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A Decade of Democratic Decline and Stagnation

Laura Jakli, M. Steven Fish, and Jason Wittenberg

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Overview

This chapter identifies the structural factors that contribute to democratic development, with a special focus on recent cases of failed democratization. Countries' levels of democratization are explained by a similar set of factors, including fuels export dependence, economic development, and late national independence. We also examine the percentage of Muslims in the population as a factor because Islamic countries typically face unique challenges in democratization, including greater sex inequality and lack of religious freedom (Fish 2002; Rowley and Smith 2009). We conclude by arguing that there is hope for rapid democratization if policies are implemented to alleviate poverty and alter economic dependency on hydrocarbons.

Introduction

The last decade has witnessed the slowing down, if not reversal, of the democratic wave that began with

the fall of communism in 1989. For example, the Arab Spring of 2011 brought down autocratic governments in Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia, but only Tunisia has succeeded in building a democracy. The Caucasus and

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Sub-Saharan Africa have been regressing at especially worrisome rates. Even democracies thought to be stable, such as Hungary and Poland, have begun to regress. The regime trajectories of the early twenty-first century demonstrate that the path to an open polity is by no means predetermined.

This chapter employs statistical analysis to show why some countries have lost democratic ground (backslid) or have failed to improve their democracy scores (stagnated) over the last decade. It considers how to reduce the hazards of democratization's reversal, and concludes with a discussion of an important factor behind stalled democratic progress—despotic executives.

Theory and Central Concepts

Scholars have created a large number of typologies of democracy (Collier and Levitsky 1997). However, as Møller and Skaaning (2010) note, these typologies are often of limited analytic value because the categories they employ do not correspond in empirically useful ways with how actual democracies and non-democracies differ from one another. Our objective is to make empirical sense of democratic successes and failures in a way that does not excessively prejudice what counts as democracy.

To accomplish this analytical objective, we distinguish between three types of democratizers: *robust*, referring to countries that have not displayed significant authoritarian reversals since initial democratization; *tenuous*, referring to countries that have had some experience with democracy since initial democratization but recently have been mired between democracy and authoritarianism; and *failed*, referring to countries that have had some experience with democracy since initial democratization but have recently fallen into authoritarianism. Distinguishing between three types of democratizers comports with actual patterns of democratization better than lumping them together under commonly used labels such as 'semi-democratic', or 'partly free' (Levitsky and Way 2002) or 'plebiscitarian autocracies' (see Chapter 3 in this book).

The distinctions between types of democratizers are also helpful insofar as we want to steer clear of implying that the politics of regimes have directionality or that there is a clear linear trajectory toward full democracy. We agree with Levitsky and Way (2002) that not all authoritarian and semi-authoritarian

regimes have the same propensity to democratize, and that there is no guarantee that democratization lies in an autocratic regime's future. Nonetheless, we depart from their conceptual framework in that we believe that democratic backsliding is empirically measurable (at least by coarse indices) and, to some degree, directional.

We contend that a number of structural factors make challenges to the incumbent by an opposition more or less probable. One is economic development. Higher levels of development are typically associated with a burgeoning middle class as well as general societal and political sophistication—which tend to make the electoral arena more competitive.

We also examine fuels export dependence, which is often regarded as a bane to open government. Oil, for example, tends to finance political and economic repression, fuel corruption, and promote economic statism (Sachs and Warner 2001). These all weaken the viability of political competition. Moreover, oil, gas, and mineral rents weaken a government's dependence on revenue derived from taxing its citizens, which often leads to electoral abuses and exacerbates a regime's authoritarian tendencies (Conrad and DeMeritt 2013). However, the authors also note that this mechanism is contingent on a regime's level of democratization: democracies are less susceptible to backsliding than autocratic or mixed regimes.

Some scholars contend that ethnic heterogeneity hinders democratization. Heterogeneity generally weakens the ability of political factions to compromise (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972), and may fuel incumbents' motivation to maintain unilateral power. Longevity of independent statehood is also strongly correlated with democracy. How long a country has enjoyed independence may influence not only national identity and political behaviour but also the nature of the political regime.

Islamic culture may also pose some special challenges to democratization and the creation of open society (Fish 2002). This may be due to close association between sacred and secular authority, strong societal distinctions between believers and non-believers, and the lower status of females in many Islamic societies. Relatedly, we posit that sex inequality places constraints on popular rule and reduces the political threat posed to an autocratic incumbent. This is because sex equality may promote a less hierarchical cultural milieu for decision-making and increase demand

for democratic institutions, among other advantages (Fish 2002; Inglehart, Norris, and Welzel 2002).

In sum, we conclude that a number of structural conditions may undermine electoral challenges to autocratic incumbents. We test these conjectures in the empirical sections of this analysis. Although these structural factors are generally fruitful in yielding predictions of a country's level of democratization, short-term agents of democratic failure tend to better explain instances of democratic backsliding.

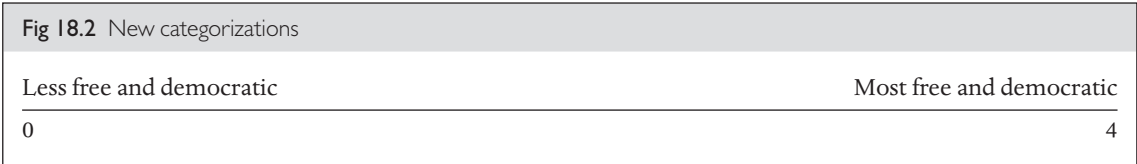
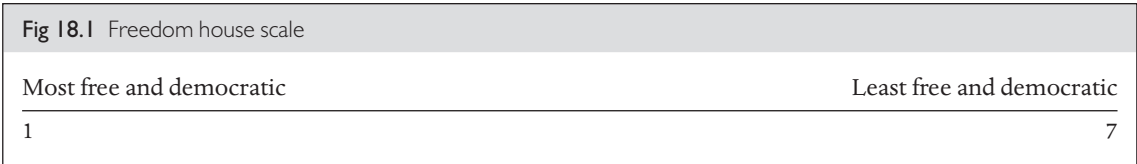
Measuring Democracy

Freedom House scores countries on a 1–7 scale—with 1 indicating most free and democratic and 7 indicating least free and democratic. Using the most recent Freedom House data, we sort all countries in our dataset ($n=158$) into our own five analytic categories. For the purpose of empirical analysis, 'established democracies' are coded as a 4, 'robust democratizers' as a 3, 'tenuous democratizers' as a 2, 'failed democratizers' as a 1, and 'established autocracies' as a 0. We use five categories because this increases the number of observations in the categories without unduly lumping together democratic and undemocratic countries. Figures 18.1 and 18.2 compare the Freedom House scale to our own democratization categorizations.

