The Differential Effects of "Democratic" Institutions on Dissent in Dictatorships

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Why do some dictatorships face dissent while others do not? In this article, we argue that nominally democratic institutions created to co-opt the dictatorial opposition have different effects on the likelihood of elite and collective dissent. By providing concessions through the creation of parties and legislatures, dictators reduce the probability of elite mobilization (via a coup) against the regime. For everyday citizens, the creation of nominally democratic institutions has the opposite effect, increasing citizen grievances and helping citizens overcome the collective action problem associated with dissent. We find empirical support for our expectations: nominally democratic institutions are negatively associated with the likelihood of coups and positively associated with the likelihood of collective dissent. Our findings suggest that the creation of "democratic" institutions may sometimes threaten dictatorial rule rather than insulate it.

Challenges to dictatorial rule are frequent and can originate from within the ruling elite or from within broader society (e.g., Gandhi 2008; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Hollyer, Rosendorff, and Vreeland 2015; Svolik 2012). Some dictatorships face coups—uprisings from within the ranks of their own civilian or military elites (Luttwak 1968). In Comoros, for example, two sons of the island's first democratically elected president, Ahmed Abdallah, initiated a coup against the incumbent regime of President Colonel Azly Assoumani in 2000 (BBC 2000b). In the same year in Fiji, George Speight, the son of opposition politician Sam Speight, attempted a coup against President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, declaring Fiji to be "under civilian rule, with the assistance of armed forces" (BBC 2000a).

Not all dictators are threatened by elite overthrow; others experience popular dissent that loosens their hold on power. In 2011, incumbent governments in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, and Jordan contended with popular revolt in the streets, resulting in leadership changes in several countries. In Tunisia, for example, protests began in December 2010; President Ben Ali resigned less than a month later (Al Jazeera 2015). Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who ruled the country for three decades, also resigned his post following a month of protests in 2010 (Al Jazeera 2011). Why do some dictatorships experience dissent—either by elites or by groups of citizens—while others do not? Why do elites purge leaders via coups in some countries and not others? Why do citizens in dictatorships sometimes take to the streets in opposition to the regime and sometimes stay home?

Whether they are elites or average citizens, people consider dissent against the government when they are unhappy, either in absolute terms (Gurr 1970) or relative to other individuals (Lichbach 1995): grievances including inequalities, deprivation, and poor economic conditions can lead to individual dissatisfaction (e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Gurr 1970; Hollyer et al. 2015; Muller 1985). Working alone, an aggrieved individual can rarely change government policy; instead, individuals generally must work collectively to pressure the state for policy change. Because government changes to the status quo often take the form of nonexcludable goods (e.g., policy change), however, individuals face incentives to stay home—to free ride and let others bear the costs of collective action (Lichbach 1995; Olson 1965). The rebel's challenge is to find actors or institutions that reduce the costs of mobilization against the government, increase its (private) benefits, or provide information about its pros and cons (Klandermans 1984; Kuran 1991). The government's challenge is the opposite: to make collective dissent against its rule by dissident groups as difficult as possible.

Dictators can control dissent by repressing people who are unhappy—thereby thwarting their ability to mobilize against the government—or by buying them off with concessions. Dictators may co-opt their opposition, providing them with material and rights concessions (Conrad 2011) to solidify dictatorial rule, discourage political dissent, and encourage economic productivity (Olson 1993). Dictators can also attempt to appease rivals through the creation of nominally democratic institutions like legal political parties and legislatures (e.g., Gandhi 2008; Gandhi and Przeworski 2006, 2007; Magaloni 2006). Co-optation via the creation of democratic institutions seems to work as dictators might hope: the existence of institutions like political parties and legislatures increases the length of dictatorial rule (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007) and increases economic growth (Jensen 2014; Wright 2008).

In this article, we argue that the extent to which a dictator creates nominally democratic institutions to appease the opposition—an action that we refer to as co-optation—does not buy off all people equally.[1] As a result, nominally democratic institutions have different effects on the likelihood of elite and popular mobilization against the government. By giving opposition elites a voice in legal political parties and legislatures, providing them with policy concessions via those institutions, and rendering decision-making power more diffuse and thus more difficult to usurp, dictators reduce the probability of elite mobilization (via a coup) against the incumbent regime. For nonelites, the creation of nominally democratic institutions in dictatorships has the opposite effect on the probability of collective dissent. The creation of such institutions increases citizen grievances and provides information that helps citizens overcome the collective action problem associated with dissent. We find empirical support for our expectations: nominally democratic institutions are negatively associated with the likelihood of coups and positively associated with the likelihood of collective dissent.

This project offers a number of innovations for the scholarly understanding of how "democratic" institutions affect dissent against dictatorial governments. In a departure from previous research, we show that the same co-optative institutions can have opposite effects on different forms of political dissent—elite coups and collective dissent. Although the creation of nominally democratic institutions co-opts elites from engaging in dissent, co-optation is associated with citizen protest against the government. More broadly, our research contributes to the comparative literature on nominally democratic institutions in dictatorships, arguing that institu-

tionalization only successfully "co-opts" individuals when they are permitted to participate. For nonparticipators, that institutionalization provides other people with benefits generates feelings of relative deprivation—a finding that we expect to be of interest to scholars of political violence. Finally, because protest can provide information to regime insiders about popular dissatisfaction with the incumbent government (Casper and Tyson 2014), the creation of democratic institutions may actually threaten dictatorial rule rather than insulate it.

THE DISSIDENT'S (COLLECTIVE) DECISION TO DISSENT

Whether they are civilian or military elites or average citizens, individuals consider dissent against the government when they are unhappy, either in absolute terms (Gurr 1970) or relative to other people (Lichbach 1995), and when they blame the government for their circumstance (e.g., Javeline 2003). We refer to these individuals, regardless of whether they are elites or average citizens, as *dissidents*. Dissident grievances against the government, which range from relatively small perceived inequalities to knowledge about abysmal economic conditions (Przeworski, Alvarez, and Cheibub 2000), can lead to individual dissatisfaction (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Gurr 1970; Muller 1985) and the consideration of dissent. In particular, relative deprivation—the difference between what individuals expect to have (or what they see that others have) and what they have—has often been identified as a precondition of revolutionary activity (Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010; Gurr 1970; McAdam 1999).

