

# Did British Colonialism Promote Democracy? Divergent Inheritances and Diminishing Legacies

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## Abstract

Did British colonial rule promote post-independence democracy? We provide evidence that the relationship follows a strong temporal pattern. Former British colonies were considerably more democratic than other countries immediately following independence, but subsequent democratic convergence has largely eliminated these differences in the post-Cold War period. Existing theories expounding superior British culture or alternative colonial institutions cannot account for divergent inheritances and diminishing legacies. To explain the time-varying pattern, we analyze European powers' varying policy approaches to decolonization, and changes in the international system. Britain more consistently treated competitive democratic elections as a prerequisite for gaining independence, leading to higher initial democracy levels. However, nascent democracies that lacked deep-rooted societal transformation faced challenges to democratic consolidation because of Cold War superpower competition. Later shifts in the international system toward promoting democracy further contributed to convergence by destabilizing colonially rooted dictatorships.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Colonialism, British rule, Institutions

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# 1 Introduction

How did colonial rule affect post-independence political outcomes? Amid the enormous social science and historical literatures on colonialism, scholars devote considerable attention to assessing the relationship between British colonialism and democracy.<sup>1</sup> Existing research is inconclusive. Many scholars expound pro-democratic legacies: British governance promoted the rule of law and better acquainted subjects with the norms of democratic procedures (Emerson 1960; Weiner 1987; Ferguson 2012). Scholars also routinely control for a British colonial rule dummy in cross-national democracy regressions. However, statistical findings vary: some find strong evidence for a Britain effect (Bernhard et al. 2004; Olsson 2009), whereas others do not (Barro 1999; Przeworski et al. 2000; Miller 2015). Furthermore, recent political science research on colonialism and democracy mainly looks “beyond national colonial legacies” (Owolabi 2014) and instead focuses on alternative historical legacies such as Protestant missionaries, forced migration, and European settlers—often explicitly de-emphasizing the importance of British colonialism. Research on economic development features a similar debate, with support for the importance of colonizer identity (La Porta et al. 1998; Grier 1999; Fails and Kriekhaus 2010; Lee and Schultz 2012) countered by arguments that other aspects of colonial rule were more important (Acemoglu et al. 2001; Kohli 2004; Engerman and Sokoloff 2011; Iyer 2010).

This article establishes a specific mixed legacy of British colonialism on democracy, and demonstrates that the Britain effect cannot be convincingly explained without examining change over time. We document that although British colonial rule bequeathed a large and statistically distinguishable democratic inheritance at independence, this legacy diminished afterwards. In countries’ first full year of independence, the average difference in democracy levels exceeds 30% of the range of the standard Polity scale. In fact, British colonialism accounts for nearly all of the democratic variation among post-colonial nations during the “Second Wave” of democracy (Huntington 1993)—because essentially all non-British colonies were non-democratic at independence. However, ex-British colonies do not discernibly differ from non-former British colonies in democracy levels since 1991.

We first perform numerous statistical tests to demonstrate the existence and robustness of this largely overlooked pattern. Cross-sectional models estimate a moderately large positive association between British rule

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<sup>1</sup>de Juan and Pierskalla (2017) recently reviewed this vast literature.

and democracy among all post-independence years for countries that gained independence after 1945. The correlation is quite large at independence and robustly statistically significant, and only a large amount of bias from unobserved covariates could explain away the estimated effect. We also show that the effect estimates at independence remain strong when controlling for leading alternative historical explanations studied in recent research, contrary to arguments that factors such as Protestant missionaries or European settlers can explain away the Britain effect. However, the coefficient estimate is considerably smaller and not consistently significant in a post-1991 sample. These findings are similar when accounting for alternative democratization accounts such as modernization theory or the resource curse, when changing democracy measures, and when expanding the sample to include all non-European countries using data since 1800.

The article then offers an explanation for divergent inheritances and diminishing legacies. First, policy differences across empires during the post-1945 decolonization era contributed to British colonies' advantages at independence. Focusing on decolonization builds off a smaller strand of the existing historical and social science literatures (Smith 1978; Kahler 1984; Spruyt 2005; Pepinsky 2015) and contrasts with existing prominent political science theories focused on long-term cultural or institutional factors—which cannot explain change over time. After 1945, Britain facilitated more gradual transitions to independence tailored to local circumstances, compared to other major colonial powers, evidenced across various pre-colonial democracy indices. However, these reforms were still relatively short-term prior to granting independence: British colonies would not have exhibited their democratic advantage at independence had, counterfactually, they gained independence even several years before they factually did. Britain also avoided the successful anti-colonial revolutions that ended European rule in many other colonies. This factor correlates with democracy levels at independence, as do mechanisms that help to explain Britain's post-1945 decolonization strategy relative to other European powers: metropolitan democracy level and colonial lobby strength.

Second, two important trends in the international system help to explain diminishing legacies. Colonies in our core sample gained independence amid Cold War competition that undermined Western incentives to promote democracy. Given these poor international conditions, newly independent states that possessed democratic but relatively shallow institutions—such as many British colonies—should suffer reversals. However, several decades later, the “Third Wave” democratization forces that began during the Cold War and accelerated afterwards created more favorable international conditions for Western democracy promotion. This makes democratization, or at least movement toward greater levels of electoral competition, more

possible in all ex-colonies—even those lacking prior democratic experience. Combined, these two shifts in the international environment should largely wash out the initial British colonial advantage. Evidence from time series regressions demonstrate patterns of both (1) democratic reversals shortly after independence in ex-British colonies and (2) greater democratic gains by non-former British colonies several decades after independence. We also show the decolonization mechanisms that correlate with democracy levels at independence do not correlate with post-1991 democracy levels.

Most directly, the theory and findings provide a more nuanced perspective on how British colonialism affected democracy compared to existing research. However, the conclusion also discusses important implications for studying historical legacies more broadly. Contrary to path dependent mechanisms specified in studies of economic development, analyzing British colonialism and other prominent historical factors in the literature (such as European settlers and Protestant missionaries) suggests that colonial legacies for democracy were less persistent. This likely has resulted in part because of the importance of decolonization—which social scientific research on colonial legacies tends to overlook—and because changes in the international system can greatly impact countries’ prospects for democratization.

## 2 Establishing the Pattern: Trends Over Time

Figure 1 graphically establishes the time-varying relationship between British colonialism and democracy.<sup>2</sup> Both panels contain a sample of 73 former colonies that gained independence from a Western European country between World War II and 1980, which corresponds with the second major wave of Western European decolonization (Abernethy 2000; Olsson 2009).<sup>3</sup> Ex-British colonies appear in black and non-British are in gray. We use a broad definition of British colonies to ensure that our core findings are not driven by selection effects regarding how intensely and for how long Britain decided to rule a territory after gaining nominal control.<sup>4</sup> The dependent variable is average Polity IV score, specifically, the standard *polity2* vari-

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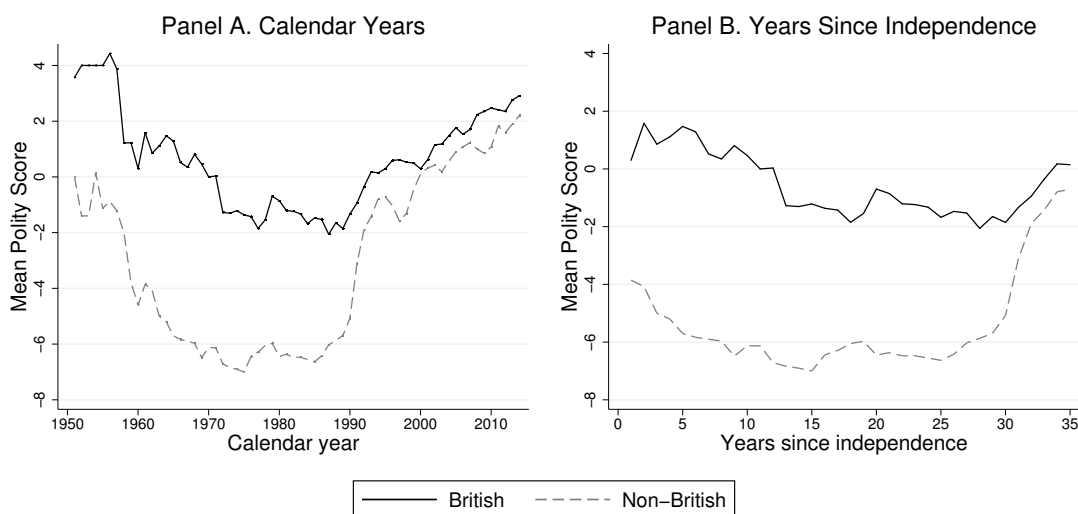
<sup>2</sup>Section 4 describes the variables in more detail.

<sup>3</sup>Empirically, this sample captures the bulk of the British Empire, and also minimizes heterogeneity in metropolitan institutions and policy over time. Appendix Table A.1 lists every country in the sample.

<sup>4</sup>We include territories over which Britain gained control as League of Nations mandates after World War I (e.g., Tanganyika/Tanzania, Iraq) and exerted minimal internal control (e.g., Kuwait). This is somewhat broader than Lange’s (2009) definition of British colonies, from whom we differ by counting British Middle

able (Marshall and Gurr 2014). The time unit on the horizontal axis of Panel A is calendar years, and in Panel B is (country-specific) years since independence. The basket of countries changes over time in Panel A as new countries gain independence. By contrast, Panel B contains a constant basket of countries, which implies that changes over time reflect changes in democracy scores rather than changes in the sample. Panel B only includes the first 35 years after independence because this is the longest time period that enables a constant sample of countries.

**Figure 1: Ex-British Colonies Versus Other Ex-Colonies After Independence**



Both panels demonstrate two main patterns. First, ex-British colonies were strikingly more democratic on average at independence than other ex-colonies. This difference equaled 30% of the Polity scale in the first year of independence, and 29% of the Polity scale averaging between 1950 and 1965. Appendix Table A.4 highlights similar patterns using cross-tabs. Over half of British ex-colonies were democratic (*polity2* score of at least 6) at independence, compared to only one non-British colony. Therefore, British colonialism can explain nearly all of the democratic variation among post-colonial nations during the “Second Wave” of democracy—because essentially all non-British colonies were non-democratic at independence.

Second, this gap narrowed considerably over time, which itself followed from two trends. Ex-colonies on average became less democratic shortly after independence, although this pattern was sharper in British Eastern colonies. However, like Lange, we do not code as British colonies modern-day countries that merged a smaller British colony with a larger non-British colony (Cameroon, Somalia, Yemen).

colonies.<sup>5</sup> Within the first six years of independence, the average Polity score declined by 14% of the Polity scale in ex-British colonies compared to 7% of the Polity scale in non-British colonies. However, the two groups of countries come close to converging only three decades after independence, which for many countries corresponds to the peak of the “Third Wave” in the mid-1990s (Huntington 1993). Appendix Table A.4 shows that since 1991, only 23% of ex-British colonies have had an average *polity2* score of at least 6, compared to 16% of non-British colonies.

### 3 Existing Theories

Existing research on British colonialism and democracy largely overlooks the time-varying pattern that we document, and consequentially produces unconvincing explanations. The literature presents three main arguments. First, Britain fostered post-colonial democracy by altering the political institutions and/or culture of its territories in ways that should enhance prospects for democratic consolidation. This perspective cannot explain the change over time that largely eliminated the British advantages. A second, closely related perspective is that the Britain effect is conditional on the type of colonial rule it practiced and should only appear in certain types of British colonies. This perspective also cannot explain change over time, nor why short and indirectly ruled British colonies also exhibited divergent legacies from non-British colonies (see below). A final school argues against any positive Britain effect, and instead that cross-empire differences can be explained by other colonial-era factors or by pre-colonial differences between empires. This argument is inconsistent with divergent inheritances at independence.

#### 3.1 Culture and Institutions

Numerous proposed mechanisms link British colonial rule to stronger post-colonial democracy, focusing primarily on cultural and institutional explanations. Weiner (1987) posits two main mechanisms through which Britain promoted “tutary democracy” (18). First, Britain promoted bureaucratic structures that maintained order through the rule of law rather than through arbitrary authority. Because these administrative institutions gradually become indigenous, colonial subjects gained experience with law-based governance (see also

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<sup>5</sup>Although this is difficult to see visually in the figures, below we present time series models with a lagged dependent variable and unit fixed effects that demonstrates this pattern.

Narizny 2012, 362; Abernethy 2000, 406; and Treisman 2000, 418-427). Second, Britain provided a limited system of representation and elections that enabled political elites to learn to use and to internalize the norms of democratic procedures (see also Lipset et al. 1993, 168; Diamond, 1998, 8; and Abernethy 2000, 367). Although France also introduced elections in many of its African colonies prior to independence, Britain tended to grant greater responsibilities to its elected legislative organs, whereas France practiced a more centralized style of rule (Emerson 1960, 232). These arguments closely relate to arguments about other beneficial British institutional legacies: common law (La Porta et al. 1998) and parliamentary institutions with strong legislative constraints on the executive (Abernethy 2000, 367). Another closely related argument emphasizes the role of human capital (Glaeser et al. 2004)—specifically, higher education levels in former British colonies (Diamond 1998, 9)—in shaping economic and political outcomes.

A common theme among these cultural and institutional arguments is that British colonial rule should promote long-term advantages because superior culture or institutions should promote democratic stability. These theories therefore face difficulties accounting for change over time. This is a problem when we consider the temporal pattern shown in Figure 1. Former British colonies that became independent after 1945 are not consistently more democratic than the former colonies of other nations over the longer term. Ex-British colonies exhibited steep democratic declines in the 1960s and 1970s, and failed to achieved large democratic gains in the 1980s and 1990s.

### **3.2 Heterogeneity Within the British Empire**

Many qualify pro-Britain arguments by instead positing that only certain British colonies received beneficial inheritances. These arguments concern *how* Britain governed its various territories, in particular, how directly it ruled them. One proxy for directness of rule is length of British colonial rule in a territory. Huntington (1984, 206) asserts that British colonial rule should have only promoted democracy in countries it ruled for a long period, whereas the democratic record of former British colonies in Africa, “where British rule dates only from the late nineteenth century, is not all that different from that of the former African colonies of other European powers.” Olsson (2009) provides statistical evidence that the length of British colonial rule mattered. Mahoney (2010), though not explicitly discussing democracy, emphasizes the intensity of colonial rule and its interaction with colonizer origin.

Lange (2004, 2009) statistically examines heterogeneity within the British empire by measuring the directness of British rule with the percentage of court cases in the 1950s that were heard in customary rather than British colonial courts. More customary court cases correspond to less direct rule. Among a sample of ex-British colonies, he demonstrates a positive relationship between direct rule and post-colonial democracy (2004, 915). An even more extreme type of British indirect rule occurred in its Middle Eastern colonies, which were acquired as Mandate territories after World War I and/or ruled indirectly through monarchs. There is also evidence that Britain ruled more directly in its forced settlement colonies, in particular by granting metropolitan legal rights to colonial subjects prior to World War II (Owolabi 2015). This relates to Mamdani's (1996) hypothesis that two-tiered colonial legal systems, prevalent in African colonies, contributed to subsequent political dysfunction.

These arguments differ from unconditional pro-Britain positions by implying that British rule should associate with democracy where it was especially intrusive (such as the settler and plantation colonies), but not in other areas (such as African and Middle Eastern colonies). However, similar to cultural and institutional arguments, these theories do not attempt to explain change over time. They anticipate that British colonies ruled directly and/or for long periods should be stable democracies since independence, whereas indirectly ruled countries should not be democratic at independence or afterwards.

### **3.3 Alternative Historical Explanations**

Other recent work on historical causes of democracy argues that colonizer identity is relatively unimportant. This research instead posits that alternative aspects of the colonial or pre-colonial era that correlate with colonizer identity offer greater explanatory power.

Two recent contributions critique the British colonialism-democracy thesis by arguing that cross-empire Protestant missionary influence accounts for any beneficial aspects of British colonial rule: "Some scholars suggest that British colonialism fostered democracy ... but this may be because [Protestant missionaries] had greater influence in British colonies" (Woodberry 2012, 254). Although British colonies tended to have higher education levels, stronger civil societies, and more electoral participation prior to independence, Woodberry claims these are entirely accounted for by the larger number of Protestant missionaries in British colonies (255). Lankina and Getachew (2012, 466-7) similarly argue: "With respect to the societal under-



pinnings for democratic development, the record of British colonialism is not very laudable. . . . Our call to isolate the impact of missionary activity from that of colonial authority rests on the role of Christian missions in the promotion of education.” Empirically, Woodberry (2012) demonstrates that a British colonialism indicator becomes statistically insignificant and substantively small when controlling for colonial-era Protestant missionaries across a large sample of non-European countries with democracy level averaged between 1950 and 1994. This resembles Hadenius’ (1992, 133) earlier finding that controlling for Protestant population share explains away the Britain effect.