In our new categorization, established democracies have maintained a Freedom House score of 2.5 or less since 1975 and established autocracies have never gotten a Freedom House score less than 4. There are three intermediary categories of democratizers. At some point between 1975 and 2013, robust democratizers did not achieve a Freedom House score as low as

2.5; however, they attained that level (or better) from 2014–16. Tenuous democratizers have scored at least as well as 3.5 in some year between 1975 and 2013, but failed to achieve a Freedom House score of lower than 2.5 between 2014 and 2016. Tenuous democratizers have also averaged a Freedom House score better (lower) than 4 between 2014 and 2016. Finally, failed democratizers fell below a 3.5 at some point between 1975 and 2013, and have averaged a Freedom House score of 4 or worse in the 2014–16 period. We use the average score between 2014 and 2016 in order to reduce the risks that our conclusions result from short-lived volatility in scores. The coding is summarized in Table 18.1. Table 18.2 lists the distribution of countries across our five categories.

We also use the data from the Varieties of Democracy project (V-Dem) to measure the levels of democracy that result from the various scenarios of democratization we analyse. V-Dem aids us in examining democratization with an unparalleled degree of nuance and complexity (Lindberg *et al.* 2014). Its approach to data collection and aggregation differs from existing efforts as it collects a huge variety of regime indicators and other information on every country in the world. The broad range of indicators comprising V-Dem provides an expansive resource for constructing multi-dimensional measures of democratization (see Chapter 4 in this book for details). To conduct our analysis, we employ V-Dem's measures of electoral and liberal democracy, but also make use of Freedom House's liberal democracy index. V-Dem's electoral democracy and liberal democracy indices may be particularly useful for capturing types of directional progressions due to the institutional components that comprise their evaluation.



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Table 18.1 Summary of Country Coding Guidelines for FHI data

Democratization Category	Coding for Democratization Category	FHI Score Range
Established Autocracy	0	[4-7] (1975–2016)
Failed Democratizer	1	≤ 3.5 in some year (1975–2013), but avg. FHI >4 for 2014–16
Tenuous Democratizer	2	≤ 3.5 in some year (1975–2013); >2.5 for some year between 2014–16: avg. FHI <4 for 2014–16
Robust Democratizer	3	(2.5–7] (1975–2013); [1–2.5] (2014–16)
Established Democracy	4	[1–2.5] (1975–2016)

Table 18.2 List of Countries by Category of Democratization

Established Autocracy (n=38)	Failed Democratizer (n=26)	Tenuous Democratizer (n=32)	Robust Democratizer (n=36)	Established Democracy (n=26)
Afghanistan	Armenia	Albania	Argentina	Australia
Algeria	Belarus	Bangladesh	Benin	Austria
Angola	Burkina Faso	Bhutan	Brazil	Barbados
Azerbaijan	Central African Republic	Bolivia	Bulgaria	Belgium
Burundi	Congo	Bosnia	Cape Verde	Botswana
Cambodia	Djibouti	Colombia	Chile	Canada
Cameroon	Gabon	Comoros	Croatia	Costa Rica
Chad	Gambia	Dominican Republic	Cyprus	Denmark
China	Guinea-Bissau	Ecuador	Czech Republic	Finland
Congo-Zaire	Honduras	Fiji	El Salvador	France
Cote d'Ivoire	Jordan	Georgia	Estonia	Germany
Cuba	Kenya	Guatemala	Ghana	Greece
Egypt	Kyrgyzstan	Indonesia	Guyana	Iceland
Eritrea	Madagascar	Lesotho	Hungary	Ireland
Ethiopia	Malaysia	Liberia	India	Israel
Guinea	Maldives	Macedonia	South Korea	Italy
Haiti	Mali	Malawi	Latvia	Jamaica
Iran	Morocco	Mexico	Lithuania	Japan
Iraq	Nigeria	Moldova	Mauritius	Netherlands
Kazakhstan	Pakistan	Mozambique	Mongolia	New Zealand
North Korea	Russia	Nepal	Namibia	Norway
Laos	Sri Lanka	Nicaragua	Panama	Palau
Lebanon	Tajikistan	Nigeria	Peru	Sweden
Libya	Thailand	Papua New Guinea	Poland	Switzerland
Mauritania	Venezuela	Paraguay	Portugal	United Kingdom
Qatar	Zimbabwe	Philippines	Romania	United States

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Table 18.2 (Continued)

Established Autocracy (n=38)	Failed Democratizer (n=26)	Tenuous Democratizer (n=32)	Robust Democratizer (n=36)	Established Democracy (n=26)
Rwanda		Sierra Leone	Senegal	
Saudi Arabia		Solomon Islands	Slovakia	
Somalia		Tanzania	Slovenia	
Sudan		Tunisia	South Africa	
Swaziland		Turkmenistan	Spain	
Syria		Zambia	Suriname	
Togo			Taiwan	
Turkmenistan			Trinidad	
Uganda			Ukraine	
Uzbekistan			Uruguay	
Vietnam				
Yemen				

Democratic Stagnation

The most pronounced trend of the last decade is simple democratic stagnation. Any improvement we see in the data over the last decade of democratization is rather fragile and minimal. For example, a few of the countries that were previously established autocracies have transitioned out of this category and are now failed democratizers. In fact, there are 26 failed democratizers by the 2014–16 measures, whereas based on 2005–07 measures, there were just 20. This implies that, over the last decade, more than a handful of countries experienced a brief democratic opening but subsequently reversed trajectories; they scored a 3.5 or better in at least one year, but over the past three years, averaged a 4 or worse. They have thus rapidly backslid into authoritarianism. One example of this trajectory can be found in the Maldives. In 2008, the Maldives elected a new leader, Mohamed Nasheed, in what was lauded by international election observers as the first free and fair election in the country's history. Nasheed had defeated a despotic leader, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who had been in power for three decades. However, the Maldives's democratic opening was short-lived; five years ago, Gayoom loyalists forced Nasheed to resign, and since his forced resignation, the democratic gains of the country have been tenuous.

