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Why Do Ruling Parties Extend Authoritarian Rule? Examining the Role of Elite Institutions and Mass Organization

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Why Do Ruling Parties Extend Authoritarian Rule? Examining the Role of Elite Institutions and Mass Organization[*]

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Abstract

A number of studies show that autocracies with ruling parties are more long-lived than those without. Much of the literature attributes this to party institutionalization at the elite-level, which is said to reduce elite schisms. Others point to the ability of grassroots party organizations to mobilize mass support. There is very little empirical research that examines these different mechanisms. This paper fills that gap using new data from the V-Party database, which provides detailed expert-coded information on the attributes of all autocratic ruling parties between 1970 and 2019. I find that both mass-based organization (e.g. well-developed networks of local branches and strong ties to social organizations) and elite-level institutionalization (e.g. depersonalized, collective control over candidate nominations) are associated with regime longevity, but the findings for mass organization are stronger and more robust. The findings suggest that mass organization is one of the main factors that makes party-based autocracy so durable.

1 Introduction

Research on autocratic regimes has expanded significantly over the past two decades. One of the most robust findings in this literature has been that regimes with well-developed ruling party organizations are more robust than regimes without such parties (e.g. Geddes 1999, Svolik 2012, Wright and Escriba-Folch 2012, Levitsky and Way 2010, Kavasoglu 2021). Why is this the case? The most common explanation for this association is that institutionalized ruling parties reduce uncertainty for elites about the future division of spoils and careers. This incentivizes long term loyalty and reduces elite discord (see Magaloni 2008, Svolik 2012). While this explanation predominates in the neo-institutional literature, others have argued that ruling parties increase authoritarian survival by helping the regime mobilize mass support ((e.g. Slater 2010, Levitsky and Way, 2010, Handlin 2016). Extensive grassroots organization can help the regime gather information, recruit followers, and mobilize supporters.

Despite over two decades of work on this topic, there is almost no empirical work that attempts to separate—or even directly examine—these different mechanisms. Many demonstrate an association between having a strong ruling party and regime survival, but these studies cannot tell us whether it elite-level institutionalization or mass organization that drives this association. The major reason for this lacuna is that scholars have previously lacked fine-grained, cross-national data on the characteristics of authoritarian ruling parties.

This paper helps fill this gap by drawing on new data from the V-Party project, a global dataset that provides information on virtually all political parties that have sat in parliaments between 1970 and 2019 (Luhrmann et al 2020). This dataset applies the expert-coding methodologies used in the well-known Varieties of Democracy project to the study of political parties. It includes data on a large number of party characteristics, including party ideology, identity, positions, and organization, and provides this extensive data for 207 autocratic ruling parties over a 50 year timespan. Importantly for this project, this includes a number of measures of elite-level institutionalization and grassroots party organization.

Using this new data, I examine how levels of mass-based organization and elite-level institutionalization affect the longevity of party-based regimes. I find some support for both explanations, but the evidence for mass-based organization is stronger and more robust. Specifically, I find that regimes are more long-lived when their ruling parties have 1) more active local organizations, 2) branch networks with wide geographic reach, and 3) more robust ties to social organizations. These findings hold while controlling for a number of alternative explanations, including 1) whether the regime has its origins in revolutionary struggle, 2) whether it is a Marxist-Leninst regime, 3) whether it has a strong ideology, and 4) whether it employs a linkage strategy based on clientelist appeals.

I also find some evidence that regimes are more long-lived if party appointments are decided by the party collective, as opposed to being under the arbitrary control of a leader. This indicates some support for the notion that elite-level party institutionalization extends the lifespan of autocratic regimes. But this finding is not always robust to model specification and other measures of elite-level party institutionalization do not appear to be consistently correlated with regime longevity.

These findings make several contributions to the literature. Overall, the results indicate that grassroots-party organization contributes to authoritarian longevity. They further suggest that this is one of main reasons that ruling parties extend the lifespan of autocracies. For those interested in the factors that contribute to autocratic breakdown, the mass basis of parties may be just as important as elite-level party institutionalization. Scholars of autocracy should devote more attention to the factors that shape mass political mobilization under autocracy.

2 Ruling Parties, Elite Cohesion, and Regime Survival

The neo-institutional revolution in the study of autocracy is now over 20 years in the running. In that time, we have learned much about how various nominally democratic institutions—such as legislatures, elections, courts, and parties—work. Among the most

studied of these institutions is the ruling party. Many studies have shown that regimes with institutionalized ruling parties survive longer than those without such parties. Such evidence comes from large-N studies (e.g. Geddes 1999, Magaloni 2008, Svolik 2012, Wright and Escriba-Folch 2012, Kavasoglu 2021), medium-N comparisons (Slater 2010, Levitsky and Way 2010), and within-case studies (Brownlee 2007, Reuter 2017).

Almost all these studies posit elite cohesion as the core mechanism that links regime survival and ruling party institutionalization. The basic argument is that institutionalized ruling parties temper elite discord and foster elite loyalty. Institutionalized ruling parties reduce uncertainty for elites and extend their political time horizons. Loyal elites are dependably rewarded for their service with policy influence, rents, or career advancement opportunities. In institutionalized ruling parties, senior cadres are retired and younger cadres are promoted through the ranks in a predictable manner (see Svolik 2012, Reuter and Turovsky 2014).

In this way, ruling parties can help dictators solve a commitment problem that lies at the heart of authoritarian rule. Elites under autocracy expect to be rewarded for their loyalty. Such rewards may take the form of wealth, power and/or influence. Dictators want to induce elite loyalty, but they have a hard time making credible promises to provide these rewards. There is nothing to prevent a dictator from reneging on their agreement to reward service with spoils. Without a constraint on the arbitrary authority of dictators, elites can never be sure that leaders will not abuse them (see Svolik 2012, Meng 2020).

One way that dictators can make their commitments credible is if they delegate some authority to some formal institutions—such as a ruling party—with some modicum of independence that can govern careers and rent distribution in a predictable fashion (e.g. Magaloni 2008, Reuter 2017, Meng 2021). Cadres in regimes with strong ruling parties have a vested interest in remaining loyal to the regime because party norms and rules generate reasonable expectations that loyalty will be rewarded in the future.

While these theories are compelling, the quantitative evidence for them is usually indirect. A number of studies show that single party regimes survive for longer or that

regimes with ruling parties are more long-lived, but these studies do not demonstrate that the mechanism is party institutionalization at the elite level.[1] This lack of direct evidence is problematic because, as I discuss below, there is a prominent alternative explanation for why ruling parties might stabilize autocratic rule that has little to do with elite cohesion. Namely, ruling parties may help the regime mobilize the masses.

