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Regime Legitimation Strategies (RLS) 1900 to 2018

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Abstract

In this paper we introduce new expert-coded measures of regime legitimation strategies for 179 countries in the world from 1900 up until 2018 that are comparable across time and space. Country experts have rated the extent to which the government promotes or references *its performance, the person of the leader, rational-legality, and ideology* in order to justify the regime in place. With regards to ideology, the experts are further asked to categorize the ideology of the regime as *nationalist, communist/socialist, conservative/restorative, religious, and/or separatist.* The main purpose of this paper is to describe and validate the data against expectations on claims from case studies as well as with existing regime type classifications. We show that experts do understand and can be employed to code legitimation claims. Not only do we document historical shifts in legitimation claims, but the measures also pick up recent trends, such as, an increased emphasis of the leader in countries such as Russia, Turkey, Cambodia over the last decades, and more recently also in India and the Philippines; as well as recent increases in legitimation claims based on both conservative and nationalist ideologies the European countries Serbia, Hungary and Poland, which also have experienced autocratization in recent years.

1 Introduction

Governments routinely make claims that provide justification for why they are entitled to rule. These claims legitimate the rules, both formal and informal, on who holds authority, how they can exercise it, and to what ends, and thereby empower rulers to exercise authority, i.e. make collectively binding decisions. Different claims to legitimacy have ramifications for how a country functions (Burnell 2006), as well as the nature of the relationship between the state and its citizens (Weber [1922] 1978).

This paper introduces new expert-coded measures of regime legitimation strategies for 179 countries in the world from 1900 up until 2018. Sophisticated methods for the selection and aggregation of expert-coded data from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project ensure the comparability of observations across time and space. Country experts have rated the extent to which the government promotes or references *its performance, the person of the leader, rational-legality, and ideology* in order to justify the regime in place. The item on ideology asked the experts to further categorize the ideology of the regime as *nationalist, communist/socialist, conservative/restorative, religious, and/or separatist.* Expanding on von Soest and Grauvogel (2017a, 2017b), our data is the first to capture legitimation claims across time, and for all regime types. The temporal aspect allows not only for tracking trends, but crucially for analyzing what happens following changes in legitimation claims or what happens with legitimation claims when other aspects of rule are transformed. By also measuring claims put forward by democratic regimes we are able to for the first-time document when changes from procedural to identity-based claims, such as the person of the leader or the ideology occur which may coincide with autocratization.

2 The Concept of Legitimacy and Legitimation

Legitimacy is one of the most crucial, yet also most contested concepts in political science (Barker 2001; Beetham 1991; Gilley 2009; Levi, Sacks, and Tyler 2009; Lipset 1959; Rigby and Fehér 1982; Weatherford 1992). It goes back to the political writings of Sallust on the conspiracy of Catiline in which he develops the idea of an *imperium legitimum.* From its etymological beginnings, legitimate rule was explicitly delineated from tyrannical rule. Legitimacy originally referred to a form of political rule is conducted in accordance with the law. Legitimate rule is supposed to be free of arbitrariness and despotism . As such, legitimacy occupies a key position in democratic theory as well as normative state philosophy. Legitimate rule refers here to how a good political order should look like, carrying semantics that range from fair, right, just, free, appropriate, proper, to acceptable and voluntarily consensual.

In contrast to this rich normative tradition, Max Weber has set the ground for a different understanding of legitimacy (Weber [1922] 1978). Instead of following the quest for what is a good rule, he advocated an empirical usage of the concept. In other words, instead of asking how political rule *should* look, Weber proposed we observe how political rule actually *is* (Collins, Randall, and others 1986). Weber's strict empirical usage of the term makes it possible to extend legitimacy from democratic theory to the empirical study of both democratic and autocratic regimes.

It fits both because it is interested in understanding the sources of obedience to authority irrespective of the means by which that authority is constituted:

In addition every such system attempts to cultivate the belief in its legitimacy... What is important is the fact that in a given case the particular claim to legitimacy is to a significant degree and according to its type treated as "valid"; that this fact confirms the position of the persons claiming authority and that helps to determine the choice of means of its exercise (Weber [1922] 1978, 213-4).

We adopt this Weberian notion of legitimacy and use the term in an explicit empirical-analytical way. In line with the passage above, we argue that behind *every* political order there is a "legitimacy idea" (Kielmansegg 1971) that constitutes the major narrative of why a ruler is justified to rule, no matter if the regime is democratic or autocratic. The "legitimacy idea" captures the reason why a ruler is (or feels) entitled to rule and what this purported right to rule actually entails. Simultaneously, legitimacy refers not only to the claims of rulers, but their reception by the ruled. Thus legitimation in Weberian sense is a two-stage process that entails the ruler's articulation of set of claims to justify that rule and their acceptance by those under that rule. Only when the ruler's claim is congruent with the belief of the ruled, we can meaningfully speak of legitimate rule. Legitimation is therefore always a relational concept that connects a dominant A to a subordinate B. It is a relationship in which subordinate B sees the entitlement claim of dominant A as being justified and follows dominant A due to a perceived obligation to obey (Gerschewski 2018, 653–55).

Famously, Max Weber distinguished in his work between three forms of legitimate rule – rational-legal, charismatic, and traditional. Rational-legal is based "...on a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands." Charismatic rests "...on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him." And traditional is grounded "on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them" (Weber [1922] 1978, 1:215). Weber's concepts are ideal-typical. They are not descriptive, but analytic accentuations of one or more features of reality. They are drawn in pure and abstract terms, so that they can be compared to an empirical reality as tools of measurement that allow us to judge the extent to which certain principles or mechanisms are present in any concrete social or political formation [Weber ([1904] 1949), 89-91). As such, the types of legitimacy, while they are logically distinct concepts designed to measure, are not logically exclusive in reality. In fact, we would expect any real-world system of authority to combine some elements of more than one form of legitimation. We would also expect the ways in which different regimes legitimate their rule to overlap to some extent, even if they trend to greater similarity in-type than across- type.

Rational-legal authority is based on the existence of an extensive, binding, and consistent set of laws which regulate the conduct of authority. Under systems of legal authority, rule is by officials following a highly-specified, precise, set of rules (the law). Only the top rung of the hierarchy are not officials in a pure sense. Those exercising supreme domination in a legal form of authority are usually selected by special means such as election (democracy or oligarchy), appropriation (seizing power), or succession (monarchy). Though even their authority is usually subject to constraint by the law. In a pure type of legal authority, the selected rulers oversee a bureaucratic administrative staff who see to the rational adjudication of the law.

Traditional authority is based on age-old, sanctified practices. The rulers in such systems are appointed on the basis of established customs (primogeniture, tournament, election by small collegial bodies) and obeyed on the basis of this status. Obedience is usually based on a common upbringing that stresses the importance of customary practices and adherence to them. They are often embedded in the natural cycle of life, religious practice, and communal/social life and organization, or all three. The administrative staff in such a system

is composed of personal retainers. Subordinates are loyal to the ruler, (and in contrast to rational-legal officialdom – not to a set of externally established impersonal rules). Subordinates follow the commands of traditional authorities because they correspond to his/her status as an authority, or if they fall into a sphere in which tradition grants authority a free hand.

Charismatic authority is based on the extraordinary, supernatural or exceptional qualities of an individual leader. Such leaders share an intense personal bond with a devoted following that believes in their extraordinary qualities. Because of this they have a powerful say in the shape of the social formations over which they preside. Weber attributes the power to "reveal" or "ordain", "normative patterns" and/or "order" to them (Weber [1922] 1978, 215-6). In addition, charismatic domination is a response to extraordinary circumstances, such as profound disillusionment with or a crisis in the existing state of affairs. Second, as a response to such conditions, it is revolutionary in nature. Finally, it is inherently unstable and short-lived in its pure form. Any failure that calls the extraordinary nature of leadership into account will weaken it, and if successful, over time it will come to be routinized, in the direction of the other two forms of legitimacy. It eventually will be traditionalized or rationalized.

While there are certain affinities between forms of legitimacy and certain regimes, there is no direct correspondence. Anyone familiar with contemporary democracy will immediately recognize the centrality of the legal-rational type as essential to common understandings of democratic practice. But even in democracy we can see a routinized element of charisma in the popular election of leaders who control rational-legal officialdom. It has been inverted and subjected to legal regulation. Instead of followers recognizing their responsibility to follow extraordinary leaders, a sovereign people select the leader most fit to lead through laws promulgated to achieve that end (Berhard 1999).

Curiously, the same two types of legitimacy – rational-legal and charismatic – may well be central to authority in a harshly authoritarian regime. Jowitt (1983) makes such a claim for Leninism, though the degree of both types and how they combine are radically different from democracy. In general, with regard to both charismatic (at least in its pure non-routinized forms) and traditional legitimacy, it is hard to imagine democratic rule that is based largely or exclusively on either. Though one could imagine how certain elements residually embedded from earlier forms of rule could play a small role (e.g. monarchs as heads of state). Generally speaking, as the dominant form of legitimation, both are much more conducive to the legitimation of authoritarianism.

2.1 Beyond Weber

David Beetham (1991) has formulated a critique of Weber's typology of legitimate rule. Beetham argued that Weber collapsed several dimensions into one typology, thereby overloading it. Instead, he proposes to keep separate at least three dimensions: legality, justifiability, and the explicit expression of consent. Legality refers to the observation that a political order cannot be ruled against the existing laws, but need to be in accordance with them. As such, legality speaks directly to the etymological origin of the concept of legitimacy. Secondly, justifiability refers to the need to go beyond the legal sphere. A legitimate order needs to anchor its legitimacy claim in a widely shared narrative, be it a national myth, a shared history, a political ideology, or any other kind of identity-creating source. A legitimate order needs social cement that binds the people together. Thirdly, Beetham argues that legitimacy needs to be explicitly conferred, be it in the form of mass rallies, elections, or even swearing an oath. What we can learn from Beetham's intervention is that an

empirical study of legitimacy needs to address to what extent the legitimacy belief has been condensed into legal form, to what extent the claim and the belief can be justified in the first place, and to what extent this is explicitly transferred to the public sphere.

Beyond the Weberian tradition, a second important empirical understanding of legitimacy stems from David Easton (1965; 1975). His systems theory approach is also normatively neutral and therefore well-suited for an application across the democracy-autocracy divide. In a nutshell, Easton's idea of a political system is system of interaction in which values are authoritatively allocated. Two forms of input, demands and support, need to be transformed into outputs which again have repercussions via feedback effects on the inputs. It is particularly Easton's discussion of support that is of relevance here. Easton distinguished between two modes of support: the diffuse and the specific. Diffuse support refers to "evaluations of what an object is or represents – to the general meaning it has for a person – not of what it does" (Easton 1975, 444). Diffuse support is therefore independent of the daily input, but refers a "reservoir of favorable attitudes or good will" that is able to help members to "accept or tolerate outputs to which they are opposed" (Easton 1965, 273). As such, diffuse support is more long-term oriented, identity-related, and often entails a full-fledged political ideology, be it in the form of a thin ideology like nationalism or a thick one like communism (Freeden 1998). In contrast, specific support is a short-term evaluation of the performance of the political system, a "quid pro quo for the fulfillment of demands" (Easton 1965, 268). It is based on a cost-benefit calculus. If the incumbent rulers deliver, the population will support them in the short term. If the rulers fail to do so, support is withdrawn. Specific support is therefore an utilitarian updating in light of ruler performance. Fritz Scharpf (1999) has more recently taken up this idea and has developed it into his dualism of "input" and "output" legitimacy with the former referring more to ideational and the latter more to interest-based sources of legitimacy.

There is some disagreement as to whether what Easton sees as specific support or what others have more recently called performance legitimacy (White (1986); Hechter (2009); Zhao (2009); Soest and Grauvogel (2017a)) should be called legitimacy. From a Weberian perspective, legitimacy must entail more than obedience on the basis of material or coercive incentives or sanctions:

> Loyalty may be hypocritically simulated by individuals or by whole groups on purely opportunistic grounds, or carried out in practice for reasons of material self-interest. Or people may submit from individual weakness or helplessness because there is not acceptable alternative (Weber [1922] 1978, 214).

