Better the Devil You Know? Autocracy, State Failure, and Human Rights

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Abstract

This article tests an essential Hobbesian claim on order and the state of nature by asking: are human rights systematically worse under a stable autocrat or in a failed autocracy? With the rising incidence of autocratic failure, it is important to know exactly how detrimental failures are to human rights. This article updates currently available data to compare physical integrity rights under periods of autocratic failure to the same rights under autocratic stability, concluding that physical integrity rights are systematically far worse in failed autocracies. The absence of central authority appears to be the root cause behind this difference, though the proximate cause seems to lie firmly with warring factions that develop in light of that absence. More broadly, this article addresses physical integrity rights violations perpetrated by both state and non-state actors, widening the scope of violations traditionally considered in quantitative human rights scholarship.
The most important political distinction among countries concerns not their form of government but their degree of government. Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*

Are human rights systematically worse in failed or stable autocracies? Consider Iraq.

Under Saddam Husain, political and often physical survival hinged on unquestioning obedience to the president (Tripp 2007). People who were out of line were silenced; either killed en masse, as thousands of Kurds were during the al-Anfal campaign, or selectively eliminated, as about 500 senior members of the party were within a month of Husain’s swearing-in as president. Husain was the archetypal stable autocrat, and his reputation for ruthlessness was justified by systematic repression throughout his time in power. His fall, however, offered little respite to Iraqis. As Husain’s networks of control disintegrated, people started to regroup, but there was no national command and no unity as each fragment fought for power on its own. In addition to the danger of being targeted by tribal-like factions, citizens faced rampant criminality that arose when all state prisons were opened, the police across the country disappeared, and state borders became wholly unguarded. General lawlessness became the rule of the day and the hastily created police forces with little oversight were implicated in the very thefts, oil and drug exchanges, and kidnappings they were formed to prevent. Iraq had become a failed autocracy.

In Iraq in 2003, chaos replaced a brutal tyrant; many of the same violations that had been carefully planned and executed as part of policy before were now perpetrated by any faction, group, or individual that mustered the resources. The difference between the two situations is enormous—they are two extremes of a governance spectrum, with absolute central control on the one hand and no central control whatsoever on the other. Both typically result in severe human rights violations, but remarkably little is known about which type is systematically worse—a
question of considerable relevance to the intergovernmental organizations and relief agencies charged with the responsibility to protect.

   Autocracies frequently engage in human rights violations, sometimes to the point that makes any alternative, no matter how grim, appear to be a welcome change (Dassin 1986; Kasozi 1994; Annas and Grodin 1995; Rummel 1996; Ensalaco 2000). Yet, when a regime breaks down, change for the better does not always quickly follow. After the collapse of Husain’s regime, Iraq did not quickly form an effective alternative government. Somalia seems incapable of pulling itself out of failure, while the Congo seems to have only partially succeeded. While a prolonged failure of state is rarely, if ever, planned or desired, it does happen. In fact, it happens more and more.

   [Figure 1 about here]

   The need for a better understanding of the severity of rights violations during periods of autocratic failure has become increasingly important since the war in Iraq and has gained even further traction with the events of the Arab Spring. Recent events, however, are not all that motivates research on failure. Since 1990, the incidence of on-going state failures has more than doubled; in the past seventeen years we have seen as many failure onsets as in the forty-five years before. Figure 1 demonstrates this increase. With the rising incidence of autocratic failures, it is important that we learn exactly how detrimental failures are to human rights, so that we can devote enough attention to them and develop measures that reduce and alleviate human hardship associated with them.

   A direct comparison of physical integrity rights under periods of autocratic failure to the same rights under autocratic stability paints a clearer picture. It juxtaposes situations we generally know are bad to situations about which we know far more. We know quite well how
stable autocracies fare, in terms of rights, when compared to democracies (Poe and Tate 1994, Davenport 1995, Poe et al. 1999, Cingranelli and Richards 1999b, Davenport 1999, Hathaway 2002, Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003, Landman 2005, Hafner-Burton 2005, Davenport 2007b, Simmons 2009). Although we know that failed autocracies are awful, we do not know if they fare just as poorly, better, or even worse than their stable counterparts. The findings in this article will provide some insight; not only will they indicate whether failed autocracies produce more egregious violations of physical integrity rights, but they will also suggest how much worse, or better, than stable autocracies they are. As neither qualitative nor quantitative literatures consistently suggest that one situation is worse than another, I test the essential Hobbesian claim:

H1: People in autocracies that fail on average endure a higher number of physical integrity rights violations than do people in stable autocracies.