3 Mass-Based Party Organization and Regime Survival

Elite schisms are one of the main drivers of authoritarian breakdown, so it makes sense that much of the literature has focused on how ruling parties maintain elite cohesion. But in order to hold on to power, autocrats must also secure support (or at least quiescence) from the masses (e.g. Svolik 2012). Mobilizing and organizing mass support is the other main function of authoritarian ruling parties, yet the new literature on autocracy has paid significantly less attention to how mass-based party organization contributes to authoritarian longevity.

Yet, this was not always case. Mid-20th century scholarship on autocracy was heavily focused on the issue of mass mobilization. For example, in his classic treatment of authoritarianism, Linz averred that the most important distinction among autocracies was not the identity of the ruling group, but rather "the degrees of mobilization" that existed (1970, 260). This emphasis was also evident in modernization-based accounts of autocracy, which often hinged on the extent to which the ruling group was able integrate and channel newly mobilized political demands (e.g. Apter 1965, Huntington 1968, Zolberg 1966).

To be sure, a number of prominent recent works emphasize the importance party-based

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[1]There are some partial exceptions, including Meng (2021) who demonstrates that parties that outlive their founding leader—and have thus demonstrated some institutional autonomy—are more stable than those that do not. Reuter and Szakonyi (2019) show that United Russia, Russia's ruling party, has experienced more defections in regions with more personalist leadership.

mass organization for authoritarian stability (e.g. Slater 2010, Levitsky and Way, 2010, Handlin 2016). An on-the-ground organizational presence can strengthen authoritarian rule by expanding the regime's presence at the grassroots, mobilizing supporters, and gathering information. Permanent grassroots organizations with extensive geographic presence can help ruling parties fulfill these tasks. In addition, the strongest parties often have robust linkages with other para-party organizations and civil society groups that multiply the party's mobilizational reach (e.g. Handlin 2016). In some settings, extensive networks of party cadres may also be used to gather information and enhance regime's ability to punish dissent (Friedgut 1979, Levitsky and Way 2010, Geddes, Wright and Frantz 2018, 133). In clientelist settings, strong parties may also strength autocracy by helping the regime to monitor vote behavior and thus enforce vote buying exchanges (e.g. Stokes 2005).

At the same time, it is not a foregone conclusion that grassroots organizational capacity has a major impact on authoritarian longevity. In democracies, mass partisan organization has declined in recent decades. As the internet and other mass communication technologies have expanded, the need for in-person mobilization may be on the decline. Many modern autocracies eschew an official ideology, agitation, or mass indoctrination, preferring instead to promote political apathy. Indeed, as early modernization theorists first observed, there are many downsides to mass mobilization for autocrats, as many autocracies are ill-equipped to deal with mass political participation (Lipset 1960, Huntington 1968). Politicized citizens, after all, are more likely to seek out alternative viewpoints, demand accountability, and develop a sense of political agency. Thus, mass mobilization can backfire, especially if politically mobilized citizens turn against the regime at the polls or on the streets.

This paper seeks to determine whether the grassroots mobilizational capacity of ruling parties contributes to authoritarian longevity. Previous studies have shown that regimes with ruling parties are more long-lived, but it is as yet unclear whether this correlation is due to high levels of elite cohesion, or whether it is due to mass organization. This paper investigates these mechanisms in more detail than has been previously attempted.

4   Data and Research Design

This section describes a series of empirical tests that examine the association between regime longevity and various indicators of ruling party strength, at both the elite and mass level. The dependent variable in all analyses is autocratic regime breakdown. To construct this variable, I begin by delineating a sample of authoritarian regimes. Following Howard and Roessler (2009), I consider regimes that have either a POLITY IV score greater than 6 or a Freedom House Political Rights score of less than 3 to be minimally democratic.[2] Authoritarian regimes are those countries with both a POLITY score less than 7 and a Freedom House Score greater than 2.5. The use of both Freedom House and POLITY helps ensure that the sample includes non-democracies on which there is some agreement about regime type.

This sample of autocracies between 1972 and 2019 delimits the analysis.[3] I then code regime failure as all country-years in which an autocratic regime ends. Following Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014), I define a regime as "the rules that identify the group from which leaders can come and determine who influences leadership choice and policy (314)." When one autocratic regime ends, it may be followed by another autocratic regime, or the country may democratize. To code regime breakdown, I follow the criteria used by Geddes, Wright and Frantz (2014). For observations not included in their sample frame (e.g. after 2015), regime breakdowns were coded by the author and two research assistants. Instances of foreign-imposed regime change are censored, as are regimes that were still in existence as of December 31, 2019. The result is a binary autocratic country-year variable equal to one for autocratic years when a regime breaks down and zero for years when there is regime continuity.

Indicators of ruling party strength, the main independent variables, come from the V-Party project, a new global dataset that provides information on virtually all political parties that have sat in parliaments between 1970 and 2019 (Luhrmann et al 2020).

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[2]Results are substantively similar using alternative measures of regime type such as Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) and Boix, Miller, and Rosato (2015).

[3]1972 is the first year that Freedom House began its coding

Building on the model and infrastructure of the V-Dem Project, V-Party contains expert-coded assessments on various aspects of party ideology, identity, positions, and organization. Using V-Dem methodology (Coppedge et al 2020), 665 experts coded 1955 parties across 1560 elections in 169 countries. The data is coded for each party in each country for each election year. The modal number of coders for each election was 4. These expert assessments are then aggregated using V-Dem's Bayesian Item Response Theory measurement model (Pemstein et al 2020).

The V-Party project has the potential to transform research on parties under autocracy. The data contains a range number of indicators that have heretofore been unavailable for a large, representative sample of autocracies, including detailed data on party ideology, linkage strategies, leadership structure, party cohesion, and various aspects of mass organization.

Table 1: V-Party Items on Mass Party Organization

Variable Name	Question Given to Expert Coders	Ordinal Response Options
Local Organizational Activity	To what degree are party activists and personnel permanently active in local communities?	0: There is negligible permanent presence of party activists and personnel in local communities. 1: ...minor... 2: ...noticeable... 3: ...significant... 4: There is widespread permanent presence of party activists and personnel in local communities.
Local Organizational Extensiveness	Does this party maintain permanent offices that operate outside of election campaigns at the local or municipal-level?	0: The party does not have permanent local offices. 1: ...few... 2: ...some... 3: ...most... 4: The party has permanent local offices in all or almost all municipalities.
Ties to Social Organizations	To what extent does this party maintain ties to prominent social organizations?	0: This party does not maintain ties to any prominent social organization. 1: ...weak... 2: ...moderate... 3: ...strong... 4: This party controls all prominent social organizations.

