

Can Iraq democratize? How long will it take?

Abstract:

The title questions are surely among the most significant on the agenda of contemporary scholars of international relations and national security. Social scientists can and should address such policy-relevant questions with the same rigorous methods that they routinely apply to theory testing. This paper assesses prospects for democracy in Iraq in light of the historical precedents of nations with comparable experiences. That analysis reveals that:

- (1) Since the end of the 19th century, only 30 nations have experienced an autocracy as extreme as Iraq's over as long a time.
- (2) Only nine of those 30 have produced coherent democracies subsequently.
- (3) Only two of those nine are now established democracies; the remainder's democratic experiments are still in progress.
- (4) The average time required for these nine prospects to transit the path from extreme autocracy to coherent, albeit precarious, democracy has been about 50 years and only two have managed it in less than 25 years.
- (5) Iraq lacks the structural conditions that theory and evidence indicate have been necessary for successful democratic transitions in the past.

Thus, the odds of Iraq achieving democracy in the next quarter-century are quite close to zero, at best about 2 in 30, but probably far less. The past experience of Middle Eastern countries suggests that when democracy finally comes to Iraq, few Iraqis alive today will be there to greet it.

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Security Studies submission (second revision)

Can Iraq democratize? How long will it take?

"Democracy's hard. It's tough stuff,
and it takes time." – Donald Rumsfeld¹

1. Introduction

The title questions were elevated to the top of the U.S. foreign policy agenda when President Bush declared from the deck of the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln on May 1, 2003 that

“The transition from dictatorship to democracy will take time, but it is worth every effort. Our coalition will stay until our work is done. Then we will leave, and we will leave behind a free Iraq.”

More than three years later, a realistic assessment of the likely political future in Iraq is scarcely less critical to charting a course for U.S. policy. However, the pronouncements of policymakers have been riddled with contradictions and vagaries that do little to specify the duration of the “hard journey” said to be required: Declarations that “Iraq is now free” appear in the same speeches as warnings that “democracy will take time,” and that “it will not happen over night”. Such open-ended projections, equally compatible with interpretations ranging from months to centuries, provide too little guidance for the serious assessment of policy options.

These questions have attracted the opinions of pundits as well as policymakers.² For the most part, however, they have cited neither well-established theories of democratization nor rigorous social science evidence to support their views. Scholars have an obligation to address these policy-relevant questions, but thus far the effort has been carried largely by journalists who monitor day-to-day dynamics and by area scholars who offer regional expertise.³ A comparative, theoretically-informed empiricism has been notably absent.

The result is confusion about both Iraq’s present accomplishments and its future course.

¹ “Rumsfeld Warns Iraq's Neighbors Against Aiding Zarqawi” David Stout, *NY Times*, June 1, 2005.

² Opinions range from Anthony Cordesman, quoted in *USA Today* 11 November 2002, “The notion that Iraq will suddenly emerge as a stable democracy and will change the rest of the Arab world crosses the line between neo-conservative and neo-crazy,” to Colin Powell’s (2002) “We reject the condescending notion that freedom will not grow in the Middle East or that there is any region of the world that cannot support democracy.”

³ Articles on democracy in the Middle East number in the hundreds. For example, see Wimmer (2003) on the ethno-religious dimension, Nikash (2003) on the Shiites, Duffield (2005) on oil, and Diamond (2004) on the American occupation. The immediate way forward for U.S. policy has also been addressed by innumerable works, including Bergen and Reynolds (2005), Biddle (2006), and Krepinevich (2005).

Elections are lauded as symbolic of the arrival of democracy, but every democratic theorist agrees that there is far more to democracy than elections. The voter turnout of the courageous Iraqi people is said to signal the triumph of democracy, but history shows that it has never been the unwillingness to vote that has prevented democracy, but rather the failure to honor the results of those elections.⁴ An Iraqi-headed government may embody sovereignty, but scholars of democracy are unanimous that the tricky part of maintaining the monopoly on the legitimate use of force lies not in creating instruments of power, but instead in constraining its illegitimate exercise. That requires a web of respected institutions, mobilized interests, and deeply-rooted values, not foreign armies. Immediate problems – forming a government, holding an election, maintaining security, or passing an oil law – have been addressed as if their resolution would be decisive in engineering a democratic Iraq, without consulting the historical record of democratization elsewhere.

This paper seeks to fill these gaps by fashioning a working hypothesis out of theory and evidence culled from the past experience of similar states. Its motivation rests on the conviction that analysts should take into account the details that make Iraq unique only in concert with a generalization of the title questions.⁵ “Will Iraq democratize?” is better answered after considering “Have other nations with Iraq’s experience become democratic?” “How long will it take?” surely requires one to ask “How long has it taken for similar nations?”⁶

This comparative method offers a benefit beyond Iraq as well. The analysis will help to define what should be considered realistic outcomes if regime change is contemplated in the other two-thirds of the Bush administration’s “Axis of Evil”, Iran and North Korea. U.S. policy in Afghanistan must also depend inevitably on judgments about its political future, which this analysis may also help to illuminate.

⁴ “The problem is not to hold elections but to create organizations.” Huntington (1968: 7). Welzel et al. (2003) demonstrate that individual-level expressions of support for democracy are only weakly linked with societal-level democracy.

⁵ These would include security problems, ethnic conflicts, regional complications, cultural predilections, and external involvement. A good example of such an ideographic approach is Haradstveit and Hveem (2005). Blueprints for the design of a democratic system include Dawisha and Dawisha (2003) and Lawson (2003).

⁶ Of course, no set of past cases can ever definitively predict the future of a current one, because there are always unique attributes that make the parallels imperfect. Rather than *beginning* with this “impossibility theorem”, however, we address the objections to generalization in a later section.

We identify cases comparable to Iraq based upon two simple intuitions. First, the more autocratic the nation, the longer it will take to achieve democracy. Second, the more prolonged the autocracy, the more difficult and protracted any democratic transition will be. The next section of the paper begins by exploring the theoretical reasoning that informs the central expectation: that extreme and long-established autocracies transit to democracy only over long expanses of time. The third section introduces a metric that will enable us to compile a list of states comparable to Iraq in the intensity and duration of their autocratic experience. After a review of the political history of Iraq in section four, we use that measure in section five to summarize the experience of those nations subsequent to their extreme autocratic periods. In section six, we move beyond historical comparison to a theory-driven structural analysis designed to determine whether conditions in Iraq are more similar to those established autocracies that have democratized or to those that have not. In the process, the central claim is tested in an alternative way, the robustness of the findings to the Third Wave era is assessed, and the effect of previous American military occupations is evaluated. Section seven produces a composite projection based upon both the structural analysis and historical experience.

2. Why privilege historical prediction?

Previous theory advances a wealth of factors that affect democratic prospects, and any of them could be used to identify nations comparable to Iraq.⁷ Because our principal interest lies in forecasting rather than theory testing, however, the main analysis relies on a conclusion that is undisputed in the empirical literature: the best prediction of a nation's level of democracy is its past level (Gleditsch and Ward, 1997; O'Loughlin et al, 1998; Feng and Zak, 1999; Scarritt et al., 2001; Moon et al., 2006; Foweraker and Landman, 2004). This finding of a strong serial correlation is validated by original analyses below, but we begin by elucidating why, despite theoretical differences, most accounts agree that democratization is a necessarily slow process

⁷ In addition to choosing comparable cases on the basis of single variables such as autocratic history or religion, multiple factors may also be included in a broader statistical analysis, as in section five below and in Lawson and Thacker (2003a). Analysts and policymakers seeking the soundest prediction of Iraq's future will surely wish to gather judgments rooted in a variety of perspectives, not exclusively the ones offered by this article.

characterized by hysteresis, a physics term that means, literally, to be late.⁸ It describes systems that react slowly and at a lag to the forces applied to them, so that they depend on past history as well as current forces.⁹

Structural explanations, whether in the modernization or dependency traditions, contend that democratization unfolds slowly because it requires complex, multi-faceted evolution in the political, social, and economic realms. This approach invariably identifies relatively enduring national qualities as requisites of democracy: income level and economic structure, class structure and inequality, education, colonial legacy, dependency, geographic region, religion, and ethnic divisions (Lipset, 1959, 1994; Moore, 1966; Bollen, 1983; Inglehart, 1988; Burkhart & Lewis-Beck, 1994; Rueschemeyer et al., 1992; Przeworski and Limongi, 1997; Przeworski et al., 2000; Doorenspleet, 2004).

Actor-oriented explanations that attribute greater importance to elite behavior see democratic possibilities in a broader range of circumstances, but they are scarcely more optimistic concerning the time frame required (Kitschelt, 1992, O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986). They generally portray democratic transitions as staged processes that begin with a democratic opening (i.e. the breakdown of an authoritarian regime), then register a democratic breakthrough, and conclude with democratic consolidation (Diamond, 1999 Carothers, 2002). While the first two of these stages can usually be identified as discrete events triggered by identifiable agents, democratic consolidation – “the process by which a newly established democratic regime becomes sufficiently durable that a return to nondemocratic rule is no longer likely” – is inherently a longer-term proposition (Gasiorowski and Power, 1998: 740).¹⁰

From the standpoint of either of these schools of thought it is not hard to see why rapid

⁸ Hysteresis 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 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.

⁹For example, Badawi and Makdisi (2007) find that nations close the gap between their actual level of democracy and the level expected on the basis of their current structural conditions at a rate of around 4-5% per year. Barro (1991) similarly estimates that 25% of the adjustment occurs over five years and almost 70% over twenty years.

¹⁰ This is also where most transitions break down: Power and Gasiorowski (1997) report that nearly a third of Third World democracies collapse before the first (post-founding) election, about half before the first change in power has been effected, and more than 60% within 12 years. See Pevehouse (2002) and Diskin et al. (2005) for the determinants of democratic collapse.

democratization is rare.¹¹ Democratic consolidation must take time because the conditions necessary for it are themselves the outcomes of protracted processes (Linz and Stepan, 1996). First, a minimally competent and effective state must hold power and monopolize the legitimate means of violence within identified borders. To do so, it must dominate the military, competing groups, and other authoritarian enclaves. It must extend its rule across the country, extracting resources necessary for its operation, delivering services, and maintaining order. This requires the construction of bureaucracies, the authoring of legislation and administrative rules, the recruitment and training of personnel, etc. When few officials carry over from the previous regime, staffing these agencies with technocratic, management, and political experience is itself a long-term project. This is the monumental task barely underway now in Iraq, most visibly in the areas of security and utility service provision. Daunting as it is, it constitutes merely state-building, a necessary *forerunner* to democracy-building.