Hariri (2012, 2015) offers a different account that links the pre-colonial and colonial eras, providing evidence that (1) territories with a long history of statehood have experienced lower levels of post-Cold War democracy and (2) a proxy for European settler influence positively correlates with democracy. Although Hariri does not focus on the Britain-democracy thesis, the general thrust of his framework resembles Woodberry (2012) and Lankina and Getachew (2012): specific colonial-era actors caused democracy, whereas differences among colonizers were relatively unimportant (Hariri 2012, 474). Similarly, pre-colonial characteristics of territories, i.e., selection effects, impact prospects for the directness of rule and for democracy promotion rather than the identity of the colonizer. Acemoglu et al.’s (2001) related contribution about colonial-era European settlers explicitly draws this conclusion: “it appears that British colonies are found to perform substantially better in other studies in large part because Britain colonized places where [large-scale European] settlements were possible, and this made British colonies inherit better institutions” (1388).

Like other existing arguments about Britain and democracy, these alternative historical explanations do not anticipate changes in the efficacy of British colonialism over time. They posit that after controlling for the causally important historical factors—and therefore addressing selection effects—British rule should not correlate with democracy either at independence or anytime afterwards.

## **4 Regression Evidence: Can Existing Theories Explain the Pattern?**

The first set of regressions establish the pattern from Figure 1 using regression analysis, while additionally evaluating different samples as well as accounting for some of the most standard alternative explanations in the democracy literature, including modernization theory and the resource curse. We then consider addi-

tional robustness checks that vary the models, measures, and time sample. Broadly, the robust time-varying pattern contradicts theories based on longer-term culture and institutions, which do not anticipate convergence over time. We then specifically address existing theories that allege certain forms of selection effects or alternative colonial institutions, or examine heterogeneity within the British empire.

## 4.1 Core Results

We present results from pooled OLS models that use country-year as the unit of observation and cluster standard errors by country. Table 1 estimates:

$$Polity_{it} = \alpha + \delta BritishColony_i + \beta X_{it} + \epsilon_{it}, \quad (1)$$

where  $Polity_{it}$  is the *polity2* score for country  $i$  in year  $t$ ,  $\delta$  is the main parameter of interest, and  $X_{it}$  is a vector of covariates that differs across specifications. Panel A of Table 1 uses the same sample of 73 post-1945 independence countries as in Figure 1, and Panel B uses an expanded sample since 1800 of all 129 non-European countries with Polity data.<sup>6</sup> Each panel contains three time periods: all post-independence years (through 2014), the first full year of independence,<sup>7</sup> and only post-1991 years. The latter two follow the disjunctures highlighted in Figure 1.

Column 1 in both panels of Table 1 pools all sample years. It recovers the common finding in the existing large-N literature: former British colonies are in general more democratic than other countries. Column 2 demonstrates a similar relationship remains even when controlling for five standard democracy covariates

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<sup>6</sup>Polity IV includes all countries with a population of at least 500,000 in 2015. Among British colonies, the Panel B sample adds to the Panel A sample the five major settler colonies (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, United States) and two Middle Eastern quasi-British colonies (Egypt and Iraq) that gained independence before 1945.

<sup>7</sup>Polity IV measures its variables in December 31 of the given year, and only provides post-independence data. Although coding democracy scores at independence may seem to be an error-prone process, there do not appear to be strong concerns about measurement error in *polity2* at independence relative to other times and places. The Polity coders do not flag any cases of coding uncertainty in the year after independence, compared to 33 cases in later years of our sample.

**Table 1: Core Results**

Panel A. Post-1945 independence countries. DV: <i>polity2</i> score						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	3.301*** (1.173)	2.482** (1.038)	6.038*** (1.473)	6.912*** (1.575)	1.062 (1.295)	0.0463 (1.331)
Ethnic frac.		-2.630 (2.298)		-0.988 (2.525)		-0.596 (3.214)
Muslim %		-0.0325** (0.0131)		-0.0309 (0.0186)		-0.0341** (0.0153)
ln(GDP/cap)		1.025 (0.657)		0.423 (1.028)		0.569 (0.868)
ln(Pop.)		0.669* (0.388)		0.544 (0.478)		0.372 (0.456)
ln(Oil & gas/capita)		-0.460* (0.235)		-0.753* (0.397)		-0.549* (0.279)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.062	0.169	0.200	0.376	0.008	0.145

Panel B. All non-European countries. DV: <i>polity2</i> score						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	4.453*** (1.240)	4.662*** (1.021)	6.228*** (1.202)	6.289*** (1.123)	0.339 (1.180)	0.268 (0.981)
Muslim %		-0.0550*** (0.00785)		-0.0411*** (0.0129)		-0.0770*** (0.0118)
Ethnic frac.		-1.773 (1.448)		-0.364 (1.901)		-1.952 (1.985)
Country-years	11,088	11,071	129	127	3,147	3,130
R-squared	0.084	0.197	0.215	0.293	0.001	0.222

Notes: Table 1 summarizes a series of OLS regressions by presenting coefficient estimates, and country-clustered robust standard error estimates in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

in Panel A: logged annual GDP per capita, logged annual population, logged annual oil and gas production per capita, Muslim percentage of the population in 1980, and ethnic fractionalization.<sup>8</sup>

Although Columns 1 and 2 of Table 1 provide evidence for a positive British colonialism effect, the estimated magnitude of the coefficients is relatively small. The estimated effect of 3.3 in Panel A corresponds to the move from Saudi Arabia to slightly more liberal Kuwait in 2014, or from Guyana to India.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, as

<sup>8</sup>Appendix Table A.2 describes these variables and their sources. Three of the 73 countries in the core sample are missing GDP per capita data in all years (four at independence), which accounts for the discrepancy in sample size between the specifications that include these covariates versus those that do not. Because of missing data on the three time-varying covariates in the 19th century, the Panel B regressions with controls only include ethnic fractionalization and Muslims (two countries are missing data on these variables in the bigger sample).

<sup>9</sup>The range of the Polity scale is 20.

shown below, the coefficient estimate in the full temporal sample is not robustly statistically significant using every democracy measure (Table A.6, Panel A, Column 2) nor across all types of British colonies (Tables A.17 through A.20). The estimated effect in Panel B is somewhat larger, although this arises primarily from including four historically exceptional neo-Britains.

The remainder of Table 1 disaggregates time periods. Columns 3 and 4 present results for each country's first full year of independence.<sup>10</sup> The Britain coefficient estimate in Panel A increases by 83% between Columns 1 and 3, and by 278% between Columns 2 and 4. The magnitude is even larger once standard covariates (Column 4) or region or year fixed effects (Table A.5) are included. The estimated effect is remarkably large: more than 6 on the standard 20-point *polity2* scale, and exceeding 8 in the year fixed effects model. For comparison, France had a *polity2* score only 7 points larger than Algeria's in 2014. The coefficient estimates are also large in Panel B.

One hint that the findings at independence are unlikely to be entirely driven by unobserved factors is that the coefficient estimate *increases* when adding covariates in both Panels A and B. Therefore, the sign of the bias induced by omitting unobservables must (1) go in the opposite direction as the bias induced by omitting the observable factors in Table 1 and (2) be large in magnitude in order to explain away the finding. Considering the large magnitude of the coefficient estimate and insensitivity to observables, even without being able to exploit natural experimental variation, it appears quite unlikely that selection effects can explain away the positive British colonial rule effect at independence—although the robustness checks below further examine this possibility.

However, the findings are quite different when instead examining the period since 1991. The coefficient estimates in Columns 5 and 6 of Table 1 are substantively small in estimated effect and never statistically significant. Therefore, lingering concerns that omitted variable bias drives the results at independence must additionally address the diminished coefficient estimates in the post-Cold War era by identifying factors that covary with British colonialism and a short-term *but not* long-term positive democracy effect.

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<sup>10</sup>Never-colonized countries' "year of independence" in our data is their first year with Polity IV data. The United States' "year of independence" in our dataset is 1800 because Polity IV does not have data for 1783.

## 4.2 Robustness Checks

Four sets of robustness checks reinforce these findings: adding year or region fixed effects, altering the dependent variable, changing the different cutoff dates, and disaggregating non-British colonizers.

First, Appendix Table A.5 alters the set of covariates and demonstrates similar results when controlling for either region or year fixed effects to account for unobserved heterogeneity in the cultural characteristics of specific regions or in the international climate toward democracy at different times.

Second, the results are similar across different dependent variable measures. Appendix Table A.6 considers V-Dem’s polyarchy measure (Coppedge et al. 2018) and Boix et al.’s (2012) binary democracy measure, chosen because they exhibit extensive time coverage. Tables A.7 through A.10 change the dependent variables to disaggregated democracy components, capturing the standard distinction between contestation (constraints on the executive, free and fair elections) and participation (extent of the franchise). Most contestation measures exhibit a similar pattern of divergent inheritances and diminishing legacies as the aggregate democracy measures. The British advantage is more persistent post-1991 using Polity IV components. However, the long-term relationship is sensitive to adding covariates, and the estimated effect magnitude still declines by about half. By contrast, there is no clear pattern of a British advantage at independence or anytime afterwards for various participation measures. Collectively, this evidence is consistent with arguments that the British governing tradition should promote contestation, whereas broader global trends after World War II promoted widespread franchises and holding elections even if the elections were not competitive.

Third, the chosen date cutoffs do not affect the findings. Appendix Table A.11 demonstrates that the coefficient estimates from Columns 3 and 4 of Table 1 are similar when analyzing average *polity2* score over each country’s first six years of independence, instead of just the first year, or between 1946 and 1965. Table A.11 also shows that the findings from Columns 5 and 6 of Table 1 are mostly unchanged when defining “recent” years as either 35 years after independence (the same end year used in Figure 1) or only 2014 (the last year in our sample), rather than the post-1991 period.<sup>11</sup> Finally, rather than truncating the sample by time period, Appendix Table A.12 interacts British colonialism with either year or years since independence. It shows

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<sup>11</sup>The Britain coefficient is statistically significant at 10% in one of the specifications for 35 years after independence in the full sample, which the appendix discusses.

that the Britain coefficient estimates declines significantly over time.

Fourth, we disaggregate non-British colonies by their colonizer and show that no single non-British colonizer drives the findings (Appendix Table [A.13](#)).

### 4.3 Selecting Better Colonies?

Many studies propose colonial or pre-colonial factors other than British colonization to predict democracy. Tables [2](#), [A.14](#), [A.15](#), and [A.16](#) evaluate prominent alternative historical accounts: European settlers, Protestant missionaries, other colonial and historical factors, human capital, and geography. These tables generate two main takeaways. First, alternative historical accounts do not explain away the Britain effect. The Britain coefficient remains large and statistically significant in every regression in the first year of independence (Columns 3 and 4 of each panel), and the coefficient estimates across the entire post-independence period are also minimally impacted in most specifications (Columns 1 and 2). Second, the disaggregated time periods and samples qualify arguments about other colonial legacies. Overall, these findings mitigate concerns that Britain—which, as the world’s leading naval power in the 19th century, was well-positioned to annex the most economically and strategically desirable colonies—simply colonized places that were inclined to become more democratic regardless of which European power colonized them.

Panels A and B of Table [2](#) assess the European settlers thesis—premised on the idea that colonial European settlers transplanted representative institutions—which does not explain away the temporally contingent Britain effect and itself receives circumscribed support. When examining post-1945 independence countries, the colonial European settler coefficient is consistently small in magnitude and never statistically significant. Among all non-European countries, the settlers thesis receives support in all years and in post-1991 years but not at independence. Therefore, European settlers may explain some variation in post-colonial democracy, but these differences did not exist at independence. Comparing across columns and across these two panels suggests that democratic gains by ex-Spanish American countries in the 1980s and 1990s account entirely for the significant settlers coefficient. We require additional theorizing to explain why—if colonial European settlers bequeathed democratic legacies—these effects appeared more than a century after independence.

The thesis that areas with longer histories of statehood above the local level should be less democratic,

**Table 2: Alternative Historical Explanations**

Dependent variable: <i>polity2</i> score						
Panel A. European settlers, post-1945 independence countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	3.425*** (1.145)	2.501** (1.081)	6.017*** (1.457)	6.543*** (1.679)	1.477 (1.276)	0.361 (1.396)
ln(Eu. pop. %)	0.132 (0.260)	0.0156 (0.262)	-0.0225 (0.303)	-0.313 (0.299)	0.435 (0.291)	0.281 (0.319)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.064	0.169	0.200	0.385	0.033	0.154
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel B. European settlers, all non-European countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	4.647*** (0.939)	4.767*** (0.894)	6.297*** (1.182)	6.296*** (1.128)	0.689 (1.048)	0.578 (0.963)
ln(European settlers)	0.620*** (0.101)	0.416*** (0.117)	0.205 (0.141)	0.0131 (0.151)	0.851*** (0.148)	0.553*** (0.160)
Country-years	11,088	11,071	129	127	3,147	3,130
R-squared	0.193	0.232	0.226	0.293	0.168	0.279
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel C. State antiquity in 1500, post-1945 independence countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	5.202*** (1.152)	4.177*** (1.098)	8.471*** (1.386)	8.163*** (1.662)	3.219** (1.266)	1.754 (1.360)
State antiquity in 1500	-0.382 (1.712)	-0.0824 (2.165)	1.537 (2.033)	4.478 (3.015)	-2.532 (1.996)	-2.994 (3.128)
Country-years	3,333	3,246	62	60	1,471	1,423
R-squared	0.156	0.219	0.400	0.450	0.095	0.149
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel D. State antiquity in 1500, all non-European countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	5.488*** (1.090)	5.667*** (1.001)	8.356*** (1.090)	8.231*** (1.079)	1.542 (1.124)	1.348 (1.055)
State antiquity in 1500	-3.664*** (1.162)	-2.131* (1.277)	-0.633 (1.376)	0.585 (1.532)	-4.795*** (1.653)	-2.635 (1.939)
Country-years	10,122	10,122	112	112	2,763	2,763
R-squared	0.176	0.220	0.380	0.398	0.082	0.183
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel E. Protestant missionaries, post-1945 independence countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	2.690** (1.180)	2.332** (1.048)	5.060*** (1.545)	6.398*** (1.594)	0.639 (1.294)	-0.0189 (1.345)
Protestant missionaries	0.988** (0.459)	0.487 (0.637)	1.489*** (0.403)	1.332*** (0.490)	0.625 (0.452)	0.171 (0.697)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.088	0.173	0.269	0.410	0.022	0.146
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel F. Protestant missionaries, all non-European countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	1.431 (1.061)	2.397** (0.966)	4.795*** (1.359)	5.042*** (1.322)	-1.031 (1.187)	-0.289 (1.019)
Protestant missionaries	1.393*** (0.429)	0.744* (0.422)	1.607*** (0.360)	1.254*** (0.393)	0.895** (0.410)	0.0105 (0.418)
Country-years	10,395	10,395	121	121	2,980	2,980
R-squared	0.053	0.129	0.270	0.302	0.020	0.201
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES

Notes: The paired panels in Table 2 are identical to those in Table 1 except each adds one additional covariate: log of colonial European population, state antiquity in 1500, or Protestant missionaries. Appendix Table A.2 describes these variables and their sources. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

evaluated in Panels C and D, receives even weaker support. Overall, the results are similar to those for European settlers: no support in the post-1945 decolonization sample; and, among all non-European countries, some support in all years and post-1991 (although not when including covariates), but not at independence. Every specification for the first year of independence has a positive sign, i.e., opposite from the theoretical prediction that a longer history of statehood hinders democracy. Appendix Table A.14 demonstrates similar results when controlling for related pre-colonial or early colonial factors: European settler mortality rates (Acemoglu et al. 2001), historical population density (Acemoglu et al. 2002), years elapsed since a territory’s Neolithic transition (Hariri 2012), and year of colonial conquest.

The Protestant missionary hypothesis also cannot explain away the Britain effect at independence,<sup>12</sup> and itself appears to follow a similar temporal pattern. In Panels E and F, Protestant missionaries correlate somewhat strongly with democracy in all years, and very strongly at independence—but not after 1991. Additional theorizing is needed to explain this temporally contingent pattern because existing pro-missionary arguments rely on the types of structural cultural influences that seemingly should imply a long-term in addition to a short-term effect (Woodberry 2012; Lankina and Getachew 2012). Tables A.15 and A.16 show that two related human capital explanations (secondary education and literacy) also cannot explain away the Britain effect, nor can standard geographical controls.

