NBER WORKING PAPER SERIES

DEMOCRACY BY MISTAKE

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Working Paper 23944
http://www.nber.org/papers/w23944

NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH
1050 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138
October 2017

I thank Alexander Libman, Staffan Lindberg, Thomas Pepinsky, Daniel Ziblatt, and other participants in the 2017 APSA convention (San Francisco), for helpful comments. I acknowledge support from the UCLA College of Letters and Sciences. The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Bureau of Economic Research.

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NBER Working Paper No. 23944
October 2017
JEL No. K00,N20,P16

ABSTRACT

How does democracy emerge from authoritarian rule? Influential theories contend that incumbents deliberately choose to share or surrender power. They do so to prevent revolution, motivate citizens to fight wars, incentivize governments to provide public goods, outbid elite rivals, or limit factional violence. Examining the history of all democratizations since 1800, I show that such deliberate choice arguments may help explain up to one third of cases. In about two thirds, democratization occurred not because incumbent elites chose it but because, in trying to prevent it, they made mistakes that weakened their hold on power. Common mistakes include: calling elections or starting military conflicts, only to lose them; ignoring popular unrest and being overthrown; initiating limited reforms that get out of hand; and selecting a covert democrat as leader. These mistakes reflect well-known cognitive biases such as overconfidence and the illusion of control.

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1 Introduction

Since authoritarian rulers rarely wish to give up power, the emergence of democracy out of dictatorship is at first sight puzzling. Such transitions replace the dominance of an individual or narrow group with a broader sharing of authority. Incumbent leaders suffer an unambiguous loss—one that, given the initial imbalance, they should have been able to prevent. And yet democratization happens.

A number of theories purport to explain why. Elites are said to embrace democracy as a way to: commit to future income redistribution, forestalling revolution (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006)("AR"); motivate citizens to fight foreign attackers (Ticchi and Vindigni 2008, Ferejohn and Rosenbluth 2017), or nudge future governments away from patronage (Lizzeri and Persico 2004). One elite faction might liberalize to win support against its competitors (R. B. Collier 1999, Llavador and Oxoby 2005). Or democracy could begin as a "great compromise" between deadlocked social groups (Rustow 1970), perhaps formalized in a "pact" (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 37-9).

One thing these arguments share is the assumption incumbents democratize *intentionally.* Rulers choose to do so because, given prevailing conditions, they think it is in their interest. Surrendering or dividing power is the cost leaders have to pay to prevent revolution, field an effective army, improve public services, sideline an elite rival, or limit social conflict. In Rustow's words, democracy results from a "deliberate decision on the part of political leaders" (Rustow 1970, 355).[2]

Examining all cases of democratization between 1800 and 2015, I document that some may, indeed, fit each of these arguments. Some incumbents—such as King Frederick VII of Denmark, who accepted constitutional monarchy in 1848—have deliberately chosen reform.

However, a different set of images dominates. For many, reform presents itself not as a calculated strategy but as a "leap in the dark" (Disraeli in 1867; Bismarck a few years later; Franco's heirs in Spain), a "jump in the dark" (Giolitti in 1912), or a "leap *into* the dark" (Poland's rulers after

[2] Some arguments—e.g. Lizzeri and Persico (2004)—focus on franchise extension rather than democratization in general; still, it seems worth examining whether their logic applies more broadly.

World War I).[3] Rather than clinching a deal with the masses, one king is pictured racing from the bridge table to "take ship for England from a lonely beach." Another ruler flees to exile without his medicine or glasses; many end in jail. Asked whether he was moving left or right, one bemused authoritarian confesses to "going around in circles."[4] France's Louis Philippe appears, in Tocqueville's phrase "like a man awakened at night by an earthquake... knocked flat before he had understood" (1964, 86-7). Chaos, myopia, and miscalculation loom larger in these accounts than rational planning.

In this paper, I conjecture that democracy has often emerged not because incumbent elites chose it but because, in seeking to *prevent* it, they made one or more critical mistakes.

To explore this question, I examined each of the 218 historical episodes that qualify as democratization under three common definitions.[5] From a range of sources, I composed a synopsis of each episode, noting agreements and disagreements among historians and analysts. I recorded whether each deliberate choice argument might help explain why democratization occurred and also noted whether any significant mistakes by the incumbents contributed.

Depending on which democratization definition is used, I find that each of the six intentionalist arguments could apply in from 4 percent of cases (nudging governments to reduce patronage) to 16-19 percent of cases (democratization by pact). At least one may have contributed in 28-33 percent. However, in 64-67 percent of cases the incumbents appear not to have intended to share power: they democratized by mistake.

The type of mistake varies; I identify several common patterns. First, many leaders succumb to hubris. Some—like Louis Philippe—underestimate the strength of opposition, fail to compromise or repress until too late, and are overthrown. Their revolutionary successors then introduce reforms.

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[3] Pharand et al. (2013, 7); Anderson (1993); Hopkin (1999, 162); *Corriere della Sera*, May 4, 1912, quoted in Larcinese (2011, 9); Biskupski, Pula, and Wróbel (2010, 120).

[4] King Manuel II of Portugal (Birmingham 1993, 148); Tunisia's Ben Ali (Tunisie Secret 2013); Mikhail Gorbachev (Remnick 1991).

[5] Correcting certain codings reduces the total to 201. The synopses (totaling 735 pages and citing 1,064 sources) will be posted online.

Others—like Augusto Pinochet in Chile—overestimate their popularity, call an election or referendum, neglect to manipulate sufficiently, and lose, splitting the elite and empowering opponents. Previously resistible pressures force concessions or drive them from office.

A second mistake—made by Leopoldo Galtieri in Argentina—is to initiate military conflict, expecting to win, only to lose not just the battle but political power, as colleagues defect and rivals mobilize. A third is to slide—like Mikhail Gorbachev after 1985—down the "slippery slope," introducing partial reforms to strengthen the regime, but inadvertently undermining it.

In each of these cases, the ruler does not mean to share authority in a democratic manner. But his misstep destroys the previous status quo, weakening him and empowering the opposition. In another scenario, not the top official but other members of the ruling group make the crucial blunder. They choose a leader—like Juan Carlos or later Adolfo Suárez in post-Franco Spain—whom they trust to preserve the system, but who destroys it.

Of course, not *all* errors lead to democratization. And those that do lead directly only to the fall of an incumbent dictator or authoritarian regime; democracy then emerges only if structural and other conditions permit. Nor is democracy a mistake for those empowered by it. I do not attempt to make any general, abstract, causal claims. What I do argue, based on the historical evidence, is that in most democratizations to date the rulers did not intend to surrender power. Rather, democratization occurred when they failed to choose the course most likely to avoid it.

That democratic transitions occur amid uncertainty is not a new point. O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986, 3-4) emphasized the importance of "elements of accident and unpredictability, of crucial decisions taken in a hurry with very inadequate information, … of dramatic turning points reached and passed without an understanding of their future significance." They mentioned some of the errors I discuss. For Przeworski (1991, 14), democracy is a system based on uncertainty, and democratization "is an act… of institutionalizing uncertainty." I demonstrate the aptness of these insights. But I also push the point further. For O'Donnell and Schmitter, myopia and miscalculation, although central, are problems for democratization rather than reasons for its success. Democracy typically requires deliberate action by one elite faction—"soft-liners"—who ally with moderate

opponents against “hard-liners.” It takes “the talents of specific individuals (*virtù*)” to overcome the vagaries of *fortuna* (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 5). In my argument, *fortuna* is not an obstacle but the hero of the story: reform occurs when *fortuna* overwhelms the *virtù* of autocracy’s defenders. Przeworski notes that misperceptions can lead liberalizers down what I call the “slippery slope.” Still, he seems to see democracy emerging mostly from rational negotiation between reformers and moderates (Przeworski 1991, 66). Capoccia and Ziblatt (2010, 938) also note the “potential causal importance of political mistakes, misperceptions, and unintended consequences on both strategic behavior and institutional outcomes,” although they do not develop this point further.

My argument relates to several literatures. Certain recent works have sought to check aspects of the AR argument against the historical record. Art (2012) examined 16 Western democratizations from the 19th and early 20th centuries, exploring whether fear of revolution prompted franchise expansions. He found significant evidence in only two of the 16 and ambiguous support in another three. Haggard and Kaufman (2012, 2016) studied 78 “third wave” democratic transitions (and 25 reversions) between 1980 and 2008, and found about half occurred amid “distributive conflict,” one element of AR’s argument. They did not assess whether these reforms aimed to—or in fact did—commit the elite to future redistribution, AR’s key claim.

Analyzing 348 franchise extensions, Przeworski (2009) found these were more frequent after political unrest.[6] Aidt and Jensen (2014), in a narrower European sample, found franchise expansions increased after revolutionary events *anywhere in Europe*, a plausible proxy for revolutionary threat. I also find unrest was common before democratization; however, few episodes fit other elements of AR’s account. For instance, rather than an incumbent democratizing to preempt revolution, it was often revolutionaries who democratized after ousting the previous incumbent.[7]

Methodologically, the paper is an exercise in process tracing—“the analysis of evidence on processes, sequences, and conjunctures of events within a case for the purposes of either developing or testing

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[6] He reports weak or no statistical evidence for the Lizzeri Persico argument about patronage and for the claim that franchise extensions aimed to motivate citizens to fight in wars.

[7] For instance, France in 1848, Portugal in 1911.

hypotheses about causal mechanisms" (Bennett and Checkel 2014, 7). Given the focus on roughly 200 cases, this might be termed a "large-N" application. It also aims to contribute to the "historical turn" in democratization studies (Capoccia and Ziblatt 2010, Kreuzer 2010).

Two sets of causes of democratization are often distinguished. Some relate to actions of players in the political game ("agency"), others to environmental factors—such as economic development, social organization, and inequality—that shape parameters and payoffs ("structure"). Most scholars now agree that neither is sufficient to explain regime change: what matters is their interaction (Kennedy 2010, Miller 2012). I focus here entirely on agency and have nothing to say about development, inequality, or other structural factors.[8]

The next section reviews deliberate choice explanations of democratization and clarifies what I mean by democratization by mistake. Section 3 discusses the method of analysis. Section 4 presents results for deliberate choice arguments and Section 5 results for democratization by mistake. Section 6 discusses the findings.

2 Theory

2.1 Democratization by choice

What might induce authoritarian rulers to surrender or share power? A number of arguments—some recent, some older—posit that they do so deliberately.

A first approach sees democracy emerging from a bargain, usually between rich and poor (although the division might be ethnic, racial, or religious). In one version, democratic institutions are the enforcement mechanism (AR 2006). The poor wish to expropriate the rich. At most times, they cannot coordinate a revolt, but occasionally some shock such as economic crisis galvanizes them into action. At such moments, the wealthy would like to coopt the revolutionaries by promising a larger share of future income. However, both sides know the rich will be able to renege after the rebels

[8] However, my data reveal that democratizations followed or coincided with popular mobilization in 85-87 percent of cases, economic crises in 65-67 percent, and foreign pressures to democratize in 62 percent.

disband. Establishing a parliament and enfranchising the poor creates a mechanism to enforce such promises, thus preventing revolution.

This account has several observable implications. Democratization should follow or coincide with anti-elite mobilization in protests, strikes, or other mass actions, motivated by economic or redistributive demands. In response, incumbents should incorporate the poor into politics, for instance giving them voting rights. These reforms should, in turn, increase redistribution from rich to poor and prompt the poor to demobilize rather than continue agitation. And—since democratic institutions supposedly make the commitment *credible*—the rich should not cancel redistribution or reimpose autocracy almost immediately afterwards.[9]

AR (2006, 38-9) also suggest two variants in which the middle class is central. First, if the threat comes from the middle class—or if the poor cannot organize without middle class leadership—incumbents may need to enfranchise only the middle class, creating "partial democracy." Second, if redistribution to the middle class automatically benefits the poor as well, the middle class may serve as a "buffer." The policies it selects, if allowed to choose, are radical enough to appease the poor but not radical enough to upset the rich.

A second possible bargain concerns national defense. When a country is attacked, the rich need citizens to take up arms. By granting political rights, they motivate the poor to fight—and, afterwards, to put away their weapons. "The basis of democratization," wrote Weber, "is everywhere purely military in character." Democracy triumphed in Europe "because the community wished and was compelled to secure the cooperation of the non-aristocratic masses and hence put arms, and along with arms political power, into their hands" (Weber 1927, 324-5, Ticchi and Vindigni 2008, Ferejohn and Rosenbluth 2017). This account requires that democratization occur around the time of war or at least significant threat of it. The elite must consciously choose to extend rights—and should extend them to those needed to fight, or, later, to those it seeks to demobilize.