The manifest inability of the Iraqi state to exercise control belies the claim that Iraq should be considered democratic because elections have been successfully conducted. Until the state is providing all the services and functions expected of government, unaided by outside forces, no assessment of a system's level of democracy can be meaningful. By definition, a democratic government must actually be governing. In practice, the gravest threats to democracy occur when the state attempts to balance these governance challenges with the constraints imposed by the democratic principles discussed below. For example, it is relatively easy to provide security or to respect civil liberties, but devilishly difficult to do both at the same time.

Second, the state must assume a democratic form in which executive power is subordinated to the rule of law. Incentives for law-based behavior must be institutionalized and elites must be habituated to honoring the constraints they impose. Mechanisms and procedures must be empowered to keep office holders accountable to the public will and some agency must

¹¹ A third theoretical approach to democratization, which emphasizes diffusion, is more ambiguous as to speed but selective in the circumstances under which democracy is likely (Starr, 1991; Starr and Lindborg, 2003; O'Loughlin et al., 1998; Gleditsch and Ward, 2000). For example, Brinks and Coppedge (2006) estimate that during the most rapid phase of democratization a nation may be expected to close nearly one-fourth of the gap between its own level of democracy and its neighbors each year. However, the undemocratic "neighborhood" surrounding Iraq precludes democratization through the diffusion channel. Another literature finds that short-term economic downturns destabilize all governments, but do not necessarily bring democracy (Gasiorowski, 1995; Bernhard et al., 2003).

arise to animate them. Norms of compromise among elites must be internalized as well as externally enforced by some system of checks and balances. Such attitudes are not native to all political cultures, they are selected against by autocratic environments, and the institutions that embody them do not arise naturally (Waterbury, 1999).

Third, mass attitudes and habits must be developed to demand popular consent and to reward it with citizen cooperation. The democratic state must command the loyalty of the population, even when citizens disapprove of policies, doubt the officials that adopt them, and lament the outcomes they generate. The near- unanimously perceived legitimacy of the state must become its central resource, but that presupposes acceptance of nationhood that is embodied in the state. Further, such political capital accumulates much more slowly through performance and precedent than does the attachment to charismatic autocratic personalities or identity-based allegiances. All evidence indicates that Iraqi security forces today feel greater loyalty to ethnic groups and their militias than to the government, a pattern rooted in the inconsistent and uneven commitment to the idea of the Iraqi nation itself manifested throughout its political history.

Fourth, civil society (e.g. independent media) and “political society” (e.g. political parties) must flourish if democratic norms are to guide political and social behavior (Diamond, 1994). Policy dissent must be tolerated and authority challenges must be protected. Elections must be made meaningful by wide-spread, well-informed political participation. To achieve stability that participation must be motivated at least as much by negotiable policy preferences as by the polarizing rigidity of group identity or personal loyalty that mark most immature political systems. The dominant showing of religious and ethnic parties in the most recent Iraqi elections greatly weakened the secular forces most likely to produce democratic compromise.

These requirements explain why democratic change is either incremental or subject to reversal when it is not. They also lead us to expect that democracy will arise much less frequently and be consolidated much more slowly in nations like Iraq that have experienced extreme autocracy for an extended period.¹² As the above discussion makes clear, this is partly a result of the autocratic experience itself and partly the continuing effect of the slowly changing structural

¹² This account is challenged by optimists who argue that the momentum of the Third Wave and active democracy promotion efforts from the outside can effect political change more quickly in the modern era (Huntington, 1991; Whitehead, 1996). This argument is confronted in section six below.

conditions that were responsible for the extreme autocracy in the first place. These two causal strands are separated in section six below.

3. What nations compare with Iraq? Defining “established extreme autocracy”

The first step toward establishing the roster of nations that may provide insight into Iraq’s future is to characterize political systems in a way that facilitates comparison. The most recent data set of the Polity project is the obvious choice (Jagers and Gurr, 1995).¹³ We 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 yield a continuous measure in which pure autocracy is scored -10 and full democracy +10. The democracy/autocracy conceptions of Polity, rooted in the theoretical work of Eckstein and Gurr (1975) on authority relations, emphasize the range of political participation in the recruitment of the chief executive and the extent of constraints on executive power. 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 appropriate power directly or are designated by a closed group. For readers unfamiliar with the Polity data, the meaning of these elements is clarified in Appendix 1, which summarizes Polity’s coding rules, and Appendix 2, which applies them to Iraq and other autocracies.¹⁴

To make concrete the title question, “Can Iraq democratize?”, we adopt the criteria of a Polity score of +7 or more, which recognizes a “coherent democracy, with institutionally strong,

¹³ Polity is widely regarded as the most reliable and valid of the available data sets and it offers the greatest coverage, encompassing nearly 200 countries for each year between 1800 and 2004 (Munck and Verkulin, 2002; Moon et al., 2006). Its conception of democracy is unusually well documented via the writings of its founders, its exemplary codebook, and other materials (Gurr, 1974; Marshall and Jagers, 2002). There are, of course, many alternative data sets on democracy, each utilizing its own definition of democracy, but we need not probe more deeply the fine points of the various conceptions of democracy or the techniques for measuring it: All agree that Iraq belongs in the most autocratic category (Alvaraz et al., 1996; Coppedge and Reinicke, 1991; Gasiorowski, 1996; Moon et al., 2006; Vanhanen, 2000). See also the data sets on autocracy cited in footnote 17.

¹⁴ To minimize doubts about the coding of individual cases, Polity is augmented whenever possible with textual references to Freedom House’s (2006) ratings, which are available only since 1972 but have been updated through 2005. The Freedom House conception of “freedom” is more eclectic than Polity’s emphasis on democratic institutions and empirically more sensitive to civil liberties. Yet, the two theoretically different data sets are in close empirical agreement – 83% of the variance in one is shared by the other (Moon et al., 2006).

or internally consistent, authority patterns”.¹⁵ Coherent democracies are more stable and enduring than incoherent polities, which have substantial features of both democracy and autocracy (or lack the effective institutions of either) and are coded between +6 and -6. (Gurr, 1974; Harmel, 1980; Lichbach, 1984; Jagers and Gurr, 1995).¹⁶ Polity regards nations scored at -7 and below “coherent autocracies”.

To isolate nations most like Iraq, we add the category of *extreme* autocracies – those coded at -9 or -10. In 2004, there were seven of them : two “pure autocracies” scored at -10 (Saudi Arabia and Qatar), plus Iraq and four others coded -9 (North Korea, Swaziland, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan), but different only in that they lack a hereditary monarchy. Polity actually assigned no score to Iraq in 2003-4 since it was under foreign domination, but for convenience we refer to it hereafter by the -9 score it held from 1978 through 2002.

To illustrate how these seven *extreme* autocracies are distinct from other coherent autocracies, Appendix 2 decomposes Polity’s coding of them and compares it with the far more common profile of autocracies rated -7. In 2004, the best known members of this latter group of thirteen (plus three rated -8) are China, Syria, Zimbabwe, Kuwait and Cuba. The most notable historical cases include the Soviet Union between Stalin and Gorbachaev, almost all of the Eastern European states during the Cold War era, and Afghanistan for most of the last 40 years. Extreme autocracies are distinguished from others most clearly by the absence of executive constraints and political participation.¹⁷

¹⁵ The standard for “coherent democracy” can be signified by a simple denotation: for 2004, the latest year available, those making the “cut” at +7 include Turkey, Russia, Georgia, Colombia, El Salvador, Madagascar, Honduras, Croatia, and Albania. Those falling just short at +6 include Bangladesh, Venezuela, Malawi, Ukraine, Serbia/Montenegro, Ecuador, Estonia, Namibia, Benin, Mali, Mozambique, Comoros, Fiji, Guyana, and East Timor.

¹⁶ As will become clear, lowering the bar from +7 to +6, +5, or even +4 affects very few cases. The +7 standard has been used frequently in studies examining various consequences of democracy relevant to declared U.S. interests, especially in the “democratic peace” literature (Rousseau et al., 1996; Mansfield and Snyder, 2002; Keller, 2005; Hadenius and Teorell, 2006). Other plausible cut-off points would incline the analysis toward greater pessimism. Dahl (1998) argues that +8 is more appropriate and Davenport and Armstrong (2004) find that human rights are much better upheld at +8 and above. The most authoritative study on the diffusion of democracy – a key issue for the Bush initiative to spread democracy in the Middle East – also uses +8 (O’Loughlin et al. (1998). Lai and Slater (2006) use +6, but report that their results would be no different at either +5 or +7.

¹⁷ Other recent efforts to distinguish among authoritarian regimes also place these states in the most autocratic category. Hadenius and Teorell (2006, 2007) recognize five major types of autocracy, five minor types, and six hybrids, largely on the basis of “modes of power maintenance” that correspond roughly to Polity’s “executive

We expect *extreme* autocracies to yield to democracy less often than other authoritarian systems, because of differences in executive constraints and political participation that are central to the potential for a democratic transition. In particular, the unlimited power of Iraq's Saddam Hussein contrasts with the greater constraints on executive authority found in less extreme autocracies. (See Appendix 2.) Restraints on the chief executive, which imply the existence of competing institutions and elites, provide an important channel of political change (Karl, 1990). As O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986:19) put it, "there is no [democratic] transition whose beginning is not the consequence – direct or indirect – of important divisions within the authoritarian regime itself."

Political change in the former USSR illustrates the significance of this effect. The Soviet Union was coded as an extreme autocracy (-9) for slightly under 20 years, ending with the death of Stalin in 1952. 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 autocratic, there is little doubt that the USSR was markedly less autocratic than it had been under Stalin and dramatically less autocratic than Iraq. For example, 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 shoots of proto-democracy to emerge. The more diversified leadership and greater differentiation of power in states with executive constraints breeds a very different pattern of political behavior, and political competition creates a far richer reservoir of experienced personnel to steer the state away from autocratic extremes. For example, in the -7 autocracy of 1987, Boris Yeltsin was demoted from the Politburo for criticizing Gorbachev, but by 1989 he was back in parliament and by 1991 he was influential in the democratization process. Under Stalin or

selection" criteria. They identify Iraq as an amalgam of a military and a one-party state, a category that manifests the highest level of autocracy among any of those sixteen categories. Our "extreme autocracies" are scattered among their "monarchies", "military regimes", and "one-party states", all of which exhibit very low democracy scores. None are found in their category of "multiparty states" which is the largest, least autocratic, and most likely to transit to democracy. Diamond (2002) codes all nations for 2001 and includes all of our "extreme autocracies" except Uzbekistan as "politically closed authoritarian regimes", a category of the most autocratic nations distinguished from electoral authoritarian regimes by the absence of multiparty electoral competition and "pluralism". Geddes (1999) distinguishes a sub-set of "personalist" regimes like Saddam's Iraq from other military and single-party regimes and expects them to have greater difficulty in democratizing.