There are also a few notable cases in which democratic consolidation has been rapid and successful over the past decade. Tunisia and Bhutan have both jumped from a score of 0 (established autocracy) to a score of 2 (tenuous democratizer). After years of tumultuous uprising, in 2014, Tunisia adopted a progressive constitution and held free and fair elections with a high turnout of 67 per cent. Legalized political parties have exploded since the Arab Spring; this provides an additional signal of Tunisia's rapid democratization. In Bhutan, the recent triumph of democratization is largely a function of progress in implementing public transparency and anticorruption initiatives, including prosecutions against a number of prominent public officials. Moreover, Bhutan has rapidly transitioned from a despotic monarchy to a largely symbolic one; just a decade ago, the monarch and his inner circle held enormous influence over parliament; now, Bhutan's legislature is increasingly autonomous in policy making. A handful of countries have also risen a less dramatic—but still notable—one point on our 0–4 scale: Fiji, Guyana, the Maldives, and Nepal.

There are also some notable recent backsliders. Most dramatically, Mali has sunk in our categorizations from a robust democratizer (3) to a failed democratizer (1) in just a decade. This decline has largely been attributed to an armed conflict that has been ongoing in northern Mali since 2012, in which local

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Tuareg rebels declared the secession of a new northern state. During this initial conflict period, Mali's constitution was briefly suspended and, more recently, elections have been repeatedly delayed in light of the fragile political climate. As a number of country experts have noted, the government's authority in parts of the north remain tenuous even today. Aside from issues with the ongoing insurgency, grand corruption remains a major problem in government; this is aided by the fact that the line between public and private ownership is not well delineated. Aside from the remarkable backsliding in Mali, each of the following countries has recently dropped at least one point on the 0–4 scale: Bangladesh, the Dominican Republic, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. This implies that 14 of 158 cases—or approximately 9 per cent of the world—have faced democratic decline in the last decade.

What Undermines Democracy?

We now turn to testing the influence of structural factors that scholars consider critical to the strength and resilience of democracy. We operationalize economic

development as Gross National Income per capita (PPP), drawn from the World Bank (2015a); economic reliance on hydrocarbons as the proportion of export income generated by oil and gas, also from the World Bank (2015c); and ethnic heterogeneity from Alesina *et al.* (2002). Late national independence is represented by a dummy for whether a state was independent in 1900, drawn from historical sources. The percentage of the population that is Muslim comes from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2009), and is cross-checked with the World Religion Database (Johnson and Grim 2008). Sex inequality, as measured by differential literacy rates between men and women, comes from the World Bank (2015b). Where possible, we also crosschecked data with the CIA World Factbook (2015).

Tables 18.3 and 18.4 present the results of a series of regression models, with the dependent variables being V-Dem's liberal democracy and electoral democracy indices. Since each of these varies between 0 and 1, we fit a fractional outcome regression model. The electoral democracy index is designed to evaluate the strength of the electoral principle of democracy. It is comprised of a number of evaluations. It captures the degrees of political competition and participation—via extensive suffrage; free operation of political and

Table 18.3 Fractional Regressions of VDEM Electoral Democracy Scores on Hypothesized Determinants

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Percentage Muslim	–0.006*** (0.002)	–0.010*** (0.002)		–0.008*** (0.002)	
Late National Independence	–0.591*** (0.197)		–0.704*** (0.198)		
Fuels Export Dependence	–0.010*** (0.003)		–0.013*** (0.003)	–0.010*** (0.003)	–0.013*** (0.004)
Economic Development	0.00002*** (0.000006)	0.00002*** (0.000006)	0.00002*** (0.000006)	0.00003*** (0.000005)	0.00003*** (0.000006)
Sex Inequality	0.0012 (0.0103)	0.0004 (0.0111)	–0.0093 (0.0098)		
Ethnic Fractionalization	–0.150 (0.330)	–0.401 (0.350)	–0.067 (0.338)		
Constant	0.739*** (0.251)	0.343 (0.226)	0.720*** (0.262)	0.178 (0.131)	–0.061 (0.132)
Observations	158	158	158	158	158

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 18.4 Fractional Regressions of VDEM Liberal Democracy Scores on Hypothesized Determinants

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Percentage Muslim	−0.008*** (0.002)	−0.012*** (0.002)		−0.009*** (0.002)	
Late National Independence	−0.437*** (0.187)		−0.565*** (0.191)		
Fuels Export Dependence	−0.013*** (0.004)		−0.016*** (0.004)	−0.013*** (0.004)	−0.017*** (0.004)
Economic Development	0.00003*** (0.000005)	0.00003*** (0.000006)	0.00003*** (0.000006)	0.00003*** (0.000005)	0.00004*** (0.000006)
Sex Inequality	0.002 (0.011)	0.002 (0.012)	−0.011 (0.010)		
Ethnic Fractionalization	−0.265 (0.337)	−0.554 (0.356)	−0.194 (0.348)		
Constant	0.141 (0.243)	−0.222 (0.225)	0.033 (0.258)	−0.437 (0.131)	−0.698 (0.140)
Observations	158	158	158	158	158

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

civil society organizations; clean and regular elections; and meaningful elections that affect the composition of the chief executive. The electoral democracy index is also designed to capture the freedom of expression and independence of media.

V-Dem's liberal democracy index takes a sceptical view of political power in the sense that it measures the strength of democracy in terms of the limits of government power. Its components include the strength of constitutionally protected civil liberties, rule of law, the independence of the judiciary's appointments and operations, as well as checks and balances on executive power. Notably, the electoral and liberal democracy measures are not comprised of mutually exclusive evaluations; the liberal democracy index also takes the level of electoral democracy into account. It is therefore no surprise that the two measures tend to be similar across a majority of our cases. However, as we will see when we examine failed democracies more closely—the differences in degree of electoral versus liberal democracy may be quite sharp in autocratic and semi-autocratic states.