Working alone, however, even the most dissatisfied individual can rarely change government policy; regardless of how aggrieved an individual may be, the government is unlikely to respond with policy change to a single individual's protest. When actors desire change to the status quo, they instead must consider joining together, committing to exert resources and effort and assuming the risk of negative government responses to collectively challenge the status quo or pressure the government for policy change (Lohmann 1994; Shadmehr and Bernhardt 2011). We define *collective dissent* as a coordinated citizen act to influence political outcomes outside of state institutions (Ritter and Conrad 2016a). Citizens dissatisfied with the status quo act together to threaten or impose costs on the government, using this leverage in the attempt to gain concessions on some policy, resource allocation, or power arrangement. Collective dissent may be legal or illegal, violent or nonviolent, with dissident actions ranging from peaceful protests to violent riots to rebellion.

Even when individuals share a common grievance, it is difficult for them to form into groups capable of challenging

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1. Following Corntassel (2007), we consider "co-optation" to be synonymous with the creation of nominally democratic institution in dictatorships.

the government, for two reasons. First, individual dissent often depends critically on expectations of dissent by other individuals (Bueno de Mesquita 2010; Casper and Tyson 2014; Hollyer et al. 2015; Kuran 1991; Lohmann 1994; Shadmehr and Bernhardt 2011), and it is not easy for potential dissidents to know the private preferences of others. Especially in the face of repressive governments, potential dissidents may engage in preference falsification: the misrepresentation of one's true preferences as a result of social or political pressure (Kuran 1997) or because the opposition is perceived as weak (Kuran 1989). Second, even when citizens expect participation from other aggrieved individuals, individuals face a collective action problem in deciding whether to mobilize around an issue or action. Especially when benefits from dissent activities are public goods, individuals face incentives to free ride and let others bear the costs of collective action (Lichbach 1995). The logical conclusion of the free rider problem is underprovision (Olson 1965)—no one joins the movement. To solve these problems, potential dissidents have three choices: reduce the costs of collective dissent, increase its benefits, or provide additional information about costs and benefits to potential dissidents (Klandermans 1984).

In what follows, we focus on the extent to which nominally democratic institutions help (increasingly) dissatisfied individuals overcome the collective action problem inherent in mobilizing against the government. We argue that elites' and average citizens' capacity to overcome the collective action problem varies across dictatorships, specifically with regard to the extent to which dictators co-opt potential dissenters into the regime through the creation of nominally democratic institutions. We begin by discussing how dictators control dissent. We next explicate the conditions under which dictators create nominally democratic institutions. We then discuss the extent to which these institutions thwart dissent by elites—coups—and collective dissent like protests and riots, arguing that while nominal democratic institutions successfully "buy off" elites, they rarely appease the masses.

THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO CONTROL DISSENT

The dissident's challenge is to create institutions that persuade individuals to engage in collective dissent rather than to free ride on the actions of others. The government's challenge is the opposite: to neutralize domestic threats by making collective dissent against its rule as difficult as possible. One option for thwarting dissent is for the government to engage in repression (e.g., Davenport 2007; Goldstein 1978), restricting group capacity (Galtung 1969) and invoking fear of severe consequences for mobilization (Cederman et al. 2010; Gurr 1970; McAdam 1999; Rejali 2007). Dictators can repress

by banning rights on freedom of speech, assembly, or travel, increasing costs of collective action (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996), or they can impose physical harm to thwart dissent through torture, imprisonment, or mass killing (Davenport 2007; Frantz and Kendall-Taylor 2014; Sullivan 2015). Unfortunately for the leader, however, repression is not a surefire bet for thwarting dissent. Repression is costly (Wintrobe 1998), is not always effective (Gandhi 2008), and is sometimes argued to increase dissent, especially when citizens feel more aggrieved as a result of further violations of their rights (Cederman et al. 2010; Gurr 1970; McAdam 1999).

Repression is not the only dictatorial tool to neutralize domestic threats. Although their provision of concessions is generally lower than that of their democratic counterparts (McGuire and Olson 1996), dictators provide goods to their populations to solidify their rule, discourage dissent, and encourage economic productivity (Bell 2011; Olson 1993). We define concessions as the intentional extension of benefits to nonregime actors in exchange for loyalty. Gandhi (2008, 75–76) makes the case for the importance of dictatorial concessions: "To ensure political acquiescence among citizens, dictators may have to offer groups within society some concessions. . . . A state with full monopoly over the means of coercion requires citizens who are willing to serve as loyal soldiers and police. Similarly, a functioning economy requires the regime to provide incentives for people to reveal their private information, to work, and to save."

In addition to offering material and rights-oriented concessions (Conrad 2011), dictators can establish nominally democratic institutions, such as political parties and legislatures, to *co-opt* the opposition. Co-optation is a specific type of concession: an intentional extension of "some form of political participation to actors who pose a threat" to the ruling regime in exchange for their loyalty or acquiescence (Corntassel 2007, 139). Dictators use nominally democratic institutions to "neutralize threats to their rule and solicit cooperation" (Gandhi 2008, 140). Nominally democratic, co-optative institutions like political parties and institutionalized legislatures reduce the transaction costs of distributing concessions to outside groups in exchange for loyalty and enable dictators to monitor and control opposition behavior (Gandhi and Przeworski 2006). Dictators can better manage elite conflict, for example, by organizing and distributing patronage (e.g., career advancements and material rewards) through political parties (Gandhi 2008; Geddes 1999). Dictatorial legislatures similarly serve as "institutionalized forums" where a dictator and opposition elites regularly meet and make policy compromises (Svolik 2012). Legislatures "lower the transaction costs of exchanging (concessions) for political support" (Gandhi 2008, 78). In short, nominally democratic institutions facilitate

regular interaction between dictators and elites and serve to distribute various benefits to those opposition elites (Geddes 1999; Svolik 2012). Co-optation seems to have positive effects: dictatorships with political parties and legislatures generally survive longer (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007) and enjoy a higher level of economic growth (Jensen 2014; Wright 2008).

Importantly, however, nominally democratic institutions do not buy off all citizens equally: co-optative institutions have different effects on the likelihood of elite and mass mobilization. By giving elites a voice in institutions like legal political parties and legislatures—and by providing them with policy concessions via those institutions—dictators reduce the probability of elite mobilization (via a coup) against the incumbent regime. When dictators create nominally democratic institutions, they also decrease the probability of an elite military coup because co-optative institutions render decision-making power more diffuse and thus more difficult to usurp. However, for everyday citizens, the creation of nominally democratic institutions has the opposite effect on the probability of collective dissent, increasing citizen grievances and helping citizens overcome the collective action problem associated with dissent.