Saddam Hussein (-9), he certainly would have been purged.

Furthermore, because the usually-violent demise of the highly personalist extreme autocracy is tantamount to the utter destruction of the state itself, any succeeding political system lacks the conditions necessary for a successful democratic transition. The absence of competing institutions and elites in extreme autocracies deprives any future regime of experienced personnel, established procedures, the rule of law, and the habits of compromise necessary to build a stable democracy.¹⁸ All of these problems are readily apparent in contemporary Iraq.

The other potential avenue for political change identified in the literature is political participation, which was also unusually sharply constrained under Saddam Hussein. The presence of electoral competition, however flawed, provides access to one important mechanism of democratization not available to our extreme autocracies: “electoral revolutions... which transform rigged electoral rituals into fair elections” (Bunce and Wolchik, 2006: 6) A history of elections, especially in Eastern Europe, “taught people to link regime legitimacy with the act of voting,” (2006:4) and even these limited exercises in participation provided pathways for future mobilization. Also these regimes allowed “pockets of political autonomy”(2006: 15). By contrast, popular mobilizations cannot arise under severe repression, nor, of course, will extreme autocracies permit the autonomous civil society or political society that could anchor a new democratic system (Geddes, 1994). For example, senior clerics were executed by the Baath government precisely to prevent a religious establishment from challenging the government (Nakash, 2003). The significance of the contrast with a -7 autocracy may be illustrated best by the role played in the democratization of Poland by the Roman Catholic Church and the independent trade union movement Solidarity and its predecessors. It is inconceivable that such elements of civil society could have survived an *extreme* autocracy and equally inconceivable that democratization could have come as quickly as it did to Poland without them.¹⁹

¹⁸ Geddes (1999:132) finds that personalist regimes hardly ever survive the death of the founder because the most able successors will have been eliminated as a potential rivals, certainly the pattern formed by Saddam Hussein’s many purges, which began almost immediately upon his seizure of power. And the violence that usually surrounds the collapse dooms democratic prospects. “Democracies are created by negotiation. It is very rare for them to emerge directly from popular insurgency, rebellion, or civil war.”

¹⁹ Islam in Iraq is an intriguing parallel as an institution of civil society, but it does not provide the same unifying nationalism in ethnically fractionalized Iraq that the Catholic Church represented in Poland. Sharp divisions

Since actor-oriented theories generally attribute democratic transitions to either elite competition or popular mobilization, extreme autocracies that feature neither must have very poor democratic prospects. Nor will democratic norms and the habit of extending legitimacy to the state exist in an extreme autocracy such as Iraq's. The analysis reported in Table 1 strongly confirms the key assumption underlying our historical approach: democratic

Table 1: Percentage of nations that achieve coherent democracy after various lags

	5 years	10 years	20 years
Extreme autocracy (-9/-10)	1.02	2.88	7.21
Other coherent autocracy (-7/-8)	3.96	7.17	13.12
Incoherent polity (+6 to -6)	6.72	11.09	15.22

change is relatively rare and comes most slowly for the most autocratic of states. As shown in the first row, extreme autocracies are extremely unlikely to transition to democracy over any short time frame. Only 1.02% have been able to do so within five years and only about 1 in 14 (7.21%) are coherent democracies even twenty years later.²⁰ Table 1 also validates the distinction between extreme autocracies and other coherent autocracies by showing that their trajectory of political change has been quite different. At a lag of five years, for example, nations that had been scored at -7 or -8 are nearly four times as likely to become democratic as are extreme autocracies. They make the democratic transition nearly as often as incoherent polities after 20 years, whereas extreme autocracies remain only about half as likely to have effected such a change.²¹

We postulate that democratic prospects are diminished by both the intensity and the *duration* of a nation's autocracy. *Established* autocracies differ from more fleeting ones because pre-existing proto-democratic elements gradually atrophy and potential democratic leadership inevitably passes from the scene. As the remnants of previous political systems are slowly extinguished by established autocracies, authoritarian patterns become more deeply entrenched and democratic norms and expectations become alien among both leaders and the public. Thus, democratic transitions face greater obstacles with fewer resources.

between competing Islamic traditions in Iraq have been exploited by autocrats to prevent challenges going back to Ottoman times, and most studies still expect Islam to retard rather than advance democracy.

²⁰ The sample includes only cases since the beginning of the twentieth century.

²¹ Similarly, Geddes (1999) finds that personalist regimes like Iraq's are less than half as likely to transit to stable democracy as military regimes. Hadenius and Teorell (2007) confirm that result and also find that military and one-party states (Iraq being a hybrid of the two) are very much less likely to become democratic than other authoritarian regimes.

In order to assemble a roster of nations with a political history similar to Iraq's, we require a length criteria that distinguishes them from nations that have had a more brief brush with autocracy. Unfortunately, the duration of autocracy has not received as much attention in existing literature as has the persistence of democracy. Lijphart (1999) uses a two decade time period to demarcate an "established democracy" and estimates of when a democracy should be considered "consolidated" range anywhere from 12 years (Gasiorowski and Power, 1998) to 25 years (Mainwaring, 1993). We borrow Lijphart's benchmark to label as "*established extreme autocracies*" nations that have maintained a score of -9 or -10 for twenty years or more.

This convenient round number is roughly a full political generation and is exceeded by Saddam Hussein's 24 year reign, which illustrates these duration effects. Since Iraq's population has a median age of 19.7, more than half of Iraqis could have known no other regime. Nor could the officials of the new Iraqi government, which must be among the least experienced in the world. Most are newcomers to politics, many are newly arrived in Iraq after living abroad for decades, and none have any experience whatsoever in democratically governing Iraq.²²

4. Iraq's political history

In fact, the summary provided by Figure 1 shows that Iraq has been predominantly autocratic – and never democratic – for its entire history. This absence of democratic history substantially diminishes its future prospects, since Feng and Zak (1999) show that the probability of a democratic transition is five times greater for a country that has experienced democracy in the past, however briefly. Of course, a distinct Iraqi state dates only to the British occupation after World War I, when the separate Ottoman provinces based on the towns of Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra were unified.²³ The effort to build a nation from these disparate regions with their

²² Marr (2006: 5-8) identifies 97 leaders in three governments: the Iraq Governing Council and the Council of Ministers appointed by the CPA in 2003, the interim government selected after the transfer of sovereignty in 2004, and the government elected in early 2005. She finds that of Iraq's post-Saddam leaders only 27% were known to be living under Saddam's regime in 2003 whereas 38% were known to be abroad (another 19% were living in the northern Kurdish "free" zone and 16% are of unknown background). Most Iraqis who have held office since the 1970s have been banned from public service.

²³ "The term al-'Iraq (meaning the shore of a great river along its length, as well as the grazing land surrounding it) had been used since at least the eighth century by Arab geographers to refer to the great alluvial plain of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, a region known in Europe as Mesopotamia." (Tripp, 2000:8)

Persian attachments, the authorities' trust in the citizenry was no stronger than the anemic popular allegiance to an alien state (Tripp, 2000).²⁶ Even when Ottoman control flagged, as it did for long periods, it was as likely to give way to foreign rule as to local dynasties, such as when Georgian mamluks exercised authority in Baghdad for most of the eighteenth century. None of this was conducive to the development of the organic relationship between the state and its citizens that mark modern democracy, or even the national identity that can be exploited by the state to achieve legitimacy and command obedience as a forerunner to democratization.

An Iraqi national identity has been challenged by both sub-national and supra-national forces ever since. King Faisal, the first of the Hashemite monarchs, described the people of Iraq as “unimaginable masses of human beings, devoid of any patriotic idea, imbued with religious traditions and absurdities ... and prone to anarchy.”²⁷ On the one hand, clan-based tribal organization in Iraq commands great loyalty and wields great power, especially in rural areas.²⁸ On the other, most Kurds and many Arabs identify with broader communities that lie mostly outside Iraq. Kurds resisted inclusion in Iraq under the British mandate and continue to seek an independent Kurdistan as a national homeland for a population divided between Iraq, Iran, and Turkey even today.²⁹ Pan-Arabism pre-dated the formation of Iraq and was long a powerful force, especially among sunnis, even leading to a flirtation with confederacy involving Jordan, Syria, and Egypt at various points in the 1950s and 1960s.³⁰ The connection of the southern Iraqi shi'a to Iran stems mostly from the clerical establishment centered in the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala

²⁶Ottoman rule was only the most recent incarnation of an age-old history of control by various foreign powers, which at various times also included Greeks, Romans, Mongols, and Turkmen, as well as caliphs centered from Medina and Damascus to central Asia, frequently supported by foreign mercenaries.

²⁷ Cited in Batatu (1978: 25).

²⁸ Seventy five percent of Iraqis have kinship to one of Iraq's 150 tribes and it is often their strongest identity affiliation. “In 1933, a year after Iraqi independence, it was estimated that there were 100,000 rifles in tribal hands and 15,000 in the possession of the government” (Hassan, 2007). Saddam Hussain's rise to power rested on his membership in the Albu Nasir tribe of Tikrit (numbering some 20,000, many of whom became the core of the Republican Guard), especially the Albu Ghafir lineage of the Baijat clan (Baram, 2003; Cockburn, 2003). “Among the legacies of tribalism in Iraq are intense concern with family, clan, and tribe; devotion to personal honor; factionalism; and above all, difficulty in cooperating across kinship lines – the underlying basis of modern civic society. (Marr, 2004: 18)”

²⁹ The separate Kurdish identity held by about 20% of the population concentrated in the north has been a consistent impediment, not least because cycles of rebellion and repression encouraged a central government with strong coercive powers but weak integrative capacity.

³⁰ So strong is symbolism of Pan-Arab nationalism that throughout the Ba'th era the highest party organ in Iraq was called the Regional Command, whereas the National Command had membership from across the Arab world.

as well as the flow of people and ideas that have resulted.³¹

Optimists point out that “democratic institutions are not entirely alien to the country,” but neither have they been extensive or recent. During much of the Ottoman period, provincial governance was quite autonomous from the center and, in turn, provincial control of rural areas was precarious at best. The resultant indirect rule had some of the characteristics we associate with the constraints on executive power that help define democracy. However, because the traditional tribal leadership that shared power with imperial authorities was itself authoritarian, hierarchical, and based on kinship rather than popular consent, governance is better described as decentralized and weakly institutionalized than as a system of checks and balances. Similarly, the relative autonomy of provincial governors from central Ottoman authority was a matter of the inability to muster the power needed to enforce the tributary system, not a principled acceptance of the virtues of limited government.

