

Roots and Fruits of Democracy: Natural Resources, Income Distribution and Social Violence

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Abstract

This paper proposes the argument that natural resource abundance and large economic inequality, by shaping the interests of different social groups, are key factors for the determination of the transition scenario from authoritarianism to democracy. In turn, the transition scenario, and in particular the level of violence during democratization, determines the success or failure of a democratic reform. We analyze the historical experience of countries that democratized during the "third wave" of democratization in order to shed some light on the determinants and consequences of current and future democratic transitions.

1. Introduction

In the last decades democracy extended beyond its traditional boundaries in the Western hemisphere and spread around the globe. Between 1973 and 2003 during the so-called "third wave" of democratization more than sixty countries all over the world adopted democratic institutions either after the collapse of larger states (e.g., former USSR), or after the end of dictatorships and authoritarian dominant-party systems (e.g., South Korea). By the beginning of the 21st century, democracies existed in every major world region except for one, North Africa and the Middle East, where not even a single democratic regime was in place. The recent events in the region, however, might put an end to this "Arab anomaly", paving the way towards a full globalization of democracy.

The mass movement claiming political enfranchisement that ousted President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia triggered popular pressures in neighboring countries, led to the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, a violent civil conflict Syria, and protests in other Arab countries including Algeria, Bahrain, and Yemen. This new Arab awakening in reference to the spread of democratic ideals in these countries has raised many hopes of a fast political and economic development in a region that lags behind Western economies despite its remarkable abundance of natural resources. It is already apparent, however, that the (attempted) regime transitions are taking very different paths in the different countries. While in some cases the mass movements have succeeded in opening up the possibility of rapid and relatively peaceful regime changes, in others the movement towards democracy is faced with stronger resistance by (parts of) the ruling elites and appears longer, more uncertain, and stained with blood. Will the emergence of democracy be (equally) beneficial to all countries? Will the different transition modes make a difference for the features of the emerging democracies?

The experiences of countries that democratized in the last decades may be interesting not only in an historical perspective but could potentially be insightful for the prospects of the current democratic movements in the Arab world and elsewhere. The data suggest that not all democracies have succeeded in granting the protection of basic individual rights and in fostering the implementation of well-crafted economic policies. According to the Freedom House, out of the sixty-seven countries which experienced a democratic transition between 1973 and 2003, only about one half are classified nowadays as "Free" (countries where there is a compliance with a wide array of political rights and civil liberties). All the others are classified as

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either “Partly Free” (countries with some significant limitations on these rights and liberties) or “Not Free” (countries where basic political rights and civil liberties are widely and systematically denied) as summarized in Table 1.²

Table 1. Civil Liberties after Democratic Transition

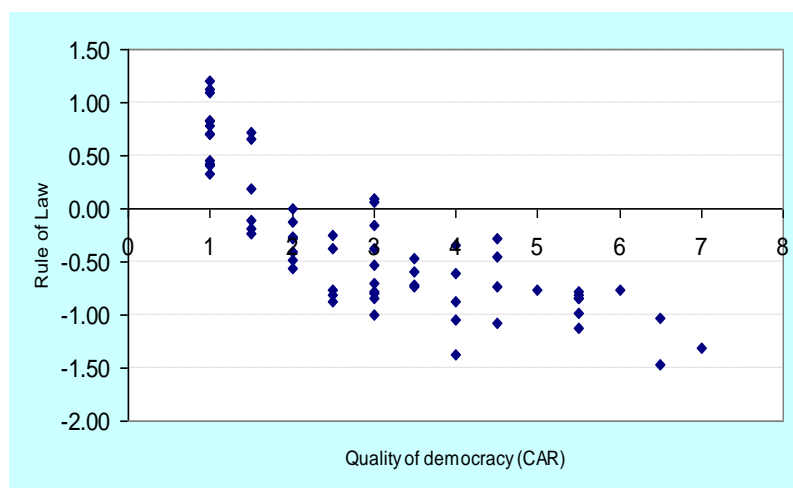
	Free	Partly Free	Not Free
Pre Transition	0	31	36
2005	35	23	9

Source: Freedom House (2005).

Furthermore, while some countries were able to implement stable democratic institutions, democracy has been unstable in others, and some form of autocratic rule has been restored. The data further suggests the existence of a relatively weak correlation between the prevalence and quality of democratic liberties and the implementation of growth-enhancing economic policies and institutions. The quality of rule of law is, on average, higher in democracies. Nonetheless, countries with very similar democratic liberties exhibit large differences in the quality of rule of law. Figure 1 plots, for instance, the relationship between quality of the rule of law and the combined average rating of political rights and civil liberties indices of the Freedom House (so-called CAR index) for the sixty seven countries that democratized during the “third wave”. The CAR index takes values on a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 representing the best practice and 7 the worst. Furthermore, whether democratization or an improvement in democratic rights is indeed causal for improving economic policies and institutions in different countries is still debated in the literature. The empirical evidence, surveyed in more detail below, seems to suggest that the interaction between rule of law and political regime runs both ways, implying non-trivial bi-directional feedback mechanisms that, to a large extent, still remain to be explored.

The democracies that emerged in the last years do not only differ in terms of outcomes (the *fruits* of the change of political regime) but have also very different origins (the *roots* of democratization). Historically, authoritarian regimes have collapsed and new democracies emerged under very different scenarios. In some cases, the transition is initiated from the bottom up: the disempowered part of the population forces a change of regime opposed by the authoritarian power-holders threatening revolution and social unrest. In fact, the transition to democracy has occurred in very different ways, involving different levels of conflicts across countries, being essentially peaceful in some case and very violent in others. In other cases, the process is top-down or, even if it initiated from below, essentially consensual and accompanied by the Elite.

Figure 1. Quality of Democracy and Rule of Law. Source: Freedom House (2005) and World Bank (2005).



² Table A1 in the Appendix contains the corresponding raw data on transition years and civil liberties.

This paper proposes the view that abundance of natural resources and inequality in the distribution of the generated rents shape the interests and relative fighting power of the different groups and, in turn, determine the type of transition from authoritarianism to democracy. At the same time, the transition scenario may have a significant impact on the success or failure of a democratic reform. The goal of the analysis is therefore to study the link between the contingencies of democratization and the features of the emerging democracies or, in other words, to investigate whether different paths (to democracy) are relevant for the economic and political outcomes or whether the mere emergence of democracy is all that matters. The idea is to look into the historical experience of the countries that democratized in the last decades in order to shed some light on the determinants and consequences of current and future democratic transitions.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a discussion of the related literature, focusing on democratization processes and on the political economy of the resource curse. Section 3 discusses the transition from authoritarian regimes to democracies in the light of a simple “political game” between different social groups and summarizes the testable hypothesis on determinants and consequences of the different scenarios of democratic transition. Section 4 investigates the empirical validity of these hypotheses in light of the available data from the third wave of democratization. Finally, Section 5 offers some concluding remarks.