The idea behind these regression models is to assess the independent effects of each variable, contingent on the inclusion of other factors. Model 1 includes all hypothesized causal variables—percentage of Muslims

in the population, late national independence, fuels export dependence, economic development, sex inequality, and ethnic fractionalization. As a robustness check, we also present alternative specifications, for a total of five models. Model 2 excludes late national independence and fuels export dependence, model 3 excludes percentage of Muslims in the population, model 4 excludes late national independence, ethnic fractionalization, and sex inequality, and model 5 excludes percentage of Muslims in the population, sex inequality, and ethnic fractionalization. Using these models, we check whether our core regression coefficient estimates are sensitive to the addition or subtraction of regressors.

Economic development, fuels export dependence, percentage of the population that is Muslim, and late national independence are all statistically significant and the signs are in the expected direction. That is, higher economic development, lack of fuel export dependence, low percentage of Islamic practice, and early national independence are correlated with democracy regardless of which indicator we use.

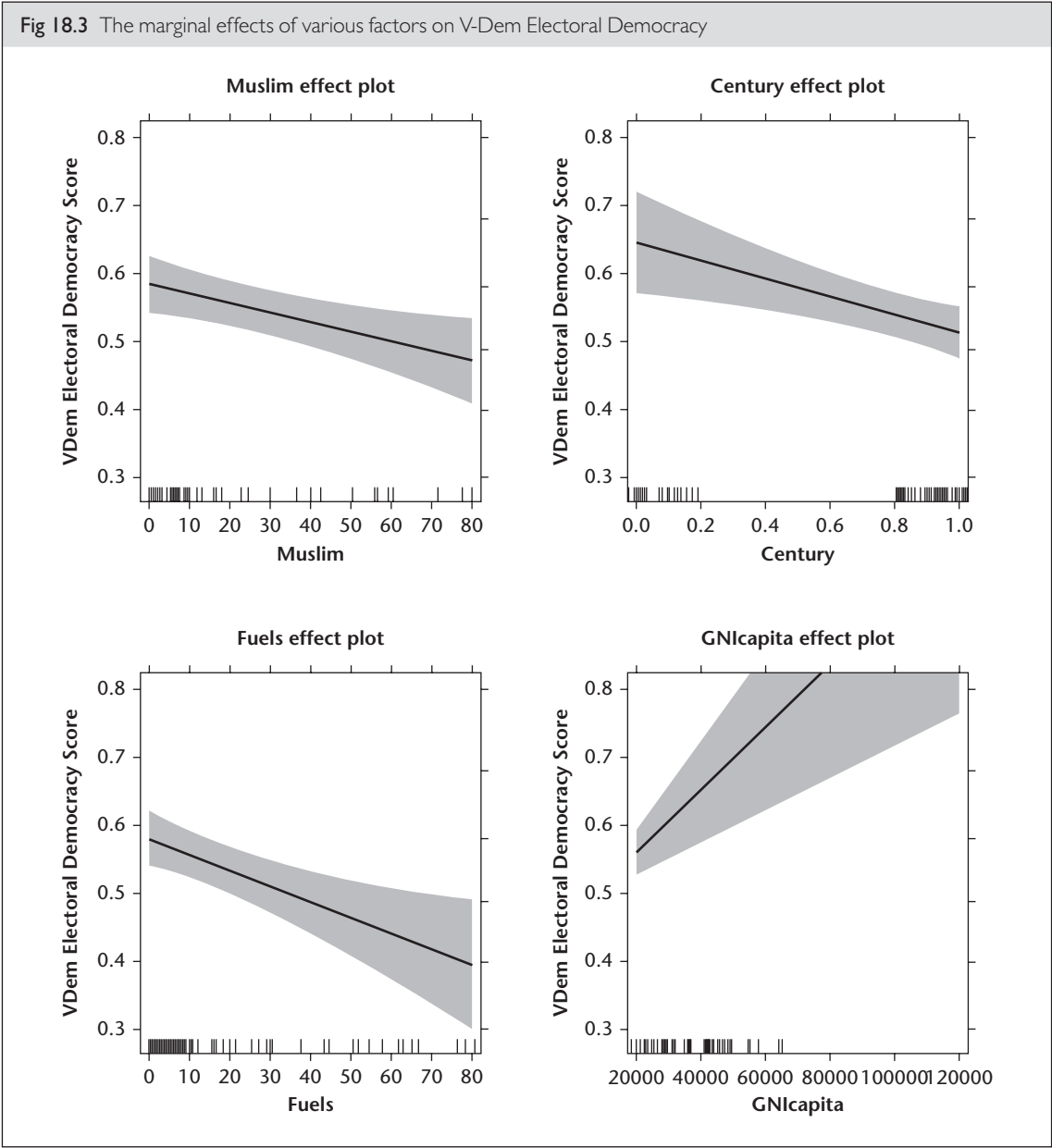
There is, however, one surprise here. There seems to be little correlation between sex inequality and either liberal democracy or electoral democracy. This runs counter to Fish and Wittenberg (2009), whose analysis

of democratization ten years ago suggested a strong correlation. Why might this difference appear? On first look, it appears that some difference might be driven by the old Soviet states (for example, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan), which have backslid on democratization but, due to the educational and economic system under socialism, score rather well on gender equality. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that the other exceptional cases driving this

trend come from Latin America—failed democracies, including Honduras and Venezuela—have histories of strong socialist institutional configurations.

We can illustrate how these structural factors affect the prospects of democratization by computing the predicted liberal democracy and electoral democracy scores at different levels of these factors along a continuum (marginal effects). These predicted scores are illustrated in Figures 18.3 and 18.4, where the solid

