Democracy and the transnational dimensions of low-level conflict and state repression

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Abstract

This paper examines the transnational dimensions of low-level conflict and state repression. In this regard, special emphasis is placed on the role of political regimes. Drawing on a simple model, we argue that democracy has opposing effects on conflict intensity. On the one hand, democracy satisfies demand for political participation and thus reduces conflict potential. On the other hand, we highlight that domestic democracy may spur dissatisfaction and conflict abroad, which, in turn, may induce conflict spillovers. As a result, the net effect of democracy on low-level conflict and state repression is ambiguous and depends on the level of democracy in the neighborhood: We predict that democracy is more pacifying in democratic environments and may spur conflict in autocratic environments. By the symmetry of the model, we also predict that democratic environments are more pacifying for democratic countries and may spur conflict in autocracies. Empirical evidence using panel data on different types of low-level conflict and state repression for 160 countries in the period from 1950 to 2011 supports these hypotheses. Additionally, two case studies illustrate the mechanisms of our model.

Keywords: democracy, low-level conflict, intrastate conflict, state repression

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The spread of internal violence in the Middle East and North Africa during the Arab Spring is the most popular example of conflict contagion in recent times. Observations of such conflict spillovers have fueled the literature on intrastate conflict for decades. It is now well established that conflicts in neighboring countries increase the risk of domestic conflict (see, e.g., Bosker and de Ree 2014; Garcia and Wimpy 2016; Gleditsch 2007; Hegre and Sambanis 2006; Metternich, Minhas, and Ward 2017). In this regard, most studies focus on high-intensity conflicts like civil wars, whose spatial dimensions have been studied extensively. However, the transnational causes and consequences of "low-level" conflict and violence, such as protests and riots, have received less attention. This lack of research stands in contrast to the fact that low-level conflict is highly prevalent and often precedes more intensive forms of violence. Moreover, governments may respond to related threats with repression, which, at least in recent history, is estimated to have claimed more lives than other forms of conflict (Rummel 1997).

Illustrating the spatial distribution of low-level conflict, figure 1 shows the number of anti-government demonstrations, general strikes, and riots per 100,000 person-years in the period from 2000 to 2011 (data are from Banks and Wilson 2017, a more detailed description of the indicators is provided below. The relative frequency of these conflicts varies considerably, with the incidence rate virtually equaling 0 for some and exceeding 5 for other countries. Despite this heterogeneity, there is also evidence for spatial clustering, particularly regarding high incidence rates. This observation is in line with the implications of well-known mechanisms like demonstration effects, that may induce spillovers of low-level conflict between countries (see, e.g., Bamert, Gilardi, and Wasserfallen 2015; Kuran 1998).

Against that background, this paper considers the relationship between low-level conflict and state repression from a transnational perspective. In this regard, special emphasis is placed on the role of political regimes. Our paper is closely related to the literature analyzing conflict contagion through the lens of regime types (Maves and Braithwaite 2013; Gleditsch and Rivera 2015). Unlike previous work, we take both domestic and neighboring regime type into account, and focus on the interaction between the two. This makes our interpretation considerably broader, as we do not only focus on pro-democracy movements. Instead, our results bear implications for contagion of voiced government opposition in a large variety of contexts. Drawing on a simple formal model, we show that democracy may have opposing effects on low-level conflict. On the one

hand, we follow arguments from the literature indicating that inclusive political institutions have a pacifying effect, e.g. by satisfying demand for political participation. On the other hand, we highlight an indirect channel through which democracy may increase the risk of internal conflict. We argue that people evaluate participation possibilities relative to those provided by the political systems of proximate countries. Higher levels of domestic democracy thus tend to increase political dissatisfaction particularly in neighboring autocracies. This increased dissatisfaction abroad may spur conflict, which, in turn, can induce conflict spillovers. As a result, the net effect of democracy on low-level conflict is ambiguous. Moreover, the model reveals an interaction between domestic and neighboring democracy, implicating that domestic democracy is more likely to decrease internal conflict and repression in democratic environments, while domestic democracy is more likely to increase internal conflict and repression in autocratic environments. At the same time, neighboring democracy is more likely to decrease internal conflict in democratic, and to decrease internal conflict in autocratic countries.