In any case, direct Ottoman control was reimposed early in the nineteenth century, and the empire-wide modernizing reforms known as the Tanzimat affected the Iraqi provinces by strengthening the state while also reconfiguring the constellations of rural power through land reforms. Their high point was marked by the blip in Figure 1, which represents the adoption of the first Ottoman constitution in 1876, soon suspended, and a bicameral Parliament (one house indirectly elected, the other appointed by the sultan) that lasted less than a year.³² In 1908, the Parliament returned and the constitution was restored in revised form. From the Iraqi viewpoint, however, this period of the Young Turks was not as liberalizing as its Polity code of -1 might suggest, especially after the 1913 coup, since it was associated with decreased autonomy for the

³¹ For example, in modern times, Ayatollah Khomeini was exiled to Najaf for thirteen years prior to the Iranian revolution. Many prominent shi'i leaders in Iraq spent much of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iran, including current prime minister Nouri al-Maliki, former prime minister Ibrahim abd al-Karim Hamza al-Ashaiqir al-Jaafari, and former presidents of the Iraqi Governing Council, Sayyed Abdul Aziz al-Hakim and Ezzedine Salim. The Supreme Assembly for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI), the largest party in the Iraqi Council of Representatives, was founded in Tehran. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the most important Islamic leader in Iraq was born in Iran.

³² The empire became notably less autocratic, moving from 10 to 5, but only slightly more democratic, at 1 rather than 0. On the 21 point scale, the resulting six point movement from -10 to -4 consists of a 2 point increment to reflect that the sultan's power, formerly unlimited, became slightly constrained; a 3 point increase because repression of political participation was removed; and 1 point for an expansion of the groups permitted to participate.

provinces and suppression of opposition to “Turkification” of the multi-ethnic empire.³³ Marr (2004: 8) summarizes the Ottoman legacy on Iraqi political thought this way:

“The ideas behind Ottoman government were duly passed on to the Iraqi officials trained in the Ottoman tradition, which was founded, above all, on the bedrock of authoritarian paternalism. This encouraged elitism, the attitude that the rulers know best and need not consult the ruled. Although these ideas were modified in time, they persisted with remarkable tenacity among Iraq’s ruling group right through the first half of the twentieth century.”³⁴

The British mandate that bridged the Ottoman provinces and the independent Iraqi state from 1924 to 1936 featured a king with powers only slightly limited by an indirectly elected parliament, a system that Polity coded identically to the -4 of the first Ottoman constitution.³⁵ They introduced Western governmental forms but “the prevailing visions of order were still unmistakably hierarchical and authoritarian” (Tripp, 2000: 30).³⁶ The state created under the mandate also reflected the cleavages that continue to impede nation-building, state-building, and the advance of democracy today. Just as under the Ottomans, governmental personnel, including the officer corps of the army, were drawn almost exclusively from Sunni Arabs who made up less than 20% of the population. When the independent Kurdistan envisioned by the Treaty of Sevres in 1920 failed to materialize, the Kurdish population was divided among Iraq, Turkey, and Iran, complicating both foreign relations and the development of a distinctly Arab identity for Iraq. Together with strong tribal attachments, tensions between sects constituted centrifugal forces that would challenge even the best designed central government to contain them. Dodge’s (2003:9) explanation for why such a state was not forthcoming indicts the British:

³³ The -1 recognizes that the constraints on the sultan were more substantial than under the 1876 constitution (-4).

³⁴ It is not at all clear that “consulting the ruled” would have produced better governance since the level of education of the population was extremely low. In 1921, for example, total secondary school enrollment was 101 students and only about 8000 were in primary schools (Akwari and Matthews, 1949). Clearly, the literate citizenry that democratic theory assumes as a precondition for civil society and political society was not present. As late as the 1950s literacy was around 10%. Even by the mid-1950s, enrollment beyond the elementary level was only about 40,000 and the first university was not founded until 1957 (Eppel, 1998).

³⁵ The king had the power to select the prime minister, approve all laws, and dissolve parliament, half of which he appointed.

³⁶ Foreign influence was overwhelming. The British chose as monarch King Faisal, a Sunni born in present-day Saudi Arabia as the son of the emir of Mecca and the brother of the future king of Jordan. Briefly king of Syria, Faisal was living in Britain when installed by the British to rule over the majority Shi’ites of Iraq. He was later confirmed by a bogus referendum. An unequal treaty forced on Iraq gave Britain power over all financial matters as well as foreign and defense policy.

“The idea of creating a legitimate, stable state with the ability to rule efficiently over its population was dropped altogether. Britain’s primary policy goal from 1927 onward was to unburden itself of its international responsibilities towards Iraq as quickly as possible. ... Britain decided to construct a “quasi-state,” one which bore the appearance of a *de jure* national polity but whose institutions were in fact a facade built in order to allow Britain to disengage.”³⁷

That facade was a constitutional monarchy, whose Polity coding of -4 (briefly, -3) between 1924 and 1958 characterizes the predominantly, but not exclusively, authoritarian institutional pattern also described by Dawisha and Dawisha (2003:36).³⁸

Under the Hashemite monarchy, which ruled from 1921 until 1958, Iraq adopted a parliamentary system modeled on that of its colonial master, the United Kingdom. Political parties existed, even in the opposition, and dissent and disagreement were *generally tolerated*. Debates in parliament were often vigorous, and legislators were *usually allowed* to argue and vote against the government without fear of retribution. Although the palace and the cabinet set the agenda, parliament *often managed to influence policy*.

The added italics indicate the essential elements of an incoherent polity – ostensibly democratic institutions not found in extreme autocracies but which carry nowhere near the autonomous influence they would in a real democracy. Governments seldom lasted long enough to establish stable authority relations.³⁹ Marr (2004: 78-79) summarizes:

The regime’s greatest weakness was its failure to build viable political institutions to support its rule. Leaders relied on the army and bureaucracy as the mainstay of the state and on martial law rather than political bargaining.... Perhaps the greatest disservice to the

³⁷ The League of Nations had set down five conditions to be met for statehood: (1) a “settled” government, (2) the state be “capable of maintaining its territorial integrity and political independence,” (3) that it be “able to maintain the public peace throughout the whole territory”, (4) that it have “adequate financial resources to provide regularly for normal government requirements,” and (5) that the laws afforded “equal and regular justice for all” (Dodge, 2003:31). Such conditions were never met and it is arguable whether they are closer after American occupation than in 1932.

³⁸ The democracy score of 1 reflects the existence of some political participation, but its largely factional character also increases the autocracy score by 1. The autocracy score of 5 is also composed of 3 points for executive selection from a closed group (rather than election) and 1 point for a chief executive only slightly to moderately constrained by the legislature.

³⁹ While Polity (accurately) codes a similar level of democracy/autocracy over the entire period, political forms and behavior underwent substantial variation. Britain retained full colonial control until 1930, when it began a transition to Iraqi autonomy not completed until 1936, even though *de jure* sovereignty was transferred in 1932. Twelve different cabinets followed over the next seven years. A series of communal and tribal rebellions between 1933 and 1936 and their brutal suppression signified the growing power of the Iraqi military and the death of Faisal in 1933 marked the end of the monarchy’s dominance. The military coup of 1936 brought to power a coalition of the army and leftist reformers, but the latter were driven from office ten months later. Six more coups followed before Britain reasserted military control in 1941 and installed a pro-British government with greater power for the monarchy. However, recurrent cycles of martial law, press censorship, and party repression followed by liberalization continued to be the norm, along with rapid changes in governments.

country was the regime's refusal to deal with the opposition in parliament, where opposition leaders could have achieved a measure of responsibility and experience."

Cycles of political violence, bloody suppression, and leadership rotation became a well established pattern in response to multiple cleavages over identity, social reforms, power ambitions, and foreign policy. As Tripp (2000:78-79) observes:

"The partisans of the varying ideas of Iraq had little difficulty in agreeing on the fundamentally authoritarian role of the state: for nationalists – whether Iraqi or Arab – the task of forming the nation was too important to allow the 'divisiveness' of democratic processes to intervene; for the radical critics of the social order, the entrenched power of the landed elites and others could be broken only by forceful government action."

Moreover, those in power at any given moment and the army itself were even stronger advocates of an authoritarian state than the opposition described above.

A sea change occurred with the military coup of 1958. It went beyond previous governmental changes, with the assassination of the royal family and key political figures, followed by the declaration of a republic and a new constitution. Under the new military government, the Iraqi state and society became even more centralized than before, operating under the coup leader, 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, who became prime minister, minister of defense, and commander in chief. In the absence of British colonial influence, the monarchy, or a legislature, this arrangement became the greatest concentration of political power in the hands of a single individual in Iraq's brief history, though the source of that power was a military establishment that was itself riven with tribal, sectarian and ideological cleavages that made it impossible for anyone to fully control. Polity registers this regime as -5, with a zero for democracy and a 5 on the autocracy scale.⁴⁰

For the next decade the few trappings of democracy gradually slipped away as various civilian and military groups vied for control of the state in increasingly extra-legal and violent ways amid regional and ethnic revolts, brutal suppressions, and the banning or purging of political parties and military factions. Four changes of government and many failed coups occurred between 1958 and 1968 alone. The Ba'athists first came to power in the bloody 1963 coup, after

⁴⁰ With participation now significantly suppressed, the democracy score reverted to 0 and the autocracy score was incremented by 1. Constraints on the chief executive were absent, adding another 2 points to the autocracy score. However, at the same time, 3 points were removed from the autocracy score because the chief executive seized power rather than being selected by any established procedures, autocratic or otherwise. Polity regards this arrangement as closer to incoherence than to coherent autocracy.

which they assassinated leading members of the previous government and arrested, tortured, and executed an estimated 3,000 members of the Iraqi Communist Party.⁴¹ They were in turn removed before the end of the year.

When the Ba’thists returned to power in a 1968 coup, it was accomplished in concert with elements of the military tied to the coup leader by clan affiliation and patronage ties rather than ideology. That was Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr, a Tikriti who had been prime minister in the first Ba’thist government. With the help of a young protege of his own clan, Saddam Hussein, he insured one-party rule with a series of execution of rivals and dissenters in a reign of terror that cowed any opposition, followed by a new constitution that enshrined the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) as the power center of the new regime and stipulated that only Ba’thists could be members. The resulting government was downgraded by Polity to a code of -7, a coherent autocracy, to reflect the significantly suppressed political participation.

By the mid-1970s, Saddam Hussein clearly had become the major force in the government through his control of the security system and the party. With his ascendance to the presidency in 1979, the Polity code reached -9, this last two point increment reflecting the institutionalization of the executive recruitment, in which Saddam was selected by a formalized process (election by the RCC) rather than through a seizure of power. That Polity code, documented further in Appendix 2, represented the essence of an extreme autocracy: an unelected, unconstrained chief executive and a virtual absence of political participation, accentuated by the severe repression of civil liberties and political rights reflected in Freedom House’s lowest scores.