The main contribution of this article is empirical. The two widely used indices in quantitative human rights scholarship, the Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human Rights dataset (Cingranelli and Richards 2010, 1999a) and the Political Terror Scale (Gibney et al. 2007), both focus on physical integrity rights violations perpetrated by state actors. In a failed state, however, rights violations likely happen at the hands of both state and non-state actors, and an empirical assessment of a human rights situation in such a state should encompass violations perpetrated by both. This article therefore adds data on physical integrity rights violations in failed states to the CIRI dataset, and, in order to ensure a valid comparison, updates selected observations of physical integrity rights violations in stable autocracies to also include violations perpetrated by non-state actors. The results suggest that the gap in severity of rights violations
in failed and stable autocracies is substantial: a failed autocracy is about eight times as likely to receive the lowest score on the CIRI index as its stable counterpart.

While the received wisdom might be that human rights violations in failed autocracies are worse than those in stable autocracies, the received wisdom does not speak as to how much worse, on average, those violations are. This article provides an estimate. More broadly, this article addresses physical integrity rights violations that are perpetrated by both state and non-state actors, and so widens the scope of violations traditionally considered in quantitative human rights scholarship.

**Theoretical Background**

In the interests of theoretical and methodological consistency, failure is defined here as the categorical absence of central leadership. This strict definition is faithful to the original meaning of anarchy, the most undisputed form of state failure. A review of cases without central leadership reveals that pure anarchy, where individuals stand alone against all others, generally does not manifest; instead, factionalism with varying numbers of groups takes over. The groups are typically well balanced; the period of failure is fraught with violence as all groups fight for power and none prevails.

Rights abuses that occur during autocratic failure are to some extent different from those that citizens suffer under repressive successful autocrats. When a state is a stable autocracy, leadership is clearly defined, as is its primary goal of survival in office. Stable autocrats find that human rights violations tend to increase their survival in office, and thus repress in a very particular way (Dassin 1986; Kasozi 1994; Rummel 1996; Ensalaco 2000; Kiernan 2002; Donnelly 2007). Victims of repression in such states are usually political opponents and those
who support them, as well as marginalized groups that may be, or are believed to be, engaged in revolutionary activities (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). Repression in a stable autocracy uses methods selected to effectively silence those suspected of opposing the regime and to serve as a warning to the rest of the population. Political imprisonment (Englehart 2009), disappearances, and torture are therefore more likely than arbitrary rape or killings, and may even be completely legitimate under the autocrat’s laws, fully documented, and preceded by a trial (Dassin 1986; Rummel 1996; Donnelly 2007).

In a failed autocracy, on the contrary, the fallen autocrat cannot sustain such repression. People’s allegiances to the fallen power and the political opposition (which itself may have become an irrelevant term) diminish in importance. New allegiances are formed, often based less on politics than on ethnic, tribal or clan affiliations, and typically manifest as factions. The indiscriminate rights violations that commonly follow resemble the Hobbesian environment of all against all at the group level, with several groups and none strong enough to prevail. The mere absence of a central authority is therefore not the direct cause of rights violations; instead, the many factions that fight for power amongst themselves take their toll (Peterson 2000; Woodward 2003). Those who do not fight become victims of opportunistic maltreatment and killing that is less controlled, less thought-out, and less selective, but no less deadly (Lemarchand 2003; Rotberg 2003; Rotberg 2004; Prunier and Gisselquist 2003; Reno 2003). Instead of elaborate methods aimed at sustaining psychological terror, brutality spreads in all directions.

This differing nature of repression, however, does not preclude us from making a comparison. The violations just named all fall into the category of physical integrity rights abuses, which encompasses extrajudicial killings, torture, disappearances and political imprisonment. While we may observe more disappearances in stable and more killings in failed
autocracies, both of these observations give us information on the same dimension of human rights (Cingranelli and Richards 1999a)—physical integrity rights—and this allows us to compare them side by side.

**Methods and data**

To find the extent to which autocratic failure affects physical integrity rights, we must consider two issues. First, factors other than the presence or absence of an executive affect people’s physical integrity rights. Poe, Tate, and Keith (1999), Landman (2005), and Davenport (2007a), for example, all find that regime type, population size, economic standing, and civil wars are significantly related to physical integrity rights. Second, autocratic failure is almost certainly not a random occurrence. Although uncertainty remains about the causes of autocratic failure, executives do not disappear at random. The Political Instability Task Force has, for example, established that particular characteristics of regime type are the main factor behind revolutions, ethnic wars, and adverse regime changes, and that partial autocracies and partial democracies with factionalism are particularly prone to political instability (Marshall et al. 2001; Goldstone et al. 2010). It is also possible that poorer autocracies fail sooner than their wealthy counterparts, that an executive with less control over the population is more vulnerable, that a war ravaged country is less stable, or that a populous state is harder to control. To arrive at a meaningful conclusion about the effect of autocratic failure on physical integrity rights, we must control both for the effects of other factors that affect rights, and for the effects of factors that may be common to failed but not stable autocracies.

