When Dictators Die

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Consider the following authoritarian leaders: Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, North Korea's Kim Jong-Il, the USSR's Joseph Stalin, Kenya's Jomo Kenyatta, and Yugoslavia's Josip Broz Tito. Each of them died while in office. The ability of such leaders to live out their days in power is not as uncommon as one might think, given the constant threat to authoritarian leaders posed by power-hungry political elites, an interventionist military, or a dissatisfied public. From 1946 through 2012, 79 sitting autocrats died of natural causes, representing 16 percent of the 495 autocrats who left office during this period.[1] Moreover, eleven of the approximately 55 authoritarian leaders *currently* in office are at least 69 years old and in varying stages of declining health. This means that a fifth of the world's dictatorships will face a leadership turnover in the not-too-distant future.

What can we expect when aging dictators die while in power? How does an autocrat's death in office affect a country's political trajectory? At first blush, the possibility of succession in a fifth of the world's autocracies would seem to augur well for democracy's future trajectory. Political scientists have documented a slow but steady authoritarian resurgence in recent years. But will the impending wave of successions help to improve democracy's fortunes?

Alternatively, perhaps the number of aging and ailing dictators should

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TABLE—THE WORLD'S AGING AUTOCRATS, AS OF 1 JANUARY 2016

Country	Leader	Age	Years in Office
Algeria	Abdelaziz Bouteflika	78	16
Angola	Jose Eduardo dos Santos	73	36
Cameroon	Paul Biya	82	33
Cuba	Raúl Castro	84	7
Equatorial Guinea	Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo	73	36
Eritrea	Isaias Afwerki	69	22
Kazakhstan	Nursultan Nazarbayev	75	24
Republic of Congo	Denis Sassou-Nguesso	72	18
Sudan	Omar al-Bashir	72	26
Uganda	Yoweri Museveni	71	29
Uzbekistan	Islam Karimov (d. 2016)	77	24
Zimbabwe	Robert Mugabe	91	28

make us worry. Succession has a reputation of being the Achilles heel of authoritarianism, and observers often speculate that a leader's death will precipitate destabilizing political infighting that could plunge a country into chaos. Adding to these concerns is the fact that most of today's aging dictators have yet to identify political successors.

Despite the apparent logic behind both the optimistic and the pessimistic view, our study of the complete set of authoritarian leaders who died in office between 1946 and 2012 shows that there is little warrant for either. Our findings indicate that a leader's death in office almost never leads to significant near-term liberalization. Likewise, only rarely does it spell the end of the regime or precipitate instability in the form of coups or protests. On the contrary, authoritarian regimes have proven to be remarkably resilient when a leader dies.

When an authoritarian leader died during our period of study, the regime—that is, the group in power and the rules for governing—remained intact through the following year 87 percent of the time. In 76 percent of cases, the same regime was still in power five years after a leader's death. The degree of stability following an autocrat's death in office is particularly remarkable when compared to other forms of leadership transition: After all other types of leadership exit in autocracies, the regime remained intact for one year in just 43 percent of cases, and for five years in only 34 percent.

Unlike other forms of leadership transition, which are almost always politically motivated, death in office is not the result of decisions or actions taken by political actors. When an autocratic ruler dies of natural causes while in power, he or she leaves behind a populace and an elite that, up to that point, had opted to support rather than challenge the leader. Death in office is not a reflection of a disgruntled elite and citizenry, as is often the case with other forms of leadership transition. Thus when a dictator dies the political elites, rather than fragmenting, tend to coalesce around a new successor. To do otherwise would risk their privileged access to power.[2]

Although the natural death of a sitting dictator rarely prompts regime instability, it does occasionally occur—especially in countries that have recently experienced protests or a coup. Thus we have also examined the factors that increase the likelihood of instability in the wake of a leader's death. Perhaps unsurprisingly, we find that personalist regimes, in which power is highly concentrated in the hands of an individual, are more prone to instability following a leader's death than other, more institutionalized autocracies. Yet even in personalist contexts, regimes are remarkably resilient after a leader's death, particularly when compared to other forms of leadership exit. Even when the institutional channels for handling succession are weak, elites have a strong incentive to rally behind a new leader.