In order to identify ruling parties, I first selected the sample of parties that V-Party coders identified as supporting the government. In all autocratic country-years where more than one government support party existed, I then coded the party that was the

primary ruling party. I then cross-validated this list against the Miller (2020) dataset of autocratic ruling parties and adjudicated any discrepancies.[4]

The main independent variables are expert-coded indicators from the V-Party dataset. I use the question items, shown in Table 1, to measure mass organization.

All of these indicators focus on the ability of the party to engage with citizens at the grassroots level. First, I use two indicators that tap the reach and activity of party cadres at the local level (*Local Organizational Activity* and *Local Branch Extensiveness*). In democracies, professional grassroots organization has long been viewed as core to a party's success (Michels 1911, Panebianco 1988, Tavits 2012). Organizationally weak parties deploy activists either not at all or only sporadically during election campaigns. Parties with permanent, active branches are better able to establish roots in society, organize supporters, and mobilize voters. A well-organized network of professional cadres can also help the party gather the information on society that is necessary for targeting mobilizational efforts, enforcing clientelist exchange, and, at times, applying coercion (e.g. Friedgut 1979, Stokes 2005, Levitsky and Way 2010). All of these functions are further enhanced if this organizational capacity has broad geographic reach. Some parties have strong local organizations, but these organizations are limited to the capital or to party strongholds. Parties with a wide geographic reach will be more effective at mobilizing and penetrating a broader swathe of society. *Local Branch Extensiveness* taps this dimension.

Another important vector of social mobilization in authoritarian regimes operates via social organizations and civil society groups. Whether it is social democratic ties to labor unions (Przeworski and Sprague 1986) or Christian Democratic ties to churches (Kalyvas 1996), scholars of European party systems have long noted that links with civil society can be crucial to grassroots party organization. Indeed, these insights have been extended to Latin American democracies as well (Levitsky 2003, Samuels and Zucco 2015) Parties are more effective at mobilizing when they develop ties to organizations–e.g. labor unions, NGOs, religious groups, neighborhood associations, sport and hobby groups, and business associations—with pre-existing societal roots. in the case of Venezuela, Handlin (2016)

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[4]The two ruling party lists agreed in almost 99% of country-years.

has shown that pro-Chavez parties have been most successful in areas where the party established links with para-partisan Communal Councils. In communist regimes, the ruling party has traditionally been aided in it's mobilizational role by state-administered mass organizations that are supervised by the party (Kasza 1995). Therefore, my third indicator of mass organizational strength is the ruling party's *Ties to Civil Society.* Finally, since the mass mobilizational capacity of a party is the product of multiple forms of grassroots organization, I also may use an additive scale, *Mass Mobilization Index*, which is the sum of the three measures described above.

I also draw on new indicators from the V-Party project to help measure elite-level party institutionalization (see Table 2). Measuring party institutionalization at the elite-level is challenging. What we want to measure is the strength of the norms and procedures, formal or informal, that reduce uncertainty over long-term career advancement and spoil distribution. The difficulty, of course, is that elite politics under autocracy is opaque and it is hard to observe these norms and procedures. Real constraints cannot be reliably inferred from formal institutional rules, and, conversely, the absence of such parchment rules does not foreclose the possibility of informal constraints.

Table 2: V-Party Items on Elite-Level Institutionalization

Variable Name	Question Given to Expert Coders	Ordinal Response Options
Party Personalization	To what extent is the party a vehicle for for the personal will and priorities of one individual leader?	0: The party is not focused on the personal will and priorities of one individual leader. 1: ...occasionally focused... 2: ...somewhat focused... 3: ...mainly... 4: The party is solely focused on the personal will and priorities of one individual leader
Collective Nomination Procedures	Which of the following best describes the process by which the party decides on candidates for national legislative elections?	0: The party leader unilaterally decides on which candidates will run in national legislative elections 1: The national party leadership (i.e. an executive committee) collectively decides.... 2: Delegates of local/regional organizations.... 3: All party members decide on which candidates will run for the party in national legislative elections in primaries/caucuses.

The expert surveys used by the V-Party project can help with this difficult measurement task. Country experts are well-positioned to make qualitative judgements about elite-level party institutionalization. The first measure, *Party Personalization* is an item that taps whether "the party is a vehicle for the personal will and priorities of an individual leader." Much of the literature argues that main threat to institutionalization is capricious meddling—or the specter thereof—by the dictator. Cadres in personalized parties should have less certainty about their future career prospects within the party (e.g. Svolik 2012).

Party Personalization is an expert-coded assessment of overall levels of personalism in the party, but V-Party also contains an item that direclty taps the extent to which the dictator exercises manual control over cadre policy in one key political arena, nominations to legislative elections. *Collective Nomination Procedures* is an item that asks expert coders to evaluate the extent to which the party leader—usually the dictator in autocratic ruling parties—controls nominations or whether this task is carried by a collective leadership organ or the party active.[5].

Finally, I also draw on a third, more objective indicator that may speak to the party's autonomy from the autocrat. Several scholars have proposed that parties created by the dictator are more likely to be under the arbitrary influence of the dictator than are parties that predate the regime's existence (e.g. Geddes, Wright and Frantz 2018, Meng 2021, Zeng 2020). Regime leaders should find it easier to undermine the institutional integrity of parties that are created by them. And since more institutionalized parties are expected to lengthen the lifespan of autocracy, we should expect that regimes with ruling parties that were founded before the current regime came to power should be more long-lived than those whose parties were created by regime leaders. To test this, I use a dummy variable, *Party Predates Regime* equal to one if the party was founded before the current regime came to power and zero if otherwise.[6]

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[5]In initial analyses, I use the ordinal version of this variable shown in Table 2, but I also explore a dichotomous version that differentiates leader-controlled nomination procedures from all collective nomination procedures

[6]Data on the age of the party comes from Miller (2020).

Several controls are also included. Since institutionalization may be related to the age of the party, most models control for *Ruling Party Age.* I also include a control equal to one if the party is a communist party,*Communist,* to ensure that any results on key variables are not driven by the exceptional longevity of Marxist-Leninst regimes. Finally, I also control for the Level of Democracy, using V-Dem's continuous polyarchy scale, the country's *GDP/capita* and the level of *Urbanization.* Descriptive statistics for all variables appear in the supplementary appendix.