2. The literature

This paper contributes to two important strands of the literature. The vast literature on democratization and democratic consolidation, which has been developed since the 1950s by political scientists, sociologists and (more recently) economists, and the literature on the natural resource curse, which attempts to account for the observed negative correlation between natural resource abundance and growth performance. In particular, this article relates to the more recent branch of the literature focusing on the political-economy characteristics of resource-rich countries as a source of the “paradox of the plenty” (Karl, 1997).

Democratization. The idea that growth in income and human capital causes institutional improvement, is the cornerstone of the influential *modernization hypothesis* most closely associated with the work of Seymour Martin Lipset (1959), and also reproduced in many central works on democracy (e.g., Dahl, 1971). Lipset believed that educated people living in economically developed countries with a rather equal distribution of wealth are more likely to resolve their conflicts of interest through negotiations and voting than thorough violent disputes. Education is needed for courts to operate and to empower citizens to engage with government institutions. According to this view, countries differ in their stock of human and social capital, and institutional outcomes depend on a great extent on these endowments. Huntington (1991) argued that the third wave of democratization was indeed facilitated by the “high levels of economic well-being which led to more widespread literacy, education and urbanization, a larger middle class, and the development of values and attitudes supportive of democracy”.

The focus on the consequences of modernization as a main determinant of democratization, was challenged by the work of Moore (1966), and more recently by Luebbert (1991), who emphasized the existence of different “paths to the modern of world”. According to this view, the class structure and the relative strength of the bourgeoisie ultimately determine the political consequences of a modernization process. In other words, only in those countries characterized by a relatively strong middle class economic modernization paves the way to democratic institutions. Not only structural economic change can lead to political transformations: democratization may also arise from shocks that hit the society. For instance Haggard and Kaufman (1995) suggest that economic crisis may accelerate the democratization process by extending the discontent against authoritarian regimes.

An alternative approach studying the democratic transition sees democratization as a concession by part of authoritarian rulers in order to raise taxation. The more elastic is the tax base, the more difficult it is to raise taxes without agreement, and therefore the higher will be the likelihood of democratic concessions. As a consequence, democratization is less likely to occur in agrarian and natural resource based economies where production factors are easily taxed than in economies where the production structure is centered on (more mobile) human and physical capital. Arguments along this line are proposed in contributions by Bates

(1991), Rogowski (1998) and Tilly (2004), among others.

Apart from the transition to democracy, scholars have also extensively studied the problem of *democratic consolidation* focusing on the challenge of making new democracies secure, of extending their survival beyond the short term, and of making them immune against the threat of authoritarian regression. Linz and Stephan (1996) stress the importance of the regime in place before the transition, distinguishing, in particular, among four types of nondemocratic regimes: authoritarian, totalitarian, post-totalitarian and sultanistic. Differences in the basic characteristics of the regime in place (ideology, degree of pluralism, forms of mobilization and type of leadership) crucially affect the range of paths of transition and in turn the consolidation of the new institutions. For example *pacted* transitions, which take place through extensive negotiations about the character and sequence of political change, constitute one of the paths from authoritarianism, but appear unlikely to emerge from totalitarianism.

Putnam (2002) looks at the level of social capital (mainly trust and cooperation) whose primary engine is the civil society. In his view, only those countries that are characterized by an active and organized civil society are able to consolidate the democratic institutions after the transition. Departing from this analysis, Hibnik (2005) builds a challenging case in favor of an alternative view: social capital is not generated from below, in grassroots organizations and voluntary associations, but is instead the product of leadership and institution building from above, by elites in the state and political parties.

Finally, as mentioned above, the last decade has witnessed a reviving interest in the issues of democratization and democratic consolidation also within the field of economics. Acemoglu and Robinson (2006a) argue that the revolutionary threat faced by the elite and its inability to commit to policy reform are the principal reasons leading to transitions to democracy. In particular, in the absence of the possibility of credible commitments to future fiscal redistribution, political elites are forced to release power once the opposition is able to organize and mount a revolution. Other authors suggest that under certain circumstances the elite may find it profitable to change the regime, indicating the potential for top-down democratization. Bourguignon and Verdier (2000), for example, argue that democracies may represent a better environment for the provision of public education, which is needed to sustain the process of economic development. According to Lizzeri and Persico (2004), the top-down democratic extension in Britain's age of reform facilitated the implementation of policies that benefited the community at large.

The (political economy of) natural resource curse. The idea that political incentives are key to understanding the resource curse has been explored by political scientists and economists alike. Within political science, many authors focused on specific case studies; Karl (1997) and Ross (2001) analyzed, respectively, the dismal effects of oil in Venezuela and timber in several South-East Asian countries. The economic literature, instead, is more theoretically oriented and proposes various mechanisms consistent with the prediction of a lower income associated with abundance of natural resources.

A first wave of economic models studying how the abundance of resources affects policy making by shaping the incentive of politicians consisted of rent-seeking models. These models show how natural resources may foster rent-seeking behavior which has a destructive effect on normal productive investment and hence growth. In general, as long as rent-seeking represents a dead weight loss, anything that encourages rent-seeking will lower steady state income and therefore growth along the transition to steady state. The case studies in Gelb (1988) and Auty (1990) lend support to this hypothesis.

More recently the literature has focused attention on incumbency distortions. Acemoglu and Robinson (2006b) propose a model where underdevelopment results from political elites blocking productive innovations because of a "political replacement effect". In their model, innovations erode elites' incumbency advantage, increasing the likelihood that they will be replaced. Fearing replacement, political elites are unwilling to initiate change, and may even deliberately slow down economic development. Such behavior is more likely to arise when the rents from maintaining power are high, such as where public income is derived from natural resources. In a related contribution, Cervellati and Fortunato (2007) study an economy where reforms are non-neutral and inequality in the distribution of resources generates vested interest and slows down economic development.

Other authors suggest that natural resource abundance favor an over-expansion of the public

sector. Robinson et al. (2006) show that with more (or more valuable) resources, the future utility of having political power will increase. An incumbent will therefore tend to employ people in the public sector in order to raise the probability of remaining in power. Similarly, Robinson and Torvik (2009) develop a political economy model of soft budget constraints, where the political desirability of soft budgets increases in resource wealth. Surveying the literature, van der Ploeg (2011) concludes that in non-democratic regimes resource abundance creates corruption and leads to persistence of bad institutions and lack of rule of law.

