

# Can Iraq democratize? How long will it take?

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Paper prepared for the Annual Meetings of the International Studies Association, March 1-5, 2005, Honolulu.

**Abstract:** *The prospects for democracy in Iraq should be assessed in light of the historical precedents of nations with comparable experiences. That analysis reveals:*

*(1) Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, only 30 nations have experienced an autocracy as extreme as Iraq's over as long a time.*

*(2) Only ten of those 30 have produced coherent democracies subsequently.*

*(3) Only two of those ten is now an established democracy; the remainder's democratic experiments are still in progress.*

*(4) The average time required for these ten prospects to transit the path from extreme autocracy to coherent, albeit precarious, democracy has been about 50 years and only one has managed it in less than 25 years.*

*Thus, even if Iraq faced conditions as favorable to democratization as these 30 - and it almost certainly does not - the odds of Iraq achieving democracy in the foreseeable future are quite close to zero, at best about 1 in 30.*

*The experience of the Soviet Union suggests that by the time democracy reaches Mesopotamia, it will no longer be Iraq.*

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# Can Iraq democratize? How long will it take?

## 1. Introduction

The only safe response to the title questions is the pat one of political journalists: “time will tell.” But that is not good enough. A meaningful discussion of policy choices in Iraq (and similar cases) requires at least some tentative working hypothesis concerning the likely future. This paper contributes to the effort to build one.

Specialists that apply regional knowledge to these questions would do well to heed the stylized facts that result from a subtle generalization of the title questions. “Will Iraq democratize?” is better answered after considering “What have been the odds for other nations with Iraq’s experience?” “How long will it take?” surely requires one to know “How long has it taken for others in the past?”<sup>1</sup>

The cautionary reminder of this broader historical record is especially warranted because most commentators are convinced that Iraq offers an unusually *difficult* challenge to democratization, which makes any rendition of the prior experience of others a relatively *optimistic* estimate of Iraq’s prospects. In cases of this sort, a ceiling for optimism is a useful antidote to forecasts rooted in an especially strong desire for a positive outcome.

The paper begins by introducing the data base of the Polity Project, which summarizes the experience with democracy and autocracy of nearly 200 nations over more than 200 years. First, it is used to compile a list of nations with autocratic histories similar to that of Iraq, which has suffered an unusually extreme form of autocracy for a full political generation. Second, it allows us to summarize the experience of these nations subsequent to the end of their extreme autocratic periods.<sup>2</sup> The result is an historically-realistic framing of the range of Iraq’s most likely political future.

A “stylized facts” approach is justified by our principal interest in forecasting rather than explanation, and by the strong serial correlation consistently found among measures of democracy (Przeworski et. al., 2000).<sup>3</sup> Rapid, lasting changes in levels of democracy are not at all common.

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<sup>1</sup>A word is in order about what this paper is not. It provides no authoritative forecast and does not recommend how to maximize democracy’s prospects in Iraq. It offers no useful judgement about the short-term likelihood of success for any particular strategy or initiative. Those things can be done better by case experts taking into account the details of the ethnic conflicts, security problems, cultural predilections, regional complications, and external involvement that make Iraq unique. This paper establishes the comparative historical parameters.

<sup>2</sup> This assumes, optimistically, that Iraq’s extreme autocracy has now ended.

<sup>3</sup>This forecasting approach privileges explanations of democratization based on a nation’s current political system and its historical experience. Of course, many other potential projections can be derived from existing theory, some of which has been successfully tested in rigorous empirical studies. Of particular interest to the Iraqi

(continued...)

Democratization is a complex, multi-faceted structural change that unfolds slowly over protracted periods, not a discreet event that occurs rapidly in response to immediate stimuli. Democratization is a process dominated by hysteresis, a path dependence that makes data-based prediction far easier than empirical adjudication of alternative explanations.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Identifying democracy and autocracy: the data

The first step to identifying the roster of nations that may provide insight into Iraq's future is to characterize Iraq's political system in a way that facilitates comparison with other nations over a broad expanse of time. The only method of comparing such a large number of cases is to reduce the complexity of each of them to a data point.<sup>5</sup> This severe loss of information is inherently risky, though it can be made less so by using a frequently validated data set with a well documented coding scheme.<sup>6</sup> For this study, the obvious choice is the most recent data set of the Polity project, various versions of which have been used in countless studies of democracy and political change (Jagers and Gurr, 1995).<sup>7</sup> Polity is augmented at several points with Freedom House's (2004) well-known ratings, which are available only since 1972. Appendix 2 demonstrates the close agreement between the two.

We especially rely on Polity IV's often-used 21 point scale of institutionalized democracy, which subtracts a 10 point autocracy scale from a 10 point democracy scale to provide a continuous measure in which pure autocracy is scored -10 and full democracy +10. The

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<sup>3</sup>(...continued)

case is the consistent finding that Islamic societies, oil producers, Middle Eastern states, heterogeneous ethnic societies, and relatively poor economies are less likely to democratize than others.

<sup>4</sup> Hysteresis is a physics term that means, literally, to be late. It describes systems that do not directly follow the forces applied to them, but react slowly, at a lag. Under hysteresis, system states depend on past history as well as the current forces acting on them. It is used especially to denote systems that do not return completely to their original state after a disturbance has been removed. For instance if you push on a piece of putty it will assume a new shape, but when you remove your hand it will not return to its original shape, or at least not entirely or quickly. Political systems are like that: Saddam Hussein's hand will affect the shape of Iraqi governance long after his direct influence has ended. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hysteresis>)

<sup>5</sup>Comparative case studies would be a useful method after the comparable cases have been identified by the approach of this paper.

<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that disagreements can be avoided. Democracy is multi-dimensional and different weightings of its different elements are plausible. Subjective judgements are inevitable, but it would be unfortunate if quibbles over this or that case were to deflect from the clear general message that emerges from this analysis.