Succession Dynamics

What succession-related dynamics typically occur around the time of an autocrat's death? Our qualitative review of the 79 instances of autocrats dying in office reveals two common trends: First, ailing or aging leaders infrequently identify a successor, particularly in non-monarchies; and second, regime elites, the public, and outside political observers frequently worry about the regime's viability in the wake of a longtime leader's death. This is true across diverse authoritarian settings.

Only rarely do authoritarian incumbents who are sick or old choose a successor. The lack of a succession plan typically creates a high degree of uncertainty, both domestically and abroad, about a regime's ability to survive the leader's death. In Guinea, for example, the death of President Lansana Conté in 2008 after 24 years in office was widely anticipated, given his advanced age and poor health. Yet despite his steadily declining health and broad speculation that he would not be able to finish his term in office, Conté did not groom or even identify a successor. Up to his last days in office, the old president sidelined anyone whom he perceived as a threat to his power.

In many instances, regimes either lack constitutional provisions that clearly delineate the succession process or lack respect for those constitutional provisions that do exist, so that formal regulations provide little guarantee of how political transitions will unfold.[3] When Turkmenistan's President Saparmurad Niyazov died in 2006 after sixteen years in office, constitutional provisions were in place, but they were disregarded. Turkmenistan's constitution stipulated that the chairman of the Assembly should assume the presidency, but the chairman was arrested shortly after Niyazov died. The National Security Council and cabinet named Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov as acting president. The ruling Democratic Party followed suit and endorsed him as its candidate, securing his ascension as Niyazov's heir. In Turkmenistan and many other cases that we examined, the political elite was able to overcome the lack

of succession plans or confusion surrounding them in order to carry out the transition to a new ruler without major incident—a dynamic that we will return to below.

Authoritarian rulers often resist identifying successors out of fear that doing so might enable a competitor to establish a base of support that could be mobilized to remove them from office prematurely. A leader's advance announcement of a successor could also trigger an elite backlash against the selection. This occurred in Bulgaria in 1989, when 78-year-old Todor Zhivkov, who had been in power since 1954, was forced out of office. It also occurred in Paraguay that same year, when 77-year-old military ruler Alfredo Stroessner was ousted in a coup after serving as president for 35 years.

Rare but vivid examples such as that of Tito in Yugoslavia can lead observers to fear that the death of a longtime ruler will trigger similar dynamics, particularly in ethnically or regionally divided countries.

Even in cases where incumbent leaders have eligible sons, they are often reluctant to publicly announce any advanced plan for succession. In Togo, for example, President Gnassingbé Eyadéma, who ruled from 1967 to 2005, took measures to position his son to assume power. Eyadéma passed a constitutional amendment to lower the minimum age for presidential candidates and appointed his son to a cabinet position. The president long denied accusations that he was grooming his son for the succession, however, because he feared alienating others in the ruling party who themselves hoped to assume power. Similarly, in Syria, the designation of Bashar al-Assad (b. 1965) as successor to his father, Hafez, was still highly uncertain in the months leading up to the latter's passing in June 2000. As late as January 2000, Bashar al-Assad did not have an official post in the Syrian regime, and many analysts continued to view Vice-President Abdel-Halim Khaddam as the most plausible candidate to replace Hafez al-Assad.[4]

There are exceptions to this trend. Monarchies generally have well-established succession rules, and many leaders of non-monarchies with sons, such as Azerbaijan's Heydar Aliyev (1993–2003), are explicit about their intentions for succession. Even in some highly personalized regimes where hereditary succession is not an option, such as in Venezuela under Hugo Chávez, leaders have designated successors before they die, as the ailing Chávez did in late 2012 with Nicolás Maduro. But more often than not, ill or elderly autocrats have been reluctant to designate their replacements.

Because autocrats so infrequently identify their successors, there are often concerns in the run-up to a leader's death about the potential

for power vacuums and instability to emerge after the leader's passing. Autocrats who die in office tend to have occupied their posts for many years.[5] They have tenures lasting an average of seventeen years, compared to just seven years for leaders who leave power for reasons other than death. Longevity in office enables such leaders to portray themselves as indispensable to the political system. Thus the death of a sitting leader often generates widespread concerns that the system will unravel in his absence.