This paper complements the two broad strands of literature reviewed in this section by suggesting that an unequal distribution of (rents from) natural resources may lead to institutional development traps and slow development in association with the failure of democracy. The paper, therefore, (i) offers a contribution to the literature on natural resource course by proposing a political economy explanation of the course based on the origins of the state rather than policy formation, and (ii) add to the democratization literature a detailed investigation of the effects of different (structurally determined) types of regime transitions.

3. Determinants and consequences of the modes of democratization

3.1 Democratization as a political game

To make sense of diverging democratization experiences and of the existence of many democracies that differ widely in their structure and performance, it may be useful to think of the emergence of democracy as resulting from a *political game* played by different social groups receiving different benefits under democratic and non-democratic institutions.

To lay down the trade-off faced by the different groups let us think of the government as a body with two crucial responsibilities: the distribution of the benefits of the production of income (say through a fiscal redistribution scheme) and the provision of productive public goods (say property rights protection or, more in general, a well-functioning rule of law). Think of these two functions as being linked by a trade-off: the larger is the re-distribution of income among different groups the lower is the efficiency in the protection of property rights and the rule of law. One can think at many reasons behind the existence of such a trade-off. Firstly, both redistribution and provision of public goods are costly and require the capacity to collect taxes from the population. The larger is the level of taxation the larger are the distortions on economic activity. Therefore larger redistribution may come at the cost of fewer resources available for providing public goods. Next, in line with an argument discussed above, extracting resources from the population by means of taxation and implementing a good rule of law requires, or at least is facilitated, by the active cooperation of the citizens.³ If the population (or a part of it) does not recognize the authority of the government, it may react by, e.g., hiding taxable income and trying to circumvent the legal system. An implication of this view, which is very relevant for the purposes of this study, is that the effectiveness of the action of the government is likely to shrink if the population (or part of it) finds the action of the government in place to be not legitimate.

Let us further assume that the main difference between a democratic and a non-democratic regime lies in whether the state apparatus (the government) is under the control of a minority of the population (e.g., an oligarchy or an autocracy) or a majority of the population (e.g., a democratic regime holding free and contested elections). An authoritarian regime is characterized by the existence of substantial constraints on the participation in the political decision process. Constraints are present in a number of different institutional arrangements. In some cases, as it was the case in the oligarchies of the 18th and 19th century, the franchise is officially restricted; alternatively a dictator or a military *junta* govern the country without the authorization of an electoral process; finally, even when elections are officially held, in many countries the political power remains *de facto* in the hands of a restricted number of people (as in the case of one-party systems). As opposed to an oligarchic regime, in a democracy the franchise extends to the great majority or the entire the population and (at least some) political *voice* is granted to all social groups.

³ The comparison between the efficiency of democracies and non-democracies in equilibrium and their ability to implement a rule of law is studied in the theory by Cervellati, Fortunato and Sunde (2008). The work by Cervellati, Fortunato and Sunde (2012) further study the role of expectations in sustaining multiple equilibria with different rule of law and propose the view that different transition to democracy may work as a coordination device for individual expectations.

Given these assumptions, the trade-off faced by the group controlling the state apparatus is between attempting to implement a more concentrated distribution of income (in favor of the group in power) at the cost of larger economic distortions, or limit the activities of rent extraction in favor of a higher provision of public goods, and ultimately, higher efficiency. Notice that, in principle, this trade-off might be in place irrespective of whether the state is controlled by a small (and rich) elite or a (poor) majority of the population, that is, irrespective of whether the political franchise is limited or extended. Either the government is able to implement policies that create widespread benefits and, in turn, confer legitimacy to its actions, or the state has little legitimacy. In the last case the quality of the emerging institutions, including the rule of law, will be poor. The point is that the bidirectional feedback between the choices of a central government and the actions of citizens may give rise to failed states in both democracies and non-democracies. Nonetheless, the incentives (and the trade-off) faced by an oligarchic elite may be related to the ones faced by the masses in the emerging democracy.

A natural implication of this political economy representation is, as discussed next, that one should expect that the structural features in place in one economy before the democratic transition should matter for both the modes of the transition and the features of the emerging democracy.

3.2 Natural resources and the democratization scenario: deriving testable hypotheses

Samuel Huntington (1993) provides an analysis of regime transitions during (what he calls) the “third wave” of democratization. He concludes that the implications of a violent transition for the quality of the emerging democracy are not entirely clear, but conjectures that violent uprisings should be expected to lead to worse democracies. This prediction would emerge also from a theoretical framework, like the one described above, interpreting violent conflicts as a result of a game between different social groups that aim at maximizing the utility of their members. Given the assumed features of the prototype democratic and authoritarian regimes described above, one can analyze the preferences of the different social groups with respect to the trade-off they face and derive some hypotheses about the determinants and consequences of the different modes of democratic transitions.

By its very definition, in an oligarchic (non-democratic) regime only the preferences of a minority are taken into account for the selection of public policies. Being unconstrained and free to pursue its objectives, the empowered elite will try to appropriate economic rents, and expropriate the powerless majority of the population. Faced with the trade-off between rent extraction and imposing distortions discussed above, the elite has a larger incentive to expropriate the easier it is to redistribute disposable income to themselves. We should therefore expect that the ruling elites will exploit their power to forcefully extract income at the cost of imposing large distortions in countries where natural resources are abundant and, importantly, easy to loot. In the presence of natural resources like, e.g., oil and minerals, it is easier to exclude the disempowered majority from the benefits of these resources. Under these conditions the disenfranchised masses of people should be less likely to confer legitimacy to the state. As consequence, these authoritarian regimes should be associated with inefficient institutions and large inequality.

In democracies where the majority of poor have a larger political voice, the redistribution schemes tend to be more progressive. However, also the wealthy (former) elites take part in the decision process and universal franchise is usually coupled with institutional mechanisms that protect the minorities. While redistribution is generally limited in democracies, certain forms of expropriation of private property, or nationalization of firms and industries, by part of the newly enfranchised population can be expected to take place during the process of democratization, however. Again, and crucially, we should expect this to be more likely in countries richly endowed with natural resources that are easy to grasp like the ones that do not require investment in expensive equipment, and can easily be sold in the market legally or illegally.⁴ Also natural resources, that have higher operational costs associated with them, such as oil, bauxite, or mineral gas, are subject to public expropriation since they are much less mobile across borders than physical or human capital, which makes it more difficult for their owners to escape seizure. Furthermore

⁴ Timber, alluvial diamonds, and some drugs like coca or opium poppy are examples of such easily lootable natural resources.

these resources can be made subject to state monopolies which allows the group in control of the government to direct rent extraction and redistribute the revenues.