We can resolve the first issue by simply including the factors that affect physical integrity rights in the parametric model. The problem of non-random occurrence of failure is more
complex, but the statistical method of matching provides an effective solution. It proposes to match treated (in this instance failed) cases to control (stable) cases prior to analyzing the data with the parametric model. Such analysis controls for the effects of the confounding variables and significantly increases the probability that any differences between the treated and control groups are indeed due to the treatment (Ho et al. 2007a). It allows us, for example, to match on conflict. Some states fail while at war, others while at peace. With matching, we can compare a state that failed while war was raging to a stable autocracy in a similarly violent conflict.

The treatment variable in this project is autocratic failure; an autocracy is considered treated when failed, and not treated, or a control, when it is stable. The entire dataset is therefore limited to states that are not democracies, or states that score below six on the Polity 4 scale. The unit of analysis upon which the matching is performed is a country year. A matched pair of observations would, for example, be a failed autocracy A in year 1978 and a stable autocracy B in year 1979. To avoid omitted variable bias, a matching procedure must include all variables that would have been included in an analysis with a parametric model without matching, provided that they are causally prior to the treatment (Ho et al., 2007a). Many of the covariates that are the basis for the match are recoded for the cases of failure to reflect the observation prior to failure in order to avoid this post-treatment bias. Therefore, if country A fails in year 1982, the log of GDP per capita score used for the matching is the score in 1981. For the same reason, the dependent variable, physical integrity rights, and its lag were not examined during the matching procedure.

Matching is generally a method for pre-processing data before parametric analyses. The matched data in this project were therefore analyzed with an ordered logistic regression, with physical integrity rights as the dependent variable, autocratic failure as the treatment variable,
and a set of control covariates, which were also used to perform the match. A control variable of lagged physical integrity rights was added to the final parametric analysis in one instance. The following section presents the variables.

**Dependent variable**

This analysis focuses on a subset of human rights, chiefly because we tend to give those rights more weight, and as a result expend more effort at collecting information about them. The dependent variables used are measures of physical integrity rights, reported by two sources - the Political Terror Scale (PTS) (Gibney et al. 2007) and the Cingranelli-Richards Human Rights Dataset (CIRI) (Cingranelli and Richards 2010, 1999a). Both indicators measure state-sanctioned killings, torture, disappearances, and political imprisonment. I employ two indicators because each has a weakness that the other addresses; consistent results when both are used are thus particularly convincing. The scores for both indicators are coded using annual reports on human rights practices from two sources: Amnesty International and the U.S. State Department.

Political Terror Scale (PTS) data used here are available for 188 countries between the years 1976 and 2006 (Gibney et al. 2007). The scores are on a five point scale, where one indicates no repression and five the highest levels of repression. The version used in this analysis is based on an average of scores from Amnesty International reports and U.S. State Department reports. To facilitate interpretation, the scores were recoded so that one stood for the lowest levels of physical integrity rights and five for the highest.

Since this indicator primarily measures state-sanctioned abuse, it likely does not completely capture the severity of violations perpetrated by non-state actors. As a result, the level of repression as a whole in a failed autocracy may be under-reported in the PTS physical
integrity rights scale. It is therefore necessary to exercise caution when interpreting the results. Since the bias in the data runs consistently in one direction, we can determine a priori which results will be conclusive and which will not. If the analysis finds no statistically significant discrepancy between the physical integrity rights in both situations, the bias precludes us from concluding that there is in fact no discrepancy. Abuses in failed states not recorded by the measure may be so severe that in reality a discrepancy does exist, making rights abuses in failed autocracies significantly greater. If the analysis finds that physical integrity rights abuses are significantly worse in stable autocracies, the bias again renders the results inconclusive. The rights abuses in failed autocracies that might have been neglected in the measure might render the discrepancy insignificant or even reverse the relationship if included. If, however, the analysis shows that rights abuses in failed autocracies are significantly worse than those in stable autocracies, the results are not weakened by the bias and are conclusive. If the possibly unreported rights abuses in failed autocracies were included in the physical integrity rights measure, they would only strengthen the result, suggesting a larger discrepancy between the levels of rights abuses. In summary, because of the likely bias in the PTS physical integrity rights data, the results are only conclusive if they show that physical integrity rights are worse in failed autocracies than they are in their stable counterparts.

The Cingranelli Richards (CIRI) composite index used here is available for 195 countries between the years 1981 and 2006. The scores are on an eight point scale to which each of the four components contributes from zero to two points, zero being the lowest level of rights and two the highest. The worst overall human rights situation therefore merits a score of zero on the composite physical integrity rights index. CIRI largely does not include physical integrity rights scores for failed autocracies; most failed autocracy observations are coded as missing or “-77.”
I fill-in these observations with human coded scores, which were coded using the same sources, the US State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and Amnesty International’s Annual Reports, and closely following the CIRI coding rules. As mentioned above, physical integrity rights are coded on four dimensions: torture, political imprisonment, disappearances, and extrajudicial executions. For each category, a score of 2 is assigned if there are no cases of that violation reported in a country in a particular year; 1 is assigned if there are between 1 and 49 cases of that violation reported or if violations are “numerous” or “multiple”; and 0 if there are more than 50 cases reported or if violations are “widespread” or “routine”. For the cumulative scale the scores from the four dimensions are then added together to form the physical integrity rights index.

