

Against All Odds?  
Historical Trends in Imposed Democracy & the  
Future of Iraq & Afghanistan\*

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# Against All Odds? Historical Trends in Imposed Democracy & the Future of Iraq & Afghanistan

## **Abstract**

American policymakers frequently referenced the post-WWII success stories of Germany and Japan as plausible futures for the imposed democratic regimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. To evaluate the historical validity of this comparison, we examine the durability, institutional trajectory, and long-term political institutional impact of 40 imposed democratic regimes during the period 1800-1994. Our analysis suggests the following regarding imposed democratic regimes: (a) half fail before their 30th year; (b) only 30 percent experience a long-term strengthening of their democratic institutions; and (c) their failure reduces the likelihood and durability of any subsequent democratic experience in host states.

## 1 Introduction

Prior to the invasion of Iraq by coalition forces in 2003, American policymakers emphasized the broader benefits likely to result from the removal of Saddam Hussein's authoritarian regime and the cultivation of a democratic regime in its place.<sup>1</sup> The democratization of Iraq (and to a lesser extent Afghanistan) would, first and foremost, improve the political and economic well being of Iraqi citizens. A democratic Iraq would pursue peace abroad, eliminating a major antagonist in the Middle East and setting the stage for the settlement of conflicts long plaguing the region. Finally, American policymakers argued that a democratic Iraq would stimulate further democratization and greater economic prosperity in the Middle East, a region characterized historically by authoritarian regimes and widespread poverty, conditions that reinforced political instability and conflict.

The broader goals of American foreign policy were grounded, in part, in two cases of democratic, market-oriented regimes imposed from abroad: West Germany (later unified Germany) and Japan following WWII. Defeated in war, West Germany and Japan were transformed by the United States and its allies from militarist regimes with weak democratic cultures into paragons of democracy, institutions that were in turn reinforced by capitalist economies that generated startling levels of prosperity. Furthermore, West Germany and Japan were critical to the functioning, and ultimate success, of the Western security system during the Cold War, and served as beacons of democracy, economic prosperity, and peaceful foreign relations in regions notable for authoritarian regimes, state controlled economies, domestic turmoil, and interstate conflict. Similar to the impact of post-WWII West Germany and Japan, American policymakers suggested that democratic, prosperous, and peaceful regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq would serve as catalysts for similar outcomes in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Contemporary scholarship suggests some tangential support for these policy expectations, as democratic regimes are found to be more prosperous, are unlikely to engage in militarized conflict with each other, exhibit significantly greater respect for human rights, and proliferate geographically through "snowballing."<sup>2</sup> These scholarly findings were bolstered by early policy analysis, particularly by those focusing on Iraq.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, other scholarship warns of potential negative byproducts from newly democratized states, such as regional instability, tendencies toward aggressive foreign policies by the fledgling democracy, the difficulty of grafting democratic institutions on to ethnically diverse societies, as well America's poor track record of transplanting democracy.<sup>4</sup> In turn, this scholarship squares with the cautionary policy analysis of the contemporary cases.<sup>5</sup>

Clearly, by 2006 the United States had adjusted its expectations regarding feasible outcomes in Afghanistan and Iraq, a shift that might call into question the necessity of studying, in part, the historical validity of the original policy

expectations.<sup>6</sup> We argue that such an exercise is important for three reasons. First, it is important to establish the validity of the original policy expectations, given prevailing historical patterns identifiable prior to the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan—that is, how much American policymakers might reasonably have known given available historical data. Second, despite the aforementioned shift in American policy expectations regarding Afghanistan, and in particular, Iraq, the cultivation of democratic regimes abroad remains central to American foreign policy.<sup>7</sup> In addition to this retrospective evaluation of policy expectations, questions regarding the future of the political systems in Iraq and Afghanistan remain relevant. For example, how likely is it that the democratic regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq will achieve the strength and durability of the West German and Japanese beacons? If democratic institutions fail in the contemporary cases, what are the long-term implications of their failure for the return of democracy in these countries?

In order to address these retrospective and prospective questions, we explore three general behavioral characteristics of democratic regimes cultivated by third parties during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: (1) their durability; (2) the likelihood of a strengthening and/or weakening of their democratic institutions over time; and (3) the impact of these regimes on the subsequent institutional trajectories of their host states, including the return of democratic institutions if the initial externally cultivated democratic regime fails. Prior to exploring these characteristics, we discuss several assumptions underlying our conceptualization of democratic regimes that are externally cultivated, followed by the identification of the sample of democratic regimes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that we employ in our analysis. We conclude the article with a discussion of the implications of our analysis for expectations of success in the contemporary democracies in Afghanistan and Iraq.

## 2 Assumptions

Our analysis is grounded in four assumptions pertaining to democratic regimes that are cultivated from abroad. First, we assume that the cultivation of democratic institutions in contemporary Afghanistan and Iraq are representative of a general class of events that we refer to as *imposed democratic regimes*.<sup>8</sup> While the conditions that precipitate the imposition of democracy vary across cases (e.g., war, colonialism), as do the types of democracies that are imposed (e.g., parliamentary versus presidential democracies), we argue that the sub-class of imposed democratic regimes can be studied and general observations made. In addition to comprising the bedrock of inferential social science,<sup>9</sup> assuming the existence of a class of imposed democratic regimes and the legitimacy of inter-case comparisons are implicit in the aforementioned American foreign policy that presented the comparison with post-WWII West Germany and Japan.

Second, while several studies evaluate American efforts to impose democracy historically,<sup>10</sup> we assume that all external attempts to establish democratic institutions, regardless of the source of the imposition, are relevant to our assessment of democracy in contemporary Afghanistan and Iraq. Therefore, British efforts to develop democratic institutions in many former colonies, for example, and the subsequent performance of these post-colonial democracies, are relevant to our study, not solely those impositions carried out by the United States.

Third, we assume that while some democratic regimes are imposed following cataclysmic events, such as defeat in interstate wars, other democratic regimes are imposed more gradually, such as the incremental granting of autonomy and self-government that characterized a number of post-colonial transitions to democracy (e.g., Canada beginning in 1867). Here, we cast our conceptual net widely when considering the type of democratic regime imposition, and then discuss whether and how the conditions underlying an imposition are relevant to our overall assessment of the behavioral characteristics of imposed democratic regimes.

Last, we assume that the history of imposed democratic regimes, and representative samples derived from this history, contain cases in which democratic institutions are strongly and weakly present in a host state. Therefore, imposed democratic regimes can reflect strong democratic institutional arrangements, as in the case of post-WWII West Germany and Japan. At the same time, polities can reflect moderate or weak democratic political institutions, such as in the Nigerian (1960) or Sri Lankan (1948) cases. Furthermore, we observe that the degree to which a polity is democratic can fluctuate over time, as democratic institutions strengthen or weaken. For example, the imposed democratic regime in Pakistan (1947) evolved from a relatively weak democracy at its inception to a relatively strong democracy by 1958, the year in which the democratic regime was overthrown by the Pakistani military.

### 3 Sample of Imposed Democratic Regimes

Our sample of imposed democratic regimes is drawn from the *Polity III*d database on polities (i.e., authority patterns), supplemented with reference to the *Encyclopedia of World History* and various country monographs.<sup>11</sup> The sample's temporal domain includes the period 1800–1994, a span that enables us to construct a substantial database of a relatively rare events, imposed democratic regimes. Furthermore, the terminal year of 1994 facilitates executing out-of-sample forecasts of the contemporary cases of interest, the fledgling democratic regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq. While we discuss the coding of imposed democratic regimes in greater detail elsewhere,<sup>12</sup> we summarize our procedures here.