Violent regime transitions. When natural resources are abundant and their distribution is highly concentrated, it is relatively unlikely for small elites to be willing to give up power. In this case, elites rather prefer an authoritarian regime, which allows them to keep full control over the policy space. This is the scenario characterizing many oil and mineral resource-rich economies where restricted elites control power and resources, and are firmly opposed to any kind of democratic reform. Democratization can be enforced, however, by the disenfranchised population under (the shadow of) conflict and against the will of the ruling elite. If the powerless masses face a window of opportunity, e.g., as they become sufficiently strong, determined and organized, they may revolt and overthrow the existing regime. Historically, many regime changes resulted from the uprising of a politically (and economically) deprived class. The threat of revolution and social unrest, for example, played a decisive role in the establishment of voting rights in many Latin American countries, like in Nicaragua (1979) and Bolivia (1982).

When the transition is forced by the masses, while the elites are still entrenched and unwilling to accept a reduction of their political power, however, it is unlikely that the overthrown elite will accept the new rules of the game and confer legitimacy to the government. Furthermore, the masses themselves should be less likely to favor efficiency and the emergence of a good rule of law since this would reduce their ability to extract rents once in power. New democracies that emerge under such a scenario are therefore not very likely to generate efficient economic institutions and inclusive societies.

In sum, when controlling public rents from natural resources is easier, then we should expect that the trade-off between redistribution and efficiency is more likely resolved in favor of the former even when the (previously disenfranchised) masses manage to get to power. Consequently, if the rents controlled by the incumbent authoritarian rulers are very high, it is more likely that the new rulers will attempt to extract resources as well. Under these conditions the costs of giving up political power and succumbing to a regime change are sizable for the oligarchic elite which might attempt violent repression of uprising and the incentives to get in control of the state apparatus even with violent means is higher for those currently excluded from the rents.

Peaceful regime transition. In an alternative scenario, the transition to democracy can also be accepted, or even in some cases actively promoted, by (a part of) the formerly authoritarian power-holders. The implementation of democratic institutions can play an instrumental role to enable the emergence of effective property rights protection and rule of law. Efficient economic institutions are particularly important in an industrial economy where their implementation contributes to align the economic incentives, favors the adoption of new technologies and spurs productive investments. Oligarchic elites may lack the commitment power that is needed for a government to be legitimate and firmly convince the population that the government action will be aimed at providing public goods by limiting rent extraction. If the level of inequality is low and/or natural resources are not abundant (i.e. rent extraction is not particularly rewarding) the elites may find it profitable to trade-off a certain degree of progressive redistribution in a democracy against the possibility of having an environment more favorable for economic activity.⁵ The formerly disenfranchised masses in turn are more likely to confer legitimacy to the new political system since this allows them to have a say in the political arena and to influence policies in their interest, e.g., by implementing a progressive system of redistribution of resources and incomes.⁶ Peaceful transitions to liberal democracies followed the industrial take-off in the 19th century in many European countries and Western offshoots. During the “third wave” of democratization, consensual transitions characterized some eastern European countries after the break-down of the former USSR.

⁵ The works by Lizzeri and Persico (2004) and Llavodor and Oxoby (2005) discuss the role of conflict within the elite. The parts of the elite that derive a large part of their economic returns from entrepreneurship and human capital rather than natural resources may favor or push a process of democratization to reap the benefits of higher returns to their activities.

⁶ The prediction that peaceful transitions are more likely to occur when inequality is low and tend to lead to an environment more favorable for economic activity is consistent with the recent empirical findings of Chong and Gradstein (2007) and Sunde et al. (2008). More specifically, evidence on the differential role of the transition scenario for the quality of democratic institutions and growth, respectively, is provided by Cervellati, Fortunato, and Sunde (2011) and Cervellati and Sunde (2013).

This discussion can be summarized as saying that in economies where natural resources are important, easy to loot and materialize in large inequalities democratization is less likely to take place peacefully, and less likely to lead to high quality democracies. The discussion so far can be therefore summarized in two testable hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The roots of democratization. Transitions to democracy can emerge under different scenarios: peacefully and under a broad consensus in the population, or under a violent conflict. When natural resources are abundant and inequality is high a democratic transition is more likely to emerge against the will of the ruling elite and under a scenario of conflict triggered by the disenfranchised masses and fuelled by attempts of repression by part of the elite.

Hypothesis 2: The fruits of democratization. The democratization scenario has important implications for the quality and growth prospects of the emerging democracy. A new democracy is more likely to be characterized by a better rule of law and effective protection of property rights if it emerges out of a larger consensus and a peaceful transition. Democratization under conflict is less likely to bring effective protection of property rights and rule of law.

Summing up, these hypotheses imply that democratic institutions may play an instrumental role for the implementation of growth-enhancing policies and institutions, such as a rule of law. Democratization may not be sufficient to implement good institutions, however. The democratization scenario depends on whether the political and economic interests are broadly aligned in the population. Non-democracies characterized by a large inequality and/or abundance of natural resources are more likely to experience violent transitions and lead to low quality democracies.

4. Some evidence from the “Third Wave” of democratization

We now turn to investigate the consistency of the testable hypothesis with empirical evidence. We proceed in two steps. First, we investigate the relationship between natural resource abundance, inequality and the type of democratic transition, and then we study the relationship between the type of transition and the features of the emerging democracy.

Resource abundance, inequality and democratic transitions. It is not straightforward to classify countries according to whether they experienced *consensual* or *conflictual* transitions without necessarily being somewhat arbitrary. In a consensual scenario, when all the social groups agree on the necessity of an institutional change, the transition should occur in relatively smooth and non-violent fashion. In the alternative scenario, the conflict of interest between different social groups and the opposition of the elite to the change of regime may materialize in mass movements and pressure by part of the disenfranchised people. Democratic transitions taking place after social unrest, political pressure, and violent struggles may represent only a subset of the “conflictual” democratization as described above. In fact, democratic transitions could be conflictual even if they take place in the absence of open violence but in the shadow of an imminent, credible conflict. Measuring the intensity of violence and social unrest that precedes a political change, therefore, provides a pragmatic (but potentially conservative) strategy to distinguish consensual from episodes of democratization with open conflict.