To account for the PTS bias, the newly coded CIRI scores for failed autocracies include both violations perpetrated by the failed government elements and abuses perpetrated by non-state actors, which largely manifest in the form of factions. The observations for stable autocracies, as coded by CIRI, do not include rights violations that may have been perpetrated by non-state actors. I therefore coded violations perpetrated by non-state actors for those observations as well, and adjusted the scores where appropriate.

Using both measures of physical integrity rights produces results that are more informative and more convincing. The updated CIRI composite index resolves the bias in the PTS scale and provides a more accurate measure of rights violations. Should the results of the analysis that uses the PTS scale be inconclusive, the results from analyses using CIRI can clarify the outcome. The unchanged PTS scale provides credible results as a strong basis for any variations coming from the results using CIRI. The results based on newly coded observations will be significantly more convincing if supported by those based on a standard measure.
Treatment variable

In agreement with the strict definition of autocratic failure established earlier, the treatment variable measures failure as the absence of an executive. The measure used is from the Polity 4 project (Marshall and Jaggers 2006); it is called Interregnum, and denotes periods of a “complete collapse of central political authority” (Marshall and Jaggers 2000b, 17). A radical transformation in the mode of governance may follow such collapse, although there are cases where no substantial developments were made after a period of failure. Interregnum is normally assigned a score of -77 on a ‘rougher’ version of the Polity scale, but is replaced by a score of zero on the more widely used version of the scale. For the purposes of this analysis, the ‘rough’ scale was recoded to reflect the presence or absence political authority, where one stands for the absence of authority, or failure, and zero denotes presence of authority. After merging this variable with the physical integrity rights scores, fifty-nine country-years of interregnum remained, and those are the cases included in the analysis.

Control variables

The control variables in the parametric analysis, which are also the covariates in the matching procedure, are regime type, natural log of GDP per capita, population density, natural log of land area, civil conflict, log of cumulative conflict fatalities, count of years in civil conflict, count of years in approximately the same regime, peace years, log of the per cent of land area that is mountainous, and UN subregion. The first variable is taken from the Polity IV dataset (Marshall and Jaggers 2006); the next three are from the World Bank Development Indicators (World Bank Group 2007), with the missing GDP per capita scores filled in from Penn World Tables (Heston, Summers, and Aten 2006). The conflict and conflict fatalities variables
are from datasets by Gleditsch et al. (Gleditsch et al. 2002), and Lacina and Gleditsch (Lacina and Gleditsch 2005), respectively; the conflict fatalities variable was recoded to reflect a cumulative count. The log of mountainous terrain variable is by Fearon and Laitin (Fearon and Laitin 2003), and the UN Subregion variable was coded based on the sub-region composition by the United Nations Statistics Division. The remaining variables were all constructed based on the sources listed, year in conflict and peace years using Gleditsch et al., and regime count using the Polity scale.

**Matching**

Using MatchIt (Ho et al., 2007b), I created two matched datasets. In the first, each treated observation is matched with one control observation, while in the second each treated observation is matched with two. Choosing more than one control match for each treated observation can increase the efficiency of the procedure in cases with relatively few treated observations.\textsuperscript{xiii} This is such a case: there are fifty-nine country-years of interregnum compared to 2,223 country-years of stable autocracy. Despite this dramatic disparity, the low number of treated observations is not excessively problematic. The variance of the causal effect is mostly a function of the number of treated units, and therefore discarding control units until their number approximately matches the number of treated units will reduce bias without problematically reducing variance. Matching each treatment observation with two control observations is a sufficient precaution, and both versions - with single and double control matches - should and do produce comparable results.

The immediate aim of matching is to improve balance, or the extent to which the treatment and control covariate distributions resemble each other.\textsuperscript{xiv} Balance can be assessed
using empirical quantile-quantile (QQ) plots, which compare full empirical distributions for the treated and control groups for each variable. Figure 2 shows a set of QQ plots for the dataset with single control matches.\textsuperscript{xv} Two plots are given for each covariate, one prior to matching and one after. The forty-five degree line on a plot indicates identical distributions, and the closer the points on a plot are to that line, the better the match. The plots in Figure 2 show that the process of genetic matching dramatically reduces the differences in covariate distributions of treated and control groups. While, for example, the plot for the natural log of cumulative conflict fatalities is not particularly close to the forty-five degree line prior to matching, the plot for the same covariate after matching falls largely along that line. Since this is the case for most covariates in that match, genetic matching decidedly improves the balance of covariate distributions. Figure 3 presents the QQ plots for the dataset with double control matches.