#### 4.4 Heterogeneity Within the British Empire

Appendix Section A.4 examines heterogeneity within the British empire. The British empire was notable for the cultural and geographic diversity of areas it ruled and for the variety of institutional forms adopted to govern them. Various British bureaucracies—such as the Colonial Office, India Office, the Foreign Office, and for-profit corporations—established their own local institutions and followed divergent policies toward local inhabitants and traditional authorities. Whereas many argue that Britain bequeathed democratic legacies only to directly ruled colonies (Diamond 1989; Lange 2004; Olsson 2009; Owolabi 2015), Appendix Tables A.17 through A.20 show that many subsets of British colonies exhibit the core time-varying pattern. There is evidence of democratic advantages at independence among indirectly ruled British colonies, British colonies without metropolitan legal institutions, short-ruled British colonies, and when subsetting the data

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<sup>12</sup>The magnitude of the coefficient estimate for British colonialism in Panel F of Table 2 relative to Panel B of Table 1 is somewhat attenuated because Woodberry (2012) is missing data for the four neo-Britains.



to only include Sub-Saharan African colonies. One difference found in these tables, however, is that directly ruled colonies as measured using Lange’s (2009) customary courts variable exhibit a democratic advantage even in the post-1991 period (Panel A of Table A.17, although it is not robust to adding covariates). Still, directly ruled colonies fit the general pattern of convergence because the coefficient estimate is considerably smaller than at independence (37% decline between Columns 1 and 5), and other proxies for direct British rule do not exhibit any evidence of persistence: British colonies with metropolitan legal institutions and long-ruled British colonies (Panels B and C of Table A.17).

## 5 Decolonization Policies and Divergent Inheritances

Despite wide-ranging debates about British colonial legacies, existing theories cannot explain change over time documented in Figure 1 among post-1945 decolonization cases: the strong short-term, yet weak long-term, estimated effect for British colonialism. The remainder of the article presents a theory that emphasizes (1) Britain’s relatively gradual and flexible approach to decolonization,<sup>13</sup> and (2) the importance of international democracy promotion for mitigating colonial legacies. This section focuses on democracy levels at independence, and the next section explains why the effect declined over time.

To explain British colonies’ initial democratic advantages, we argue that—relative to its imperial rivals—Britain more adeptly encouraged democratic preparation before granting independence, and better tailored independence timing to individual colonies’ democratic development. Consequently, Britain promoted more competitive elections prior to granting independence, and we show that British colonies would not have exhibited their democratic advantage at independence had they counterfactually gained independence even several years before they factually did. Britain also tended to grant independence in response to strong local demands, which prevented having to relinquish the post-colonial state to guerrilla movements. By contrast, other colonizers alternated between an undignified hurry to relinquish colonial possessions, inflexible opposition to independence, and attempts to guarantee post-colonial influence. Statistical evidence demonstrates that these decolonization differences—which stemmed in part from Britain’s relatively high level of democracy and less entrenched colonial lobby—help to explain divergent democratic inheritances.

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<sup>13</sup>This contention builds off historically oriented research on post-World War II decolonization (Smith 1978; Kahler 1984; Spruyt 2005).

## 5.1 Democracy as an “Honourable” Exit Strategy

Britain more actively encouraged democratic preparation prior to granting independence and tailored the timing of independence to individual colonies’ democratic development (Young 1970). Britain generally followed its decolonization strategy of transferring “complete power to colonies as soon as the transfer could be made decently—that is, to a democratically elected government which could reasonably be held to represent a ‘national will’” (Fieldhouse 1986, 8), although of course not every colony met this ideal. The final pre-independence election tended to culminate a longer process of democratic devolution to fulfill Britain’s goal of an “honourable exit” (Young 1970, 482). This produced structures for democratically electing national officials. For example, India gained independence from Britain in 1947, about a year after the introduction of responsible self-government at the national level, although wealthy voters had elected national and provincial legislators since the early 1920s, and elected officials had controlled all the executive departments in some provinces since the 1930s.

Even in poorer and less institutionalized Nigeria, Britain imposed a federal constitution in 1954 designed to balance sharp regional divisions and to prevent undemocratic power concentration by any one group. In the late 1950s, as France pushed out its African colonies, in Nigeria “the Secretary of State for the Colonies refused to set a date [for independence] until regional self-government had been tested and other problems, especially the related questions of minority fears and the demand for new states, had been resolved” (Sklar and Whitaker 1966, 51). In India, Nigeria, and many other cases, Britain introduced elections well before independence but installed increasingly comprehensive reforms as independence became more likely.

This pattern contrasts starkly with France, the largest non-British colonizer. Despite implementing uniform electoral reforms in all its African colonies shortly after World War II, France planned to retain power for the long term until circumstances changed in the late 1950s, after failures in Vietnam and Algeria had “progressively infected all French political life” (Young 1970, 471). Consequently, only two years after every French African colony except Guinea had voted to remain within the French colonial sphere, France simultaneously granted independence to all 14 of its Sub-Saharan African colonies with a population over 100,000. Similarly, Belgium quickly retreated from Africa after rioting in Leopoldville in 1959, granting independence to the Congo in 1960 and to Rwanda and Burundi in 1962. By contrast, British colonialism in Africa ended in stages throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

Table 3 assesses the effects of Britain’s calculated independence timing. If Britain tended to hold onto its colonies longer to secure higher democracy levels, then it should be true that if Britain had let go of its colonies earlier, they would have not have enjoyed the relative democratic inheritance documented throughout the article. Although British colonies held a democratic advantage relative to non-British colonies throughout the first half of the 20th century, this advantage grew precipitously in the last few years of colonial rule (see Appendix Figure A.2). The dependent variable in Table 3 is a “counterfactual” democracy measure at independence. For non-British colonies, this variable takes the value of the country’s V-Dem polyarchy score in the first full year of independence. For British colonies, this variable takes the value of the colony’s polyarchy score either five (Columns 1 and 2) or one year before independence (Columns 3 and 4). These regressions assess whether, had British counterfactually granted independence to its colonies earlier than it factually did—perhaps by following France’s path of pushing all its colonies out in a single year—whether they would still have enjoyed a democratic advantage at independence. Strikingly, given the robust positive correlations between British colonialism and democracy in the first year of independence (see Appendix Table A.6 for the original specifications using V-Dem), the coefficient estimate flips to negative and significant for the five-year counterfactual and is insignificant with an inconsistent sign in the one-year counterfactual. This suggests strongly that Britain’s concerted democracy promotion in the *immediate* lead-up to independence was crucial for generating its colonies’ relative democratic inheritance, as opposed to longer-term factors.

**Table 3: British Colonialism and “Counterfactual” Democracy Level at Independence**

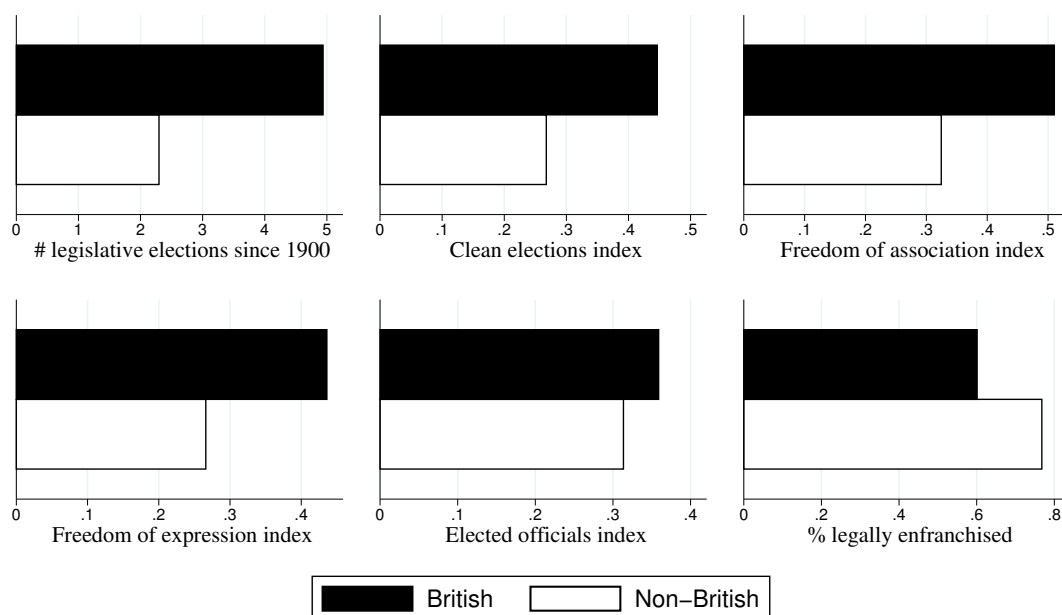
	DV: “Counterfactual” V-Dem level at independence			
	Br. cols.: V-Dem 5 yrs. before		Br. cols.: V-Dem 1 yr. before	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
British colony	-0.0796** (0.0353)	-0.0993*** (0.0346)	0.00624 (0.0376)	-0.00454 (0.0382)
Country-years	65	61	65	61
R-squared	0.075	0.223	0.000	0.104
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES

Notes: Table 3 summarizes a series of OLS regressions by presenting coefficient estimates, and robust standard error estimates clustered by country in parentheses. Columns 2 and 4 control for the same standard democracy covariates as in Table 1, Panel A. The sample in every specification consists of post-1945 independence countries. \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .

Britain’s divergent policy approach to decolonization affected colonies’ political climate immediately before independence. Figure 2 depicts averages from six V-Dem indicators (cumulative lower house elections since 1900, and the five polyarchy components used in Appendix Table A.8). The data support the idea that British colonies were more democratic immediately prior to independence than non-British

colonies across a range of democratic contestation indicators. British colonies had freer elections, and greater freedom of association and expression. They also enjoyed more extensive electoral experience. At independence, the average British colony had experienced six lower house elections since 1900, whereas the average non-British colony had only two. By contrast, British colonies were not significantly different on two lesser measures of democracy: whether the executive was elected, and franchise size. Simply having elected officials across a broad franchise did not necessarily correspond to high electoral fairness, powerful elected officials, or the broader presence of democratic institutions. Instead, all colonies followed a similar trajectory after World War II with regard to the presence of elections and a nominally large franchise.<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 2: Democratic Preparation at Independence**



*Notes:* The sample for Figure 2 contains all post-1945 independence countries with V-Dem data, which provides all six variables. Each variable is measured in the year before independence.

## 5.2 Avoiding Violent Power Transfers

Another aspect of the British government's flexible approach to decolonization was that it usually ceded power before pressure for independence engendered violent rebellion. The rarity of major rebellions in

<sup>14</sup>Appendix Table A.8 provides corresponding regression results, although the time period differs slightly from that in Figure 2: the year after independence as opposed to the year before independence.

British colonies contrasted with France's heavy-handed policies in Vietnam after Japan departed, and its view that Algeria was an integral part of France—similar to how Portugal viewed its African colonies. Where these violent rebellions succeeded, they limited the colonizer's power to set the terms and timing of independence by increasing the costs of remaining in the colony and by creating powerful alternative claimants to state power. In this situation, independence arrangements resembled negotiated surrender more closely than constitution-making. These treaties tended to hand power to the former guerrilla movement in a hasty or disorganized fashion, and these rebel groups tended to establish authoritarian regimes (Wantchekon and Garcia-Ponce 2015, 9).

One consequence of Britain's more flexible decolonization policies was that it faced fewer major revolts in its colonies after World War II than other powers. Within our sample, 28% of non-British colonies experienced major decolonization violence versus 6% of British colonies. Even when the British did face such rebellions, as in Malaysia and Kenya, they successfully avoided handing over power to rebels through a combination of successful counterinsurgency and granting opportunities to non-violent nationalist groups. Our guerrilla takeover variable does not score any violent takeovers in British colonies in our sample, compared to three French, three Portuguese, and Dutch Indonesia.<sup>15</sup> The absence of guerrilla takeovers in British colonies spared its new states "a potentially potent source of antidemocratic pressure" (Diamond 1988, 9).

Panel A of Appendix Table A.21 assesses the democratic implications of guerrilla takeovers. Columns 1 and 2 examine the guerrilla takeover correlation in isolation, with and without covariates. They show that this factor is negative and significantly correlated with democracy levels at independence, roughly the same magnitude of the coefficients for British colonialism shown throughout the article. Columns 3 and 4 re-run these specifications while adding the British colonial dummy. Because no British colonies are coded as having guerrilla takeovers, these regressions compare British colonies and (non-British) guerrilla takeover countries to non-British non-guerrilla takeover countries. Both variables are statistically significant, although the Britain coefficient is somewhat attenuated from previous regressions, about 12%. Although the absence of guerrilla takeovers in British colonies cannot by itself explain the Britain effect at independence, it appears to be one contributing factor to British colonies' more favorable democratic inheritance.

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<sup>15</sup>The sample does not include South Yemen because its subsequent merger with North Yemen does not allow comparisons in the post-Cold War period. Additionally, Zimbabwe gained independence from a rogue white settler government rather than directly from Britain.

### 5.3 Explaining Divergent Decolonization Policies

Two factors appear particularly important for explaining Britain's better-planned decolonization policies. First, Britain itself was more democratic than most other decolonizing powers, consistent with existing research showing that democratic powers are more likely to spread democracy than are dictatorial powers. Narizny (2012, 362) argues that Britain tended to promote a liberal state-society relationship in its colonies to advantage British firms. More broadly, Gunitsky (2014, 569-71) argues that democratic great powers seek to expand their trade and patronage networks by democratizing client states, hence shifting the institutional preferences of domestic actors and coalitions, although the present argument departs somewhat from Boix's (2011, 815) claim that democratic powers only seek to export democracy to wealthier states where they expect democracy to be stable. Whereas existing research focuses mainly on post-independence Western influence, we suggest that a similar phenomenon occurred during post-World War II decolonization—part of the Cold War period often thought to be a low tide for international democracy promotion. Across empires, the United States, Belgium, and Netherlands were also stably democratic, whereas Portugal and Spain were both authoritarian until the end of the decolonization era. France, although never fully authoritarian, went through a less democratic period during the 1950s and 1960s when Charles de Gaulle revised the constitution to personalize power after gaining office following a military revolt in Algeria.

Second, the political power of social groups that favored continued colonial rule—in particular, European settlers and business interests—were weaker in Britain. French citizens in Algeria could vote in French elections and their lobby often held the balance of power in unstable Fourth Republic governments. They successfully prevented decolonization until the late 1950s (Marshall 1973). Investors with colonial interests provided another pressure group that favored limiting devolution. France protected firms in its colonies against international competition (Kahler 1984), and Belgium's largest company, the Societe Generale de Belgique, controlled 60% of the Congo's economy (Peemans 1975, 182). By contrast, although pro-colonial interests were present in Britain, the country possessed a less powerful pro-colonial lobby than did other colonial powers (Spruyt 2005). For example, in Rhodesia, the British government pressured European settlers to grant broader rights to Africans, and in 1968 overcame pro-settler forces in the House of Lords to impose economic sanctions on the rogue settler regime (Coggins 2006).

Appendix Table [A.21](#) supports two empirical implications of colonizers' divergent democratization com-

mitments. Panel B examines the metropole's *polity2* score in each country's year of independence. Panel C uses the Manifesto Project's (Gabel and Huber 2000) measure of the degree to which metropolitan political parties' manifestos mentioned decolonization and anti-imperialism, a proxy for the power of colonial lobbies. Higher levels of metropole democracy and heightened political party attention to decolonization are each significantly correlated with ex-colonies' *polity2* scores at independence (Columns 1 and 2). These factors also somewhat attenuate the British colonialism effect at independence, with the coefficient estimates ranging from 27% to 41% lower than in regressions that omit both intervening factors but use the same sample.

## 5.4 Promoting Friendly Successor Regimes?

An alternative possible explanation for divergent democratic inheritances relates to colonizers' specific desire to promote friendly successor regimes, even if they were authoritarian. Several prominent cases featured pro-French leaders winning elections with the help of the colonial authorities and then building durable authoritarian regimes, including Gabon, Cote d'Ivoire, and Senegal. However, this observation does not convincingly explain lower post-colonial democracy levels in non-British colonies. Britain *also* attempted to promote friendly post-independence regimes, exemplified by Malaysia, Swaziland, Jordan, and most West Indies states.

Two pieces of statistical evidence substantiate that post-colonial relationships were not considerably different between ex-British and other former colonies. First, Appendix Table [A.22](#) evaluates two post-independence measures that affected the relationship with the ex-colonizer: Communist bloc membership and the presence of a NATO base in the country. Neither of these factors systematically correlate with democracy at independence in models that also control for British colonialism, and the Britain coefficient estimate is largely unchanged. Second, Appendix Table [A.23](#) examines countries' differences in ideal points from their colonizer, measured using voting data from the United Nations General Assembly. It presents a bivariate specification, as well as ones with region and/or year fixed effects to capture common preferences among countries. Although the coefficient estimate for ex-British colonies is positive—indicating that ex-British colonies voted differently than Britain more frequently than other ex-colonies from their former colonizer—it is not statistically significant in any specification (the lowest p-value is 0.27).

Overall, this evidence supports that although non-British colonies more frequently harbored pro-colonial *dictatorships* than ex-British colonies, this reflected British preferences for democratic decolonization reforms—whether to friendly or unfriendly local elites—rather than, necessarily, lesser ability to secure their preferred successor regime.