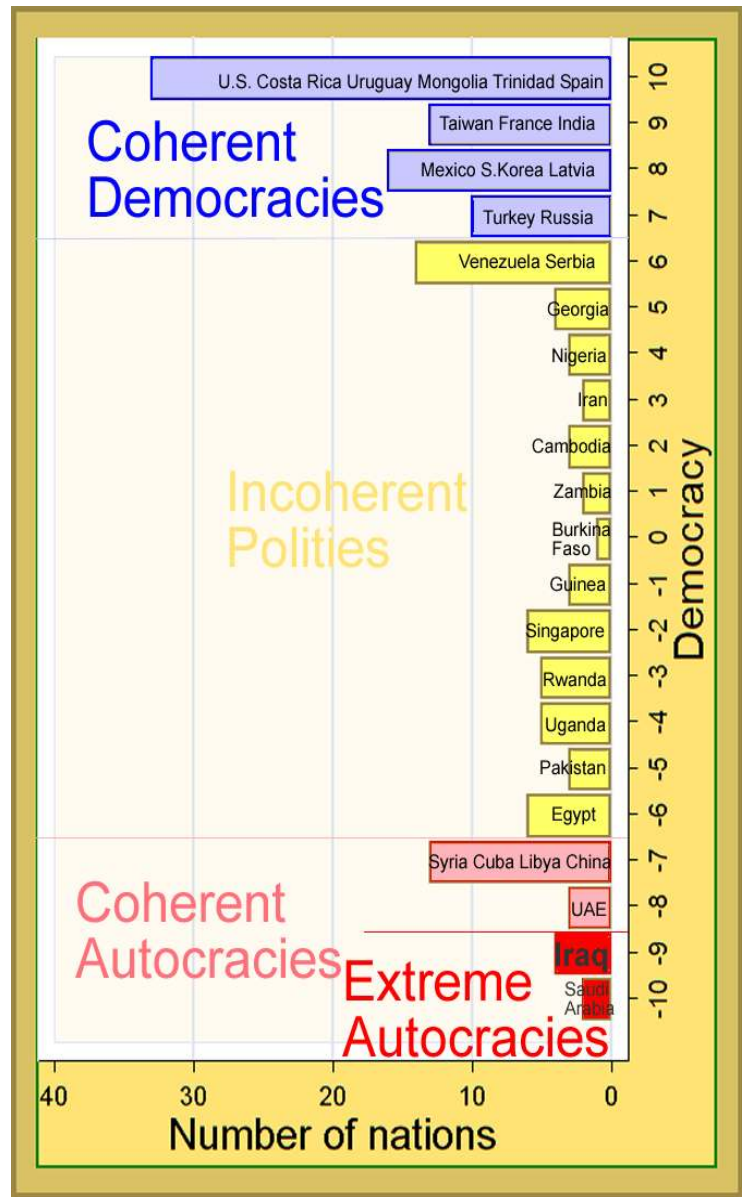
<sup>7</sup> Polity is widely regarded as the most reliable and valid of the available data sets (Munck and Verkuin, 2002; Moon et. al., 2004). It also offers the greatest coverage, encompassing every country with a population greater than 500,000 for each year between 1800 and 2003, a total of 14,875 cases. Its conception of democracy is unusually well documented via the writings of its founders, its exemplary code book, and other materials (Gurr, 1974; Eckstein and Gurr, 1975; Marshall and Jagers, 2002; <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/polity/>)

democracy/ autocracy conceptions of Polity center around several dimensions of authority relations, emphasizing the recruitment of the chief executive, the extent of constraints on the executive, and the range of political participation. In fully democratic systems, chief executives are elected in open, formal competition by broad electorates, and, once in office, are heavily constrained by statutory limitations and by other actors (especially elected legislatures). In pure autocracies, political participation is repressed, and chief executives with unlimited authority are designated by a closed group or else power is appropriated directly. A brief treatment of the scaling of variables, adapted from Marshall and Jaggers (2002) is included as Appendix 1 for reference.

In order to give heuristic content to this scale, the histogram in Figure 1 identifies the distribution of nations in 2003, with the frequencies represented by the lengths of the respective bars. The histogram is overlaid with examples of nations that occupy each point to illustrate the scale. For example, the red bar at the very bottom of the figure represents two nations with a score of -10. Five others at -9, including Iraq, are represented by the bar above it.

The top blue bar represents 33 nations assigned the highest score, +10, by virtue of their rating as a 10 on the democracy scale and a 0 on the autocracy scale.<sup>8</sup> In addition to this group of

**Figure 1: The Polity Scale with examples**



<sup>8</sup> For comparison with other well-known data sets, all but two of these nations (Trinidad & Tobago and Papua New Guinea) were rated “free” in the 2003 Freedom House compilation. About two-thirds of them also (continued...)

33 “pure democracies”, 39 others are grouped in the categories +7 to +9. It is evident that these nations have notable flaws in comparison with the democratic ideal, but most observers would regard them as identifiably democratic. That group of 72 is set off in blue in the histogram, because the Polity Project has long regarded a score of +7 or more as constituting a “coherent democracy” (CD), “regimes with institutionally strong, or internally consistent, authority patterns.”<sup>9</sup> Polities between +7 and -7 are termed “incoherent”, in that they have substantial features of both democracy and autocracy. They are expected to be less stable – and the histogram, where they are marked off in yellow, shows that they are somewhat less frequent – than those at the extremes.<sup>10</sup> The bottom of the histogram, expanded in Figure 2, records in shades of red the incidence of “coherent autocracies” (CA), the 23 nations at -7 and below. Polity assigned no score to Iraq in 2003 since it was under foreign domination, but for convenience we continue to refer to it by the -9 score it held from 1978 through 2002.

