dependence	-0.001 (0.009)	-0.0005 (0.008)	-0.007 (0.013)	0.010 (0.014)	-0.006 (0.010)
Personalist	0.869*** (0.226)				
Military	1.759*** (0.255)				
Monarchy	-0.551 (0.427)				
Sum of elections held		-0.078** (0.039)			
Time since first election			-0.636** (0.306)		
Duration	0.011 (0.017)	-0.022 (0.016)	-0.070 (0.045)	-0.096* (0.050)	-0.016 (0.017)
Duration <sup>2</sup>	0.0002 (0.0003)	0.001 (0.0003)	0.002 (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)	0.0004 (0.0004)
Duration <sup>3</sup>	-0.00000 (0.00000)	-0.00000 (0.00000)	-0.00002 (0.00002)	-0.00002 (0.00002)	-0.00000 (0.00000)
Constant	-2.841* (1.659)	-0.168 (1.142)	1.825 (2.251)	3.305 (2.108)	-0.105 (1.207)
Region dummies	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Decade dummies	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	3,893	3,893	1,611	547	3,893
Log Likelihood	-661.886	-691.804	-311.425	-204.211	-634.725
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,375.771	1,429.609	668.851	454.423	1,315.450

Notes: \* p<0.1; \*\* p<0.05; \*\*\* p<0.01

Logit regressions with Geddes-Wright-Frantz (GWF; 2014) regime failure as dependent variable. Dominant party regime is reference category for regime dummies in Model 1.

Table 3: Second-stage IV-probit results on regime failure, with Election year or ElecShortTerm as endogenous regressors.

Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Election year	2.202 (1.50)		1.898** (0.75)		1.873** (0.91)		1.744** (0.84)		1.961* (1.03)	
ElecShortTerm		3.443* (1.85)		2.350** (1.03)		2.194* (1.22)		2.585** (1.13)		2.841** (1.34)
Election past 5 yrs	-0.435 (0.35)		-0.347* (0.19)		-0.336 (0.22)		-0.331 (0.21)		-0.355 (0.24)	
ElecLongTerm		-2.455* (1.39)		-1.510** (0.76)		-1.380 (0.89)		-1.814** (0.85)		-1.841* (0.97)
Region Polity	2.041*** (0.77)	1.942** (0.85)	2.296*** (0.54)	2.336*** (0.53)	2.191*** (0.58)	2.199*** (0.57)	2.206*** (0.50)	2.210*** (0.51)	2.164*** (0.60)	2.043*** (0.63)
ln(GDP per capita)	-0.245*** (0.09)	-0.218** (0.11)	-0.227*** (0.07)	-0.225*** (0.07)	-0.234*** (0.07)	-0.232*** (0.08)	-0.261*** (0.07)	-0.251*** (0.07)	-0.234*** (0.07)	-0.218*** (0.08)
GDP per capita growth	-0.010** (0.00)	-0.009* (0.00)	-0.014*** (0.00)	-0.013*** (0.00)	-0.014*** (0.00)	-0.014*** (0.00)	-0.011** (0.00)	-0.010** (0.00)	-0.014*** (0.00)	-0.014*** (0.00)
Military size	-0.098 (0.07)	-0.084 (0.07)	-0.130* (0.07)	-0.126* (0.07)	-0.108 (0.07)	-0.108 (0.07)	-0.103 (0.07)	-0.098 (0.07)	-0.107 (0.07)	-0.100 (0.07)
Resource dependence	0.000 (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)	0.000 (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)	0.000 (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)	0.000 (0.00)
Duration	-0.014 (0.01)	-0.023*** (0.01)	-0.021*** (0.01)	-0.026*** (0.01)	-0.032** (0.02)	-0.036** (0.02)	-0.014 (0.01)	-0.021*** (0.01)	-0.032** (0.02)	-0.036** (0.02)
Duration <sup>2</sup>	0.000 (0.00)	0.000** (0.00)	0.000** (0.00)	0.000*** (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)	0.000 (0.00)	0.000** (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)	0.001* (0.00)
Duration <sup>3</sup>	-0.000 (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)	-0.000* (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)
Neighboring instability					0.662** (0.26)	0.663** (0.26)			0.662** (0.26)	0.614** (0.27)
Neighb. instab. past 5 yrs					0.081 (0.12)	0.091 (0.12)			0.079 (0.12)	0.093 (0.12)
Region dummies	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year dummies	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	3782	3782	3434	3434	3264	3264	3782	3782	3264	3264
Countries	112	112	112	112	112	112	112	112	112	112
Sargan p-value	—	—	.01	.01	.15	.16	.25	.26	.68	.64
Cragg-Donald Wald F stat	11.5	9.0	12.0	10.7	9.4	8.9	32.9	27.0	21.4	18.0

Notes: \* p<0.1; \*\* p<0.05; \*\*\* p<0.01. Standard errors in parentheses.

IV-probit models; second-stage regressions with Election year and ElecShortTerm as endogenous independent variables and regime failure as dependent variable.

All models include share of neighboring autocracies with election year as instrument. Models 3–10 also include share of autocracies globally with election year as instrument. Models 3–6 further include five extra instruments tapping neighboring and global environment in terms of autocratic elections.

First-stage regressions are reported in Appendix Table A.21.