Precautions like these are more frequently encountered among non-hereditary autocracies than among hereditary monarchies. Nevertheless, crown princes have killed their fathers and dynasties have been overthrown. So at least some precautions are always necessary. It is not obvious that the cost of guarding an autocrat is greater than the cost of guarding presidents and legislatures. Indeed it seems likely that the total cost in terms of office space, living space when that is provided, and guards in Washington is greater than the equivalent cost in Berlin during the Third Reich. The guards serve a different purpose of course. The president does not fear assassination by a senator but by a conspiracy of low ranking people. Nevertheless he requires guards and so do the Senators, Congressman, and high civil servants.

The decision processes in democracies and in autocracies are quite different. In general, policy debates are conducted rather quietly in autocracies whereas they make a lot of noise in democracies. Further although autocrats sometimes tell their cabinet to vote on policies, the final decision is theirs. There is a myth that when Lincoln proposed the emancipation proclamation his cabinet all voted against. Lincoln then said, "Passed unanimously." This is a myth but it does show the power that a central single person can have even in so-called democracies.

That the common man has little influence on policies in autocracies is normally regarded as a disadvantage of that form of government. There are, however, a number of cases in which democracies have been overthrown by autocrats with popular support. Both of the Napoleon's carried off such an operation. So did Mussolini. Normally however autocracies are established by well entrenched and armed minorities that displace democracies by means of *coups d'etat*.

The view that democracy is better than autocracy is a current orthodoxy. There are cases where everyone favors the autocracy. The citizens of Rome and modern historians think that Augustus Caesar provide a better government than the late Republic. Gibbon lists the period of the adoptive emperors as the happiest time in the history of the human race. Not everyone is as enthusiastic, but it must be admitted that they gave very good government. One of them was also a philosopher of such importance that his work is still taught in modern universities.

There appear to have been three comparatively short periods in which democracy was common before modern times. It is not clear but it looks as if the first civilization, Sumer, had democratic aspects; but these were quickly extinguished. The second was a classical period of Greece Rome and Phoenicia. This ended when the Roman Republic conquered the bulk of the other democratic systems. It itself was replaced by emperors. The third case is a large collection of democratically governed city-states in the Middle Ages. Most but not all of these were replaced by 1600 or earlier. Altogether autocracies were the dominant to form of government until very recently. Whether they will continue to account for about half of all governments, or rise to complete dominance or fall back to a minority form of government is uncertain. I have my own preferences; but there is no evidence that these preferences will prevail.

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AUTOCRATIC SUCCESSION

In autocracies a "succession" takes place, when one autocrat replaces another. In practice, this happens in one of three ways: An autocrat may live out his term of office, or he may retire peacefully (e.g., voluntarily or when his term expires), or he may be forced out. Obviously some of these options are not exclusively at the discretion of the autocrat alone, and his future will depend on his foresight and his ability to protect himself, and among these are his ability to nominate his own successor or change the succession rules. Seen from the perspective of a potential contender for the role as autocrat, the choices are, in a way, more simple: He can do nothing and hope to become the autocrat himself some day or he can try to improve his own career prospects by forcing the autocrat out of office. Either way, the situation is one of strategic interaction and with institutions playing an important role.

This is not a trivial problem. Historically all states, including existing democracies, have begun as autocracies of some form and moved through a long process of state building, including — among many other things — a constitutionalization of the regime, whereby its procedures have been formalized, either through written and explicit constitutions, or through agreements and implicit and gradually evolved common law rules (cf. De Long and Shleifer, 1993; Congleton, 2001). Accordingly, the succession of one autocrat to another is probably the most frequent type of regime

change in world history. Nonetheless, except for anecdotal studies the question of autocratic succession has only received little attention. The first scholar to investigate the issue theoretically was Gordon Tullock in his public choice analyses of autocracy (Tullock, 1974, 1987a,b, 2001), and this has recently been formalized and empirically applied (Kurrild-Klitgaard, 2000; cf. Anderson and Boettke, 1993).