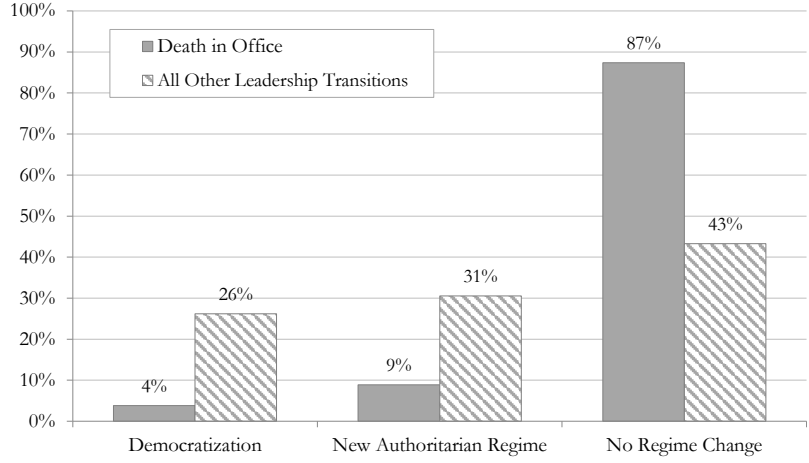
Anxieties that a leader's death will lead to instability are probably heightened by the few dramatic cases in which an autocrat's passing did destabilize his country. In Yugoslavia, for example, the 1980 death of 87-year-old President Josip Broz Tito, who had been in power since 1945, unleashed strong ethnonationalist sentiments that opportunistic leaders fueled to advance their political agendas. Many observers consider Tito's death to have been the catalyst for the country's breakup ten years after his passing. Rare but vivid examples such as this one can lead observers to fear that the death of a longtime ruler will trigger similar dynamics, particularly in ethnically or regionally divided countries.

Such was the case in August 2012, when Ethiopian prime minister Meles Zenawi died. Meles had been in power since 1995. On his death, power passed to Deputy Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn, according to constitutional guidelines. Yet Parliament did not immediately give Hailemariam, a Protestant who hailed from the south, its official endorsement, nor was he quickly appointed head of the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which was dominated by northern Orthodox Christians. This raised concerns of an impending power struggle within the ruling group. Observers speculated that Hailemariam—who had relatively little experience wielding executive power and would be the EPRDF's first leader without a military background—might find it difficult to win the support of the EPRDF's complex multiethnic structure. Ultimately, however, power passed smoothly, making this Ethiopia's first nonviolent leadership transition.

Similarly, in Gabon, the death of President Omar Bongo in June 2009, after 41 years in office and without an identified successor, raised widespread concern that the country would suffer a coup d'état or descend into a prolonged period of political conflict. In the end, the president of the Senate became interim president, as called for by the constitution, and elections were held that August. The ruling party rallied around Bongo's son, Defense Minister Ali Ben Bongo Ondimba, who won a plurality of votes and was sworn in two months later, despite violent protests and allegations of fraud.

In other cases, particularly when hereditary succession is a possibility, concerns focus on how well- or ill-equipped the heir apparent is to fill the shoes of the previous leader. For example, the Azerbaijani media portrayed Ilham Aliyev (b. 1961) as a playboy with few political creden-

Figure 1—Regime Outcomes Within a Year of an Autocratic Leadership Transition, 1946–2012



tials. Outside observers speculated that he would struggle to fill the void left by his father, who had built a cult of personality during his ten years in office. Similarly, the Economist Intelligence Unit assessed Syria's Bashar al-Assad as lacking the necessary military support to survive as president once his father passed away.[6] Yet, after assuming office, Ilham Aliyev and Bashar al-Assad each ultimately consolidated power, and both continue to rule at the time of this writing.