## 6 International Democracy Promotion and Diminishing Legacies

Although different decolonization approaches bequeathed ex-British colonies with a more established electoral framework at independence, these policies minimally altered deeper structural factors argued to affect democracy promotion. For example, only five British colonies in the core sample had GDP per capita levels at independence above the \$6,055 threshold that Przeworski et al. (2000, 98) show perfectly predicts democratic stability—five oil-rich countries, four of which were highly authoritarian Gulf sheikhdoms. Nor did power-sharing arrangements at independence in countries such as Nigeria and Uganda—engendered by electoral competition—solve deep sources of inter-ethnic strife (Paine, forthcoming).<sup>16</sup>

The general weakness of domestic factors posited to consolidate democracy should instead leave countries vulnerable to the broader international climate for democracy promotion, which we argue helps to explain diminishing legacies. Evidence from time series regressions demonstrate patterns of both (1) democratic reversals shortly after independence in ex-British colonies and (2) greater democratic gains by non-former British colonies several decades after independence. The unfavorable Cold War international environment corresponds empirically with democratic reversals, although ex-British colonies remained more democratic on average than other ex-colonies for several decades (Figure 1). However, “Third Wave” democratization forces that began during the Cold War and accelerated afterwards created more favorable international conditions for Western democracy promotion. This created an alternative pathway to democratization—or at least heightened political competition—for countries with unfavorable colonial legacies. By contrast, “ceiling effects” imply that ex-British colonies should gain less on average from alternative democratization forces. Combining these effects with immediate post-independence reversals should largely wash out the initial British colonial advantage, which the data demonstrate.

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<sup>16</sup>Unreported regressions show that British colonies and other colonies are statistically indistinguishable at independence in ethnic fractionalization levels or income per capita (after excluding the Gulf states).



## 6.1 Post-Independence Longitudinal Trends

Figure 1 depicted two key longitudinal trends in democracy since independence, complementing the main cross-sectional patterns discussed above. First, although both British and non-British ex-colonies experienced democratic decline within the first years of independence, this pattern is stronger among ex-British colonies. Average *polity2* score fell by more than twice as much in former British colonies compared to others in the six years after independence, 2.8 points compared to 1.4. Second, ex-British colonies did not benefit from international trends toward democratization in the 1980s and 1990s as strongly as did other countries. In the three decades following the initial wave of democratic reversals, former British colonies exhibited almost identical democracy levels as a decade after independence—compared to a 4.2 point increase among other countries. Because many countries in the sample gained independence in the early 1960s, the period of 30-to-35 years after independence roughly corresponds to the peak of the “Third Wave” in the mid-1990s.

Tabular data in Appendix Table A.4 display a similar pattern. Many ex-British colonies exhibited democratic declines after independence: over half of the British democracies at independence exhibited average *polity2* scores less than 6 since 1991. Furthermore, ex-British colonies have largely failed to move from non-democracy at independence to subsequent democratization. Among the ex-British colonies that were not democratic at independence, none have risen to an average *polity2* scores of at least 6 since 1991. By contrast, 16% of non-British colonies rose to Polity scores greater than 6.

Table 4 assesses these trends statistically by estimating dynamic panel models. The model is:

$$polity2_{it} = \beta_i + \gamma_t + \theta polity2_{it-1} + \rho Ind.Years_{it} + \delta BritishColony_i \times Ind.Years_{it} + \beta X_{it} + \epsilon_{it}, \quad (2)$$

where  $polity2_{it}$  is the *polity2* score for country  $i$  in year  $t$ ,  $polity2_{it-1}$  is the lagged dependent variable,  $\delta$  is the main parameter of interest,  $Ind.Years$  is the number of years since independence,  $X_{it}$  is a vector of time-varying covariates that differs across the specifications,  $\beta_i$  is a vector of country fixed effects, and  $\gamma_t$  is a vector of year fixed effects. The unit and time fixed effects account for the confounding influence of time invariant heterogeneity among countries and global shifts in democracy promotion over time. The models do not estimate the direct effect of *BritishColony* because it is perfectly collinear with the vector of country fixed effects, and every model uses country-clustered standard errors.

**Table 4: Time Series Results**

Dependent variable: <i>polity2</i> score						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-	All post-indep. years, 1945-	1st 6 yrs. post-indep.	1st 6 yrs. post-indep.	After 6 yrs. post-indep.	After 6 yrs. post-indep.
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Years since indep.	0.0121 (0.00794)	0.0212** (0.0105)	0.123 (0.116)	-0.0714 (0.147)	0.0150*** (0.00354)	0.0185* (0.00940)
Br. col.*Years since indep.	-0.0128** (0.00516)	-0.0123** (0.00553)	-0.437** (0.198)	-0.470** (0.204)	-0.0118* (0.00593)	-0.0122** (0.00582)
Country-years	3,811	3,668	431	407	3,380	3,261
Countries	73	70	73	69	73	70
R-squared	0.850	0.850	0.449	0.474	0.856	0.857
LDV	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Country FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Year FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Marginal effects						
Post Ind. Years   Br. colony=1	-0.000693 (0.00782)	0.00893 (0.0112)	-0.315** (0.133)	-0.542*** (0.208)	0.00319 (0.00458)	0.00631 (0.00993)
Post Ind. Years   Br. colony=0	0.0121 (0.00794)	0.0212** (0.0105)	0.123 (0.116)	-0.0714 (0.147)	0.0150*** (0.00354)	0.0185** (0.00940)

Notes: Table 4 summarizes dynamic time series regressions (described in Equation 2) by presenting coefficient estimates for the main variables of theoretical interest, and country-clustered standard error estimates in parentheses. The other coefficient estimates are suppressed for expositional clarity. The bottom panel presents marginal effect estimates calculated from the same models. Every specification includes a lagged dependent variable, country fixed effects, and year fixed effects. The even-numbered columns additionally control for the three time-varying standard democracy covariates in Table 1, Panel A: income per capita, population, and oil production per capita. The sample in every specification consists of post-1945 independence countries. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

Columns 1 and 2 of Table 4 show a general positive trend over time in democracy levels among non-British colonies (p-value in Column 1 is 0.129), but also that ex-British colonies have experienced less pronounced gains, as evidenced by the negative and statistically significant interaction term between British colonialism and years since independence. Columns 3 and 4 analyze the first six years of independence and demonstrate a statistically significant negative marginal effect estimate for years since independence among ex-British colonies, which indicates decreased democracy levels. Finally, the post-six independence year sample in Columns 5 and 6 reveals similar findings as the full temporal sample: other ex-colonies gained in democracy levels more strongly than former British colonies.

## 6.2 Unfavorable International Conditions and Democratic Reversals

Most colonies in our sample gained independence amid Cold War competition that undermined Western incentives to promote democracy. The literature broadly agrees that Cold War competition enabled dictators to play the United States and the Soviet Union, and their respective allies, off each other to avoid democratic

reforms. Even if the United States inherently preferred democratic regimes, its threat to withhold aid if not reciprocated by democratic reforms was not credible given the desire to avoid pushing countries into the Soviet camp (Dunning 2004, 411). Correspondingly, this period coincided with the “Second Reverse Wave” of democratization (Huntington 1993).

The combination of poor international conditions and weak domestic conditions—resulting from Britain’s decolonization policies focusing more on election-promotion than on transforming society—should engender democratic reversals. Table 5 lists the 10 ex-British colonies that were democratic at independence but suffered a reversal before the mid-1990s (see Appendix Table A.4),<sup>17</sup> and therefore drive the pattern demonstrated in Columns 3 and 4 of Table 4. In most cases, the reversals occurred within a decade of independence. Each case exhibited either a military coup or authoritarian consolidation by the incumbent. Such events highlight the importance of domestic factors, as opposed to external regime-changing factors like British intervention or rebel victory in a post-colonial civil war.

**Table 5: Reversal Events in Failed British-Colonized Democracies**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Independence year</i>	<i>Reversal year</i>	<i>Event</i>
Burma	1948	1958	Military coup
Sri Lanka	1948	1978	Consolidation
Sudan	1956	1958	Military coup
Malaysia	1957	1969	Consolidation
Nigeria	1960	1966	Military coup
Sierra Leone	1961	1967	Military coup
Uganda	1962	1966	Military coup
Gambia	1965	1994	Military coup
Lesotho	1966	1970	Consolidation
Fiji	1970	1987	Military coup

### 6.3 Favorable International Conditions and Third Wave Democratization

International conditions changed sharply in the last decades of the Cold War—and especially after 1991—to favor democracy promotion. Not only did many Soviet-funded dictatorships lose their source of support, the fall of the Soviet Union also substantially increased the West’s leverage to implement democratic conditionalities in return for foreign aid (Dunning 2004; Levitsky and Way 2010; Boix 2011). Such shocks to the international system can disrupt authoritarian equilibria. To exemplify the importance of the Cold War ending, Gunitsky (2014) argues that shocks to superpowers have ushered the different international

<sup>17</sup>Somalia, Botswana, and Zimbabwe also exhibit similar patterns.

waves of democracy, and characterizes 1989 to 1995 as the only hegemonic shock since 1947. Haggard and Kaufman (2016, 9) show that the number of regime transitions in 1990 and 1991 far exceeded that in any other years between 1980 and 2008. This grounds why we distinguished the post-1991 period throughout the paper.

Favorable international conditions should foster democratic gains. In five of the six non-British cases with an average *polity2* score of at least 6 after 1991 (Benin, Cape Verde, Lebanon, Madagascar, Mali, Philippines; see Appendix Table A.4), five transitioned to democracy in or after 1991 and the other (Philippines) occurred in 1987. Thus, the only non-British colonies that have experienced relatively high democracy levels experienced their gains during a period several decades after independence in which international forces favored democratization—the first major international shock to destabilize colonial-inherited regimes. Angola and Mozambique provide additional relevant examples for the theory because of their guerrilla origins, although neither achieved full democracy. Rebels seized control of the government in both countries at independence in 1975 after long decolonization wars with Portugal. These countries fit the general pattern in Appendix Table A.21 that guerrilla regimes were undemocratic at independence. However, intense Cold War rivalries in these countries reached a detente in the late 1980s (Reno 2011, 76), which fostered a lasting liberalization of Mozambique’s formerly one-party regime in the 1990s (Manning 2005) and—briefly—free and fair parliamentary elections in Angola in 1992 (Fituni 1995, 152).

Third Wave forces also facilitated greater democratic contestation in some ex-British colonies, such as Kenya and Zambia. However, the leveling influence of the changed international environment should promote fewer gains in British colonies because of ceiling effects. Ex-British colonies’ higher baseline democracy levels in the 1980s imply that there were fewer possible gains to accrue from these alternative democratization forces. Appendix Table A.25 supports this claim. The unit of analysis is country and the dependent variable is average democracy score since 1986 (the first year in which an upward trend begins in Panel A of Figure 1). Column 1 includes all countries from the Table 1 sample and recovers the visual intuition from Figure 1: ex-British colonies gained less during the Third Wave than other colonies. Column 2 shows a similar finding when adding covariates. However, the remaining columns include only countries whose average Polity score between 1980 and 1985 was less than 0, which includes every non-British colony in the sample but only a subset of the British colonies.<sup>18</sup> Column 3 shows that the estimated difference in

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<sup>18</sup>The low maximum Polity score among non-British colonies eliminates the common support needed to

Third Wave gains between British and non-British colonies drops by 79% when excluding the 17 British colonies with higher baseline democracy levels than any non-British colonies in the sample, and loses statistical significance. Overall, these considerations help to explain the evidence from Columns 5 and 6 of Table 4 that ex-British colonies experienced less pronounced gains during the Third Wave, accounting for the near-convergence in democracy levels shown in Figure 1 and across the regression tables.

## 6.4 Empirically Assessing Decolonization Mechanisms After the Cold War

A final implication of this focus on democratic reversals after independence is that the decolonization mechanisms assessed in Appendix Table A.21 should correlate weakly with post-1991 democracy levels. Appendix Table A.24 supports this implication. In contrast to existing arguments that revolutionary takeovers tend to engender highly durable authoritarian regimes, the coefficient estimate for guerrilla takeover at independence is small in magnitude and null in the post-1991 period (Panel A). Metropole democracy score exhibits a similar pattern (Panel B). The coefficient estimate for colonizer manifesto diminishes by 58% in Column 1 between the independence and post-1991 samples (Panel C). Although the estimate remains statistically significant, unreported results show that a handful of colonies in the small empires (United States, Dutch, Belgian) drive the correlation.

## 7 Conclusion

This article established a time-varying pattern between British colonialism and post-colonial democracy. Ex-British colonies enjoyed a democratic advantage at independence because of more concerted British efforts to promote democracy leading up to independence. However, these countries became democratic during amid inauspicious international conditions—Cold War superpower competition—for consolidating democracy. Later shifts in the international system corresponding with “Third Wave” democratic forces exerted larger democratizing effects for non-British colonies (because of their lower starting point), which combined with earlier democratic reversals in ex-British colonies to generate near-convergence between British and other ex-colonies since 1991.

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estimate an interaction effect, which is why we prefer truncating the sample.

The most direct contribution of these findings is to advance debates about British colonialism and democracy. Simply put, the British democratic legacy cannot be understood without examining changes in outcomes over time. Expounding the time-varying pattern is crucial not only to reconcile mixed existing statistical findings, but also to assess theoretical explanations for the Britain effect—yielding our focus on decolonization-era effects rather than on the traditional explanations from British colonialism studies regarding longer-term cultural and institutional effects. Additionally, although our supplemental results that examine heterogeneity within the British empire complement some accounts by showing evidence that directly ruled British colonies may have enjoyed more durable democratic legacies (Lange 2004; Olsson 2009; Owolabi 2015), we also show that even indirectly ruled British colonies governed for relatively short periods of time enjoyed a democratic advantage at independence. Our decolonization-based explanation accounts for important democratic similarities that existed across much of the British empire. Overall, rather than extolling or condemning British rule, our findings support a more nuanced interpretation: it facilitated short-term democratic gains relative to other European empires, but in general British rule failed to engender conditions for consolidating democracy.

More broadly, the analysis also raises important questions regarding for how long historical legacies persist and why they end. Influential accounts of colonial legacies emphasize mechanisms that generate long-term path dependence between colonial-era events and contemporary outcomes (e.g., Putnam 1993; Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson 2001, 2001). Research on economic development posits questions such as “Was the Wealth of Nations Determined in 1000 B.C.?” (Comin et al. 2010). We do not question persistent long-term legacies for economic development, but do highlight that such frameworks may not apply to explaining democracy.

By contrast, the literature on colonialism and democracy yields less precise expectations for the length of democratic legacies. For example, Hariri’s (2012) study on state antiquity/colonial European settlers examines post-colonial democracy levels between 1991 and 2012, and Woodberry’s (2012) on colonial Protestant missionaries examines post-colonial democracy levels between 1950 and 1994. However, our theoretical and statistical approach suggests the importance of analyzing various time periods, which Table 2 confirms for these specific factors. The coefficient estimate for Protestant missionaries follows a similar temporal pattern as documented for British colonies: strong at independence and weak since 1991. Our dual theoretical focus on decolonization reforms and shifts in the international system may prove useful to better

understand Protestant missionary legacies in future research. By contrast, the coefficient estimates for state antiquity and European settlers does not follow a temporal pattern anticipated by any existing theories—weak at independence, and strong only since 1991 and only in the full sample of non-European colonies. Additional theorizing is needed to explain this pattern, which appears to be driven by Spanish American countries democratizing in the 1980s and 1990s, more than a century after independence for nearly all these colonies.

Overall, for the broader literature, our approach to studying British colonial legacies offers an important step for understanding how long historical legacies persist. Other colonial-era events contained largely in the post-1945 decolonization period likely also exhibit divergent inheritances and diminishing legacies. Decolonization was a critical juncture that shaped subsequent decades, and for some effects may have been as important as the longer period of colonial rule. However, although critical junctures can shape outcomes over centuries or millennia, this is not always true: historical events, even important ones, can be reversed by subsequent ones. To explain democratic trends, shifts in the international environment appear particularly relevant. Further synthesizing different democracy literatures in future research may produce theories with greater explanatory power.