### 3. How autocratic was Iraq?

#### Defining “extreme autocracy”

Within the group of coherent autocracies, we distinguish a sub-category of the most *extreme* autocracies, nations coded at -10 or -9 by Polity, to constitute the reference group of nations with political systems most similar to those of Iraq. As we see in Figure 2, there are only seven such nations in 2003: two “pure autocracies” scored at -10 (Saudi Arabia and Qatar), plus Iraq and four others coded -9 (North Korea, Swaziland, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan). We differentiate this sub-category of extreme autocracies (SA) because an analysis reported in Table 1 reveals that the trajectory of political change for such nations over the entire twentieth century is quite

**Figure 2: Current Coherent Autocracies**



<sup>8</sup>(...continued)

received the highest score in both its Political Rights and Civil Liberties categories (Freedom House, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> The standard for “coherent democracy” can be signified by a simple denotation: those making the “cut” at +7 include Turkey, Russia, Colombia, Indonesia, El Salvador, Ukraine, Madagascar, Honduras, Croatia, and Albania. Those falling just short at +6 include Bangladesh, Venezuela, Ghana, Malawi, Serbia/Montenegro, Sri Lanka, Ecuador, Estonia, Namibia, Benin, Mali, Mozambique, Guyana, and East Timor. The Polity update of Jan. 28, 2005 listed the cut-off at +/-6, rather than +/-7 as it has been for many years. This paper uses the old standard.

<sup>10</sup> Coherent polities, whether democratic (+7 and above) or autocratic (-7 and below) have been found to be more enduring than the incoherent ones (-6 to +6) (Gurr, 1974; Harmel, 1980; Lichbach, 1984).

distinctive.<sup>11</sup> At a lag of five years, for example, nations that had been scored at -7 or -8 are more than three times more likely to become democratic than are those at -9 or -10, 4.88% to 1.53%.

In fact, after 10 or more years, the likelihood of a nation scored -7 or -8 making this transition is almost identical to that of incoherent polities, while extreme autocracies are far less likely. The difference between these groups can be found in Polity's coding of democracy and autonomy, illustrated with the example of Iraq.

Iraq's score of -9, which results from subtracting its 9 on autocracy from its 0 on democracy, can be decomposed from the Polity codes recorded in Table 2. It is clear that Iraq has none of the attributes associated with democracy and almost all of those associated with autocracy. For example, Saddam Hussein was appointed President and Chairperson of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) in 1979 by the RCC itself. The chief executive's selection by designation, not election, contributes two points toward Iraq's autocracy score, as illustrated in the boldface line of Table 2.<sup>12</sup> Recruitment via contested election, by contrast, would have incremented Iraq's democracy score by +2.

The powers of the executive in Iraq are unlimited by either statutory arrangement or challenge from other institutions, adding three points to its autocracy score. Polity's notes describe why their coders judged it in this way: "The Chairman of the RCC serves as chief

**Table 1: Percentage of nations achieving coherent democracy after various lags**

	5 years	10 years	20 years
Extreme autocracy	1.53	4.26	9.94
Other coherent autocracy	4.88	9.02	15.72
Incoherent polity	6.35	10.92	15.43
Coherent democracy	93.49	90.40	88.89

**Table 2: Decomposing Iraq's Autocracy**

			DEM	AUT
Components		Iraq score	0	9
executive recruitment regulation	XRREG	2 designational, not regulated		
<b>exec recruitment competitiveness</b>	<b>XRCOMP</b>	<b>1 selection, not election</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>
executive recruitment openness	XROPEN	4 open, not hereditary	0	0
executive constraints	XCONST	1 unlimited authority	0	3
participation regulation	PARREG	4 restricted		2

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<sup>11</sup> The judgements of Polity and Freedom House substantially converge, even though they emphasize markedly different dimensions of democracy and freedom. Four of the Polity seven were in Freedom House's "least free" category. Twelve of the fourteen "least free" were also designated coherent autocracies by Polity.

<sup>12</sup>The composition of Polity's 21-point scale is summarized in Appendix 1.

executive, prime minister, and commander of the armed forces. The RCC exercises both legislative and executive power, whereas the elected legislature (National Assembly) can only enact laws approved by the RCC. The judiciary is not independent, and the president can override any court decision.”<sup>13</sup>

Political participation by the public is repressed and no opposition is permitted, accumulating four more points on the autocracy scale. “Any formal political activity must be sanctioned by the government. Opposition to the regime is silenced by an efficient security force that maintains an environment of intimidation and fear on which government power rests. The government continues to execute perceived political opponents and to torture and kill individuals suspected of (or even related to persons suspected of) anti-state crimes. The authorities routinely used arbitrary arrest and detention, and security forces routinely torture, beat, rape, and otherwise abuse detainees. In 1995, the RCC called the first-ever direct presidential elections in Iraq. As the sole candidate, Hussein was approved by a reported 99.9% of the electorate in a poll that did not provide for secret ballots and was widely considered a sham.”

Thus, Iraq exhibits almost all the characteristics of a pure autocracy - an unelected, unconstrained executive and an absence of political participation - and consequently scores 9 on the autocracy scale. The comparison with the other severe autocracies in Appendix Table A1 reveals that the only missing element that deprives Iraq of the pure autocracy score assigned to Saudi Arabia and Qatar is the hereditary character of their monarchies.

However, Appendix Table A2's comparison of Iraq with the sixteen coherent autocracies at -7 and -8 reveals that all 16 feature greater constraints on executive authority, in contrast to the unlimited power of Iraq's Saddam Hussein, and/or allow greater political participation. Both of these represent potential avenues of political change that are not open in Iraq and other extreme autocracies, which explains the differences in propensities for political change cited above. In such systems, democratization cannot arise from the system itself, because there are no counter elites to slowly accrue power to challenge the executive and no broad-based political forces.