Why nominally democratic institutions co-opt elites

Although they are not subject to alternation of power associated with contested elections, dictators are more likely than leaders of democracies to face coups (Lindberg and Clark 2008). Following Luttwak (1968, 12), we define a coup as an infiltration of a small but critical segment of the government apparatus used to remove the government from control. Coups can occur at the hand of political or military elites (Luttwak 1968; Powell and Thyne 2011) but always involve the "rapid seizure of power by a small group followed by the speedy acceptance of the new authorities by the remaining portions of the government and the population" (Quinlivan 1999, 132).[2] Coups are distinct from popular dissent and revolutions because coup plotters seek to seize power from within the present system of government rather than by destroying the extant system entirely (e.g., Luttwak 1968, 68).

The creation of nominally democratic institutions decreases the likelihood of elite dissent via a coup by making it more difficult for elites to coordinate against the extant regime. This is the case for two reasons. First, previous literature argues

that dictators create nominally democratic institutions to co-opt their opposition. Institutions like legislatures provide the dictator with a forum through which to provide opposition elites with concessions to buy their support. High-level members of the opposition often receive rewards in return for their willingness to participate in "democratic" institutions like elections and legislatures (e.g., Lust-Okar 2005; Magaloni 2008).[3] In addition to receiving concessions for their participation, legislative institutions provide opposition party leaders with information that further helps to facilitate power sharing with the dictator (Svolik 2009). As a dictator co-opts increasing numbers of political elites into the incumbent regime, coup plotters have a smaller pool from which to mobilize elites against the government via a coup. In addition, as increased numbers of elites are co-opted into the extant system, even non-co-opted elites are discouraged from coup initiation because it becomes increasingly costly: even successful coups can be costly for those who have opposed intervention, as they may face "the same costs as unsuccessful conspirators: demotion, discharge, prison, death" (Geddes 1999, 127).

Second, institutionalized dictatorships are more likely than their uninstitutionalized counterparts to provide investment-friendly rights protections to their citizens, which provides leaders with additional assets for redistribution. Boix (2003) finds empirical support for his argument that authoritarian legislatures are positively correlated with enhanced property rights because "the existence of an authoritarian legislature indicates multiple veto players, which reinforces property rights and ensures investors that their produce will not be expropriated" (Wright 2008, 325). These policies are often argued to be responsible for the fact that dictatorships with nominally democratic institutions experience increased economic growth relative to their more personalistic counterparts (Gandhi 2008; Jensen 2014; Wright 2008). Because economic benefits often accrue to elites in the leader's inner circle and are infrequently redistributed to common citizens, elites are less likely to be motivated to engage in a coup when they are permitted to participate in an institutionalized legislature; to do so would be to risk the more certain accruing of benefits under the current regime.

In addition to expecting nominal democratic institutions to be negatively associated with the likelihood of a civilian coup for the reasons discussed above, we expect these institutions to be negatively associated with the likelihood of military coup. This is the case even though members of the military may not directly participate in institutionalized par-

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2. Powell and Thyne (2011, 251–52) define coups as "illegal and overt attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive" and argue that "the state apparatus . . . include(s) non-civilian members of the military and security services or civilian members of the government."

3. For a review of the literature on authoritarian elections, see Gandhi and Lust-Okar (2009).

ties and legislatures. As a dictator co-opts more individuals into institutionalized decision-making processes, military coup plotters face more dispersed political power that supports the existing government apparatus. As a result, it becomes increasingly difficult and risky for the military to initiate a coup as political institutionalization increases. Thus, our first hypothesis reflects the expectation that nominally democratic institutions are negatively correlated with the likelihood of a (civilian and military) coup.

> **H1.** Coups are less likely to occur in dictatorships with co-optative institutions than in dictatorships without co-optative institutions.

Why nominally democratic institutions do not co-opt citizens

In addition to facing threats from within the elite ranks, dictators must also be aware of the potential for collective dissent against their rule. Although coups may be more common in unseating dictators than uprisings from below (Svolik 2012), the potential for unrest and for democratization is very real (e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Boix 2003). When scholars argue that leaders co-opt their opposition through the creation of nominally democratic institutions (e.g., Gandhi 2008), they are typically referring to elite opposition. For example, although Gandhi (2008) defines the opposition as anyone who is located in a policy position different from the dictator's, her theory focuses on the extent to which elites can be bought off with legislative positions and activities. Other scholars argue that it is high-level members of the opposition who receive rewards in return for their willingness to play nicely with the incumbent regime (e.g., Lust-Okar 2005; Magaloni 2008). According to Thomas Pepinsky, "One common saying is that the job of legislators under (Indonesian President) Soeharto was *datang, duduk, diam, duit*, which we might translate as 'show up, sit down, shut up, get paid'" (2012; see also Pepinsky 2009). Although the creation of "democratic" institutions co-opts elites, the creation of these institutions also has implications for average citizens in the extent to which they are (dis)satisfied with the regime and in their ability to collectively dissent.

We assume that citizens, like elites, are interested in having the ability to live, work, and engage in leisure without interference from the government. Citizens want the government to respect their individual rights and provide them with material benefits. In order to co-opt citizens via the creation of nominally democratic institutions, leaders or elites who receive benefits via co-optation must pass a portion of those benefits onto the general population. If the creation of co-optative institutions generates increased economic growth

(Gandhi 2008; Jensen 2014; Wright 2008), for example, a portion of the associated benefits may be shared with everyday citizens. Because citizens are unlikely to be in the leader's winning coalition (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003) in most dictatorships, however, we assume that increased dictatorial wealth is not always extended to the members of the general population.[4] If elite political survival is not dependent on everyday citizens, there is no theoretical reason to expect elites to share the spoils of co-optation.

Whereas democracies engage in redistribution primarily through the provision of public goods, dictators typically redistribute through direct cash transfers (Kammas and Sarantides 2018) and rent-seeking activities (Giuliano, Mishra, and Spilimbergo 2010) that benefit "politically powerful elites" (Kammas and Sarantides 2018). Deacon (2009) shows formally that, relative to democracies, the more concentrated political power in dictatorships results in spending "on transfers targeted to powerful groups." He argues that, when power can be "controlled by satisfying only a small group, it is costly to gain political support by providing a public good that spreads to the entire population; targeted transfers are a more effective way to spend public funds in this case" (250). For example, although Uganda has had a legislature since 1962, average citizens have not seen the benefits of institutionalization. The *Economist* (2017) reports that "the young complain about crumbling services and too few jobs," citing growth in income per person of 3% a year for the first 25 years under President Museveni's rule and growth in income in the past five years of approximately 1%.