Initially, we rely on the *Polity III*d's composite regime score (*DEMAUT*) to identify a base sample of imposed regimes reflecting various degrees of democratic institutions.<sup>13</sup> Specifically, imposed regimes reflecting *DEMAUT* scores greater

than zero during the initial year of imposition are coded as democratic, with the strength of democratic institutions ranging from weak (a *DEMAUT* score of 1) to strong (a *DEMAUT* score of 10). Once we identify an imposed democratic regime's first year of existence, we trace the persistence of the regime until the point at which (1) the state hosting the imposed polity ceases to exist, (2) a host state's *DEMAUT* scores falls below a value of 1 (thereby resulting in a regime that is becoming more autocratic), or (3) the terminal year of the study (i.e., 1994).<sup>14</sup> Relying on these coding criteria, we identify a sample of 40 imposed democratic regimes, a sample that is reported in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Imposed Democratic Regimes, 1800-1994.

State	Start	<i>DEMAUT</i> <sup>1</sup>	End	<i>DEMAUT</i> <sup>2</sup>	Duration
Austria	1946	10	1994	10	49
Botswana	1966	10	1994	10	29
Jamaica	1959	10	1994	10	36
Japan	1952	10	1994	10	43
Malaysia	1957	10	1994	7	38
New Zealand	1857	10	1994	10	138
W. Germany/Germany	1949	10	1994	10	46
India	1950	9	1994	8	45
Lesotho	1966	9	1970	9	5
Mauritius	1968	9	1994	10	27
Namibia	1990	9	1994	9	5
Austria	1920	8	1934	-88	15
Cyprus	1960	8	1994	10	35
Gambia	1965	8	1994	10	30
Ireland	1922	8	1994	10	73
Nigeria	1960	8	1964	7	5
Panama	1989	8	1994	7	6
Sudan	1954	8	1958	8	5
Singapore	1957	7	1965	-66	9
Somalia	1960	7	1969	7	10
Sri Lanka	1948	7	1994	7	47
Uganda	1962	7	1966	-88	5
Sierra Leone	1961	6	1967	6	7
Comoros	1975	5	1976	5	2
Honduras	1908	5	1936	5	29
Philippines	1935	5	1972	2	38
Syria	1944	5	1950	5	7
Canada	1867	4	1994	10	128
Congo	1960	4	1963	4	4

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South Africa	1920	4	1994	8	75
Zimbabwe	1964	4	1987	1	24
Cuba	1901	3	1959	-88	59
Benin/Dahomey	1960	2	1963	2	4
Guyana	1966	2	1980	0	15
Haiti	1918	2	1950	-88	33
Kenya	1962	2	1969	0	8
Lebanon	1941	2	1990	-77	50
Pakistan	1947	2	1958	8	12
Yugoslavia/Serbia	1838	2	1858	2	21
Zambia	1964	2	1972	0	9

<sup>1</sup>*Polity III*d composite regime score in a regime's first year.

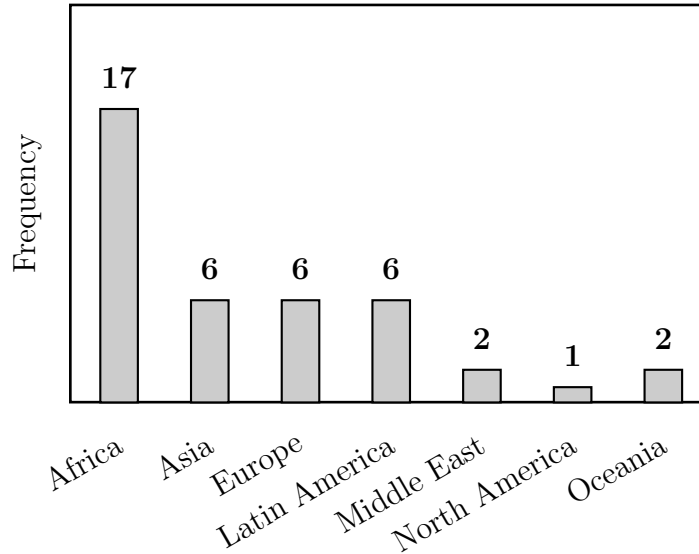
<sup>2</sup>*Polity III*d composite regime score in a regime's final year.

Consider the basic distributional characteristics of the sample of 40 imposed democratic regimes reported in Table 1. First, imposed democracy is a phenomenon occurring primarily during the twentieth century. Specifically, while we identify three cases (7.5 percent) occurring in the nineteenth century (Yugoslavia in 1838, New Zealand in 1857, and Canada in 1867), the remainder of the sample occur in the twentieth century. Furthermore, the cross-temporal distribution of these democratic regimes in the twentieth century is uneven, with 7 of the 37 regimes (19 percent) occurring prior to 1940, and the remaining 81 percent thereafter. The decade reflecting the greatest frequency of imposed democratic regimes is the 1960s, with 15 imposed democratic regimes (37.5 percent) occurring during this period, most of which correspond to the wave of new regimes in post-colonial Africa.

Next, consider the regional distribution of imposed democratic regimes. Figure 3.1 reports the distribution of the 40 imposed democratic regimes across seven geographic regions. First, we observe that each region that we identify in Figure 3.1 experiences at least one imposed democratic regime. The contemporary effort in Iraq is not the first such effort in the Middle East, as previous democratic impositions occurred in both Lebanon (1941) and Syria (1944). Second, despite the occurrence of imposed democratic regimes in each region, it is clear that most occur in two regions, Africa (17, or 42.5 percent) and Latin America (6, or 15 percent). Finally, the distribution of imposed democratic regimes across the regions, as well as the diversity of states and conditions in these regions, reinforces the notion that analysis of the contemporary cases of Afghanistan and Iraq would

benefit from comparisons with cases beyond that of post-WWII West Germany and Japan.

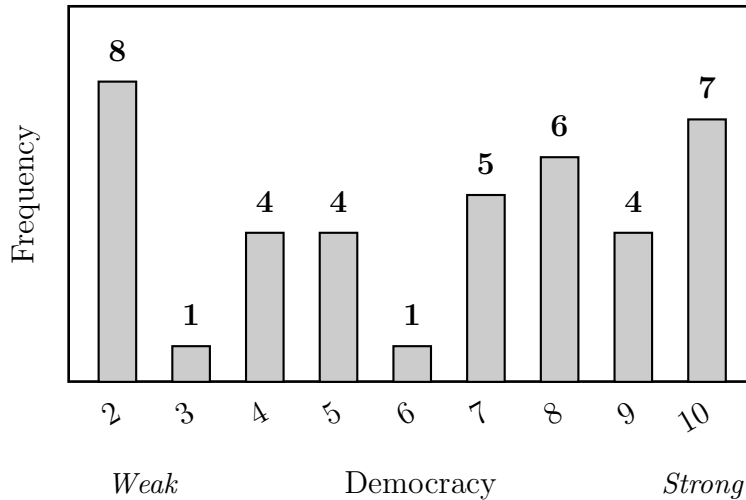
**Figure 3.1:** Frequency of Imposed Democratic Regimes by Region.



Finally, we consider the distribution of imposed democratic regimes in terms of the degree, or strength, of democratic institutions. To facilitate our discussion, in Figure 3.2 we plot the frequency of imposed democratic regimes (in each regime's first year) by the strength, or degree, of democratic institutions reflected in *Polity III*d data's coding of the variable *DEMAUT*. Moreover, 13 (32.5 percent) of the weak democratic regimes occur when the value of *DEMAUT* ranges in value from 2 to 4. Indeed, the most frequently imposed democratic regime has a *DEMAUT* value of 2 (8 cases, 20 percent), not the fully developed democratic regimes associated with post-WWII West Germany and Japan.

Our simple descriptive analysis of the sample of 40 imposed democratic regimes emphasizes that, while rare, imposed democratic regimes are more frequent than one might anticipate, and certainly more than is reflected in the very constrained sub-sample of post-WWII West Germany and Japan. There is considerable variation in both the regional distribution of these regimes and the strength of their democratic institutions. This variation is important, because it suggests that the sample can provide insights into the performance of imposed democratic regimes under a variety of conditions, information that will enable us to more fully assess the prospects for imposed democratic regimes in contemporary Iraq and Afghanistan. In the following sections, we examine the durability of imposed democratic

**Figure 3.2:** Frequency of Imposed Democratic Regimes by Degree of Democracy.



regimes, the post-imposition trajectory of imposed democratic institutions, and the prospects for the return of democratic institutions if the initial imposition of democracy fails.