We provide two empirical examples to illustrate these mechanisms: the historical example of the 1848 revolutions in Europe and the contemporary Arab Spring. To provide evidence that these mechanisms generalize to a large set of countries, we also test our hypotheses using panel data on 160 countries in the period from 1950 to 2011. The results strongly support the hypotheses derived from the theoretical model. Furthermore, our findings suggest that geographical distance may be more relevant for the interaction effect deduced from the theoretical model than other considered types of proximity.

Before we start elaborating on our theory, we glance at the empirical literature on intrastate conflict and political regimes. While this literature provides rich evidence on domestic factors driving high-intensity conflict, we highlight a lack of evidence on determinants of low-level conflict and its transnational dimensions.

1 The state of the empirics of intrastate conflict and political regimes

Empirical studies have identified several variables that are robustly linked to intrastate conflict. These include low income levels, large populations, youth bulges, and recent political instability (see, e.g., Blattman and Miguel 2010; Hegre and Sambanis 2006; Urdal 2006).

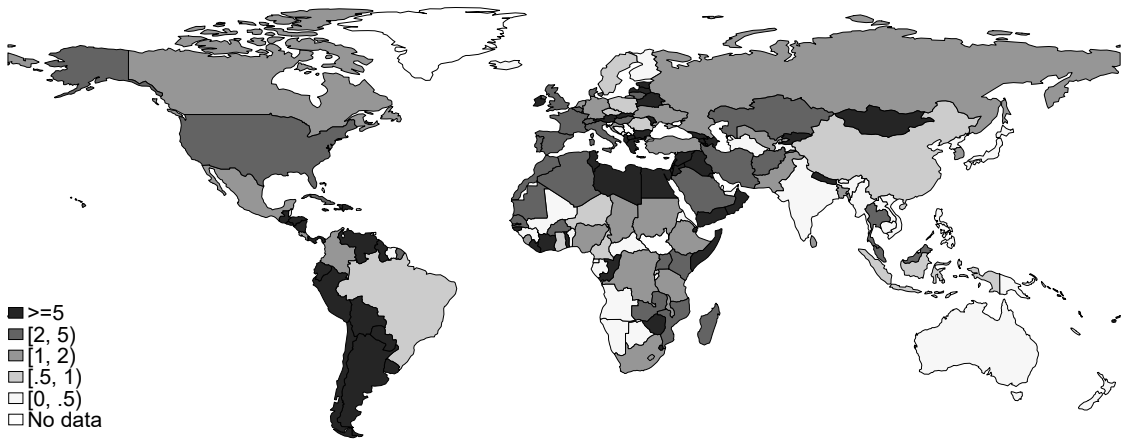


Figure 1: Number of anti-government demonstrations, general strikes, and riots per 100,000 person-years (2000 - 2011)

With regard to the role of democracy, evidence is less conclusive. Because of its inclusive political institutions and mechanisms for non-violent contestation, it is sometimes argued that democracy reduces the risk of intrastate conflict (see, e.g., Gurr 2000). However, there is substantial evidence contradicting the hypothesis that more democratic countries are internally less conflict prone (see, e.g.,Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Fearon and Laitin 2003). One explanation for this finding is that democracy may have opposing effects on the motivation and the opportunity for internal conflict (Gleditsch, Hegre, and Strand 2012). On the one hand, democracy may reduce the motivation for rebellion by assuring political rights and by providing opportunities to influence government policies. On the other hand, the greater openness and the more liberal practices under democratic political regimes can provide greater opportunity to organize insurrections.[1] While most research focuses on such domestic effects of political regimes, there is a lack of studies on the transnational interaction of different political regimes and its effects on domestic conflict.