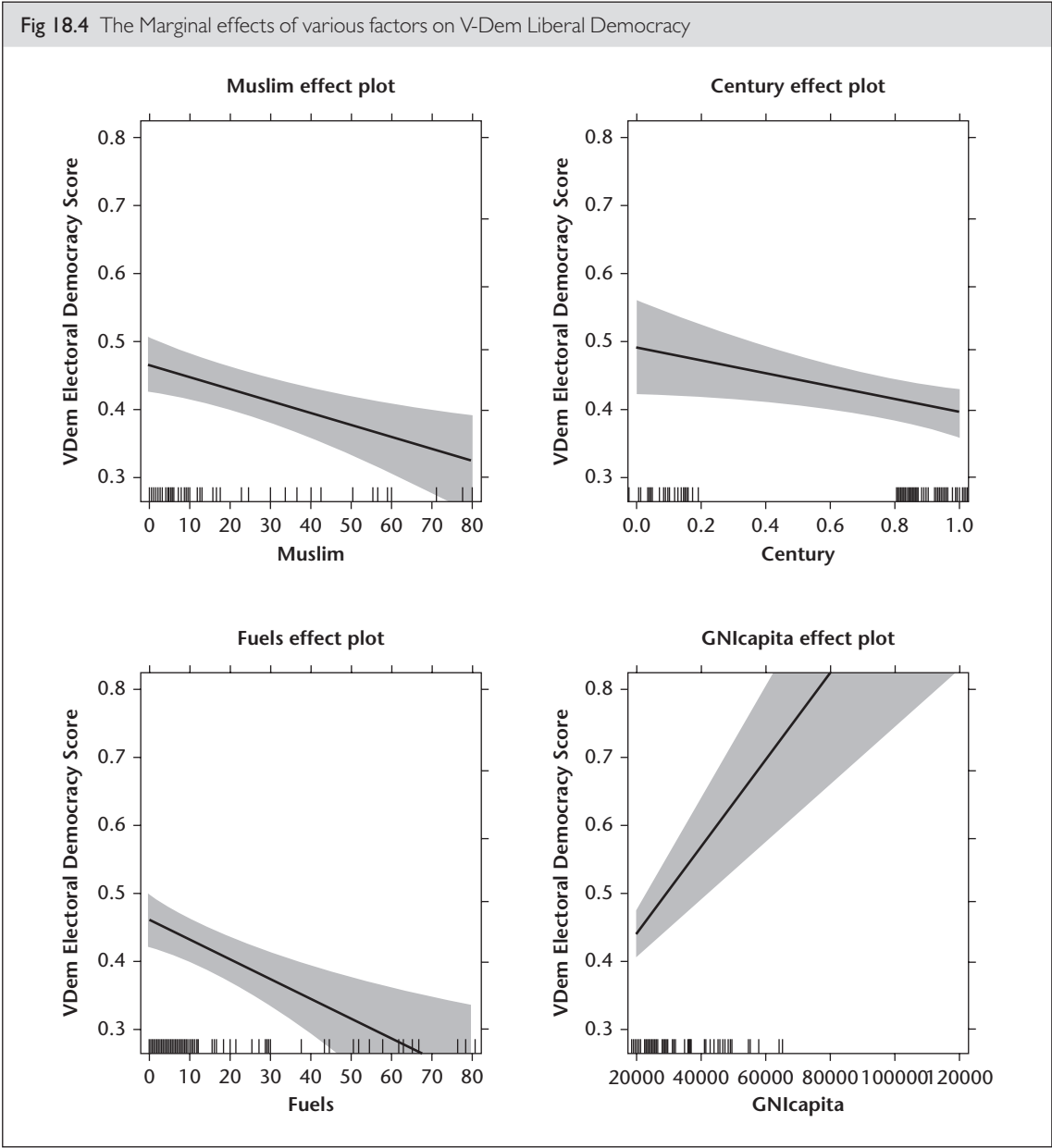
Fig 18.3 The marginal effects of various factors on V-Dem Electoral Democracy



lines represent the predicted democratization score. The grey bandwidth represents the associated 95 per cent confidence intervals, a measure of the uncertainty in our statistical estimates. The hash marks on the horizontal axes represent values for the different countries of the corresponding explanatory variable.

As illustrated by the trends in both Figure 18.3 and Figure 18.4, economic development is the strongest predictor of democratization. Annual income

per person in the 26 failed cases averages roughly US\$8,208; in the 36 robust democratizers, it averages US\$19,429. The negative relationships between our V-Dem measures and both fuels export dependence and the percentage of Muslims is unequivocal. Indeed, of the 26 failed democratizers we have in our dataset, fuels account for over half of exports in five of them, while it does so in only one of 36 robust democratizers (Trinidad and Tobago). Islam appears to complicate



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democratization significantly as well. The proportion of the population that adheres to Islam in the failed democratizers averages 43 per cent; in the robust democratizers, it is just 7 per cent. Moreover, predominantly Muslim countries comprise nearly half of the failed democratizers; meanwhile, Senegal is the only predominantly Muslim country in our dataset that is categorically a robust democratizer.

While the effect of late national independence is somewhat weaker, it is still notable. Of the failed democratizers, only four maintained national independence prior to 1900. Among robust democratizers, eight maintained national independence prior to 1900. Since neither ethnic fractionalization nor sex inequality were statistically significant, we do not plot their marginal effects.

How can we interpret these marginal effects on V-Dem indices in relation to the more popular Freedom House measures? The average V-Dem electoral democracy score at a Freedom House score of 1 is .85; at a Freedom House score of 2 it is .74; at 3 it is .64; at 4 it is .47; at 5 it is .41; at 6 it is .28; and at 7 it is .16. The results are similar for V-Dem liberal democracy scores, but for each 1-point interval jump along the Freedom House score, there is greater variation in the change along V-Dem liberal democracy scores and the 'drop-off' in liberal democracy scores is steeper. The average V-Dem liberal democracy score at a Freedom House score of 1 is .78; at a Freedom House score of 2 it is .61; at 3 it is .46; at 4 it is .31; at 5 it is .22; at 6 it is .16; and at 7 it is .07. In sum, a 1-point change in the Freedom House Index corresponds to a roughly .1 change along the 0-1 ranging V-Dem scoring spectrum, see Box 18.1.

BOX 18.1 KEY POINTS

- The level of economic development is positively related to successful democratization.
- Fuels export dependence, a large Muslim share of the population, and late national independence are all negatively related to successful democratization.

The Limits of Explanations Based on Structural Factors

It is critical for us to understand the limits of our model in the context of failed democratization. We

now hone in on the 26 cases of failed democratization to understand how well our model predicted various cases' strength of electoral democracy and liberal democracy. Table 18.5 presents the expected electoral democracy and liberal democracy scores of each failed democratizer (based on their actual scores on the explanatory variables), with 95 per cent confidence intervals in parentheses below each estimate, and the country's actual score alongside it in the adjacent column as well for comparison.