Some scholars have moved beyond Weber's caveat and have argued that discourses that pledge the basic satisfaction of human material needs or even more elaborate socio-economic compacts between the ruler and ruled constitute a viable base for legitimation (Gehlen 1963; Cook 1993; Lake 2009). Skeptics point out that such accounts conflate the difference between support and legitimacy. Because the use of material or coercive means to secure compliance to authority is highly contingent on renewed application of sanctions or rewards, the critics would see distinctions between obedience on this basis and on the basis of legitimacy (Bernhard 1993, 26–27; Gerschewski 2013, 2018). Such criticism would not however take issue with the idea that poor government performance can weaken legitimacy (Lipset 1959; Juan Jose 1978), only that it cannot substitute for a credible set of beliefs, even though it can undermine it. In order to facilitate the empirical study of this conceptual controversy, we have collected data on the performance-based justification of authority.

3 The V-Dem Legitimation Survey

On the basis of these theoretical considerations, we have compiled a list of five questions that mirror the most important legitimacy claims. Our aim is to capture only the legitimacy claims of the rulers and not the question of legitimacy beliefs of the people.[1] As outlined, a form of rule's claim to legitimacy regularly rests on different components. It can be more identity-, process- or output-based (Soest and Grauvogel 2017a) but these claims are not mutually exclusive and are often invoked in parallel (e.g. Alagappa (1995)). Based on the central conceptualizations of Weber and Easton, we selected four expert questions that focus on a government's legitimation strategies in respect its rational-legal rule, the person of the leader, its political ideology and its performance to comprehensively capture claims to legitimacy. The experts furthermore categorized the content of a government's ideology. The questions are presented in Table 1 below. *The regime* is understood as a set of formal and/or informal rules that govern the choice of political leaders and their exercise of power. *The government* is understood as the chief executive along with the cabinet, ministries, and top civil servants.

To capture Weber's legal-rational type, we ask: "To what extent does the current government refer to the legal norms and regulations in order to justify the rule of the regime in place?" We also include a question on charismatic legitimation: "To what extent is [the leader] portrayed as being endowed with an extraordinary personal characteristics and/or leadership skills (e.g. as father or mother of the nation, exceptionally heroic, moral, pious, or wise, or any other extraordinary attribute valued by the society)?" We did not directly ask about traditional rule in a Weberian sense, but use a part of our question about dominant political ideology to proxy for it. We posed the following question to our country expert coders: "To what extent does the current government promote a specific ideology (an officially codified set of beliefs used to justify a particular set of social, political, and economic relations) or social model (for example socialism, nationalism, modernization, religious traditionalism, etc.) in order enhance the legitimacy of the regime in place?" The content of the political ideology is then put forward in a separate, multiple choice question. We give five different possibilities: nationalism, socialist or communist, conservative or restorative, separatist or autonomous, and religious. In so doing, we believe to cover the most important types of political ideologies. As we show below, Weber's traditional rule can be inferred from the conservative/restorative and/or the religious answer. Lastly, we tackle performance legitimation by posing the following question: "To what extent does the government refer to performance (such as providing economic growth, poverty reduction, good government, and/or providing security) in order to justify the rule of the regime in place?"

3.1 V-Dem's Methodology

Our five legitimation items were included in one of V-Dem's sub-questionnaires and are all coded by country experts. The five questions and response scales were detailed about in Table 1. With the exception Ideology Character, the expert's rating for all four items and country years are entered into V-Dem's measurement model which converts expert scores into an interval latent variables. This is a Bayesian item response theory model that estimates country-year point estimates on the basis of the expert codings. Patterns of coder dis/agreement are used to estimate variations in reliability and systematic differences in thresholds between ordinal response categories, in order to adjust the point estimates of the latent concept. To achieve

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[1]A prior expert survey examined a similar set of claims to legitimacy questions (Soest and Grauvogel 2017a, 2017b)

Table 1: The V-Dem Legitimation Battery

Question (variable name)
Performance (v2exl_legitperf)
To what extent does the government refer to performance (such as providing economic growth, poverty reduction, effective and non-corrupt governance, and/or providing security) in order to justify the regime in place?
Rational-legal (v2exl_legitratio)
To what extent does the current government refer to the legal norms and regulations in order to justify the regime in place?
Leader (v2exl_legitlead)
To what extent is the Chief Executive portrayed as being endowed with an extraordinary personal characteristics and/or leadership skills (e.g. as father or mother of the nation, exceptionally heroic, moral, pious, or wise, or any other extraordinary attribute valued by the society)?
Ideology (v2exl_legitideol)
To what extent does the current government promote a specific ideology or societal model (an officially codified set of beliefs used to justify a particular set of social, political, and economic relations; for example socialism, nationalism, religious traditionalism, etc.) in order to justify the regime in place?
Response options: 0: Not at all. 1: To a small extent. 2: To some extent but it is not the most important component. 3: To a large extent but not exclusively. 4: Almost exclusively.
Ideology character (v2exl_legitideolcr)
How would you characterize the ideology/ideologies identified in the previous question? 0: Nationalist (v2exl_legitideolcr_0) 1: Socialist or communist. (v2exl_legitideolcr_1) 2: Restorative or conservative. (v2exl_legitideolcr_2) 3: Separatist or autonomist. (v2exl_legitideolcr_3) 4: Religious. (v2exl_legitideolcr_4)
Response options: 0: No. 1: Yes.

cross-national and temporal comparability, V-Dem's approach is to use both lateral coders that code several countries for a shorter time period, and bridge coders that code the full time series for more than one country, as well as anchoring vignettes that integrate information on coder thresholds into the model (for a more detailed description of how this is done see Coppedge et al. (2019), and for the measurement model see Pemstein et al. (2018)). The vignettes employed for the legitimation battery are included in the appendix.

3.2 Number of experts

The mean number of expert coders ranges from 4.69 to 4.72 for the legitimation variables over the 119 years for which we have data, totaling 18,604 country years. In general, there are fewer experts further back in time; the mean number of expert coders per country and year rises from 4.23 in the year 1900 to 5.5 in 2018. A full accounting of the number of coders for each variable and country year are available in the appendix (see Figures 13, 14, 15, and 16). There are a number of notable countries that unfortunately were not coded by the requisite number of experts in the 2019 update (v.9), e.g. Iraq (1920-2018), China (1900-2018), and Greece (1900-2015). Hopefully these lacunae can be fixed during the next scheduled update of the data set. The data included in the V-Dem v.9 dataset does not include country-years with less than 3 expert coders. For explorative purposes, the full data including observations with less than 3 expert coders, can be requested from the authors, however it is strongly recommended to rerun any analysis excluding these observations with less than 3 coders as a robustness check. In this paper, we include in China and Laos in Figure 9 displaying the legitimation trends in communist regimes. While China and Laos only have 2 to 3 coders depending on year, the face validity of the measure is not too bad with regards to the importance of ideology. Albeit

in China, the person of the leader clearly lacks face validity. Not only would we expect to clearly detect Mao Zedong (in power 1949-76), we would also have expected an uptick in leadership-based claims following President Xi Jinping's assent to power in late 2012 given his moves to personalize power (Shirk 2018).

4 Data Validation

In this section we explore the data for the four different legitimation claims and the variation in the ideological character of those claims. We begin by examining different claims to legitimacy at the aggregate level. Figure 1 shows the distribution of claims for all available country years, including horizontal bar plots, indicating the mean and standard deviation. It shows that we have data points spanning the full spectrum for each claim and that the mean for Ideology, and the Leader is around the middle of the scale (at 2.03 and 2.04), and the distribution for Performance and Rational-legal is slightly skewed to the right with a mean at 2.14 and 2.08. The figure provides a reference going forward with the data exploration.
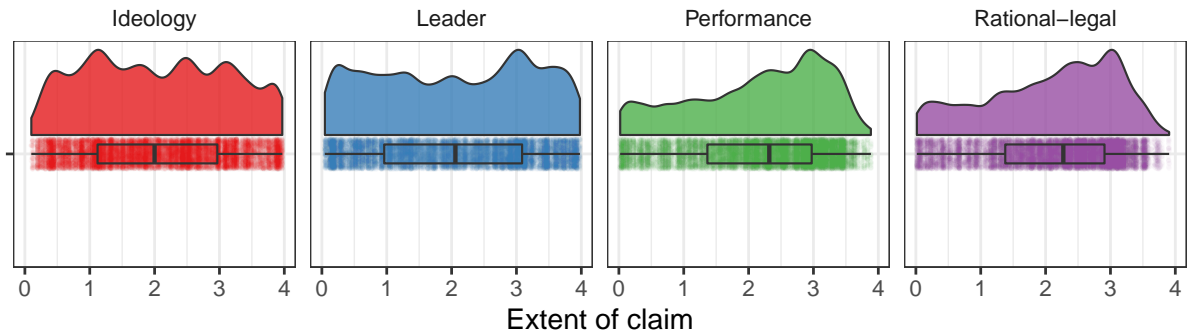

Figure 1: Distribution of Legitimation Claims

Do different regime types have different propensities to rely on the four different types of claims to legitimacy we have measured? Using the Regimes of World typology from V-Dem Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg (2018)] figure 2 below plots the degree to which closed autocracies, electoral autocracies, electoral and liberal democracies rely on different legitimation claims from 1900 to the present. Our expectation is that autocracies should be more dependent on ideological and leadership-based claims, whereas democracies should be focused on rational-legal and performance criteria to justify authority. By and large the data is in line with this expectation.
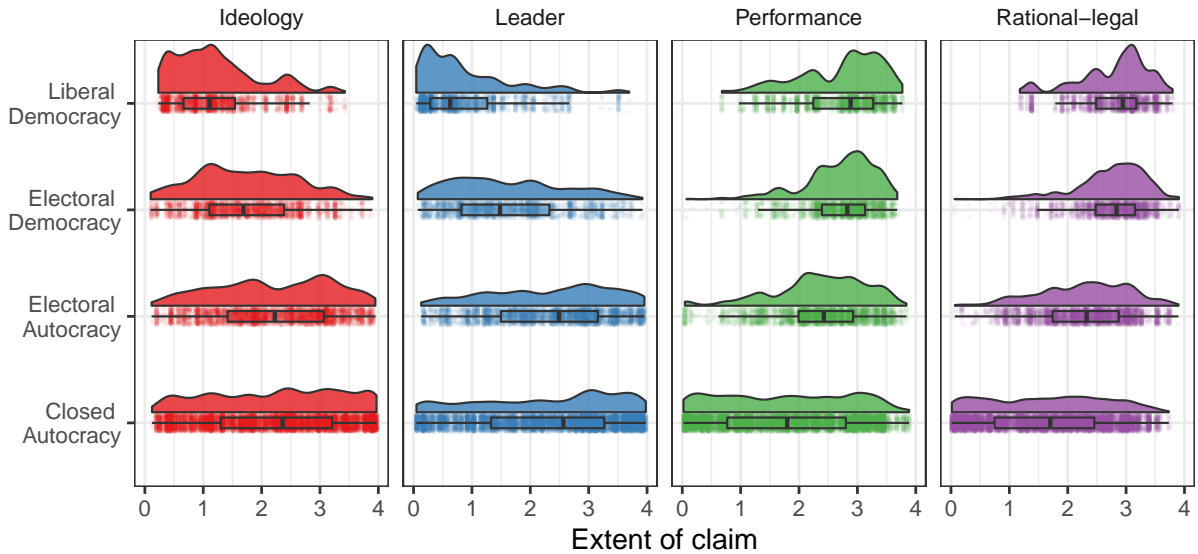
Figure 2: Distribution of Claims by Regime Type (Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg 2018)

Beginning with ideological claims, both closed and electoral autocracies rely more heavily on these sorts of claims to justify their rule, than the two democratic regime types. Among democracies, electoral democracies exhibit a greater propensity to utilize ideological rationales than liberal democracies. There are a number of liberal democracies that are exceptional in this regard. For instance, from 2004 to 2016 Israel relied heavily on the personal authority of its rulers, a period which was characterized by the domineering leadership of prime ministers such as Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu. Another exception in this regard is South Africa under the presidency of Nelson Mandela. His role as the charismatic leader of the anti-Apartheid movement and its first democratic elected president gave him strong credibility as a transformational leader. The picture with regards to claims based on performance and rational-legal exhibit, in line with our expectation, the reverse relationship. Closed autocracies, in particular, do not rely on these sorts of claims to a high extent, whereas electoral autocracies, with their emulation of democratic procedures, rely on them to a greater extent, but not as extensively as democracy (Ginsburg and Moustafa 2008). The other aspect that is quite interesting with regard to electoral authoritarianism is that it combines all four claims in large measure. With regard to personalistic-leader-based and ideological claims, it ranks just a bit lower than closed autocracies, yet its level of reliance on performance and rational legal claims is just a bit lower than the democracies it emulates to generate legitimacy (Schedler 2009).