#### 4 The Durability of Imposed Democratic Regimes

Central to an assessment of the performance of contemporary Afghanistan and Iraq is the durability of these nascent democratic regimes. Any analysis of regime durability confronts the issue of right-censoring, such that we are unable to determine precisely how long each political regime persists for those regimes that persist beyond the terminal point of our observation period, the year 1994. For example, if a democratic regime is imposed in 1993, we only observe it for two years in our data sample (1993–1994). This imposed democratic regime might terminate on January 1, 1995, or the regime might persist until the year 2050, yet we are unable to observe the latter trajectory. For example, consider the Panamanian democracy imposed by the United States in 1989. In our data, we observe that this regime persists until 1994, but technically we are unable to observe its persistence beyond this point, despite the fact that it might very well persist (and does.)<sup>15</sup>

This issue notwithstanding, we can gain leverage on the expected durability of an imposed democratic regime by identifying cases reflecting characteristics similar to those that are of primary interest, in this case contemporary Afghanistan and Iraq. Initially, we explore the durability of imposed democratic regimes by dividing

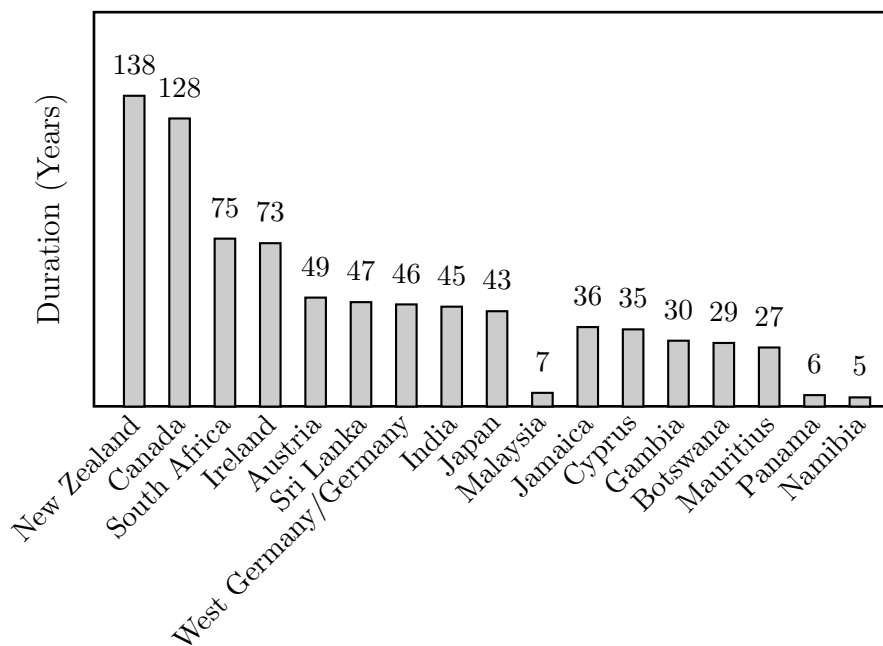
our sample of 40 cases into two sub-samples. One sub-sample contains cases (17, or 42.5 percent) that are censored by the terminal point of our study, the year 1994, while the second sub-sample contains the remaining cases (23, or 57.5 percent) that fail prior to 1994 (i.e., the durability of these imposed democratic regimes is known). In general, this breakdown of the sample suggests that nearly 60 percent of imposed democratic regimes in our sample fail and assume autocratic forms of government. This estimate of the tendency of imposed democratic regimes to fail is conservative, because it excludes the potential for right-censored cases to fail shortly after the conclusion of the observation period (e.g., a hypothetical breakdown in the democratic regime in Panama in the year 1995).

In Figure 4.3 we report the distribution of the durability for the sub-sample of enduring democratic regimes. The mean durability of this set of regimes is 50 years, despite the fact that this sub-sample is right-censored and a number of these regimes continue to persist into 2006. Indeed, one might reasonably anticipate that the democratic regimes in Germany and Japan will be equally as durable as the regimes in Canada and New Zealand. Furthermore, only 3 of the regimes (Malaysia, Panama, and Namibia) endure for less than 25 years. Still, even these relatively nascent regimes might achieve the durability of the remaining cases in the sub-sample.

The primary question is whether the sub-sample of durable imposed democratic regimes reflect cases that provide a basis for comparison for the contemporary cases of Afghanistan and Iraq. One case that might provide an approximation of the contemporary cases, particularly Iraq, is the imposed democratic regime in Sri Lanka. Created in 1948 following British colonization of approximately 130 years, Sri Lanka was a relatively strong democratic system upon its installation, and this institutional strength continued through 1994. One might argue that the durability of democratic institutions is remarkable, given the ethnic divisions in the country that were a catalyst for the a long-running civil war between the Tamil Tigers and the government, a civil war that continues today. In this respect, the Sri Lankan case might provide some basis for optimism regarding the prognosis for democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq, as despite an ethnically charged political environment, democratic institutions survive in Sri Lanka. Yet, one might consider that of 17 durable imposed democratic regimes, few such regimes approximate the domestic political and social conditions found in contemporary Iraq and Afghanistan.

We turn now to a discussion of the sub-sample of imposed democratic regimes that expired during the period of observation. We report the set of cases and their respective durations in Figure 4.4. Perhaps the most striking pattern in Figure 4.4 is the frequency of imposed democratic regimes that fail rather quickly. Specifically, while the mean durability of the sub-sample is 16 years, it is striking that 13 (57 percent) of the imposed democratic regimes in this sub-sample persist for ten

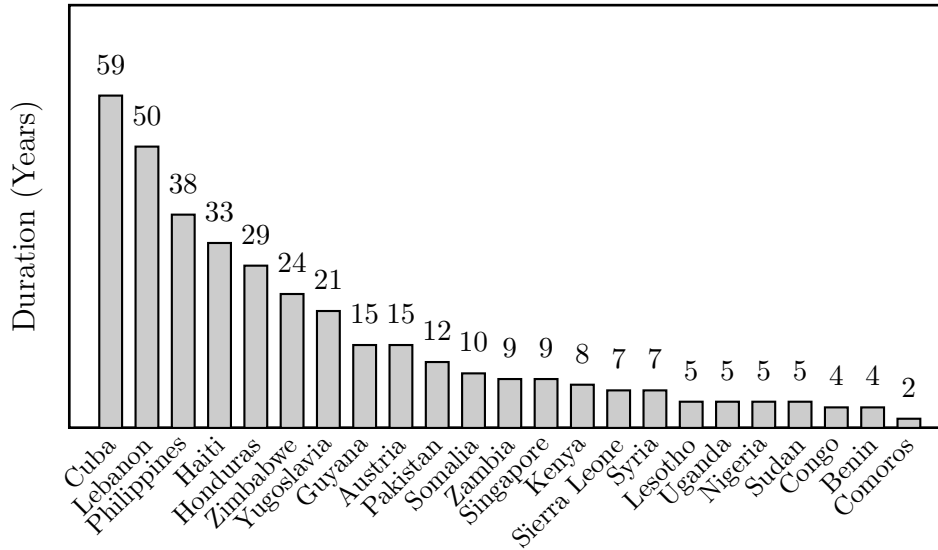
**Figure 4.3:** Enduring Imposed Democratic Regimes.



years or less. While two cases, Lebanon and the Philippines, that are ultimately failures in our sample persist for long durations (50 and 38 years, respectively), these are exceptional cases. Indeed, the hallmark of this sub-sample is the *rapid breakdown* of imposed democratic regimes. Several cases in which imposed democratic regimes fail rapidly, such as Yugoslavia, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, and Nigeria, bear similar characteristics to the contemporary cases of Iraq and Afghanistan. In these historical cases, imposed democratic regimes survive for less than a quarter of a century.