Regarding state repression, most studies examining government violations of human rights focus on domestic influence factors (for an overview of core findings, see Dav-

[1]Multiple studies find a non-monotonic relationship between democracy and conflict, indicating that countries with a mix of autocratic and democratic institutions – so-called anocracies – show the highest levels of violence (see, e.g., Fein 1995; Hegre and Sambanis 2006; Hegre 2014). However, the finding that anocracies show higher levels of political violence has been challenged, particularly due to measurement problems. Highlighting conceptual overlaps between conflict indicators and the Polity scores (Marshall and Gurr 2016) as a widely used democracy measure, Vreeland (2008) demonstrates that the inverted-U-shaped relationship between democracy and civil war disappears when the most problematic components are removed from the Polity scores. Hill (2016) presents similar evidence on the relationship between democracy and state repression. Utilizing techniques of statistical learning, Jones and Lupu (2018) reveal complex relationships between different types of violence and democracy. Their results support the hypothesis that there is "more violence in the middle" only under specific conditions. While evidence that anocracies are more violent is relatively strong regarding minor civil conflicts, the authors find no support for this relationship with respect to state repression.

enport 2007; Hill and Jones 2014). A notable exception is the study of Danneman and Ritter (2014): Highlighting that governments are likely to anticipate the risk of conflict contagion, they provide evidence that conflicts in neighboring countries are related to higher levels of repression. According to the authors, this reflects the preemptive use of repression as a measure against the threat of domestic uprising. More generally, both governments and dissidents may base their decisions on expectations about each others' behavior (De Jaegher and Hoyer 2019; Lawrence 2017; Ritter and Conrad 2016). Following these insights, rebellion and repression should be considered simultaneously, which we will do in the following analysis.

Given the lack of research on the interrelations of political regimes with low-level conflict and state repression, we develop a simple model that scrutinizes the relationships highlighted in the introduction. The following section draws on arguments outlined above when describing the relationships between democracy, low-level conflict, and state repression. Its main contribution is to highlight mechanisms through which domestic and neighboring democracy interact when determining the risk of domestic unrest.

2 Theory

Before we continue to elaborate on the model in technical detail, we will present the idea in a nutshell and link it to related models that deal with dissent and repression.

The basic starting point of our model assumes that in all countries at least a small number of potential insurgents would like to overthrow the government by mobilizing dissatisfied citizens. Dissatisfaction arises if the discrepancy of expected well-being and actual well-being of individual citizens becomes too large. Well-being stems from two sources, economic and political satisfaction. Higher actual income and political participation possibilities, i.e. the democracy level, positively affect overall well-being, but citizens are also able to compare their well-being to what they could expect if they lived in a neighboring country. Thus, we assume that citizens evaluate the performance of their government against that of other governments. This is the first transnational mechanism we consider: Increased domestic participation possibilities have a pacifying effect, while a higher democracy level abroad lowers satisfaction with domestic political institutions. Therefore, improvements in the latter may make mobilization of citizens against the government more likely, because citizens join the insurgents if they become sufficiently dis-

pleased.

Thus, any government is faced with a certain level of threat it needs to withstand to stay in office. To counteract its opponents, the government can make use of repressive practices. As we do not focus on "endgame scenarios" in the theoretical section (Dragu and Lupu 2017), which more likely result in major events of high-level violence, we assume for simplicity that the government is able to counterbalance insurgents activities. Thus, our main focus rests on situations where ordinary repression of public protest and uprising is sufficient to secure office. Because repression is costly, the government will just impose as much repression as necessary to stay in office, but not more. Repression, therefore, is used purely for instrumental reasons.

However, if countries face insurgents, some conflict may spill over to their neighbors (Bamert, Gilardi, and Wasserfallen 2015; Danneman and Ritter 2014; Kuran 1998). How the government deals with this constitutes the second transnational mechanism in the model. The total threat to the government therefore consists of domestic insurgents' activity and spillovers from other countries. Mirroring the domestic situation, dissatisfaction in the neighboring country also depends on relative political participation possibilities. This implies that higher domestic participation possibilities appease the domestic population but make the foreign population less satisfied with their government if it falls short of providing the same level of participation. This leads to spillovers back to the country where participation increased. As a consequence of this interdependence, the net effect of domestic and foreign democracy on low-level conflict is ambiguous, which might explain the inconclusive empirical evidence in previous studies.