In order to analyze the strategic considerations facing autocrats and contenders, we may distinguish between two different elements typically found in the succession rules of autocracies: eligibility rules and selection rules. Eligibility rules regulate who may come into consideration as possible new autocrats in terms of, e.g., sex, family, caste, class, or political party. Selection rules stipulate the proper procedures for how to select the autocrat from among those eligible and may range from the simple and informal to the complex and formal; they may stipulate, e.g., that the successor is appointed by the autocrat, or that he is elected by some body, or that there is some combination of appointment and approval. Finally, an autocracy may be strictly hereditary, as the vast majority of European autocracies have been over the last — at least — 2000 years, but even hereditary autocracies exhibit a wide range of different selection rules.

For analytical purposes we will distinguish between three ideal typical forms of succession rules: "Open" succession where no individual is pre-selected as the autocrat's automatic successor and two forms of "closed" succession: one where the successor is appointed and one hereditary. The strategic choices of autocrats and contenders may obviously be very different under such alternative rules. To see this, let us assume that there are two relevant positions: That of autocrat and that of potential successor, i.e., a contender who aspires to succeed the autocrat, and who may or may not be a relative. Let us further assume that the potential successor is faced with a simple choice of either trying to overthrow the autocrat or remaining passive and not attempt a coup. The variables to be considered include the benefits of being autocrat, the probability of becoming the next autocrat if he himself puts the present autocrat out of office, but also the direct costs associated with the coup and the potential costs of an unsuccessful overthrow and the probability of incurring these. All these must be compared with those of remaining passive, first and foremost the benefits from being a potential successor and the probability of remaining so. The requirement for a potential successor to attempt to overthrow is accordingly that his expected payoff from doing so must exceed his expected payoff from remaining in his current position. If this is not the case, then the rational course of action for the potential successor will be to remain passive.

Obviously, the autocrat himself has a say in the process. We should expect an autocrat to try to maximize his expected payoff, i.e., his benefits of being an autocrat as well as the probability of maintaining this position, which we for the present purposes will assume is a function of the constitutional rule governing succession; this is, of course, an extreme simplification, but one which for the present purposes may be defensible. Thus, if an autocrat is faced with a choice between the two or more constitutional rules, we may assume that he will favor the one that will minimize the danger of coups. Constitutional rules can, however, never be changed without costs, and he must therefore also consider these transaction costs when considering his expected payoff from alternative rules. In other words, if the costs of changing a constitutional rule of succession are low or non-existent, the ruling autocrat will prefer that rule which he believes will maximize his probability of remaining so. And if he has the power to do so, he will change the constitutional rule from one he prefers less to one he prefers more.

Under a constitutional rule of open succession, there will typically be several individuals contending for the place as the successor, and they may have much to gain. On the other hand, it is often a relatively low-cost enterprise to depose autocrats; the direct costs are quite small (often just the investment, e.g., in some poison, a knife, or a gun). Furthermore, a contender in an autocracy with open succession will not know for certain that he will end up succeeding, and so he must do something about the situation himself. There may even be some element of self-defense in doing so, since other contenders may have an interest in improving their own chances by worsening his. This will clearly negatively affect his expected benefits from passivity, and hence increase his expected payoff of attempting an overthrow relatively. If there are several contenders in an autocracy with no constitutional rules of succession at all, any equilibrium may turn out to be extremely fragile, and the situation one of continuously shifting coalitions, coups, and counter-coups. On the other hand, the uncertainty may also work in exactly the opposite direction, if the expected costs of an unsuccessful coup attempt are considerable, in which case the equilibrium may be that nobody dares move first. An autocracy with open succession may accordingly exhibit either extreme instability or a considerable stability, depending on whether institutions may be developed that will induce and support equilibria and increase the costs of attempting a coup.