We assume that if our statistical model predicted a country's level of both electoral and liberal democracy (or at least one of the two), then our explanations work reasonably well. As Table 18.5 demonstrates, of the 26 cases in our dataset, only 12 met one of these criteria. For example, our model is spot on for Kenya—a country with very low GNI per capita (US\$3070), high ethnic fractionalization, and late independence (1963). It also works very well for the Maldives—a Muslim majority country (98.4 per cent), with a moderate GNI per capita (US\$11480), which was quite recently decolonized (1965). Pakistan's fate is also well predicted—another Muslim majority country (96.3 per cent), highly unequal in terms of sex (the literacy gap is 27 per cent), with a low GNI per capita (US\$5320), and late independence (1947).

In 14 of the failed democratizers, however, our predictions for the strength of electoral democracy and liberal democracy are quite inaccurate. They appear in bold in Table 18.5. Most often, the failures were the old Soviet states—the democratic performance of which the model over predicted. These include Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. What is notable is that these cases all do exceptionally well on literacy rates across both genders, which contributes to inflated estimates via our sex inequality variable. Some of these countries also have reasonably high GNI per capita, and relatively small Muslim populations. Later in this analysis, we will provide some plausible explanations for the state of democratization in these post-Soviet states. Our model also over predicted the performance of a number of African countries—including the Central African Republic, Zimbabwe, and Madagascar. Other African states were severely under predicted—including Burkina Faso, Mali, and Nigeria.

Some degree of inaccuracy is of course expected; after all, our model only accounts for the effects of certain background conditions. A more complete explanation would also account for the agency of the actors in political systems that have a stake in regime

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Table 18.5 The Failed Democratizers and our Model's Prediction of their Fates

Country	Predicted Polyarchy	Actual Polyarchy	Predicted Libdem	Actual Libdem
Armenia	.56 (.48-.64)	.36	.43 (.36-.51)	.20
Belarus	.54 (.47-.60)	.3	.41 (.34-.47)	.1
Burkina Faso	.43 (.36-.50)	.7	.27 (.21-.34)	.52
Central African Republic	.51 (.40-.61)	.32	.36 (.26-.46)	.16
Congo	.38 (.27-.49)	.31	.22 (.14-.31)	.1
Djibouti	.36 (.27-.45)	.3	.21 (.13-.27)	.15
Gabon	.38 (.26-.50)	.42	.23 (.13-.32)	.23
Gambia	.37 (.26-.50)	.31	.22 (.15-.29)	.15
Guinea-Bissau	.45 (.37-.54)	.43	.3 (.22-.37)	.23
Honduras	.7 (.6-.78)	.52	.53 (.43-.63)	.34
Jordan	.42 (.31-.53)	.27	.26 (.17-.36)	.19
Kenya	.51 (.43-.59)	.52	.36 (.28-.43)	.35
Kyrgyzstan	.38 (.28-.47)	.58	.22 (.15-.30)	.39
Madagascar	.5 (.41-.59)	.21	.35 (.27-.43)	.14
Malaysia	.51 (.44-.59)	.37	.38 (.31-.46)	.22
Maldives	.42 (.32-.53)	.44	.27 (.18-.37)	.24
Mali	.38 (.29-.47)	.69	.23 (.15-.30)	.5
Morocco	.41 (.31-.49)	.31	.25 (.18-.33)	.26
Nigeria	.25 (.15-.35)	.58	.12 (.06-.19)	.13
Pakistan	.4 (.30-.50)	.41	.24 (.16-.33)	.27

(Continued)

Table 18.5 (Continued)

Country	Predicted Polyarchy	Actual Polyarchy	Predicted Libdem	Actual Libdem
Russia	.61 (.51-.71)	.30	.43 (.32-.54)	.15
Sri Lanka	.56 (.51-.61)	.55	.43 (.38-.48)	.34
Tajikistan	.40 (.30-.50)	.21	.25 (.16-.33)	.08
Thailand	.71 (.63-.79)	.17	.56 (.46-.65)	.1
Venezuela	.53 (.39-.67)	.45	.33 (.19-.46)	.17
Zimbabwe	.53 (.46-.59)	.32	.38 (.32-.44)	.17

outcomes. Some may fight for democracy, whereas others may prefer the opportunities for power and corruption that comes with dictatorship. In the next section, we focus in particular on the actors inhibiting democratization.

Agents of Democratic Failure

We can distinguish between five primary agents of democratic failure: (1) the masses; (2) insurgents; (3) meddling foreign powers; (4) power-seeking armed forces; and (5) a despotic chief executive. The masses may carry out an uprising or revolution. Insurgents may sabotage democratization by instigating a civil war. A foreign power may thwart a democratic opening by launching an invasion or arming insurgent forces. The armed forces may also intervene to throw elected leaders out of power. Lastly, a chief executive may engage in despotic actions. In turn, referencing Table 18.5, we consider which of these agents may have contributed to the 14 cases of failed democratization that our model failed to predict.

In Armenia, the cause of strife remains a despotic chief executive. Most recently, election monitors expressed concern over the fairness of the 2013 presidential election, in which the incumbent candidate, President Sargsyan of the Republican Party of Armenia (HHK), was re-elected for his third term. On the one hand, monitors were concerned because of the

reported use of administrative resources toward Sargsyan's reelection campaign. On the other hand, there was scepticism among experts concerning the unusually high electoral support for the incumbent.

In Belarus, the narrative is similar: President Aleksandr Lukashenko secured his fifth term in the October 2015 presidential election. Election monitors were highly sceptical over the freedom and fairness of the election. He also continues to hold tight grip over the media and describes his style of governance as authoritarian (see Chapter 22).

Burkina Faso has most recently been subject to democratic weakening due to interference from the military as well as mass uprisings. Following mass protests at the end of 2014, the long-time president Blaise Compaoré was forced to resign. However, in September 2015, the presidential guard—the Régiment de Sécurité Présidentielle (RSP)—comprised of his core loyalists, attempted to stage a military coup. Dozens of civilians were killed in the process, and the political situation has remained fragile since.

In the Central African Republic, both insurgencies and armed forces continue to weaken the chances of successful democratization. The ongoing conflict between Muslim Séléka forces and Christian militias has led to large-scale religious cleansing. The conflict is so severe that approximately one million people have reportedly been internally displaced. In early 2014, the UN interfered to launch a large-scale stabilizing mission involving 11,000 troops. Although the insurgency

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was followed by a cease-fire agreement, peace and rule of law has proven difficult and short-lived.