While political conditions had been deteriorating since the 1968 Ba’thist coup, this “changing of the guard marked a decisive shift, already under way, from a one-party state to a personal, autocratic regime, dependent ... on Saddam Hussein and his close family members and cohorts... [P]ersonal loyalty became critical. The party was weakened as an institution, and what little pluralism and balance had remained at the top disappeared.” (Marr, 2004: 177) This “personal autocracy focused on one man and his whims ... and the party was reduced to an appendage.” (178) Saddam’s inner circle was drawn almost exclusively from members of his

⁴¹ The Ba’th (Renaissance) Party originated in Syria in the 1940s and was established in Iraq in 1951 as secular, Arab nationalist, and vaguely socialist. After engineering an unsuccessful assassination of ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim, it was purged in 1959 but soon reconstituted itself.

family, clan and the extended kinship network of his tribe.

Throughout the period, the state became more and more centered on Saddam Hussein, which also expanded its influence through a vast patronage network funded by massive oil revenues.⁴² He eliminated his rivals in brutal fashion, including the execution of five members of the RCC within days of his inauguration, imprisonment of dozens of Ba'thists and government officials, mass executions of Communist and Da'wa party activists, and murders of such prominent political and religious leaders as Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and many family members of Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim.⁴³

In sum, Iraq has known nothing other than an *extreme* autocracy for nearly a quarter-century, during which nearly two-thirds of all living Iraqis were born. A full generation has been deprived 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. Prospective democracies that arise from such established autocracies must begin anew and virtually from scratch. Marr (2006: 7) addresses the significance of the duration of extreme autocracy from the leadership standpoint:

“If we take the age of twenty - a time when people are graduating from college or going to work and are increasingly aware of their political environment – as a threshold of adulthood, at least 57% [and perhaps as much as 82%] of the current leadership came of age after the Ba'th came to power in 1968. Few have much recollection of the pre-Ba'th era.”

Among the populace, that number is smaller yet: about one current Iraqi in 20 reached adulthood before the Ba'th and only about 1 in 50 before the 1958 coup. For the half-century before that, the Iraqi government was more foreign than indigenous and more monarchic than democratic.

5. What can we expect after established extreme autocracy?

The criteria of twenty years at a Polity score of -9 or -10 now enables us to identify a

⁴² As early as 1959, oil generated 60% of the state budget, freeing the government from the pressures of accommodating the private sector of the economy or tolerating the political opinions of economic elites. By the time Saddam came to power, nationalized oil production approached two-thirds of total GDP as the traditional agricultural sector was reduced to 7%. Perhaps a third of the urban population worked for the government directly or indirectly.

⁴³ Of course, the brutality of Saddam's offensive against the Kurds, the mass deportation of as many as 200,000 shi'a to Iran, and the crushing of the rebellion after the first Gulf War are well known.

manageable list of nations comparable to Iraq. *Since the beginning of the twentieth century, only 30 current nations have endured twenty continuous years of extreme autocracy.*⁴⁴

We can now address the question to which we have been building: How have those thirty established extreme autocracies (EEAs) fared? As shown in Table 2, nine, including Iraq, remain coherent autocracies, five of them *extreme* autocracies. Table 3 lists the twelve which are incoherent polities, including three that are not coded by Polity because no fully functioning government exists. Another nine, as shown in Table 4, are currently coherent democracies, only two of which have achieved the longevity required to be considered *established* democracies. We discuss each category in turn and explore their implications for Iraq.

Table 2 lists the nine countries which were once EEAs and are now coherent autocracies, including Iraq and the four others that remained *extreme* autocracies in 2004.⁴⁵ None of the nine offers any optimism for a rapid transformation in Iraq, since all have been autocratic for more than 30 years and three for more than 50 years, including North Korea, another frequently-mentioned candidate for regime change. Each has dislodged at least one autocrat without escaping autocracy, reminding us that Iraqi autocracy did not begin with Saddam Hussein's arrival (nor North Korea's with Kim Jung Il) and may well not end with his departure.⁴⁶

Table 2: 9 EEAs, still coherent autocracies

Years autocratic*	
Iraq	37
Qatar	34
North Korea	57
Saudi Arabia	79
Swaziland	32
Bhutan	98
Syria	42
Bahrain	34
Oman	48
* as of 2004	

⁴⁴ This includes nations whose autocracy began before the twentieth century, but extended into it. It excludes East Germany (-9 from 1960 to 1988), which was incorporated into Germany (+10). The post-World War II cases of democratization are sometimes inaccurately cited as precedents (Byman and Pollack, 2003; Dobbins et al., 2003; Crane and Terrill, 2003), but they really have radically different histories. Germany's extreme autocracy was brief (1933-1944) and preceded for a longer period (1919-1932) by the Weimar Republic (+6). It was scored +1 or +2 since 1890. Italy had no democratic tradition, but its extreme autocracy (-9) was also relatively brief (1928-1942) and preceded by two decades of -1. Japan's last coherent autocracy ended in 1857, after which it was coded as more democratic than autocratic (+1) for more than 75 years before 1945. These nations also had far greater prospects in terms of democratic requisites (Bellin, 2004). Closer were the fourteen now-independent nations which endured extreme autocracy as Soviet republics for slightly under 20 years (Xxxx, 2005). Russia itself is included among the thirty on the basis of the extreme autocracy ending in 1904.

⁴⁵ All nine continue to be rated "not free" by Freedom House through 2005 as well.

⁴⁶ Hedenius and Teorell (2007: 152) find that "from 1972 to 2003, 77% of transitions from authoritarian government resulted in another authoritarian regime."

The twelve former EEAs listed in Table 3 also challenge expectations for rapid democratization in Iraq. They have escaped from extreme autocracy but have not emerged as democratic: Polity places nine of them in their middle category of “incoherent polity” (-6 to +6) as of 2004. We also include Haiti, Ivory Coast, and Congo here because they lack coherent

governmental rule amid wide-spread violence, though they are formally designated “interregnum” by Polity.⁴⁷ As can be seen from their most recent Polity scores, most of these twelve are far closer to autocracy than democracy, with only Malawi, Algeria, and Ethiopia registering positive scores.⁴⁸

Table 3: 12 EEAs, now incoherent polities

Current status	Polity	Freedom House	End of Last Established Extreme Autocracy
Yemen	-2	-3	1945
Ethiopia	+1	-3	1973
Iran	-6	-7	1905/1978
Nepal	-6	-3	1980
Guinea	-1	-5	1983
Haiti	...	-8	1985*
Jordan	-2	-2	1988
Algeria	+2	-5	1988
Ivory Coast	...	-7	1989
Gabon	-4	-2	1989
Congo (Kin)	...	-7	1991
Malawi	+6	0	1992

The picture is even bleaker according to the ratings by Freedom House, which are depicted in Table 3 transformed to conform with the Polity scale.⁴⁹ Freedom House considers seven of these nations “not free” and the other five only “partly free”. Not a single one has a positive score that would signify it as closer to democracy than autocracy.

Nor have they shown the kind of progress over the last decade that inspires confidence that they are in transit to a democratic future. According to Polity, only Algeria is

more democratic in 2004 than it was in 1995, whereas several were less democratic. Freedom House sees four of the twelve marginally more free in 2005 than in 1995 but seven are less free, several of which have experienced quite large drops.

⁴⁷ Afghanistan, which falls a year shy of qualifying as an established extreme autocracy with its -10 from 1945 to 1963, would otherwise belong here as well. Polity has coded it as “transitional” since the Taliban’s -7 ended in 2001 and Freedom House rated it equivalent to -3 in 2005.

⁴⁸ In a practical sense, they are as far from democracy as are the coherent autocracies, as indicated by the “not free” designations assigned by Freedom House. Congo’s last coherent polity, 1991, was -8. Ivory Coast earned a +4 briefly during 2000 and 2001, but has otherwise lingered at -6 or -7 since 1990. Haiti’s most recent Polity score was a -2 in 2003.

⁴⁹ Freedom House uses two 1-7 indexes for political rights and civil liberties, in which the *lower* numbers are more democratic. Thus, to avoid confusion and achieve comparability with Polity in Table 3, their indexes are mapped to Polity’s -10 to +10 scale using the formula $14.32 - 1.70*(FH_{pol} + FH_{civ})$ and rounding downward. That formula is derived from a regression which accounted for 82% of the variance over the 4823 cases for which data exists on both.

The last column of Figure 3 also may provide some hints concerning Iraq's future by registering the year when each nation exited extreme autocracy. Yemen has failed to achieve democracy despite leaving extreme autocracy 60 years ago (in 1945) and five others have been languishing as incoherent polities for more than 20 years. Iran, a pure autocracy from 1800 to 1905 and again from 1955 to 1978, offers a sobering assessment for both Iraq and its own future should regime change be contemplated there. The remainder are about midway through their second decade with little forward progress visible, a caution against the belief that democratization has become dramatically easier since the advent of the "Third Wave" (Huntington, 1991). In fact, this group exemplifies an important aspect of this period: The growth of "hybrid regimes" and "illiberal democracies" made this period more one of declining autocracy than advancing democracy, especially among former extreme autocracies.⁵⁰

Haiti, which had once achieved democracy, but has subsequently relapsed, is a cautionary tale that returns us to concerns about protracted democratic consolidation. It reached +7 in 1990 and from 1994-1998, but had regressed to -2 by 2000.⁵¹ Initial achievement of democracy by no means guarantees a democratic future, a judgment reinforced by a count of the 98 countries that have had a coherent democracy at one time or another since the beginning of the twentieth century. Nearly half (43) subsequently lost their democratic status, seven of them more than once. Only 18 of those 43 are democratic today, and a third of those 18 failed on two occasions before achieving a more lasting democracy.

Finally, Table 4 lists the relevant dates for the nine established extreme autocracies that were coherent democracies in Polity terms as of 2004, only four of which are also regarded as "free" by Freedom House.⁵² This group is ostensibly the basis for optimism in Iraq, but that judgment may be premature since only two – Portugal and Turkey – meet Lijphart's 20 year criteria to be considered "established democracies". As shown in the table, Portugal has been a democracy since 1976, just three years after its period as an established extreme autocracy ended

⁵⁰Hedenius and Teorell (2007) show that since the 1980s the incidence of electoral *autocracies* has grown substantially more rapidly than the frequency of electoral democracies.

⁵¹Malawi, which has bounced between +4 and +6 since 2000, was also once rated (tentatively) as democratic. In earlier Polity versions, it reached +7 from 1994-2000, but the 2004 update revised those codes to an incoherent +6.