[Figure 2 and Figure 3 about here]

The pairs of matched observations for the single control matches are listed in Table 1; the pairs for the double control matches are listed in Table A3 in the online Appendix.

[Table 1 about here]

A survey of the treated cases in the matched pairs reveals that in all cases of interregnums at least two and often more factions fought to secure power. In Afghanistan, the number of factions varied between two and at least nine (Ewans and Marsden 2011); in Bosnia (Palmer 2011), Uganda (Jennings and Rake 2011), and Angola (George and Garztecki 2011) there were at least three; in Burundi (Mthembu-Salter 2011a), the Comoros (Europa World online 2011), Guinea Bissau (Edward George and Abreu 2011) and Nicaragua (Brown and Murison 2011) two; in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Mthembu-Salter 2011b), Sierra Leone (Edward George and Raja 2011b) and Cote d’Ivoire (Edward George and Raja 2011a) at least four; in
Liberia at least eight; (Outram 2011) and in Somalia at least fifteen (Clarke 2011). Further, these groups are named as the main and often the only perpetrators of egregious rights violations during the interregnums. Extrajudicial executions and torture are reported to have happened in all cases of interregnums just listed. In Liberia in 1993, for example, indiscriminate killings of civilians, political murders, and torture are attributed to members of at least six factions (United States Department of State 1993). Uganda in 1985 (United States Department of State 1986), Sierra Leone in 1998 (United States Department of State 1999), and Bosnia in 1993 (United States Department of State 1993) saw indiscriminate killings of civilians as well. Throughout the 1990s in Somalia, civilians were common victims of inter-clan fighting (United States Department of State 1993, 1996, 2000), while thousands in Afghanistan were targeted as political motives intertwined with family and tribal feuds, battles over drug turf, religious zealotry and personal vendettas (United States Department of State 1993).

As this survey is by no means exhaustive, it likely leaves out numerous other groups, including those that might have resulted from further branching of the initial factions. The general character of the failures is nonetheless quite visible. The extremely anarchical Hobbesian idea of all against all does not appear to manifest, not even in Somalia, which is often identified as the ideal-type of state failure (Peterson 2000; Woodward 2003). Instead, we observe the phenomenon of many groups fighting for the top with none strong enough to prevail. Since the treatment used in this analysis is the absence of a central authority and not the presence of unresolved faction competition, the results will not conclusively determine that warring factions are responsible for the difference in rights in failed and stable autocracies. Nonetheless, while the root cause of rights violations in the failed cases may be the absence of central authority, the proximate cause does appear to lie with the warring groups.
Results

The two sets of matches were analyzed using ordered logistic regression. The results are consistent across all iterations and suggest that there is a significant difference between physical integrity rights in failed and stable autocracies. Failed autocracies appear to have worse physical integrity rights than their stable counterparts, and the matching procedure dramatically increases the likelihood that the disparity is due to failure itself.

The results are presented in Tables 2 (PTS) and 3 (CIRI). Since the treated and control observations are already matched, the coefficients for the matching covariates are not interpretable. The covariates were included in the analysis to correct for any remaining imbalance. The only interpretable coefficients are those for the treatment variable (interregnum), and the physical integrity rights lag (where applicable), which was added to the dataset after matching. The results of analyses that include the rights lag are presented separately because the addition of a lag decreased the number of observations. It is evident, however, that the inclusion of a lag does not substantially change the findings. Interregnum, indicating autocratic stability or failure, is consistently highly significant and negative, which shows that autocratic failure is linked to lower physical integrity rights scores. The coefficient for the lag of physical integrity rights is, as expected, consistently positive and significant, indicating that repression in the past is linked to repression in the present.

[Tables 2 and 3 about here]

The previously noted bias of the PTS physical integrity rights measure only strengthens this finding. Since it primarily measures state-sanctioned repression, the PTS physical integrity rights measure likely does not fully capture the abuses perpetrated by non-state actors. While people living in stable autocracies are most likely to be repressed by the regime itself, people
living in failed autocracies are subject to abuses by both the failed regime and various non-state actors. This imbalance enhances the observed discrepancy. Since failed autocracies are consistently worse even when their rights performance is measured with an imbalanced indicator that likely under-reports abuses, they are clearly the worse environment for physical integrity rights. The results from the analyses using the updated CIRI physical integrity rights measure confirm this relationship. On the basis of these consistent results, we can reject the null hypothesis.

Further analysis of the results more clearly illustrates the impact of failure. Figure 4 maps the predicted probabilities for physical integrity rights scores when interregnum takes the values of zero and one, while holding the pre-treatment covariates constant at their means.xvi The bars show the predicted probabilities that a state will receive a given physical integrity rights score as a stable autocracy (light bars) and as a failed autocracy (dark bars). The newly coded CIRI rights scores provide a particularly valuable insight here, as they more closely approximate the actual gap in rights violations in the two situations.