In Honduras, a despotic chief executive has brought the country into democratic decline. The ruling National Party (PN) and its leader—President Juan Orlando Hernández—have continued to disrupt the country’s democratic development with corruption scandals. Moreover, the Honduran constitution was recently amended to eliminate the term limits previously imposed on the president and to circumvent the congressional vote on military policing.

Kyrgyzstan’s democratic failure is also primarily due to an unruly executive. President Atambayev has reportedly used the executive branch to harass, intimidate, and altogether eliminate his political enemies. Moreover, ultranationalist vigilante groups like Kyrk Choro (40 Knights) and Kalys (Justice) have repeatedly threatened political opponents of the ruling party (particularly ethnic minority groups).

Over the last decade, Madagascar has been severely weakened by Andry Rajoelina’s 2009 military-backed coup. Madagascar continues to experience large-scale political corruption (Wickberg 2014), cuts to international aid, and general political discontent. In May 2015, the National Assembly voted to impeach President Hery Rajaonarimampianina—but was quickly struck down by the courts. While this would usually be lauded as a demonstration of judicial power vis-à-vis the executive, the action was particularly damaging to democracy because, reportedly, Madagascar’s executive often exerts pressure on judges through reassigning magistrates to different locations. In light of these dynamics, the opposition supporters perceive the court decision as illegitimate.

In Malaysia, the primary limiting factor is also the executive. Multiple electoral oversight commissions have noted that the electoral framework is severely unjust and thereby weakens the country’s electoral legitimacy (Norris, Frank, and Martinez i Coma 2014; Khoo 2014). Moreover, corruption scandals are frequent and Malaysia’s partisan patronage networks are complex and far-reaching (Siddiquee 2010; Gomez 2014). The Malaysian case is yet another instance in which the executive keeps very tight control over the media as well.

As we briefly discussed earlier in this chapter, Tuareg insurgents have destabilized Mali. Given the tenuous peace with the rebels, Mali’s constitution was briefly suspended in 2012, and elections have been delayed repeatedly (Lecocq *et al.* 2013). Corruption remains a problem in Mali’s government, and media

self-censorship has increased significantly as a result of insurgents’ widespread terrorizing of journalists during the 2012 rebellion (Freedom House 2016).

Nigeria has recently gained democratic momentum—after 16 years in power, the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) lost the 2015 presidential election and its majority in the National Assembly to the opposition, All Progressives Congress (APC). However, insurgent forces—specifically, Boko Haram—have continued to terrorize civilians as well as members of government. In response to the terrorist threats, the Nigerian government’s forces have continued to commit human rights violations. These violations reportedly include extrajudicial killings, mass arrests, illegal detentions, and even civilian torture.

Russia’s continued problems with democratization are also rooted in its executive: President Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin have continued a far-reaching crackdown on civil society, specifically targeting domestic non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Over the last decade, the regime has continued to intensify control and state censorship of media. The modern Russian media landscape is saturated with nationalist, pro-Putin propaganda. Moreover, the regime has been closely linked to the execution of a dozen dissidents and political opponents in recent years. It has also been accused of meddling in foreign elections and promoting pro-Russian separatist insurgencies in the region.

In Tajikistan, the executive is yet again arguably responsible for the country’s democratic failures. The President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, has been in power since 1994. His ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP) reportedly ramped up efforts to persecute the opposition prior to the March 2015 parliamentary elections, as well as directly following the elections. The PDP has not only arrested opposition leaders, but it also outright banned the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT)—labelling it a terrorist organization. Given this series of purges, the ruling party has cemented a virtually unopposed position in policy legislation and implementation.

In Thailand, the masses as well as the military played an important role in undermining democratic rule. Indeed, the country’s political environment rapidly deteriorated in 2014 due to a series of public demonstrations that often devolved into violent disruptions organized by an opposition group, the People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC). A number of PDRC supporters occupied government ministries and major intersections in Bangkok. Allegedly, the

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PDRC was also responsible for cutting off power to the homes of members of the governing Puea Thai Party (PTP). Following counter protests by the administration's loyalists, as well as a series of bombings, dozens were killed and hundreds more injured. Eventually, the army declared martial law and detained senior leaders from both the opposition's camp and the government; it shortly thereafter announced a coup d'état. The resulting National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) suspended the constitution, forcibly dispersed all rallies, and imposed severe restrictions on freedoms of speech, association, and the press. Thailand has since remained in a very fragile political state.

In Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe led ZANU-PF in an authoritarian manner for over three decades, until he was sacked in a coup orchestrated by elements within his own party. Following in Mugabe's tradition, the ruling ZANU-PF continues to use state institutions as well as intimidation to punish opposition politicians, their supporters, and critical political activists (Kriger 2005; Meredith 2018). Moreover, recent elections (both local and national) have been marred by small-scale electoral violence and other reported irregularities.

In short, we find that despotic chief executives continue to reign as the agent of democracy's demise. In eight of the 14 cases our model failed to predict, the primary cause was, arguably, a despotic executive. In another three cases, they shared responsibility with another actor. In a small subset of our cases, insurgents, militaries, and mass protests have also contributed to democratization's demise. However, the trend remains: the chief executive has been the primary agent of democratic backsliding. Note that in almost all instances, the culprit is specifically the president. This is not surprising given the wealth of literature on the relative danger of presidential versus parliamentary systems (Linz and Valenzuela 1994; Fish 2006). It thereby follows that finding ways to constrain a president may be crucial to safeguarding democracy, see Box 18.2.

BOX 18.2 KEY POINTS

- Objective structural conditions predict the levels of electoral and liberal democracy with a reasonable degree of accuracy in about half of the cases of failed democratization.
- Beyond that, we have to look at political actors; the role of the chief executive being particularly important.

Strengthening Legislatures and Curtailing Executive Power

As suggested by Fish (2006), a strong legislature may be the best antidote to an executive's abuse of power. This continues to ring true given the modern political climate of failed democratizers. Constitutions' drafters who seek to maximize the chances of democratic success should vest expansive powers in the parliament and design rigorous checks and balances between the legislature and the executive. Because the V-Dem liberal democracy index focuses on institutional checks and balances and the limitation of government power, this measure may be especially important in formulating certain predictions about the future regarding the viability of a country's democracy.