Another school of thought traces democracy not to compacts between rich and poor but to splits within ruling circles. Lizzeri and Persico (2004) view democratization as a way that growth-oriented

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[9] AR (2006, p.231) assume that "democracy has at least some window of opportunity before a coup can occur."

factions incentivize officials to buy support with public goods rather than patronage. Since public goods are non-rival, their usefulness for attracting votes increases with the electorate's size. Thus, broadening the franchise prompts politicians to substitute public goods for targeted transfers. Evidence might include claims by reformers that democratization would increase efficiency or reduce corruption.

Alternatively, political reforms might reflect partisan competition. One party might extend the franchise believing new voters will support it against a rival (R. B. Collier 1999, Llavador and Oxoby 2005). In this case, the historical record should show the reformers expected to benefit electorally from the reform.

A third school sees democracy as a peace-making device. It emerges, according to Rustow (1970, 352-5), as a "great compromise" after "prolonged and inconclusive political struggle" between social forces. Observable implications include a history of "prolonged and inconclusive" conflict and a reconciliation between factions that coincides with democratization. In some cases, groups may conclude an explicit agreement—a "pact"—defining rules to resolve conflicts (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 37-9). Evidence of this would—unsurprisingly—consist of a formal agreement between previously hostile forces.

In all these accounts, democracy is consciously chosen by the ruling group or some subset of it. But has democracy typically been a deliberate choice of incumbent elites? I suggest another possibility.

2.2 Democratization by mistake

If democracy sometimes results from incumbents' mistakes, what constitutes a mistake? By a mistake, I mean the choice of a course of action or inaction, the expected payoff of which is lower than that of some other feasible course. The expectations are those based on objective probabilities. In the language of game theory, a mistake is an action that, in a game of complete and perfect information, would be *off the equilibrium path*.

Mistakes come in two main forms. A mistake of *information* occurs when the actor has incorrect beliefs about the players' payoffs, the probabilities (if there are moves by Nature), or the timeline of

the game. The actor's reasoning may be perfect in itself. "We must not say," Cicero wrote, "that every mistake is a foolish one."[10] But this reasoning is based on faulty information. A mistake of *calculation* occurs when, despite accurately assessing payoffs, probabilities, and timeline, the actor solves the game incorrectly. He fails to see that a different action yields a higher expected payoff.

Not all actions with undesired outcomes are mistakes. One may lose a gamble that was, nevertheless, optimal ex ante. Or, faced with only bad options, one may choose the "lesser evil." Conversely, an action may be a mistake even if all options were bad. All that is required is that one other feasible course have a higher expected payoff.

It might seem odd at first to label a choice that is logical given what was known at the time a "mistake." Hindsight, in the cliché, comes with 20/20 vision. But "mistakes of information" do, in fact, conform with common usage and dictionary definitions.[11] That dictators, operating in an information-poor environment, sometimes blunder is not surprising, as I discuss later. But this suggests again why models that assume full information are likely to mislead.

To say a mistake led to democratization is not to say that the leader, having stumbled off his optimal path, did not then reconcile himself to losing power. In a sense, every leader who does not fight to the death to cling to office might be said to "choose" democratization. But that would be as strange as to say that a criminal who surrenders, having blundered into an ambush of armed police, goes to jail by choice. The leader "democratizes by mistake" if at some point he chooses a path that increases the odds of democracy relative to another feasible path that—had he realized it—he would have preferred. Finally, I do not assume that leaders prioritize staying in power above all else. If they choose to step down in order, say, to avoid bloodshed, that is not in itself a mistake. If they

[10] "Non enim omnis error stultitia est dicenda" (Cicero 44 BC).

[11] The *Oxford English Dictionary* includes among meanings "a regrettable choice" and illustrates with a quote from Eliot's *Middlemarch*: "How could I know, when I was fifteen, what it would be right for me to do now? My education was a mistake." The inability to have known something, while perhaps excusing a mistake, does not make it any less a mistake.

could have avoided *having* to step down to avoid bloodshed through wiser action earlier on, then their earlier misstep *is* a mistake.

3 Method

3.1 Identifying cases of democratization

How one conceptualizes democratization depends on how one thinks about democracy. One tradition places political regimes along a continuum, from pure autocracy to pure democracy (Bollen and Jackman 1989). Democratization is then any reform that moves the country a certain distance in the democratic direction. I call this a *directional* definition. A second tradition sees democracy as a binary category—either a system is one or it is not; democratization is a reform, however large or small, that moves the country across the definitional threshold (Przeworski, Alvarez, et al. 2000). I call this a *qualitative* definition. A third approach combines the first two in a *hybrid* concept. Such definitions require both a movement of a certain size in the democratic direction and the crossing of some qualitative threshold.

Which definition is most appropriate depends on the purpose (Collier and Adcock 1999). Fortunately, we need not privilege one here. I adopt one of each type and show similar conclusions follow whichever is used. My directional definition is an increase of six or more points on the 21-point Polity2 scale, completed within three years.[12] My qualitative definition employs data of Boix, Miller, and Rosato (2013)(henceforth "BMR"). They define a democracy as a country in which: elections are free and competitive, the head of government is either directly elected or answerable to an elected parliament, and at least half the male population has the right to vote. Democratization is a change from non-democracy to democracy.[13] Finally, for a hybrid definition, I adopt the Polity team's concept of a "major democratic transition." This occurs when: A) a country's Polity2 score

[12] Used, for instance, in Kapstein and Converse (2008). Since I am concerned with the *initiation* of democratization, where an extended rise in Polity2 contains several such cases, I focus on the first.

[13] Used in Boix and Stokes (2003).

rises by six or more points within three years, and B) its Polity2 score moves from the interval [-10, 0] to (0, 10] or from (0, 6) to [6,10].[14]

The broad coverage of these datasets permits examination of all democratizations between 1800 and 2010 (BMR) or 2015 (Polity IV). Applying these definitions yields a preliminary list of 218 cases. However, for various reasons, 17 turn out not to coincide with any political reform (see Appendix Table A1).[15] Excluding these 17 cases leaves 201 democratization episodes (see Table A2). Of these, 153 fit the directional definition, 129 the qualitative definition, and 138 the hybrid definition; as is evident, the cases overlap.

3.2 Method of categorization

For each case, I prepared a synopsis of relevant events and historians' interpretations, noting disagreements. Based on this evidence, I evaluated whether each intentional argument could help explain why democratization occurred. Setting the bar low, I treated the arguments as not mutually exclusive, coding each positive if it was at least *somewhat plausible* that it contributed. I also noted any evidence democratization occurred because of mistakes.

The sources—1,064 in all—included history books and articles, newspapers, magazines, web publications, biographies, memoirs, diaries, and published interviews of participants. Each type is subject to particular biases and distortions. Historians' may be influenced by their political beliefs or philosophical worldview. Newspapers and magazines target specific audiences. Memoirs and interviews, while offering unique insight into actors' motivations, are distorted by self-justification. (Since admitting mistakes is embarrasing, this should work *against* the conjecture that mistakes mattered.) Diaries not intended for publication are less self-serving, but they may be partial,

[14] Used in Kim and Bahry (2008), Rigobon and Rodrik (2004), and Rodrik and Wacziarg (2005). I correct some anomalies in Polity's coding (see Appendix Table A1, bottom two lines).

[15] Since Polity aims to characterize "authority patterns" rather than regime-type per se, some incongruities are to be expected. Based on the history, I also adjusted dates of several cases (see Table A1).

episodic, or esoteric. Temporally proximate primary sources are more likely to contain direct observation and unfiltered evidence of actors' thinking (Lieberman 2010, 41). Still, heeding Kreuzer's (2010, 383) call to "take not only history, but also historians seriously," I did not ignore the valuable analytical work already done by scholars to interpret the documentary record.

I adopted standard techniques to adjust for potential biases (e.g. Howell and Prevenier (2001)). First, for each source I considered, based on identity of producer and context, what type of bias was plausible, and discounted evidence that aligned with the posited bias. Second, I sought multiple sources to cross-check facts and compare interpetations. The ultimate test, as with any historical work, will be examination by critical readers; to maximize transparency, the synopses provide lengthy quotations from sources. While some readers might differ on a few codings, the real question is whether such changes would alter the general patterns. In fact, it would take a massive revision of codings to shift the balance of results.

As recommended by Lieberman (2010, 45), I graded the quantity and quality of sources available for each case and incorporate these judgments into the analysis. Specifically, I classified the materials: A) "a lot of information, and no serious disagreement on relevant points," B) "moderate amount of information and no serious disagreements on relevant points," C) "significant disagreement or ambiguity among sources on some relevant points, or key pieces of information lacking," D) very little information. I show patterns change little if I exclude cases graded C or D.

How to judge whether the evidence from a case fits each intentionalist argument? An example may help illustrate. In 1974, Greece returned to civilian rule after the colonels who had seized power in 1967 lost control amid Turkey's invasion of northern Cyprus (Diamandouros 1986). (This qualifies as democratization under both Polity and BMR criteria.) Did a rich elite democratize to commit to redistribution to the poor? First, the incumbents were not a rich elite: they were a military faction. Second, the junta in 1974—under Brigadier Dimitrios Ioannidis—had no intention of democratizing. Ioannidis had ousted the previous leader, Giorgios Papadopoulos, after the latter began a political liberalization. Large protests did occur, although led by students rather than the poor. Far from conceding political rights, the colonels sent tanks to crush them (Gallant 2001, 203-4). As the Cyprus disaster sapped Ioannidis's military support, other leading officers, led by President Phaidon

Gizikis, appointed as prime minister Konstantinos Karamanlis, a charismatic, center-right former premier with a reputation for anti-communism. It is hard to see how *that* could have represented a commitment to redistribute. Did the military democratize to motivate citizens to fight or reward them for fighting? The conflict with Turkey was, indeed, the trigger for the junta's collapse. However, the military did not democratize to persuade citizens to fight because, after Ioannidis's overthrow, those in charge were determined to avoid war. The joint chiefs of staff, who unanimously demanded Ioannidis' resignation, "agreed that war was impossible" (Woodhouse 1985, 157). Karamanlis, seeking a diplomatic resolution, "at once made it clear that there could be no question of a military confrontation with Turkey" and ordered demobilization (Clogg 1975, 341). Was it a case of one elite faction broadening access in the hope of winning votes? The junta was certainly not angling for votes, and, again, it did not mean to democratize. A "great compromise" or pact? Karamanlis did initially form a government of national unity—but one that totally excluded the left (Diamandouros 1986, 159-60). Karamanlis made decisions "explicitly avoiding reaching any 'settlement'—let alone a 'pact'—with other democratic political leaders" (Sotiropoulos 2002, 164). I coded this case negative on all scores.

How can one tell if a leader's course of action was a mistake? This raises challenging questions of historical interpretation and counterfactual reasoning. Such analysis is simultaneously "nothing new," "difficult," and essential to "all causal inference" (Tetlock and Belkin 1996, 3). Note that we need not make strong predictions about what would have happened in some counterfactual scenario; all we need judge is whether, at a key decision point, accurate information and correct strategic logic would have favored an alternative course.

One source of evidence is subsequent assessments by leaders or close associates. Despite the tendency to rationalize their actions, some former rulers do admit error. In 1997, the Albanian Democratic Party's tightening grip on power was broken by a nationwide insurrection of savers victimized by unregulated pyramid schemes. "We did not understand the reality," the party head, Tritan Shehu, confessed a few years later. "The best would have been to declare new elections in January, but none

of us recommended that" (Abrahams 2015, 182). Mikhail Gorbachev, asked later whether he would have begun reforms had he known where they would lead, replied "Probably not" (Ash 2009).[16]

Another source is accounts of well-informed contemporaries. As noted, Tocqueville portrays Louis Philippe as blundering into revolution. Louis Philippe's son, the Prince of Joinville, wrote to his brother in 1847 that: "The King is inflexible and will listen to no one… He has arrived at an age at which a man no longer accepts criticism" (Bourgeois 1919, 285-6). Such sources also reveal what alternatives seemed available at the time. For instance, Tocqueville claims to have warned the interior minister of rising popular anger and proposed concessions that could preserve stability (Tocqueville 1964, 32-3). Participants clearly believed that, had Guizot not banned the Paris reform banquet, had the King dismissed the unpopular Guizot earlier, or had the government controlled the troops that killed more than 50 protesters on the Boulevard des Capucines, the July monarchy might well have survived (Antonetti 1994).