The Freedom House (2005) classified the democratic transitions that occurred in the period 1973 to 2003 according to the level of violence which characterized the transition scenario. In particular, the study considers four categories: “High Violence”, “Significant Violence”, “Mostly Nonviolent” and “Nonviolent” transitions.

As a first investigation of the hypothesis, Figure 2 divides the democracies of the third wave in two groups according to the inequality in the distribution of income measured in the year in which the transition took place. Those countries with a Gini index below the average of the sample are labeled as (relatively) “equal” while the others are defined “unequal”. The figure shows that, in line with the arguments presented above, the great majority of equal countries experienced regime changes which are classified by the Freedom House as either “nonviolent” or “mostly nonviolent” (i.e., consensual transitions, which occur without violent social conflict). On the contrary, more unequal countries displayed much higher levels of violence during the transition towards a democratic political system. In particular, seventy percent (25 out of the 37) of the countries that had a Gini index lower than the average in the year before the transition experienced a peaceful democratization. Conversely more than two thirds (20 out of 28) of the countries that had a Gini index above the average did experience a violent transition to democracy.

Figure 2. Inequality and the Mode of Transition to Democracy.

Source: Freedom House (2005) and WIID2 (2005).

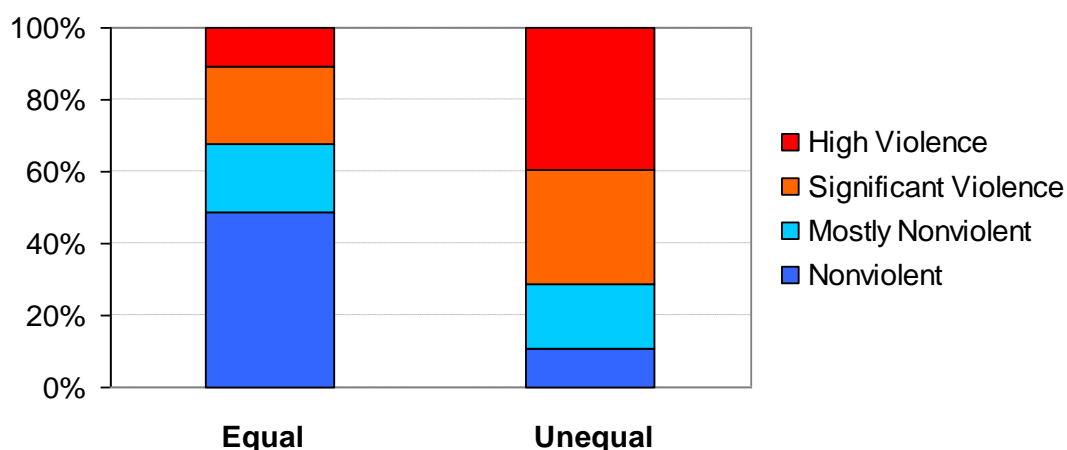


Table 2 investigates the hypothesis more structurally by ways of a multivariate regression analysis. The dependent variable is a binary indicator of whether the transition to democracy was associated with violence. The key explanatory variables are inequality (measured by the share of landless or by the Gini-index) and, alternatively, either a binary indicator of whether a country exports more than 33% of GDP in oil (column 1, 2 and 3) or the interpolated share of GDP made up by fuel (i-fuel, column 4, 5 and 6) to proxy for natural resource abundance. All the explanatory variables are measured in the year previous to the democratic transition. In order to account for potential confounds, we also present specifications that control for institutional quality (in terms of law and order), ethnic tensions, and log GDP per capita, all measured before the democratic transition.⁷ Regardless of the specification, the results suggest that the propensity of observing violence during democratization was significantly higher in countries with abundant natural resources and high levels of inequality, consistent with the argument before. Although the inclusion of some controls (particularly land inequality) reduces the sample size considerably, the results suggest a significant and sizable effect of oil (and generally mineral) resources on the likelihood of observing a violent regime transition.

⁷ Data for law and order and ethnic tensions are taken from the International Country Risk Guide, which are available from 1984, which implies a substantial loss of observations since democratization events before 1984 have to be dropped from the respective specifications.

Table 2: Inequality, Natural Resources and Violence During the Democratic Transition

Dependent Variable	Violent Transition (0/1)					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Inequality pre-transition (Gini)	0.016*** [0.004]	0.014** [0.006]	0.012* [0.006]		0.016** [0.006]	
Oil dummy (pre-transition)	0.402*** [0.075]	0.389*** [0.095]	0.376*** [0.096]	0.769*** [0.114]		
Civil liberties		0.059 [0.074]	0.026 [0.074]		-0.012 [0.072]	
log GDP per capita		-0.01 [0.044]	0.012 [0.034]		0.011 [0.034]	
Ethnic Tensions			-0.08 [0.076]		-0.079 [0.078]	
Share of Landless				0.026*** [0.008]		0.026*** [0.008]
I-fuel (pre-transition)					0.004** [0.002]	0.009*** [0.002]
Constant	-0.153 [0.172]	-0.259 [0.421]	0.081 [0.550]	0.071 [0.144]	-0.007 [0.515]	0.02 [0.166]
Observations	61	32	32	23	32	22
adjusted R-squared	0.19	0.146	0.181	0.301	0.216	0.322

Notes: Dependent variable is binary, coefficients are OLS estimates, standard errors in brackets.

*, **, *** denotes significance on the 10%, 5%, and 1% level. See the text for details of data description and sources.

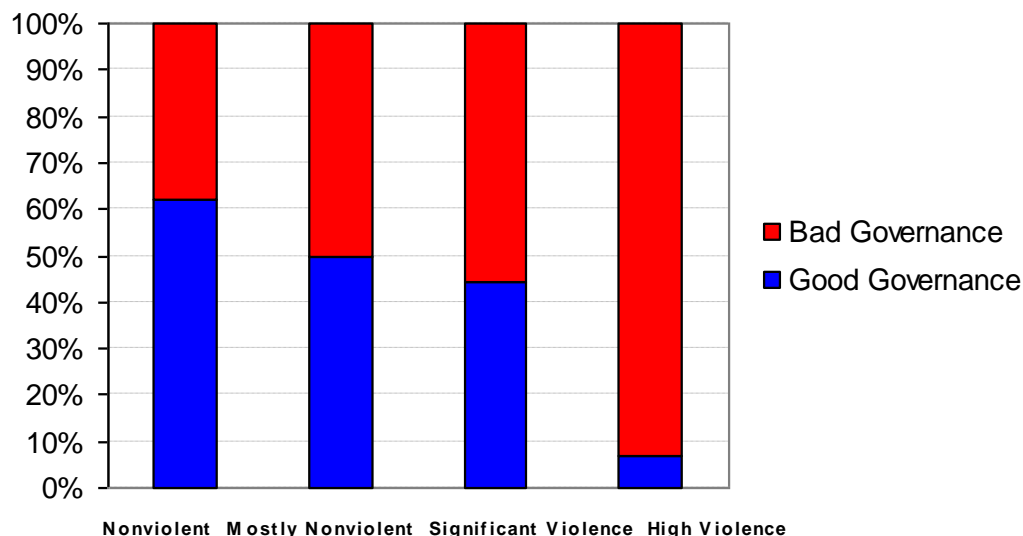
Democratic transitions, rule of law and civil rights. We next turn to investigate the empirical relevance of the second hypothesis, namely whether the level of violence during the transition scenario (i.e., the type of democratic transition) has any bearing on actual outcomes in terms of property rights protection and the quality of democratic institutions.