We make no causal claim in regard to the design and power of the legislature, given the variety of other factors that contribute to both institutional design and democratic outcomes. However, we suggest that designing and sustaining a strong legislature could have helped prevent the level of democratic backsliding we have witnessed in—for example—Armenia, Belarus, Central African Republic, Russia, and Zimbabwe. Moreover, in many cases, the bolstering of the legislature has promoted open politics. Bhutan serves as one recent example of this.

Altering the Structural Factors

Many of the structural variables used in the previous analysis are rather slow to evolve; economic development is generally a multi-decade endeavour. Its effects on the prospects for democratization may take generations to materialize. Moreover, countries' histories of national independence are also fixed and immutable. However, a majority of even the robust democratizers obtained independent statehood only in the twentieth century. The percentage of Muslims (or any other faith community) in a population is also relatively stable over time. However, a country's religious composition may be viewed as a source of special challenge, rather than an insuperable barrier to, successful democratization. In countries like Indonesia, Islamic mass organizations have played constructive roles in building civil society and democratization. Fuels export dependence is not immutable, but it is also rather sticky, at least in the short term. However, countries like Mexico have successfully democratized in the past by changing policy and reducing their reliance

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on hydrocarbons and diversifying their exports. The success of Mexico prompts us to speculate about what might happen if fuels-dependent countries whose democratization failed manage to diversify their exports.

In sum, while structural factors do change, they are very difficult to move in the short term. Diversifying exports seems like the most viable option in terms of providing a 'quick fix.' Concentrated efforts of rapid economic development and industrialization may also provide positive democratic gains—as in the case of South Korea in recent decades, see Box 18.3.

BOX 18.3 KEY POINTS

- Although difficult to manipulate in the short term, reductions in fuel export dependence would reduce the likelihood of democratic breakdown.
- Other important structural factors are less amenable to political engineering; as such, political solutions such as providing checks and balances on the executive can act as an important bulwark against relapses into authoritarianism.

Conclusion

In a majority of countries around the world, democratization continues to be tenuous at best. In fact, only 62 of our 158 cases have achieved the status of established democracy or robust democratizer. As we have analysed in parallel, countries' degree of electoral democracy and liberal democracy indicate similar trends and are explained by a similar set of factors—including: (1) fuels export dependence; (2) economic development; (3) percentage of Muslims in the population; and (4) late national independence. We have argued that there is hope for rapid democratization if policies are implemented to alleviate poverty and alter dependency on hydrocarbons.

Failed democratizers usually feature despotic executives who can take advantage of weak institutions. We detailed multiple instances in which despots manipulated institutions to stay in power for decades. Since it can be difficult to know in advance who will become a despot, the solution is to design better institutions to constrain executive power. Popular anti-authoritarian uprisings gain media attention, but it should be recognized that sometimes 'the people' are against democracy. Foreign influence, however, was not particularly prevalent amongst our cases. To be sure, outsiders

have done some meddling. For example, some of the chief executives who presided over democratization's demise enjoyed the backing of foreign governments. Yet these governments are never the primary actor in democracy's demise.

Our focus on failed democratizers does miss a very worrying trend undermining democratization. There are a number of countries that are unambiguously in democratic decline, but by any index of democratic strength, remain too democratic compared to underdeveloped democracies to enter into our in-depth analyses of democratic failure. Three such notable cases of relative democratic decline include Hungary, Poland, and Turkey—wherein the parties (and rulers) in power have continued to chip away at checks and balances and concentrate executive power. The transformations have been more gradual because in each case the leader has chosen to legitimize the institutional changes by implementing them through at least nominally democratic procedures such as parliamentary votes or popular referenda. If the people no longer support democracy, then even strong constraints on the executive will not be enough to save the system.

? QUESTIONS

1. How do measures of liberal and electoral democracy serve to analyse the factors determining failure of democratization?
2. How does a failed democratizer differ from an established autocracy?
3. How might economic dependence upon oil and gas production affect the prospects for democratization? Under what regime conditions do we expect a strong negative effect?

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4. How might a long history of national independence and statehood decrease the probability that democratization will fail?
5. What factors other than those discussed in this chapter might affect the probability that democratization will succeed or fail?



Visit the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book for additional questions to accompany each chapter, and a range of other resources: www.oup.com/uk/haerpfer2e/.



FURTHER READING

Åslund, Anders. (2007), *Russia's Capitalist Revolution: Why Market Reform Succeeded and Democracy Failed* (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics). This book furnishes a provocative explanation for one of the most momentous cases of democratic failure of modern times, and provides a welcome evaluation of economic as well as political transformation.

Juan, J. Linz, (1978), *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown, and Reequilibration* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press). This slim volume remains the starting point for all studies on the failure of democracy. Though it focuses largely on interwar cases, its acute theoretical insights remain relevant for contemporary circumstances.

Posusney, M. P. and Angrist, M. P. (2005) (eds), *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner). This edited volume provides a wealth of insights on why democratization fails. Its focus on the Middle East, given that the region is often overlooked in studies of regime change, makes the volume particularly useful.

Smith, P. H. (2005), *Democracy in Latin America: Political Change in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). This engaging book holds up theories of regime change to the experience of Latin America. Exemplary in its use of theory to understand cases, and of cases to refine theory, the book provides a wealth of information as well as insights into various theories of democratization. It also probes the possible limits of democratization and the factors that may impose those limits.

Villalón, L. A., and VonDoepp, P. (2005) (eds), *The Fate of Africa's Democratic Experiments: Elites and Institutions* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press). Focusing largely on the effects and the limits of the effects of institutions on democratization, this edited volume provides much insight into the difficulty and tenuousness of many of Africa's experiments with open politics.



IMPORTANT WEBSITES

<<https://www.v-dem.net/en/data/>> The Varieties of Democracy website provides access to various versions of their data, as well as an online analysis tool to explore multiple indices in a single country.

<<http://hdr.undp.org/en/>> The Human Development Report, issued annually by the United Nations Development Programme, contains a wealth of data for nearly all of the world's countries on factors related to socioeconomic development and living standards.

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