Reports provide similar evidence of misperception in Mali in 1991. As protests mounted outside the palace, the country's dictator, Moussa Traoré, mocked advisors who urged him to announce reforms, saying: "You're panicking for nothing!" (Jeune Afrique 2011). He made only vague promises and was soon overthrown. A few days before Pinochet's plebiscite, his foreign minister described the president as "utterly confident. If he knows we are going to lose he must be a Sir Laurence Olivier!" (Muñoz 2008, 199). Of course, leaders sometimes aim to deceive and aides may dissemble. Still, such records provide prima facie evidence of mistaken assessments.

Having scoured the historical record, the final step was often a thought experiment. Was there an alternative course more likely to preserve the regime that—had he realized it—the leader, or the ruling group, would have preferred? Pinochet, for instance, could have postponed the plebiscite or campaigned for it harder, intimidating opposition more effectively. He could have resigned in favor of a new, more appealing military insider with less blood on his hands. Any of these steps would have

[16] This would not necessarily indicate a mistake if Gorbachev meant just that reforms had been a gamble that turned out badly. However, elsewhere he acknowledges specific "mistakes" (e.g. Steele (2011)).

increased the regime's survival odds.[17] Gorbachev could have begun with fiscal adjustment to accommodate the plunging oil price rather than ill-conceived economic reforms that created chaos.

4 Assessing the power of deliberate choice explanations

How often might each of the six intentional arguments help explain why democratization occurred? Table 1 shows aggregate results.

4.1 Credible commitment to redistribution

Depending on the democracy definition, the commitment-to-redistribution story might contribute in 6-8 percent of cases. Three seem plausible. Britain's Third Reform Act of 1884 enfranchised 50 percent of males for the first time. Gladstone's main motive was probably to seek votes for the Liberals and placate radicals within his party (Wright 1970, 13, Jones 1972, 28, R. B. Collier 1999, 61, 66). Still, demonstrations of agricultural workers had alarmed "some of the more nervous minds" in parliament (Hayes 1982, 71, 276). Such protests could not explain why Gladstone first promised reform in 1880, since then "there was no pressure to speak of" (Hoppen 1998, 651). But they may have inclined the Lords to acquiesce in 1884. A second case is 1994 South Africa. The Afrikaner elite may reasonably have feared revolution, and the transition agreement included an element of economic redistribution. The third case is Belgium in 1848, when a Liberal government broadened the franchise to coopt the lower and middle bourgeoisie and split them from the radicals (Witte, Craeybeckx and Meynen 2009, 55-6), while—perhaps not accidentally—securing Liberal majorities for "most of the next forty years" (R. B. Collier 1999, 91).

AR (1996) cite Argentina in 1911-12 as a confirming case, and I include it, with reservations. The conservatives who introduced reforms seem not to have thought these would threaten their power. Believing "the political status quo would be maintained" (R. B. Collier 1999, 46, Lewis 2003, 77), the

[17] Some incumbents—often dominant parties—choose to democratize, anticipating that they will continue to dominate under a competitive order (Slater and Wong 2013). I do not consider that in itself a mistake.

elite was “shaken” by its “unprecedented political defeat” (Winn 2006, 115). The 1905 uprising that supposedly dramatized the revolutionary threat enjoyed, according to Rock (2002, 193), “virtually no popular support”; the newspaper *La Nación* dismissed it as a “parody of sedition.” It was *after* the reforms that worker unrest exploded (Rock 1987, 196). The middle class Radicals, empowered by the reforms, harshly repressed worker militancy (Winn 2006, 115). These issues notwithstanding, I code the case positive to give the argument the benefit of the doubt. Others coded positive (all with reservations) include Colombia (1937), Albania (1990-92), South Korea (1988), Nepal (1990 and 2006), Sweden (1911), the Netherlands (1917), and Uruguay (1985).

Table 1. Democratizations for which deliberate choice arguments might fit (percentage of cases)

	Democratization concept		
	Polity	*MDT*	*BMR*
Democracy as commitment to redistribute, preventing revolution (Acemoglu Robinson 2006)	6	7	8
Democracy to motivate masses to defend regime in war or civil war (e.g. Tichi and Vindigni 2008)	4	4	5
Democracy to reduce patronage (Lizzeri and Persico 2004)	4	4	4
Democratization to increase support for incumbent party (e.g. Collier 1999)	5	5	10
Democracy the result of “great compromise” after “prolonged and inconclusive struggle” (Rustow 1970)	14	16	15
Democracy the result of pact (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1985)	16	17	19
At least one of these arguments	28	30	33

Source: Author’s assessments. See Appendix for detailed historical sources.
Note: BMR: Boix, Miller Rosato definition; MDT: “Major Democratic Transition” under Polity definition.

Why does this argument, which seems plausible, not fit more cases? Like other scholars (Przeworski 2009, Aidt and Jensen 2014, Haggard and Kaufman 2016, 2012, Treisman 2015), I find that mass unrest does often precede democratization: historical accounts mentioned some kind of popular mobilization in 85-87 percent of cases. However, mass unrest can lead to democratization by paths other than the one AR describe.

First, some incumbents, rather than democratizing to prevent revolution, are overthrown by one. A post-revolution regime then does the democratizing (13-17 percent of cases). In 1848 Paris, the ragbag of left-wing journalists, socialist agitators, middle class notables, and one romantic poet who declared the republic were certainly not the July monarchy's elite.[18] Second, some popular mobilizations have nothing to do with redistribution; in Armenia in 1997-8, for example, a non-democratic government fell over policy on Nagorno-Karabakh. Third, reversing AR's logic, some democratizations occur when a rich elite, eager to *reduce* redistribution, helps overthrow a left-wing dictator (cf. Ansell and Samuels (2014)). Finally, in economically troubled states, political reforms are sometimes offered not to commit to redistribution but as a substitute for it. Poland's Communist leaders thought that by allowing Solidarity some official role they could "get opposition support for … painful measures (particularly price rationalization)" (Domber 2013, 68). In short, many episodes that superficially resemble AR's story actually follow a different logic.

4.2 Motivating citizens to defend the regime in war or civil war

I found some evidence for this argument in 4-5 percent of cases. Giolitti's expansion of Italy's franchise in 1912 is often linked to Rome's Libyan campaign: "In 1912, as Italy's conscript soldiers faced death in the Libyan desert, it was impossible to deny them the vote any longer" (Clark 1984, 188). In 1984 El Salvador, the ruling junta's limited reforms may have sought to to buy citizens' help against a guerrilla insurgency. As the civilian president, José Napoléon Duarte, put it: "The officers were afraid the armed forces might not be able to put out the fires of revolution. To save the armed forces, they would have to break their alliance to the oligarchy and realign with political forces that could win popular support" (Duarte and Page 1986, 97).

Some cases are more tenuous. Austria's 1920 democratization did not aim to motivate the population to fight: the war was over. But elites may have hoped to pacify returning troops. China's political opening in 1911-12 occurred amid a revolution that overthrew the Qing regime. But that revolution was in part the unintended consequence of reforms—including the creation of provincial assemblies

[18] The AR (2006) model includes revolutions, but they are not supposed to lead to democracy.

with broad franchise—designed to strengthen the government against Western invaders and internal rebellions (Tanner 2009, 408-29). I code these cases positive.

Although elites rarely democratized to motivate citizens to fight, war mattered in other ways. Sometimes countries got democracy because they *lost* wars and the victors insisted—a pattern Therborn called "democracy by defeat" (Therborn 1977). Hungary democratized in 1920 at the urging of the Allies. "The French insisted on the formation of a 'democratic' government," General Horthy sniffed. "Against my emphatic advice, Károlyi submitted to this demand" (Horthy 2000, 120). Japan and the Philippines enacted democratic constitutions after World War II under US occupation. In Germany in 1918-19, those left of the ruling elite accepted constitutional monarchy and then a republic as the only way to get an armistice from the Allies (A. Taylor 2004 [1945], 209, R. B. Collier 1999, 105).

Oddly, France democratized in 1871 after defeat by an *authoritarian* power. Bismarck, reluctant to deal with a provisional government that might prove ephemeral, called for an elected assembly. "Negotiating with this Government, can we hope to achieve something solid?" he asked Thiers. "I am myself of the opinion that in order to treat of peace, an Assembly elected by the nation is better than a restoration of the Empire" (Thiers 1915, 35, 76).

In other cases, military defeat delegitimizes an incumbent. Argentina's 1983 transition was linked to the Falklands War—not because the military wished to reward conscripts for fighting, but because the Falklands fiasco, among other failures, discredited the generals. In the longer run, war may facilitate democracy by "building administrative capacity, boosting the economy, or integrating the nation" (Mansfield and Snyder 2010, 25). Support for these links, too, may not be strong. Mansfield and Snyder (2010) found that among 38 cases in which war preceded democratization, historical evidence suggested war *caused* the reforms in only five, and was "ambiguous or dubious" in 12.

4.3 Nudging governments to prefer public goods to patronage

In December 1875, a Turkish constitutional reformer, Midhat Pasha, complained that the Ottoman Empire was being undermined by corruption.

> [T]he service of the State was starved, while untold millions were poured into the Palace, and the provinces were being ruined by the uncontrolled exertions of governors who purchased their appointments… The only remedy that he could perceive, lay, first, in securing a control over the sovereign by making the Ministers—and especially as regarded the finances—responsible to a national popular Assembly (Midhat (1903, 80)).

The next year, at Midhat Pasha's urging, a new sultan enacted a constitution that guaranteed personal liberty and the rule of law and introduced a bicameral parliament. This appears to fit the Lizzeri Persico argument.[19]

Even interpreting loosely to include all democratic reforms aimed at supporting modernization or reducing corruption, I found few others—about 4 percent. In Bolivia in 1880, mining elites hoped stable civilian government would attract investment in railways. In Costa Rica (1948-9), a centrist government forged a coalition behind democracy and economic opportunities for the growing middle class (Yashar 1997, 189-90). Early 19th century Britain might fit, as Lizzeri and Persico suggest. However, only the Third Reform Act of 1884 makes the list of democratizations under any of the three definitions, and I found no evidence reducing patronage was an influence then.

4.4 Recruiting new voters to out-compete elite rivals

However, the UK's Third Reform Act *was* among the 5-10 percent of cases that might fit the elite competition argument. Historians have characterized Gladstone's bill to enfranchise rural householders as a piece of "cold political calculation" (Wright 1970, 13), which his radical colleague Joseph Chamberlain believed "would give the Liberals a majority in the next elections" (Jones 1972, 28, R. B. Collier 1999, 66). Similar cases include José Batlle y Ordónez's introduction of the secret ballot and compulsory voter registration in Uruguay in 1915-16, which he thought would win his faction many voters (Vanger 2010, 29-32), as well as the Netherlands in 1897 and Norway in 1898.

[19] It did not end well. The following year, Sultan Abdülhamid banished Midhat Pasha, dissolved parliament, and indefinitely suspended the constitution (Howard 2001, 68).

4.5 A "great compromise" between deadlocked factions, or pact

Although exceptions exist, "great compromises" and pacts tend to coincide. The "great compromise" story may apply in 14-16 percent of cases, and pacts or their equivalent in 16-19 percent. I include in both categories: Venezuela's 1958 "Pact of Punto Fijo," Colombia's "National Front" agreements of 1956-8, Spain's transition of 1975-8, Uruguay's 1984 "Naval Club Agreement," and, with less confidence, Brazil in 1985 (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 37-47, Przeworski 1991, 90). I also accept Rustow's characterization of Sweden's 1911 reform as a "great compromise," although a pactless one. Besides such well-known examples, I include South Africa (1994), Poland (1989), the Netherlands (1917), Italy (1948), the Comoros' Fomboni Accord (2006), and Nepal (1990) (Chadda 2000, 111).

4.6 Change over time and robustness

Although each theory illuminates certain episodes, the deliberate choice stories cannot explain two thirds of the cases even somewhat plausibly. Do the arguments fit better in particular periods? Tables A3-A5 in the Appendix analyze the three "waves" of democracy separately.[20]

Since the first wave contains only 16 (BMR) to 24 (Polity) cases, results are more volatile. In that wave, most explanations perform somewhat better, although the "great compromise" story loses power. Still, except for elite party competition—which may have contributed in six of the 16 BMR cases—no single argument helps explain even one quarter of cases. In the second wave, the first three explanations lose almost all relevance, while the "great compromise" story rises to around 20 percent of cases under Polity and MDT definitions. The "great compromise" and pact arguments are also relatively salient in the third wave, while the others hardly ever apply.