[Figure 4 about here]

Results from the double control matched dataset, for example, suggest that a failed autocracy faces a 65 percent chance of receiving the lowest score on the physical integrity rights scale, while a stable autocracy has only an 8 percent chance of receiving the same. Put another way, a failed autocracy is about eight times as likely as a stable autocracy to score a zero on the CIRI index. A stable autocracy, on the other hand, is over six times as likely to score a two or three.

Several robustness checks confirm the results presented above and demonstrate the breadth of the impact of interregnum. First, the analysis was repeated with two additions to the
sample. Two cases of interregnum, Lesotho and Solomon Islands, were democracies before failure and were so excluded from the original sample. The original sample included only autocracies because autocracies face a much higher likelihood of failure and engage in significantly higher levels of repression (Poe and Tate 1994; Davenport 1995; Poe, Tate, and Keith 1999; Cingranelli and Richards 1999b; Davenport 1999; Hathaway 2002; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Landman 2005; Hafner-Burton 2005; Davenport 2007b; Simmons 2009).

From the human rights standpoint, a comparison of two evils is more rigorous as well as politically relevant. The results from this robustness check were consistent with those presented; in all cases, the coefficient for interregnum was negative and significant while the lag of physical integrity rights was positive and significant. Including the two failed democracies in the analysis therefore does not change the results; failed regimes are consistently worse than stable autocracies when it comes to physical integrity rights. Results are presented in Table A4 in the online Appendix.

Second, a separate matching procedure was conducted including an ethnic discrimination covariate to control for the possibility of particularly vicious abuses that often tend to accompany ethnic discrimination or strife. The al-Anfal campaign against the Kurds in Iraq is an example of such violence under a stable autocrat (Tripp 2007), while the massacres of Muslims in Bosnia during the Yugoslav Wars are an example of that in a failed autocracy (Palmer 2011). The ethnic discrimination covariate was recoded based on data by Wimmer, Cederman and Min (Wimmer et al. 2009). The results from that analysis confirm those presented here and are presented in Table A5 in the online Appendix.

Third, a time series cross section ordered logistic regression—with physical integrity rights (PTS) as the dependent variable and the same covariates that were used in matching, but in
their discrete-time form—demonstrates that the main finding is not an artefact of matching. The results, presented in Table A6 in the online Appendix, consistently show that interregnum has a statistically significant and negative impact on physical integrity rights. These findings withstood various changes to the model, including the addition of a lagged dependent variable, which had—as above—a consistently positive and a statistically significant coefficient, and the addition of different regional controls.

Fourth, in place of interregnum the PITF definition of state failure is used as the main independent variable in a time series cross section ordered logistic regression. As in all other iterations, state failure has a negative and statistically significant impact on physical integrity rights, which persists as the lagged dependent variable and various regional controls are added to the model (Table A7 in the online Appendix). This robustness check demonstrates that the main finding is not attributable to the definition of the treatment variable, but is instead consistent with the standard definition of state failure.

Finally, a series of substantive robustness checks that use alternative measures of distress in place of physical integrity rights showed that the main finding was not idiosyncratic. Due to the preponderance of missing data, only natural log measures of internally displaced populations and diphtheria and measles immunizations in children between twelve and twenty-three months were used as alternative dependent variables. The checks included regressions using the matched data (Table A8 in the online Appendix), as in the main finding, as well as a time series cross section version of the data, as in the robustness check for the physical integrity rights. The results from both types of analyses consistently showed that interregnum is linked to higher numbers of internally displaced populations and lower levels of immunizations against diphtheria and measles in children between twelve and twenty-three months of age. Interregnum
appears generally toxic on the human dimension: it leads to an increase in human rights violations, directly impacts already vulnerable populations such as infants, and creates new vulnerable populations such as the displaced, who are then subject to numerous hazards that they would not otherwise face.

**Implications and possibilities for further research**

The findings show that on average, citizens of failed autocracies endure a far higher number of physical integrity rights violations than do citizens of stable autocracies. In fact, a failed autocracy is about eight times as likely to receive the lowest score on the CIRI index as its stable counterpart. A score of zero stands for over fifty individual cases of each torture, disappearance, political imprisonment, and extrajudicial killings per year. Though indicative of terrible crimes, this measure is quite forgiving when the actual numbers are considered; in several cases of failed autocracies included in this analysis, fifty and more victims were reliably reported to have been tortured and/or extrajudicially executed in a single day. The matching procedure employed in the analysis suggests that the absence of central authority is the root cause behind the difference in the severity of violations; the proximate cause, however, seems to firmly lie with the factions that fill that void.