A fuller picture of the durability of imposed polities emerges if we examine the durability of these two sub-samples in a combined fashion. To do so, we construct a Kaplan–Meier plot of the survival of imposed democracies in Figure 4.5. In Figure 4.5 the vertical axis reflects the percentage of the sample surviving at a given duration, which is marked by the horizontal axis. The Kaplan–Meier analysis enables us to examine the duration of these polities while also accounting for the right-censoring of the unknown polity durations after the terminal year in our sample, 1994. The first striking pattern revealed in Figure 4.5 is the initial sharp rate of failure by imposed democratic regimes. In our sample of imposed democratic regimes nearly one-third fail by the tenth year of their imposition. This

**Figure 4.4:** Expired Imposed Democratic Regimes.

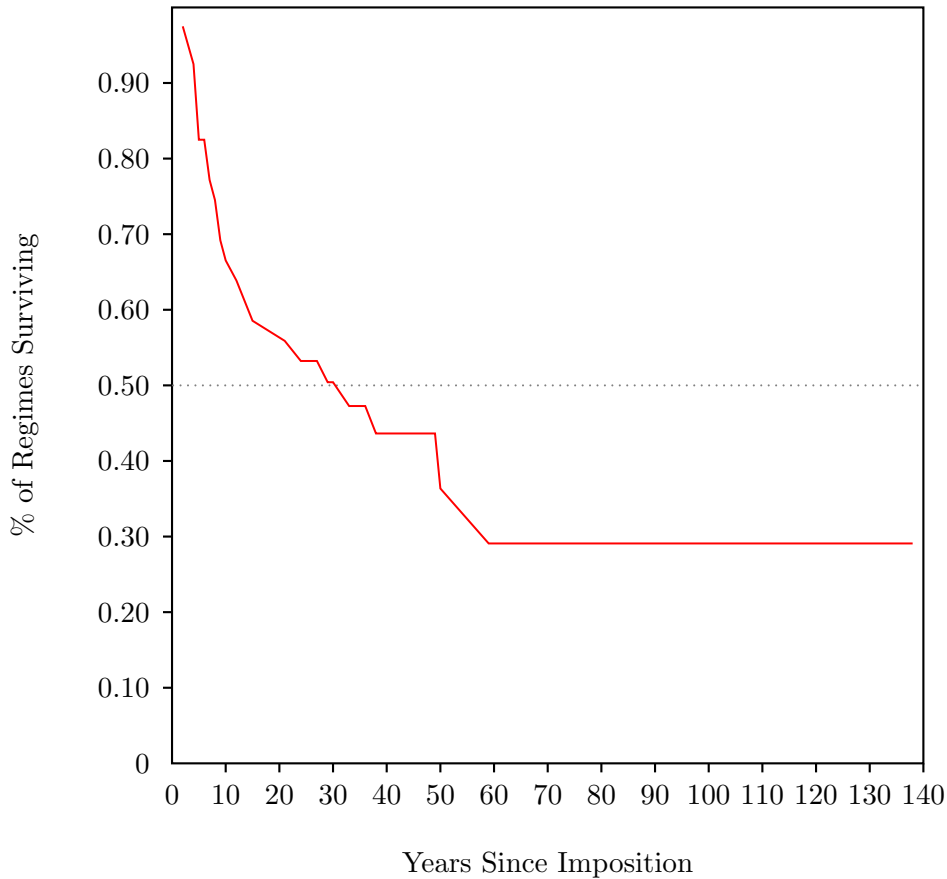


high rate of imposed democracy failure persists for a sustained period of time, with half of the cases in the sample terminating by the 30th year following their first year of imposition. Yet, the longer imposed democratic regimes persist, and the deeper the political roots these regimes establish, the more their probability of failure declines. For example, in moving from the 30th to the 40th year after imposition of democracy along the horizontal axis in Figure 4.5, only an additional 7 percent of the imposed democratic regimes remaining in the sample fail, highlighting the greater persistence of more mature imposed democratic regimes. Indeed, among imposed democracies that survive until the 59th year since their imposition, no failures occur.

All imposed democratic regimes, however, are not created equal. Democratic regimes can be imposed in different ways and begin their histories from different baselines. These foundational factors exert an important influence upon their survival as democracies. For example, in general democratic regimes that are imposed following periods of colonialism (i.e., are “colonially imposed”) are more durable than are those imposed democratic regimes that are not preceded by period of colonialism. A colonially imposed democracy has a restricted mean duration of 56.8 years, while democratic regimes imposed absent colonialism have a mean persistence of 41.8 years.

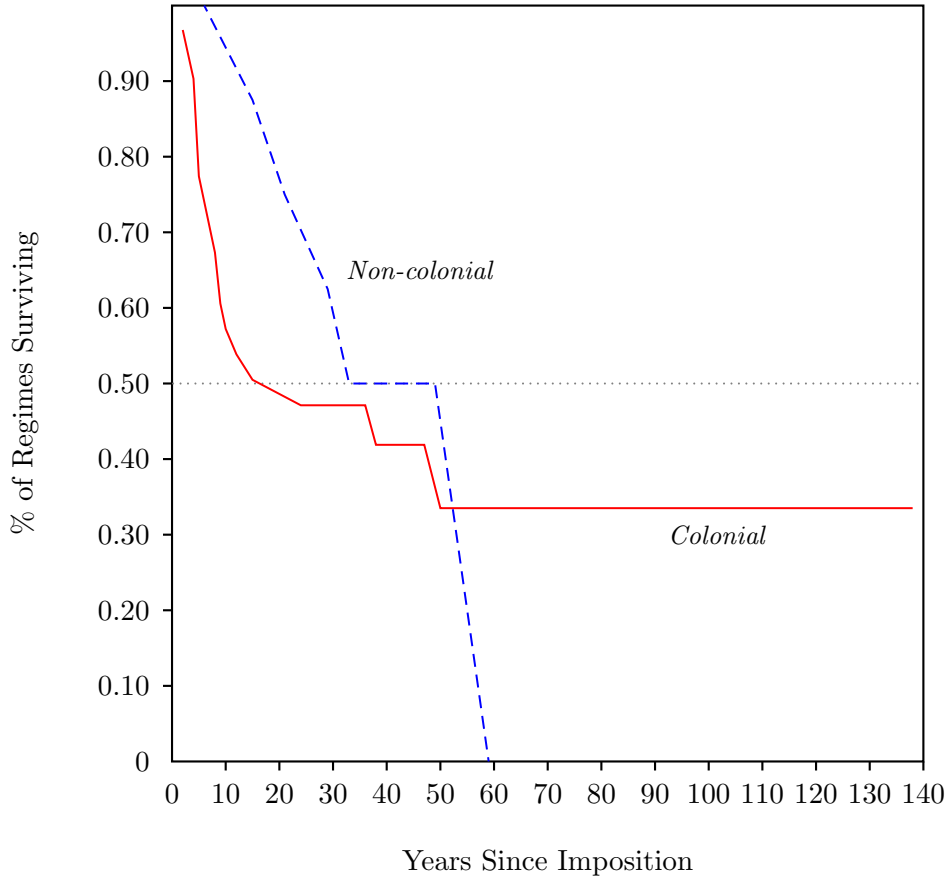
Yet, these general differences do not reveal the full dynamics of colonially and non-colonially imposed democracies, something that is illustrated in the Kaplan–

**Figure 4.5:** The Survival of Imposed Democratic Regimes.



Meier plot reported in Figure 4.6. In the earliest years following their establishment, colonially-imposed democratic regimes are significantly more likely to fail relative to their non-colonial counterparts. By the tenth year after their imposition, 43 percent of colonially-imposed polities fail. By contrast, the subsample of non-colonially imposed democratic regimes do not approach this failure proportion until the 29th year after imposition, by which time 37.5 percent of non-colonially imposed democracies have failed. Indeed, non-colonially imposed democratic regimes outperform colonially-imposed democracies through the first half-century of their existence. Conditions change beyond this point such that by the 59th year after imposition *all* non-colonially imposed democracies fail while 33 percent of colonially-imposed polities persist. Indeed, for those colonially-imposed democracies that make it to their 50th birthday, none of these cases fails.