Many "democratizations" studied here were subsequently reversed. Do deliberate choice arguments better explain those that proved permanent? Table A6 includes only cases for which the Polity2 score never fell below the level achieved at democratization (Polity2 and MDT definitions) or which

[20] I use Huntington's (1991) periodization: 1st wave: 1828-1926; 2nd wave: 1927-1962; 3rd wave: 1963-.

never reverted to non-democracy (BMR). Support is slightly stronger for most arguments, but still none is even somewhat plausible in about two thirds of cases.

Could patterns be distorted by inadequacies in the sources? One rough check is to observe whether patterns change if one excludes cases for which sources were less plentiful and revealing. Table A7 repeats the analysis using only cases for which I graded the source set A or B ("no serious disagreement on relevant points" and either "a lot" or "a moderate amount" of information). In fact, the patterns are almost identical.

5 Assessing the frequency of democratization by mistake

How often did democratization follow from incumbents' errors? Table 2 summarizes the findings. In 64-67 percent of cases, evidence suggests incumbents did not mean to democratize: democratization occurred because they made one or more mistakes. What sorts of mistakes?

5.1 Hubris

5.1.1 Ignoring warnings and getting overthrown by popular revolt

In 13-17 percent of all cases, democratization occurred after the incumbent fell to a popular uprising, having failed to heed and adequately respond to unrest. Of course, not all revolutionary overthrows result from mistakes: some incumbents had no better course of action. But in other cases, some alternative—often one proposed but rejected—would have increased the regime's survival odds.

Recall again Louis Philippe, who turned a series of reform banquets into a revolution by refusing even mild concessions. Thiers, his premier, pleaded with the king to add "fifty or a hundred thousand new electors." "Impossible!" he retorted. "I cannot part with my majority" (Senior 1878, 6). Instead, he parted with his crown. Mali's Traoré, who accused ministers of "panicking for nothing," also rejected even retractable promises that might have calmed rioters (Jeune Afrique 2011). Democratization began after the dictator's overthrow. Other who misjudged unrest and botched the response include Nicolae Ceaucescu (Romania 1989), Baby Doc Duvalier (Haiti 1990),

Mohammad Suharto (Indonesia 1998), Slobodan Milosevic (Yugoslavia 2000), Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (Tunisia 2011), and Blaise Compaore (Burkina Faso 2015). (Again, I do not claim that any available course would have reliably prevented their fall, only that in each case there was an alternative that would have reduced the odds, at least for a while.)

Table 2. Democratization as result of incumbents' mistakes (percentage of cases)

	Democratization concept		
	Polity	*MDT*	*BMR*
Hubris: Incumbent overestimates support	39	41	40
…as a result, incumbent fails to preempt revolt with concessions and/or repression, and is overthrown.	17	17	13
…as a result, incumbent calls election or referendum and suffers costly defeat.	24	24	29
Military adventure: Incumbent starts or enters war, hoping to rally public, but loses war and political control.	6	6	9
Slippery slope: Incumbent initiates partial reform, thinking this will stabilize authoritarian regime, but cannot stop.	31	30	34
Trusting a traitor: Incumbent elite selects leader it thinks will defend regime, but who undermines it.	8	7	10
Counterproductive violence: Incumbent represses in way that inflames protest, splits elite, or otherwise undermines regime	12	13	15
At least one mistake	67	67	64

Source: Author's calculations.

Note: BMR: Boix, Millier Rosato definition; MDT: "Major Democratic Transition" under Polity definition.

5.1.2 Calling a referendum or election—and losing

Many authoritarian leaders hold elections and referenda, hoping to demonstrate strength or bolster their legitimacy without any real risk (e.g. Gandhi and Lust-Okar (2009)). Yet some overestimate their popularity and do not manipulate sufficiently. Indeed, in 51 elections since 1945 in which fraud was alleged, the incumbent party nevertheless lost (data from (Hyde and Marinov 2012)). Overconfident of victory, insiders quarrel among themselves, weakening their candidates. After the

regime loses, the elite splits or abandons the dictator. The opposition, energized by the result and sometimes backed from abroad, suddenly acquires a focal point around which to mobilize.

Such electoral miscalculations preceded democratization in 24-29 percent of cases. Pinochet, certain he would win his plebiscite, was "stunned and enraged" when the opposition triumphed, roaring: "It's a big lie, a big lie. Here there are only traitors and liars!" (Constable and Valenzuela 1991, 309, Muñoz 2008, 199). Other junta members say he pressed them to impose a state of emergency and broaden his powers; blaming him for the crisis, they refused (Spooner 1994, 243-4). Sometimes overconfident incumbents deliberately *under*-do electoral manipulation or invite international monitors to legitimize their expected victory. Pinochet's team, "shaken by the spectacle of the Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos's disgrace in the fraudulent 1986 elections" thought "their best defense was to make fraud impossible" (Constable and Valenzuela 1991, p.304).

Other victims of electoral hubris include: Mate Granic (Croatia 2000)[21], Daniel Moi and Uhuru Kenyatta (Kenya 2002)[22], Nicaragua's Sandinistas (1990)[23], Poland's Communists (1989)[24], Abdou Diouf (Senegal 2000)[25], King Alfonso of Spain (1931)[26], and many more. In each case, the weakened incumbents could no longer prevent reform.

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[21] "Rarely has an election that was so closely monitored by the domestic press and overseas observers produced such a surprising result" (Bellamy 2001, 28).

[22] "The 'professor of politics' had miscalculated fundamentally… Moi and his advisors remained incredulous" (Steeves 2006, 227).

[23] "[W]hen the voting stations closed Sunday evening President Daniel Ortega was calmly writing his acceptance speech, having been lulled into unfounded optimism by a series of polls that gave him a huge percentage lead… 'But the polls,' people kept saying. 'The polls'" (Guillermoprieto 1990, 83).

[24] "'Never in our darkest nightmares did anyone predict such a shameful rout,' [one high party official] spluttered, gulping whiskeys and shaking his head in astonishment" (Meyer 2009, 81). The Communists expected Solidarity to do well but not a landslide.

[25] "Shut up in his palace, he did not see in time the ground swell that would sweep him away" (Diop, Diouf and Diaw 2000, 174).

[26] "No one was more surprised by the magnitude of the [opposition's] success than were the Republicans themselves" (Mendizabal 1938, 105).

5.2 Initiating or entering a military conflict—and losing

Table 1 showed very limited support for the view that authoritarians democratize to motivate citizens to fight wars. However, war may matter in another way. Some dictators start military conflicts, thinking this will rally citizens behind them, but then lose, humiliating the country and splitting the regime (Oakes 2012).

Consider General Galtieri, who, facing domestic unrest, invaded the Falkland Islands in 1982. Galtieri was determined *not* to democratize. "In the last fifty years other military procesos, faced with the proliferation of criticism, took the wrong path and thought elections were the solution to the political problem," he said in 1981. "[W]e must not make the same mistake" (Stohl 1987, 229). Instead, he made a different one.

According to Robben (2007, 313), "Galtieri hoped that the Argentine people would close ranks behind his historic move, that the economic and human rights problems would receive less national and international attention, and that a conventional war would restore the military honor lost in the dirty war." Critically, he assumed Britain would not fight. Galtieri later admitted: "Personally, I judged any response from the English scarcely possible, indeed absolutely improbable" (Rock 1987, 378). In fact, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher sent a fleet to reclaim the islands. Argentina's surrender three months later prompted violent protests in Buenos Aires, which divided the military and forced Galtieri's resignation. His successor, General Bignone, facing an export collapse, financial crisis, mass demonstrations, and strikes, saw no option but retreating to the barracks: "The regime did not consciously hand power over to the civilians; the withdrawal was largely unpremeditated" (Stohl 1987, 222).

Similar mistakes help account for 6-9 percent of democratizations. Not all represent diversionary wars, but in each case the ruler could have stayed out. Germany and Austria's democratizations in 1919-20 followed from their loss in World War I. German democracy in the late 1940s reflected Hitler's defeat. Other cases include the Greek colonels of 1974; Paraguay's war against Brazil in 1864; Idi Amin's invasion of Tanzania; and, possibly, Giolitti's 1911 Libyan campaign, which proved

harder than expected and, although initially boosting the prime minister's popularity, also "radicalized workers and the trade-union movement" (R. B. Collier 1999, 69).[27]

5.3 Enacting partial reforms to stabilize the regime—but undermining it

Often, authoritarian leaders think they can introduce partial reforms without surrendering significant power. They may hope to buy international respectability, coopt domestic opposition, or revitalize their bureaucracy. But the legislatures, "opposition" parties, "national conferences," or other institutions they create can get out of hand (Levitsky and Way 2010). Instead of renewing the regime, reforms push it onto the slippery slope. In about one third of cases, democratization followed mistakes of this type.

Take Mikhail Gorbachev. His memoirs make clear his aim was a kind of humane socialism, led by a reinvigorated Communist Party (Gorbachev 1996). But his reforms engendered forces and conflicts he could not manage. Other sliders include Mathieu Kérékou in Benin (1991), Hastings Banda in Malawi (1993), Manuel Costa de Pinto in São Tomé and Principe (1991), and (probably) Ismet Inönü in late 1940s Turkey.

5.4 Selecting a leader to preserve the regime—who destroys it

Another error involves not the top figure but the rest of the ruling group. In 7-10 percent of cases, insiders choose a leader they believe committed to preserving the existing order, but who undermines it. Either he was always a secret reformer or he becomes one.

In Spain, Generalisimo Franco thought he had made secure arrangements to preserve dicatorship after his death, packing corporatist bodies with hardline loyalists. As he said: "Everything is tied up, and well tied" (Cercas 2012, 30). But he made two mistakes. First, he chose the young prince Juan Carlos as successor. As King, Juan Carlos proved committed to preserving not the fascist state but the monarchy, which he thought required modernizing political institutions. Second, Franco

[27] Of course, I do not mean that Hitler, for instance, went to war "by mistake," only that the German loss in World War II—not what Hitler intended—led to democratization—again, not Hitler's plan.

tolerated the rise of an apparently loyal careerist, Adolfo Suárez, even while considering Suárez's ambition "dangerous" (Ibid., 301). As Juan Carlos's prime minister, Suárez systematically dismantled fascism.

To the colleagues who appointed him General Secretary, Gorbachev also came to seem a traitor. "We believed in Gorbachev for a very, very long time," wrote one Politburo member, Vitaly Vorotnikov. "Alas, we realized what was happening far too late" (Dobbs 1997, 262). In Taiwan, Lee Teng-hui, the reformist president after Chiang Ching-kuo's death, was similarly reviled by many KMT veterans. After Lee stepped down, they expelled him from the party (Kagan 2007, 12).[28] Other "traitors" include Roberto Ortiz in Argentina in the 1930s (Potash 1969, 105, Lewis 2003, 89) and B.J. Habibie, Suharto's hand-picked successor in Indonesia, who "had never intimated any special fondness for liberal democracy" (Horowitz 2013, 43), but who initiated reforms that enraged the Golkar bosses and army generals.

5.5 Using repression counterproductively

Violent repression sometimes succeeds in crushing opposition. In other cases, it backfires, catalyzing protest, prompting defections of security personnel or other insiders, or intensifying foreign pressures (Sutton, Butcher and Svensson 2014). Such mistakes can threaten the regime's survival. For instance, in Bangladesh in 1990, the shooting of several students and one professor sparked nationwide demonstrations that, within weeks, led to the arrest of President Ershad for corruption (Crossette 1990, Rizvi 1991). Such counterproductive violence occurred before 12-15 percent of democratizations.

5.6 Other mistakes

One additional blunder is to pick unnecessary fights with powerful social actors, as Perón did in 1955 when he attacked the Catholic Church, perhaps wrongly thinking this would win him votes (Crassweller 1996, 279). In fact, it re-awakened "the dormant resistance of segments of the old

[28] It is less clear that Chiang, who recognized the need for reform, would have opposed Lee's actions.

pluralist order" (Rock 1987, 317). Another is to win so big it changes the game. In early 1990s Fiji, the ethnically Fijian elite imposed a constitution that discriminated so blatantly against the Indian majority that Fijians could no longer unite against the Indian threat. The Fijian vote fragmented, forcing leaders to govern in coalition with an Indian party (Premdas 1995, 141).