When citizens do not themselves feel the benefits of economic growth, the creation of nominally democratic institutions in dictatorships can create or increase grievances among the citizenry. Whereas citizens may have previously believed the regime unable to provide concessions, the observation of concessions targeted at elites can show citizens that the dictator is willing and able to "buy off" potential threats. As long as citizens can observe the creation of nominally democratic institutions by the dictator, they do not need any other piece of information to be aware or to be convinced that a leader is willing to concede. Especially when they view opposition elites' position as improving relative to their own—and when opposition elites fail to share their improved lot—feelings of

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4. We do not argue that dictators never engage in redistribution: in instances when the dictator or the opposition share the benefits of economic growth with average citizens (i.e., engage in redistribution), institutional co-optation is less likely to heighten citizen grievances against the regime. If elites do engage in redistribution following the creation of nominally democratic institutions, we are less likely to find empirical support for hypothesis 2.

relative deprivation can sow the individual seeds of dissent. Put differently, when everyday citizens see elites being rewarded with material concessions for their participation in a nominal democratic institution and citizens fail to receive any benefits themselves, citizen perceptions of relative deprivation are likely to increase.

In addition to heightening individual grievances against the regime, the creation of legislative institutions facilitates collective dissent by altering the perceived costs and benefits of individuals considering dissent. The decision to dissent is not simply a function of an individual's grievances; whether citizens are willing to engage in collective dissent is dependent on the extent to which they believe that other people are willing to join the movement (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita 2010; Casper and Tyson 2014; Hollyer et al. 2015; Kuran 1991; Lohmann 1994; Shadmehr and Bernhardt 2011). Institutions are often argued to facilitate mobilization, in part by reducing the perceived costs of individual participation in collective mobilization (e.g., Carey 2000; Schelling 1978; Weingast 1997)—and by doing so in a manner in which citizens recognize that other citizens are similarly influenced to dissent.

A wealth of literature focuses on the effect of information on protest, arguing that increased information helps citizens to overcome collective action problems (e.g., Hollyer et al. 2015; Little 2015; Shadmehr and Bernhardt 2011). For example, low-level dissent activities can serve as information to convince people to reveal their true preferences about collective dissent; Lohmann (1994) argues that the relatively small Monday Demonstrations in Leipzig were instrumental in providing information to potential dissidents about the extent of dissatisfaction with the East German regime. Hollyer et al. (2015, 764) argue that publicly observable information—in their case, transparency about government economic performance—affects not only individual citizen beliefs but also "higher order beliefs—their beliefs about the beliefs held by other citizens" (see also Morris and Shin 2002). We argue that the creation of nominally democratic institutions in dictatorships similarly provides discontented citizens with information that allows them to better overcome the collective action problem associated with dissent. When elites participate publicly in legislatures and then fail to redistribute to the masses, citizens are better able to form shared expectations about the success of collective dissent than they would be absent those institutions. Citizens know not only how information about legislative institutions (and lack of redistribution) influences their own beliefs but also that other citizens have access to that information: "As citizens become more aware of one another's perceptions, they become better able to judge the willingness of others to mo-

bilize in protest" (Hollyer et al. 2015, 766). Thus, the creation of nominally democratic institutions in dictatorships makes collective dissent more likely than it would be absent the creation of those institutions.[5]

Because the creation of nominally democratic institutions in dictatorships (1) heightens the grievances of potential dissidents and (2) decreases the costs of collective dissent, we expect co-optation to be positively related to the likelihood of collective dissent.

H2. Collective dissent is more likely to occur in dictatorships with co-optative institutions than in dictatorships without co-optative institutions.

TESTING HYPOTHESES

Our theory leads us to expect a negative relationship between co-optative institutions and elite coups and a positive relationship between co-optative institutions and collective dissent by citizens. In what follows, we operationalize our main concepts: co-optative institutions, elite coups, and collective dissent. To test our hypotheses, we first show using logit models that co-optative institutions are negatively correlated with coups and positively correlated with collective dissent. This estimation technique is subject to the criticism that dictatorships in which nominal democratic institutions are created may be systematically different in an (un)observable way from dictatorships that fail to institutionalize. Thus, our logit estimates potentially produce a biased estimate of the effect of co-optative institutions and dissent. Because we know that certain types of dictatorships are more likely to create nominal democratic institutions than others (i.e., that institutionalized regimes are systematically different from uninstitutionalized regimes in terms of observed covariates),[6] our estimates in these models are also heavily dependent on modeling assumptions (Gelman and Hill 2007; Morgan and Winship 2014). In order to ensure a covariate balance in our sample and show that our empirical results are not dependent on the functional form assumptions required of the aforementioned model, we also

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5. Svolik (2012) argues that the existence of hierarchical political parties reduces individual incentives to dissent. Even if the incentives of lower-level party members to dissent are constrained by the structure of the party, we still expect the creation of legislatures to increase the probability of popular dissent because all citizens are not part of the party structure in dictatorships. For this reason, we also do not assume that citizens need to rely on their party leaders to organize them in dissent against the regime (e.g., Lust-Okar 2004; Steinert-Threlkeld 2017).

6. For example, dictatorial leaders are more likely to create institutionalized legislatures when they are threatened (e.g., Gandhi 2008; Magaloni 2006; Svolik 2012; Wright, Erica, and Geddes 2015).

estimate models using coarsened exact matching (CEM) methods to account for the nonrandom creation of co-optative institutions. We find substantial statistical and substantive support for our hypotheses using both of these empirical strategies.

Operationalization

We test our hypotheses using binary time-series cross-sectional (TSCS) data on 91 dictatorships from 1947 to 2006. The unit of observation is the country-year. Following Alvarez et al. (1996), Gandhi (2008), Przeworski et al. (2000), and Vreeland (2008), we adopt a minimalist conceptualization of regime type and create our cross-sectional sample using a binary measure that identifies dictatorships based on the lack of direct elections of the executive and the legislature by popular vote. In particular, we use the "exselec" variable from Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland (2010) to determine whether a contested election occurred in a given country-year. If a contested election occurred, we identify that country-year as democratic and exclude it from our data. If there is no popular election or committed delegate election for executive selection in a given country-year, we identify it as dictatorial.

Since our hypotheses concern two types of opposition dissent—elite coups and popular mobilization—we require two dependent variables. With regard to elite coups, we are interested in any extraconstitutional attempt to forcibly remove a current leader by any members of the state apparatus. We operationalize Elite Coups using data from the Cross-National Time Series Data Archive (CNTS; Banks 2010), coding a binary variable as 1 whenever a country experiences one or more of the following coup events in a given year: "extraconstitutional or forced changes in the top government elite or its effective control of the nation's power structure in a given year."[7] We measure our second dependent variable, Citizen Dissent, using two measures from the CNTS.[8] Antigovernment Demonstrations is a binary variable coded 1 whenever a country experiences one or more of the following events in a given year: "any peaceful public gathering of at least 100 people for the primary purpose of displaying or voicing their opposition to government policies or authority, excluding demonstrations of a distinctly anti-foreign nature" (Banks 2010). Riots is a binary variable coded 1 whenever a country experiences "any violent demonstration or clash of more than 100 citizens involving the use of physical force" (Banks 2010).