In the next figure, 3, we compare the ways in which military, monarchic, party and personalist autocracies seek to legitimize their rule. This categorization is drawn from the typology and coding proposed by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014). While we find less variation between different forms of autocracy compared to figure 2, there are some clear differences. As one would expect, dominant-party based regimes (a high percentage of which are Leninist) rely on ideology to a larger extent than do other autocratic regimes. Again, there are some outliers but they do not cast doubt on the descriptive inference we present above. For instance, Ivory Coast under the rule of the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire – African Democratic Rally (PDCI) from independence up until 1999 was not very ideological (Piccolino 2018, 502). Legitimation in this case was

highly personalistic, based on the charisma of the leader of the independence struggle Félix Houphouët-Boigny who ruled until his death in 1993. His style of leadership was known as "Houphouetism" and towards the end of his reign his followers referred to him either as "Papa" Houphouët or "The Old One," cementing his reputation as the "father of the nation" (Toungara 1990)

Military regimes do not promote the qualities of the leader to the same extent as the three other types, all of which have similar higher values. On average, monarchies rely on this claim to the greatest extent and with the most consistency, as demonstrated by the very low variance on the mean. Somewhat surprisingly, party-based and personalistic regimes promote the leader to a similar degree. However, this may a product of the fact that we use the distinct categories in the data, and did not use the hybrid types in the data. This may be due to the fact that in revolutionary and post-revolutionary regime-building stage one-party regimes strongly rely on cults of charismatic leadership (e.g., Stalin's Russia, Mao's China, Castro's Cuba, or Kim's Korea, or the example of Ivory Coast discussed above as exemplary one-party big-man rule in post-independence Africa).

With regard to performance legitimacy monarchies rely on such claims to a lesser extent. While personalistic dictatorship relies on such claims less than military or one-party rule, we were surprised that the levels between these three were similar. It is possible that under such regimes neo-patrimonial distribution of resources is seen as a kind of performance, which can used to claim the legitimacy to rule. Such arguments would make sense in the context of big-man rule in Africa (Bratton and Van de Walle 1994; Médard 1992; Erdmann and Engel 2007).
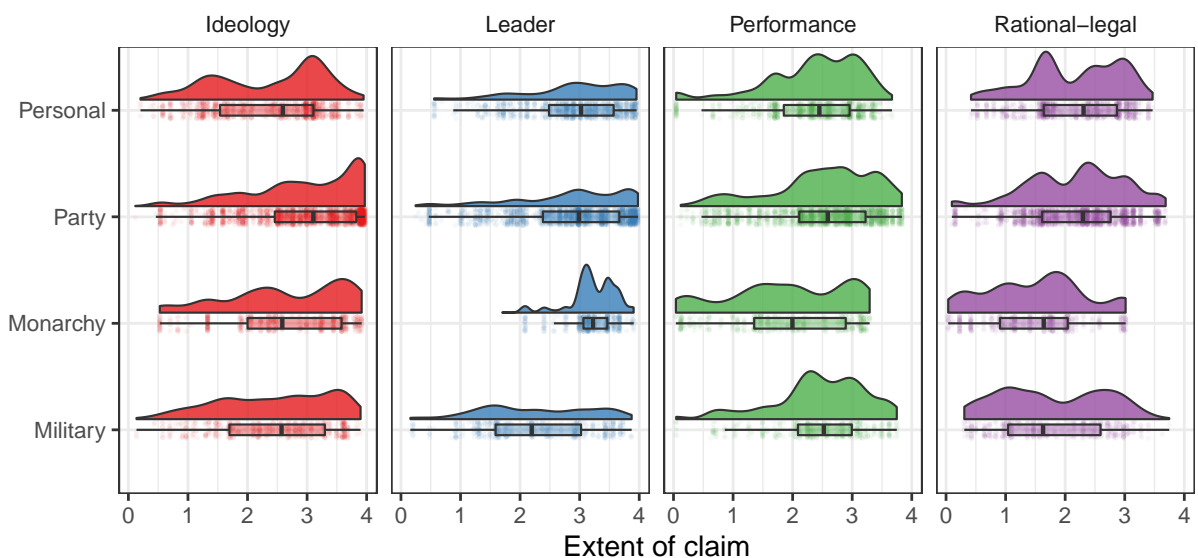

Figure 3: Distribution of Claims by Autocratic Regime Type (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014)

Breaking down legitimation claims by the regime categorization proposed by Wahman, Teorell, and Hadenius (2013) offer some nuance with regards to differences between one-party and multi-party regimes (see figure 4). As expected, One-party regimes rely to a greater extent on ideology than any other regime type, and rely on the person of the leader more than do multiparty authoritarian regimes. While indistinguishable in terms of

performance claims, one-party dictatorship, on average, relies somewhat less on rational-legal claims than do their multi-party cousins.
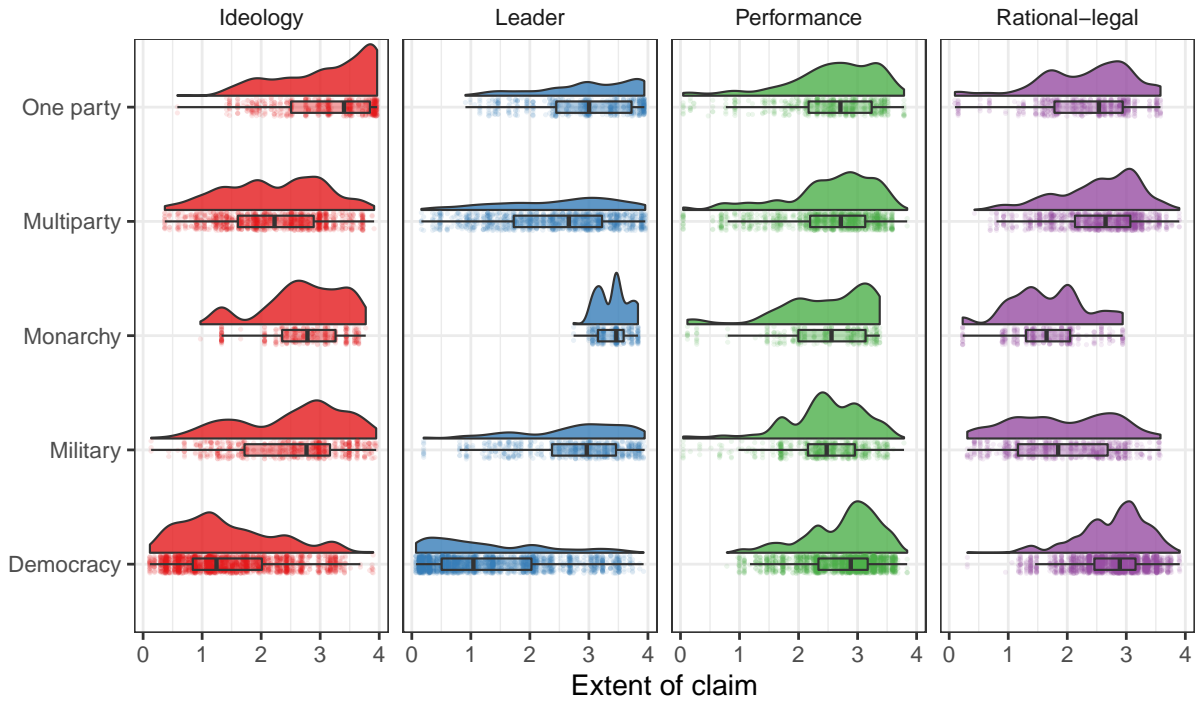

Figure 4: Distribution of Claims by Autocratic Regime Type and Democracy (Wahman, Teorell, and Hadenius 2013)

4.1 Legitimation Claims and Level of Democracy

The scatter diagrams in figure 5 plot the four legitimation claims against V-Dem's Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) for a cross-section of all countries in the V-Dem dataset in 2018. Including all country years the correlation between the claims and the EDI are: Ideology -0.33, Leader -0.42, Performance 0.44, Rational-legal 0.52. This reiterates the pattern of associations already visible in the previous plots, but also highlights that the four legitimation measures are not mere proxy measures of *democracy*. They carry additional information.
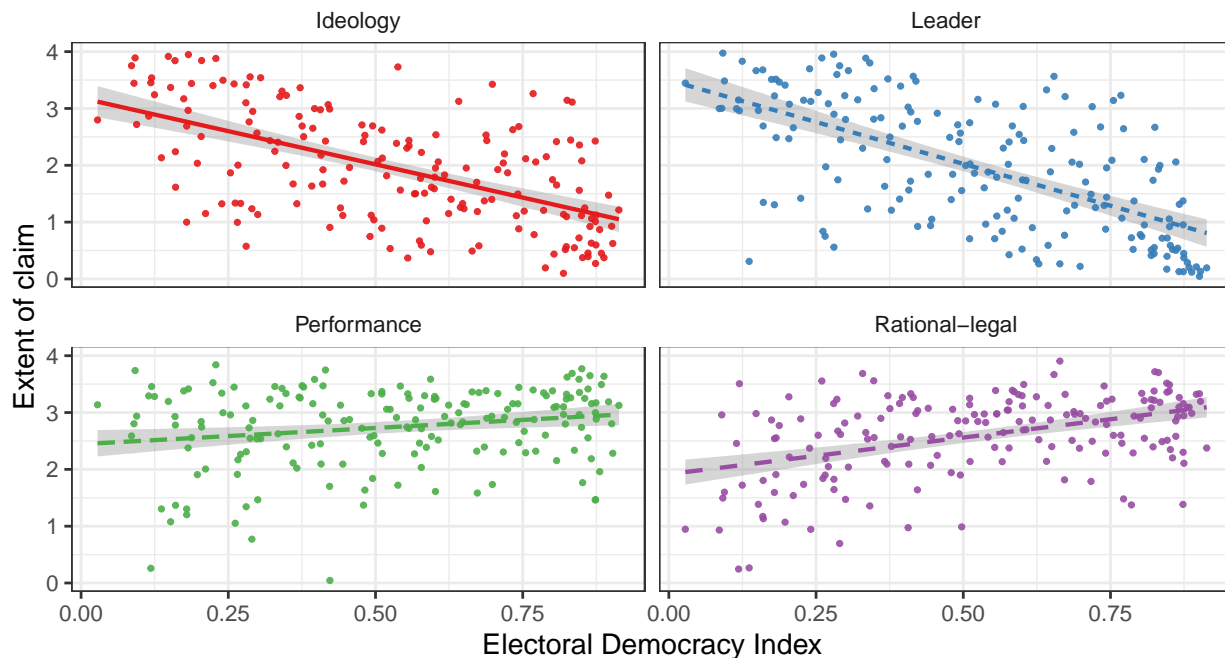
Figure 5: Relationship between Claims and Democracy: 2018