In a regime with appointed succession the autocrat's challenge is to choose someone who is unlikely to pose a serious threat against himself. For while an appointed successor may be relatively better off than one who is merely

one out of several contenders, the latter's expected benefits of overthrowing the autocrat are considerable, especially if he is certain that he will become the new autocrat and the direct costs of attempting a coup are likely to be negligible. Finally, since he is the appointed successor the probabilities of getting away with it are quite favorable. The appointed successor must also consider the risk that the autocrat may change his mind and appoint another heir as well as the risk that some other hopeful will try to eliminate the appointed successor in order for him to take this place. Both possibilities will affect the appointed successor's expected benefits negatively and increase his expected payoff of a coup attempt relatively.

If we compare these considerations with those of a system with hereditary succession, there are important differences. The differential in gains between the current position and that of an autocrat may be smaller for an heir-apparent than for a remote contender, while the risk of being removed by the autocrat or others, or dying before succeeding, are quite small. Furthermore, an heir-apparent in a hereditary monarchy is often a relatively young person, whereas an appointed successor in a non-hereditary autocracy (or a contender in an autocracy with open succession) may be more resourceful individuals in their own right and of an age and experience comparable to that of the autocrat himself. The high certainty of succession, which may create the incentive for an appointed successor to kill off the autocrat, thus works in exactly the opposite direction under hereditary succession.

Some simples games may illustrate the evolution of constitutional rules of succession in autocracies. Let us assume that we have two players, the Autocrat (*A*) and the potential Successor (*S*), and that each has a choice between two different strategies. The Autocrat may choose between two succession rules (R_o or R_h), where the former is maintaining a status quo of open succession and the latter is a new rule of hereditary succession, while the potential Successor may choose between either attempting an overthrow (*O*) or remaining passive (*P*). Let us further assume that it indeed is the case that hereditary autocracies exhibit more stability and fewer coups than non-hereditary autocracies, and that the costs of changing succession rules are negligible.

Given these assumptions, it follows that the Autocrat favors the new rule (hereditary succession) over the present rule (open succession), and we may assume that the Autocrat's preference ordering over the outcomes is a given by the lower left numbers in the cells of the matrix in Figure 1. Let us furthermore assume that potential Successors may come in one of two forms: Those who may be personally benefiting from a change in the rules (e.g., because they will come closer to the position as Autocrat) and those who will not benefit. In that case we may have two types of games. Let us, for example, assume that the potential Successor, is someone who would benefit directly from this new rule, an Heir-Apparent (S_h), and that the difference between the benefits of remaining a potential successor and becoming autocrat faster and with greater certainty is small, and that the costs involved in attempting a coup are insignificant. In that case we may give his preference ordering over the outcomes as in the upper right corners of the cells of the matrix in Figure 1. This game has a unique Nash equilibrium, namely the outcome (R_h, P), i.e., that the Autocrat will change the rules from open succession to hereditary

Actors		S_h	
	Actions	P	O
A	R_o	2 2	3 3
	R_h	1 1	4 4

Figure 1: Interaction between autocrat and heir-apparent.

succession, while his Heir-Apparent will not attempt a coup but remain passive.

A slightly different situation is where the potential Successor is someone who would not benefit directly from this new rule, i.e., a more remote contender (S_c). Let us assume that the difference between the benefits of remaining a potential successor and becoming autocrat faster and with greater certainty are considerable, but that the costs involved in attempting a coup vary depending on whether the succession is open or hereditary. In that case the interaction may have the structure of the game in Figure 2, which has two Nash equilibria, (R_h, P) and (R_o, O), and thus resembles the game called Chicken. In this game, one player will give in, if the other gets his will.

These games illustrate that given certain assumptions one should expect an autocrat to attempt to move from open succession to hereditary, and that this will coincide with potential successors generally not attempting coups. They are of course extremely stylized, and in the real world the situation is far less simple; most fundamentally, we are here only considering two types of succession, and the evolution of constitutional rules are rarely the outcome of the decisions of a single individual, not even succession rules in autocracies. An important point to note is that if the costs of changing the succession rules are considerable, the autocrat's preference ordering over the outcomes may likely be: (R_o, P) (tm) (R_h, P) (tm) (R_o, O) (tm) (R_h, O). The game between Autocrat and Heir-Apparent now has the unique Nash equilibrium (R_o, P), i.e., the Heir-Apparent will still not attempt a coup and the Autocrat will not attempt to change the rules. In contrast, the game between Autocrat and Contender now has a unique Nash equilibrium (R_o, O), i.e., the latter will attempt a coup, while the Autocrat still will stick with the rules.