Based on these findings we must conclude that human rights violations in failed autocracies require particular attention, both scholarly and humanitarian. The central finding of this analysis is that failed autocracies have far more physical integrity rights violations than stable autocracies. To any agency or entity concerned with intervention or aid, or other methods of lowering human costs in intractable situations, this information is of crucial importance. Given the high likelihood that citizens of failed autocracies will experience the worst, states in
such situations should, as a class, be accorded more attention and likely more resources. Further, in numerous cases abuse escalates to the highest levels within months - in Uganda in 1985, for example, dozens of extrajudicial killings were frequently reported, all within a few months of failure onset (United States Department of State 1986); when the regime collapsed in Somalia in 1991, hundreds suffered summary execution, 120 people in a single incident (United States Department of State 1992). States experiencing autocratic failure should therefore not only receive more attention, they should also receive more attention very quickly. The human costs associated with autocratic failure and the small window of time within which they often become full-blown ought to be foremost among the factors that determine when and how help is offered.

The results leave no doubt that failed autocracies foster a particularly horrific environment with regards to physical integrity rights. It should be in no way inferred, however, that repressive dictatorships should be sustained or supported with the reasoning that the alternative, a failed autocracy, is infinitely worse on the human rights dimension. Repressive dictatorships, though according to these findings less repressive on average, are nonetheless detrimental to human rights. Returning to the example of Iraq presented in the introduction, we cannot say that for the sake of human rights Husain should never have fallen. To the Kurdish population that suffered extreme repression for decades but saw freedom and relative security fairly soon after his downfall (Tucker 2004; Muir 2007), such a statement would ring absurd.

A complexity that merits further thought lies in the fact that although citizens in failed autocracies on average endure more physical integrity rights violations than do citizens in stable autocracies, the majority of the worst human rights violations happen in stable autocracies. When the absolute lowest score on the physical integrity rights scale (PTS) is surveyed, only 15 per cent of the observations come from country-years of failed autocracies. In contrast, 72 per cent
come from country years of stable autocracies, and, surprisingly, 13 per cent come from states that classify as democracies on the Polity scale. These distributions imply that while failed autocracies generally produce more physical integrity rights violations than stable autocracies, they are not uniformly the worst states, nor are the worst states uniformly failed autocracies. To claim that repressive dictatorships should be sustained and supported on the basis of the results presented here would therefore be overly simplistic.

The results presented here are limited; they are only a short-term comparison. Future studies will need to explore how situations develop as time passes, and to ask: how likely is it that democracy will follow failure and how long is the consolidation of democracy likely to take? If rights eventually improve, by how much do they improve and how quickly? In addition, we need to better understand how outside agents can best promote such a process. Would intervention help or hinder progress? What can be done to most effectively reduce rights violations in intractable situations?

Further efforts should be devoted to gathering data on human rights abuses and repression by insurgent and non-state entities, and to theorizing the conditions under which they are more or less likely to engage in abuses. Does the number of factions affect the severity of abuse? Is the balance among all sides fighting for power a deciding factor in the level of violence? A close reading of the cases of failed autocracies included in this analysis does not reveal substantial regional or cultural idiosyncrasies in violations, but this question, too, merits further study.

In future work the definition of failure can be expanded to include states with nominal but ineffective leadership. The definition used here drew the line between failed and stable at the absence of central leadership. Arguably, states in which the central authority is nominally still in
power, but achieves little or nothing, should count as failed as well. The expansion should, however, preserve the difference between states like Somalia and Myanmar, which both have low state capacity, but differ considerably in the level of government control. In Somalia during the early 1990s, for example, citizens were perishing from famine and there was no government in sight to ask for or receive international help (Perlez 1993).\textsuperscript{xviii} In Myanmar during the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, on the contrary, the generals were strong enough to bar most international relief efforts, just as hundreds of citizens were dying of disease and malnutrition (New York Times 2008). In Somalia the human costs can be attributed to incapacity; in Myanmar they were due to deliberate inaction. Re-classifying failed states according to a more sensitive definition should take this distinction into account.

Finally, even though the findings here appear to be quite robust, the indices used are not perfectly nuanced. They do not count the number of rapes reported, or children sold, and do not examine how a disappearance compares to an extrajudicial execution in the eyes of the people affected. To confirm this finding, or perhaps to question it, we should ask the people that have gone through both autocratic failure and stability how they compare. While scales and indices provide an objective view, and should certainly be the basis of any quantitative analysis of human rights, any furthering of our knowledge about violations under varying levels of stability and political tyranny would be a welcome addition. The indices we use now, after all, do not measure the value of freedom.

\footnote{Data used in the analysis are available for replication upon request; an online Appendix is also available.}
\footnote{All facts on Iraq are attributed to Tripp (2007).}
Democracies are not included in the main analysis because they rarely fail. For more, see robustness checks at the end of the Results section.

Updating only selected observations of stable autocracies instead of all observations of stable autocracies is possible because of the matching procedure used in the analysis.