Even though the effect of democracy on low-level conflict is ambiguous, the model reveals an important interaction. First, domestic conflict induced by a democratic neighborhood is more severe in autocracies. Intuitively, high participation possibilities abroad increase the perceived lack of supply in participation under autocracy while it constitutes a "catch-up" process from the perspective of citizens under democracy. As an increasing "democratic deficit" affects dissatisfaction stronger than a decreasing "democratic advantage", the influence of foreign democracy decreases in the domestic democracy level. Second, the pacifying effect of democracy is larger in democratic neighborhoods. Thus, increasing participation possibilities are predicted to be especially effective in reducing conflict if the reference countries are democracies. In other words, the influence of democracy is the stronger the more a country "lags behind" in providing political rights. The

empirical results support these predictions of the model.

Our underlying model, which we will explain in the following subsection, abstracts from several innovative and important ideas that have recently been introduced into the literature. We keep the model as simple and streamlined as possible to highlight the main channels. Some authors recently stressed that the repressive level in a country not only depends on the will and need of the government to repress, but also on the will of the security agents, the military, bureaucrats, etc. to follow orders (DeMeritt 2015; Dragu and Lupu 2017; Dragu and Przeworski 2018; Tyson 2018). This is crucial for the survival of the leader and the regime. They usually refer to this situation as a principal-agent issue (PA) the government faces. Dragu and Lupu (2017) for example argue that the willingness of security agents to comply with the order to repress citizens depends on their perception that other agents will comply as well. Dragu and Przeworski (2018) additionally highlight another channel in which corrupt activities of government agents additionally undermine the capacity to repress. DeMeritt (2015) even shows that this PA is not a purely domestic issue, but also possibly influenced by decisions of foreign powers to intervene in a conflict. Similarly, Kydd and Straus (2013) also consider the interrelationship of foreign intervention, the outbreak of civil war and atrocities committed by the government. We do not model such dependencies within the security apparatus, however, as they do not directly affect the main mechanism which we analyze. In the theoretical section, we focus on dissent and repression in times when regimes are still stable enough that severe limitations on the capacity to repress do not matter. That is, we abstract from "endgame scenarios" (Dragu and Lupu 2017). Other authors also show how protests interrelate with coups d'tats in a coordination game (Casper and Tyson 2014). To avoid distractions from the main channel, we do not model the possibility of regime change, coups, and civil war. Thus, the assumption that the level of repression can be chosen solely by the government is a simplification and future work might lift this limitation to generalize our results.

Other studies highlight the controversial role of information and communication technology (ICT) and media in general for coordination of insurgents and the spread of information (Little 2016; Casper and Tyson 2014). The spread of such technologies, e.g. social networks or (mobile) internet in general, affects our theory at least in two aspects. First, information gathering about other countries becomes easier. Little (2016) focuses on the role of ICT for publicizing complaints about the domestic regimes, but this information

could, in principle, also be used to inform people in other countries about the situation abroad. Thus, in our case it is more likely that citizens will be able to precisely evaluate their expected well-being in other countries, especially with respect to political participation. This implies that the channel highlighted by our model might be more important today than it used to be in the past.[2] Second, ICT affects the ability of insurgents to coordinate, but also the ability of governments to localize insurgents Berman, Felter, and Shapiro 2020.

Several studies analyze the coordination between citizens of the opposition: Bueno de Mesquita (2010) scrutinized the role of revolutionary vanguards for the coordination of dissenters and insurgents. In his model, vanguards can mobilize dissenters by committing violent attacks, which signals support by the population, without which such attacks would not be possible. The model has multiple equilibria, between which the role of the vanguard differs. In a model proposed by Tyson (2018), there are also spillover effects within the domestic population. His model therefore combines coordination issues in the population with a PA between the government and security agents. In our model dissatisfied people simply join insurgents. We argue that these – generally very important – aspects do not alter our main point. Rather, they define whether the regime will be able to withstand the activity of the insurgents. ICTs either lead to an intensified activity level of the insurgents or they lower the costs of repression.