#### **4. What nations compare with Iraq? Defining “established extreme autocracy”**

Figure 2 locates Iraq in the company of contemporary nations which share elements of its autocracy, but it does not capture the historical dimension. Iraq is not just a extreme autocracy – it is an exceptionally long-lived one. The summary provided by Figure 3 shows that Iraq has been

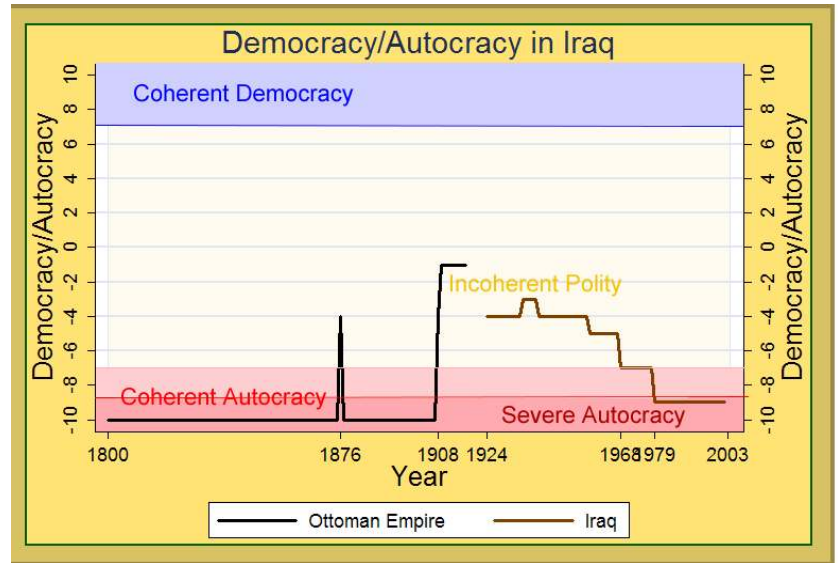
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<sup>13</sup> Also, “All members of the RCC are high-ranking members of the Arab Baath Socialist Party and the government essentially rubberstamps decisions previously made by the party's ruling body, the Regional Command. Members of the legislature are either Baath party members or ‘independents’ handpicked by the party leadership. Saddam Hussein is in full control of the ‘people's representatives’ and can remove them at will.”



predominantly autocratic – and never democratic – for its entire history, ever since it emerged in 1924 as a -4 from the Ottoman Empire, which was itself a *pure* autocracy for all but a few years over the previous centuries. Iraq’s high point of democratic experience was a brief glimpse of -3 between 1936 and 1940. Clearly, it was neither the Baathist triumph in 1968 (which carried Iraq from -5 to -7) nor Saddam’s arrival in 1978 (-7 to -9) that banished democracy from the Iraqi landscape. Thus, it is not to be expected that his departure would automatically herald a reversion to some pre-existing democratic norm. But does that history make it less likely that Iraq will quickly embrace democratic change? Intuitively, it seems relevant that Iraq has known nothing other than a extreme autocracy for nearly a quarter-century, depriving a full generation of any experience that could foster democratic attitudes, develop democratically-inclined leaders, create democratic institutions, or even permit the emergence of proto-democratic civil society.

**Figure 3: Iraq’s political history**



Thus, this historical dimension is factored in to the effort to identify countries with which Iraq should be compared. Just as Lijphart (1999) uses a two decade time period to demarcate an “established democracy”, we borrow this convenient benchmark to label as “*established extreme autocracies*” those nations that have maintained a score of -9 or -10 for twenty years or more. We expect that the experience of such countries will make it more difficult for them to evolve into coherent democracies than those nations which have had a more brief brush with autocracy. Table 3 provides evidence that the likelihood of political change does depends on the length of time spent as an extreme autocracy. The t-value of -

**Table 3: Predicting Polity score, forward 20 years**

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs =	10574
Model	290024.3	2	145012.1	F( 2, 10571) =	6108.8
Residual	250936.5	10571	23.7382	Prob > F =	0.000
Total	540960.8	10573	51.16437	R-squared =	0.536
				Adj R-squared =	0.536
				Root MSE =	4.872

20 yrs Polity	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t
Polity	.7557923	.0073567	102.73	0.000
time as EA	-.0081335	.0038432	-2.12	0.034
_cons	.6681297	.049927	13.38	0.000



2.12, statistically significant beyond .05, indicates that the more years spent under extreme autocracy, the lower the likely Polity score 20 years hence. Predictions 10 years in the future are more strongly effected ( $t = -4.01$ ).<sup>14</sup> It is less clear that twenty years is the appropriate cut-off point. As a practical matter, we require *some* criteria to differentiate those nations we will regard as similar enough to Iraq to provide some insight into its likely future. A series of probit analyses not shown demonstrates that status as an “established extreme autocracy” does significantly diminish the likelihood of becoming a coherent democracy within five, ten, and twenty years, but the results are not very robust across plausible specifications.

Iraq’s 23 year stretch as a extreme autocracy is hardly unprecedented, but neither is it especially common. Among 2003’s extreme autocracies, only four others meet the condition of twenty consecutive years at -9 needed to be considered established extreme autocracies: Saudi Arabia (77 years), North Korea (37), Qatar (32), and Swaziland (30).<sup>15</sup> Of course, these nations do not offer much guidance to Iraq today, except to confirm that autocracy of various degrees is often a highly stable governance form relatively immune to political change.<sup>16</sup> With the polity associated with Saddam Hussein’s dominance decisively shattered by the war and foreign occupation, however, these long-lived autocracies no longer constitute Iraq’s peer group. (That is not to say, of course, that a *new* autocracy may not emerge in its place.) Instead, we now look to guidance from those nations that have *emerged* from a generational experience as an established extreme autocracy. That list is a manageable one. *Since the beginning of the twentieth century, only 30 current nations have endured twenty continuous years of extreme autocracy.*<sup>17</sup>

The post-World War II cases are sometimes cited as precedents, but they are really quite different. Germany’s extreme autocracy was brief (1933-1944) and preceded for a longer period (1919-1932) by the Weimar Republic’s +6. Italy had no democratic tradition, but its extreme autocracy (-9) was also relatively brief (1928-1942). Japan’s last coherent autocracy ended in 1857. Closer were the thirteen now-independent nations which had extreme autocracy experience as Soviet republics for slightly under 20 years, which we treat separately below.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> These numbers are significantly smaller when the analysis is restricted to the twentieth century, during which the pace of political change has clearly accelerated.