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## A.1 Data Description and Statistics

**Table A.1: Post-1945 Independence Countries**

Country	W.Eu. indep. yr.	Br. col.	Country	W.Eu. indep. yr.	Br. col.
Lebanon	1943	NO	Somalia	1960	NO
Jordan	1946	YES	Togo	1960	NO
Philippines	1946	NO	Kuwait	1961	YES
Syria	1946	NO	Sierra Leone	1961	YES
Bhutan	1947	YES	Tanzania	1961	YES
India	1947	YES	Algeria	1962	NO
Pakistan	1947	YES	Burundi	1962	NO
Israel	1948	YES	Jamaica	1962	YES
Myanmar	1948	YES	Rwanda	1962	NO
Sri Lanka	1948	YES	Trinidad & Tobago	1962	YES
Indonesia	1949	NO	Uganda	1962	YES
Libya	1951	NO	Kenya	1963	YES
Cambodia	1953	NO	Malawi	1964	YES
Laos	1954	NO	Zambia	1964	YES
Vietnam	1954	NO	Gambia	1965	YES
Morocco	1956	NO	Singapore	1965	YES
Sudan	1956	YES	Zimbabwe	1965	YES
Tunisia	1956	NO	Botswana	1966	YES
Ghana	1957	YES	Guyana	1966	YES
Malaysia	1957	YES	Lesotho	1966	YES
Guinea	1958	NO	Equatorial Guinea	1968	NO
Benin	1960	NO	Mauritius	1968	YES
Burkina Faso	1960	NO	Swaziland	1968	YES
Cameroon	1960	NO	Fiji	1970	YES
Cent. Afr. Rep.	1960	NO	Bahrain	1971	YES
Chad	1960	NO	Qatar	1971	YES
Congo	1960	NO	United Arab Emirates	1971	YES
Congo, D.R.	1960	NO	Guinea-Bissau	1974	NO
Cote d'Ivoire	1960	NO	Angola	1975	NO
Cyprus	1960	YES	Cape Verde	1975	NO
Gabon	1960	NO	Comoros	1975	NO
Madagascar	1960	NO	Mozambique	1975	NO
Mali	1960	NO	Papua New Guinea	1975	NO
Mauritania	1960	NO	Suriname	1975	NO
Niger	1960	NO	Djibouti	1977	NO
Nigeria	1960	YES	Solomon Islands	1978	YES
Senegal	1960	NO			

*Notes:* Table A.1 lists every country in the post-1945 independence sample. Lebanon is included because it gained independence among the same World War II forces that caused other colonies to gain independence in the 1940s. In a handful of cases, the first year of Polity IV data does not begin until several years after the independence year, in which case the first Polity IV year is used as the year of independence in our dataset. Independence year data from Hensel (2014).

**Table A.2: Data Sources for Additional Variables**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Notes and description</b>	<b>Source</b>
Ethnic fractionalization	Computed as 1-Herfindahl index of ethnic group shares.	Alesina et al. (2003)
Muslim percentage of population	Measured in 1980.	La Porta et al. (1999)
GDP per capita	Logged annual GDP per capita. We use Penn World Table (Feenstra et al. 2013) data and impute estimates from linear regressions using Maddison (2008) in years of missing Penn World Table data. Missing values pre-1950 and post-2011 are imputed from the country's score in 1950 and 2011, respectively.	Feenstra et al. (2013), Maddison (2008)
Population	Logged annual population. We use Penn World Table (Feenstra et al. 2013) data and impute estimates from linear regressions using Maddison (2008) in years of missing Penn World Table data. Missing values pre-1950 and post-2011 are imputed from the country's score in 1950 and 2011, respectively.	Feenstra et al. (2013), Maddison (2008)
Oil and gas production	Logged annual oil and gas production per capita.	Ross (2013)
European settlers	To capture Acemoglu et al.'s (2001) and Hariri's (2012) hypotheses about European settlers, we use the log of European population share at the date closest to independence with available data.	Easterly and Levine (2016)
State antiquity	A territory's combined years with government above local level. Following Hariri (2012), state antiquity is calculated in 1500.	Bockstette et al. (2002)
Protestant missionaries	Number of Protestant missionaries per 10,000 people in 1923.	Woodberry (2012)



**Table A.3: Summary Statistics**

<i>Post-1945 independence countries</i>			
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>N</b>
polity2	-1.501	6.617	3825
British colony	0.468	0.499	3825
Ethnic frac.	0.576	0.237	3825
Muslim %	35.963	38.15	3825
ln(Oil & gas/capita)	1.985	3.089	3825
ln(GDP/cap)	7.805	1.16	3681
ln(Pop.)	15.47	1.672	3825
ln(Eu. pop. %)	-2.298	2.272	3825
State antiquity in 1500	0.299	0.313	3333
Protestant missionaries	0.734	1.129	3825
ln(Settler mortality)	5.277	1.227	1687
Population density in 1500	5.285	6.75	2742
Years since Neolithic transition	4.358	2.537	3673
Colonial onset year	1818.645	126.849	3771
Secondary education	8.964	8.817	2535
Literacy in 1960	30.374	25.178	3504
Distance to Coast	339.084	321.418	3825
Island	0.195	0.396	3825
Landlocked	0.22	0.414	3825
Latitude	15.392	10.296	3825
Precipitation	992.914	745.344	3825
Precipitation sq.	1541270.831	1858844.619	3825
British direct rule	0.128	0.334	3825
British indirect rule	0.35	0.477	3825
Metropolitan legal institutions	0.129	0.335	3825
Colonial duration	140.495	125.841	3771
Middle East	0.127	0.333	3825
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.538	0.499	3825
Communist Bloc	0.052	0.222	3825
NATO base	0.124	0.33	3825
Guerrillas inherit state	0.092	0.289	3825
Colonizer Polity	8.202	3.1	3825
Colonizer Anti-Colonial Manifesto	0.973	0.419	3506
<i>All non-European countries since 1800</i>			
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>N</b>
polity2	-1.225	6.586	11088
British colony	0.246	0.431	11088
Ethnic frac.	0.481	0.247	11071
Muslim %	25.619	38.316	11071
ln(European settlers)	-0.866	3.513	11088
State antiquity in 1500	0.309	0.342	10122
Protestant missionaries	0.484	0.796	10395
ln(Settler mortality)	4.513	1.038	7810
ln(Pop. density in 1500)	0.65	1.743	10593
Years since Neolithic transition	4.485	2.504	10849
Colonial onset year	1693.384	163.368	8554
Island	0.157	0.363	11088
Landlocked	0.189	0.392	11088
Latitude	19.196	14.209	11088
Precipitation	1025.876	688.001	11022
Precipitation sq.	1525724.483	1635237.11	11022
British direct rule	0.106	0.308	11088
British indirect rule	0.14	0.347	11088
Metropolitan legal institutions	0.108	0.31	11088
Colonial duration	153.32	134.116	10957
Middle East	0.13	0.336	11088
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.221	0.415	11088
Communist Bloc	0.078	0.268	11088
NATO base	0.136	0.343	11088

## A.2 Robustness Checks for Table 1

Tabular data exhibit similar patterns as Figure 1. Table A.4 divides ex-colonies into four categories based on post-independence democratic experience. “Democratic consolidation” countries had a *polity2* score of at least 6 at independence and an average *polity2* score of at least 6 between 1991 and 2014. “Failed post-colonial democracies” had a *polity2* score of at least 6 at independence but an average *polity2* score less than 6 between 1991 and 2014. “Late democratizers” had a *polity2* score of at less than 6 at independence but an average *polity2* score of at least 6 between 1991 and 2014. Finally, “never democratizes” countries had *polity2* scores below 6 at independence and in the 1991 through 2014 period. Table A.4 exhibits two main patterns. First, over half of British colonies were democratic at independence, compared to only one non-British colony—Somalia, which Britain administered for 15 years after World War II. However, fewer than half of these British democracies were democratic post-1991. Second, British colonies have benefitted less from international democracy promotion. Whereas six non-British colonies that were authoritarian at independence became fully democratic by or during the Third Wave, no British colonies that were undemocratic at independence were stable democracies during the Third Wave.

**Table A.4: Cross-Tabulation of Regime Trajectories**

Democracy in 1st year?	British colony	Non-British	Regime trajectory	British colony	Non-British
Yes	18 (53%)	1 (3%)	Democratic consolidation	8 (44%)	0 (0%)
			Democratic reversion	10 (56%)	1 (100%)
No	16 (47%)	38 (97%)	Late democratizer	0 (0%)	6 (16%)
			Never democratizes	16 (100%)	32 (84%)

### A.2.1 Alternative Covariates

**Table A.5: Alternative Covariates for Table 1: Region and Year FE**

Dependent variable: <i>polity2</i> score						
Panel A. Post-1945 independence countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	2.606** (1.008)	3.304*** (1.178)	5.667*** (1.418)	8.027*** (2.911)	0.850 (1.131)	1.077 (1.302)
Country-years	3,825	3,825	73	73	1,734	1,734
R-squared	0.204	0.186	0.320	0.567	0.202	0.045
Region FE	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Year FE	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel B. All non-European countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	4.361*** (1.052)	4.239*** (1.363)	5.906*** (1.182)	7.315** (3.201)	0.918 (0.982)	0.356 (1.184)
Country-years	11,088	11,088	129	129	3,147	3,147
R-squared	0.256	0.180	0.343	0.542	0.295	0.016
Region FE	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Year FE	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES

*Notes:* Table A.5 summarizes a series of OLS regressions by presenting coefficient estimates for British colonialism, and country-clustered robust standard error estimates in parentheses. In Panel A, the odd-numbered columns control for region fixed effects: Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East and North Africa, and the rest of Asia. Small (mostly island) countries not in any of these regions compose the omitted basis category. In Panel B, the odd-numbered columns control for different region fixed effects because of the broader sample: Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East and North Africa, the rest of Asia, North and South America, and Oceania. Small (mostly island) countries not in any of these regions compose the omitted basis category. In both panels, the even-numbered columns do not include the region fixed effects but do control for year fixed effects. \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .

## A.2.2 Alternative Democracy Measures

Table A.6 evaluates two alternative democracy measures with extensive temporal coverage: V-Dem's electoral democracy index (polyarchy) and Boix et al.'s (2012) binary democracy measure. V-Dem's polyarchy is a weighted average of indices measuring freedom of association, clean elections, freedom of expression, elected officials, and suffrage. Boix et al.'s variable equals 1 for countries with high contestation and participation levels, and 0 otherwise.

**Table A.6: Alternative Democracy Measures**

Panel A. DV: V-Dem polyarchy, post-1945 independence countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	0.0958** (0.0409)	0.0494 (0.0345)	0.0914** (0.0396)	0.104*** (0.0351)	0.0586 (0.0475)	-0.00364 (0.0466)
Country-years	3,824	3,680	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.051	0.183	0.073	0.325	0.018	0.142
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel B. DV: V-Dem polyarchy, all non-European countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	0.165*** (0.0430)	0.177*** (0.0378)	0.128*** (0.0372)	0.129*** (0.0356)	0.0352 (0.0462)	0.0364 (0.0390)
Country-years	10,288	10,275	116	115	3,118	3,105
R-squared	0.091	0.163	0.112	0.175	0.004	0.217
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel C. DV: Boix et al. democracy, post-1945 independence countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	1.266*** (0.462)	1.054*** (0.403)	1.868*** (0.708)	2.207*** (0.835)	0.698 (0.479)	0.0251 (0.573)
Country-years	2,973	2,860	70	66	961	920
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel D. DV: Boix et al. democracy, all non-European countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	1.476*** (0.335)	1.837*** (0.334)	2.240*** (0.616)	2.663*** (0.756)	0.0389 (0.359)	0.0683 (0.383)
Country-years	8,988	8,986	122	121	1,675	1,673
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES

Notes: Table A.6 changes the dependent variable from Table 1 to evaluate other aggregate democracy indices. The dependent variable in Panels A and B is V-Dem's electoral democracy index (polyarchy), which is a weighed average of the components described in the notes for Tables A.8 and A.9. The dependent variable in Panels C and D is Boix et al.'s (2012) binary democracy measure, and the models are logit because of the binary dependent variable. To ensure comparability to the corresponding democracy component table, we drew the democracy variable directly from Miller (2015), one of the co-authors for Boix et al. (2012), because he provides disaggregated contestation and participation data (Table A.10). The even-numbered columns in Panels A and C control for the standard democracy covariates used in Table 1, Panel A. The even-numbered columns in Panels B and D control for the standard democracy covariates used in Table 1, Panel B. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

### A.2.3 Disaggregating Democracy: Contestation and Participation

Following the existing literature, most results in this article analyze aggregate democracy scores. However, many hybrid regimes exhibit certain features commonly associated with democracy—such as elections—without others, such as checks and balances or broad political participation. It is possible that British colonialism more strongly affected some aspects of democracy than others. Drawing on existing arguments about colonialism, the most likely British advantages at independence would concern the core contestation elements of democracy: free and fair elections, and constraints on the executive (Emerson 1960, 232; Abernethy 2000, 367). By contrast, norms of representation after World War II created elections—although not necessarily competitive—and broad franchises across the colonial world (Miller 2015). To assess these considerations, we separately analyze the three main components of the Polity IV index; the five components of V-Dem’s polyarchy index; and the contestation and participation components of Boix et al.’s (2012) binary democracy variable, measured by Miller (2015). The notes below the tables provide more detail on each variable.

Collectively, Tables A.7 through A.10 show that the pattern of divergent inheritances and diminishing legacies holds for most contestation measures, but not for participation. Three V-Dem measures correspond closely with contestation: freedom of association, clean elections, and freedom of expression. Panels A through C of Tables A.8 (post-1945 independence countries) and A.9 (all non-European countries) show that British colonialism significantly associates with all three at independence, but not post-1991. The same pattern emerges using Miller’s (2015) contestation variable (Table A.10, Panels A through D). The high contestation indicator equals 1 if he codes the regime as democratic or competitive oligarchy, and the medium contestation indicator additionally equals 1 if he codes the regime as electoral authoritarian or electoral oligarchy.

By contrast, there is no significant association between British colonial rule and the participation/suffrage component of these datasets even at independence, as Panel E of Tables A.8 and A.9 and Panels C and D of Table A.10 show. Nor is there a significant association for V-Dem’s elected officials index (Panel D of Tables A.8 and A.9), which measures the minimal democratic concept of whether the chief executive and legislature are appointed through popular elections. The V-Dem codebook notes that “a popular election is minimally defined and also includes sham elections with limited suffrage and no competition ... This index is useful primarily for aggregating higher-order indices and should not necessarily be interpreted as an important element of democracy in its own right” (44).

The components of the aggregate Polity IV index provide weaker evidence of convergence over time, as many of the British colonialism coefficient estimates are positive and significant even post-1991 (Table A.7). However, even this table provides some evidence of convergence. For all three democracy components in the main post-1945 independence sample, the Britain coefficient loses statistical significance in the post-1991 regression when adding covariates. Furthermore, in every specification, the magnitude of the coefficient estimate is considerably smaller in the post-1991 regression than in the corresponding year-of-independence regression. The median decline in magnitude is 48%.

**Table A.7: Polity IV Components**

Panel A. Post-1945 independence countries. DV: Polity IV executive recruitment						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	5.155*** (1.526)	4.037** (1.611)	8.656** (3.884)	8.802** (4.141)	6.168** (2.530)	2.750 (2.302)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.020	0.029	0.058	0.144	0.024	0.055
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel B. All non-European countries. DV: Polity IV executive recruitment						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	3.641*** (0.793)	3.780*** (0.730)	6.361*** (2.054)	6.728*** (2.284)	3.253** (1.412)	3.443** (1.489)
Country-years	11,015	10,998	129	127	3,147	3,130
R-squared	0.010	0.016	0.035	0.049	0.007	0.029
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel C. Post-1945 independence countries. DV: Polity IV executive constraints						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	5.498*** (1.514)	4.275** (1.619)	8.673** (3.811)	8.621** (4.044)	6.432** (2.469)	2.933 (2.214)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.023	0.034	0.060	0.141	0.027	0.065
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel D. All non-European countries. DV: Polity IV executive constraints						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	3.793*** (0.770)	3.978*** (0.728)	6.383*** (2.014)	6.823*** (2.231)	3.472** (1.382)	3.723** (1.453)
Country-years	11,088	11,071	129	127	3,147	3,130
R-squared	0.011	0.016	0.036	0.056	0.009	0.032
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel E. Post-1945 independence countries. DV: Polity IV political competition						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	5.491*** (1.579)	4.182** (1.659)	9.247** (3.834)	9.399** (4.065)	5.783** (2.568)	2.240 (2.338)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.023	0.033	0.067	0.137	0.021	0.052
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel F. All non-European countries. DV: Polity IV political competition						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	3.022*** (0.952)	3.264*** (0.878)	5.780*** (2.079)	6.252*** (2.274)	2.998** (1.475)	3.187** (1.543)
Country-years	11,055	11,038	129	127	3,147	3,130
R-squared	0.007	0.016	0.029	0.047	0.006	0.030
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES

Notes: Table A.7 changes the dependent variable from Table 1. The dependent variables correspond with the three main concept indices that underlie Polity IV: executive recruitment (Panels A and B), executive constraints (Panels C and D), and political competition (Panels E and F). The former two correspond with democratic contestation and the latter with democratic participation. The even-numbered columns in Panels A, C, and E control for the standard democracy covariates used in Table 1, Panel A. The even-numbered columns in Panels B, D, and F control for the standard democracy covariates used in Table 1, Panel B. \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .

**Table A.8: V-Dem Polyarchy Components, Post-1945 Independence Countries**

Panel A. DV: V-Dem freedom of association						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	0.132** (0.0532)	0.0737 (0.0492)	0.190*** (0.0566)	0.220*** (0.0531)	0.0341 (0.0604)	-0.0300 (0.0603)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.046	0.141	0.140	0.374	0.004	0.161
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel B. DV: V-Dem clean elections						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	0.164*** (0.0529)	0.0950** (0.0466)	0.153*** (0.0575)	0.158*** (0.0566)	0.145** (0.0588)	0.0339 (0.0557)
Country-years	3,823	3,679	72	68	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.082	0.235	0.094	0.272	0.063	0.195
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel C. DV: V-Dem freedom of expression						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	0.108** (0.0485)	0.0747 (0.0451)	0.144** (0.0585)	0.171*** (0.0636)	0.0180 (0.0580)	-0.0124 (0.0633)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.036	0.094	0.080	0.151	0.001	0.110
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel D. DV: V-Dem elected officials						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	0.00457 (0.0769)	-0.0729 (0.0757)	-0.106 (0.0993)	-0.0865 (0.0956)	-0.0250 (0.0824)	-0.100 (0.0977)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.000	0.076	0.016	0.264	0.001	0.064
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel E. DV: V-Dem suffrage						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	-0.0866* (0.0450)	-0.0767** (0.0382)	-0.0564 (0.0801)	0.000446 (0.0713)	-0.0763** (0.0374)	-0.0745* (0.0390)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.036	0.179	0.007	0.217	0.044	0.198
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES

Notes: Table A.8 changes the dependent variable from Table 1. The dependent variables are the five component indices used to construct the polyarchy index: freedom of association (Panel A), clean elections (Panel B), freedom of expression (Panel C), elected officials (Panel D), and suffrage (Panel E). The even-numbered columns control for the standard democracy covariates used in Table 1, Panel A. \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .

**Table A.9: V-Dem Polyarchy Components, All Non-European Countries**

Panel A. DV: V-Dem freedom of association						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	0.186*** (0.0546)	0.199*** (0.0461)	0.209*** (0.0491)	0.211*** (0.0451)	0.0240 (0.0532)	0.0191 (0.0445)
Country-years	10,369	10,356	119	118	3,118	3,105
R-squared	0.068	0.151	0.138	0.220	0.001	0.202
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel B. DV: V-Dem clean elections						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	0.237*** (0.0531)	0.248*** (0.0471)	0.234*** (0.0508)	0.230*** (0.0504)	0.0780 (0.0551)	0.0842* (0.0489)
Country-years	10,780	10,767	122	121	3,118	3,105
R-squared	0.111	0.173	0.171	0.211	0.014	0.175
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel C. DV: V-Dem freedom of expression						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	0.165*** (0.0499)	0.179*** (0.0431)	0.157*** (0.0503)	0.162*** (0.0493)	0.0274 (0.0503)	0.0226 (0.0443)
Country-years	10,326	10,313	118	117	3,118	3,105
R-squared	0.060	0.140	0.080	0.118	0.002	0.168
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel D. DV: V-Dem elected officials						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	0.164** (0.0659)	0.176*** (0.0577)	0.0930 (0.0844)	0.0879 (0.0844)	-0.0267 (0.0645)	-0.0283 (0.0603)
Country-years	10,595	10,582	124	123	3,118	3,105
R-squared	0.024	0.070	0.009	0.029	0.001	0.056
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel E. DV: V-Dem suffrage						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	0.198*** (0.0515)	0.198*** (0.0521)	0.0810 (0.0756)	0.0822 (0.0764)	-0.0482 (0.0329)	-0.0508* (0.0304)
Country-years	10,877	10,864	125	124	3,118	3,105
R-squared	0.046	0.046	0.009	0.012	0.017	0.080
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES

Notes: Table A.9 changes the dependent variable from Table 1. The dependent variables are the five component indices used to construct the polyarchy index: freedom of association (Panel A), clean elections (Panel B), freedom of expression (Panel C), elected officials (Panel D), and suffrage (Panel E). The even-numbered columns control for the standard democracy covariates used in Table 1, Panel B. \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .

**Table A.10: Miller (2015) Components**

Panel A. Post-1945 independence countries. DV: Miller (2015) High contestation						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	1.280*** (0.465)	1.082*** (0.406)	1.805*** (0.640)	2.259*** (0.737)	0.698 (0.479)	0.0251 (0.573)
Country-years	2,973	2,860	70	66	961	920
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel B. All non-European countries. DV: Miller (2015) High contestation						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	1.493*** (0.370)	1.902*** (0.377)	2.634*** (0.562)	3.013*** (0.663)	0.0389 (0.359)	0.0683 (0.383)
Country-years	8,988	8,986	122	121	1,675	1,673
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel C. Post-1945 independence countries. DV: Miller (2015) Medium contestation						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	0.996*** (0.330)	0.613* (0.321)	1.776*** (0.564)	2.717*** (0.886)	0.147 (0.420)	-0.679 (0.485)
Country-years	2,973	2,860	70	66	961	920
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel D. All non-European countries. DV: Miller (2015) Medium contestation						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	0.759** (0.333)	0.919*** (0.307)	1.930*** (0.497)	1.985*** (0.486)	0.0217 (0.378)	-0.00390 (0.382)
Country-years	9,054	9,052	122	121	1,693	1,691
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel E. Post-1945 independence countries. DV: Miller (2015) High participation						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	0.0972 (0.357)	-0.245 (0.369)	0.818 (0.515)	1.322* (0.682)	-0.372 (0.433)	-1.212** (0.531)
Country-years	2,973	2,860	70	66	961	920
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel F. All non-European countries. DV: Miller (2015) High participation						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	1.280*** (0.278)	1.310*** (0.273)	0.906** (0.398)	0.922** (0.404)	-0.471 (0.385)	-0.561 (0.390)
Country-years	9,054	9,052	122	121	1,693	1,691
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES

Notes: Table A.10 changes the dependent variable from Table 1, and also uses logit models because every dependent variable is binary. The dependent variables correspond with the contestation and participation components that Miller (2015) uses to disaggregate Boix et al.'s (2012) binary democracy measure. Miller codes countries as high, medium, or low contestation, and high or low participation. The dependent variable in Panels A and B equals 1 if Miller codes the country as high contestation (democratic or competitive oligarchic), and 0 otherwise. The dependent variable in Panels C and D equals 1 if Miller codes the country as at least medium contestation (democratic, competitive oligarchic, electoral authoritarian, or electoral oligarchy), and 0 otherwise. The dependent variable in Panels E and F equals 1 if Miller codes the country as high participation (democratic, electoral authoritarian, plebiscitary authoritarian), and 0 otherwise. The even-numbered columns in Panels A, C, and E control for the standard democracy covariates used in Table 1, Panel A. The even-numbered columns in Panels B, D, and F control for the standard democracy covariates used in Table 1, Panel B. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .



## A.2.4 Alternative Time Periods

Table A.11 considers different cutoffs for “early” and “late” periods after independence. Columns 5 and 6 in Panel B, which contains the full non-European sample, exclude countries that were never colonized by Western Europe because counting years since independence for these countries (which, in the dataset, is coded as years since the first year with Polity IV) is not possible. One of the 35 years after independence specifications in the all non-European countries sample retains statistical significance at 10% (Table A.11, Panel B, Column 4). This specification still provides evidence of convergence because the coefficient estimate is 65% smaller than the corresponding regression in the first year of independence. However, this finding shows that evidence of convergence is somewhat weaker when adding in 19th century Spanish countries, which tended to be highly undemocratic decades after independence in part because, for these countries, 35 years after independence does not coincide with Third Wave democratization forces (which is why the post-1991 comparison, as in Table 1, is more meaningful). Notably, the estimated Britain coefficient estimate is even smaller in those specifications when adding year fixed effects to account for country-invariant time shocks such as the Third Wave (results available upon request), where the coefficient estimates diminish even more and are not statistically significant.

**Table A.11: Alternative “Early” and “Late” Post-Colonial Periods**

Dependent variable: <i>polity2</i> score								
Panel A. Post-1945 independence countries								
	First six years since independence		1946 to 1965		35 years after indep.		2014	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
British colony	5.649*** (1.381)	6.347*** (1.423)	5.308** (2.301)	5.913*** (1.565)	0.905 (1.520)	0.0956 (1.700)	0.704 (1.398)	0.916 (1.754)
Country-years	438	414	411	393	73	70	72	69
R-squared	0.176	0.318	0.142	0.395	0.005	0.178	0.004	0.161
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel B. All non-European countries								
	First six years since independence		1946 to 1965		35 years after indep.		2014	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
British colony	5.736*** (1.145)	5.781*** (1.056)	6.397*** (1.746)	6.845*** (1.482)	1.891 (1.292)	2.029* (1.210)	0.902 (1.195)	0.795 (1.045)
Country-years	776	766	1,256	1,256	101	101	129	127
R-squared	0.186	0.282	0.166	0.257	0.024	0.109	0.005	0.192
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES

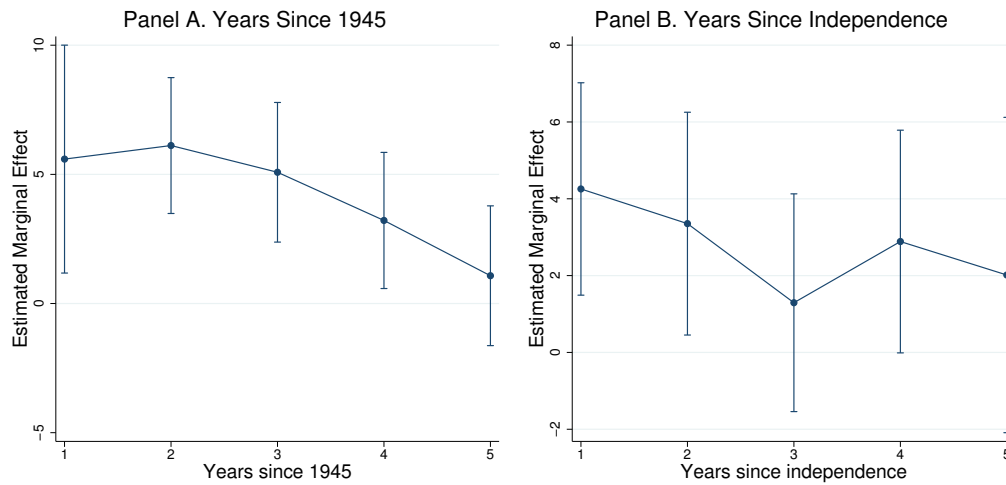
Notes: Table A.11 alters the time periods that Table 1 analyzes to assess two alternative early periods (first six years since independence, 1946 to 1965) and two alternative late periods (35 years after independence, 2014). The covariates in even-numbered columns are identical to those in Table 1. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

**Table A.12: Interacting British Colonialism with Time**

Dependent variable: <i>polity2</i> score				
Panel A. Post-1945 independence countries				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
British colony	5.370*** (1.556)	5.593*** (1.489)	8.066*** (2.320)	9.039*** (2.050)
Years since independence	0.122*** (0.0266)	0.135*** (0.0310)		
British colony*Years since indep.	-0.0755* (0.0399)	-0.103** (0.0425)		
Years since 1945			0.143*** (0.0275)	0.151*** (0.0289)
British colony*Years since 1945			-0.113** (0.0430)	-0.153*** (0.0424)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	3,825	3,681
R-squared	0.117	0.222	0.132	0.242
Covariates?	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel B. All non-European countries w/in 35 years of indep.				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
British colony	5.558*** (1.294)	5.965*** (1.194)	14.74*** (2.939)	15.72*** (2.499)
Years since independence	0.0474* (0.0274)	0.0575** (0.0267)		
British colony*Years since indep.	-0.0894** (0.0391)	-0.0993** (0.0386)		
Years since 1800			-0.00392 (0.00667)	0.0140 (0.00902)
British colony*Years since 1800			-0.0637*** (0.0191)	-0.0712*** (0.0166)
Country-years	3,476	3,459	3,476	3,459
R-squared	0.103	0.218	0.152	0.260
Covariates?	NO	YES	NO	YES

*Notes:* The even-numbered columns in Table A.12 are identical to Column 1 of Table 1, and the odd-numbered columns in Table A.12 are identical to Column 2 of Table 1, except: (1) Columns 1 and 2 of Table A.12 additionally control for years since independence and interact this variable with British colonialism, and (2) Columns 3 and 4 of Table A.12 additionally control for years since 1945 in Panel A (and years since 1800 in Panel B) and interact this variable with British colonialism. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

**Figure A.1: Interacting British Colonialism with Time**



*Notes:* Panel A plots the marginal effect estimates for British colonialism as a function of years since 1945 (Table A.12, Panel A, Column 3). Panel B plots the marginal effect estimates for British colonialism as a function of years since independence (Table A.12, Panel A, Column 1).

### A.2.5 Disaggregating Non-British Colonies

Table 1 contrasts British colonies with the quite heterogeneous excluded category of “non-British colonies.” Perhaps very low levels of post-colonial democracy among a single non-British power drives the result, in which case we would be estimating a “not French” or “not Portuguese” effect rather than a truly pro-British effect. Table A.13 examines this possibility more closely by presenting results from models that include a full set of other European colonizer dummies (French, Portuguese, Spanish, U.S., Dutch, Belgian, Italian, Australian) with British colonies composing the excluded basis category. The differences in average democracy level relative to British colonies in the year after independence are consistently significantly lower for all of the main rival empires: French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Belgian. It is difficult to interpret the coefficient estimates for the U.S. (Philippines), Netherlands (Indonesia, Suriname), and Australia (Papua New Guinea) because they each colonized so few territories in our samples. For the main non-British empires, the differences at independence weaken somewhat in the full temporal sample, and have mostly dissipated after 1991—reinforcing the Table 1 pattern.

**Table A.13: Disaggregating European Powers**

Dependent variable: <i>polity2</i> score						
Panel A. Post-1945 independence countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
French colony	-4.024*** (1.183)	-3.008*** (1.085)	-6.934*** (1.613)	-7.144*** (1.862)	-1.901 (1.381)	-0.992 (1.356)
Portuguese colony	-0.681 (1.831)	0.0604 (1.658)	-8.794*** (1.553)	-9.669*** (1.813)	2.191 (2.282)	2.258 (2.033)
Spanish colony	-6.298*** (1.059)	-5.988*** (2.082)	-9.294*** (1.330)	-11.57*** (1.738)	-6.361*** (1.074)	-4.376 (2.921)
U.S. colony	2.952*** (1.059)	-0.762 (1.761)	-0.294 (1.330)	-3.992** (1.773)	6.806*** (1.074)	4.823** (2.030)
Dutch colony	-0.629 (1.975)	0.673 (2.383)	0.206 (2.309)	-0.537 (2.015)	2.660* (1.350)	4.550*** (1.696)
Belgian colony	-4.178*** (1.250)	-4.971*** (1.576)	-4.961*** (1.837)	-7.727*** (1.999)	-1.417 (2.064)	-2.764 (2.835)
Italian colony	-4.530* (2.058)	-0.0733 (1.731)	-2.294 (5.451)	-0.151 (5.984)	-3.854 (2.550)	-0.0453 (1.790)
Australian colony	3.823*** (1.059)	- -	1.706 (1.330)	- -	2.931*** (1.074)	- -
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.109	0.197	0.280	0.445	0.085	0.198
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel B. All non-European countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
French colony	-2.520** (1.008)	-2.133** (0.981)	-4.633*** (1.228)	-3.991*** (1.255)	-1.717 (1.152)	-0.731 (1.214)
Portuguese colony	-0.213 (1.227)	-1.975 (1.454)	-6.456*** (1.084)	-8.094*** (1.149)	3.179 (1.972)	1.743 (1.822)
Spanish colony	0.719 (1.114)	-1.544 (1.313)	-3.279*** (1.084)	-5.266*** (1.227)	4.943*** (1.306)	2.454* (1.399)
U.S. colony	4.326*** (0.890)	2.166* (1.198)	1.944** (0.883)	0.387 (1.211)	6.827*** (0.794)	4.309*** (1.150)
Dutch colony	0.814 (1.855)	0.753 (1.324)	2.444 (2.034)	1.792 (1.510)	2.807** (1.076)	2.742*** (0.682)
Belgian colony	-2.794** (1.111)	-4.783*** (1.228)	-2.723* (1.514)	-4.597*** (1.402)	-1.373 (1.913)	-3.514* (1.937)
Italian colony	-3.111 (1.977)	0.993 (1.981)	-0.0563 (5.207)	3.470 (5.400)	-3.622 (2.420)	1.288 (2.620)
Australian colony	5.150*** (0.890)	2.753** (1.219)	3.944*** (0.883)	2.093* (1.205)	2.987*** (0.794)	0.227 (1.136)
Country-years	11,088	11,071	129	127	3,147	3,130
R-squared	0.033	0.131	0.134	0.243	0.122	0.258
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES

Notes: The specifications in Table A.13 are identical to those in Table 1 except each specification replaces the British colonialism indicator with fixed effects for every other colonizer in the sample. \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .

### A.3 Alternative Historical Explanations

Table A.14 evaluates four additional historical alternative explanations. The variables are:

- Settler mortality: Log of estimated settler mortality from Acemoglu et al. (2001).
- Population density: Log population per square kilometer in 1500 from Acemoglu et al. (2002)
- Neolithic transition: Thousands of years elapsed as of 2000 that a territory transitioned to agricultural production (the unit of analysis is modern country boundaries) from Putterman and Trainor (2006)
- Colonial onset year: Year that a Western European country initially colonized the territory from Olson (2009). This variable is missing for never-colonized countries.