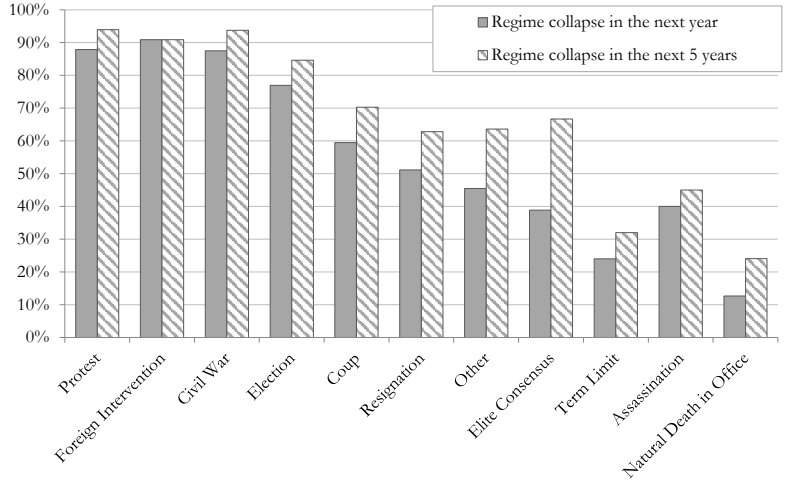
The King Is Dead, Long Live the King

Are the concerns that surround the death in office of a longtime autocrat—about regime viability, the emergence of power vacuums, and instability—warranted? Our research indicates that such outcomes do not often materialize and that a leader's death in office rarely precipitates a significant shift in a country's political trajectory. The deaths of North Korea's Kim Jong-Il in 2011 and Ethiopia's Meles Zenawi in 2012 underscore this finding. Unlike other forms of leadership turnover, which are associated with heightened risk of regime instability, a dictator's death in office most often leads to a continuation of the status quo.

As indicated in Figure 1, between 1946 and 2012, the regime remained intact a year after an autocrat's death 87 percent of the time. In 9 percent of cases, a leader's death brought down the regime within a year but was followed by a new dictatorship, as was the case in Guinea following Conté's death in 2008. In 4 percent of cases, it ushered in democracy, as in Spain following the 1975 death of General Francisco Franco, who had ruled the country since 1939.[7]

Compared to other forms of leadership exits, death in office is associated with a remarkably high level of regime resilience. Our analysis

FIGURE 2—THE PROBABILITY OF REGIME CHANGE FOLLOWING A LEADERSHIP TRANSITION, 1946–2012



shows that among all other types of leadership transition, regimes persisted through the following year just 43 percent of the time. Moreover, transitions to democracy took place much more frequently, occurring in 26 percent of cases, while new dictatorships arose in 31 percent.

We find that the stability that follows an autocrat's death in office extends up to five years afterward. Only 24 percent of autocratic regimes that lost their leaders to natural deaths collapsed within the ensuing five years; of those, 37 percent democratized and the remainder fell under new dictatorships. In contrast, fully 66 percent of autocratic regimes that underwent other types of leadership transition collapsed within five years; of these, 46 percent democratized, and the rest transitioned to new dictatorships.

Do different types of leadership transition influence the likelihood of regime change? Figure 2 offers a detailed picture of the one-year and five-year outlooks for autocratic regimes that have undergone each type of leadership transition. Death in office is the least likely type to precipitate regime change, even when compared to regime-sanctioned forms of leadership transition, such as term limits or informal decisions made among elites behind closed doors.

We also explored whether a leader's death in office tends to create opportunities for a more modest political opening, using increases in combined Polity IV scores as indicators of liberalization.[8] On average, there is no meaningful rise in countries' Polity scores in the years following the deaths of rulers.[9]

Even if successors pursue reforms early on, they tend to face resistance from elements of the old regime. For example, soon after taking office in 2000, Bashar al-Assad began a series of political reforms intended to slowly open up the country, ranging from increasing press

freedoms to releasing political prisoners.[10] Yet individuals who had been influential in his father's regime were able to leverage their political clout to tone down the reforms and limit their implementation.

The case of Syria is emblematic of overall trends in many autocracies following a longtime leader's death. Newly installed successors are constrained by a firmly entrenched political system, limiting their ability to shape the direction of the regime. They tend to be highly beholden to the political, economic, and military elites who served as loyal advisors to the outgoing leader and have little incentive to change. Moreover, new leaders inherit the legacy of the "state" left behind by the previous leader, which limits the regime's capacity for change. An incoming leader who seeks to deviate from the status quo is likely to provoke fierce resistance from the "old guard," who retain considerable control over the levers of power in the new system. Moreover, some of these "strongmen" might try to seize power for themselves if they perceive new policies as posing a threat to their interests.

Elites sometimes seek to appoint a relatively weak successor, calculating (at times mistakenly) that they will be able to control him. This could also help to explain some of the observed stability that follows an autocrat's death in office. If relatively powerful members of the elite feel that they will have sway over such a "compromise candidate," they may be more apt to reach consensus because they believe that their future interests will be preserved. In Turkmenistan, for example, Niyazov's replacement, Berdimuhammedov, was a dentist who had served as minister of health and then as deputy prime minister. In Angola, the 1979 death of Agostinho Neto, the country's first president, led the 75-man Central Committee of the Soviet-backed ruling party to appoint the innocuous planning minister Eduardo Dos Santos as the country's new president. Both of these "compromise candidates" became strongmen who remain in power today.