4.2 Face Validity Checks

We explore the validity of our measures looking at selected individual countries over time to see if the values generated by the expert surveys are congruent with what is generally known about the development of each country. If we start by looking at legitimacy claims based on the personalistic characteristics of the ruler, the short dotted blue line in figure 4, we can clearly identify the rise of strongmen. In line with the recent literature on the personalization of the Cambodian regime (see Morgenbesser (2018)). The measure picks up Hun Sen's ascension to the premiership in Cambodia in 1985 and notes a peak in person-based legitimation claims in 2018, when he audaciously commissioned a grand and ostentatious monument to himself (Nachemson 2018). We also see an uptick in India after the 2014 electoral success of Hindu-nationalist Narendra Modi and an even sharper rise in the Philippines after notorious strongman Rodrigo Duterte was elected president. His personalistic claims to legitimacy has begun to approach that of the previous notorious egoist-in-chief of the island nation, Ferdinand Marcos (1965-86). In Thailand, we see a sharp rise in leader-based claims since the coup-mastermind General Prayuth Chan-o-cha assumed dictatorial power in 2014. In Turkey we see a dramatic increase in personalistic legitimation claims since Recep Erdogan assumed the premiership in 2003. These increased even further after he became president in 2014. And even more striking, the intensity of claims based on Erdogan's persona now surpasses those of the founder of the republic and its first president, Kemal Attatürk (in power 1923-38). In the US we note a small, yet significant increase in claims based on the person of the leader since Trump's inauguration in 2017, which is now on par with that of the wartime president Franklin D. Roosevelt (in power 1933-45).
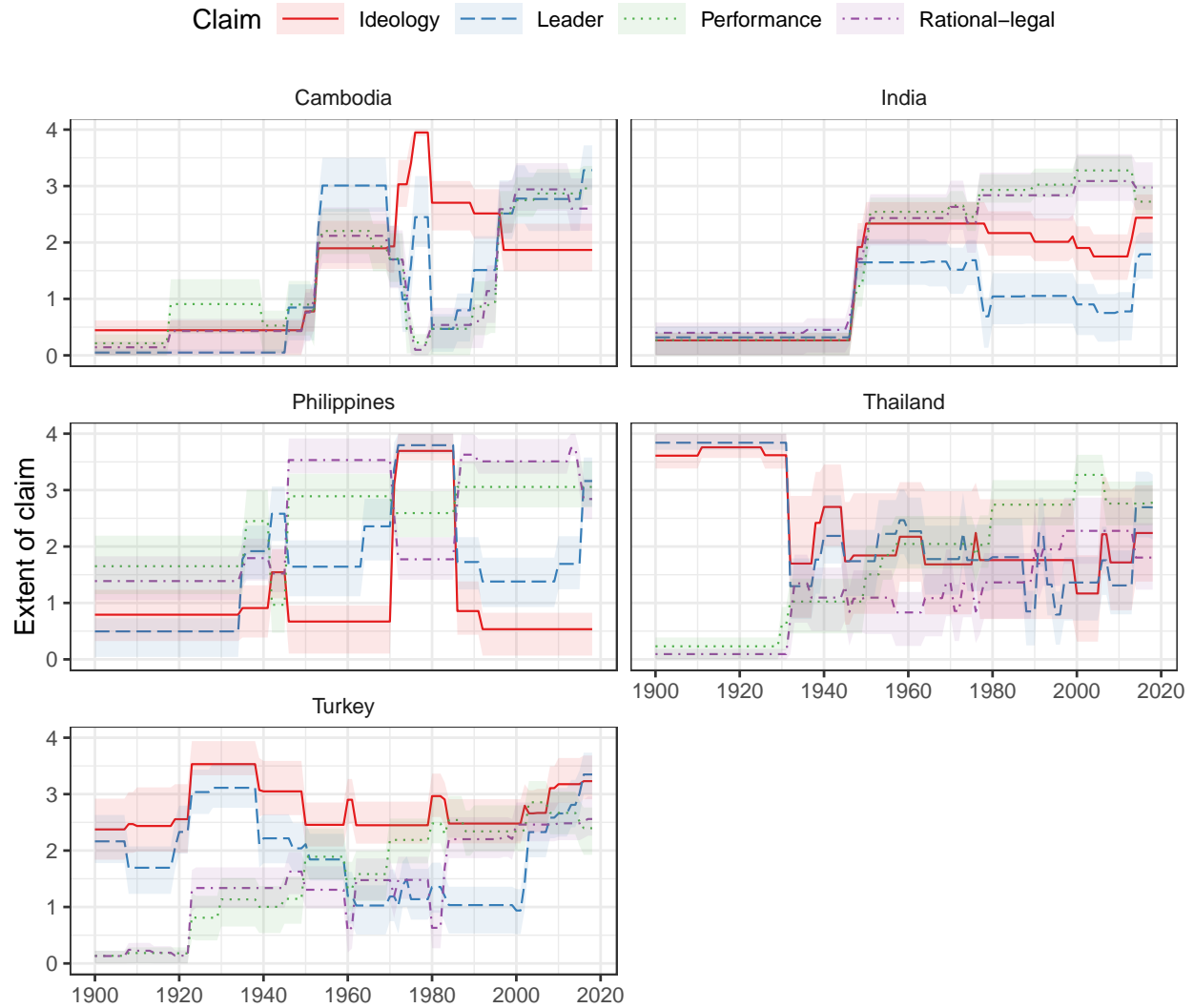
14

Figure 6: The Rise of Strongmen

We see similar surges in personalist legitimacy claims in the two Central European EU members, Poland and Hungary, that have experienced recent bouts of autocratization (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). In Russia, the government has steadily elevated Putin's persona and is approaching levels close to Stalin's "cult of personality". In Serbia we note the dramatic fluctuation in claims based on the appeal of Josip Tito (in power 1953-80), Slobodan Milošević (in power 1989-97), a rise again since after the Serbian Progressive Party's Tomislav Nikolić won the presidency and entered power in 2012. The high level of personalist legitimacy claims has since continued since Aleksandar Vučić assumed the presidency in 2017. In addition, we also observe an increase in legitimacy claims based on ideology, in particular nationalism, in all four countries (see appendix figure 12).
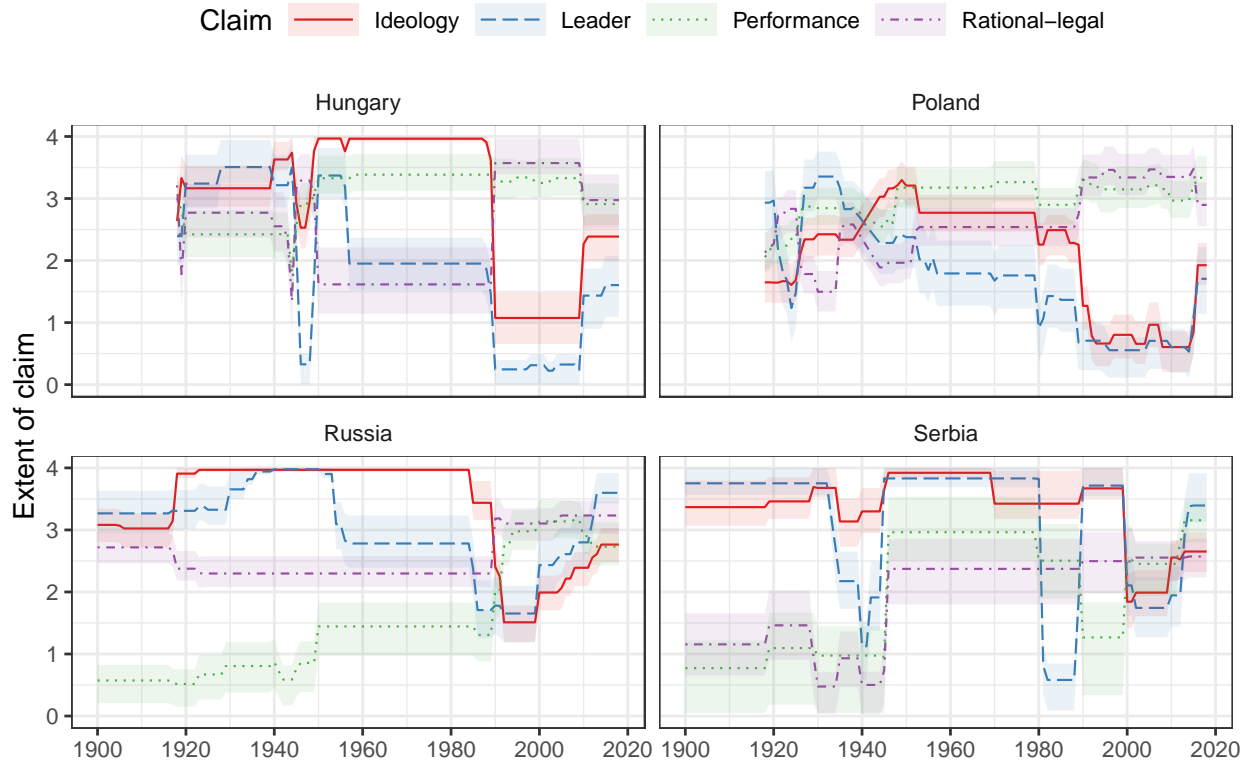
Figure 7: European Backsliders

In line with expectations, the highest level of reliance on the person of the leader is seen in absolute monarchies, such as Bahrain, Jordan, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Oman (see figure 8). Monarchy, by its nature, heavily relies on the person of the leader in staking its claim to the legitimacy of the regime. And as is evident from the North Korean timeline, see figure 9, things truly reach true heights on this score when the regime is the "socialism in one family" practiced by the Kim dynasty in North Korea.
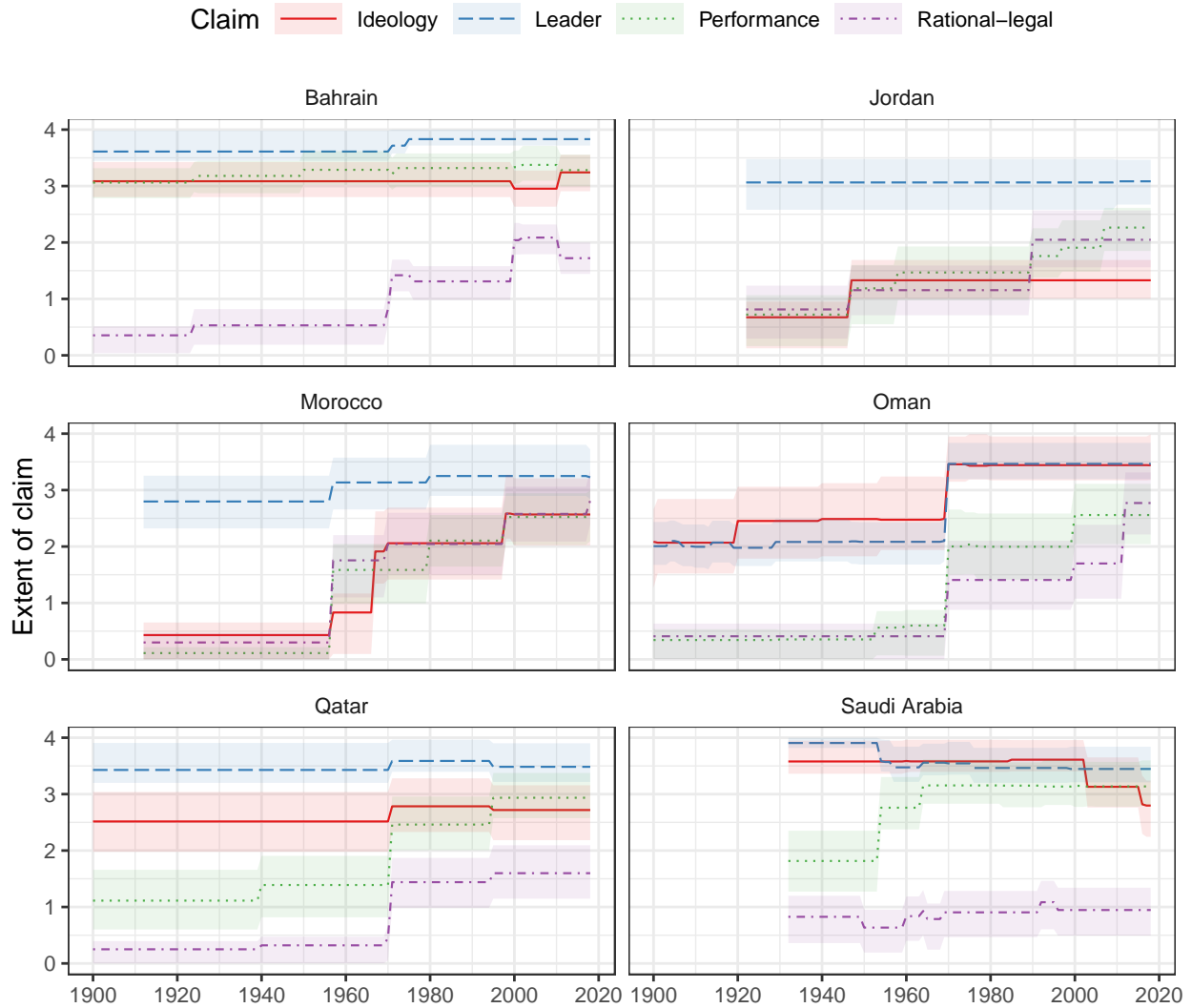
Figure 8: Kingdoms Promote the Person of the Leader