**Table A.14: Additional Pre-Colonial and Early Colonial Alternative Explanations**

Dependent variable: <i>polity2</i> score						
Panel A. Settler mortality, post-1945 independence countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	6.014***	6.226***	10.01***	10.52***	3.331**	3.187*
	(1.256)	(1.336)	(1.884)	(1.679)	(1.528)	(1.745)
ln(Settler mortality)	-0.297	0.0705	0.0236	-1.368	0.0724	0.422
	(0.440)	(0.678)	(0.781)	(1.394)	(0.631)	(0.916)
Country-years	1,687	1,641	30	29	725	703
R-squared	0.242	0.280	0.566	0.657	0.088	0.098
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel B. Settler mortality, all non-European countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	4.420***	4.916***	8.247***	8.193***	-0.280	0.139
	(1.065)	(0.951)	(1.310)	(1.405)	(1.202)	(1.028)
ln(Settler mortality)	-1.748***	-1.433***	-0.835	-0.840	-1.420***	-1.004**
	(0.338)	(0.358)	(0.520)	(0.594)	(0.429)	(0.466)
Country-years	7,810	7,810	79	79	1,961	1,961
R-squared	0.229	0.260	0.498	0.506	0.083	0.186
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel C. 1500 Population density, post-1945 independence countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	4.430***	3.957***	8.282***	8.052***	2.025	1.607
	(1.160)	(1.218)	(1.437)	(1.738)	(1.356)	(1.596)
ln(Pop. density in 1500)	0.0233	0.0290	0.0557	0.147	-0.0703	-0.0431
	(0.0865)	(0.0894)	(0.0739)	(0.118)	(0.0990)	(0.119)
Country-years	2,742	2,694	52	51	1,246	1,222
R-squared	0.118	0.143	0.424	0.455	0.036	0.040
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel D. 1500 Population density, all non-European countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	3.758***	4.298***	5.885***	5.989***	-0.472	-0.138
	(1.068)	(0.936)	(1.276)	(1.164)	(1.183)	(1.015)
ln(Pop. density in 1500)	-0.840***	-0.459*	-0.173	0.180	-0.916**	-0.360
	(0.300)	(0.232)	(0.317)	(0.346)	(0.359)	(0.308)
Country-years	10,593	10,593	118	118	2,906	2,906
R-squared	0.126	0.214	0.203	0.280	0.050	0.258
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES

**Table A.14, continued**

Dependent variable: <i>polity2</i> score						
Panel E. Date of agricultural transition, post-1945 independence countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	3.650*** (1.146)	2.926*** (1.031)	6.285*** (1.504)	7.213*** (1.621)	1.850 (1.236)	0.542 (1.287)
Years since Neolithic transition	-0.165 (0.321)	-0.127 (0.304)	-0.231 (0.396)	0.128 (0.367)	-0.519 (0.343)	-0.375 (0.372)
Country-years	3,673	3,564	69	66	1,639	1,591
R-squared	0.076	0.198	0.209	0.394	0.056	0.190
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel F. Date of agricultural transition, all non-European countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	4.244*** (1.099)	4.572*** (1.013)	6.279*** (1.179)	6.280*** (1.135)	0.478 (1.113)	0.480 (1.009)
Years since Neolithic transition	-0.766*** (0.161)	-0.429** (0.210)	-0.480** (0.241)	-0.223 (0.282)	-0.878*** (0.231)	-0.382 (0.260)
Country-years	10,849	10,849	122	122	3,006	3,006
R-squared	0.171	0.218	0.260	0.297	0.111	0.237
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel G. Colonial onset date, post-1945 independence countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	2.884*** (1.052)	2.327*** (0.844)	5.912*** (1.469)	6.953*** (1.581)	0.783 (1.161)	0.0550 (1.119)
Colonial onset year	-0.0175*** (0.00391)	-0.0169*** (0.00404)	-0.00804 (0.00597)	-0.00644 (0.00701)	-0.0193*** (0.00355)	-0.0204*** (0.00361)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.172	0.262	0.223	0.389	0.172	0.308
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel H. Colonial onset date, all non-European countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	5.490*** (1.033)	5.333*** (0.963)	6.267*** (1.241)	6.227*** (1.224)	1.181 (0.977)	0.961 (0.900)
Colonial onset year	-0.0137*** (0.00241)	-0.00919*** (0.00289)	-0.00520 (0.00328)	-0.000949 (0.00373)	-0.0217*** (0.00261)	-0.0171*** (0.00306)
Country-years	8,554	8,537	105	103	2,586	2,569
R-squared	0.180	0.209	0.227	0.286	0.289	0.343
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES

Notes: The paired panels in Table A.14 are identical to those in Table 1 except each adds one additional covariate: logged settler mortality, logged population density in 1500, years since Neolithic transition, or year of colonial onset. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

Table A.15 only uses the post-1945 independence sample because the secondary education variable that Woodberry (2012) uses is averaged between 1960 and 1985 and therefore is measured well after independence for early decolonizers. Similarly, the literacy variable (following that used in Owolabi 2015) is measured in the 1960s. More specifically, the variables are:

- Secondary education: Percentage of the population with some secondary education (averaged between 1960 and 1985) from Woodberry (2012).
- Literacy: Following Owolabi (2015), we code adult literacy rates from United Nations (1980) for the year closest to 1960 with available data.

**Table A.15: Human Capital**

Dependent variable: <i>polity2</i> score						
Panel A. Secondary education, post-1945 independence countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	2.325*	1.903	5.551***	5.516**	0.116	-1.285
	(1.309)	(1.240)	(1.874)	(2.073)	(1.626)	(1.659)
Secondary education	0.134	0.162	0.0244	0.111	0.0369	0.0382
	(0.0953)	(0.112)	(0.113)	(0.130)	(0.0985)	(0.133)
Country-years	2,535	2,413	48	45	1,149	1,078
R-squared	0.080	0.197	0.169	0.362	0.003	0.167
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel B. Literacy, post-1945 independence countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	1.764	1.581	4.907***	5.381***	-0.537	-0.779
	(1.174)	(1.138)	(1.753)	(1.775)	(1.453)	(1.382)
Literacy in 1960	0.0965***	0.110***	0.0849***	0.127***	0.0871***	0.110***
	(0.0230)	(0.0323)	(0.0297)	(0.0288)	(0.0266)	(0.0387)
Country-years	3,504	3,417	66	64	1,581	1,533
R-squared	0.198	0.254	0.343	0.478	0.118	0.222
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES

Notes: The paired panels in Table A.15 are identical to those in Table 1 except each adds one additional covariate: secondary education or literacy. \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .

Table A.16 controls for three geographical covariates from Woodberry (2012): indicator for island nations, indicator for landlocked countries, and latitude. Using data from World Bank (2016), it also controls for rainfall and rainfall squared, as evaluated in Haber (2012).

**Table A.16: Geography**

Dependent variable: <i>polity2</i> score						
Panel A. Post-1945 independence countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	2.847*** (0.957)	2.383** (0.974)	5.897*** (1.384)	6.826*** (1.618)	0.754 (1.091)	0.191 (1.181)
Island	5.607*** (1.485)	4.774*** (1.618)	2.493 (1.671)	1.971 (1.708)	5.964*** (1.591)	5.444*** (1.710)
Landlocked	-0.826 (1.217)	-1.970 (1.247)	-1.028 (1.724)	-1.339 (1.650)	0.0259 (1.546)	-2.059 (1.605)
Latitude	0.0161 (0.0650)	0.0141 (0.0657)	0.0395 (0.100)	0.115 (0.106)	-0.0408 (0.0709)	-0.0164 (0.0808)
Precipitation	0.00425* (0.00253)	-8.88e-07 (0.00258)	0.00567* (0.00335)	0.00368 (0.00339)	0.00545** (0.00257)	-0.000426 (0.00248)
Precipitation sq.	-1.52e-06* (8.29e-07)	-3.48e-07 (8.61e-07)	-1.39e-06 (1.05e-06)	-7.01e-07 (1.14e-06)	-2.26e-06*** (7.78e-07)	-4.64e-07 (8.33e-07)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.208	0.255	0.318	0.435	0.208	0.277
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel B. All non-European countries						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	4.802*** (1.190)	4.367*** (1.061)	6.039*** (1.159)	5.928*** (1.190)	0.574 (1.068)	0.152 (1.021)
Island	2.359** (1.090)	1.895* (1.067)	2.595* (1.324)	2.102 (1.337)	3.090** (1.402)	2.332 (1.466)
Landlocked	-1.142 (0.885)	-1.380 (0.903)	0.478 (1.183)	0.0418 (1.196)	-0.932 (1.252)	-1.637 (1.237)
Latitude	0.0118 (0.0404)	-0.00419 (0.0382)	-0.0132 (0.0393)	-0.0140 (0.0375)	0.0381 (0.0447)	0.0180 (0.0412)
Precipitation	0.00606*** (0.00176)	0.000391 (0.00220)	0.00323 (0.00231)	-1.62e-05 (0.00306)	0.0103*** (0.00211)	0.00431 (0.00273)
Precipitation sq.	-1.71e-06** (7.31e-07)	2.92e-08 (8.49e-07)	-5.23e-07 (8.72e-07)	4.87e-07 (1.08e-06)	-3.32e-06*** (7.50e-07)	-1.57e-06 (9.83e-07)
Country-years	11,022	11,005	128	126	3,122	3,105
R-squared	0.188	0.223	0.319	0.336	0.205	0.264
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES

Notes: Table A.16 is identical to Table 1 except each specification adds the geography controls described above. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .



## A.4 Heterogeneity Within the British Empire

Table A.17 presents results for three measures of the directness or intensity of British rule. In Panel A, we code a British colony as experiencing direct British rule if less than 20% of its court cases in the 1950s were heard in customary courts, whereas British indirect rule composes the remaining British colonies (Lange 2004). There is a natural break in Lange’s variable around 20%. It is not possible to run an interaction term with Lange’s continuous variable because this variable is not coded outside the British empire. Panel B controls for Owolabi’s (2015) dichotomous measure of whether colonial subjects possessed legal rights equivalent to metropolitan citizens’, and for an interaction term between this variable and British colonialism. It states the marginal effect estimates for British colonialism conditional on whether or not the colony had metropolitan legal institutions. Panel C controls for Olsson’s (2009) length of colonial rule variable and for an interaction term with British colonialism. It presents marginal effects estimates for British colonialism conditional on the 25 percentile of the length of colonial rule in the sample (65 years) and the 75 percentile (151 years).

Across the different direct rule measures, the patterns resemble those in Table 1. With the exception of metropolitan legal rule colonies,<sup>19</sup> all types of British colonies exhibit a statistically significant democratic advantage at independence. Given the existing literature, these findings are unsurprising for directly ruled colonies. However, existing arguments do not anticipate this result for indirectly ruled colonies, which did not tend to inherit the “good” British culture and institutions.

Additionally, all types of British colonies exhibit evidence of convergence over time. Excepting British colonies with few indigenous court cases (the direct rule measure in Panel A), the coefficient estimates for the marginal effect of British colonialism are small in magnitude and statistically insignificant in the post-1991 period. For directly ruled British colonies measured using Lange’s (2009) variable, the coefficient estimate diminishes by 53% between Columns 3 and 5 in Panel A (and 64% between Columns 4 and 6). However, at least when excluding controls, the direct rule measure remains statistically significant. This yields suggestive evidence that directly ruled British colonies retained some systematic democratic advantages even in the post-Cold War period.

Table A.18 disaggregates the results by two theoretically relevant world regions.<sup>20</sup> Many accounts of British colonial rule, such as Lange (2009, 53) and Abernethy (2000, 410), mention Britain’s Middle Eastern colonies as atypical of the rest of the British empire. The colonies were either ruled indirectly by local monarchs with minimal colonial interference (Bahrain, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait) or were acquired as mandates after World War I and only briefly experienced colonial rule (Iraq, Jordan, and Israel). Predictably, given the prevalence of authoritarianism in the region, Panel A shows that at independence the marginal estimated effect of British colonialism is even higher outside the Middle East than among all countries. However, the coefficient estimate in the post-1991 sample remains small and statistically insignificant. This demonstrates that the weak post-1991 correlation in Table 1 is not an artifact of coding certain Middle Eastern countries as belonging to the British empire.

Panel B disaggregates countries by Sub-Saharan Africa. This region provides a hard test of the colonizer influence hypothesis because Britain’s African colonies tended to experience short durations of colonial rule, and were poorly institutionalized and characterized by systems of rule that denied full legal rights to large sections of the population (Mamdani 1996). By contrast, cases frequently cited as examples of positive

<sup>19</sup> Although the coefficient estimate for the marginal effect of British colonialism is relatively large among metropolitan legal rule colonies, the few number of non-British metropolitan rule countries in the present sample render the estimate imprecise and statistically insignificant. Only two non-British colonies with Polity IV data had metropolitan legal institutions.

<sup>20</sup> Whereas Appendix Table A.5 adds a full set of region fixed effects to the Table 1 specifications, Table A.18 examines heterogeneity when isolating individual and theoretically relevant world regions.

British institutional legacies, such as India and the Caribbean nations, are outside of Africa (Diamond 1988, 6). However, the estimated short-term effect of British colonialism is in fact larger in Africa than among all post-1945 independence countries, and yields the same pattern of strong short-term but not long-term effects—contrary to Huntington’s (1984, 206) assertion that British colonialism had no effect in Africa.

**Table A.17: Heterogeneity Within the British Empire: Measures of Direct Rule**

DV: <i>polity2</i> score. Sample: post-1945 independence countries						
Panel A. Direct vs. indirect British rule (colonial court cases)						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British direct rule	7.835*** (1.750)	6.740*** (2.213)	10.61*** (1.498)	11.26*** (2.004)	4.942** (1.979)	4.022 (2.981)
British indirect rule	1.944 (1.240)	1.273 (1.077)	4.794*** (1.671)	5.526*** (1.754)	-0.0305 (1.368)	-0.627 (1.314)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.145	0.224	0.287	0.434	0.072	0.189
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel B. Metropolitan legal rights						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	1.717 (1.167)	1.939* (0.974)	5.011*** (1.713)	6.501*** (1.663)	-0.250 (1.348)	0.121 (1.253)
Metropolitan legal institutions	6.821*** (0.734)	8.585*** (1.060)	4.473 (3.363)	5.105 (3.814)	7.333*** (1.645)	8.895*** (1.400)
Br. col.*Metro. legal institutions	1.161 (1.915)	-0.668 (2.170)	0.864 (3.966)	-0.255 (4.415)	-0.121 (2.424)	-1.721 (2.601)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.204	0.282	0.264	0.418	0.163	0.266
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Marginal effects						
British colony   Metro. legal=1	2.878* (1.519)	1.271 (1.977)	5.875 (3.577)	6.246 (4.252)	-0.371 (2.014)	-1.600 (2.550)
British colony   Metro. legal=0	1.717 (1.167)	1.939* (0.974)	5.011*** (1.713)	6.501*** (1.663)	-0.250 (1.348)	0.121 (1.253)
Panel C. Length of colonial rule						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	1.549 (1.690)	0.819 (1.290)	4.094* (2.389)	5.547** (2.458)	-0.0937 (1.829)	-0.867 (1.574)
Colonial duration	0.0125*** (0.00375)	0.0116*** (0.00299)	0.00125 (0.00558)	0.00134 (0.00624)	0.0164*** (0.00486)	0.0175*** (0.00413)
Br. col.*Col. duration	0.00936 (0.00805)	0.0104 (0.00773)	0.0127 (0.0121)	0.00965 (0.0143)	0.00593 (0.00739)	0.00587 (0.00707)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.179	0.272	0.235	0.395	0.175	0.310
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Marginal effects						
British colony   Col. dur.=151 yrs.	2.963*** (1.033)	2.387*** (0.825)	6.016*** (1.458)	7.004*** (1.598)	0.801 (1.142)	0.0195 (1.110)
British colony   Col. dur.=65 yrs.	2.158 (1.312)	1.494 (0.952)	4.921*** (1.830)	6.174*** (1.844)	0.292 (1.470)	-0.485 (1.289)

Notes: Table A.17 is identical to Panel A of Table 1 except: (a) Panel A replaces the British colonialism indicator with two fixed effects that distinguish direct and indirect British rule, (b) Panel B additionally controls for metropolitan legal institutions and its interaction with British colonialism, and (c) Panel C additionally controls for colonial duration and its interaction with British colonialism. The bottom parts of Panels B and C provide marginal effect estimates. \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .

**Table A.18: Heterogeneity Within the British Empire: World Regions**

DV: <i>polity2</i> score. Sample: post-1945 independence countries						
Panel A: Middle East						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	4.026*** (1.140)	2.799** (1.203)	8.061*** (1.403)	8.205*** (1.597)	1.819 (1.251)	0.0234 (1.499)
Middle East	0.657 (3.201)	-0.160 (1.888)	7.635*** (1.326)	7.934*** (2.480)	-4.169 (4.204)	-3.225 (2.753)
British colony*Middle East	-4.000 (4.639)	-1.888 (3.447)	-15.56*** (3.677)	-12.88** (4.868)	-0.240 (5.287)	2.037 (3.795)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.082	0.174	0.339	0.439	0.057	0.152
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Marginal effects						
British colony   Mid. East=1	0.0264 (4.496)	0.911 (2.977)	-7.500** (3.399)	-4.673 (4.427)	1.579 (5.137)	2.060 (3.377)
British colony   Mid. East=0	4.026*** (1.140)	2.799** (1.203)	8.061*** (1.403)	8.205*** (1.597)	1.819 (1.251)	0.0234 (1.499)
Panel B: Sub-Saharan Africa						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	3.969** (1.982)	4.447** (1.696)	3.684 (2.423)	6.343*** (2.227)	2.311 (2.194)	2.082 (2.407)
Africa	-0.0708 (1.212)	1.277 (1.685)	-2.615 (1.709)	-3.007 (1.921)	1.793 (1.687)	2.368 (2.524)
British colony*Africa	-1.621 (2.292)	-3.581 (2.153)	3.998 (3.014)	0.468 (2.894)	-1.876 (2.683)	-3.265 (2.795)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.069	0.186	0.223	0.402	0.018	0.161
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Marginal effects						
British colony   Africa=1	2.348** (1.151)	0.866 (1.316)	7.682*** (1.793)	6.811*** (2.075)	0.435 (1.543)	-1.183 (1.504)
British colony   Africa=0	3.969** (1.982)	4.447** (1.696)	3.684 (2.423)	6.343*** (2.227)	2.311 (2.194)	2.082 (2.407)

Notes: Table A.17 is identical to Panel A of Table 1 except each panel adds a specific region fixed effect and interacts the region fixed effect with British colonialism. The bottom parts of each panel provide marginal effect estimates. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

**Table A.19: Table A.17 Specifications with all non-European Countries**

DV: <i>polity2</i> score. Sample: all non-European countries						
Panel A: Direct vs. indirect British rule (colonial court cases)						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British direct rule	8.717*** (1.444)	8.083*** (1.241)	10.12*** (1.082)	9.672*** (1.106)	4.134** (1.642)	2.852* (1.485)
British indirect rule	1.127 (1.179)	1.882* (1.039)	4.212*** (1.522)	4.497*** (1.438)	-1.646 (1.286)	-1.117 (1.097)
Country-years	11,088	11,071	129	127	3,147	3,130
R-squared	0.163	0.248	0.279	0.341	0.058	0.248
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel B: Metropolitan legal rights						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony = 1	0.504 (1.065)	1.416 (0.989)	4.604*** (1.509)	5.035*** (1.442)	-2.173* (1.259)	-1.466 (1.146)
Metropolitan legal institutions	5.973*** (0.729)	5.345*** (0.467)	4.140 (3.274)	3.403 (3.464)	5.609*** (1.620)	4.018*** (1.211)
Br. col.*Metro. legal institutions	3.703** (1.433)	2.518** (1.270)	1.281 (3.709)	0.811 (3.846)	2.681 (2.162)	1.717 (1.826)
Country-years	11,088	11,071	129	127	3,147	3,130
R-squared	0.217	0.280	0.274	0.327	0.126	0.278
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Marginal effects						
British colony   Metro. legal=1	4.207*** (0.959)	3.934*** (0.764)	5.885* (3.388)	5.846 (3.565)	0.508 (1.757)	0.251 (1.374)
British colony   Metro. legal=0	0.504 (1.065)	1.416 (0.989)	4.604*** (1.509)	5.035*** (1.442)	-2.173* (1.259)	-1.466 (1.146)
Panel C: Length of colonial rule						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	3.276* (1.815)	2.796* (1.558)	5.543*** (2.105)	5.136** (2.017)	-0.412 (1.717)	-1.009 (1.456)
Colonial duration	0.0135*** (0.00279)	0.00756** (0.00314)	0.00647* (0.00363)	0.00101 (0.00423)	0.0200*** (0.00443)	0.0129*** (0.00436)
Br. col.*Col. duration	0.00907 (0.00828)	0.0132* (0.00743)	0.00534 (0.0106)	0.00876 (0.0105)	0.00376 (0.00727)	0.00797 (0.00630)
Country-years	10,957	10,940	127	125	3,118	3,101
R-squared	0.192	0.245	0.258	0.313	0.185	0.309
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Marginal effects						
British colony   Col. dur.=259 yrs.	5.623*** (1.326)	6.208*** (1.218)	6.926*** (1.552)	7.404*** (1.545)	0.563 (1.120)	1.056 (1.010)
British colony   Col. dur.=44 yrs.	3.674** (1.544)	3.376** (1.321)	5.778*** (1.741)	5.521*** (1.655)	-0.247 (1.470)	-0.659 (1.248)

Notes: Each panel of Table A.17 is identical to Panel B of Table 1 except: (a) Panel A replaces the British colonialism indicator with two fixed effects that distinguish direct and indirect British rule, (b) Panel B additionally controls for metropolitan legal institutions and its interaction with British colonialism, and (c) Panel C additionally controls for colonial duration and its interaction with British colonialism. The bottom parts of Panels B and C provide marginal effect estimates. \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .

**Table A.20: Table A.18 Specifications with all non-European Countries**

DV: <i>polity2</i> score. Sample: all non-European countries						
Panel A: Middle East						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	5.517*** (1.200)	5.634*** (1.102)	7.795*** (1.123)	7.757*** (1.130)	1.543 (1.158)	1.056 (1.096)
Middle East	-4.020*** (1.006)	-1.011 (1.105)	-2.201 (2.342)	-0.803 (2.564)	-5.437** (2.418)	-1.534 (2.479)
British colony*Middle East	-4.318* (2.414)	-4.852** (1.906)	-6.723* (3.591)	-6.677* (3.436)	-3.061 (3.130)	-2.951 (2.742)
Country-years	11,088	11,071	129	127	3,147	3,130
R-squared	0.170	0.221	0.323	0.354	0.118	0.243
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Marginal effects						
British colony   Mid. East=1	1.199 (2.095)	0.782 (1.535)	1.071 (3.411)	1.079 (3.227)	-1.519 (2.908)	-1.895 (2.522)
British colony   Mid. East=0	5.517*** (1.200)	5.634*** (1.102)	7.795*** (1.123)	7.757*** (1.130)	1.543 (1.158)	1.056 (1.096)
Panel B: Sub-Saharan Africa						
	All post-indep. years, 1800-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	5.494*** (1.590)	5.935*** (1.221)	6.179*** (1.615)	6.494*** (1.382)	0.146 (1.626)	0.422 (1.224)
Africa	-0.739 (0.686)	0.240 (0.848)	-0.0608 (1.110)	0.173 (1.219)	-2.039* (1.102)	-1.849 (1.390)
British colony*Africa	-3.092 (1.952)	-4.312** (1.674)	0.140 (2.399)	-0.576 (2.349)	0.748 (2.193)	-0.474 (1.854)
Country-years	11,088	11,071	129	127	3,147	3,130
R-squared	0.103	0.217	0.215	0.294	0.018	0.238
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Marginal effects						
British colony   Africa=1	2.402** (1.133)	1.623 (1.172)	6.320*** (1.775)	5.918*** (1.919)	0.894 (1.472)	-0.0515 (1.445)
British colony   Africa=0	5.494*** (1.590)	5.935*** (1.221)	6.179*** (1.615)	6.494*** (1.382)	0.146 (1.626)	0.422 (1.224)

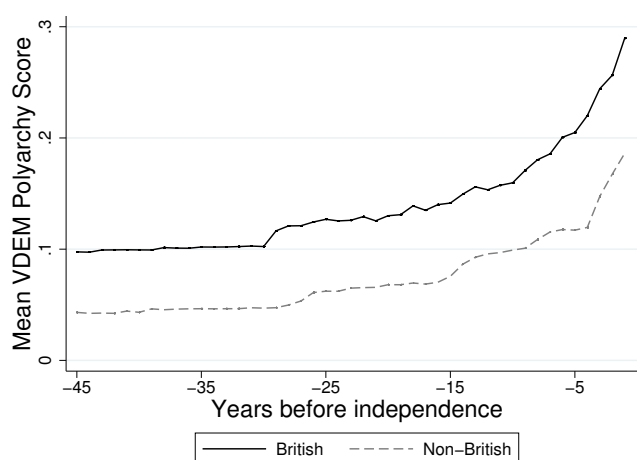
Notes: Table A.17 is identical to Panel B of Table 1 except each panel adds a specific region fixed effect and interacts the region fixed effect with British colonialism. The bottom parts of each panel provide marginal effect estimates. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

## A.5 Supplementary Material for Mechanisms Sections

Appendix Figure A.2 compares V-Dem polyarchy scores in British and non-British colonies, indexed by years prior to achieving independence. V-Dem data, unlike Polity IV, is available in many pre-independence years. The figure exhibits two main patterns. First, British colonies in our sample were consistently more democratic than other colonies throughout the 20th century, although the Britain line is somewhat biased upward relative to our core sample because V-Dem excludes many highly authoritarian British Middle Eastern colonies. This pattern is consistent with earlier arguments such as Weiner's (1987) that British democratic advantages extended deep into the colonial era. However, this first takeaway also requires a qualification. To properly interpret long-term advantages, it is crucial to analyze the absolute level of democracy among British colonies rather than only the difference from other colonies. Forty-five years before independence, not only is the mean polyarchy score very low among British colonies, but only two colonies featured franchises of at least 10% of the colonial population. Even Jamaica, the colony with the highest polyarchy score at this time, had a lower polyarchy score than the *average* polyarchy score among British colonies one year before independence. Thus, despite the advantage relative to non-British colonies earlier in the colonial era, considerable reforms were still required during decolonization to help explain the large number of British colonies that became democratic by independence (see Appendix Table A.4).

The second main pattern in Figure A.2 is that British colonies became dramatically more democratic during the decolonization era and their democratic advantage relative to other colonies increased. The difference in the last year of colonial rule is 72% larger than 30 years before. Table 3 shows the importance of Britain's more calculated decolonization strategy for explaining its colonies' relative democratic advantage at independence. Had Britain counterfactually granted independence an average of even one year earlier than it actually did, then British colonies would not have enjoyed a democratic advantage prior to independence. Similarly, France could have conceivably promoted higher levels of democracy in its colonies had it not liquidated almost its entire African empire in 1960.

**Figure A.2: British Colonies Versus Other Colonies Before Independence**



*Notes:* The vertical axis in Figure A.2 shows the average V-Dem polyarchy score for British colonies and for other countries in the post-1945 independence sample, averaged across the number of years before a particular colony achieved independence.

Table A.21 assesses decolonization mechanisms. In addition to colonizer Polity score, the variables are:

- Guerrillas inherit state at independence: Fearon and Laitin's (2003) dataset provided a candidate list of conflicts. We consulted secondary sources to assess whether the group involved in violence gained control of the state at independence. Those cases are coded as 1, all others are 0.
- Colonizer anti-colonial manifesto: We averaged Gabel and Huber's (2000) party-election-level data across all party-elections between 1945 and 1960, excluding political parties that never held office during this period. These scores reflect the power of colonial lobbies, with party commitment to decolonization much higher in Britain and Holland than in Belgium or France. This variable is not coded for Portuguese or Spanish colonies, where political parties were illegal, or for Italian colonies that were ruled as trustee states after World War II.

**Table A.21: Assessing Negotiated Decolonization Mechanisms at Independence**

DV: <i>polity2</i> score in first post-independence year				
Panel A. Guerrilla takeover				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Guerrillas inherit state	-6.554*** (1.392)	-7.618*** (1.821)	-3.567** (1.403)	-3.818** (1.766)
British colony			5.633*** (1.498)	6.068*** (1.692)
Countries	73	69	73	69
R-squared	0.082	0.244	0.240	0.398
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel B. Colonizer Democracy				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Colonizer <i>polity2</i>	0.899*** (0.213)	0.926*** (0.212)	0.516*** (0.175)	0.508*** (0.176)
British colony			4.390*** (1.635)	5.030*** (1.784)
Countries	73	69	73	69
R-squared	0.188	0.330	0.260	0.415
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel C. Decolonization Manifestos				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Colonizer Anti-Colonial Manifesto	7.288*** (1.650)	7.485*** (1.984)	4.145*** (1.198)	3.767** (1.508)
British colony			3.536** (1.564)	4.433** (1.691)
Country-years	65	62	65	62
R-squared	0.197	0.373	0.228	0.421
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES

Notes: Table A.21 contains a cross-section of post-1945 independence countries. The table reports estimates for the main covariates, with robust standard errors in parentheses. Columns 2 and 4 additionally control for the same standard democracy covariates from Table 1, Panel A. \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .

**Table A.22: Post-Independence Colonizer Influence**

Dependent variable: <i>polity2</i> score						
Panel A. Communist bloc membership						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	3.151*** (1.188)	2.148** (1.020)	5.780*** (1.510)	6.420*** (1.617)	0.684 (1.305)	-0.530 (1.248)
Communist bloc	-1.536 (1.267)	-3.445* (1.937)	-2.514 (1.980)	-3.793 (2.665)	-3.625 (2.328)	-5.420* (2.778)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.065	0.181	0.207	0.390	0.025	0.182
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES

Panel B. NATO military bases						
	All post-indep. years, 1945-		First independence year		Post-1991	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
British colony	3.377*** (1.177)	2.646** (1.058)	5.917*** (1.507)	6.846*** (1.628)	1.119 (1.318)	0.302 (1.364)
NATO military base	1.055 (1.791)	1.328 (1.308)	-1.846 (2.296)	-0.694 (2.002)	0.849 (1.969)	1.880 (1.454)
Country-years	3,825	3,681	73	69	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.065	0.173	0.208	0.377	0.010	0.155
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES

Notes: The specifications in Table A.22 are identical to those in Table 1 except each panel adds one additional covariate. Panel A controls for Communist bloc membership, operationalized as an indicator for countries that were at any time full or observer members of COMECON. Panel B controls for NATO military bases, operationalized as an indicator for the presence of NATO base facilities (as distinct from a training mission) in the countries at independence. \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .

**Table A.23: UN Voting Patterns**

DV: Difference in ideal point from colonizer				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
British colony	0.152 (0.140)	0.168 (0.163)	0.156 (0.146)	0.174 (0.157)
Country-years	260	260	260	260
R-squared	0.016	0.050	0.381	0.407
Region FE?	NO	YES	NO	YES
Year FE?	NO	NO	YES	YES

Notes: The dependent variable in Table A.23 draws from Bailey et al.'s (2017) measure of countries' ideal points, measured using data from UN General Assembly votes. The dependent variable measures the difference in ideal points between each ex-colony and their colonizer. The sample contains post-1945 independence countries over their first five years of independence. Column 1 is a bivariate regression, Column 2 includes region fixed effects, Column 3 includes year fixed effects, and Column 4 includes region and year fixed effects. \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .



**Table A.24: Assessing Negotiated Decolonization Mechanisms Post-1991**

DV: <i>polity2</i> score. Years: post-1991				
Panel A. Guerrilla takeover at independence				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Guerrillas inherit state	-1.205 (1.504)	-0.0862 (1.606)	-0.596 (1.586)	-0.0724 (1.653)
British colony			1.141 (1.349)	0.0331 (1.376)
Country-years	1,734	1,663	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.003	0.145	0.011	0.145
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel B. Colonizer democracy				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Colonizer Polity	0.0566 (0.174)	-0.116 (0.186)	-0.0803 (0.230)	-0.165 (0.235)
British colony			1.554 (1.571)	0.656 (1.636)
Country-years	1,734	1,663	1,734	1,663
R-squared	0.001	0.149	0.012	0.150
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES
Panel C. Decolonization manifestos				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Colonizer Anti-Colonial Manifesto	3.047** (1.374)	2.804* (1.410)	4.181*** (0.947)	4.312*** (1.099)
British colony			-1.281 (1.281)	-1.942 (1.238)
Country-years	1,543	1,496	1,543	1,496
R-squared	0.042	0.151	0.047	0.162
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES

Notes: Table A.24 contains a cross-section of post-1945 independence countries. The table reports estimates for the main covariates, with robust standard errors in parentheses. Columns 2 and 4 additionally control for the same standard democracy covariates from Table 1, Panel A. \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .

**Table A.25: Comparing Third Wave Democratic Gains**

DV: Difference in average <i>polity2</i> score, 1986-2012 vs. 1980-1985				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
British colony	-3.635*** (1.081)	-3.315** (1.567)	-0.811 (1.159)	-0.0921 (1.311)
Countries	72	69	55	54
R-squared	0.143	0.221	0.010	0.237
Sample	Full	Full	Low 1980s polity	Low 1980s polity
Covariates	NO	YES	NO	YES

Notes: Table A.25 contains a cross-section of post-1945 independence countries. Columns C and D exclude all countries with an average Polity score below 0 between 1980 and 1985. The table reports estimates for the main covariates, with robust standard errors in parentheses. Columns 2 and 4 additionally control for the same standard democracy covariates from Table 1, Panel A. \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .

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