It is clear from our analysis that the death of an autocrat is much more highly correlated with regime resilience than other forms of leadership transition. So what is it about a leader's death in office that facilitates such stability? As mentioned above, unlike other forms of leadership exit such as coups, elections, or departures spurred by elite consensus, a leader's death of natural causes is not politically motivated. If dictators manage to remain in office until the very end, it means that regime actors by and large have opted to remain loyal.

We can therefore infer that dying dictators leave behind a set of players who support the status quo and the perks that it affords them. Such individuals have a strong incentive to converge on the selection of a successor in order to preserve their privileged access to the spoils of office. Any perceived divisions could expose the regime to a power grab from outside the ruling clique. Elites therefore act quickly to preserve the regime, even if it precludes them from contesting the top post, instead of engaging in internal bickering that would risk undermining the system.

It is possible, of course, that we observe a relationship between regime instability and death in office because such instability occurs in the days and months before a dictator's passing. Due to the propensity of dictators to conceal information about their health, however, it is difficult to evaluate accurately the political consequences of a leader's declining health. We can, however, evaluate the impact of a leader's age.

If advanced age were a trigger of instability, we would expect older leaders to experience more coups, protests, and regime transitions. Yet statistics reveal little evidence of this. The risk of regime collapse in any given year for aging dictators (65 years and older) is 5 percent, the same as that for their younger counterparts. The risk of a coup in any given year for older dictators is 2 percent, slightly lower than the risk for younger dictators (4 percent). Similarly, the risk of a protest in any given year is 17 percent for older dictators, compared to 19 percent for younger ones. In sum, the data imply that old age alone is not a driver of political instability in dictatorships, as we might expect if succession disputes grow more destabilizing as dictators age.

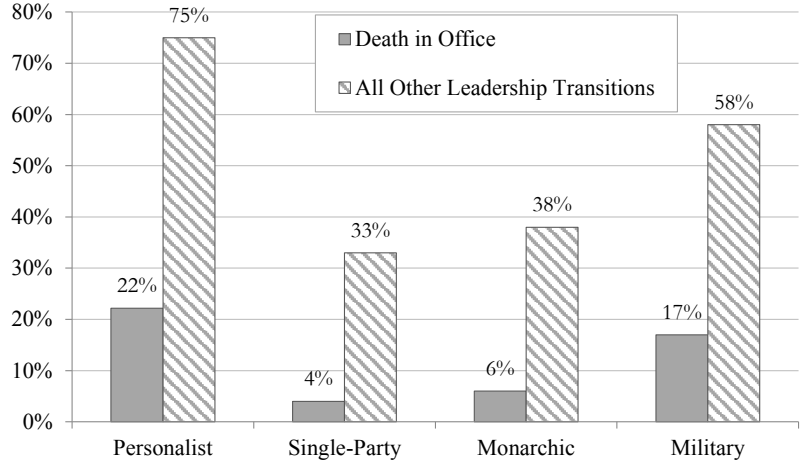
When Does Death in Office Trigger Instability?

Though instability following an autocrat's death in office is uncommon, it does sometimes occur. What factors trigger or increase the chances of this? Our analysis suggests that the "type" of autocracy is one of the most important determinants of regime resilience or instability after an autocrat's death.

We categorize dictatorships according to whether they are governed by a ruling family (monarchy), a single political party (one-party dictatorship), the military as an institution (military dictatorship), or a single individual with concentrated power (personalist dictatorship). Among leaders who died in office during our period of study, 17 (22 percent) governed monarchies, 47 (59 percent) governed one-party dictatorships, 6 (8 percent) governed military dictatorships, and 9 (11 percent) governed personalist dictatorships. Figure 3 shows the propensity of regime collapse within twelve months of a leader's death, disaggregated by regime type.[11] Monarchies and one-party dictatorships are particularly likely to survive a leader's death in office (94 and 96 percent, respectively), followed by military dictatorships (83 percent) and personalist dictatorships (78 percent).