To measure the actual implementation of property rights, we use an indicator of rule of law proposed by the World Bank. This indicator reflects the quality of institutions and governance and it “measures the success of a society in developing an environment in which fair and predictable rules form the basis for economic and social interactions and the extent to which property rights are protected” (Kaufman *et al.*, 2004). In particular, we classify the countries of our sample in two groups, the “Good Governance” and the “Bad Governance” group, depending on whether they perform better or worse than the average.

A first look at the data suggests indeed that the level of governance in the emerging democracies might indeed be related to the level of violence during the regime change. Figure 3 shows that the majority of countries that implemented democratic institutions peacefully perform above average in terms of rule of law and property rights protection. Conversely, those countries characterized by a violent transition scenario perform, in the great majority, very poorly in terms of the quality of governance. This evidence is in line with the predictions of the hypothesis derived in the previous discussion.

Figure 3. Transition to Democracy and Quality of Governance.

Source: Freedom House (2005) and World Bank (2005).

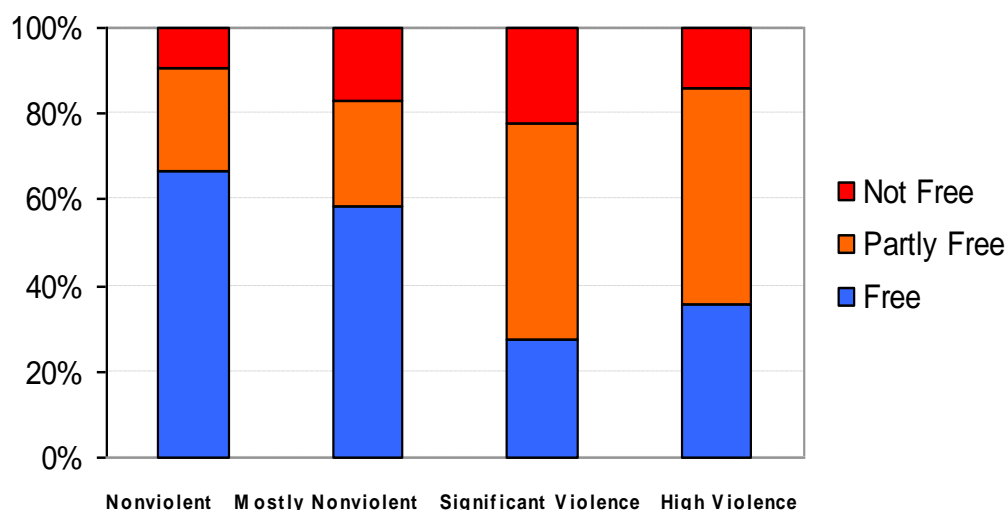


Almost seventy percent (23 out of 32) of the countries that changed regime under a *conflictual* scenario (i.e. significant or high violence) display a rule of law below the average quality within the group of new democracies as of 2005. On the contrary, 19 of the 33 countries that experienced a peaceful political (i.e. nonviolent or mostly nonviolent) change have been able to implement economic institutions above the average quality.

The previous discussion also suggests that consensual and non-violent transitions to democracy should lead to stable democracies that are accepted by the great majority of the population. The degree of civil liberties and the political rights within a country can be informative on the overall quality of democratic institutions. Employing the Freedom House classification into “Free”, “Partly Free” and “Non Free” countries described in the introduction, Figure 4 shows that political and civil rights are granted in the majority of countries that have democratized without social conflict, while the opposite holds true in democracies that originated in a scenario with conflict.

Figure 4. Democratic Transition and Civil Liberties.

Source: Freedom House (2005).



A more structural test of the hypothesis is again performed using multivariate regressions. The dependent variable is institutional quality, measured in terms of law and order, or in terms of civil liberties, as of 2005. The data are again taken from the International Country Risk Guide (law and order) and from Freedom House (civil liberties). The dependent variables are coded such that higher values indicate better outcomes. The explanatory variables are the institutional quality in the year before the transition to democracy, and binary indicators that measure the level of violence during the transition to democracy relative to non-violent transitions. Additional controls are the age of the democracy (in terms of years since democratization as of 2005), natural resource abundance (proxied by the relative importance of oil for the GDP) and inequality before the transition.

The results, presented in Table 3 that violence during the transition reduces institutional quality in the aftermath of the transition. Relative to non-violent transitions, significant or high levels of violence during the democratic transition reduce institutional quality in the long run. The results also provide evidence that institutional quality before the democratic transition, as well as inequality before the transition, have an effect on institutional quality after the transition.⁸ The main result of the detrimental effect of violence holds up, however, even when controlling for institutional quality before the transition. The somewhat weaker effects of violence during the transition when controlling for pre-transitional institutional quality and inequality also indicates that these variables affect the likelihood of the occurrence of violence during the transition to democracy and account for some of the effect of violence. Taken together, however, the results are consistent with the hypothesis that violence during the transition represents a key indicator of whether democratization indeed leads to an improvement in institutional quality. These results are not confined to the Freedom House classification of violence during the transition. Using data on the occurrence of civil conflict in the year of, or the year before, the transition to democracy using an alternative coding of democratization than Freedom House, Cervellati, Fortunato and Sunde (2014) also find a significant negative effect of violence during the transition on the institutional quality of the emerging democracies.

The results in Table 3 also show that inequality and natural resource abundance affect institutional quality partly through the type of transition. These findings are fully consistent with the recent literature on natural resource course that has extensively documented the existence of direct linkages between resource abundance and institutional quality (Moehne et al., 2006, and Torvik, 2009). The findings complement these results and show that resource abundance matters for institutions also indirectly by contributing to the determination of the transition scenario which in turn influences institutional quality.