Because we are interested in the effect of co-optation on elite and popular dissent, we require a measure of democratic institutionalization. Conceptually, co-optation can be defined as the extension of some form of political participation to an opposition group by the government. We are particularly interested in the extent to which the opposition is permitted to participate in the decision-making process and could (in theory) receive concessions from the government.[9] As a result, we measure Co-optation using data from Cheibub et al. (2010) on the number of political parties within the legislature. Following Cheibub et al. (2010), we create a binary measure of co-optation coded 0 in country-years in which the government has "either no legislature or all members of the legislature are nonpartisan" and in country-years in which the government has "a legislature with only members from the regime party." The measure is coded 1 in all country-years in which the government has a "legislature with multiple parties" (Cheibub et al. 2010).

In several of our empirical models, we include a battery of control variables argued to influence both the creation of co-optative institutions and the likelihood of collective dissent.[10] First, military leaders are argued to behave differently from other types of executives (Conrad, Conrad, and Young 2014; Geddes 1999; Svolik 2012; Wright 2008); we expect country-years led by military executives to be less likely to experience a coup because members of the military are less likely to depose a military leader. Gandhi (2008, 93–94, 98–101) argues that military leaders are also less likely to create

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7. These data do not account for unsuccessful coup attempts. Our results are robust to using data from Powell and Thyne (2011), which account for both successful and unsuccessful coup attempts. Although the Banks (2010) documentation is unclear regarding who can initiate a coup, the operationalization of a coup from Powell and Thyne (2011) includes elite violent dissent by opposition party elite who participate in legislative institutions and, thus, closely matches our concept: "Coups may be undertaken by any elite who is part of the state apparatus" (Powell and Thyne 2011, 250). Both measures of coup include instances when members of the dictator's party dissent—not only instances in which institutionalized members of the opposition elite rebel against the dictator. We appreciate an anonymous reviewer's comment that elites who are expected to share the pie with opposition party elites may be more likely to initiate a coup than elites who are not expected to share the pie. Given this logic, inclusion in these data of coup events by dictatorial party elites should bias against our finding in support of our first hypothesis.

8. Our results are robust to various measures of popular dissent from the Social Conflict Analysis Dataset (Salehyan et al. 2012), as shown in our appendix (available online).

9. Unlike Wright and Escribà-Folch (2012), who conceptualize and measure parties and legislatures separately, we are interested in the extent to which the opposition is co-opted. The concept of interest in our article is the extent to which opposition groups have an institutionalized means by which to ask for and receive concessions.

10. These control variables are consistent with those used by Svolik (2012).

co-optative institutions than civilian dictators, meaning that the concept is likely to be correlated with both our dependent variable and our main independent variable. To account for these relationships, we include in our models a dummy variable coded 1 in country-years led by military leaders and 0 otherwise (Cheibub et al. 2010). In addition, country wealth and economic growth have been found to be associated not only with the level of threat to the dictatorial regime (Gandhi 2008; Wright 2008)—which is related to the need to engage in co-optation, our main independent variable—but also with the likelihood of coups (Svolik 2012), uprisings (Svolik 2012), and democratic transitions (Acemoglu et al. 2009; Ansell and Samuels 2010; Boix 2003). In our models, we follow Svolik (2012) and control for gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, measured in thousands of purchasing-power-parity US\$2005, and GDP growth using data drawn from the Penn World Table, version 6.3 (Heston, Summers, and Aten 2009). Because Communist regimes may have received external support making them less likely to institutionalize and experience elite and mass dissent (Svolik 2012), we also include binary controls for whether a country-year has a Communist government and whether the country-year falls during the Cold War. Finally, using the arguments and replication data in Hollyer et al. (2015), we also include a control for trade openness ([Exports + Imports]/GDP).[11]

Empirical analyses

In order to determine whether there is a relationship between co-optative institutions and collective dissent, we begin with basic models intended to show correlations between our main variables of interest. Because the data we use to operationalize our main dependent variables are highly skewed toward zero,[12] we dichotomize each of the aforementioned variables and test our hypotheses by estimating the likelihood of coups and dissent using a logit model.[13] Our results are presented in table 1.

Columns 1, 3, and 5 of table 1 show coefficient estimates (sans controls) on elite coups, antigovernment demonstrations, and riots, respectively. Columns 2, 4, and 6 provide coefficient estimates in empirical models that include measures of the control variables discussed above.

The signs on the coefficients on co-optation in table 1 are all significant and in the expected direction. Columns 1 and 2 show that institutionalized legislatures in dictatorships are negatively correlated with elite coups; columns 3–6 show that the same institutions are positively correlated with popular dissent in the form of antigovernment demonstrations and riots. Because logit coefficients are difficult to interpret substantively, we estimate changes in the probability of coups and demonstrations using the results shown in table 1—column 1 (for coups), column 3 (for antigovernment demonstrations), and column 5 (for riots). To do so, we first estimate the probability of an elite coup occurring in a country-year in which co-optative institutions did not exist (where co − optation = 0). Next, we estimate the probability of an elite coup in a country-year with a co-optative institution (where co − optation = 1) and generate the first difference between these two values.[14]

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the expected probability of an elite coup for average country-years (as described above) with and without co-optative legislative institutions. The calculated mean of the expected probability of an elite coup in a country-year without a co-optative legislature is 54.44% (31.15%, 77.11%). By comparison, the mean probability of an elite coup in a country-year with a co-optative legislature is 26.19% (6.74%, 54.40%). Dictatorships with co-optative institutions are approximately 28.25% less likely than dictatorships without such institutions to experience an elite coup. Although this is a substantively large difference, we cannot be confident from these data whether legislatures cause a decrease in the probability of an elite coup or whether dictators create legislatures when environmental and other conditions suggest that they are least likely to face an elite coup.

We now turn to the substantive relationships between co-optative dictatorial institutions and our measures of popular dissent depicted in table 1. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the expected probability of an antigovernment demonstration for average country-years with and without co-optative legislative institutions. The calculated mean of the expected probability of an antigovernment demonstration in a country-year without a co-optative legislature is 24.20% (14.69%, 35.72%).