The five self-proclaimed communist states in the world also all heavily rely on ideology to justify their rule (see figure 9). In the case of Cuba, the drop off at the end is a product of the retirement of charismatic revolutionary leader, Fidel Castro, and the transfer of power to his brother Raul in 2011, and then again after Miguel Díaz-Canel assumed the presidency in 2018.Taken together the graphs in this section largely square with our expectations and offer us further confidence that expert coders can be employed to estimate legitimation claims over time.
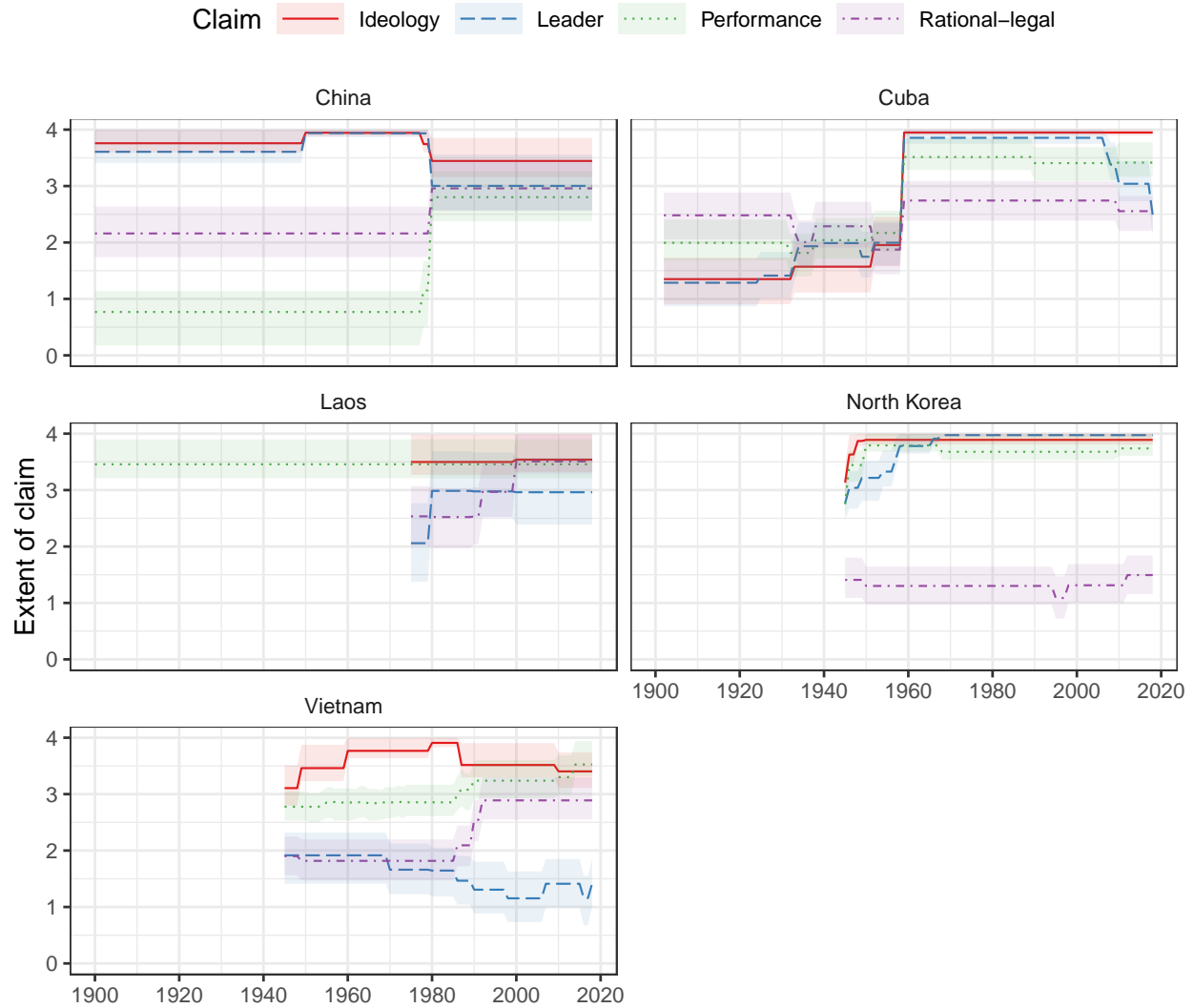
Figure 9: Communist Regimes Promote Ideology

4.3 Different Types of Ideology

In addition to asking the country experts *"To what extent does the current government promote a specific ideology [. . .] in order enhance the legitimacy of the regime in place"*, we also ask about the character of that ideology. Specifically; *"How would you characterize the ideology/ideologies identified in the previous question?"*, giving the coder the option to signify whether any of the five types of ideology were present (1 = yes, 0 = no): *Nationalist; Socialist or communist; Restorative or conservative; Separatist or autonomist; Religious*. These answers are then aggregated via averaging, taking on values between 0 [No] and 1 [Yes]. These are not mutually exclusive as a government may well promote, for example, both religion and nationalism in order to justify the regime, which, for example, is the case in both democratic Israel and autocratic Iran. In order to

make the different types of ideology claim comparable to, for example personalistic claims, we simply assign the full value form the Ideology claim variable to each ideology type that half, or more, of the experts agreed was present, allowing a regime to claim legitimacy based on more than one ideology character.[An alternative approach, which is suitable for comparing the different ideology types to each other, would be to weigh the *ideology* measure with by the mean of each *ideology character* coding.] To illustrate, out of the 9 coders for Russia in 2018, 6 reported that the ideology was *nationalist*, 6 that it was *restorative or conservative*, and 1 coder reported that the ideology was *socialist or communist*. In this case we assign the full value from the ideology claim question (in this case 2.8) to both *nationalist* and *restorative or conservative* but not to *socialist or communist*. If we look at the average level of specific ideologies in regions during specific time periods in figure 10, we see certain patterns which we would expect given what we know about history. For instance, in Africa and Asia we see increases rise in nationalism after decolonization. In Eastern Europe, as expected, we see sharp rise in Socialist and Communist ideology following World War II, and then its collapse at the end of the Cold War. We see a similar pattern in Africa when Chinese and Russian influence was widespread during the Cold War and its diminution with the collapse of European communism.

Figure 11 breaks down the distributions of Ideology character by regime types and gives us further confidence that the coders have managed to capture differences between the type of ideology promoted. For example, democracies, if anything, promote nationalism and a conservative or restorative ideology. One-party regimes, more often than not, promote a socialist or communist ideology. Military regimes promote nationalism more than do other types, and among the monarchies, most promote a conservative or restorative ideology to a high extent.
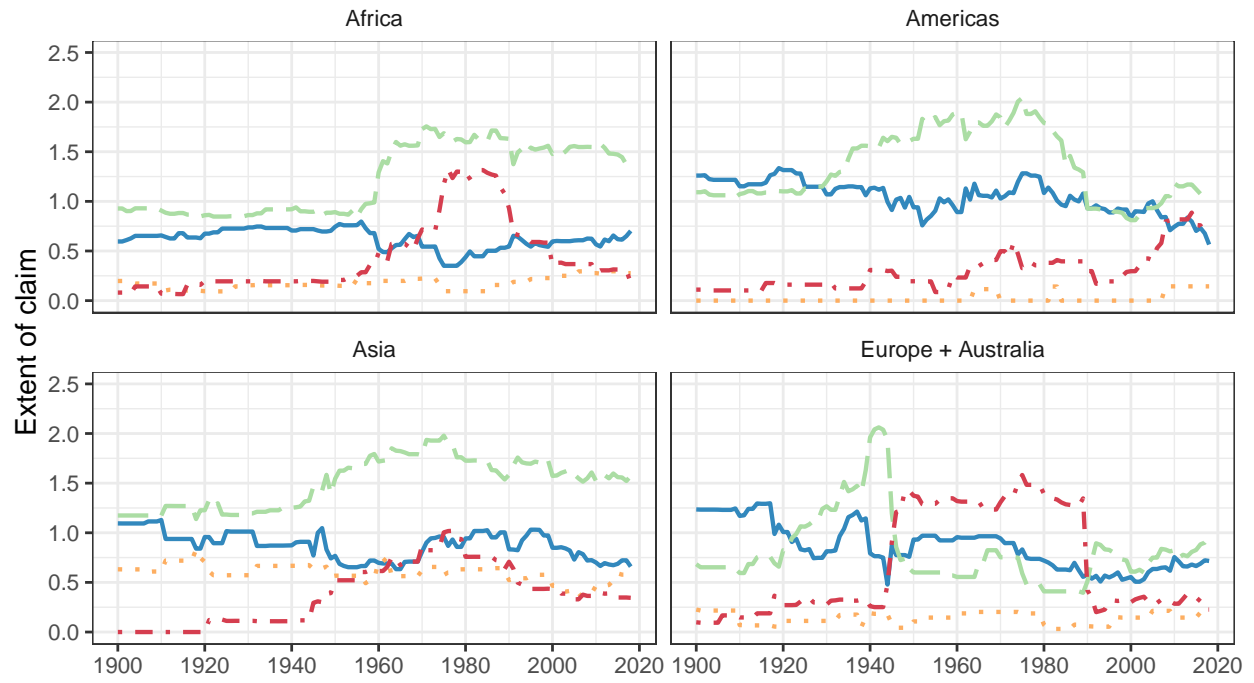
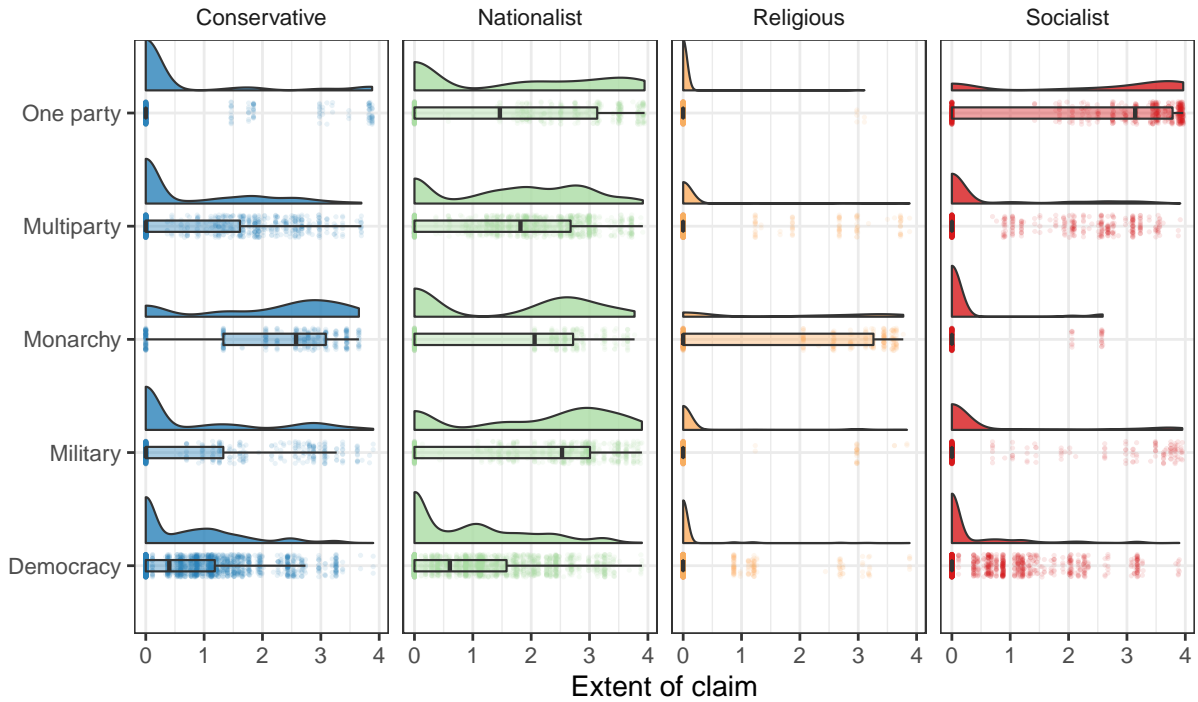Figure 10: Ideology Claims by Character and World Region

Figure 11: Ideology Claims by Character and Regime Type (Wahman, Teorell, and Hadenius 2013)

5 Conclusion

In this paper we have introduced the *Regime Legitimation Strategies (RLS)* measure, providing for the first-time measures of governments claims to the right to rule that are comparable across time and space, that are freely available for 179 countries and 119 years. We have shown how claims to legitimacy based on; Ideology; the person of the Leader; Performance; and Rational-legal norms and regulations vary across regimes, and within countries over time. From the validation exercise in section X, it is evident that experts do understand and can be employed to code legitimation claims: with very few exceptions their coding square well with expectations from case studies as well as with existing regime type classifications. In addition to capturing historical shifts the measures pick up recent trends, such as, an increased emphasis of the leader in countries such as Russia, Turkey, Cambodia, and more recently also in India and the Philippines; and recent increases in legitimation claims based on both a conservative and nationalist ideologies the European countries Serbia, Hungary and Poland, which have also experienced autocratization. These measures are, for example, of interest to scholars of autocratic politics; regime survival; nationalism; and autocratization among others.