Unreported results finally suggest that an interaction term between law and order and a binary indicator for violence accounts for the potentially differential change in institutional quality in countries that democratized peacefully as opposed to violent transitions.

5. Concluding remarks

The evidence from the successful democratic transitions of the “third wave” suggests that democracy is more likely to flourish when economic and political interests are broadly aligned in the population, thereby creating fertile soil for more inclusive and more efficient democratic institutions. Countries heavily relying on natural resources whose rents are unevenly distributed in the population were more likely to experience violent conflicts during democratization, and in turn display worse institutions after the transition to democracy. The experience of countries like Taiwan is paradigmatic; they grew under *de facto* one-party authoritarian regimes eventually turning peacefully into legitimate and stable democracies after the economic take-off. On the contrary, in unequal societies highly dependent on natural resources, democratic institutions have often been introduced by force and against the will of a substantial part of the society. The democracies that emerged under such a scenario have typically not been able to provide effective protection for political and economic (property) rights, as in the case of many natural resource abundant countries as diverse as Bolivia, Uzbekistan, or Zimbabwe.

⁸ The low number of 35 observations of democratization is due to data limitations for the ICRG index of law and order, which is only available since 1984.

Table 3: "Long-Run" Consequences of Violence During the Democratic Transition

Dependent Variable	Law and Order (in 2005)		Civil Liberties (in 2005)		Political Rights (in 2005)		Combined Avg. Index	
Mostly Non-Violent Transition	-0.354	0.059	0.8	0.888	0.436	0.484	0.618	0.703
	[0.373]	[0.471]	[0.500]	[0.568]	[0.615]	[0.714]	[0.548]	[0.631]
Significant Violence	-0.910***	-0.395	1.039**	0.8	1.047*	0.815	1.043**	0.806
	[0.329]	[0.457]	[0.442]	[0.518]	[0.544]	[0.653]	[0.485]	[0.578]
High Violence	-0.729*	0.507	1.386***	1.485**	1.411**	1.392*	1.398**	1.430*
	[0.373]	[0.516]	[0.496]	[0.643]	[0.611]	[0.807]	[0.544]	[0.717]
Age of Democracy (Years)	0.036	0.039	-0.03	-0.048	-0.025	-0.031	-0.028	-0.04
	[0.022]	[0.041]	[0.031]	[0.033]	[0.038]	[0.042]	[0.034]	[0.037]
Oil (pre-transition)		-0.67		1.701		1.644		1.632
		[1.008]		[1.086]		[1.341]		[1.196]
Law and Order (pre-transition)		0.272						
		[0.164]						
Inequality pre-transition (Gini)		-0.026*		-0.001		-0.007		-0.004
		[0.015]		[0.018]		[0.022]		[0.020]
Civil Liberties (pre-transition)				-0.039				
				[0.221]				
Political Rights (pre-transition)						0.135		
						[0.215]		
Combined Avg. Ranking (pre-transition)								0.07
								[0.233]
Constant	3.511***	3.283***	2.902***	3.196**	2.658***	2.282	2.666***	2.647
	[0.366]	[1.068]	[0.547]	[1.447]	[0.626]	[1.703]	[0.558]	[1.645]
Observations	57	35	61	59	67	59	67	59
adjusted R-squared	0.116	0.243	0.134	0.089	0.045	0.01	0.065	0.039

Notes: Law and order is measured on a scale 0-6, with higher values indicating better outcomes. Civil Liberties and Political Rights are measured on a scale 1-7 with higher values indicating worse outcomes. Reference category for violence is 'no violence during the transition'. Coefficients are OLS estimates, standard errors in brackets.

*, **, *** denotes significance on the 10%, 5%, and 1% level, respectively. See the text and Table A1 for details of data description and sources.

Democratic transitions, however, are not always exclusively driven by internal forces. The international community may in fact inflict economic and political sanctions (like embargos or diplomatic isolation) on autocratic states in order to foster democratic transition. The results suggest that these measures might be more likely to be fruitfully applied on those economies with a relatively even distribution of income and wealth and that rely relatively little on the rents from lootable natural resources. These economies might be able to sustain democratic institutions emerging out of external pressures since a regime change pushed only internally might be made difficult and hindered by the generally difficult coordination of the internal civic opposition. On the contrary, external pressures on resource-based economies with rampant inequality and easy rent seeking are likely to pave the way for democratic institutions emerging out of violence and materializing in the persistence of government characterized by a serious deficit of popular legitimacy. The results suggest that the level of violence during the transition might have long term (persistent) effects on the ability to improve rule of law and civil liberties. Under these conditions, pushing a country towards political change by any mean may be a particularly risky strategy and policies aiming at changing the internal socio-economic environment by implementing economic reforms favoring a more widespread distribution of income and equalized economic opportunities may represent a useful preliminary step to increase the pressure towards a peaceful change of regime and to make democracy work.

Finally, the evidence presented here poses more than a shadow on the prospects for a full democratic blossoming in the Arab countries. The unequal distribution of riches and the violent confrontation that characterizes the movement to democracy in some of these countries, following decades of heavy-handed governance, suggest that it could be difficult to reach a democratic consensus in the population at large. In these countries, there is a substantial risk of emergence of democracies characterized by poor protection of civil liberties and poor rule of law.

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Table A1: Raw Data: Democratic Transitions, Violence, and Civil Liberties