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11. Hollyer et al. (2015, 774) argue that there are "linkages between economic and political liberalization." Adsera and Boix (2002) argue that trade openness is correlated with our dependent variables; authoritarian regimes with free trade are associated with a reduced public sector, which may lead to increases in discontent.

12. The mean number of coups, riots, and antigovernment demonstrations identified by the CNTS is 0.047, 0.383, and 0.472, respectively. These mean values are relatively low; most countries experience few coup or dissent events in most years. Our results are robust to using counts of these measures as our main dependent variables.

13. Models in which the dependent variable is dichotomous produce inefficient estimates if there is temporal dependence within the units (Beck, Katz, and Tucker 1998). Our results are robust to the inclusion of a third-order polynomial time counter to account for temporal dependence (Carter and Signorino 2010).

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14. We compute substantive effects for country-years that are non-Communist and nonmilitary. We hold other variables at their in-sample means (for continuous variables) and in-sample modes (for ordered/binary variables).

Table 1. Relationship between Dictatorial Legislatures, Elite Coups, and Popular Dissent (Unmatched)

	Elite Coups		Antigovernment Demonstrations		Riots	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Co-optation	−.910***	−.810***	.759***	.772***	.705***	.859***
	(.237)	(.256)	(.104)	(.114)	(.105)	(.115)
GDPPC		−.606**		.094		.034
		(.264)		(.081)		(.086)
GDPPC growth		−.024**		−.012**		−.010*
		(.011)		(.006)		(.006)
Trade openness		−.002		−.011***		−.010***
		(.003)		(.002)		(.002)
Military leader		.590***		.012		.063
		(.206)		(.119)		(.118)
Communist		−.458		−.159		−.238
		(.375)		(.170)		(.171)
Cold War		−.066		−.289**		.305**
		(.241)		(.118)		(.126)
Constant	−2.898***	−2.730***	−1.997***	−1.144***	−1.981***	−1.603***
	(.108)	(.315)	(.074)	(.170)	(.073)	(.178)
Log likelihood	−467.981	−449.920	−1,201.261	−1,167.623	−1,198.428	−1,162.622
Akaike information criterion	939.963	915.841	2,406.523	2,351.246	2,400.855	2,341.244

Note. GDPPC = gross domestic product per capita; $N = 2,800$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

By comparison, the mean probability of an antigovernment demonstration in a country-year with a co-optative legislature is 52.41% (36.06%, 68.30%). Dictatorships with legislatures are approximately 28.21% more likely than dictatorships without such legislative institutions to experience an antigovernment demonstration. The results shown in figure 3 are substantively similar; dictatorships with legislatures are approximately 31.85% more likely to experience a riot than dictatorships without co-optative legislative institutions. These are very large substantive differences—even larger in magnitude than the negative substantive effect of dictatorial legislatures on the probability of elite coups.

As we note above, co-optative institutions are not randomly assigned; countries in which governments create co-optative institutions may be systematically different—with regard to both previous dissent and other structural and behavioral factors—from governments that have not invested in the creation of co-optative institutions. Although the empirical models above are informative in showing that co-optation in the form of a dictatorial legislature and collective dissent actions are correlated, we cannot use those results to argue that the same country would have faced different incidences of elite coups

and popular protests if it had a counterfactual institutionalization status (e.g., King and Zeng 2006).[15]

In our case, the lack of nonrandom assignment of dictatorial legislatures is likely to bias our results against finding support for hypothesis 1 and bias our results in favor of finding support for hypothesis 2. Dictators establish co-

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15. In order to suggest that the effects of nonrandom assignment are not of concern in our logit models, we would have to argue that the unobserved factors influencing institutionalization are uncorrelated with the observed factors that influence collective dissent against the government (Achen 1986). In our case, that assumption only holds if the dictator's decision to create a legislature and the opposition's decision to dissent are made independently. That is an untenable assumption in this case for two reasons. First, we know that dictators establish legislatures and other co-optative institutions strategically. Scholars argue that dictators are especially likely to institutionalize when they "face strong potential opposition and need cooperation from outside groups" (Gandhi 2008; Magaloni 2006; Svolik 2012; Wright et al. 2015). Second, a large literature on government repression and opposition dissent argues that these decisions are endogenous (e.g., Ritter and Conrad 2016b). If the government decision to repress is endogenous to opposition behavior, so is the decision to co-opt the opposition.
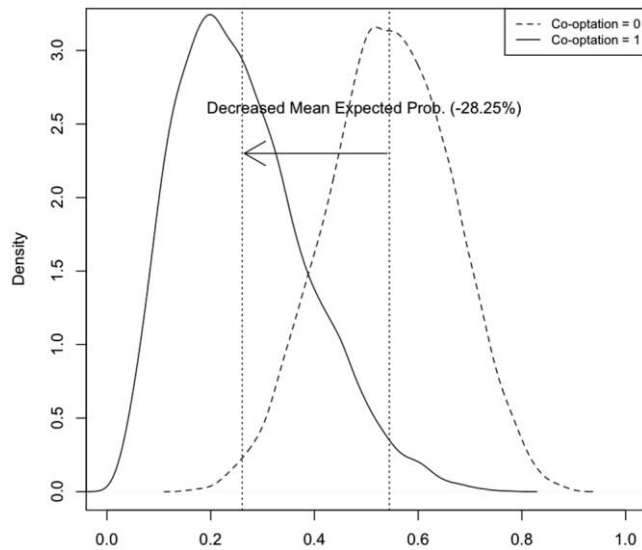
Figure 1. Change in the expected probability of a coup with (*solid line*) and without a co-optative legislature (*dashed line*).

Figure 2. Change in the expected probability of an antigovernment demonstration with (*solid line*) and without a co-optative legislature (*dashed line*).

optative institutions to neutralize threats to the survival of the leader or the regime (Gandhi 2008; Svolik 2012; Wright et al. 2015). Consequently, we expect a positive association between threats to regime stability (e.g., dissent) and the creation of co-optative institutions. Our first hypothesis predicts a negative relationship between co-optative institutions and the likelihood of coups; if institutions are created to co-opt more threatening opposition, we would expect the bias due to nonrandom assignment to cut against finding support for this hypothesis. Conversely, we hypothesize a positive relationship between co-optative institutions and popular dissent. Because we expect leaders to co-opt threatening opposition into the regime, we may see dissent as a function of the fact that more threatening groups are both more likely to be co-opted and more likely to engage in dissent. The resultant bias cuts in favor of finding support for hypothesis 2. If we find support, we cannot know whether it occurs as a result of a true relationship or as a result of the bias associated with the fact that co-optative institutions are not randomly assigned across countries in our sample.