**Figure 4.6:** Survival of Imposed Democratic Regimes, Colonial & Non-colonial Experience.



This tendency of colonially-imposed democracies to fail very early but, upon reaching a certain survival point, persist for long periods of time, suggests the presence of two competing forces influencing the durability of imposed democracy. On the one hand, colonially-imposed democracies may initially be particularly prone to failure during the early post-colonial years as the citizenry of the former colony seek to overthrow what are perceived as the last vestiges of a colonial period. In this sense, in trying to move beyond the colonial experience and establish a regime more effectively deemed as “their own,” citizens may replace democratic regimes imposed upon them by their former colonial masters in the early years after imposition.

Colonial powers, however, often bring with them a better understanding of the conditions within and a deeper commitment to a colony than non-colonial

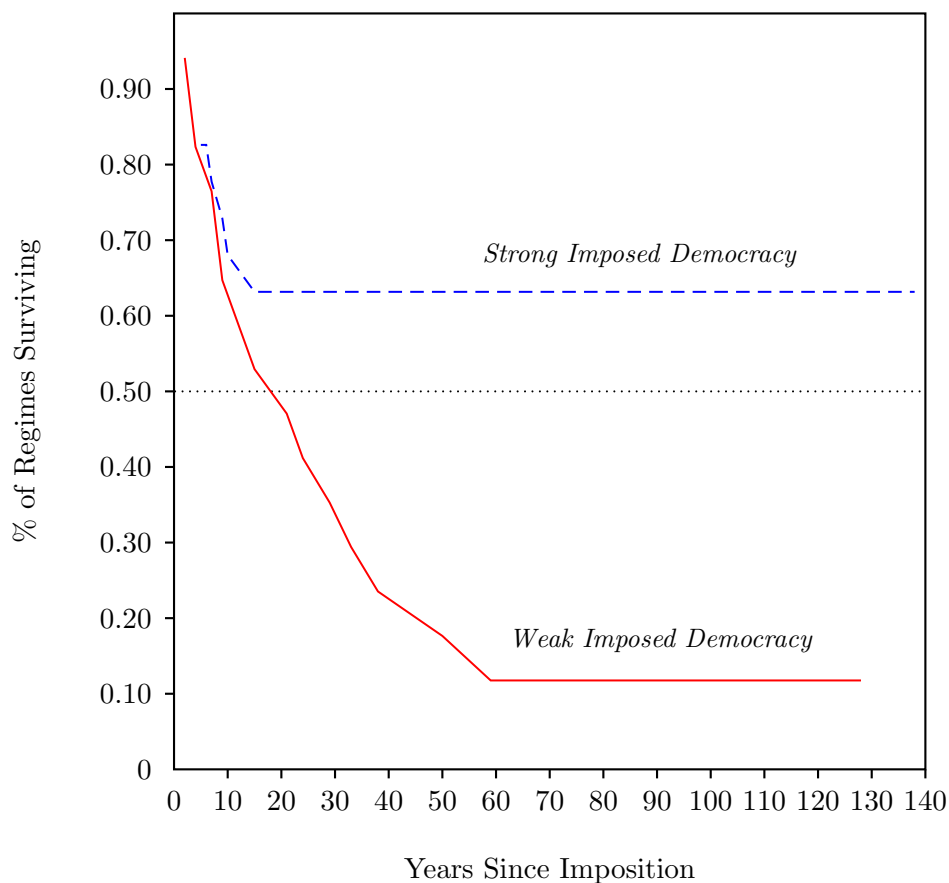
imposers bring to their targets of imposition. This deeper understanding of the context in which democratic imposition is to be conducted, coupled with a greater commitment of resources by a colonial imposer, can provide a firmer foundation for a lasting imposed democracy. As long as a colonially-imposed democracy can survive beyond its initial years when it runs the greatest risk of being thrown out with the colonizer, it is likely to be more durable than a democracy imposed by a non-colonizer.

While the method by which a democratic regime is imposed conditions the regime's survival trajectory, the characteristics of the initial imposition itself exert a strong influence upon the long-term survival of imposed democracies. Although imposed democracies can be strongly democratic at their outset, they can also be weakly democratic. Post-World War II West Germany and Japan are each examples of imposed democracies that exhibit strongly democratic institutions at their outset. However, the Philippines, and perhaps the current democracies in Iraq and Afghanistan, are examples of the latter condition, in which democratic institutions are not fully developed. On average, an imposed democratic polity that is strongly democratic has a restricted mean duration of 90 years. By contrast, a weakly democratic imposed regime reflects an expected duration of 33.6 years.

These differences in mean duration between the two groups, however, mask more complex relative dynamics. Again, we plot the Kaplan–Meier survival curves differentiating between the durability of strong and weak imposed democratic regimes in Figure 4.7. Through the first ten years after imposition, both imposed strong weak democracies demonstrate nearly an identical survival rate. At year ten, 32 percent of imposed strong democratic regimes and 35 percent of weak democracies have failed. As time passes, the gap between the two groups broadens such that by year 15, nearly half of all weak democracies have failed while only 37 percent of strong democracies have done so. This gap accelerates across time such that by year 33, 70 percent of weak imposed democracies fail. Conversely, no imposed strong democracies fail beyond the 15th year of their persistence.

The starkly different experiences of strong and weak imposed democratic regimes provides the basis for several conclusions. In general, these findings are consistent with an expectation that the imposition process is inherently risky and prone to failure, regardless of the specific form of regime imposed. Installing an entirely new political regime appears to represent such a fundamental reordering of a political system that it brings with it some measure of instability, particularly in the earliest years of imposition. Once this initial period of instability inherent to all imposed democracies passes, the degree to which the political system is directly responsive to the citizenry appears to be key to the persistence of imposed democracies. Imposed strong democracies, because they more directly include the masses into the political process, are perhaps more capable of achieving a sufficient degree of “buy-

**Figure 4.7:** The Survival of Strong & Weak Imposed Democratic Regimes.



in” by the citizens to ensure the regime’s survival. In this respect, although policymakers frequently encourage the view that the achievement of complete liberal democracy is an incremental process, our analysis indicates that weakly imposed democratic regimes are unlikely to become incrementally stronger democracies, and more likely to fail outright, reverting to authoritarian institutional structures.

## 5 Strengthening & Weakening of Democratic Institutions

As we discuss in the previous section, one perspective is that, while it might be unreasonable to expect that an imposed democratic regime will reflect the strongest degree of democracy when first installed, democratic institutions will strengthen as the regime endures and the roots of democracy deepen.<sup>16</sup> In this section, we examine whether growth, or decay, of democratic institutions occurs historically in imposed democratic regimes. In our sample of 40 imposed democratic regimes,

33 regimes (83 percent) have initial *DEMAUT* scores of less than 10, and therefore, the democratic institutions in these states have the capacity to strengthen as the regimes endure.<sup>17</sup> Within the sub-sample of 33 imposed democratic regimes that could exhibit institutional strengthening, 10 (30 percent) of the imposed democratic regimes experience such a strengthening process.<sup>18</sup> Specifically, we find institutional strengthening in ten states: Canada, Ireland, Cyprus, Gambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Mauritius, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Interestingly, of the two imposed democratic regimes that exhibit significant growth (Canada and Pakistan), one regime, the imposed democratic regime in Pakistan, is overthrown in 1958.

From one perspective, the data suggest that few imposed democratic regimes strengthen as the regime endures; indeed, the norm appears to be stability in terms of the degree to which democratic institutions are characterized by democracy. However, it is also the case that 11 of the 33 regimes (32 percent) that might experience institutional strengthening are already strong democratic regimes (i.e., where *DEMAUT* is a value greater than six.) If we remove these 11 cases from the sub-sample, thereby leaving 22 cases, the ten cases in which democracy strengthened reflect 45 percent of the sub-sample.