5.7 Timing and robustness

The importance of mistakes appears relatively constant (see Tables A8-A10). Depending on democracy concept, the proportion ranges from 56-75 percent in the first wave and 61-64 percent in the second to 65-66 percent in the third. While hubris is consistently salient, its main manifestation changes. Early on, hubristic dictators mostly succumb to unexpected revolutions; in later years, they more often suffer from electoral overconfidence. Sliding down the "slippery slope" is quite rare early on but becomes much more widespread by the third wave. The role of mistakes is *higher*—69-72 percent—if one restricts analysis to high information cases (Table A11), and only slightly lower—60-64 percent—using only democratizations that were not reversed (Table A12).

6 Discussion and Conclusion

Given the high stakes, why do so many autocrats miscalculate? In part, they err for the same reasons we all do. A range of cognitive biases and limitations likely contribute. In other ways, dictators' errors are distinctive, rooted in distortions generated by the authoritarian environment.

Some failures seem all too human. Autocrats' hubris could be just the universal tendency toward wishful thinking, writ large (Taylor and Brown 1988). "We exaggerate the odds that our favorite team or candidate will win a match or election" (Krizan and Windschitl 2007, 95). Overoptimistic in our judgments, we are also overconfident in them: those who claim 100 percent certainty are wrong 20 percent of the time (Lichtenstein, Fischhoff and Phillips 1982). And we overestimate our own relative competence: 93 percent of Americans and 69 percent of Swedes, in a 1980 experiment, rated their driving skill above the median (Svenson 1981). At the same time, previous success—even if resulting from chance—engenders the "illusion of control," an exaggerated sense of mastery. After a series of wins in a coin tossing game, even sophisticated players feel they are somehow contributing

to the outcomes (Langer and Roth 1975, 955). When information challenges the rosy view these biases create, "dissonance reduction" will incline dictators to disregard it (Festinger 1957). Leaders may also succumb to the "ostrich effect"—a tendency to avoid exposure to bad news (Karlsson, Loewenstein and Seppi 2009).

These biases increase the odds a dictator will blunder into an avoidable disaster—whether a revolution, electoral humiliation, or military defeat. The illusion of control and overconfidence also render dictators vulnerable to the slippery slope. Meanwhile, the "anchoring heuristic"—the tendency for irrelevant ideas that happen to be in the mind to influence unrelated judgments—may cause autocrats to base "estimates on present values or on extrapolations of current trends," disregarding the possibility of radical change (Kahneman and Lovallo 1993, 27).

Although these biases affect everyone, political power may intensify them. The hubris developed by some leaders constitutes an "acquired personality disorder" (Owen and Davidson (2009)). Consequences include "impetuosity, a refusal to listen to or take advice and a particular form of incompetence when impulsivity, recklessness and frequent inattention to detail predominate." Hubristic leaders "come to overestimate the reliability and validity of their intuitions" (Claxton, Owen and Sadler-Smith 2015, 68). Neurological evidence suggests power can impair the ability to process the actions and emotions of others (Hogeveen, Inzlicht and Obhi 2014).

Other pathologies are more specific to authoritarian systems. Whereas in democracies vigorous opposition and media test the leader's arguments and factual claims, dictators face fewer constraints. Autocrats often—deliberately or unwittingly—isolate themselves from discordant views. Over time, they exclude associates who question them, promoting flatterers. Among Nicaragua's Sandinistas in the 1980s, for instance, "bad-news bearers were stigmatized as Contra allies or weaklings. The lower-level Party cadres and militants, eager to please… filtered out the negative from their reports" (Guillermoprieto 1990, 89). Kenneth Kaunda "surrounded himself with conmen" (Dowden 1991). Venezuela's Pérez Jiménez "depended for advice on sycophants and third-rate generals" (Burggraaff 1972, 157). Occasionally, dictators may even believe their own propaganda. In Malawi, Hastings Banda unwisely called—and lost—a referendum in 1993. Some said the massive crowds attending

support rallies had boosted his confidence. In fact, many attendees had been dragooned by the regime's paramilitary youth groups (Muluzi 1999, 164-5).

Shielded from criticism, some authoritarian leaders exploit exotic information sources. Pinochet consulted a fortune teller (Muñoz 2008, 199). Ferdinand Marcos, a dabbler in Jewish Kabbalah, also turned to "faith healers and the occult" (Romulo 1987, 198). Burma's General Than Shwe consulted a deaf-mute soothsayer (Daily Telegraph 2007). Among African dictators, such practices are not unusual: Idi Amin, Jean-Bédel Bokassa, and Francisco Macías Nguema all "relied on sooth-sayers, sorcerers, and diviners" (Decalo 1985, 224).

While physical and mental deterioration affect leaders in all systems, they are more likely to impair decisionmaking in autocracies. Peaceful mechanisms for removing dictators are rare, and they may fear for their lives if they retire. In 2000-10, 9 percent of leaders in non-democracies (Polity2 < 6) were over 75, compared to 4 percent in democracies.[29] Even if Tocqueville exaggerated in diagnosing Louis Philippe's "senile imbecility," some dictators do become disabled in office. Primo de Rivera, by the late 1920s, was "suffering severely from diabetes and had become lethargic" (Payne 1993, 21-2). Towards the end, Mao "was unable to speak coherently," perhaps due to Parkinsonism. After a serious stroke in 1968, Antonio Salazar was replaced by Marcello Caetano; yet aides conspired to convince the dictator he was still in charge (Ludwig 2002, 262-3).

Even for healthy incumbents, forecasting political events is unusually hard in dictatorships. Polls are likely to mislead. In such systems, nervousness about seeming disloyal may generate high non-response rates or preference falsification (Kuran 1997). According to Kamiński (1999, 97), non-responses in Polish surveys rose from 3-14 percent to 30 percent as Solidarity emerged. In Uruguay before the 1980 plebiscite, almost half of those approached refused to answer polls (Schumacher 1980). Surveys also underestimated the Peronists' appeal in 1973 Argentina (O'Donnell 1988, 253).

Moreover, attitudes can change dramatically during electoral campaigns if media restrictions are loosened, allowing opposition candidates to advertise. Given the low-information starting point, a little publicity can have a big effect. In both Poland and Uruguay, televised debates seriously

[29] Calculated from Archigos dataset.

damaged the incumbents (Kamiński 1999, 86, Schumacher 1980). The effect is amplified by the tendency towards informational cascades in environments of preference falsification (Kuran 1997). The apparently solid support when a ruler calls a semi-free election can metamorphose into an opposition landslide.

Regime agents, although seeming loyal and promising victory, may defect en masse as their own informational cascade unfolds (Rundlett and Svolik 2016). Shortly before the 1990 Nicaraguan election, the Sandinistas' internal polls showed their approval sinking. When officials questioned local agents, these said "they were willing to put both hands and both feet into the fire, that we were way ahead, and that on February 25 they would deliver the votes" (Guillermoprieto 1990, 89). That did not happen.

If mistakes are so important to the history of democratization, why do scholars emphasize intentionalist theories? Several reasons seem plausible.

First, just as cognitive biases predispose leaders to make certain mistakes, other biases cause scholars to underestimate the role of error in history. "Hindsight bias" makes what happened seem inevitable (Fischhoff 1982, 341-3). Yet, outside Greek tragedies, mistakes are usually thought avoidable. Meanwhile, the "representativeness heuristic" leads scholars to expect a historically significant phenomenon like democratization to have a historically significant cause.[30] "By the logic of representativeness, a small event is unrepresentative of a great outcome, and so the two should not be related causally" (Kuran 1997, 260). Primed to discover a grand, deterministic process, we neglect the role of foolish blunders.

Mistakes have causes, but—unlike intentional actions—generally no meaning. Yet humans are predisposed to seek meaning and find it even where there is none—for instance, identifying patterns in random noise. An interpretation of history that has only causes and no meaning feels unsatisfactory. Focusing on accidents violates "the norm of reporting history as a good story, with all the relevant details neatly accounted for" (Fischhoff 1982, 348).

[30] Historians call this the "fallacy of identity"—"the assumption that a cause must somehow resemble its effect" (Fischer 1970, 177).

Emphasizing mistakes violates norms not just in history, but also in much of economics and political science. To a game theorist, an explanation in which actors leave the equilibrium path seems to miss the point of what explanation is. Behavioral economics has brought biases and cognitive limitations to the forefront in many fields, but not yet in economic history and the political economy of regime change.

It is precisely in these areas that one should expect the most errors. Intuitive judgments tend to be more accurate when the setting is regular and rule-based and when individuals have had opportunities "to learn these regularities through prolonged practice" (Kahneman 2011, 240). Examples include chess and fighting fires. Few environments are *less* regular and conducive to practice than regime transitions—rare events involving multiple actors in complex configurations.

Other settings of institutional reform also suggest the historical importance of error. Rational accounts of how elites choose electoral systems—PR or majoritarian, and their subtypes—have sparked debate (Boix 2010, Cusack, Iversen and Soskice 2010, Kreuzer 2010). Yet rational accounts have trouble explaining the fact that in both early 20th Century Western Europe and postcommunist Eastern Europe incumbents often "supported electoral rules that later eliminated them from politics" (Andrews and Jackman 2005, 65).

Another example is the global spread of human rights treaties. The rapid ratification of such agreements by some of the worst offenders suggests a puzzling myopia. The year before Pinochet held his plebiscite, his government signed the UN's Convention Against Torture. Clearly, he did not foresee that this treaty would be used against him 11 years later by a Spanish judge. "[I]n a period of rapid flux," writes Sikkink (2011, 40), "states may misunderstand the implications of their actions. They make mistakes." African leaders whose countries were early ratifiers of the Rome Statute creating the International Criminal Court found themselves among the court's early targets (Ibid.).

Recognizing the role of democratization by mistake is important for several reasons. First, it suggests a revised view of the history of the last two centuries. At times, democracy did emerge from the rational clash of opposed forces. Yet in most cases it was neither simply conquered by a rising class

nor granted by an enlightened elite; it resulted from a series of blunders and reactions that no one fully intended or understood.

Second, incorporating the role of mistakes may improve predictions of regime change. While structural factors such as economic development do help explain democratization in the medium run (10-20 years), they offer little guidance on precise timing (Treisman 2015). More accurate predictions require supplementing the study of predispositions toward democracy with that of triggers of change. Deliberate choice models suggest looking for such triggers among factors that alter the interests of incumbents. Yet, if mistakes are often crucial one needs also to consider changes in leaders' information processing and cognitive functioning.

Further study may uncover what factors make mistakes more likely. Both leaders' age and tenure should matter. Age both increases the odds of impairment and reduces risk-taking (Truett 1993). Experience accrues with time in office and more competent leaders will survive longer, so one might expect new leaders to make more mistakes. Consistent with this, dictators are most likely to lose office early on (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2010, 941). However, hubris, the "ostrich syndrome," and informational filters tend to develop over time, so the relationship might be non-linear, with odds of mistakes greatest both early and late in a leader's tenure.

Some subtypes of authoritarian regimes may be more prone to blunders. Those with collective leadership—some single-party and military regimes, oligarchical proto-democracies—may vet policies better than personalistic dictatorships or monarchies (Weeks 2014). (Single-party regimes are particularly resilient (Geddes 1999, 132).) Finally, a point that is obvious but important: mistakes are more likely when dictators face critical economic or political challenges. Confronting crises, they may risk experimenting with potentially destabilizing innovations that they would avoid in easier times.