In short, the nonrandom and strategic means by which dictatorial legislatures are implemented, and in particular, the direction of the bias associated testing our second hypothesis, make it difficult for us gain leverage over our hypotheses. In order to determine the effect of institutionalization on dissent, we need to compare country-years that created co-optative institutions to country-years that did not institutionalize—but are otherwise identical in every other respect. In reality, few such comparisons exist, and so we approximate this ideal experiment using matching methods. Matching allows us to explicitly address the nonrandom assignment issues associ-
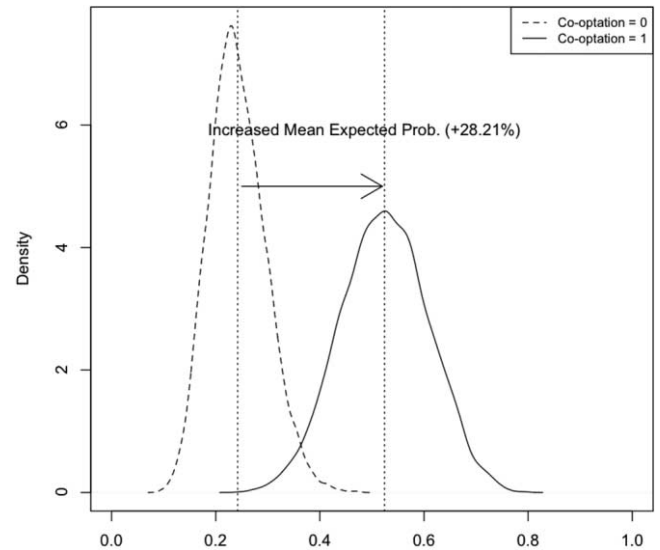
ated with institutional creation—to account for the potential confounding effects between the treatment and the outcome and reduce the probability that the results are model dependent (King and Zeng 2006). We use matching methods to calculate the latent probability of observing co-optative institutions for each unit of observation, match units that have a similar probability, and separate units into either a treatment group (in our case, those units in which co-optative institutions were established) and a control group (in our case, those units in which co-optative institutions were not established).

Because we have data on many of the observable characteristics that lead governments to create co-optative institutions, we use CEM as a preprocessing step before parametric analysis. CEM is a method in which "variables used in the matching procedure are 'coarsened' (i.e., recoded so that they assume fewer values) before the matching procedure, which matches exactly on the recoded variables" (Hill 2010, 1168).[16] This method reduces imbalances in the observable covariates influencing the establishment of co-optative institutions, while matching the unobservable propensity for establishment of co-optative institutions between treatment and control units (Ho et al. 2007).[17] Our results are presented in table 2. Columns 1, 3,

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16. For more information on CEM methods, see Iacus and King (2012).

17. The overall imbalance is given by the L1 statistic. Perfect global balance is achieved when L1 = 0; larger values (up to a maximum value of 1) indicate larger imbalance. In the tests shown below, L1 for the matched data is 0.55496159; that can be compared to the baseline balance of 0.56579214.
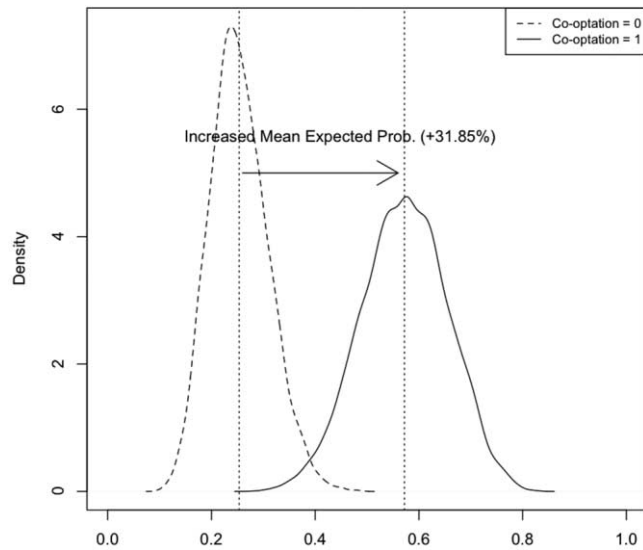
Figure 3. Change in the expected probability of a riot with (*solid line*) and without a co-optative legislature (*dashed line*).

and 5 of table 2 show matched coefficient estimates (sans additional controls) on elite coups, antigovernment demonstrations, and riots, respectively. Because coarsening can leave imbalance in the matched data, we adjust for the remaining imbalance via the inclusion of control variables in the models shown in columns 2, 4, and 6.[18]

The results shown in table 2 are consistent with those shown in table 1 and described above. In all model specifications, co-optation has the predicted effect. Institutionalized co-optation leads to substantively and statistically significant decreases in the probability of an elite coup and increases in the probability of popular dissent as measured by riots. Although the signs on the coefficient on co-optation in the models predicting antigovernment demonstrations are in the expected direction, the matched models produce estimates that are not statistically significant in columns 3 and 4 of table 2.

Figures 4 and 5 show the substantive effect of co-optative institutions on the probability of a dictatorship experiencing

an elite coup or a riot in a given year, respectively. Both figures were created using the methods described above and the empirical results shown in columns 1 and 5 of table 2. Figure 4 shows a substantively larger effect of co-optative institutions on the probability of elite coups than is shown in figure 1. Although the effect of co-optation on the probability of riots shown in figure 5 is substantively smaller than the effect shown in figure 3, the predicted change is nevertheless both statistically and substantively significant.[19]

CONCLUSION

In this article, we show that dictatorial attempts to co-opt the opposition via the creation of an institutionalized legislature do not "buy off" all citizens equally and, consequently, do not always insulate leaders from dissent; although legislatures are negatively associated with elite coups, they are positively associated with popular protest. By giving opposition elites a voice in legal political parties and legislatures, providing them with policy concessions via those institutions, and rendering decision-making power more diffuse, dictators reduce the probability of elite mobilization (via a coup) against the incumbent regime. Conversely, the creation of nominally democratic institutions has the opposite effect, increasing citizen grievances and helping citizens overcome the collective action problem associated with dissent.

This project offers a number of innovations for the scholarly understanding of nominally democratic institutions and dissent against dictatorial governments. In a departure from previous research, we show that the same co-optative institutions can have very different effects on different forms of political dissent—elite coups and collective dissent. Although the creation of nominally democratic institutions co-opts elites from dissent, it is associated with popular dissent against the government. More broadly, we contribute to the comparative politics literature on nominally democratic institutions in dictatorships, arguing that institutionalization only "co-opts" individuals when they are permitted to participate. For nonparticipators, that institutionalization provides elites with benefits generates feelings of relative deprivation that can lead to additional collective mobilization.