Turning to the issue of the weakening, or decay, of democratic institutions in an imposed regime, we return to the sample of 40 regimes. In the sample of 40 regimes, 21 (53 percent) of the imposed democratic regimes experience a weakening of democratic institutional strength. At first blush, this figure is rather imposing.<sup>19</sup> Yet, five of the 21 regimes that experience an erosion of democratic institutions also experience a subsequent strengthening of said institutions that leaves these regimes with democratic institutions that are equal to or stronger than their initial *DEMAUT* scoring. Therefore, 16 regimes in our sample, or 40 percent, experience what might be termed breakdowns in democracy without subsequent recovery (in our observation period, 1800-1994). We return to this issue of the re-emergence of democratic institutions below in Section 6.

As with our discussion of the durability of imposed democratic regimes, the relevant question is whether the contemporary cases of interest, Afghanistan and Iraq, map to any cases in the sub-sample experiencing a decay in democracy. Four cases are illustrative in this regard: Lebanon, Nigeria, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. Of the four cases, the Sri Lankan case furnishes perhaps the most optimistic analogue, with a weakening of democratic institutions followed by a re-strengthening of democracy and the persistence of these institutions, even during conditions of civil war. However, the Lebanese, Nigerian and the Philippine cases are perhaps more cautionary tales. While the Nigerian regime experiences a relatively modest degree of decay (a reduction in the *DEMAUT* score from a value of 8 to a value of 7), this regime endures for five years (1960-1964). In the Lebanese and the Filipino

cases, the democratic regimes in these cases endured for 50 (1941–1990) and 38 years (1935–1972), respectively. However, in doing so these regimes experienced a precipitous erosion in the degree of democracy, an attenuation that ultimately coincided with civil war in Lebanon and the emergence of the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines.

The democracy in Iraq has been likened to that of a seed, one that when mature will resemble a “healthy, sturdy tree” rather than a “fragile flower.”<sup>20</sup> Our analysis of the growth and decay of democratic institutions in imposed democratic regimes suggests that rarely is it the case that a metaphoric democratic seedling matures into a sturdy tree. Under adverse conditions, such as those currently prevailing in contemporary Iraq and Afghanistan, we find that weak imposed democratic regimes rarely grow into strong democratic regimes, while strong imposed democratic regimes can sometimes unravel.

## 6 Does Democracy Strike Back?

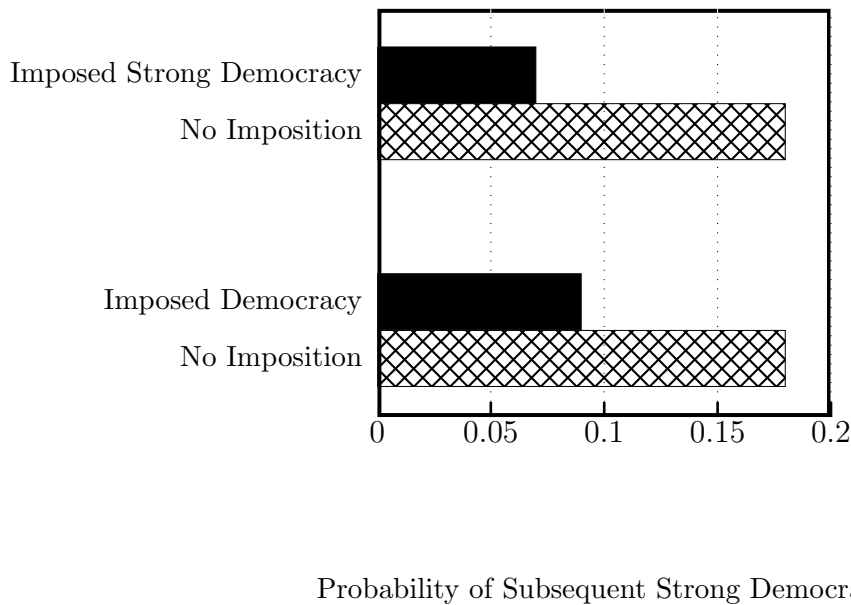
The historical experiences of imposed democracies we observe above cast a bleak outlook for the durability of the current imposed democracies in Iraq and Afghanistan. Not only do nearly 60 percent of our sample of 40 imposed democratic regimes fail during our period of observation (1800–1994), but the mean durability of this group of imposed democratic regimes is approximately 16 years. Collectively, this information suggests that, on average, it is difficult to impose durable democratic regimes.

A long-term perspective, however, might suggest a more optimistic outlook for the future of democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan. If prior democratic experience provides more fertile ground for future democracy,<sup>21</sup> then even failed imposed democratic regimes might improve the future prospects for democracy in host states. This perspective is grounded in the idea that introducing democracy into a political system, even if the initial attempt fails, sets a state on the trajectory toward democratic forms of government. Working from this perspective, our question then is whether democracy “strikes back” in states that host imposed democratic regimes, but in which the imposed regime fails.

One method of examining the likelihood of democracy to striking back is to compare the occurrence of democracy in states with a historical experience of a failed imposed democracy to states without such a history. If failed imposed democracy provides a foundation for the future establishment of democratic polities, the probability of democracy in any state year should be higher for states with a prior imposed democracy relative to states with no such history. We use *DEMAUT* scores from the *Polity IV* data sample<sup>22</sup> to investigate this effect, analyzing the effect of prior imposed democracy upon the future occurrence of both weak democracy ( $DEMAUT \geq 1$ ) and strong democracy ( $DEMAUT \geq 6$ ). Following this logic, we test the effect of imposed democracy in general ( $DEMAUT \geq 1$ )

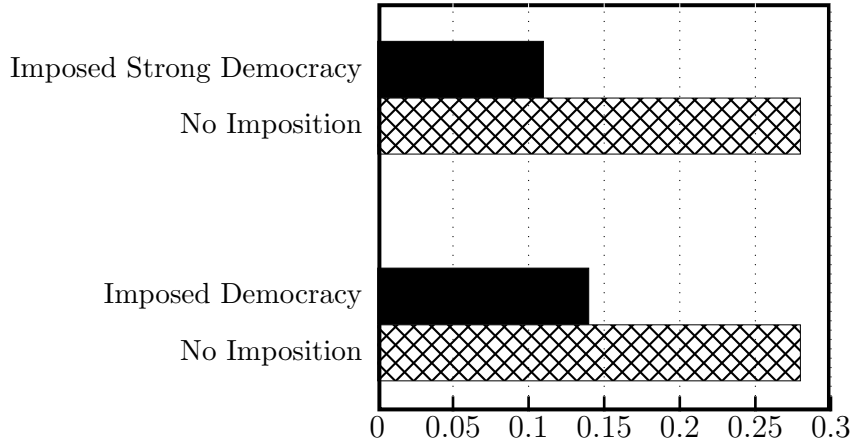
and strong imposed democracy ( $DEMAUT \geq 6$ ) on the likelihood of subsequent democratic experience. We summarize our findings in Figure 6.8. A state that has previously experienced an imposed democracy is half as likely to be strongly democratic in any future year relative to a state with no imposed democracy experience. Loosening our definition of democracy yields similar results, with a previously imposed state half as likely to reflect democracy, strong or weak, relative to a state that does not experience such an imposition.

**Figure 6.8:** Impact of Prior Imposed Democracy on Subsequent Probability of a *Strong* Democratic Regime.



If failed imposed democratic regimes in general do not improve the probability that democracy will emerge subsequently, perhaps the key lies in the strength of the imposed democracy, with strong imposed democratic regimes exerting a positive effect on the subsequent emergence of democracy in the host state. However, our analysis, summarized in Figure 6.9, suggests otherwise. Specifically, once they fail, even the strongest imposed democratic regimes reduce the probability of democracy in the future. Indeed, a failed imposed strong democracy reduces the probability of future strong democracy during any state-year by nearly 60 percent. Broadening our measure of future democracy to include weak democracy yields a similar result, with a previous failure of an imposed strong democracy reducing the probability of future democracy of any form, weak or strong, by slightly more than 60 percent.