For independent variables based on V-Party expert coded items, I use the output of the Bayesian IRT measurement model developed for V-Dem data (Pemstein et al 2020). This measurement model attempts to address some of the main problems that arise in expert surveys. Experts, for instance, may have different subjective thresholds for response categories. They may also be affected by cognitive biases related to their region or area of expertise, or be more reliable on certain items than they are on others. V-Dem's methodology ameliorates these issues by asking coders to complete additional tasks—bridge coding, lateral coding, and anchoring vignettes—that provide information on each coder's reliability and relative threshold criteria. The IRT model aggregates expert responses and incorporates the information from these additional tasks in order to reduce measurement error in the point estimates.

The unit of analysis is the autocratic country year. The dependent variable is coded 0 for all years up until the regime collapses, when it is coded one. Thus, I treat the data as binary time-series cross-sectional (BTSCS) duration data and analyze the time it takes for regime to breakdown (Beck, Katz, and Tucker, 1998). V-Party data is collected for every election year (whether single-party or multiparty), so all election-year values are propagated forward until the next election.[7] Since the analysis focuses on how the characteristics of ruling parties affect regime survival, the analysis is necessarily restricted to regimes with ruling parties.[8]

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[7]This coding rule implies that we are unable to analyze regimes that do no hold any elections at all. Fortunately, this is quite rare as the vast majority of regimes with ruling parties also have some form of election, whether single-party or multiparty.

[8]In the *Empirical Extensions and Robustness Checks* section, I also explore specifica-

Since the dependent variable is dichotomous, I employ logistic regression for all models. And, given the duration data format, I also include a cubic polynomial of each regime's age. This captures regime-level time dynamics in a manner equivalent to a Cox proportional hazard model (Carter and Signorino, 2010). Standard errors are clustered at the country level.[9]

Figure 1: Average Values of Key Ruling Party Strength Measures over Time
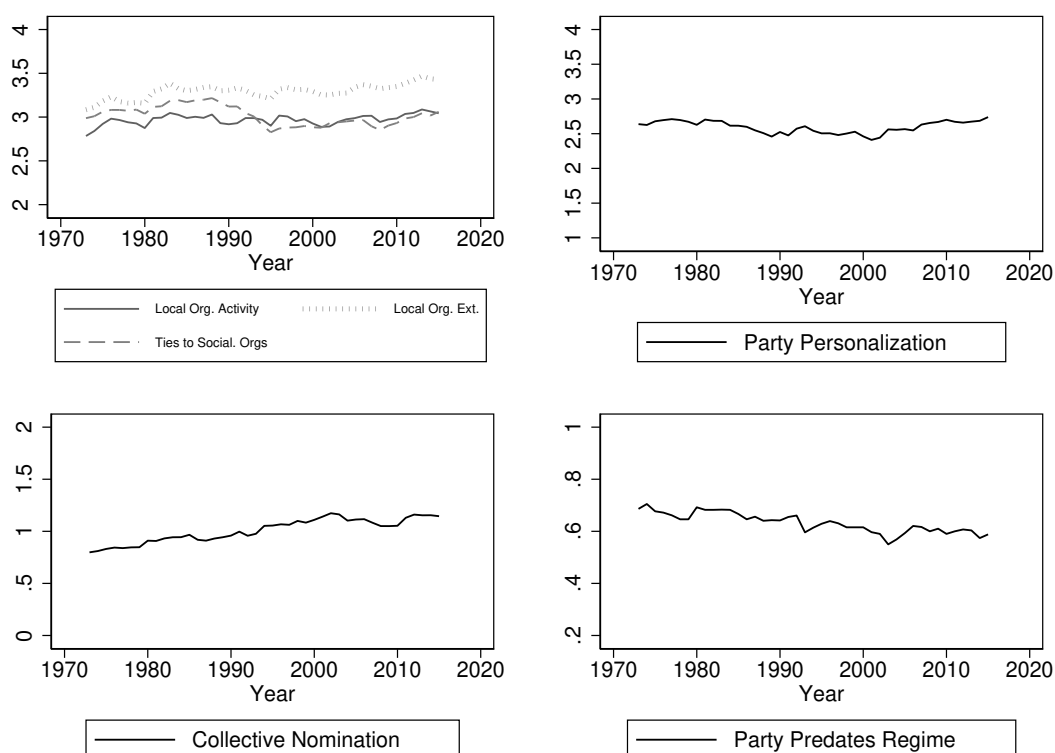
Note: These figures use interval measures that linearly translate the measurement model point estimates back to the original ordinal scale of each variable.

Panel A of Figure 1 shows how average levels of ruling party mass organization have changed over time. As we can see, there have not been noticeable global trends. This is despite the end of the Cold War and the collapse of many communist parties, which

tions that extend the analysis to include non-party regimes, assigning minimal values of party organization and institutionalization

[9]Since many countries experience only one or few regimes, the main models do not include country fixed effects. But as I show in the appendix, all results are robust to the inclusion of country fixed effects.

tend to have high levels of mass organization. If anything, ruling parties have, on average, become slightly more organizationally extensive. The remaining panels in the figure show how the various indicators of elite personalization have changed over time. Here too, there is little change over the decades.