<sup>15</sup> Uzbekistan (11) and Turkmenistan (10) date only from the demise of the Soviet Union.

<sup>16</sup> Iraq’s 34 years as a “coherent autocracy” is exceeded by nearly half of the 22 others currently holding that status, including Bhutan (96), Saudi Arabia (77), North Korea (55), China (54), Vietnam (53), Libya (52), Cuba (51), Oman (46), Laos (42), and Kuwait (42).

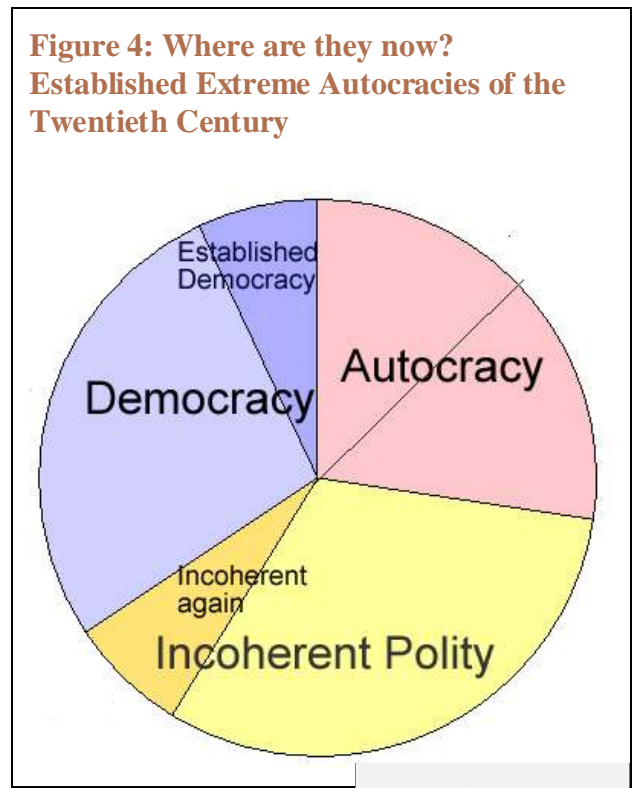
<sup>17</sup> This does not include East Germany (-9 from 1960 to 1988), incorporated into Germany (+10). Thirty-five additional countries endured one or more briefer bouts with extreme autocracy during the twentieth century.

<sup>18</sup> A total of 35 additional countries have a generational experience of CA, but not SA. Ten are currently

(continued...)

### 5. What can we expect after established extreme autocracy?

How have those thirty established extreme autocracies fared? The answer is summarized in Figure 4, elaborated in color-coded Tables 4-6, and discussed below. Nine, including Iraq, remain coherent autocracies. Eleven are coded as incoherent polities. Ten are currently coherent democracies. We discuss each category in turn. Iraq and the four others displayed in Table 4 remain extreme autocracies. All have been coherent autocracies for more than 30 years, with most of that autocracy extreme.



**Figure 4: Where are they now?  
Established Extreme Autocracies of the  
Twentieth Century**

**Table 5: Not yet democratic (n=15)**

Current status	Last SA
Yemen	-2 1945
Bhutan	-8 1952
Ethiopia	+1 1973
Iran	+3 1978
Guinea	-1 1983
Haiti	-2 1985*
Jordan	-2 1988
Algeria	-3 1988
Ivory Coast	... 1989
Gabon	-4 1989
Congo (Kin)	... 1989
Malawi	+6 1992*
Syria	-7 1999
Bahrain	-7 2000
Oman	-8 2001

\*once coherent democracy

Table 5 lists the 15 countries that have emerged from extreme autocracy, but have not yet achieved democracy.

Four of those – Bhutan, Syria, Bahrain, and Oman – are depicted in pink to indicate that they remain coherent autocracies. Of the remaining 11 in yellow, two had once achieved democracy, but have subsequently relapsed. How long have they been languishing? Two of them have failed to achieve democracy despite leaving extreme autocracy status more than 50 years ago, and two others have been longer than 25 years. Congo and Ivory Coast will need to start over from their current status, designated “interregnum” by Polity and “not free” by Freedom House. At the other end of the scale, three have emerged only

**Table 4: Extreme Autocracies(n=5)**

Years autocratic	
Iraq	34
Qatar	32
North Korea	55
Saudi Arabia	77
Swaziland	30

<sup>18</sup>(...continued)

coherent democracies: Nicaragua, Spain, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Romania, Lesotho, Mongolia, Taiwan, and Indonesia. Three were once coherent democracies, but have fallen back: Yugoslavia, Mali and Niger. Eight are still coherent autocracies, having never escaped that category: Cuba, Somalia, Libya, Kuwait, UAE, China, Laos, and Viet Nam. Fourteen are no longer CAs, but have never become coherent democracies either: Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Mauritania, Togo, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Tanzania, Burundi, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and Afghanistan.

recently, but no signs of democratization are apparent in the coherent autocracies of Syria, Bahrain, or Oman. Indeed, few on this list offer evidence that they are nearing democracy. The highest score is Malawi's +6, but it has been there before only to fall back. The next highest score is Iran, hardly a model we would like to see emulated in Iraq, a +3 a quarter of a century after its emergence from extreme autocracy.