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Appendix

Table A1: Notes on problematic cases

Country	Year	BMR cases
BMR's measure turns positive when democratic countries acquire full sovereignty, even if institutions are otherwise unchanged. Three such cases excluded.		
Cuba	1909	Return to sovereignty after withdrawal of US troops.
Pakistan	1950	Coding apparently based on establishment of sovereignty, not democratization.
Luxembourg	1890	No democratization. Just change of royal dynasty from the House of Orange-Nassau to the House of Nassau-Weilburg, ending the "personal union" with the Netherlands and thus firmly establishing the Duchy's independence.
BMR's definition includes requirement that 50 percent of males have vote; when literacy requirement for voting exists, countries can pass this threshold due to literacy increase (without any political reform). One case excluded.		
Chile	1909	No political reform—just demographic change. "For example, in Chile, where being literate was a necessary requirement to vote until the mid-20th century, it was only by 1909-10 that a majority of adult males were recorded as being literate. Accordingly, we code Chile as fulfilling condition (3) at that point in time" (Boix, Miller, Rosato 2013).
Could not find any evidence of democratization, so excluded (eight cases)		
Sri Lanka	1991	Nothing in literature suggests democratization occurred in 1991. In 1994, the ruling UNP lost parliament and presidency for the first time in 17 years, but the new President, Kumaratunga, was unable to make any political reforms, so also hard to see that year as a case of democratization.
Panama	1950 & 1952	Does not appear to have been any democratization in these years. Politics remained dominated by the caudillo José Antonio Rémon. "[T]he immediate postwar period saw a temporary shift in the locus of power from the civilian aristocracy to the National Police under Commander José Antonio Rémon. Between 1948 and 1952 he installed and removed presidents with unencumbered ease. Among his behind-the-scenes manipulations were the denial to Arnulfo Arias of the presidency he apparently had won in 1948, the installation of Arias in the presidency in 1949, and the engineering of his removal in 1951. Meanwhile, Remón increased salaries and fringe benefits for his men and modernized training methods and equipment; in effect, he transformed the National Police from a police into a paramilitary force. In the spheres of security and public order, he achieved a long sought goal by transforming the National Police into the National Guard and introduced greater militarization into the country's only armed force" (Nyrop 1980, p.33). "In July of 1948, the commandant's support for yet another scandalous vote swindle prepared the way for Domingo Díaz Arosemena's assumption of the presidency, to the detriment of Arnulfo Arias. Following President Díaz's death the next year, his successor Daniel Chanis requested Remón's resignation based on the latter's graft-related activities… Remón responded by overthrowing Dr. Chanis and handing over power to Second Vice-President Roberto Chiari (who, incidentally, was a first cousin to the police chief). But when the Supreme Court (remarkably) sustained Daniel Chanis' right to the presidency, Acting President Chiari notified the commandant that he would honor the ruling" (Mann 1996, p.68). A protest strike "paralyzed urban life" (Mann 1996, p.68). "Seeking a way

		out of the crisis, Remón opportunistically fetched Arnulfo Arias and installed him in the presidency… This action was justified with a recount of the ballots cast in 1948. It turned out that the *caudillo* had in effect won the election, but Domingo Díaz had 'mistakenly' been declared victor" (Mann 1996, p.68). "By 1951 President Arias had once more antagonized substantial segments of the population, not least because he decreed the replacement of the 1946 Constitution with his 1941 charter. On 8 May a large crowd demanded that the police chief remove the president. Remón hesitated until the National Assembly impeached Arias and elevated Vice-President Alcibíades Arosemena to the presidency, in a move sustained by the Supreme Court." After a gun battle with Arias' supporters, Arias was deposed (Mann 1996, pp.68-9). "The strongest opposition to Remón's 1952 election bid came from Harmodio Arias and the students, while the police provided his most valuable support. Remón was unpopular because of his repression of students and torture of prisoners since becoming police chief in 1947…. He was connected through family or business with about a quarter of Panama's elite" (Conniff 1990, p.628). After his election in 1952, "Remón reduced his possible future opposition by instituting a law, called the *Ley de 45,000*, which required that particular number of registered followers before a party would be officially recognized. This left Remón with only the weakened *Partido Liberal* to oppose him, leaving essentially a one-party, military-based, or, at least, military-led, system in place" (Harding 2001, pp.38-9). "Remón followed national tradition by enriching himself through political office. He broke with tradition, however, by promoting social reform and economic development. His agricultural and industrial programs actually reduced, temporarily, the country's overwhelming economic dependence on the canal and the zone" (Nyrop 1980, p.34). Remón required 45,000 signatures for legal recogition of parties, "prohibited strikes, outlawed radical groups, jailed Communists and imposed a 'voluntary' censorship on the press. At the same time, the judiciary was weakened through political appointments and intimidation. These changes created a quasi-dictatorship not unlike that of Remón's fellow strongman Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua" (Conniff 1990, p.629) Remón was assassinated in 1955.
Paraguay	2003	Does not seem to have been any clear improvement in the quality of the 2003 election or other evidence of democratization that year. See, for instance, Abente-Brun: "for the last century [Paraguay] has had a largely noncompetitive two-party system dominated alternatively by the Colorado Party (1887–1904 and 1947–2008) and the PLRA (1904–40), with two brief military interludes in 1936–37 and 1940–47. The Colorado Party ruled as a civilian hegemonic party between 1947 and 1954, then evolved into a military-civilian authoritarian regime under General Alfredo Stroessner (1954–89), and after a coup in 1989 transitioned back to a civilian hegemonic party for the next nineteen years until its defeat in 2008. Hence, civilian and military presidents came and went, and authoritarian, transitional, and democratic regimes alternated, but the Colorado Party always remained on top" (Abente-Brun 2009, p.144). Or Nickson, who doesn't distinguish 2003 from previous elections: "Previous 'democratic' elections [were] held in 1989, 1993, 1998, and 2003. Although they were

		multiparty elections, accusations of vote-buying and vote-rigging continued" (Nickson 2009, p.145). Perhaps one could make a case that the 2008 election—in which the Colorado Party lost for the first time—was a major political liberalization; see Nickson (2008): "The victory of Fernando Lugo in Paraguay's presidential election on 20 April 2008 marks an unforgettable turning-point to rank with any in the country's tortured history…. the real triumph and joy belongs "inside", in the dignified achievement of a fair election and the prospect of a peaceful transition of power in an environment where effective one-party rule has unbalanced the institutional and political culture for so long…. The good news is that Paraguay is finally embarking on a genuine democratic process, one that had been postponed for nearly twenty years since the Stroessner dictatorship ended in 1989" (Nickson 2008). But nothing comparable in 2003.
Zambia	2008	Not clear why the election this year marked a transition to democracy if the 2006 election did not. Since 2006 was also not a breakthrough, it looks more like a gradual process of improvement. "The 2006 elections marked a high water mark for the expression of democratic opinion in Zambia. A new electoral roll significantly increased the number of registered voters to 3,941,229. There was also a particularly high turnout of 71 percent. This reflected a continued steady increase in voter registration and turnout seen since democratization. Data from 1991 are unreliable. However, using as a baseline the earliest set of reliable data, in 1996, the voters' roll increased from 2.2 million then to 3.9 million in 2006, with the total number of votes cast more than doubling over the same period. The percentage of registered voters that turned out also increased from 58 to 71 percent. Secondly, whilst the 1996 and 2001 elections were marked by significant rigging, much of it organized from State House, the 2006 poll was widely recognized as free and fair. Although the verification process revealed some anomalies, and a few parliamentary results have since been nullified by the courts, for the first time since 1991 defeated presidential candidates did not dispute the results in the courts" (Larmer and Fraser 2007, p.620). Compare to evaluation of 2008: "Zambia is far from a consolidated democracy, as the stalled constitutional review process, state-dominated media, and the use of government resources to support the MMD's election campaign ably demonstrate. While the polls were no doubt far cleaner than the controversial election of 2001, representatives of foreign governments have admitted in private that they saw evidence of vote buying on both sides, and have grave doubts about the reliability of the results. As in previous elections, credible opinion polls suggested that Sata was set for a substantial victory, and the announcement of his defeat was met with incredulity in urban areas" (Cheeseman and Hinfelar 2010, p.69).
Dominican Republic	1966	No evidence of democratization. I think BMR judge this to be democratization because there is an election in 1966. But much evidence suggests this election should not be considered sufficiently free and fair.

		"The elections of 1966 took place while the country was under military occupation by U.S. Marines, an occupation that had come about precisely to prevent a victory by the Constitutionalists (of Bosch) and the reinstatement of Bosch in the presidency. A former CIA officer, Ray Cline, has recounted a meeting with President Johnson in which he described Balaguer… Johnson's response, he says, was, 'Get this guy in office down there!'" (Knippers Black 1986, p.41). "[T]here were reports, generally overlooked by the major media in the United States, of irregularities at the polls: of voters being transported from one place to another, of widespread forgery of identification cards, and of commandeering and switching of ballot boxes. It was also reported that soldiers and policemen staged an impressive show of force in every sizable town on election day and that some PRD supporters spoke of feeling intimidated" (Knippers Black 1986, p.41). "The overall total of votes cast in 1966 was 25 percent higher than the total for 1962 and 87 percent higher in Santo Domingo, where Bosch's 80 percent margin in 1962 was shaved to 63 percent. Balaguer's margin of victory corresponded almost exactly to the increase in the overall vote, as officially reported." The pro-Balaguer faction was "exercising a monopoly on armed force" and was backed by US Marines. "In the countryside and in lower-income districts of Santo Domingo, thousands of PRD activists were beaten and/or imprisoned during the electoral campaign, and several hundred were murdered. Many more were deported or fled into exile. Those who remained had good reason to be cautious" (Knippers Black 1986, p.42). One of Bosch's bodyguards was killed and his son was shot, which led him to eschew active campaiging; "he had good reason to fear for his life" (Knippers Black 1986, p.42).
Cyprus	1977	Not clear what happened in 1977 to explain this. Makarios, the elected president had been restored in 1974 after the coup collapsed. Nothing major changed in 1977; a vague declaration of goals by Makarios and Denktash, but no institutional reform. Then Makarios died. Election to replace him held only in early 1978. The restoration of Makarios in 1974 was a return to the status quo ante after a short-lived coup period, not a democratization.
Solomon Islands	2006	No evidence of democratization. After ethnic civil war breaks out, the prime minister invites an Australian-led military and police intervention to restore order. After the militias are disarmed, an election is held in 2006. Initially, the bargaining in parliament results in a prime minister from the same faction as before. But rioting leads parliament to reject that candidate and pick another. The 2006 election is apparently not more democratic than the 2001 election. So a case of restoration of (imperfect) democracy after civil war interlude and foreign intervention, not a move from autocracy to democracy.
Date corrected		
Italy	1913	The reform that increased the franchise to > 50 percent of males came in 1912-13, not 1919. In 1912, reforms under prime minister Giovanni Giolitti established "nearly universal manhood suffrage and laid the basis for support mobilization in the elections of 1913." This reform increased the electorate from 3 million to 8.5 million (Collier 1999, p.70). It left disenfranchised "only about half a million adult males" (Larcinese 2011, p.2). "[B]ecause of the ongoing informal practice of intervention in the electoral process, some analysts have dated the move to a democratic regime with the 1919 reforms,

		which, in addition to eliminating the remaining restrictions on the suffrage for males between twenty-one and thirty, introduced proportional representation, thereby substantially curbing those practices by giving an advantage to well-organized parties" (Collier 1999, p.71). However, it does not seem to me reasonable to require PR for a regime to be coded democratic.
Gambia	Was 1972, now 1970	In 1970, in a referendum, 70.5 percent voted for Gambia to become a republic (Hughes and Perfect 2006, p.176). Until then, the head of state had been Queen Elizabeth, represented in Gambia by the Governor General. Jawara "was automatically sworn in as president on April 24" (Hughes and Perfect 2006, p.176; Lea 2001, p.188). Through 1977, the president was selected by a "college of electors made up of the directly elected MPs in the House of Representatives" (Hughes and Perfect 2006, pp.185-6). The parliamentary candidates declared their presidential preference when they ran. The 1966 and 1972 elections were very similar in quality. The key change was the referendum of 1970, which led to the declaration of a republic, and to the election of Jawara (by the elected parliament) as president.