Country	Transition Year	Pre-Transition: Liberties* and Inequality						Post-Transition (2005): Liberties*				Transition Scenario
		PR	CL	CAR	Status	Gini	Year	PR	CL	CAR	Status	
Albania	1992	7	6	6.5	NF	29.3	1989	3	3	3	PF	Mostly Nonviolent
Argentina	1983	6	5	5.5	NF	43.8	1981	2	2	2	F	High Violence
Armenia	1998	6	5	5.5	NF	28	1988	4	4	4	PF	Significant Violence
Azerbaijan	1991	6	5	5.5	NF	31.7	1988	6	5	5.5	PF	Significant Violence
Bangladesh	1991	4	4	4	PF	33.6	1989	4	4	4	PF	Significant Violence
Belarus	1991	6	5	5.5	NF	24.2	1988	6	6	6	NF	Nonviolent
Benin	1991	7	7	7	NF		1989	2	2	2	F	Mostly Nonviolent
Bolivia	1982	7	5	6	NF	51.5	1982	3	3	3	PF	High Violence
Bosnia-Herz.	1995	6	6	6	NF	32.88	1994	4	3	3.5	PF	High Violence
Brazil	1985	3	3	3	PF	57.7	1984	2	3	2.5	F	Mostly Nonviolent
Bulgaria	1991	7	7	7	NF	20.9	1988	1	2	1.5	F	Nonviolent
Cambodia	1993	7	7	7	NF	46	1990	6	5	5.5	NF	Significant Violence
Cape Verde	1991	5	5	5	PF		1990	1	1	1	F	Nonviolent
Chile	1990	6	5	5.5	PF	47	1987	1	1	1	F	Mostly Nonviolent
Croatia	2000	4	4	4	PF	30	1998	2	2	2	F	Nonviolent
Czech Rep.	1993	7	6	6.5	NF	19.8	1987	1	1	1	F	Nonviolent
El Salvador	1994	3	4	3.5	PF	50.6	1991	2	3	2.5	F	High Violence
Estonia	1992	6	5	5.5	NF	27.8	1988	1	1	1	F	Nonviolent
Ethiopia	1995	7	7	7	NF	52.7	1990	5	5	5	PF	High Violence
Gambia	2001	7	5	6	NF	50.2	2000	4	4	4	PF	Mostly Nonviolent
Ghana	2000	3	3	3	PF	40.7	1999	2	3	2.5	F	Nonviolent
Greece	1975	7	5	6	NF	41.3	1973	1	2	1.5	F	Mostly Nonviolent
Guatemala	1996	4	5	4.5	PF	55.3	1995	4	4	4	PF	High Violence
Guyana	1992	5	4	4.5	PF	51.5	1989	2	2	2	F	Nonviolent
Hungary	1990	5	4	4.5	PF	26.8	1988	1	1	1	F	Nonviolent
Indonesia	1999	7	5	6	NF	36	1997	3	4	3.5	PF	High Violence
Iran	1979	5	6	5.5	PF	46	1978	6	6	6	NF	High Violence
Kazakhstan	1991	6	5	5.5	NF	29.1	1988	6	5	5.5	NF	Nonviolent
Kyrgyzstan	1991	6	5	5.5	NF	31.2	1988	6	5	5.5	NF	Nonviolent
Latvia	1991	6	5	5.5	NF	25	1988	1	2	1.5	F	Mostly Nonviolent
Lithuania	1991	6	5	5.5	NF	24.4	1988	2	1	1.5	F	Significant Violence
Macedonia	1991	5	4	4.5	PF	32.22	1989	3	3	3	PF	Nonviolent
Madagascar	1993	5	4	4.5	PF	62.5	1989	3	3	3	PF	Significant Violence
Malawi	1994	7	6	6.5	NF	62	1991	4	4	4	PF	Significant Violence
Mali	1992	6	5	5.5	NF	54	1990	2	2	2	F	Significant Violence
Mexico	1997	3	4	3.5	PF	54.5	1999	2	2	2	F	Nonviolent
Moldova	1994	6	5	5.5	NF	26.4	1988	3	4	3.5	PF	Significant Violence
Mongolia	1993	7	7	7	NF	33.2	1989	2	2	2	F	Nonviolent
Mozambique	1994	6	4	5	NF	39.4	1991	3	4	3.5	PF	Mostly Nonviolent
Nepal	1990	4	5	4.5	PF	54.6	1989	5	5	5	PF	Significant Violence
Nicaragua	1990	5	5	5	PF	55.7	1989	3	3	3	PF	High Violence
Nigeria	1999	7	6	6.5	NF	50.2	1997	4	4	4	PF	Significant Violence
Panama	1994	7	6	6.5	NF	56.5	1988	1	2	1.5	F	High Violence
Paraguay	1993	6	6	6	NF	45.1	1988	3	3	3	PF	Significant Violence
Peru	1980	5	4	4.5	PF	50.5	1999	2	3	2.5	F	Mostly Nonviolent
Philippines	1987	4	3	3.5	PF	45.5	1985	2	2	2	F	Significant Violence
Poland	1990	5	5	5	PF	24.5	1988	1	1	1	F	Nonviolent
Portugal	1976	5	6	5.5	NF	40.1	1973	1	1	1	F	Mostly Nonviolent
Romania	1990	7	7	7	NF	31.2	1988	3	2	2.5	F	Significant Violence
Russia	1993	6	5	5.5	NF	23.9	1988	6	5	5.5	NF	Mostly Nonviolent
Senegal	2000	4	4	4	PF	29.3	1999	2	3	2.5	F	Mostly Nonviolent
Serbia-Mont.	2000	5	5	5	PF		1999	3	2	2.5	F	High Violence
Slovakia	1989	7	6	6.5	NF	18.6	1988	1	1	1	F	Nonviolent
Slovenia	1992	5	4	4.5	PF	21.9	1989	1	1	1	F	Nonviolent
South Africa	1994	6	5	5.5	PF	59.5	1989	1	2	1.5	F	Significant Violence
South Korea	1987	4	5	4.5	PF	34.54	1986	1	2	1.5	F	Significant Violence
Spain	1978	5	5	5	PF	34.1	1974	1	1	1	F	Nonviolent
Taiwan	1992	5	5	5	PF	29.7	1991	2	2	2	F	Nonviolent
Tajikistan	1991	6	5	5.5	NF	31.8	1988	6	5	5.5	NF	Significant Violence
Tanzania	1995	6	5	5.5	NF	38	1993	4	3	3.5	PF	Nonviolent
Thailand	1992	6	4	5	PF	49.8	1991	2	3	2.5	F	Significant Violence
Turkey	1983	5	5	5	PF	57	1980	3	3	3	PF	Significant Violence
Uganda	1986	5	4	4.5	PF	37.7	1984	5	4	4.5	PF	High Violence
Uruguay	1985	5	4	4.5	PF	40.4	1983	1	1	1	F	Nonviolent
Uzbekistan	1991	6	5	5.5	NF	30.6	1988	7	6	6.5	NF	Mostly Nonviolent
Zambia	1991	6	5	5.5	PF	48.4	1989	4	4	4	PF	Nonviolent
Zimbabwe	1979	6	5	5.5	NF	62.9	1975	7	6	6.5	NF	High Violence

PR: Political Rights, CL: Civil Liberties, CAR: "Combined Average Rating" (average of FIW Political Rights and Civil Liberties scores. The scores are based on a 1-7 scale: 1 represents the highest level of freedom and 7 the lowest.) Status: F Free, PF Partly Free, NF Not Free.

Source: Freedom House (2005) and WIID2 (2005).