The two that were able to escape established extreme autocracy but didn't last as coherent democracies are cautionary tales. In addition to **Malawi**, which reached +7 from 1994-2000, but was back to +5 in 2002, **Haiti** reached +7 in 1990 and from 1994-1998. It had regressed to -2 by 2000 (earning Freedom House's lowest rating) and seems destined to fall further. Nor are these cases unusual. Initial achievement of democracy by no means guarantees a democratic future: of the 98 countries that have had a coherent democracy at one time or another in the twentieth century, 43 have subsequently slipped below that status, seven of them more than once. Most (25) are not democracies now. Of those who have made in back, about a third didn't make it on the next try either.

Table 6 lists the ten former extreme autocracies that are now coherent democracies, but the histories just cited warns us that it may be premature to consider them as evidence of a hopeful future for Iraq. Only two of those ten is, in Lijphart's phrase, an "established democracy", Portugal and Turkey, depicted in darker blue. The latter reached that benchmark of twenty years only in 2003, and has dropped from democratic status three times before. While odds would now favor these two surviving long-term, it is worth noting that six established democracies of more than two decades duration have lost their democratic status during the last century and only one has subsequently regained it.

The remaining eight countries, in lighter blue in Table 6, are very far from secure. They have achieved democracy only in the 1990's, a dangerously short duration in historical terms. Consider that of the 53 losses of democratic status cited above (by 43 nations), the average age of the democratic polity at death was about 10 years, and the median age about eight. At least five of the nations in Table 6, having not yet passed these estimates of the half-life of a failed democratic polity, are much too precarious and short-lived to inspire confidence in their democratic future. **Albania**

reached +7 only in 2002 – a year in which it went through three prime ministers and two presidents – and Freedom House has rated it only "partly free". **Mexico** reached +8 in 2000 (and

**Table 6: Coherent democracies (n=10)**

	First year of CD	Last year of SA	Years SA-CD
Albania	2002	1989	13
Mexico	2000	1912	88
Guatemala	1996	1920	76
Dom Rep.	1996	1960	36
Paraguay	1992/1998	1966	26/33
Thailand	1992	1931	61
Lithuania	1991	1952	39
Bulgaria	1990	1912	78
Portugal	1976	1973	3
Turkey	1946/1983	1907	39/76

was rated “free” only in 2001). In 1996, **Dominican Republic** and **Guatemala** both reached +8, but the former, which also had a two-month democracy in 1963, became “free” only in 1999 and Guatemala, which has never escaped “partly free” status, was downgraded further in 2003.

**Paraguay** became a +7 in 1992, but fell back to +6 in 1998, before regaining its status as a coherent democracy with +7 from 1999-2003. It remained “partly free” throughout the period.

Even if we were to accept that these ten are unambiguously and permanently democratic, Table 6 shows that the transition from an established extreme autocracy to democracy ordinarily requires about half a century. It required more than 75 years in four of them and less than 25 in only two. **Mexico** needed 88 years to reach +8 in 2000. **Guatemala** took 76 years from 1920, when its last established extreme autocracy ended.<sup>19</sup> **Thailand** took 61 years until reaching +9 in 1992. Neglecting two months of democracy in 1963, **Dominican Republic** required 36 years to become a +8 in 1996. **Turkey** has been a coherent democracy on and off since 1946, with 12 scattered years prior to 1982 below that standard, so the transit took 39 years to the first democracy and 75 years to the more continuous one. **Bulgaria** took 78 years from its last established extreme autocracy in 1912.<sup>20</sup> **Lithuania** achieved a coherent democracy 39 years after 1952, the end of a period of extreme autocracy that included 1928-1940 as an independent state and 1941-1952 as part of the Soviet Union. **Paraguay** has been +7 every year but one since 1992, so its transition required 26 years until its first democracy and 33 years until the most recent. Depending on how you treat the cases that failed to reach democracy on their first try, the average transit period was 45.9 or 50.3 years; the median was 39 or 50.

Only Portugal and perhaps Albania made the transit to a coherent autocracy from an established extreme autocracy comparable to Iraq’s in less than twenty-five years. **Portugal** is the only unequivocal success story in that its run of extreme autocracy (-9) from 1930-1973 transformed quickly to coherent democracy, with a +9 in 1976 and a +10 in 1982-2002. Still, its history is hardly comparable to Iraq’s since it was not entirely new to democracy, having experienced a +7 from 1911 to 1925. Polity recognizes **Albania**’s fledgling democracy only from July of 2002, 12 years after a generational extreme autocracy ended. Certainly the transition from extreme autocracy to coherent democracy – if it occurs at all – is better measured in decades than in years. In round figures, the average is about 50 years.

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<sup>19</sup> It also experienced a briefer stretch of extreme autocracy 1932-1943.

<sup>20</sup> It also reverted to extreme autocracy 1935-1942.

## 6. What about the post-Soviet states?

Thirteen former Soviet republics do not quite meet the standard of established extreme autocracies, because the Soviet Union was coded at -9 for slightly under 20 years, ending with the death of Stalin in 1952.<sup>21</sup> With the subsequent return of executive constraints and the end of one man rule, it was considered -7 until Gorbachev's liberalization began in 1987. While the Soviet Union in its last three decades was certainly very autocratic, there is little doubt that the USSR was dramatically less autocratic than Iraq and markedly less autocratic than it had been under Stalin. It is hard to imagine the "perestroika" evolution that occurred in the 1980s arising directly out of the Stalin period without the intervening years during which cracks in the autocracy allowed a few shoots of proto-democracy to emerge.

Even so, these nations – Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Estonia, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Latvia – illustrate all the themes identified earlier.<sup>22</sup>

(1) Transitions to democracy are relatively rare. Only three of the thirteen have achieved democracy, whereas four remain coherent autocracies and the remaining six are lodged in between.