Country	**Years**	**Polity2 change**	**Notes**
Polity I notes say the given year is an "arbitrary date"			
Yugoslavia	1937-9	from -9 to 2	Could find no *non*-arbitrary date around that year, so excluded.
Colombia	1930	from -5 to 5	Re-dated to 1936, when López Pumarejo's 1936 constitutional reform granted voting and citizen rights to all male citizens over the age of 21, regardless of literacy level or income (Osterling 1989, p.82).
Belgium	1853	from -4 to 6	Re-dated to 1848, when the government expanded the fanchise, extending the right to vote to all men who paid 20 florins (42.2 francs) in tax. This increased the electorate from 46,000 to 79,000 (Witte et al. 2005, part 2, pp.24-5).
Could not find any evidence of democratization, so excluded			
Venezuela	2012-13	from -3 to 4	Polity, which codes "authority patterns," apparently increased the country's Polity2 score because of the weaker authority position of Maduro compared to Chavez, based on the former's lack of charisma. However, for my purposes, the replacement of a more charismatic with a less charismatic leader does not constitute a case of democratization. No evidence that political institutions and practices became more democratic under Maduro. "This irregularity-prone electoral environment has only deteriorated since Chávez's death in March 2013, beginning with the election for his successor the following month. In that contest, Maduro, who was then acting president, prevailed over his opponent, Henrique Capriles Radonski, by a mere 235,000 votes (a 1.5 percent margin). The opposition claimed that, in the run-up to the election and on election day itself, there were repeated and new irregularities (for example, PSUV sympathizers were seen escorting voters to polls under the pretense of assisting them; harassing electoral observers

			and voters; paying citizens to bring people to the polls; and maybe even engaging in fraud at a few polling centers), which gave Maduro his narrow victory. After the results were announced, protests broke out in Caracas and several other cities. The government put down the demonstrations; in the end, seven people were killed and dozens were injured. The opposition called for a full audit, which was refused (although the CNE did conduct an audit of the electronic tallies versus the paper ballots), and then—for the first time since 2005—the opposition challenged the election, formally calling for the election either to be annulled or done over in roughly 5,700 voting tables (in Venezuela, each voting table or mesa electoral is associated with a particular touchscreen voting machine)" (Corrales 2015, p.43).
Djibouti	1998-9	from -6 to 2	The long-time dictator retires because of poor health in 1999 (Alwan and Mibrathu 2000, p.62); his nephew and former security service chief is then elected with 74% of the vote in what international observers say is a relatively fair election (U.S.A State Department 2010); a few months later, police arrest the new president's single challenger and jail him for four months (later released with amnesty)(Europa Publications 2002, p.336). In the next legislative election in 2003, the incumbent's party wins 100% of the seats, amid accusations of rigging ("Djibouti: No challengers for Guelleh as presidential campaign kicks off." IRIN news. March 29, 2005. http://www.irinnews.org/report/53628/djibouti-no-challengers-for-guelleh-as-presidential-campaign-kicks-off (Accessed December 9, 2013).); the opposition boycotts subsequent presidential elections, so the incumbent wins unchallenged ("Djibouti: Guelleh sworn in for second presidential term." IRIN news. May 9, 2005. www.irinnews.org/report/54297/djibouti-guelleh-sworn-in-for-second-presidential-term (Accessed December 9, 2013)). Not clear that any kind of democratization occurred.
Uruguay	1951-2	from 0 to 8	The only change was the replacement of a strong presidency with a collegial executive, modeled on that of Switzerland. Since we do not usually consider a non-collegial executive to be undemocratic, this does not seem enough to merit the characterization of democratization.
Gabon	2008-9	from -4 to 3	The only thing that seems to have changed in 2009 is that the authoritarian leader of 42 years, Omar Bongo, died and was replaced by his son, Ali Bongo, who won the presidency in an election that does not seem to have been more honest than the previous elections in which his father repeatedly won.
Pakistan	1947-9	from -4 to +4	Polity, focusing on "authority patterns," appears to have coded an increase in Polity2 based on the lower charisma of the leaders that succeeded Jinnah. For present purposes, given the lack of institutional changes, this does not seem to constitute a case of democratization. A new constitution was only enacted in 1956, and the first national election occurred in 1970.
Date corrected			

Yemen North	Was 1962, now 1967-71	from -6 to 0	Polity, which codes "authority patterns," not democratization per se, codes Yemen's "executive recruitment" score as increasing in 1962 because a coup replaces hereditary monarchy with a military regime. I do not consider this an instance of democratization. However, there is a plausible case of political reform in 1967-71, when the new leader, al-Iryani, introduces a new constitution based on post-civil-war reconciliation.
Argentina	Was 1937, now 1939	from -8 to 5	Unclear what happened in 1937, other than the election of a slightly more scrupulous president, who took office in 1938. If the increase in Polity2 is meant to capture Ortiz's reforms, the date should be 1939 or 1940.
Apparent miscodings of "major democratic transition"			
Guatemala 1879, coded as "minor democratic transition" meets the definition for "major democratic transition"; Mexico 1997, Cambodia 1993, Democratic Republic of Congo 2006, Denmark 1915, Ethiopia 1995, France 1877, Iraq 2010, Japan 1868, Japan 1952, Liberia 2006, Philippines 1944, Pakistan 1973, Somalia 2012, Spain 1871-6, and Sweden 1917, all coded as "major democratic transitions," do not meet the criteria unless transition years ignored.			

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Table A2: Cases of Democratization

Country	Year	*Democratization concept*			Country	Year	*Democratization concept*		
		Polity	*BMR*	*MDT*			*Polity*	*BMR*	*MDT*
Albania	1990-92	1	1	1	Kenya	2002	1	1	1
Albania	1997		1		Korea South	1960	1	1	1
Algeria	1989	1			Korea South	1963	1		1
Antigua	2004		1		Korea South	1987-8	1	1	1
Argentina	1912		1		Kyrgyzstan	2005-6	1		1
Argentina	1939[a]	1		1	Kyrgyzstan	2010-11	1		1
Argentina	1955-8	1	1		Latvia	1993		1	
Argentina	1963		1		Lebanon	1971[j]		1	
Argentina	1973	1	1	1	Lesotho	1993	1		
Argentina	1983	1	1	1	Lesotho	2002		1	
Armenia	1998	1		1	Liberia	2006		1	
Austria	1918-20	1	1	1	Lithuania	1992		1	
Austria	1946[b]	1	1	1	Madagascar	1991-3	1	1	1
Bangladesh	1991	1	1	1	Malawi	1993-4	1	1	1
Bangladesh	2009	1	1	1	Maldives	2009		1	
Belgium	1848[c]	1		1	Mali	1991-2	1	1	1
Belgium	1894		1		Mauritania	2005-7	1		1
Benin	1990-91	1	1	1	Mexico	1997-2000[k]		1	
Bhutan	2008	1		1	Mongolia	1990-92	1	1	1
Bolivia	1880	1		1	Mozambique	1994	1	1	1
Bolivia	1979		1		Myanmar (Burma)	1960		1	
Bolivia	1982	1	1	1	Nepal	1957-9	1		1
Brazil	1945-6	1	1	1	Nepal	1981	1		
Brazil	1985	1	1	1	Nepal	1990-91	1	1	1
Bulgaria	1918	1		1	Nepal	2006-8	1	1	1
Bulgaria	1990	1	1	1	Netherlands	1897		1	
Burkina Faso	1977-8	1		1	Netherlands	1917	1		1
Burkina Faso	2015	1		1	Nicaragua	1984		1	
Burundi	2005		1	1	Nicaragua	1990	1		1
Cambodia	1998	1		1	Niger	1991-3	1	1	1
Cape Verde	1990-91	1	1	1	Niger	1999	1	1	1
Central African Republic	1993	1	1	1	Niger	2010-11	1		1
Chile	1934		1		Nigeria	1978-9	1	1	1
Chile	1988-90	1	1	1	Nigeria	1999	1		1
China	1911-12	1		1	Norway	1898	1		1
Colombia	1867	1		1	Pakistan	1962	1		1
Colombia	1936-7[d]	1	1	1	Pakistan	1972		1	
Colombia	1957	1	1	1	Pakistan	1988	1	1	1
Comoros	1990	1		1	Pakistan	2007-8	1	1	1
Comoros	2000-06	1	1	1	Panama	1989-91	1	1	1
Congo Brazzaville	1991-2	1		1	Paraguay	1869-70	1		

Costa Rica	1949		1	
Croatia	1999-2000	1	1	1
Cuba	1940		1	
Czechoslovakia	1989-90	1	1	1
Denmark	1849	1		1
Denmark	1901		1	
Dominican Republic	1961-2	1		1
Dominican Republic	1978	1		1
Ecuador	1948		1	
Ecuador	1968	1		1
Ecuador	1979	1	1	1
Ecuador	2003		1	
Egypt	1934-5	1		1
El Salvador	1979-84	1	1	1
Fiji	1990[e]	1		1
Fiji	2014	1		1
Finland	1944	1		
France	1848	1	1	1
France	1870		1	
France	1944-46	1	1	1
Gambia	1970[f]		1	
Georgia	2004		1	
Germany	1919		1	
Ghana	1970	1	1	1
Ghana	1978-9	1	1	1
Ghana	1991-7	1	1	
Greece	1862-4	1	1	1
Greece	1926	1	1	1
Greece	1941-4	1	1	1
Greece	1974-5	1	1	1
Grenada	1984		1	
Guatemala	1879	1		1
Guatemala	1921	1		1
Guatemala	1944-5	1	1	1
Guatemala	1958		1	
Guatemala	1966	1	1	1
Guatemala	1984-6	1	1	1
Guinea-Bissau	1994	1	1	1
Guinea-Bissau	2005	1		1
Guyana	1992	1	1	1
Haiti	1986-90	1		1
Haiti	1994	1		1
Haiti	2004-6	1		1
Honduras	1894	1		1
Paraguay	1937	1		1
Paraguay	1989	1		1
Peru	1824-8	1		1
Peru	1930-3	1		1
Peru	1956	1	1	1
Peru	1963	1	1	1
Peru	1978-80	1	1	1
Peru	2001	1	1	1
Philippines	1946		1	
Philippines	1986-7	1	1	1
Poland	1989	1	1	1
Portugal	1908-11	1	1	1
Portugal	1974-6	1	1	1
Romania	1989-91	1	1	1
Russia[l]	1991-2		1	
Sao Tome	1991		1	
Senegal	2000	1	1	1
Serbia	1838[m]	1		1
Serbia	1860-1	1		
Serbia	1903	1		1
Sierra Leone	1968	1		1
Sierra Leone	1996	1		1
Sierra Leone	2002		1	
South Africa	1994		1	
Spain	1930-31	1	1	1
Spain	1975-8	1	1	1
Sudan	1964-5	1	1	1
Sudan	1985-6	1	1	1
Suriname	1988		1	
Suriname	1991	1	1	1
Sweden	1911[n]		1	
Syria	1950	1		1
Syria	1954	1		1
Taiwan	1987	1		
Taiwan	1992-6	1	1	1
Thailand	1969	1		1
Thailand	1973-5	1	1	1
Thailand	1977-8	1		1
Thailand	1983		1	
Thailand	1992	1	1	1
Thailand	2007-8	1		1
Tunisia	2011-14	1		1
Turkey	1876	1		
Turkey	1908-9	1		

Honduras	1957		1		Turkey	1946	1		1
Honduras	1971		1		Turkey	1961		1	
Honduras	1980-2	1	1	1	Turkey	1973	1		1
Honduras	2010		1		Turkey	1983	1	1	1
Hungary	1920	1			Uganda	1980	1	1	1
Hungary	1988-90	1	1	1	United Kingdom	1885		1	
Indonesia	1946-48[g]	1	1	1	Uruguay	1919		1	
Indonesia	1998-9	1	1	1	Uruguay	1942		1	
Iran	1941	1			Uruguay	1985	1	1	1
Iran	1997	1		1	USSR	1988-90	1		
Ireland	1922		1		Venezuela	1958-9	1	1	1
Italy	1913[h]		1		W. Germany	1947-9	1		1
Italy	1943-8	1	1	1	Yemen North	1967-71[o]	1		1
Ivory Coast	1999-2000	1		1	Yugoslavia	2000	1	1	1
Japan	1952		1		Zambia	1991	1		1
Jordan	1951-2[i]	1							

Sources: Polity IV; Boix, Miller, Rosato (2013).

Notes: Dating of episodes is approximate, based on the start of the Polity2 6-point increase, the BMR date of change to democracy, and an examination of the history. When Polity2 and BMR criteria indicate somewhat different years for what appears to be the same case, a range is given.

[a] Polity says 1937, but I adjust to 1939-40 to coincide with Ortiz reforms.

[b] Interpolating through the wartime interregnum, the year of "democratization" comes out as 1940. Based on the history of the case, I adjust to 1946, the first year after "interregnum."

[c] Polity date is 1853; Polity III notes say "1853 is an arbitrary date." I was unable to find any act of democratization in 1853 to match the Polity coding. In a comprehensive chronology of political events during 1846-78 (Witte et al. 2005, part 2, pp.199-200), the year 1853 has no entry. Major reforms were made in 1848. I treat 1848 as the year of change here.

[d] Polity says 1930 is "an arbitrary date." I change to 1936, year of López Pumarejo's 1936 constitutional reform, which granted voting and citizen rights to all male citizens over the age of 21, regardless of literacy level or income.