Figure 2: Correlation Matrix Among Key Indicators of Ruling Party Strength
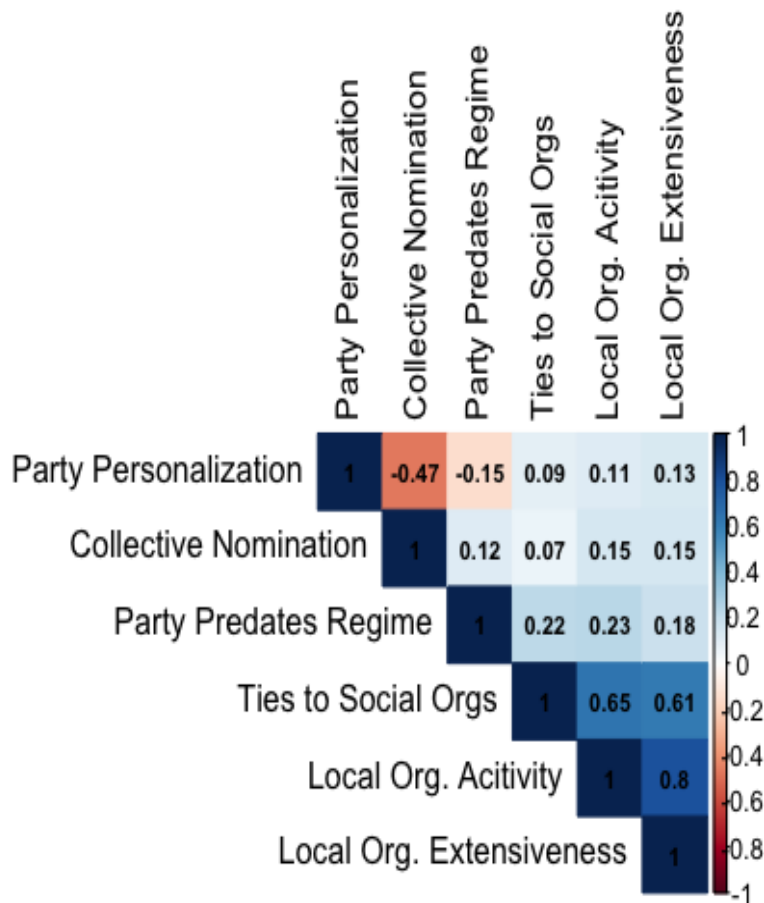
Figure 2 shows the intercorrelations among indicators of mass organization and elite-level institutionalization. Unsurprisingly, indicators of mass organization are positively and significantly correlated with each other. There is also a negative correlation between *Party Personalization* and *Collective Nomination Procedures*. The correlation between *Party Predates Regime* and *Party Personalization* is negative, but quite weak. Most importantly for the analyses below, we see that measures of mass organization are not highly

Table 3: Ruling Party Characteristics and Regime Breakdown

VARIABLES	(1) Failure	(2) Failure	(3) Failure	(4) Failure	(5) Failure	(6) Failure	(7) Failure	(8) Failure	(9) Failure
Logged Party Age	0.008**	0.008*	0.007*	0.009**	0.004	0.005	0.003	0.004	0.010**
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.007)	(0.004)	(0.004)
VDem Polyarchy Score	0.118***	0.111***	0.097***	0.106***	0.118***	0.135***	0.108***	0.130***	0.119***
	(0.031)	(0.030)	(0.032)	(0.030)	(0.032)	(0.033)	(0.031)	(0.032)	(0.031)
Communist Regime	-0.022*	-0.023**	-0.022*	-0.022*	-0.023*	-0.024**	-0.025**	-0.023*	-0.024*
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Urbanization	0.000	-0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Logged GDP/Capita	-0.008	-0.008	-0.009	-0.008	-0.010	-0.011	-0.007	-0.010	-0.010
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Local Org. Extensiveness	-0.020***								
	(0.004)								
Local Org. Activity		-0.015***							
		(0.004)							
Ties to Social. Orgs			-0.016***						
			(0.004)						
Mass Org. Index				-0.007***					-0.007***
				(0.001)					(0.001)
Party Personalization					0.000				
					(0.003)				
Collective Nomination						-0.009**			-0.007*
						(0.004)			(0.004)
Party Predates Regime							-0.009		
							(0.014)		
Personalization Index								0.003	
								(0.002)	
Observations	2,498	2,498	2,498	2,498	2,498	2,498	2,730	2,498	2,498
Regime Age Polynomial	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Cell Entries are Average Marginal Effects. Standard errors clustered on country in parentheses
*p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

correlated with measures of elite-level institutionalization. It should be straightforward to separate their effects in the regressions below.

5 Results

Results from the primary models are in Table 3. Columns 1-4 examine the relationship between grassroots party organization and regime breakdown. The results tell a consistent story: regimes are more long-lived when the ruling party has a robust mass-based organization. All the coefficients on the mass organization variables are negative and statistically significant, indicating that they reduce the likelihood that a regime will breakdown in any given year. As Figure 3 shows the probability of a regime breaking down in any given year is 2.8% when *Local Organizational Activity* is high at the 95th percentile in the data. But when *Local Organizational Activity* is low (at the 5th percentile), the yearly probability of regime breakdown more than triples to 9.5%. As the figure shows, substantive effect sizes for the other mass organization variables and the index are similarly large. These results obtain while controlling for whether the regime is communist.

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Columns 5-8 examine the association between elite-level party institutionalization and regime longevity. The indicator *Party Personalization* is not correlated with regime breakdown. *Collective Nomination Procedures* is, however, negatively correlated with regime breakdown and the coefficient is statistically significant. Regimes in which ruling party candidates are nominated in some collective fashion, as opposed to unilaterally by the leader, are less likely to breakdown. The substantive effect is substantial. When the value of *Collective Nomination Procedures* is low (at the 5th percentile in the data), the probability that a regime will breakdown in any given year is 6.5%. But that probability decreases by almost half to 3.5% when the value of the variable is at the 95th percentile in the data. Finally, *Party Predates Regime* is correctly signed, but falls well short of statistically significance.

Figure 3: Yearly Probability of Regime Failure
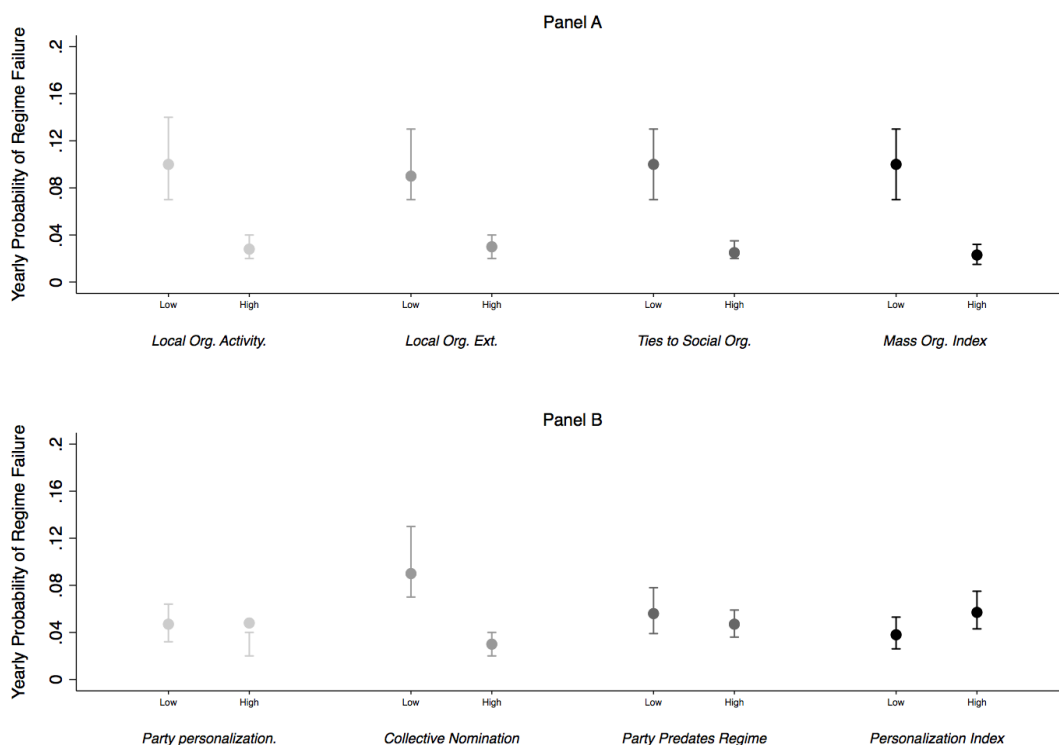
Note: Quantities in Panel A are drawn from Models 1, 2, 3 and, 4, in Table 3. Panel B is drawn from Models 5, 6, 7, and 8 in Table 3.