Finally, compared to Ritter (2013), our model abstracts from specific policy disputes. The citizens in our model care about having a say at all, relative to the political system in adjacent countries – which they value for its own sake. This means our actors do not bargain in a game-theoretical model. Our model instead serves a more modest goal: to explain how political dynamics in foreign countries affect status quo dissent and repression due to spillover effects. However, it may provide useful insights to integrate this transnational perspective in frameworks with a richer structure, such as provided by Ritter (2013).

2.1 The model

Having explained its main idea verbally, we now present the model in full detail. We consider two countries, k and l. In each country, there are insurgents who try to overthrow the government G by mobilizing dissatisfied citizens. The government thus faces

[2]Note that we do not model that uncertainty.

a certain level of threat, which is represented by the activity level of government opponents a. To withstand this threat, the government can counteract its opponents activity with repression r. The level of repression r represents the intensity of violence – including human rights violations – against government opponents. We assume that the government of the respective country stays in office if the level of repression exerted by the government outweighs the government opponents' activity level, i.e. [3]

$$r \geq a. \tag{1}$$

If $r < a$, the level of repression is too low to withstand the government opponent's effort and the government is replaced. It is noteworthy that we will impose that (1) holds in equilibrium. Rather than describing armed conflict like civil war, we thus focus on cases of low-level conflict, when repression of public protest and uprising is sufficient to secure office. In deriving the magnitude of such conflict, we follow the literature by taking conflict spillovers, as well as domestic factors, into account. The activity level of government opponents in country k therefore is composed of domestically induced activity a_k^k and spillovers from the other country a_k^l:

$$a_k = a_k^k + a_k^l. \tag{2}$$

Introducing the transmission parameter $\varphi \in (0, 1)$, which represents the degree to which conflict abroad affects domestic conflict, the spillover effect is

$$a_k^l = \varphi \cdot a_l. \tag{3}$$

Expression (3) links the activity level of government opponents in both countries, such that a higher level of conflict abroad increases domestic conflict and, by symmetry, vice versa.

Domestic attempts to remove the government originate from the dissatisfaction of the citizens. To formalize this relationship as simple as possible, we impose that the insurgents' activity level in country k is proportional to the mass of dissatisfied citizens n_k, i.e.

$$a_k^k = n_k \tag{4}$$

[3] This assumption is consistent with a large literature that shows a strong conceptual and empirical link between civil unrest and repression (see, e.g., Carey 2006; Shellman 2006; Hill and Jones 2014; Ritter and Conrad 2016).

Whether or not a citizen i becomes dissatisfied depends on her wellbeing, which is driven by economic and political factors. A citizen's utility therefore is linked to income y_k^i and political satisfaction z_k^i according to $U_k^i = \log y_k^i + \log z_k^i$. Income is related to the individual's human capital h_k^i, such that $y_k^i = \theta_k \cdot h_k^i$, where $\theta_k > 0$ is a country-specific productivity parameter.

Political satisfaction is determined by the relation of supply $p(d_k)$ and demand $\bar{p}_k^i$ for political participation possibilities, i.e.

$$z_k^i = \frac{p(d_k)}{\bar{p}_k^i}, \tag{5}$$

where $d_k \in [0, 1]$ denotes the level of democracy. Here $d_k = 0$ and $d_k = 1$ correspond to a fully autocratic and a fully democratic political regime, respectively. A higher individual-specific demand thus decreases satisfaction with given (limited) participation possibilities. By $p'(d_k) > 0$, we impose that the latter increase in the level of democracy. In addition, we allow for limited participation even under autocratic political regimes. i.e. $p(0) > 0$. Note that we abstract from direct adverse effects of democracy, e.g. due to increased opportunities of insurgents to organize insurrection (see, e.g., Gleditsch, Hegre, and Strand 2012). This is done to simplify the analysis of the main mechanisms highlighted within the framework of this model. However, these potential adverse impacts of democracy are taken into account within the empirical framework as described in the next section.