This definition is a clear departure from the Political Instability Task Force (PITF), according to which failure is defined by outbreaks of revolutionary or ethnic war, adverse regime change, and genocide. It draws a clear line between failure and stability, and removes ambiguities in categorizing the states into one or the other group. In favor of maintaining this clear line between failed and stable, cases that could be considered failures despite having nominal leaders are excluded from the group; future analyses might further nuance the central findings here by using a looser definition of failure to include low-capacity nominal leaders. For more on PITF see Marshall et al. (2001) and Goldstone et al. (2010).

For more, see end of the section on Matching.

This cutoff is identical to the one used by Vreeland, who follows Goodlife and Hawkins, and includes all states with autocratic characteristics, even those that may, in addition, have some democratic institutions. Since it includes competitive authoritarian regimes, the sample is not limited to the most extreme autocratic regimes, which is at the same time a drawback and a strength. Including a wide range of states with autocratic characteristics does not allow me to make the most specific comparison of the extremes. It allows me, however, to perform a type of statistical analysis that would likely be impossible with the smaller sample of perfect autocracies. In addition, competitive authoritarian regimes in general face a higher probability of civil war onset, while some in particular (partial autocracies and partial democracies with factionalism) are more unstable than any other regime type. Since they face a relatively high risk of failure, those
cases should be included in the analysis. About two thirds of cases included in the analysis are strong autocracies: they received scores lower or equal to -6 on the Polity scale. The rest received scores between -5 and 5 on the Polity scale. For more on the Polity-based cut-off, see Vreeland (2008) and Goodliffe and Hawkins (2006). For more on autocratic instability, see Regan and Bell (2010) and Goldstone et al. (2010).

It should be noted that some of the most horrific autocratic regimes were not included in this analysis because they occurred before the beginning of the physical integrity rights scales. In particular, Nazi Germany, Mao’s China and Stalinist Russia were not included, and clearly do not fit the trend of stable autocracies providing better human rights than failures. The time period to which this analysis is confined is, however, also the time period during which state failures have become more prevalent. While they are limited to an era, the conclusions that we can draw from the findings are limited to precisely the era in the context of which they are most relevant.

Only seven observations from the entire set of failed autocracies are assigned scores; the remaining fifty-two are given either a -77, which reflects the Polity designation for interregnum (discussed in detail under “Treatment variable”), or a missing value. For more on Polity, see Marshall and Jaggers (2000a).

The coding documentation along with justification for each score assigned is available upon request.

As human rights violations in stable autocracies by definition as well as in practice predominantly originate with the government and its actors, the changes to the original CIRI scores were few. The most notable among them are the changes to observations of Algeria in 1996, 1998, 2000, and 2001, where the physical integrity rights scores were lowered due to a substantial number of abuses perpetrated by anti- government Islamic armed groups.
To provide an alternative to the widely used Polity measure, a second measure of failure was constructed, using Executive Indices of Electoral Competitiveness by Beck et al. (2001). Unfortunately, this measure recognized even fewer cases without an executive and matched poorly, resulting in only 35 observations after matching. It was ultimately not useful, and was not included in the analyses.

All details on matching are attributed to Ho et al. (2007a), unless otherwise noted.

After exploring several possibilities, I chose to use genetic matching (Diamond and Sekhon 2013) by MatchIt (Ho et al., 2007b), implemented with replacement using the method of Abadie and Imbens (2011), because it produced matches with the best balance.

A simpler method of assessing the differences in the multivariate empirical densities is a comparison of means, where the mean of each covariate for the treated group is compared to the mean of the same variable for the control group. Tables A1 and A2 in the online Appendix present the means and correspond to Figures 2 and 3, respectively.

The plots presented report results from the analyses of the single-control matched dataset without the physical integrity lag and the double-control matched dataset with the physical integrity rights lag. Plots for the remaining iterations are similar and presented in the online Appendix as Figure A1.

For more on the challenges of coding human rights violations on a relatively limited scale, see Clark and Sikkink (2010).

International aid was nonetheless given and received.
Figure 1: The graph presents the number of states in interregnum in a given year. Interregnum is defined as the collapse, or failure, of central state authority and used as the measure of failure in this analysis. There were thirteen failure onsets between 1945 and 1989, and just as many between 1990 and 2006. The first period saw altogether fifty-two years of interregnum (divided among the thirteen cases) and the second sixty. The data are from Polity indicators by Marshall and Gurr (2000).
Figure 2: QQ plots for the single-control genetic match.
Figure 3: QQ plots for the double-control genetic match.
Figure 4: Predicted probabilities for physical integrity rights scores for stable autocracies (interregnum = 0) and failed autocracies (interregnum = 1). The top two plots use the PTS rights scale; the bottom two use CIRI. The prediction using the double control matched dataset includes the physical integrity rights lag, while the prediction using the single control matched dataset does not. The predicted probabilities that are statistically significant (p < .05) are marked with an asterisk.