In Column 8 I combine *Collective Nomination Procedures* and *Party Personalization*

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into an index of personalization.[10] It is positively signed, but not statistically significant. Finally, in Model 9 I include both the Mass Organization Index and the best performing measure of elite institutionalization.*Collective Nomination Procedures,* in the same model. Both are significant and positive, although *Collective Nomination Procedures* only reaches significance at the .1 level and the susbstantive effect of the *Mass Org. Index* is three times as large.[11]

In sum, these models indicate strong support for the hypothesis that mass-based party organization helps extend the lifespan of regimes with ruling parties. There is also evidence that elite-level institutionalization extends the lifespan of party-based regimes, but the results on these variables are mixed and the effect sizes are smaller. At a minimum, these findings suggest a strong role for mass organization in explaining why ruling parties extend the life span of authoritarian regimes. In fact they may even suggest that mass organization plays a more important role than elite-level institutionalization.

However, certain caveats are in order. The weaker findings on the elite-level variables may reflect measurement challenges. The elite institutionalization variables tap processes that are opaque and often informal, so the measures are likely less precise. Indeed, the differing results on the elite-level variables are suggestive of this. *Party Personalization* is a subjective construct and the expert-coded measure of it may be imprecise. *Collective Nomination Procedures,* by contrast, is a more objective indicator that can be accurately assessed with less error. *Party Predates Regime*, on the other hand, is a highly reliable measure, but it is an imperfect proxy for the type of precise institutional features that are captured by *Collective Nomination Procedures.*.

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[10]For this, *Collective Nomination Procedures* is reverse coded so that higher values indicate more influence by the leader

[11]Similar results are obtained when the individual components of *Mass Org. Index* are placed in the model alongside *Collective Nomination Procedures.*

6   Extensions and Alternative Explanations

This section examines a series of modeling extensions, alternative explanations, and robustness checks. Table 4 explores alternative explanations using novel data from the V-Party dataset. The table uses Model 9 from Table 3 as the primary model, but the robustness checks discussed below are substantively and statistically similar when applied to other models in Table 3. In column 1, I include a control for the vote/seat share received by the ruling party. This is an important control, but it is missing for a large number of observations so I excluded it from the main analyses. But all results remain robust when including this control.

Model 2 includes a control for whether the regime has revolutionary origins. Several scholars have argued that autocracies born of revolutionary struggle are more robust (Zeng 2020, LaChapelle et al 2020). According to these accounts, successful liberation struggle demands organizational cohesiveness. Many of the world's revolutionary regimes—e.g. the Soviet Union, China, Mozambique, Vietnam— also had high levels of grassroots organizational capacity so it is important to determine whether the results above are driven by the revolutionary origin of such parties. Using data from the Revolutionary Autocracies dataset (LaChapelle et al 2020), Column 2 examines this possibility. The findings replicate those in LaChapelle et al (2020) and Zeng (2020), showing that revolutionary regimes are more long-lived. But more importantly for the present analysis, measures of social organization remain strongly associated with regime longevity, even while controlling for a regime's revolutionary origins.

Model 3 includes a control for whether the party has a strong ideology. One possible objection to the findings on mass organization might be is that mass organization is correlated with programmatic politics and that regimes with programmatic ruling parties are more likely to attract stable followings that make them more robust. Of course, one could also make the argument that adopting a catch-all, non-programmatic stance provides the most flexibility and that autocrats benefit from depoliticizing public policy. Moreover, a centrist economic position can make it harder for the opposition to coordinate in an "ends-against-the-center" fashion (e.g. Cox 1997, Magaloni 2006)

Table 4: Ruling Party Characteristics and Regime Breakdown: Supplementary Analyses

VARIABLES	(1) Failure	(2) Failure	(3) Failure	(4) Failure	(5) Failure	(6) Failure	(7) Failure	(8) Failure
Logged Party Age	0.009**	0.010***	0.010**	0.010**	0.010***	0.009**	0.008**	0.009**
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
VDem Polyarchy Score	0.115***	0.110***	0.150***	0.130***	0.151***	0.110***	0.095***	0.104***
	(0.036)	(0.032)	(0.034)	(0.032)	(0.036)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.030)
Communist Regime	-0.022*	-0.019	-0.032***	-0.031**	-0.033***	-0.023*	-0.021*	-0.021*
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Urbanization	-0.000	0.000	-0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Logged GDP/Capita	-0.012	-0.009	-0.010	-0.011	-0.011	-0.008	-0.008	-0.008
	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Mass Org. Index	-0.007***	-0.007***	-0.008***	-0.007***	-0.007***	-0.007***	-0.007***	-0.007***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Collective Nomination	-0.007*	-0.006*	-0.006	-0.008**	-0.008**			
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)			
Vote/Seat Share	-0.000							
	(0.000)							
Revolutionary Regime		-0.036*			-0.039**			
		(0.019)			(0.019)			
Ideology			0.018***		0.017***			
			(0.005)		(0.005)			
Clientelist Appeals				-0.008**	-0.008**			
				(0.004)	(0.004)			
Leader Nominations						0.009		
						(0.012)		
Elite Schisms							0.006	
							(0.004)	
Defections								0.011
								(0.011)
Observations	2,396	2,498	2,498	2,498	2,498	2,498	2,498	2,498
Regime Age Polynomial	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Cell Entries are Average Marginal Effects. Standard errors clustered on country in parentheses
*p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

The V-Party data allows us to examine such arguments for the first time, as it presents the first ever comprehensive data on the ideological positions of autocratic ruling parties. In order to proxy for the presence of a strong ideology, I focus on the economic left-right scale, drawing on an item that asks respondents to "locate the party in terms of its overall ideological stance on economic issues." Respondents are given the option of rating the party on an ordinal scale ranging from "far-left" to "far-right". I then take the absolute value of this measure such that higher positive values indicate a stronger programmatic stance on economic issues (whether left or right) and lower values indicate a more centrist position. As Model 3 shows, *Mass Org. Index* remains strongly negatively correlated with regime breakdown while controlling for party ideology. And, intriguingly, the findings show that strong ideology is positively correlated with regime breakdown, suggesting that a catch-all strategy may be more beneficial for autocrats.