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Appendix

Question battery (including vignettes)

Legitimation introduction

Clarification: Governments make legitimacy claims – provide justifications for the form of rule under which they govern. In the following section we are interested in the nature of the legitimacy claims made by the sitting government. Please note that the government's claims to legitimacy - their legitimation strategies - are the object of inquiry here. We are not asking you to assess how ordinary people judge the legitimacy of their rulers. Do not assume that governments make legitimacy claims on only one basis. We are interested in multi-track and hybrid legitimation strategies.

The regime is understood as a set of formal and/or informal rules that govern the choice of political leaders and their exercise of power. **The government** is understood as the chief executive along with the cabinet, ministries, and top civil servants.

Performance legitimation (v2exl_legitperf)

Question: To what extent does the government refer to performance (such as providing economic growth, poverty reduction, effective and non-corrupt governance, and/or providing security) in order to justify the regime in place?

Responses: 0: Not at all. 1: To a small extent. 2: To some extent but it is not the most important component. 3: To a large extent but not exclusively. 4: Almost exclusively.

Vignettes: 0-1 The economy in Country X has fluctuated in the recent decade, and although the government takes credit for improvements when the economy is improving, they seldom connect the economic situation of the country to the political regime.

1-2 The incumbent government in Country X often claims that their policies are more conducive for economic growth and lead to lower rates of unemployment, and that the proposed platform of the opposition would set the country on course to recession. However, the incumbent does not describe the opposition as an illegitimate alternative because of this, nor suggest that the existing rules for leadership selection be set aside in order to secure continued economic progress.

2-3 Country X has had a turbulent history of civil unrest and a previous regime that was overthrown, following allegations of grand corruption. The current political leadership and state-owned news media often portray the current government a bulwark to civil conflict, and as doing their best at cleaning up a corrupt political system and bureaucracy.

3-4 Country X has seen sustained economic growth and widespread poverty reduction in the previous two decades. State owned media frequently attribute the rise in living standards to the stability of the political system and government policies. The government in Country X routinely dismisses calls for political reforms by referring to the absence of economic development and widespread corruption in a neighboring country since it introduced multi-party elections ten years ago, as a contrast to the successful and stable development of country X.

Rational-legal legitimation (v2exl_legitratio)

Question: To what extent does the current government refer to the legal norms and regulations in order to justify the regime in place?

Clarification: This question pertains to legal norms and regulations as laid out for instance in the constitution regarding access to power (e.g. elections) as well as exercise of power (e.g. rule of law). Electoral regimes may score high on this question as well as non-electoral regimes that emphasize their rule-boundedness.

Responses: 0: Not at all. 1: To a small extent. 2: To some extent but it is not the most important component. 3: To a large extent but not exclusively. 4: Almost exclusively.

Vignettes: 0-1 Country X does not hold competitive elections and the rules governing access to political power are not made transparent in Country X. Yet the government may proclaim that they have gained office through intra-party rules and regulations.

1-2 While the military government in Country X came to power through violent means, the junta often portray themselves as the only guarantors of rule of law, and the only one who can uphold a predictable climate for businesses to operate.

2-3 The president in Country X was elected by popular vote in an election tainted by accusations of widespread voter fraud in benefit of the incumbent. The key opposition leaders have called for new elections to be held, but these calls have been dismissed by the national election committee. The president proclaims that he is democratically elected, by a majority the people of Country X, and as such is the rightful ruler of the country for the upcoming 4 years.

3-4 Country X is a highly democratic country where freedom of expression and liberal principles are respected, and where horizontal accountability is institutionalized. The government clearly derive their right to rule from the electoral process and rules based on the procedures laid out in the constitution.

Person of the Leader (v2exl_legitlead)

Question: To what extent is the Chief Executive portrayed as being endowed with an extraordinary personal characteristics and/or leadership skills (e.g. as father or mother of the nation, exceptionally heroic, moral, pious, or wise, or any other extraordinary attribute valued by the society)?

Clarification: The Chief Executive refers to the Head of State or the Head of Government, depending on the relative power of each office. We are interested in the key leadership figure.

Responses: 0: Not at all. 1: To a small extent. 2: To some extent but it is not the most important component. 3: To a large extent but not exclusively. 4: Almost exclusively.

Vignettes:

0-1 The president of Country X dresses indistinguishably from the rest of his cabinet. Save for a stellar academic record, little is publicized about the president's life and extraordinary personal achievements before ascending to the top political position of the country.

1-2 The government in Country X often makes a point of the president's excellent leadership in stewarding the country through the ongoing economic crisis, but at the same time also give credit to the finance minister's work on managing the budget.

2-3 The president of Country X makes frequent media appearances in which he addresses the nation population as his family. Government communication promotes his capabilities as a skilled international negotiator and an excellent military commander. However, the life and political accomplishments of political leaders, including the president are not taught in school in Country X.

3-4 History books in Country X typically devote more than one chapter to the early life and political accomplishments of the country's president, one of which include swimming across a raging river at age 60. The portrait of the president hangs in every school classroom and public building throughout the country. The philosophy and political thought of the president is mandatory teaching in the education system of Country X.

Ideology (v2exl_legitideol)

Question: To what extent does the current government promote a specific ideology or societal model (an officially codified set of beliefs used to justify a particular set of social, political, and economic relations; for example socialism, nationalism, religious traditionalism, etc.) in order to justify the regime in place?

Responses: 0: Not at all. 1: To a small extent. 2: To some extent but it is not the most important component. 3: To a large extent but not exclusively. 4: Almost exclusively.

Vignettes 0-1 Country X ensures freedom of expression and religion both de-jure and de-facto. In school liberalism is promoted as the foundation of Country X.

1-2 The government in Country X often preaches the virtues of Christian values and promote themselves as realizing the core interest of the Nation of Country X, which they proclaim is under threat from globalization, immigration and international businesses. The president recently stated that by the mandate of the people of Country X, he is obliged to close the boarders to immigrants who do not share Country X's values and traditions.

2-3 Islam is the official religion in Country X. Throughout the modern history of Country X, all political leaders have portrayed themselves as devout Sunni Muslims, who frequently claim that political decisions are made in order to safeguard the standing of their religion in the region. While freedom of religion is enshrined in Country X's constitution there are only a few followers of different faith traditions, and none of whom are central in the state apparatus.

3-4 Communism is the official ideology of Country X. Marxist and Leninist teachings are compulsory throughout the educational system and are featured in university entry exams. Most public spaces are decorated with banners and posters carrying ideological slogans promoting communism and egalitarian values.

Ideology character (v2exl_legitideolcr)

Question: How would you characterize the ideology/ideologies identified in the previous question?

Clarification: Check all that apply.

Responses:
0: Nationalist (0=No, 1=Yes)[v2exl_legitideolcr_0]

1: Socialist or communist. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2exl_legitideolcr_1]

2: Restorative or conservative. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2exl_legitideolcr_2]

3: Separatist or autonomist. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2exl_legitideolcr_3]

4: Religious. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2exl_legitideolcr_4]
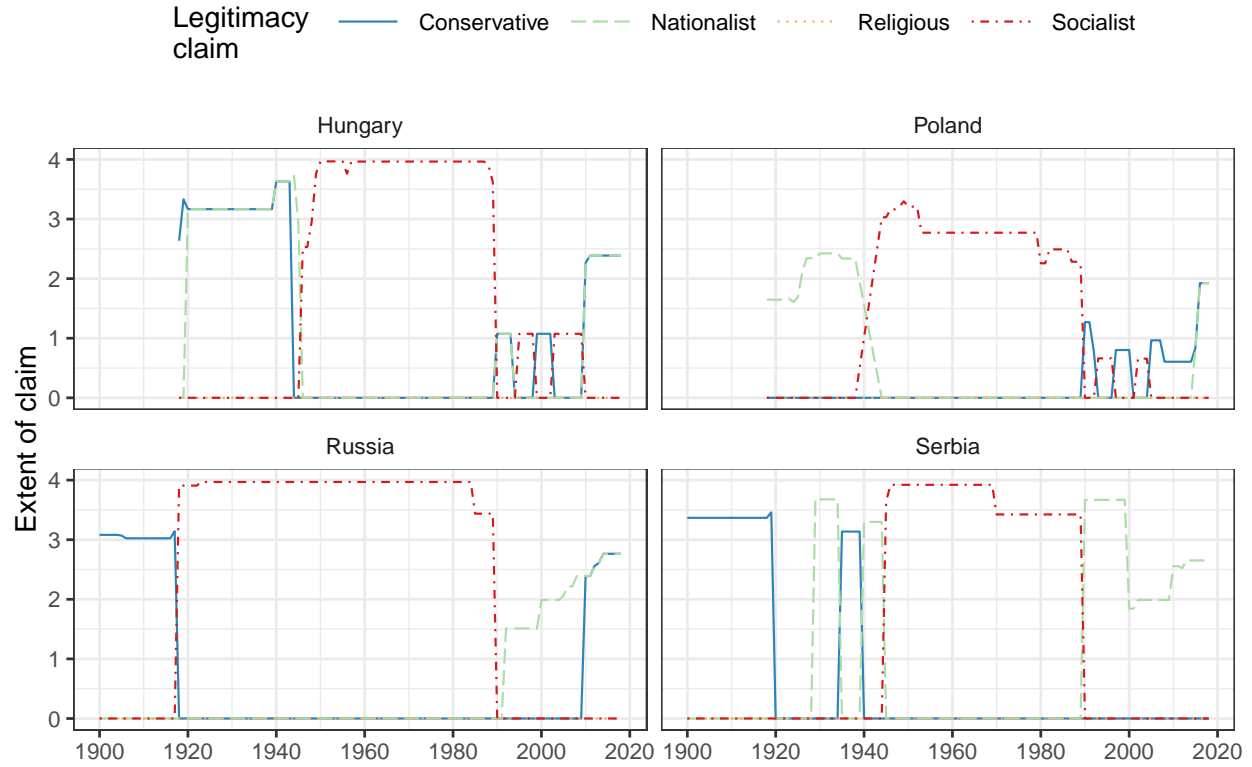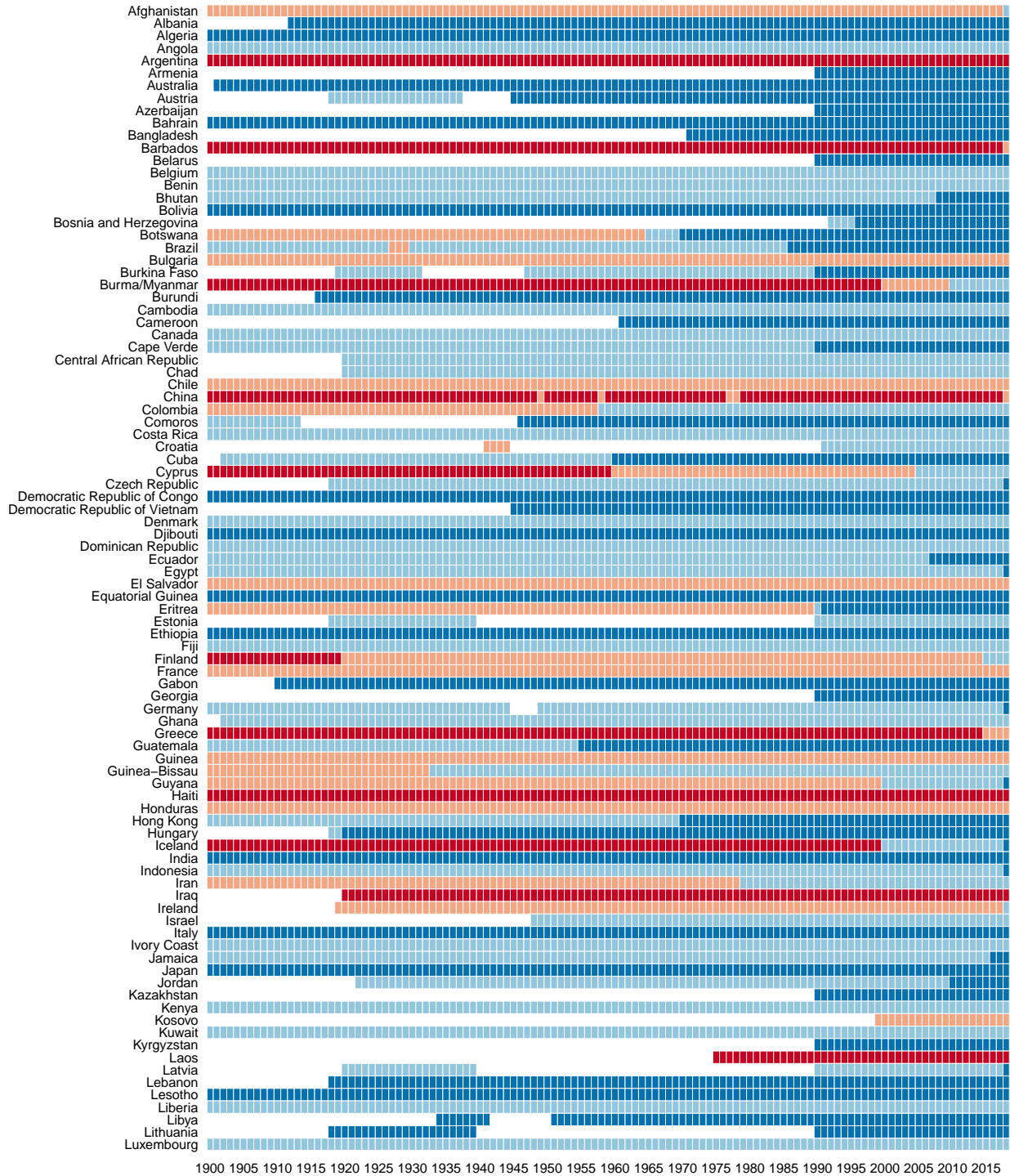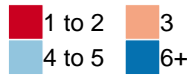
Additional validity checks