[e] Year could be 1992 instead of 1990. In 1990, a new constitution was promulgated by decree, replacing the 1970 constitution, and reducing the representation of the Indian part of the population. It did open a way to return to rule by elected officials, after the period of military-led post-coup government. But that return did not occur until elections of 1992. So 1992 might make more sense as the year for this change.

[f] The date is questionable. Apparently BMR code democracy as beginning in 1972 because this was the date of the first national election after the head of state changed from Governor General on behalf of Queen Elizabeth to president, indirectly elected by the parliament. But the referendum on republic status and the change of head of state occurred in 1970. And independence was granted in 1965, when executive power passed to a prime minister, who won a majority in the parliament in parliamentary election of 1966. I code Gambia as becoming democratic in 1970.

[g] BMR date this at 1955.

[h] BMR date this as 1919. I have changed to 1913, at which point their criteria appear to be satisfied. In 1912, reforms under prime minister Giolitti established "nearly universal manhood suffrage and laid the basis for support mobilization in the elections of 1913" (Collier 1999, p.70). This reform increased the electorate from 3 million to 8.5 million (Collier 1999, p.70). It left disenfranchised "only about half a million adult males" (Larcinese 2011, p.2).

[i] Polity calls 1951-2 an "arbitrary date," but it actually makes some sense.

[j] Perhaps should be 1970, when the legalization of parties occurred.

[k] BMR go by the date of the election in which their conditions are first met, 2000, but the changes that produced this outcome came in 1996-7.

[l] What changes in 1992 is sovereignty of state; better date for democratization would be 1991, date of fully competitive election (for president).
[m] The dating is complicated. In 1835, there was a move towards more democratic government, quickly reversed. In 1838, there was an increase in checks on the executive—a move from absolute monarchy to oligarchy. In the early 1840s, the principle of local election of prince was established. In general, the dates for Serbia are quite arbitrary: one could justify a different set of turning points.
[n] The reform occurred in 1907-9; in 1911 was the first election under the broader franchise.
[o] Polity has 1962; but this is largely due to change from hereditary monarchy to military regime, which it grades higher. No evidence of democratization in 1962. "The new regime, led by Brig.-Gen. Abdullah al-Sallal, was a republic in name only. Dominated by the military and faced with a royalist uprising in the northeastern part of the country, the regime did not initially provide for a legislature that might restrict the powers of the executive" (Baaklini, Denoeux, and Springborg 1999, p.203). However, significant reforms occurred in 1967-71.

Table A3. Percentage of cases of democratization for which deliberate choice arguments might fit: First Wave (1828-1926)

	Democratization concept		
	Polity	*MDT*	*BMR*
Democracy as commitment to redistribute to outsiders, thus preventing revolution (Acemoglu Robinson 2006)	13	16	19
Democracy to motivate masses to defend regime in war or civil war (e.g. Tichi and Vindigni 2008)	17	21	19
Democracy as device to increase provision of public goods relative to patronage (Lizzeri and Persico 2004)	17	16	19
Democratization to increase support for incumbent party (e.g. Llavador and Oxoby 2005)	17	16	38
Democracy the result of "great compromise" after "prolonged and inconclusive struggle" (Rustow 1970)	8	11	13
Democracy the result of pact (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1985)	8	11	19
At least one of the arguments above	46	47	50

Source: Author's calculations.

Note: BMR: Boix, Miller Rosato definition; MDT: "Major Democratic Transition" under Polity definition.

Table A4. Percentage of cases of democratization for which deliberate choice arguments might fit: Second Wave (1927-1962)

	Democratization concept		
	Polity	*MDT*	*BMR*
Democracy as commitment to redistribute to outsiders, thus preventing revolution (Acemoglu Robinson 2006)	4	4	4
Democracy to motivate masses to defend regime in war or civil war (e.g. Tichi and Vindigni 2008)	0	0	0
Democracy as device to increase provision of public goods relative to patronage (Lizzeri and Persico 2004)	0	0	4
Democratization to increase support for incumbent party (e.g. Llavador and Oxoby 2005)	11	13	12
Democracy the result of "great compromise" after "prolonged and inconclusive struggle" (Rustow 1970)	18	21	12
Democracy the result of pact (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1985)	14	17	12
At least one of the arguments above	36	42	32

Source: Author's calculations.

Note: BMR: Boix, Miller Rosato definition; MDT: "Major Democratic Transition" under Polity definition.

Table A5. Percentage of cases of democratization for which deliberate choice arguments might fit: Third Wave (1963-2015)

	Democratization concept		
	Polity	*MDT*	*BMR*
Democracy as commitment to redistribute to outsiders, thus preventing revolution (Acemoglu Robinson 2006)	5	5	7
Democracy to motivate masses to defend regime in war or civil war (e.g. Tichi and Vindigni 2008)	2	2	3
Democracy as device to increase provision of public goods relative to patronage (Lizzeri and Persico 2004)	2	2	1
Democratization to increase support for incumbent party (e.g. Llavador and Oxoby 2005)	1	1	5
Democracy the result of "great compromise" after "prolonged and inconclusive struggle" (Rustow 1970)	15	16	16
Democracy the result of pact (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1985)	18	19	20
At least one of the arguments above	22	23	30

Source: Author's calculations.

Note: BMR: Boix, Miller Rosato definition; MDT: "Major Democratic Transition" under Polity definition.

Table A6. Percentage of cases of democratization for which deliberate choice arguments might fit: All waves, just democratizations that were not reversed

	Democratization concept		
	Polity	*MDT*	*BMR*
Democracy as commitment to redistribute to outsiders, thus preventing revolution (Acemoglu Robinson 2006)	10	11	9
Democracy to motivate masses to defend regime in war or civil war (e.g. Tichi and Vindigni 2008)	6	6	6
Democracy as device to increase provision of public goods relative to patronage (Lizzeri and Persico 2004)	2	2	4
Democratization to increase support for incumbent party (e.g. Llavador and Oxoby 2005)	6	6	7
Democracy the result of "great compromise" after "prolonged and inconclusive struggle" (Rustow 1970)	21	21	18
Democracy the result of pact (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1985)	21	21	21
At least one of the arguments above	31	32	36

Source: Author's calculations.

Note: BMR: Boix, Miller Rosato definition; MDT: "Major Democratic Transition" under Polity definition.
Only Polity and MDT transition not followed by any net drop in Polity2 and BMR democratizations that were not reversed in any subsequent year.

Table A7. Percentage of cases of democratization for which deliberate choice arguments might fit: All waves, just high information cases

	Democratization concept		
	Polity	*MDT*	*BMR*
Democracy as commitment to redistribute to outsiders, thus preventing revolution (Acemoglu Robinson 2006)	6	6	9
Democracy to motivate masses to defend regime in war or civil war (e.g. Tichi and Vindigni 2008)	4	5	6
Democracy as device to increase provision of public goods relative to patronage (Lizzeri and Persico 2004)	3	3	4
Democratization to increase support for incumbent party (e.g. Llavador and Oxoby 2005)	2	3	9
Democracy the result of "great compromise" after "prolonged and inconclusive struggle" (Rustow 1970)	16	17	16
Democracy the result of pact (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1985)	15	16	18
At least one of the arguments above	26	28	35

Source: Author's calculations.

Note: BMR: Boix, Miller Rosato definition; MDT: "Major Democratic Transition" under Polity definition.

Table A8. Democratization as a result of mistakes by incumbents (percentage of cases): First Wave (1828-1926)

	Democratization concept		
	Polity	*MDT*	*BMR*
Hubris: Incumbent overestimates his support	38	42	31
…as a result, incumbent fails to preempt revolt with concessions and/or repression, and is overthrown.	29	32	19
…as a result, incumbent calls election or referendum and suffers costly defeat.	4	0	13
Military adventure: Incumbent starts or enters a war, hoping to rally the public, but loses both war and political control.	13	11	25
Slippery slope: Incumbent initiates partial reform, thinking this will stabilize authoritarian regime, but cannot stop.	8	5	13
Trusting a traitor: Incumbent elite selects leader they think will defend the system, but who tricks them into democracy.	0	0	13
Counterproductive violence: Incumbent represses in way that inflames protest, splits elite, or otherwise undermines regime	4	5	6
All mistakes	75	74	56

Source: Author's calculations.

Note: BMR: Boix, Miller Rosato definition; MDT: "Major Democratic Transition" under Polity definition.

Table A9. Democratization as a result of mistakes by incumbents (percentage of cases): Second Wave (1927-1962)

	Democratization concept		
	Polity	*MDT*	*BMR*
Hubris: Incumbent overestimates his support	29	33	32
…as a result, incumbent fails to preempt revolt with concessions and/or repression, and is overthrown.	11	13	12
…as a result, incumbent calls election or referendum and suffers costly defeat.	14	13	16
Military adventure: Incumbent starts or enters a war, hoping to rally the public, but loses both war and political control.	7	8	8
Slippery slope: Incumbent initiates partial reform, thinking this will stabilize authoritarian regime, but cannot stop.	14	17	12
Trusting a traitor: Incumbent elite selects leader they think will defend the system, but who tricks them into democracy.	4	4	0
Counterproductive violence: Incumbent represses in way that inflames protest, splits elite, or otherwise undermines regime	7	8	4
All mistakes	61	63	64

Source: Author's calculations.

Note: BMR: Boix, Miller Rosato definition; MDT: "Major Democratic Transition" under Polity definition.

Table A10. Democratization as a result of mistakes by incumbents (percentage of cases): Third Wave (1963-2015)

	Democratization concept		
	Polity	*MDT*	*BMR*
Hubris: Incumbent overestimates his support	43	42	44
…as a result, incumbent fails to preempt revolt with concessions and/or repression, and is overthrown.	16	16	13
…as a result, incumbent calls election or referendum and suffers costly defeat.	32	32	36
Military adventure: Incumbent starts or enters a war, hoping to rally the public, but loses both war and political control.	4	4	7
Slippery slope: Incumbent initiates partial reform, thinking this will stabilize authoritarian regime, but cannot stop.	41	39	44
Trusting a traitor: Incumbent elite selects leader they think will defend the system, but who tricks them into democracy.	11	8	13
Counterproductive violence: Incumbent represses in way that inflames protest, splits elite, or otherwise undermines regime	15	16	19
All mistakes	66	66	65

Source: Author's calculations.

Note: BMR: Boix, Miller Rosato definition; MDT: "Major Democratic Transition" under Polity definition.

Table A11. Democratization as a result of mistakes by incumbents (percentage of cases): All waves, just high information cases

	Democratization concept		
	Polity	*MDT*	*BMR*
Hubris: Incumbent overestimates his support	42	44	45
…as a result, incumbent fails to preempt revolt with concessions and/or repression, and is overthrown.	19	19	15
…as a result, incumbent calls election or referendum and suffers costly defeat.	26	26	31
Military adventure: Incumbent starts or enters a war, hoping to rally the public, but loses both war and political control.	5	5	9
Slippery slope: Incumbent initiates partial reform, thinking this will stabilize authoritarian regime, but cannot stop.	34	35	36
Trusting a traitor: Incumbent elite selects leader they think will defend the system, but who tricks them into democracy.	10	8	12
Counterproductive violence: Incumbent represses in way that inflames protest, splits elite, or otherwise undermines regime	13	15	16
All mistakes	71	72	69

Source: Author's calculations.

Note: BMR: Boix, Miller Rosato definition; MDT: "Major Democratic Transition" under Polity definition.

Table A12. Democratization as a result of mistakes by incumbents (percentage of cases): All waves, just democratizations that were not reversed

	Democratization concept		
	Polity	*MDT*	*BMR*
Hubris: Incumbent overestimates his support	40	36	42
…as a result, incumbent fails to preempt revolt with concessions and/or repression, and is overthrown.	21	19	13
…as a result, incumbent calls election or referendum and suffers costly defeat.	23	21	33
Military adventure: Incumbent starts or enters a war, hoping to rally the public, but loses both war and political control.	6	9	9
Slippery slope: Incumbent initiates partial reform, thinking this will stabilize authoritarian regime, but cannot stop.	35	32	40
Trusting a traitor: Incumbent elite selects leader they think will defend the system, but who tricks them into democracy.	15	13	13
Counterproductive violence: Incumbent represses in way that inflames protest, splits elite, or otherwise undermines regime	8	9	12
All mistakes	62	60	64

Source: Author's calculations. **Note**: BMR: Boix, Miller Rosato definition; MDT: "Major Democratic Transition" under Polity definition. Only Polity and MDT transition not followed by any net drop in Polity2 and BMR democratizations that were not reversed in any subsequent year.