⁵²Except for Russia ("not free"), the remainder are rated as "partly free" (PF) by Freedom House.

in 1973. Turkey, rated only “partly free” by Freedom House and +7 by Polity, reached the benchmark of twenty years only in 2003, but its history of democracy is not so straightforward. As the table indicates, Turkey’s last established extreme autocracy ended in 1907 and its first coherent democracy appeared 39 years later in 1946. However, it has dropped from democratic status three times since then and its current democracy dates only from 1983, 75 years after its last extreme autocracy. Having achieved 20 years of continuous democracy, odds would now favor these two democracies surviving long-term, but 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.⁵³

Democratic consolidation is far from secure in the remaining seven countries

because they have achieved democracy only in the 1990's or later. Bulgaria barely qualifies under the twelve year durability standard invoked by Gasiorowski and Power (1998) as a significant inflection point. Przeworski et al. (2000) find an average age at demise of 8.5 years for democracies.⁵⁴ An analysis of the 53 losses of democratic status cited above (by 43 nations) reveals the average age of the democratic polity at death was about 10 years, and the median age about eight.

Thus, at least six of the nations in Table 4, having not yet passed estimates of the half-life of a failed democratic polity, are much too fragile and short-lived to inspire confidence that they have achieved democratic consolidation. Indeed, one which looked promising in 2004 has already fallen: Thailand experienced a serious constitutional crisis followed by a military coup in 2006. Russia also exemplifies this precarious quality, having achieved +7 only from 2000-2004, and

Table 4: 9 EEAs, now coherent democracies

Current status	Polity	Freedom House	First year of Coherent Democracy	Last year of Est. Ext. Autocracy	Years from EEA to democracy
Albania	+7	+4	2002	1989	13
Mexico	+8	+7	2000	1912	88
Russia	+7	-5	2000	1904	96
Guatemala	+8	0	1996	1920	76
Dom Rep.	+8	+7	1996	1960	36
Thailand	+9	+4	1992	1931	61
Bulgaria	+9	+9	1990	1917	73
Portugal	+10	+10	1976	1973	3
Turkey	+7	+4	1946/1983	1907	39/75

⁵³ This does not include several European countries whose democracy was interrupted by World War II occupation.

⁵⁴ Each uses a different democracy measure and covers only the post-1970 period. Gasiorowski and Power note that only 37% of new democracies survived twelve years, but, among those that did, 69% survived another ten years and 62% another twenty. Przeworski et al. (1996) deny that the passage of time helps a democracy “consolidate”, arguing that the likelihood of collapse does not decline with age, but only with increasing development.

numerous commentators have expressed wariness over the increasing centralization of power in the Putin administration subsequently. Freedom House rated Russia as only “partly free” from 1990 to 2003, ceased to consider it an “electoral democracy” at all after the December 2003 election and has coded it as “not free” since then. Albania reached +7 only in 2002 – a year in which it went through three prime ministers and two presidents – and Freedom House has also rated it only “partly free”. Mexico reached +8 in 2000 (and was rated “free” only in 2001). In 1996, the 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. None are a sure bet to survive in a democratic form.

So, *what are the odds that Iraq will become an established democracy in the foreseeable future?* Only two of thirty established extreme autocracies have done so to date, but six others are now coherent democracies with a chance to reach the twenty year standard during this cycle. Although it is impossible to know how many of those will become “established” before collapsing, an estimate of somewhere around three or four seems reasonable, if speculative. Just under 60% of all twentieth century democracies remain today, though many of those are not yet established. A slightly smaller estimate is obtained based on Gasiorowski’s findings that two-thirds of those that have reached age 12 will reach age 20 and about one-third of the younger ones will also do so. Adding these projections to the two already established democracies gives us an estimate that about one out of five or six established extreme autocracies either already has, or in the foreseeable future will become, established democracies.⁵⁵

How long will it take for democracy to make its first appearance in Iraq? Table 4 shows that the transit from an established extreme autocracy to the achievement of the first coherent democracy – *if it occurs at all* – ordinarily requires more than half a century, *not* counting the long consolidation process. It required more than 70 years in five of the nine and less than 25 in only two. Depending on how you treat Turkey, which failed to sustain any of its first three democracies, the average transit period was 53.9 or 57.9 years; the median was 61 or 73. Fully a

⁵⁵ Even those current democracies which suffer a future relapse to autocracy or incoherence may *eventually* become established democracies, of course. But if they do not complete the process before another decline occurs, they will lie beyond a horizon of twenty years which seems a reasonable approximation of “the foreseeable future”.

third of those nine – Russia, Guatemala, and Bulgaria – also fell back into *extreme* autocracy for substantial periods after first escaping it, and required about half a century to reach democracy even after exiting for the *last* time (more than 70 years after emerging initially).⁵⁶

Only Portugal and perhaps Albania made the transit to a coherent democracy from an established extreme autocracy 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 1982-2003. Still, its history is hardly comparable to Iraq's since it had previously experienced coherent democracy from 1911 to 1925. Polity recognizes Albania's fledgling democracy only from July of 2002, 12 years after a generational extreme autocracy ended, and it remains only "partly free". Certainly the transition from extreme autocracy to coherent democracy – for the small minority who have made it at all – is better measured in decades than in years. In round figures, the average is about half a century. Add another two to four decades for that democracy to become consolidated.

The central proposition is confirmed: a history of established extreme autocracy clearly casts an enormous shadow over subsequent democratization. Among this group, democratic transitions are rare, precarious, frequently temporary, and inevitably protracted.

6. The structural potential for democracy

Since history provides so few instances of established extreme autocracies progressing rapidly to democracy and so many that have failed to do so, optimism for Iraq must rest on evidence that Iraq's potential for democracy resembles the former group more than the latter. Such evidence might be sought in a detailed ideographic analysis, but that effort is beyond the bounds of this study and is available elsewhere (Haradstveit and Hveem, 2005). However, a combination of existing theory on democratization and social science methods that render it predictive can also provide some insight – by identifying the factors that have been associated

⁵⁶ Bulgaria took 73 years from its last established extreme autocracy in 1917, but also reverted to extreme autocracy 1935-1942. Guatemala took 76 years from 1920, but also experienced extreme autocracy 1932-1943. Russia took 96 years from its established extreme autocracy and 48 years since the 19 year extreme autocracy of Stalin. A fourth country, Iran (from Table 3) also re-entered an established extreme autocracy from 1955-1978 after exiting an established extreme autocracy in 1905.

with democracy and democratization elsewhere.

Since Lipset's (1959) seminal effort at uncovering the "social requisites of democracy", scores of studies have achieved consensus on the structural factors associated with it. Democracy is most common in nations which are wealthy (Burkhart and Lewis-Beck, 1994), especially when its relatively egalitarian distribution (Muller, 1988) is manifested in high levels of education and health (Lipset, 1959; Diamond, 1992), and when strong middle and working classes emerge as political forces (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992; Doorenspleet, 2004). Economies that are poor and/or dominated by the so-called "curse of natural resources" (especially oil wealth and primary product production) are much more likely to be autocratic (Ross, 2001). Diffusion of democratic values and institutions results in a strong regional clustering of political systems (Starr and Lindborg, 2003; O'Loughlin et al., 1998; Wejnert, 2005), which is reinforced by the regional clustering of underlying cultural values (Welzel et al., 2003). Muslim countries are especially prone to autocracy (Lewis, 1996; Feng and Zak, 1999).⁵⁷ A history of British colonialism inclines nations toward later democracy (Lipset et al., 1993; Bernhard et al., 2004). Studies have also found democracy to be hampered by ethnic, language, and religious divisions (Alesina et al., 2003), by peripheral status in the world system (Bollen, 1983; Van Rossem, 1996), and by external threat (Colaresi and Thompson, 2003).⁵⁸

Many alternative regression models culled from this literature incorporate these factors in different ways, as the studies cited above (and many others) demonstrate. The small differences between them may be consequential for theory testing, but for our predictive purposes all of them produce about equal explanatory power and very similar estimates of the democratic potential of both Iraq and other nations.⁵⁹ Table 5 illustrates a typical structural specification, chosen for its fit,

⁵⁷ Stepan (2003) argues that this is better seen as an "Arab" than a "Muslim" gap, but either one predicts lower democracy in Iraq. Badawi and Makdisi (2007) find that religion is not statistically significant in equations that also include an Arab dummy and an oil production variable.

⁵⁸ More narrow factors include the tendency of Presidential systems to fail more often than Parliamentary ones (Diskin et al., 2005) and for both democracies and autocracies to be more stable during periods of stable economic growth (Przeworski et al., 1996, 2000).

⁵⁹ Barro (1999), for example, projects democracy in 1995 on the basis of a regression that uses Freedom House rather than Polity data, some 30 independent variables, and a different estimation technique. Nevertheless, the correlation between his projection and one derived from the regression reported in Table 6 is .82, markedly higher than the correlation between the actual and fitted values in either analysis (.74 for this specification and .72 for Barro's) and only a bit below the .92 correlation between Polity and his democracy measure. Variations in model

compactness, and the size of the sample with available data.⁶⁰

The strongest predictor of democracy is the average level of democracy of one's contiguous neighbors, which no doubt reflects not only diffusion processes, but also picks up variance that appears as regional effects in other studies.⁶¹ School enrollment, which contains a distributional component faithful to the more sophisticated formulations of the modernization perspective, improves on the fit of alternative measures of economic development such as GDP per capita.⁶² The strongest

negative impacts are a Muslim population, oil and primary product exports, and a dummy variable that recognizes that nations achieving their independence after 1989 have not yet had time to achieve the democratic level which their structural conditions should produce at equilibrium.⁶³

Table 5: Predicting Polity 2004 from "social requisites"

	Estimate	t
School enrollment	.03*	2.15
Democratic neighbors	.43***	4.68
Oil exporter	-3.54**	-2.92
Primary product exporter	-2.34*	-2.39
Muslim population	-4.74***	-3.86
Post 1989 state	-1.96	-1.74
constant	2.81*	2.26
N / r ²	154/.535	

specification are not significant for our purposes.

⁶⁰ For the robustness of this specification and its essential similarity to those found elsewhere in the literature, see Xxxx, (2005). All nations with data for 2004, the most recent year available from Polity, are included. To maximize the generality of the result, Polity scores for seven nations are imputed from their one and two-year lagged values and Freedom House scores, but the estimation is virtually identical with those nations omitted.

⁶¹ The average score was constructed with the aid of the Correlates of War Contiguity Data, version 3.0 (Stinnett et al., 2002). Only nations separated by a land or river border are considered contiguous. Nations with no contiguous neighbors (islands) are assigned the average score of their region, as designated by Minorities at Risk (2005). Brinks and Coppedge (2006) establish that neighbor emulation is highly significant even in the presence of elaborate regional controls.