(2) Even these three successes are only tentative, because they are precarious and short-lived. **Russia** best exemplifies this precarious quality, having achieved +7 only from 2000-2003, and numerous commentators have expressed wariness over the increasing centralization of power in the Putin administration subsequently. Freedom House has rated Russia only "partly free" since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and its rating has declined markedly since 1991. It ceased to be considered an "electoral democracy" by Freedom House (2004) after the December 2003 election and is now coded as "not free". **Ukraine**, a +7 since 1996, is also only "partly free" and its Freedom House rating has declined since then. Events of the last few months may be a hopeful sign of real democratic forces at work, but a polity that requires mass mobilization and an extra-constitutional second election to achieve executive succession is hard to see as a coherent democracy. **Latvia** is much the most encouraging of these, having emerged from the USSR in 1991 at +8.

(3) Democracy is frequently temporary. **Belarus** reached +7 from 1991 to 1994, before sinking back into the status of a coherent autocracy from 1996-2002. **Armenia**, a democracy from 1991-1994, has since bounced between -6 and +5. **Estonia** had a coherent democracy from 1917-32, but has not yet regained it.

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<sup>21</sup> Russia was an SA from 1800 to 1904 as well.

<sup>22</sup> Lithuania was included above because it qualified on its own as an established SA.

(4) Successful transitions require a long time to accomplish. With the Soviet extreme autocracy ending in 1952, even Latvia took nearly 40 years – and Latvia had a democratic tradition in the form of a coherent democracy from 1920-1933.

## 7. Conclusion: Democratic prospects in Iraq

*Can Iraq democratize?* Only time will tell, but just ten out of thirty comparable cases have made it at all, and odds are that no more than about half of them will last. About the same number remain coherent autocracies, with no move whatever toward democratization discernible, even decades after extreme autocracies ended.

*How long will it take?* The most optimistic will find scant evidence in the historical record that a democratic transition is imminent in Iraq. About half a century seems to be the average among those that have made it, however tentatively. But more time than that has elapsed among many that have not. The burden of proof surely must shift to those who are optimistic, and the burden they face is to show that Iraq is better situated than average, that Iraq looks more like Portugal than Saudi Arabia.

The past experience of Middle Eastern countries suggests that when democracy finally comes to Iraq, no Iraqi alive today will be there to greet it. And the experience of the Soviet Union suggests that by the time democracy reaches Mesopotamia, it will no longer be Iraq.

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## Appendix 1: Polity's Democracy and Autocracy Scales

<u>Polity = Democracy - Autocracy</u>	Democracy	Autocracy
Authority Coding	Scale Weight	Scale Weight

### *Competitiveness of Executive Recruitment (XRCOMP):*

(1) Recruitment by selection		+2
(2) Transitional category or dual executives	+1	
(3) Recruitment by election	+2	

### *Openness of Executive Recruitment (XROPEN):*

only if XRCOMP is coded "Recruitment by selection (1)"

(1) Selection from closed group		+1
(2) Dual designated executives		+1
only if XRCOMP is Election (3) or Transitional (2)		
(3) Dual executives, one elected	+1	
(4) Selection from open group	+1	

### *Constraint on Chief Executive (XCONST):*

(1) Unlimited authority		+3
(2) Intermediate category		+2
(3) Slight to moderate limitations		+1
(4) Intermediate category	+1	
(5) Substantial limitations	+2	
(6) Intermediate category	+3	
(7) Executive parity or subordination	+4	

### *Competitiveness of Political Participation (PARCOMP):*

(1) Participation severely repressed		+2
(2) Participation significantly suppressed		+1
(3) Predominantly factional competition	+1	
(4) Transitional	+2	
(5) Competition among stable secular groups	+3	

### *Regulation of participation (PARREG):*

(1) Participation by fluid unregulated groups		
(2) Participation by multiple identity groups		
(3) Participation by incompatible sectarian groups		+1
(4) Significantly restricted participation		+2
(5) Stable regulated participation		



Table A1 compares the profiles of Iraq (-9) with those of the other extreme autocracies, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar (-10). In both Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the executive is designated from within a group formally closed to the general public – the royal family – rather than from a group that is formally open – the power brokers that designated Saddam Hussein in 1978. It is only that absence of hereditary rule that separates Iraq from a pure autocracy. Iraq’s profile is identical to that of three other severe autocracies: North Korea, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. The seventh “severe autocracy” is Swaziland, like Saudi Arabia and Qatar a hereditary monarchy, but having at least a minimal constraint on executive power – for which it receives a -9 rather than -10 – in that the legislature ostensibly approves the king’s nomination of the prime minister and cabinet.

Table A1: Comparing severe autocracies

	Democracy	Autocracy	Executive				Participation	
			Recruitment			Constraints	Regulation	Competitiveness
			Regulation	Competitiveness	Openness			
<b>Iraq</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>
North Korea	0	9	2	1	4	1	4	1
Uzbekistan	0	9	2	1	4	1	4	1
Turkmenistan	0	9	2	1	4	1	4	1
Saudi Arabia	0	10	3	1	1	1	4	1
Qatar	0	10	3	1	1	1	4	1
Swaziland	0	9	3	1	2	2	4	1

Table A2: Comparing Iraq with coherent autocracies

	Democracy	Autocracy	Executive				Participation	
			Recruitment			Constraints	Regulation	Competitiveness
			Regulation	Competitiveness	Openness			
<b>Iraq</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>
Oman	0	8	3	1	1	2	4	2
Bhutan	0	8	3	1	2	2	4	2
U Arab Emr	0	8	3	1	2	3	4	1
China	0	7	2	1	4	3	4	1
Syria								
Myanmar								
Viet Nam								
Laos								
USSR (1987)								
Belarus	0	7	2	1	4	2	4	2
Zimbabwe								
Azerbaijan								
Eritrea								
Bahrain	0	7	3	1	1	2	3	2
Kuwait	0	7	3	1	2	3	4	2
Cuba	0	7	2	0	0	1	4	1
Libya	0	7	1	0	0	1	4	1