Figure 12: European backsliders - Ideology

Number of coders - Ideology

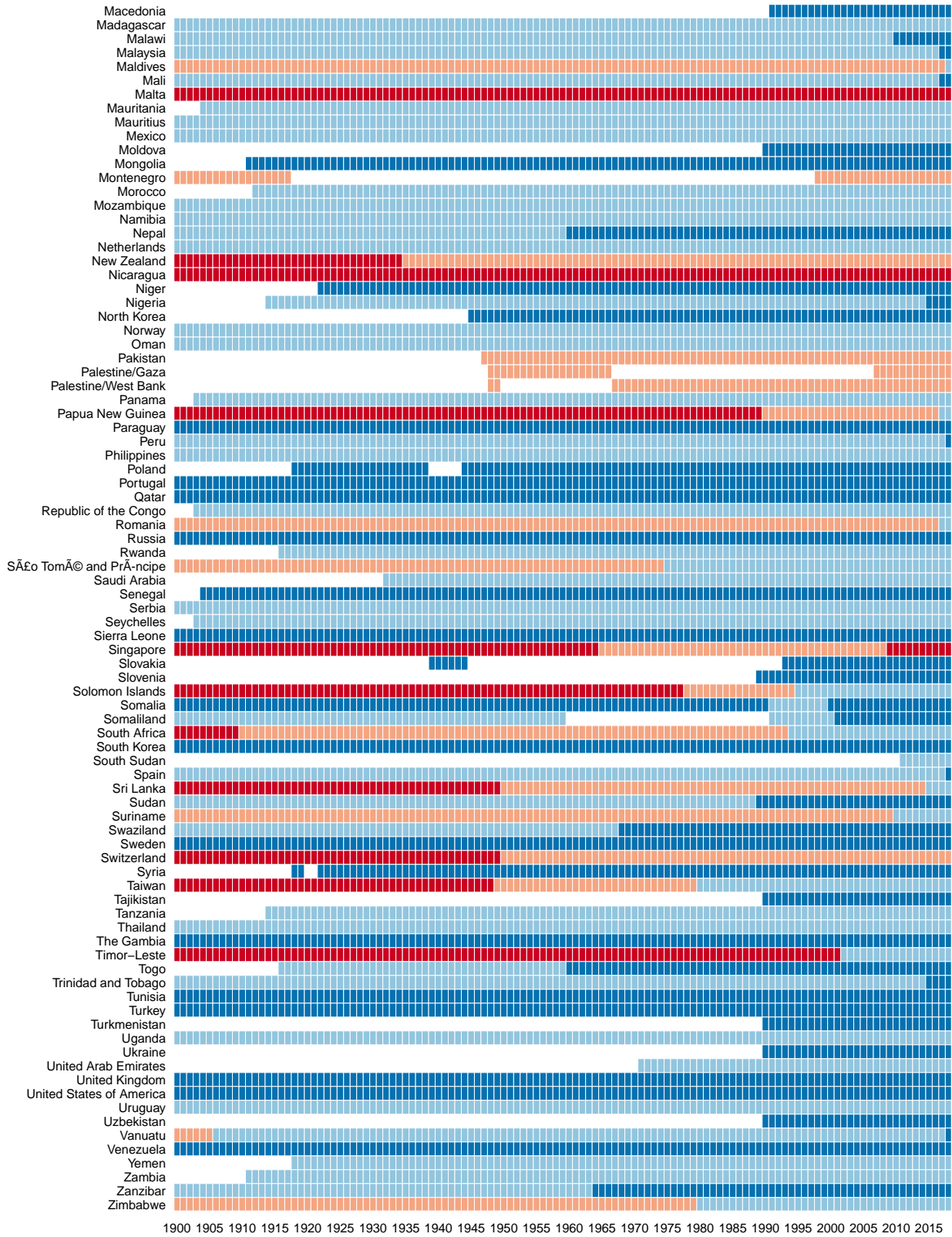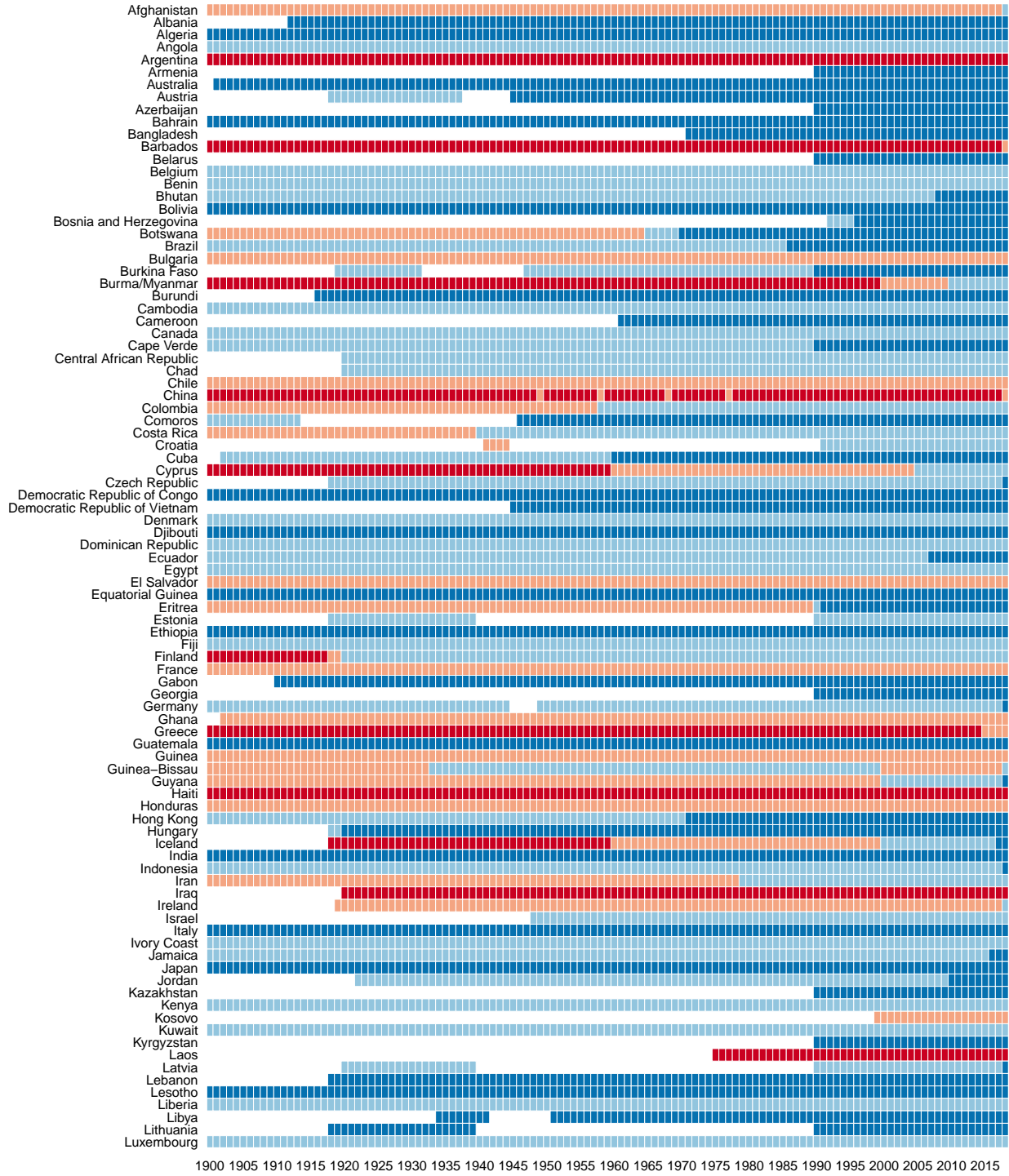**Number of coders:**

■ 1 to 2	■ 3
■ 4 to 5	■ 6+

Figure 13: Number of Coders for Ideology

Number of coders - Person of the leader
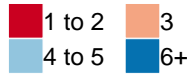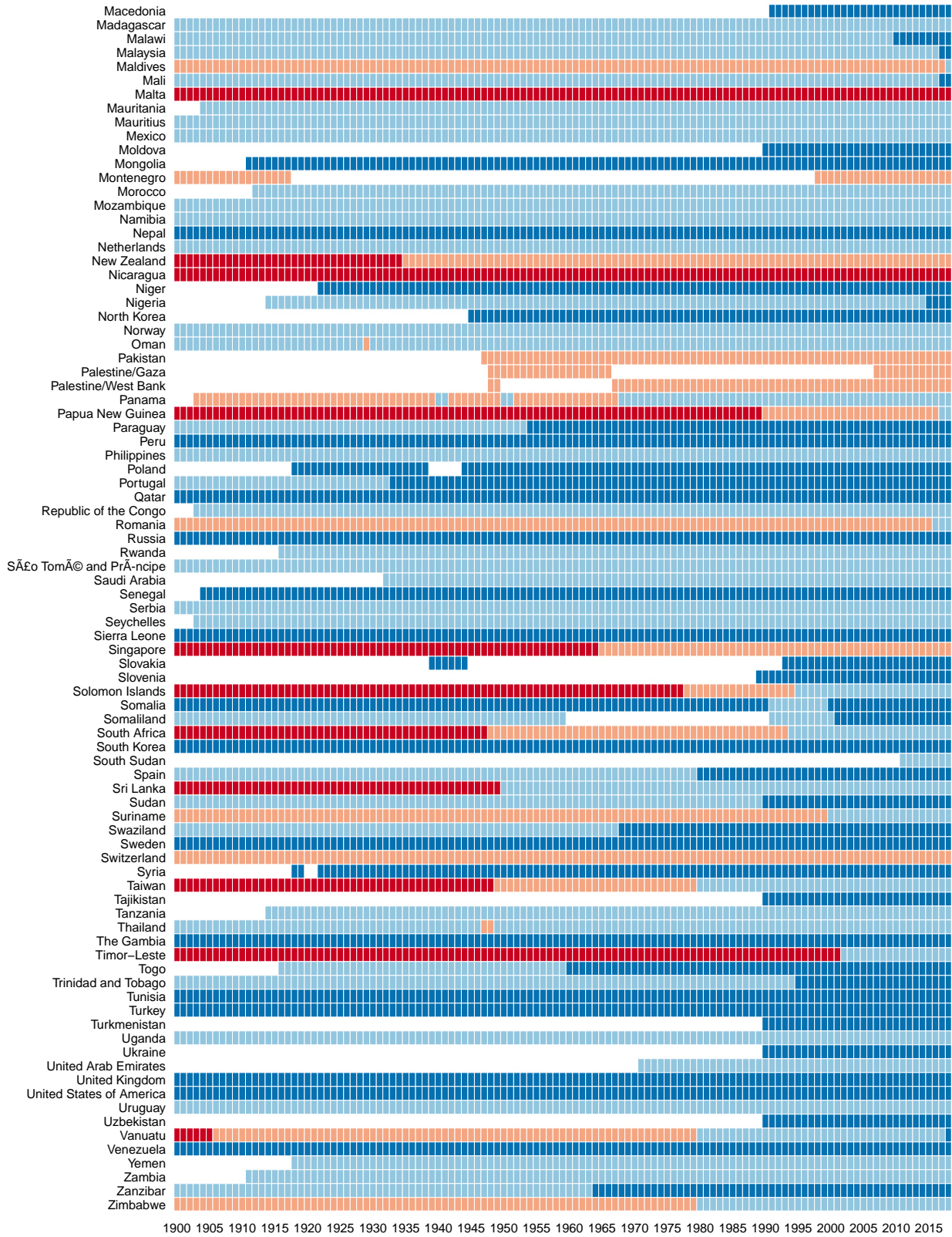
Figure 14: Number of Coders for Leader