The greater vulnerability of personalist dictatorships to collapse in the wake of a leader's death is perhaps unsurprising. After all, these regimes, by definition, lack the institutional structures (such as a well-functioning political party or professionalized military) to facilitate a political transition. And unlike monarchies, personalist regimes do not maintain established rules for succession. Because personalist dictatorships have less institutional capacity to handle the succession process,

Figure 3—Chance of a Regime Collapse Following a Leadership Change, by Regime Type



they are more vulnerable to collapse after a succession.

Even personalist regimes, however, are still quite resilient when their leaders die in office—the vast majority of personalist dictatorships survive. This is particularly notable given the overall vulnerability to leadership transition. As Figure 3 illustrates, 75 percent of personalist dictatorships collapse within a year of all other modes of leadership transition. This is more than three times the rate of failure that results from death in office. The latter turns out to be one of the least destabilizing forms of leadership transition in personalist settings.

A qualitative review suggests that even in cases of personalist rule, the relative strength of the leader's political party matters for a country's stability in the wake of his death. Personalist regimes with more-institutionalized party structures tend to be more stable than those with exceedingly dysfunctional parties. For example, in the highly personalized system in Portugal under António de Oliveira Salazar, who had ruled since 1932, the presence of the Estado Novo regime facilitated the transition of power from Salazar to Marcello Caetano in 1968, when Salazar became incapacitated after suffering a brain hemorrhage. Similarly, Syria was a personalist regime, but the Baath Party played a critical role in ensuring the peaceful handoff from father to son in 2000. Regime elites within the party agreed to support Bashar not only because it was Hafez's final wish, but also because their support for Bashar's rule would ensure regime continuity. Most recently, the EPRDF helped to facilitate Ethiopia's transition following the death of Meles in 2012 by unanimously endorsing Hailemariam, thereby securing the party's future dominance over the country's political system.

By definition, political parties in personalist regimes are weaker than those parties that govern in single-party dictatorships. The regime-type

categories do not, however, capture more subtle variations in the strength of a party relative to the dictator or small changes in the strength of a party over time. As the examples above reflect, our qualitative review suggests that even in personalist authoritarian regimes political parties can still serve to coordinate the elite in ways that facilitate stability when a leader dies in office.

Dictators who die in office tend to have been particularly adept at governing, generally leaving in their wake a set of regime actors highly motivated to identify a candidate who will continue business as usual.

Our qualitative research also suggests that countries with recent experiences of domestic instability have an elevated risk of experiencing turmoil in the wake of a leader's death. These findings are consistent with research indicating that recent instability enhances a country's prospects for future instability events.[12] Earlier periods of instability leave segments of the population with a legacy of networks, experience, and knowledge that enables them to mobilize more easily in the case of discontent over a leadership transition.

The death of Conté in Guinea in 2008 and its tumultuous aftermath illustrate these dynamics. After Conté won a third and highly fraudulent election in 2003, popular discontent with him and his regime began to grow. In the period leading up to his death, protests, strikes, and riots increased in frequency and intensity. Shortly after Conté's death was announced, the military intervened, with Captain Moussa Dadis Camara declaring that the National Council for Democracy and Development (a self-named group of junior military officers) had assumed control. Less than a year later, and likely drawing on earlier mobilizing experiences in 2003 and 2008, about fifty-thousand protesters demonstrated against the military government. It responded brutally, killing as many as 157 people (the government put the number at 56) and committing a number of other atrocities against the protesters.[13] In this instance, social unrest and the networks formed and experience gained during previous protests seemed to pave the way for unrest in the wake of the leader's death.

In another small subset of cases, a leadership transition, while producing no immediate turnover, set in motion dynamics that spurred longer-term instability. In these cases, instability seems to stem not from dynamics surrounding immediate disagreements over a potential successor, but from the tactics that a new leader uses to consolidate power. For example, opportunistic leaders sometimes leverage ethnic cleavages in order to boost their popularity and consolidate power in the short run, but these short-term strategies have a tendency to create instability later on.