Table A2 compares the Polity codes of Iraq with those of the sixteen coherent – but not extreme – autocracies. The first three rows below Iraq represent hereditary monarchies which score -8: Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Bhutan. All three feature greater constraints on executive authority, and both Oman and Bhutan allow somewhat greater political participation. These elements are also present in different combinations within the thirteen scored -7. For example, China, Syria, Myanmar, Viet Nam, and Laos are marked by slight to moderate constraints on executive authority. (For comparison, the codes of the Soviet Union (1953- 1987) were identical to those of this group.) Belarus, Zimbabwe, Azerbaijan, and Eritrea have fewer executive constraints, but repress political participation less severely. Only the idiosyncratic cases of Cuba and Libya have political participation and executive authority similar to that of Iraq.

## Appendix 2: Comparing Polity and Freedom House Scales

As can be seen from the Table bottom right, and from the country list, the Freedom House and Polity ratings differ only marginally. A \* indicates a nation that falls into a different category under the two systems. Only three nations differ by more than 1 point; all of them by only 2 points. The conclusions of this paper do not depend on idiosyncracies in the Polity data set. The data are for 2002.

### COHERENT DEMOCRACIES

### INCOHERENT POLITIES

FH ratings		Polity ratings	
Free	9 - 12	7 - 10	Coherent Democracy
Partly Free	3 - 8	(-6) - 6	Incoherent Politics
Not Free	0 - 3	(-7)-(-10)	Coherent Autocracy

country	FH	Polity3
Canada	12	10
Norway	12	10
Denmark	12	10
United States	12	10
Sweden	12	10
Slovenia	12	10
Switzerland	12	10
New Zealand	12	10
Italy	12	10
Netherlands	12	10
Finland	12	10
Cyprus	12	10
Portugal	12	10
Germany	12	10
Austria	12	10
Ireland	12	10
Uruguay	12	10
Belgium	12	10
United Kingdom	12	10
Spain	12	10
Australia	12	10
Japan	11	10
Costa Rica	11	10
France	12	9
Hungary	11	10
Lithuania	11	10
Greece	11	10
Mauritius	11	10
Czech Republic	11	10
Chile	11	9
Mongolia	10	10
Poland	11	9
Slovakia	11	9
Bulgaria	11	9
South Africa	11	9
Mexico	10	8
Thailand	9	9
Dominican Rep	10	8
Romania	10	8
India	9	9
Korea South	10	8
Peru	9	9
Bolivia	9	9
Lesotho	9	8
Croatia	10	7
Brazil	9	8
Senegal	9	8
Estonia	11	6 *
Philippines	9	8
Macedonia	8	9 *
Guyana	10	6 *
Yugoslavia	9	7
El Salvador	9	7
Argentina	8	8
Nicaragua	8	8
Honduras	8	7
Albania	8	7
Moldova	7	8
Namibia	9	6
Mali	9	6
Benin	9	6
Ghana	9	6

country	FH	Polity3
Turkey	7	7 *
Indonesia	7	7 *
Kenya	6	8 *
Paraguay	7	7 *
Guatemala	6	8 *
East Timor	8	6
Ecuador	8	6
Madagascar	7	7 *
Sri Lanka	7	6
Venezuela	7	6
Mozambique	7	6
Ukraine	6	7 *
Colombia	6	7 *
Bangladesh	6	6
Fiji	7	5
Russia	4	7 *
Malawi	6	5
Armenia	6	5
Sierra Leone	6	5
Georgia	6	5
Niger	6	4
Guinea-Bissau	5	5
Cen African Rep	4	5
Nigeria	5	4
Tanzania	7	2
Comoros	5	4
Malaysia	4	3
Djibouti	5	2
Zambia	6	1
Ivory Coast	2	4 *
Burkina Faso	6	0
Ethiopia	4	1
Cambodia	3	2
Iran	2	3 *
Burundi	3	0
Singapore	5	-2
Guinea	3	-1
Liberia	2	0 *
Tajikistan	3	-1
Nepal	6	-4
Chad	3	-2
Jordan	3	-2
Togo	3	-2
Gambia	6	-5
Gabon	5	-4
Yemen	3	-2
Haiti	2	-2 *
Kyrgyzstan	3	-3
Uganda	4	-4
Angola	3	-3
Algeria	3	-3
Congo Brazzaville	4	-4
Tunisia	3	-4
Rwanda	2	-4 *
Cameroon	2	-4 *
Morocco	4	-6
Mauritania	4	-6
Kuwait	5	-7 *
Pakistan	3	-5
Kazakhstan	3	-6
Bahrain	4	-7 *

### COHERENT AUTOCRACIES

country	FH	Polity3
Equatorial Guinea	1	-5 *
Egypt	2	-6 *
Azerbaijan	3	-7
Belarus	2	-7
Bhutan	3	-8
UAE	3	-8
Zimbabwe	2	-7
Oman	3	-8
Swaziland	3	-9
Sudan	0	-6 *
Eritrea	1	-7
Vietnam	1	-7
China	1	-7
Laos	1	-7
Libya	0	-7
Myanmar (Burma)	0	-7
Syria	0	-7
Cuba	0	-7

### EXTREME AUTOCRACIES

Uzbekistan	1	-9
Qatar	2	-10
Turkmenistan	0	-9
Korea North	0	-9
Iraq	0	-9
Saudi Arabia	0	-10

Freedom House ratings	Polity ratings		
	Demo cracy	Not coherent	Auto cracy
Free	57	6	0
PartFree	16	44	7
NotFree	0	9	16