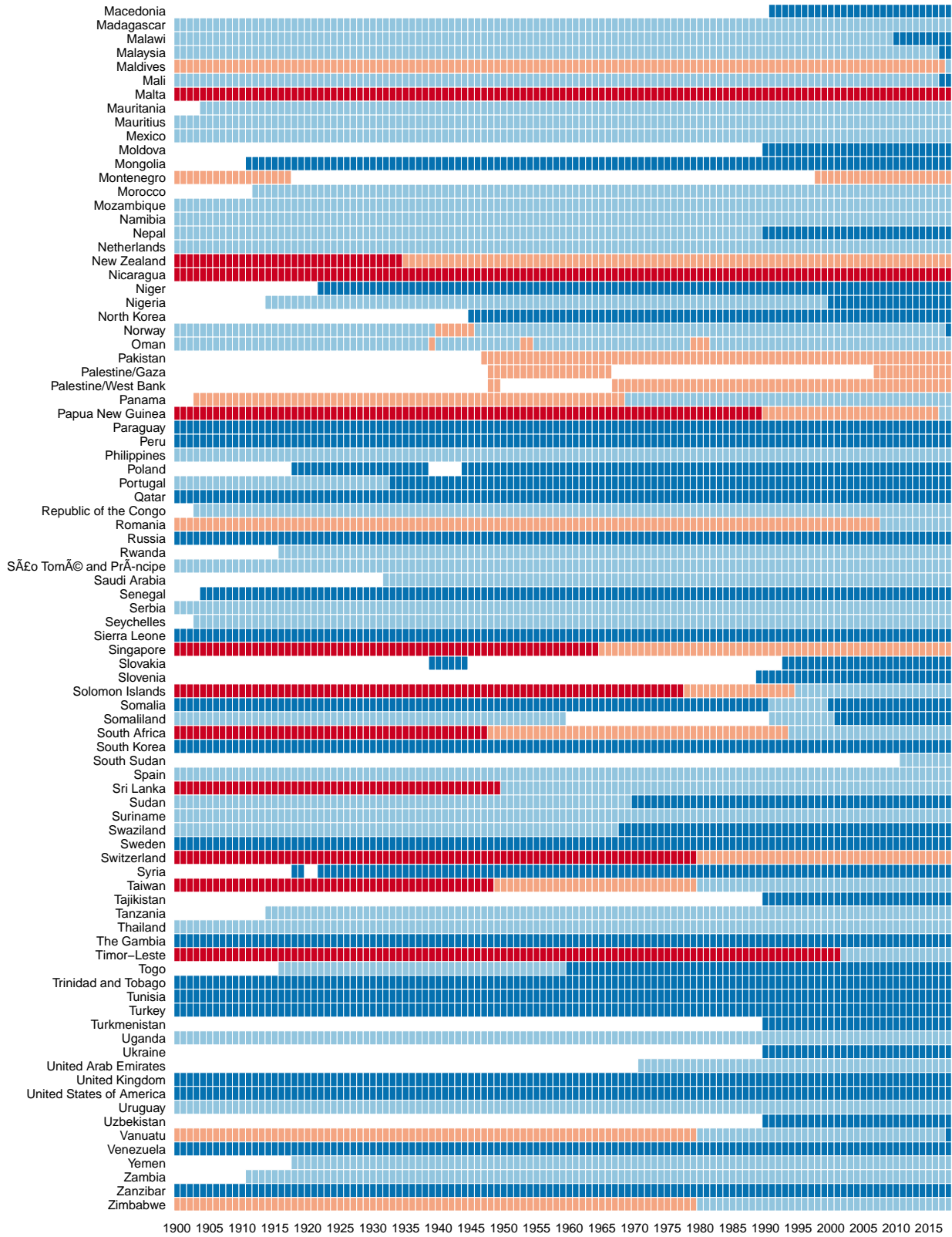# Number of coders - Performance

Figure 15: Number of Coders for Performance
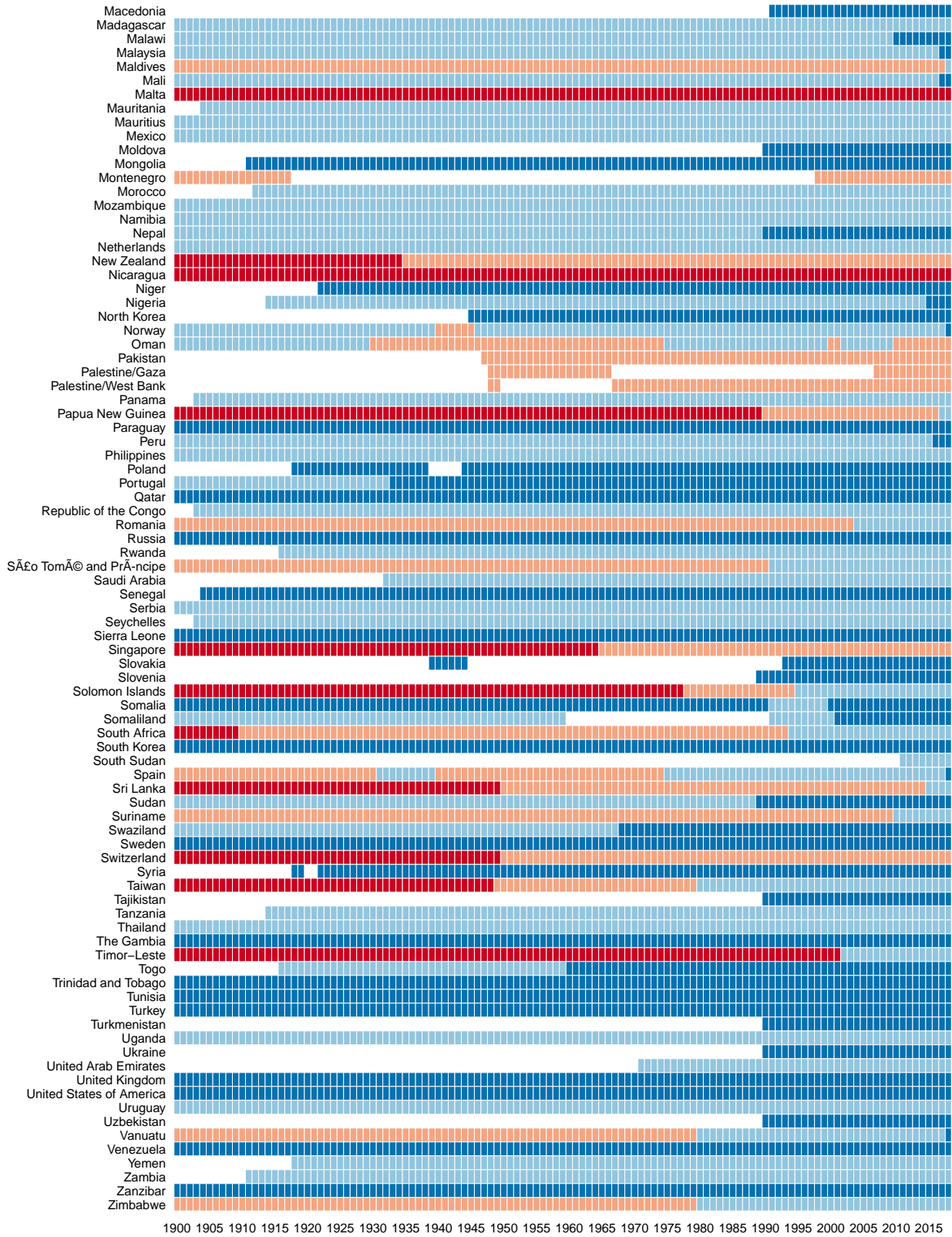
Number of coders - Rational-legal

Number of coders:

1 to 2 3
4 to 5 6+
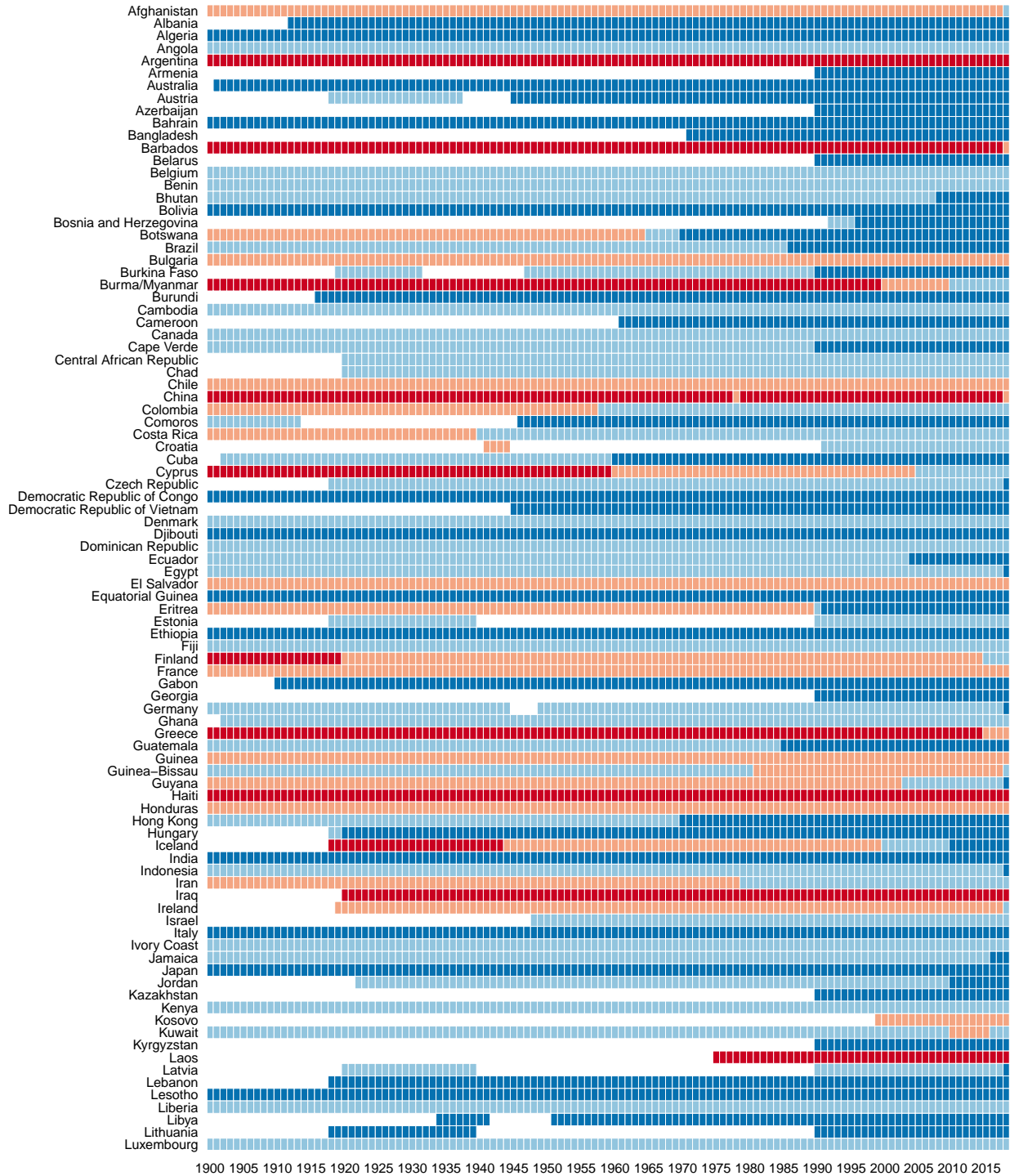
Figure 16: Number of Coders for Rational-legal