**Figure 6.9:** Impact of Prior Imposed Democracy on Subsequent Probability of *Strong or Weak* Democratic Regime.



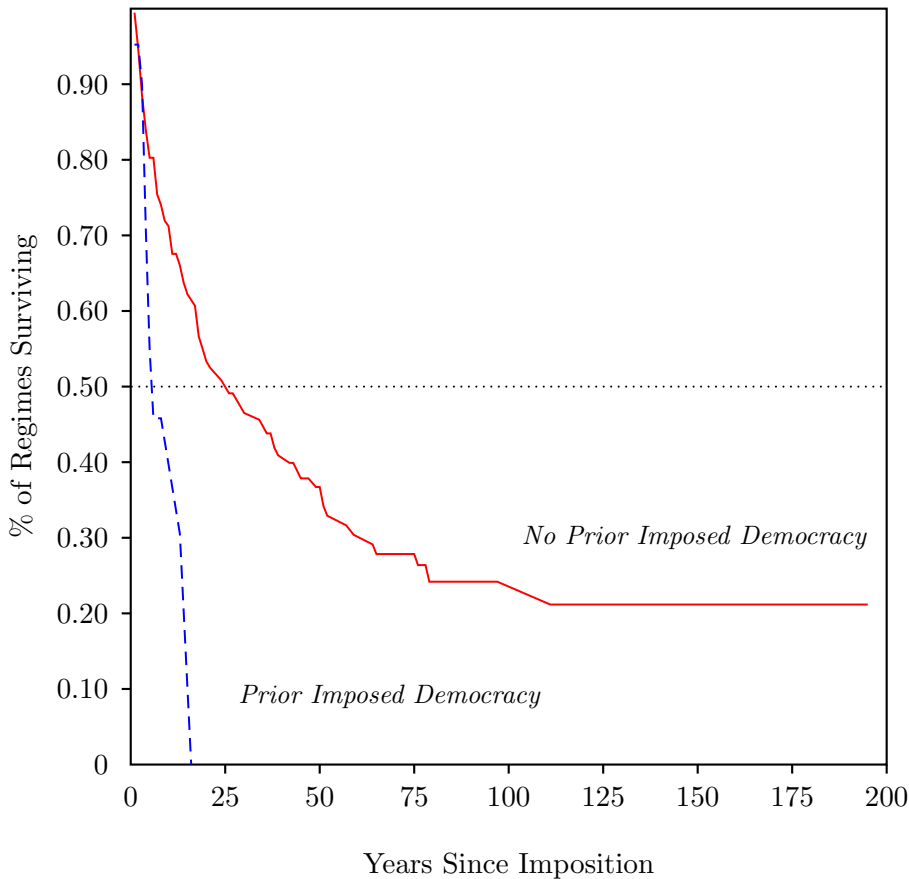
Probability of a Weak or Strong Democracy

Even if a prior experience with imposed democracy does not increase the likelihood that democracy will strike back, it is possible that the democratic experience gained during a period of imposed democracy may translate into a better environment for future democratic polities to develop. In this sense, the experience of political participation and responsive leadership gained during a period of imposed democracy, however short, may provide more favorable conditions for future democratic polities to take root and flourish, making it more durable. Our findings, however, run counter to this argument, suggesting that *imposed democracy not only reduces the likelihood that democracy will recur, but makes it less durable when it does so*. A democratic polity that develops in a state with no prior experience of imposed democracy has a restricted mean duration of 62.4 years.<sup>23</sup> By contrast, the restricted mean duration of democracy in a state with a previous history of imposed democracy is approximately one-seventh as long, only 9.2 years.

The dynamics of the durability of democracy between these two groups is particularly noteworthy. We plot the Kaplan–Meier survival curve corresponding to these two groups in Figure 6.10 to demonstrate these effects. Initially, both states with and without a prior history of imposed democracy demonstrate similar democratic polity failure rates. By the second year after a democratic polity forms, approximately 5 percent fail in states with a previous experience of democratic

imposition and those that do not have such a history. The failure rate deepens for both types of states such that by year three approximately 12 percent of democratic polities have failed in each group. However, a tipping point begins to emerge at year four that suggests a point at which previously imposed states begin to demonstrate a marked increase in instability beyond simply that associated with new democracies. At year four, 14 percent of democracies in non-imposed states have failed while 30 percent of those in previously imposed states have terminated. This effect deepens across time such that, by year 16 of previously imposed states, all subsequent democracies fail. By contrast, only 39 percent of democracies in non-imposed states fail by this point.

**Figure 6.10:** Survival of Democratic Regimes, With & Without Prior Imposition Experience.



Several explanations might account for the negative impact of imposed democracy on subsequent democracy. First, simply by virtue of their selection as cases

for imposition, states with a history of an imposed democratic regime may be inherently unstable. After all, a state in which a foreign power has gone to such lengths as to intervene directly within its borders and establish an entire political structure may, by definition, be inclined toward instability, making democracy less durable in the future. Second, the prior experience with a failed imposed democratic regime may serve to undermine support for future democratic polities. Citizens in states in which an imposed democracy has already been attempted and failed may conclude, based upon this experience, that democracy itself is a flawed endeavor for the state. Citizens may reason that if democracy cannot succeed with the support of a foreign imposing power, it is unlikely to do so without such support. Finally, the process of imposing democracy upon another state may serve to “taint” democracy as a concept, allowing parties opposed to democracy to paint subsequent efforts at democracy as an instrument for the return of foreign control. Regardless, our analysis demonstrates clearly that imposed democracy reduces the likelihood of subsequent democracy and undermines its persistence when it does occur.

## 7 Conclusion

Evaluating the success and failure of democracy in the contemporary cases of Afghanistan and Iraq is a function of absolute and relative methods of assessment. We focus on the latter method of assessment, such that we can evaluate the capacity of contemporary Afghanistan and Iraq to achieve the strength, durability, and regional influence of post-WWII Germany and Japan. More fundamentally, this approach allows us to determine, given prevailing historical patterns, the degree to which the German and Japanese examples represent reasonable cases from which to base expectations for Iraq and Afghanistan.

Specifically, we elaborate the concept of imposed democratic regimes, and identify a sample of 40 such regimes occurring in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In turn, we examine the durability, strengthening or weakening, as well as the implications of a failure of imposed democracy on the prospects for the subsequent emergence of democratic institutions. Our study of the performance of imposed democratic regimes leads us to draw several principal conclusions:

- Half of the imposed democracies fail by their 30th year of persistence, although imposed democracies that endure beyond this point are durable in the long-term;
- Half of the institutionally weak imposed democracies fail by their 15th year, and 70 percent of these regimes fail by their 33rd year. Conversely, 37 percent of the institutionally strong imposed democracies fail by their 15th year, with no failures thereafter;

- Weak imposed democracies rarely become more democratic, and 53 percent of the sample of 40 imposed democracies that we study experience a weakening in democratic institutions; and
- The failure of imposed democracies reduces the likelihood that a host state will experience democracy subsequently, as well as reducing the durability of democracy if it does return.