The need for autocratic leaders to navigate both popular and elite threats in order to remain in office has been a subject of growing attention in recent years (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2009; Padró i Miquel 2007; Svolik 2012). In building the theory presented here, we assumed the processes that lead to

18. King, Lucas, and Nielsen (2017) emphasize that a trade-off exists between optimizing balance and sample size. CEM matching fixes balance while maximizing sample size. King et al. (2017) developed the matching frontier as a solution to jointly optimize both balance and sample size. We show in our appendix that our results are robust to matching using the matching frontier. In addition, standard matching methods match observations rather than panels; in the case of TSCS data, treated panels should be matched with control panels. There is not yet a consensus on the "best" procedure for matching TSCS data. We follow Nielsen (2016), who provides an example of how to match TSCS data using the lags of the covariates. Our results are also robust to the use of this method, as shown in our appendix.

19. Because the effect of co-optation on antigovernment demonstrations does not reach traditional levels of statistical significance, we include it in our appendix.

Table 2. Relationship between Dictatorial Legislatures, Elite Coups, and Popular Dissent (Matched)

	Elite Coups		Antigovernment Demonstrations		Riots	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Co-optation	−.964***	−.935***	.171	.189	.316**	.341**
	(.009)	(.263)	(.114)	(.116)	(.117)	(.119)
GDPPC		−.956*		.781***		.643**
		(.474)		(.203)		(.206)
GDPPC growth		−.050**		.013		.013
		(.018)		(.010)		(.011)
Trade openness		.003		−.009***		−.011***
		(.003)		(.001)		(.002)
Military leader		1.002***		.262*		.280*
		(.249)		(.127)		(.130)
Communist		.53		−.021		−.369
		(.541)		(.230)		(.239)
Cold War		−.327		−.657***		−.093
		(.244)		(.128)		(.130)
Constant	−2.764***	−2.981***	−1.469***	−.958***	−1.635***	−1.244***
	(.260)	(.346)	(.078)	(.173)	(.082)	(.183)
Log likelihood	−327.509	−309.735	−934.759	−903.537	−892.876	−865.982
Akaike information criterion	659.019	635.470	1,873.518	1,823.074	1,789.751	1,747.963

Note. GDPPC = gross domestic product per capita; $N = 2,800$.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.

elite coups and popular dissent to be independent, but our results suggest that the relationship between these threats is more complicated. Protest can provide information to regime insiders about popular dissatisfaction with the incumbent government, facilitating elite coups (Casper and Tyson 2014; Galetovic and Sanhueza 2000; Thyne 2010) via their effect on observable information about the extent to which the government can survive popular dissent (Casper and Tyson 2014, 548). As a result, even though the creation of institutionalized legislatures may "buy off" elites in the short run, it may provide elites with information about popular dissent, which may eventually convince elites to mobilize when they would have otherwise remained quiet. Future research should investigate the possibility that legislative creation can indirectly increase incentives for an elite coup via the effect of co-optation on incentives for popular mobilization. Scholars may also wish to extend the theory presented here to determine how dictators handle the trade-off that we suggest is associated with the creation of democratic institutions. Under what conditions do dictators create co-optative institutions, knowing that they have divergent effects on dissent? How do dictators determine whether elite or popular dissent is more threatening?

That the creation of political parties and legislatures in dictatorships is associated with increased government repression (Vreeland 2008) is perhaps less surprising in light of our
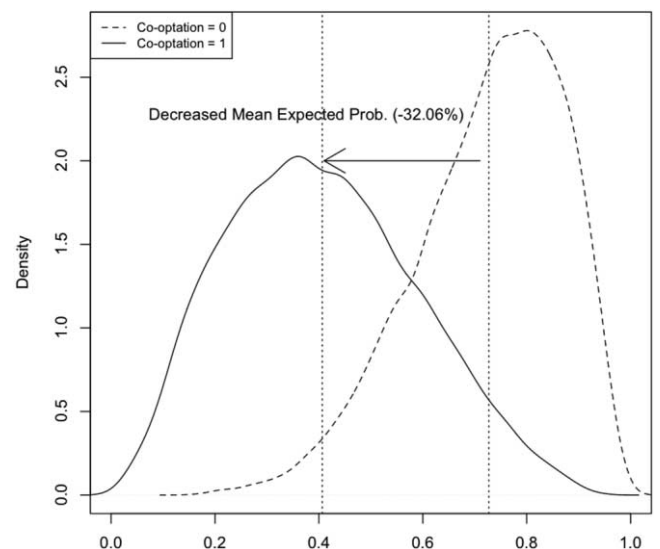

Figure 4. Change in the expected probability of a coup with (*solid line*) and without a co-optative legislature (*dashed line*) using matched data.
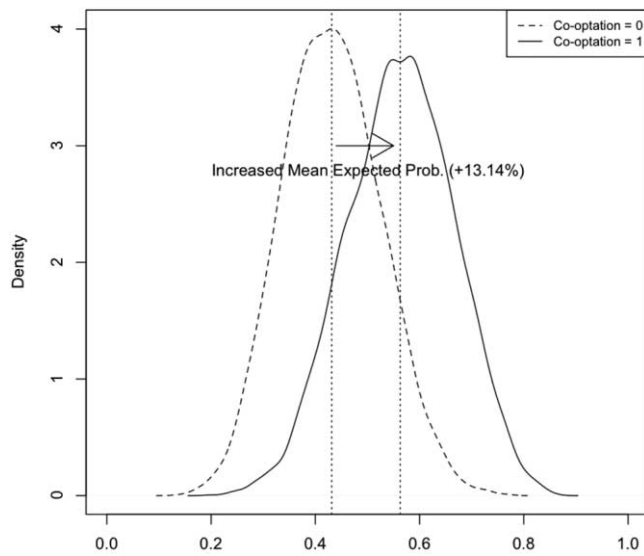
Figure 5. Change in the expected probability of a riot with (*solid line*) and without a co-optative legislature (*dashed line*) using matched data.

findings: when dictators create institutions that quell elite tensions but encourage popular dissent, they may simultaneously violate the rights of citizens to limit collective dissent. Dictators do not create "democratic" institutions as true openings of the regime; when the creation of those institutions leads to increased protest and mobilization against the regime, autocratic governments are happy to minimize popular dissent using the tools of repression.

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