Model 4 includes a variable that measures the extent to which the ruling party engages in clientelist appeals to voters. Many ruling parties rely heavily on clientelism to help them maintain dominance (Magaloni 2006, Greene 2007). One might object to the findings above by noting that parties with strong grassroots organization are better able to target clientelist appeals and monitor vote-buying exchanges. Such a story would not be inconsistent with the notion that mass organization makes ruling parties more robust, but it would represent a different causal pathway than the one that is typically offered. In Model 4, *Clientelist Appeals* is a V-Party measure that taps the extent to which "the party and its candidates provide targeted and excludable (clientelistic) goods and benefits - such as consumer goods, cash or preferential access to government services - in an effort to keep and gain votes?" *Mass Org. Index* remains robust to the inclusion of this variable. And consistent with prior case-based accounts, regimes with clientelist parties are more long lived. This finding, and the finding on ideology can be viewed as a diptych: a catch-all program and a particularistic linkage strategy appears to be the most advantageous electoral strategy for autocrats. Model 5 puts all of these variables—*Revolutionary Regime*, *Ideology*, and *Clientelist Appeals*–in a single model. Results are unchanged.

Models 6-8 explore different approaches to measuring elite-level institutionalization. First, in Model 6, I replace *Collective Nomination* with a dummy variable equal to one if the leader unilaterally decides on candidate nominations, zero otherwise. What differentiates the highest values of *Collective Nomination* from the middling values is whether candidates are nominated collectively by party elites or by the party grassroots. This distinction may not matter for assessing personalism at the elite level, so Model 6 focuses just on the distinction between leader controlled nominations and all other nomination schemes. The sign of the coefficient is positive, indicating the regimes where the leader controls party nomination are more short-lived, but it falls short of statistical significance.

Another potential way to measure elite-level institutionalization is to look at the degree of schisms within the ruling party. Column 7 includes a V-Party measure that taps the internal cohesion of the ruling party. Specifically, this item asks expert coders to assess the extent to which "elites in the party display disagreement over party strategies."[12] For the analysis here, the variable is coded such that the highest value indicates "almost complete disagreement over party strategies and many party elites have left the party", while the lowest value indicates that "elites display virtually no visible disagreement over party strategies." Model 8 includes a dichotomous version of this variable coded 1 if expert coders indicated that there were defections and zero otherwise.

Scholars argue that elite-level institutionalization should reduce elite discord and, in turn, make regimes more robust. So these variables should be positively correlated with regime breakdown. At the same time, elite schisms are caused by many factors aside from party institutions. And elite schisms can be precipitated by regime weakening just as they can cause it. That is, they are endogenous to the process of regime breakdown. This limits the utility of this measure as a proxy for elite-level institutionalization. Models 7 and 8 show that these measures of elite discord are indeed correlated with regime

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[12]The prompt includes the following clarification for coders "Party strategies include election campaign strategy, policy stance, distribution of party financial resources, cooperation with other parties (i.e. coalition formation), and the selection of legislative and presidential candidates as well as the party leader."

breakdown, but neither is statistically significant[13].

The supplementary appendix contains a number of other empirical extensions and robustness checks. Table A2 explores a series of models that include regimes with no ruling party in the sample. Given this paper's focus on the characteristics of ruling parties, the main models in Table 3 included only regimes with ruling parties. What is more, it is not apparent how one should apply a quantitative coding of party strength in non-party regimes. Still, it is interesting to explore how the inclusion of non-party regimes might affect the analyses above. Table A2 replicates the specifications in Table3, but replaces the key party-characteristic variables with the minimum possible value for each indicator.[14]

The results are broadly consistent with Table 3, but one key difference is that several of the elite institutionalization variables have significantly larger coefficients and smaller standard errors. This is particularly true for the *Party Personalization* variable. Thus, models that include non-party regimes as a baseline indicate much stronger support for the elite-institutionalization mechanisms. Though, even here, the substantive effect size of the mass organization variable is still considerably larger.

Other results in the appendix include a replication of Table 3 that includes country fixed effects. Because the dependent variable, regime breakdown, is invariant for many countries, including fixed effects dramatically decreases (and biases) the sample size. Results on the mass organization variables are substantively and statistically unchanged, but results on *Collective Nomination* are significantly weaker. Finally, Table A4 shows the models from Table 3 without control variables. Results are substantively and statistically similar, though, again, weaker for the *Collective Nomination* variable.

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[13]*Elite Schisms* shows a trend toward significance with a p-value of 0.109

[14]For V-Party's continuous measurement model values, the value is set at the minimum value for that variable in the authoritarian ruling party subset. So a non-party regime is coded the same as the 'weakest' party for that indicator.

7   Conclusion

Almost two decades of research has confirmed that party-based autocracy outperforms non-party autocracy. A number of mechanisms have been offered for this correlation, but few studies have examined these mechanisms. This paper used new data on ruling party attributes around the world to examine the characteristics of parties that are correlated with regime longevity. I find some evidence that elite-level institutionalization—especially collective control over nominations—is associated with increased longevity, but I find much stronger evidence that mass-based party organization is associated with regime longevity. Regimes where the ruling party has active, extensive local party branches and strong ties with social organizations survive considerably longer than party-based regimes without these features.

These findings suggest that scholars should pay more attention to mass mobilization under autocracy. Neo-institutional studies have reinvigorated interest in the study of autocracy by illuminating how nominally democratic institutions function under autocracy and the ways in which they can extend authoritarian rule. Much of this literature has been understandably focused on the elite-level and the ways in which these institutions help maintain elite cohesion. By contrast, mass political mobilization has received much less attention during the neo-institutional revolution. This has begun to change in recent years, as scholars have shown increasing interest in public opinion (e.g. Treisman and Guriev 2020) participation (e.g. Truex 2017) and mass organization (Handlin 2016, LaChapelle et al 2020) under autocracy, but the findings in this paper suggest that more work is needed on the ways in which regimes are able (or willing) to develop strong mobilizational capacity.