⁶² School enrollments are based on gross secondary school enrollment percentages taken from World Development Indicators. Missing data for 2004 was imputed from earlier years in several cases. Using GDP per capita instead of enrollments allows a slightly larger N, but it produces a poorer fit. The coefficient estimates of the other variables are not significantly effected by the choice of enrollments or GDP as a regressor. This pattern is consistent with the results of Bobba and Caviello (2006), who affirm the findings of Glaeser et al. (2004) against the objections of Acemoglu et al. (2005). Bobba and Caviello and Glaeser et al. both find that education predicts democracy (and GDP per capita does not) in the presence of proper controls, a result that is robust to simultaneity effects resulting from the effect of democracy on enrollment. To cope with the possible endogeneity of education in this equation, an instrumental variables analysis was performed using several plausible instruments for enrollments, including lagged GDP per capita. In most specifications, the parameter estimate for enrollments increased in size and remained significant; in all specifications, the predicted values were correlated above .95 with those of the main analysis. Of course, in the absence of indicators of the likely mechanisms through which income operates on democracy (such as education), GDP per capita is well established as a cross-sectional correlate of democracy, even while its theoretical basis remains contested (Przeworski and Limongi, 1997; Boix and Stokes, 2003).

⁶³ The Muslim percentage of the population and the dummy variable for Oil (defined as more than 1/3 of exports consisting of fuels) was taken from Fearon and Laitin (2003), augmented by CIA(2005), and World Bank (2001), which was also the source for the primary product export dummy.

Nations with predominantly Muslim populations, on average, have a Polity score nearly five points lower than would otherwise be expected, and reliance on oil exports subtracts another three and a half points from expectations.⁶⁴

All of these results are squarely in line with previous studies. Variables that sometimes appear in similar models, but did not significantly improve the fit of this one, include world-system status, ethnic fractionalization, population, population density, an island dummy, and various colonialism and regional dummies.⁶⁵ Structural factors explain about 54% of the variance in actual democracy levels, with another 46% left to be explained by the effects of political actors that are emphasized by the process tradition, by the hysteresis elaborated above, and by other unique elements of individual cases. When that powerful hysteresis effect is represented by the Polity score lagged ten years, the composite model explains about 74% of the variance and the significance of the structural factors is dramatically attenuated.⁶⁶

This “social requisites” model of the determinants of democracy is useful to us for several purposes. First, we can use this structural model as a control to more formally test the supposition that has been guiding our inquiry up until now – that a nation’s previous status as an established extreme autocracy impedes future democratization.

Though it is clear from the earlier analyses that EEAs are significantly less likely to become democratic over any time frame, we have not definitively isolated that hysteresis effect from the (partially colinear) structural conditions which

Table 6: Predicting Polity 2004 from current “social requisites” and lagged Extreme Established Autocracy

	estimate	t	est.	t	est.	t	est.	t
School enrollment	0.04	2.65	0.04	2.46	0.04	2.96	0.03	2.12
Democratic neighbors	0.40	4.44	0.41	4.16	0.36	3.56	0.44	3.99
Oil exporter	-2.53	-1.96	-3.34	-2.27	-3.31	-2.23	-3.49	-2.40
Primary product exporter	-2.07	-2.17	-2.08	-2.03	-1.65	-1.57	-1.38	-1.25
Muslim population	-4.04	-3.31	-3.58	-2.73	-4.04	-2.98	-4.01	-2.77
Post 1989 state	-2.28	-2.06						
Extreme established autocracy								
1994 (-10 years)	-6.01	-2.97						
1984 (-20 years)			-3.23	-2.11				
1974 (-30 years)					-3.40	-2.42		
1964 (-40 years)							-2.24	-1.43
constant	2.30	1.86	2.30	1.78	1.71	1.26	2.21	1.57
N / r squared	153/.564		128/.553		121/.576		106/.573	

⁶⁴ For a denial that these findings justify pessimism concerning Arab democracy, see Gambill (2003).

⁶⁵ These null findings occur because the predictors, though theoretically divergent, are empirically colinear.

⁶⁶ This result lends credence to an interactive formulation in which elite actions must occur in the context of supportive structural conditions (Doorenspleet, 2004). Elite initiatives may highlight democratic transitions, but they cannot really hasten them. As Bunce (2000:708) puts it, “elites are seen as summarizers of long-term developments and as well-positioned representatives of larger social forces.”

also predict democracy.

To do so, we add to the structural analysis of Table 5 a binary variable that takes the value 1 if a nation was an established extreme autocracy in a given previous year. For example, the coefficient of -6.01 in the first column of Table 6 indicates that, on average, nations that had been established extreme autocracies 10 years earlier (in 1994) had 2004 scores about 6 points lower than other nations, even after controlling for their current “social requisites” of democracy.⁶⁷ How long does this extreme autocratic baggage impede democratization? The remainder of the table indicates that nations that had been established extreme autocracies 20 years prior to 2004 were still more than 3 points lower than would otherwise be predicted, and those that had been EEA 30 years earlier were nearly 3 and a half points lower.⁶⁸ Beyond thirty years, the parameter estimates remain negative but are no longer statistically significant.⁶⁹ In short, it appears that established extreme autocracy significantly impedes democratization for at least thirty years, a finding consistent with the earlier historical analysis.⁷⁰

A second use of this structural analysis is that it can be used as a control model to investigate other factors that might affect democratic prospects in particular cases. Since neither Iraq’s political history nor its social requisites point to rapid democratization, optimism that Iraq will escape its apparently autocratic

Table 7: U.S. Involvement in Predicting Polity score, 2004

N = 154	Coef.	t	Coef.	t	Coef.	t
School enrollment	.03	2.15	.03	2.13	.03	2.13
Democratic neighbors	.43	4.68	.43	4.67	.45	4.73
Post-1989 state	-1.96	-1.74	-1.92	-1.68	-1.89	-1.66
Oil exporter	-3.54	-2.92	-3.50	-2.86	-3.42	-2.78
Primary product exporter	-2.34	-2.39	-2.33	-2.37	-2.23	-2.25
Muslim population	-4.74	-3.86	-4.69	-3.77	-4.52	-3.59
U.S. involvement			.50	.32		
short-term					3.09	.88
long-term					-.08	-.04
constant	2.81	2.26	2.75	2.17	2.60	2.03
R-squared	.535		.535		.538	

⁶⁷ In principle, this estimate is subject to bias if any omitted variable is correlated with both current democracy and the lagged dummy variable for extreme autocracy. If so, the coefficient could be inflated by the model misspecification and thus overstate the true effect of previous autocracy. In this case, it seemed unlikely because, as noted above, virtually every independent variable found to affect democracy in other studies had already been found insignificant when added to the specification of Table 5. To be certain, however, all were added to the models estimated in Table 6. The resulting coefficients were virtually identical to those reported.

⁶⁸ The post 1989 state dummy variable was removed since new states were omitted from the analysis by virtue of missing data on the existence of an EEA at the earlier time point. Including these states by assigning them the values of their predecessor states does not significantly effect the model estimates.

⁶⁹ In analyses not shown, it is found that established extreme autocracies underperformed extreme autocracies that were not established by two to six points.

⁷⁰ Of course, it is not identical to the 50 year estimate we obtained on the different and more particular question of how long it takes to transit to coherent democracy.

fate must stem from attributes unique to it, the most frequently cited of which is the American occupation. Lawson and Thacker (2003b) identify nineteen previous instances in which “the United States has occupied or help to occupy countries in the last century with the goal of reshaping their political system”, fifteen of which are coded by Polity.⁷¹ Table 7 reports the results when Lawson and Thacker’s dummy variables reflecting American involvement are added to the model of Table 5. It mirrors their finding that American occupation has not made a significant difference, and confirms that it is robust by estimating a different equation over a different sample.⁷²

Finally, this “social requisites” model can be used as a prediction equation to estimate the level of democracy/autocracy that should be expected for any nation given its structural characteristics, including Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, and North Korea. That prediction might be plausibly said to represent a nation’s “structural potential for democracy”, the level that could be achieved if other barriers, such as the hysteresis from past autocracy or the influence of a single individual, could somehow be removed. One might thus interpret the gap between a nation’s predicted score and its actual performance – the regression residual – as the potential for relatively rapid improvement, over, say, the next twenty years.

7. Structural considerations since the Third Wave

This measure of structural potential is very helpful in interpreting the rapid political change identified with the so-called “Third Wave” of democratization: The number of coherent democracies increased from 42 in 1984 to 76 in 2004, with over half of the new democracies (18 of 34) having been coherent autocracies two decades earlier (Huntington, 1991). At first glance,

⁷¹They consider Bosnia, Cambodia, Somalia, and South Korea as instances of “truncated or incomplete intervention” whereas Austria, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Germany, Haiti, Japan, Nicaragua, Panama, Philippines and South Vietnam “experienced more thoroughgoing and protracted occupation.” Grenada, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau are too small to be coded by Polity.

⁷² An analysis of the very similar list of cases compiled by Pei and Kaspar (2003) yields a similar conclusion. Among the 14 nations for which data is available, only four (Japan, Germany, Panama, and Haiti) emerged from occupation as democratic. Moreover, forty years after the departure of U.S. troops (or as of 2004), only the Dominican Republic could be added to that list and Haiti subtracted. Of the remaining nine, six had a lower level of democracy than when troops left and only one a higher level. In fact, prior to U.S. occupation, only four were coherent autocracies, but forty years after the occupation ended (or in 2004), *five* of them were coherent autocracies and two others were coded by Polity as in an interregnum or in transition state that could not be coded. None of the 14 was an established extreme autocracy. Tures (2005) also finds a null result for the effect on democracy of 228 U.S. military operations between 1972 and 2003, most of which were not designed to achieve democracy.

it may appear that democratization has become easier in the current era, rendering analyses over longer periods irrelevant for the future of Iraq. The impact of external support for democracy, the intellectual milieu in which non-democracies lack legitimacy, and the momentum of the wave itself have been offered as sources of this break with prior democratic experience.

Alternatively, the wave can be attributed to special historical circumstances that have already passed from the scene and, in any case, do not apply to countries with the structural characteristics and autocratic history of Iraq (Carothers, 2007). Because rapid democratization was largely confined to nations that had long possessed structural conditions favorable to democracy, the Third Wave represented a theoretically expected “catch up” to those conditions, not an exception to the rule that those conditions are necessary (Bunce and Wolchick, 2006).

To test that interpretation, the structural model first introduced in Table 5 was estimated for 1984 and the regression residual for each nation was then compared with actual levels of democracy two decades later. The first row of Table 8 singles out the

twenty nations with the largest negative residuals –those with the highest unfulfilled potential for democratization in 1984.⁷³ All had actual Polity scores at -6 or lower, even though they were projected to have scores anywhere from 5.6 to 12.2 points above that level. By 2004, all but Cuba had become more democratic and an extraordinary 15 of those 20 had become coherent democracies. The optimist’s scenario for democratization is best illustrated by seven polities which were under the sway of a Communist party supported by the Red Army in 1984: With the disappearance of that unique impediment, but with the social requisites of democracy otherwise largely in place, each achieved a coherent democracy by 2004 (Bunce and Wolchik, 2006).