This analysis highlights the importance of the costs of changing rules: If the autocrat's costs of doing so are negligible, he will try to move towards hereditary rules. We should thus expect that autocracies over time will move from open succession to hereditary succession; appointed succession will, in contrast, generally only occur as a proxy for hereditary succession. Another implication is that simultaneous with such a process, we should expect that there would be a decline in the number of coups against autocrats undertaken by potential successors. In this way the introduction of hereditary succession may be seen as a rational form of self-defense.

The empirical applicability of these results may be illustrated with data from two of the European states with the longest periods of unbroken autocratic regimes, Denmark ca. 935–1849 and Sweden ca. 970–1844. In the period under consideration, Denmark had approximately 54 autocratic "reigns," and of these 13 monarchs (24 pct.) may be said to have been deposed by their successors. The observations include periods with open succession (935–1165 and 1326–1340), appointed succession combined with election (1165–1326 and 1340–1536), and more or less formalized hereditary succession (1536–1849). In the periods with open succession, almost every second monarch was deposed by his successor, while more or less formalized hereditary succession guaranteed an extraordinary degree of stability. The periods with a combination of appointed succession and subsequent election were relatively stable, at least when compared with those of open succession. In Table 1 the data have been submitted to a simple χ^2 statistical test, which

Actors		S_c	
	Actions	P	O
A	R_o	2 2	1 3
	R_h	3 1	4 4

Figure 2: Interaction between autocrat and contender.

Table 1: Coups and constitutional rules of succession, Denmark ca. 935–1849

Constitutional rule	Non-coups	Coups	Total
Open succession	13	10	23
Appointed succession	16	3	19
Hereditary succession	12	0	12
Total	41	13	54

χ^2 (Pearson): 9.256; P: 0.010.
χ^2 (Likelihood ratio): 11.542; P: 0.003.

Table 2: Coups and constitutional rules of succession, Sweden ca. 970–1844

Constitutional rule	Non-coups	Coups	Total
Open/app. succession	23	31	54
Hereditary succession	15	2	17
Total	38	33	71

χ^2 (Pearson): 10.828; P: 0.001.
χ^2 (Likelihood ratio): 12.089; P: 0.001.

shows that a null hypothesis of the number of coups against monarchs being independent of the constitutional rules of succession must be rejected at a high level of significance.

In the period considered Sweden experienced approximately 71 monarchical "reigns," of which 33 monarchs are known to have been deposed by their successors (46 pct.). The amount and quality of information about the early medieval period is not perfect, but with some reservations the observations may be divided into two periods: more or less open succession, i.e., with election or appointment (ca. 970–1544) and hereditary succession (1544–1844). In the former period 31 out of 54 monarchs were deposed by their immediate successors (57 pct.), while in the latter only two of 17 monarchs were (12 pct.). Table 2 summarizes the statistical data and shows that the null hypothesis again must be rejected at a very high level of significance.

The empirical evidence, such as it is, thus overwhelmingly suggests that there is truth to Tullock's claims that autocracies with hereditary succession will have less coups than those with some form of open succession, and that autocracies over time tend to move from non-hereditary to hereditary succession rules. Furthermore, the suggestion by Tullock (1987a: 162) that on average approximately one in five monarchs are deposed by their successors comes quite close to the over-all ratio of coups/monarchs in the Danish case (24 pct.), while it underestimates the frequency of coups in Sweden (46 pct.). As an interesting perspective we may mention that one study has summarized the English succession 1066–1702 as containing 31 monarchs of which 18 were deposed or whose reign otherwise resulted in a disputed succession (De Long and Shleifer, 1993); if we extend this period to include the other British monarchs up to Queen Victoria, the result is 18 out of 43 (42 pct.).

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