Such was the case in Côte d'Ivoire, where the death in 1993 of the

country's first president, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, triggered the rise of Ivorian nationalism, planting the seeds for future civil strife. In this instance, the appointment of Henri Konan Bédié to succeed Houphouët-Boigny in 1993 secured the immediate survival of the ruling Democratic Party of the Ivory Coast (PDCI). Bédié's appointment, however, led Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara to defect from the PDCI and establish his own splinter party, the Rally of Republicans (RDR). The RDR posed a serious challenge to the PDCI in the 1995 elections. In response, the PDCI adopted a policy of Ivorian nationalism, which intensified ethnic divisions and led to the outbreak of civil war in 2002.[14]

Episodes of instability that come on the heels of a dictator's death, like those mentioned here, tend to dominate news headlines. The empirical record, however, suggests that such events are far from the norm. Instability rarely results from a dictator's passing. While at first glance the presence of eleven aging autocrats in authoritarian-dense Central Asia and Africa would seem to offer a tremendous opportunity to roll back the authoritarian resurgence, the evidence provided here presents a less optimistic picture.

Dictators who die in office tend to have been particularly adept at governing, generally leaving in their wake a set of regime actors highly motivated to identify a candidate who will continue business as usual. As a result, instead of creating space for change, death in office tends to perpetuate the status quo. Though most leadership transitions in dictatorships generate opportunities for political transformation, our research suggests that death in office is not among them. The death in office of a dictator, it turns out, tends to be a remarkably unremarkable event.

NOTES

1. Data on authoritarian leader exits from 1946 to 2008 come from Milan W. Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); updates to this dataset through 2012 come from Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Erica Frantz, "How Autocracies Fall," *Washington Quarterly* 37 (Spring 2014): 35–47. Authoritarian regime start and end dates, as well as authoritarian regime type (monarchic, personalist, one-party, and military), come from Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz, "Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set," *Perspectives on Politics* 12 (June 2014): 313–31. This dataset classifies as autocratic Botswana (from 1966 to the present) and Zambia (from 2002 to 2011), periods some observers may consider to be democratic. Because each of these countries experienced leadership deaths during these periods, we also ran all of the analyses presented excluding these country-years from our sample. The results remain virtually unchanged. Leader-age data come from Henk E. Goemans, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Giacomo Chiozza, "Introducing Archigos: A Data Set of Political Leaders," *Journal of Peace Research* 46 (March 2009): 269–83.

2. This finding reflects that of Jason Brownlee in "Hereditary Succession in Modern Autocracies," *World Politics* 59 (July 2007): 595–628.

3. According to Anne Meng ("Party Institutionalization in Authoritarian Regimes," unpubl. ms., 2015), in sub-Saharan Africa, the majority of the 35 parties that existed in autocracies between 1960 and 2005 chose not to create formal rules of succession—20 out

of 35 either did not have a constitution or did not have a constitutional amendment detailing who would act as the interim leader in the event of the president's death.

4. Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) country reports for Togo (2003) and Syria (2000).

5. The longer leaders have been in power, the more likely they are to maintain it; see Henry Bienen and Nicolas Van de Walle, "Time and Power in Africa," *American Political Science Review* 83 (March 1989): 19–34.

6. EIU, country report for Syria, 2000.

7. The experience of countries such as Spain after the death of Franco suggests that countries with underlying conditions conducive to democracy, or where aging leaders have embarked on political reform, could have rosier prospects. We would expect a new leader (and the elite around him) to seek to build on the country's recent political trajectory, making a future democratic transition more likely. This underscores the importance of political pressure for reform in the late years of a leader's tenure.

8. See Monty G. Marshall, Keith Jaggers, and Ted Gurr, *Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800–2013, Dataset Users' Manual* (College Park: University of Maryland, 2014).

9. See Marc Morjé Howard and Philip G. Roessler, "Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes," *American Journal of Political Science* 50 (April 2006): 376, on the effects of incumbent turnover on liberalization.

10. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2001,* Syria Country Report, *https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2001/syria#.VeH350izJyw.*

11. We look at regime collapse by the end of the calendar year of the leader's death (as opposed to by the end of the following calendar year of the leader's death) so that differences in the baseline risk of regime collapse in a given year across different regime types do not distort the results.

12. Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

13. Adam Nossiter, "U.S. Envoy Protests Violence in Guinea," *New York Times,* 6 October 2009, *www.nytimes.com/2009/10/07/world/africa/07guinea.html?_r=0.*

14. Richard C. Crook, "Winning Coalitions and Ethno-Regional Politics: The Failure of the Opposition in the 1990 and 1995 Elections in Côte d'Ivoire," *African Affairs* 96 (April 1997): 215–42.