Table 8 - Structural potential and subsequent democratization

Structural potential (regression residual), 1984	Total	Status, 2004	
		Not Coherent Democracy	Coherent Democracy
20 largest gaps	20	5	15
Other autocracies	53	50	3

However, these particular episodes of rapid transformation should *not* be taken to refute the well established fact that democratic change is *usually* a highly path dependent process exhibiting very strong hysteresis, especially among extreme autocracies. As the second row of Table 8 shows, initial euphoria should give way to a more sober recognition that democracy is likely to grow only in fertile soils. Beyond the twenty nations with the greatest unfulfilled

⁷³ Of course, the dummy variable for post-1989 state was removed as a predictor. With an N=129, the r² was .429.

democratic potential, fifty three other nations also had Polity scores of -6 or below in 1984, among them Iraq. Only *three* of those 51 had become coherent democracies by 2004. Obviously, democratization does occur – even in autocracies – but overwhelmingly among those states with structural conditions that favor it. Furthermore, among those democratizers only Albania had been an extreme autocracy.

We can also use the regression of the composite model of Table 6 to offer one last estimate of the likelihood of future democracy in Iraq. That regression, which combined current social requisites of democracy with the hysteresis of established extreme autocracy twenty years earlier (1984), projected Iraq to score -7.9 in 2004, not far from its actual level of -9.⁷⁴ Table 9, which lists the ten nations that are predicted to have the *lowest* levels of democracy by that composite model, tells us that only three states across the globe have histories and structural conditions *less* favorable to democracy today than Iraq.⁷⁵ Clearly, rapid democratization in Iraq would have required a very substantial over-achievement, the magnitude and likelihood of which can be crudely estimated.

We first observe that to achieve a Polity score of +7 Iraq would have required a positive residual 14.9 points above the -7.9 potential predicted by the composite analysis. How common is “over-achievement” of that magnitude? Since the largest positive residual in 2004 belonged to Senegal (8.9), coherent democracy under Iraq’s structural conditions would constitute the largest deviation from prediction in the world today – by a very wide margin.⁷⁶ Indeed, based on the

**Table 9: Predicted Autocracies
Predicted/Actual Polity scores, 2004**

Country	Actual	Predicted	Residual
Bahrain	-7	-8.4	1.4
Saudi Arabia	-10	-8.2	-1.8
Qatar	-10	-7.9	-2.1
Iraq	-9*	-7.9	-1.1
Oman	-8	-7.3	-0.7
UAE	-8	-5.9	-2.1
Algeria	2	-5.8	7.8
Afghanistan	-7*	-5.5	-1.5
Syria	-7	-5.2	-1.7
Kuwait	-7	-4.8	-2.2

* prior to occupation

⁷⁴ Similarly, Lawson and Thacker (2003a: 14), using Freedom House data and a much different specification and sample, “find an expected value for Iraq of 0.16” against an actual value of 0. “In other words, Iraq under Saddam Hussein was pretty much where we might have expected it to be given its demographic and economic profile.”

⁷⁵ In dissent, Byman and Pollock (2003: 124) conclude that “Iraq has a reasonably good foundation to make the transition” on the basis of income, literacy rates, and urbanization, factors identified by the structural analysis of Barro (1999). “Iraq’s numbers are comparable to those of many other states that have enjoyed real progress in the transition from autocracy to democracy, such as Bangladesh, Kenya, and Bolivia.” This conclusion is an inexplicable misreading of Barro, who explicitly projects democracy scores (on a 0 to 1 scale) using a much broader prediction equation than the factors cited by Byman and Pollock. Barro’s projections for Bangladesh (.55), Bolivia (.51), and Kenya (.40), indicate that Iraq has nowhere near their structural requisites. In fact, Iraq’s projection of .04 is, by a very wide margin, the very lowest suitability rating for democracy of any nation in his 101 country sample. The next lowest is Zaire (.16).

⁷⁶ None of the successful democratic transitions identified in our earlier historical analysis bucked odds

normal distribution, a deviation the size of Senegal's should occur in about 2.6% of cases, but a residual of 14.9 should appear in only about .058% of cases, or about 1 in 1725 – a decidedly more pessimistic assessment than emerged from our earlier analysis.⁷⁷

The other current target of a militarized democratization, Afghanistan, ranks eighth on this list, with a likelihood of achieving democracy in the range of .30% (about 1 chance in 333), just ahead of Syria (.37%), another nation sometimes speculated as a candidate for regime change. Among the Axis of Evil, Iran ranks fifteenth (1.7%) and North Korea cannot be estimated because of missing data.

8. Conclusion: Democratic prospects in Iraq

Can Iraq democratize? Only time will tell, but our historical analysis reveals that just nine out of thirty comparable cases have made it at all, and odds are that nearly half of them will not last without at least one further relapse. About the same number remain coherent autocracies, with no move whatever toward democratization discernible, even decades after extreme autocracies ended. This estimated likelihood of around 20% (5 or 6 out of 30) is, by far, the most optimistic that can be squared with evidence from comparable cases.

A consideration of the structural conditions derived from existing theory not only leaves intact the cautionary reminder of the broader historical record, but suggests that the prior experience of others may offer an overly *optimistic* estimate of Iraq's prospects. The successful democratizers were marked by structural conditions that strongly presaged democratization, whereas Iraq is notable for structures that are extremely unfavorable for democracy. Remarkably, the conclusion that Iraq is among the handful of states *least* likely to democratize – perhaps one chance in 1725 – does not even require any reference to those conditions which most commentators regard as Iraq's biggest challenges – the insurgency, ethnic rivalry, and external influences! Certainly it is difficult to see how conditions on the ground in Iraq today would boost

approaching that range; the largest residual, Albania's 6.3, should occur in more than 8% of cases.

⁷⁷ Lawson and Thacker (2003a) similarly conclude that “we certainly would not anticipate that Iraq would become a democracy”, but they attach no probability to it. Instead, they claim to predict Iraq's future democracy under an “optimistic scenario” by plugging into their prediction equation completely arbitrary values – that Iraq had a GDP four times its actual level, did not produce oil, and had ten years' experience with democracy. They conclude only that “Even accounting for large shifts in several important variables, then, it seems unlikely that Iraq would achieve a high level of political freedom.”

its prospects relative to success stories like Portugal or Albania.

How long will it take? The most optimistic observer 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. Even the successes require two or more decades beyond the initial appearance to become consolidated. The burden of proof surely must shift to those who are optimistic about progress in the foreseeable future, and the burden they face is to show that Iraq is better situated than most – that Iraq is more like Portugal, the only nation to transit quickly, than Saudi Arabia, which shows no signs of doing so.

The chances of democracy appearing under current structural conditions in Iraq appear extremely remote. The past experience of Middle Eastern countries suggests that when democracy finally comes to Iraq, few Iraqis alive today will be there to greet it. The experience of the Soviet Union suggests that by the time democracy reaches parts of Mesopotamia, it will no longer be Iraq. Odds don't appear much better for Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, or North Korea.

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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
<i>Competitiveness of Executive Recruitment (XRCOMP):</i>		
(1) Recruitment by selection		+2
(2) Transitional category or dual executives	+1	
(3) Recruitment by election	+2	
<i>Openness of Executive Recruitment (XROPEN):</i>		
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	
<i>Constraint on Chief Executive (XCONST):</i>		
(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	
<i>Competitiveness of Political Participation (PARCOMP):</i>		
(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	
<i>Regulation of participation (PARREG):</i>		
(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		

Appendix 2: Polity codes for Iraq and other autocracies

Iraq's score of -9, which results from subtracting its 9 on autocracy from its 0 on democracy, can be reconstructed from Table A1. For example, Saddam Hussein was appointed President and Chairperson of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) 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 A1. By contrast, the recruitment via contested election that marks democratic states, would have incremented the democracy score by +2.

Table A1: Decomposing Iraq's Autocracy		Dem	Auto
Components		0	9
executive recruitment regulation	designated, not regulated		
exec recruitment competitiveness	selection, not election	0	2
executive recruitment openness	open, not hereditary	0	0
executive constraints	unlimited authority	0	3
participation regulation	restricted		2
participation competitiveness	repressed, no opposition	0	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 so: "The Chairman of the RCC serves as chief 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."

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, 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 A2 reveals that the only missing element that deprives Iraq of the pure autocracy score of 10 assigned to Saudi Arabia and Qatar is the hereditary character of their monarchies. 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 1978.⁷⁸ It is not obvious that this difference has major consequences for the subsequent evolution of the political system.

Table A2 also illustrates that Iraq’s profile is identical to that of three other extreme autocracies: North Korea, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.⁷⁹ The seventh is Swaziland, a hereditary monarchy

**Table A2:
Comparing
Current
Extreme
Autocracies**

	Executive Recruitment		Participation					
	Democracy	Autocracy	Regulation	Competitive	Openness	Constraints	Regulation	Competitiveness
Iraq	0	9	2	1	4	1	4	1
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 A3:
Comparing
Iraq with
other
current
autocracies**

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

whose minimal constraint on executive power – ostensible legislative approval of the king’s nomination of the prime minister and cabinet – affords it a -9 rather than -10.⁸⁰

Table A3 offers a contrast between the Polity codes of Iraq and those of coherent – but *not* extreme – autocracies. Thirteen of them are scored -7, with most distinguished from Iraq in one or both of two key respects. The most common configuration is that of China, Syria, Myanmar, Viet Nam, Laos and the Soviet Union (1953- 1987), each of which has markedly greater constraints on executive authority than Iraq. Belarus, Zimbabwe, Azerbaijan, and Eritrea also have executive constraints greater than Iraq, and repress political participation less severely as well. Even the hereditary monarchies which score -8 – Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Bhutan – feature greater constraints on executive authority than Iraq (as do Bahrain and Kuwait), and all but the UAE allow somewhat greater

political participation also. Only the idiosyncratic cases of Cuba and Libya have political participation and executive authority similar to that of Iraq.

⁷⁸ An identical set of codes is assigned to Yemen (1945) and Iran (1978) in the final year of their established extreme autocracies. Haiti’s (1985) codes are similar, but cumulate to -9 rather than -10 because participation is “significantly suppressed” rather than “severely repressed”.

⁷⁹ Identical codes are assigned to Mexico (1910), Ethiopia (1973), Guinea (1983), Algeria (1988), Ivory Coast (1989), Gabon (1989), Congo (1991), and Malawi (1992).

⁸⁰ An identical set of codes is assigned to Nepal (1980) and Jordan (1988).