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8 Appendix

This appendix contains supplementary tables and model specifications.

Table A1: Descriptive Statistics

VARIABLES	(1) N	(2) Mean	(3) SD	(4) Min	(5) Max
Regime Failure	6,093	0.062	0.24	0	1
Vote/Seat Share	12,869	62.9	35.0	0	100
Local Org. Activity	8,659	1.27	1.19	-2.66	3.66
Party Personalization	8,594	0.44	1.50	-2.31	3.96
Elite Schisms	8,696	0.62	1.52	-3.11	3.10
Clientelist Appeals	8,599	-0.14	1.63	-3.02	3.60
Local Org. Extensiveness	8,614	1.34	1.03	-2.58	3.27
Ties to Social. Orgs	8,677	1.39	1.05	-2.80	3.94
Collective Nomination	8,591	-0.059	1.28	-2.95	3.37
Leader Nominations	8,685	0.11	0.32	0	1
Ideology	8,708	1.45	0.99	0.0020	4.28
VDem Polyarchy Score	25,356	0.26	0.26	0.0070	0.92
Communist Regime	5,938	0.28	0.45	0	1
Logged Party Age	4,820	2.92	1.06	0	4.74
Urbanization	11,444	48.4	25.0	2.08	100
Logged GDP/Capita	9,837	8.29	1.54	3.57	12.3
Party Predates Regime	16,761	0.80	0.40	0	1
Mass Org. Index	8,597	4.00	2.92	-5.83	10.1
Personalization Index	8,588	0.50	2.40	-3.98	6.76
Revolutionary Regime	30,811	0.015	0.12	0	1

Table A2: Ruling Party Characteristics and Regime Breakdown: Including Regimes with No Ruling Party

VARIABLES	(1) Failure	(2) Failure	(3) Failure	(4) Failure	(5) Failure	(6) Failure	(7) Failure	(8) Failure	(9) Failure
Logged Party Age	0.013***	0.011***	0.011***	0.013***	-0.001	-0.003	-0.004	-0.003	0.014***
	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)
VDem Polyarchy Score	0.152***	0.145***	0.136***	0.143***	0.145***	0.142***	0.129***	0.126***	0.155***
	(0.031)	(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.026)	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.029)
Communist Regime	-0.023*	-0.024**	-0.022*	-0.023*	-0.021*	-0.023*	-0.024**	-0.023*	-0.025**
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.013)
Urbanization	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Logged GDP/Capita	-0.012*	-0.011*	-0.012*	-0.012*	-0.009	-0.010	-0.008	-0.009	-0.012*
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Local Org. Extensiveness	-0.018***								
	(0.004)								
Local Org. Activity		-0.016***							
		(0.003)							
Ties to Social. Orgs			-0.015***						
			(0.003)						
Mass Org. Index				-0.007***					-0.007***
				(0.001)					(0.001)
Party Personalization					0.006**				
					(0.003)				
Collective Nomination						-0.010***			-0.008**
						(0.004)			(0.004)
Party Predates Regime							0.005		
							(0.010)		
Personalization Index								-0.001	
								(0.002)	
Observations	3,337	3,337	3,337	3,337	3,337	3,337	3,567	3,337	3,337
Regime Age Polynomial	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Cell Entries are Average Marginal Effects. Standard errors clustered on country in parentheses
*p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

Table A3: Ruling Party Characteristics and Regime Breakdown: Fixed Effect Models

VARIABLES	(1) Failure	(2) Failure	(3) Failure	(4) Failure	(5) Failure	(6) Failure	(7) Failure	(8) Failure	(9) Failure
Logged Party Age	0.031***	0.035***	0.028**	0.036***	0.017	0.018	0.017	0.017	0.036***
	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.017)	(0.012)	(0.013)
VDem Polyarchy Score	0.236**	0.232**	0.166	0.226**	0.135	0.169	0.154	0.138	0.227*
	(0.101)	(0.106)	(0.108)	(0.099)	(0.118)	(0.139)	(0.104)	(0.130)	(0.120)
Communist Regime	-0.087	-0.104	-0.079	-0.070	-0.131	-0.131	-0.025	-0.132	-0.070
	(0.082)	(0.082)	(0.069)	(0.072)	(0.090)	(0.087)	(0.055)	(0.090)	(0.072)
Urbanization	0.004*	0.003	0.003	0.004*	0.003	0.003	0.002	0.003	0.004*
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Logged GDP/Capita	-0.090***	-0.082**	-0.085**	-0.085**	-0.081**	-0.080**	-0.044	-0.079**	-0.086**
	(0.034)	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.034)	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.028)	(0.037)	(0.034)
Local Org. Extensiveness	-0.070***								
	(0.015)								
Local Org. Activity		-0.053***							
		(0.016)							
Ties to Social. Orgs			-0.049***						
			(0.013)						
Mass Org. Index				-0.026***					-0.026***
				(0.005)					(0.005)
Party Personalization					-0.012				
					(0.010)				
Collective Nomination						-0.001			-0.000
						(0.015)			(0.016)
Party Predates Regime							-0.038		
							(0.035)		
Personalization Index								-0.005	
								(0.007)	
Observations	1,743	1,743	1,743	1,743	1,743	1,743	1,994	1,743	1,743
Country FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Regime Age Polynomial	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Cell Entries are Average Marginal Effects. Standard errors clustered on country in parentheses
*p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

Table A4: Ruling Party Characteristics and Regime Breakdown: Minimal Models

VARIABLES	(1) Failure	(2) Failure	(3) Failure	(4) Failure	(5) Failure	(6) Failure	(7) Failure	(8) Failure	(9) Failure
Local Org. Extensiveness	-0.019***								
	(0.003)								
Local Org. Activity		-0.015***							
		(0.003)							
Ties to Social. Orgs			-0.017***						
			(0.003)						
Mass Org. Index				-0.007***					-0.007***
				(0.001)					(0.001)
Party Personalization					-0.003				
					(0.003)				
Collective Nomination						-0.004			-0.001
						(0.003)			(0.003)
Party Predates Regime							0.006		
							(0.008)		
Personalization Index								0.000	
								(0.002)	
Observations	2,603	2,603	2,603	2,603	2,603	2,603	3,875	2,603	2,603
Regime Age Polynomial	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Cell Entries are Average Marginal Effects. Standard errors clustered on country in parentheses
*p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01