Our analysis of imposed democratic regimes has important implications for gauging our expectations regarding democratic futures in contemporary Afghanistan and Iraq. First, successfully imposing durable democratic institutions is a difficult task, with the average likelihood of democratic institutions persisting beyond a quarter of a century in either country approaching a coin flip historically. This said, central to the success of democratic institutions in Afghanistan and Iraq is the strength of the democratic institutions and their legitimate dominance in the political system, an observation that squares with Diamond's emphasis on the necessity of a strong state as a foundation for democratic institutions.<sup>24</sup>

While the post-invasion insurgency in Afghanistan and sectarian violence in Iraq portend a perilous future for democratic institutions in each state, one counter argument is that while democracy might fall prey to anti-democratic forces in the short-term, the process of imposition will spark inexorable momentum toward democratic institutions in the long-term. As such, history might judge the attempts to impose democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq more kindly once long-term democratic success counterbalances initial failure. Yet, our analysis of the long-term implications of imposed democratic regimes suggests that historically these expectations are not borne out. Rather, the likelihood of democracy returning to these two states is significantly *lower* than had the United States and its allies not imposed democratic institutions. Furthermore, if democratic institutions do re-emerge, they are unlikely to be durable.

The overarching purpose of this article is to reconsider our expectations for the fledgling democracies in contemporary Afghanistan and Iraq by examining the performance of imposed democracies in the past two centuries. Despite the marked successes of the democratic regimes in post-WWII West Germany and Japan, based upon our analysis of a broader set of historical imposed polities, the prognosis for successful democratic institutions in post-invasion Afghanistan and Iraq is poor at best. As such, Afghanistan and Iraq are unlikely to mimic West Germany and Japan, and pre-invasion expectations that Afghanistan and Iraq would do so ignored prevailing historical odds. Finally, if democratic institutions do manage to survive in Afghanistan and Iraq, they are more likely to emulate the political trajectories in the Philippines and Sri Lanka, a path that is likely to be difficult, fraught with a high probability of failure, and provide few of the regional fruits associated with the West German and Japanese democratic beacons.

## Author Biographies

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>American policy expectations are made clear in a speech that President George W. Bush made to the National Endowment for Democracy in 2003. For a transcript of this speech, see “Iraqi Democracy Will Succeed.” *New York Times*, November 6, 2003. These early themes were also reiterated in the National Security Council document, *The National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*, available at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/iraq/iraq\\_national\\_strategy\\_20051130.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/iraq/iraq_national_strategy_20051130.pdf), as well as President Bush’s State of the Union Address speech on January 31, 2006, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/stateoftheunion/2006/print/index.html>.

<sup>2</sup>Adam Przeworski et al. *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950–1990*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Bruce Russett and John Oneal. *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001); Steven Poe and C. Neal Tate. “Repression of Human Rights to Personal Integrity in the 1980s: A Global Analysis.” *American Political Science Review* 88 (December 1994): 853–900; Samuel P. Huntington. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth-Century*. (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

<sup>3</sup>For example, see Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, “Democracy in Iraq?”, *Washington Quarterly* 26 (Summer 2003): 119-136; Adeed Dawisha, “The Prospects for Democracy in Iraq: Challenges and Opportunities,” *Third World Quarterly* 26 (June 2005): 723-737.

<sup>4</sup>Zeev Maoz. *Domestic Sources of Global Change*. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Andrew J. Enterline and J. Michael Greig. “Beacons of Hope? The Impact of Imposed Democracy on Regional Peace, Democracy and Prosperity.” *Journal of Politics* 67 (November 2005): 1075–1098; Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder. *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Choose to Fight*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005); Jack Snyder. *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: Norton, 2000); Niall Ferguson. *Colossus: The Price of Americas Empire*. (New York: Penguin, 2004).

<sup>5</sup>For example, see Larry Diamond. “Building Democracy After Conflict: Lessons From Iraq.” *Journal of Democracy* 16 (January 2005): 9-23.

<sup>6</sup>Robin Wright and Ellen Knickmeyer. “Administration Is Shedding ‘Unreality’ That Dominated Invasion, Official Says.” *Washington Post*, August 14, 2005: p. A1. Evidence of a subtle shift in goals away from a democratic-centric core can be detected in President George W. Bush’s press conference on December 20,

2006, during which he made the following statement: “What is going to happen is we’re going to develop a strategy that helps the Iraqis achieve the objective that the 12 million people want them to achieve, which is a government that can— a country that can sustain itself, govern itself, defend itself, a free country that will serve as an ally in this war against extremists and radicals.” (Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/12/20061220-1.html>).

<sup>7</sup>See President Bush’s 2006 State of the Union Address, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/stateoftheunion/2006/print/index.html>, for broad policy goals including the spread of democracy across the Middle East.

<sup>8</sup>We consider the term “imposed” to be synonymous with terms such as “cultivated” and “stimulated.” While the President George W. Bush states that the United States is uninterested in imposing an American form of government on Afghanistan or Iraq, it is clear from his language that the set of acceptable forms of government is limited to democratic variants. See Bush’s 2005 State of the Union Address, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/02/20050202-11.html>.

<sup>9</sup>Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>10</sup>Mark Peceny. *Democracy at the Point of Bayonets*. (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); James Dobbins et al., *America’s Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2003).

<sup>11</sup>Sara McLaughlin et al. “Timing the Changes in Political Structures: A New Polity Database.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42 (April 1998): 231–242; Peter N. Stearns. *The Encyclopedia of World History*. Sixth Edition. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

<sup>12</sup>Andrew J. Enterline and J. Michael Greig. “Beacons of Hope? The Impact of Imposed Democracy on Regional Peace, Democracy and Prosperity.” *Journal of Politics* 67 (November 2005): 1075–1098.

<sup>13</sup>The *DEMAUT* score combines the ordinal codings of democracy and autocracy by subtracting the latter from the former, a procedure that results in an ordinal scale ranging in value from -10 (fully autocratic regime) to 10 (fully democratic regime).

<sup>14</sup>We allow an imposed polity to persist through periods of “interregnum” or “interruption,” as these periods are identified in the *Polity* sample.

<sup>15</sup>The problem of right-censoring is inescapable. Obviously, we as authors of the present article could observe the aforementioned Panamanian regime as it persists to the very moment in time that we concluded writing this manuscript (January 2007), but not beyond this point in time. Thereafter, the issue of right censoring emerges forthwith.

<sup>16</sup>This perspective is reflected in the following statement by United States Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice: “It does not mean that the United States has to be there until Iraq is a full-fledged democracy. That’s going to take some time. *But the foundation has to be laid for democracy in Iraq*” (emphasis added). David Shelby. “U.S. Adjusts Tactics, Maintains Basic Goal in Iraq, Rice Says,” October 26, 2006, United States Department of State, International Information Programs, available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=October&x=20061026152942ndyblehs0.3759577>.

<sup>17</sup>The seven states with initial *DEMAUT* scores of 10 are Jamaica (1959), Germany (1949), Austria (1946), Botswana (1966), Japan (1952), Malaysia (1957), and New Zealand (1857).

<sup>18</sup>We code regime strengthening when an imposed democratic regime’s *DEMAUT* score increases to a value greater than its value in the first year of the regime’s imposition. Such an increase can occur at any time during the regime’s persistence.

<sup>19</sup>We code a weakening of democratic institutions when an imposed democratic regime’s *DEMAUT* score falls below that of the score in the regime’s initial year. We consider the *Polity III*d codes for “interregnum” and “interruption” to reflect instances of institutional weakening.

<sup>20</sup>See President George W. Bush’s speech to the National Endowment for Democracy on October 6, 2005. Available at <http://www.cnn.com/2005/POLITICS/10/06/bush.transcript/>.

<sup>21</sup>Adeed Dawisha, “Iraq: Setbacks, Advances, Prospects.” *Journal of Democracy* 15 (January 2004): 520; Daniel Byman, “Constructing a Democratic Iraq: Challenges and Opportunities.” *International Security* 68 (Summer 2003): 4878; Marina Ottaway and Anatol Lieven, “Rebuilding Afghanistan.” *Current History* 100 (March 2002): 13338.

<sup>22</sup>Monty G. Marshall and Keith Jagers. *Polity IV Dataset*. (College Park, Maryland: University of Maryland, 2000). Available at <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/polity/>.

<sup>23</sup>Because the largest observed duration of a non-imposed state, the United States, is censored, this value is underestimated.

<sup>24</sup>Larry Diamond. *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq*. (New York: Times Books, 2005).