Given the previous assumptions, the utility of an individual in country k is

$$U_k^i = \log\left(\theta_k \cdot h_k^i\right) + \log\left(\frac{p(d_k)}{\bar{p}_k^i}\right). \tag{6}$$

When evaluating government performance, we assume that each citizen compares her status-quo utility (6) with the utility she would obtain when living in the neighboring country. With the assumption that living conditions in neighboring countries serve as reference point, we closely follow approaches that are common in models of migration incentives (see, e.g., Borjas 1989; Kennan and Walker 2011).[4] However, our model does not only consider relative economic wealth but also relative political satisfaction. The

[4]For reasons of simplicity, our model abstracts from the possibility of migration.

individual's utility potentially obtained in the neighboring country is

$$U_k^{i,l} = \log\left(\theta_l \cdot h_k^i\right) + \log\left(\frac{p(d_l)}{\bar{p}_k^i}\right). \tag{7}$$

Note that the first term on the right hand side of (7) is the individual's utility from income she would earn in country l. The second term captures foreign political participation possibilities and therefore represents utility potentially derived from the merits of democracy abroad. To reveal implications for internal conflict, we define a citizen to be dissatisfied if $U_k^{i,l} - U_k^i > \log \varepsilon_i^k$, where ε_i^k represents the citizen's tolerance for deviations from the reference utility. Thus, ε_i^k may, for instance, capture exogenous factors determining the individual's support for the government. Utilizing previous results and assuming that ε_i^k is uniformly distributed over $(0, \delta_k)$, a dissatisfied individual is characterized by

$$\theta_{lk}\frac{p(d_l)}{p(d_k)} > \varepsilon_k^i, \tag{8}$$

and the resulting mass of dissatisfied individuals amounts to

$$n_k = \gamma_k \frac{p(d_l)}{p(d_k)}, \tag{9}$$

where $\theta_{lk} := \theta_l/\theta_k$ and $\gamma_k := \theta_{lk}/\delta_k$.[5] As is obvious from (8) and (9), dissatisfaction is driven by the democracy levels of the two countries. A higher domestic democracy level d_k has a pacifying effect as it increases political participation possibilities. In contrast, a higher democracy level abroad d_l increases participation possibilities in the reference country and, thus, lowers satisfaction with domestic political institutions. This is a direct result of the assumption that citizens evaluate their living conditions relative to those in the neighboring country. Improvements in the latter therefore may increase dissatisfaction and make mobilization of citizens against the government more likely.

To counteract this threat, the government makes strategic use of repression.[6] Because of the need to finance the police, the military, secret service activities, etc., repression is costly. Since there are opportunity costs of repression expenditures (e.g. reduced budget for achieving other policy objectives or reduced private consumption of the political leaders), the government has an incentive to keep these costs to a minimum. Setting the

[5] For convenience, we only consider cases where $n_k \in (0, 1)$, i.e. in particular $\gamma_k \frac{p(d_l)}{p(d_k)} < 1$.

[6] We assume that the government rationally chooses repression, following a large literature on the rationales and strategies behind repression, e.g. Pierskalla (2009).

price of repression to unity and taking into account that the effective level of repression has to outweigh the activity level of its opponents, the government's objective is

$$\min_{r_k} r_k \quad \text{s.t.} \quad r_k \geq n_k + \varphi \cdot a_l, \tag{10}$$

where n_k is given by (9). Since (10) implies that the government chooses the minimum level of repression required to stay in office in order to save costs, it follows that

$$CI_k^* := r_k^* = a_k = n_k + \varphi \cdot a_l. \tag{11}$$

Expression (11) states that the equilibrium level of repression is equal to the activity level of government opponents, i.e. $r_k^* = a_k$. In the following, we therefore use the notation CI to denote conflict intensity, which captures both repression and the activity level of government opponents in equilibrium. Analogous to the domestic activity level of insurgents, (11) shows that repression is proportional to the mass of domestic dissatisfied citizens. Furthermore, due to conflict spillovers, repression and the domestic activity level are linked to the intensity of conflict in the neighboring country a_l. This implies that repression increases in the mass of dissatisfied citizens and the level of conflict abroad.

By symmetry, analogous formulations for r_l^*, and a_l can be derived. Using (9) and (11), conflict intensity therefore can be expressed as

$$CI_k^* = \frac{1}{1-\varphi^2}\left[\gamma_k \frac{p(d_l)}{p(d_k)} + \varphi \cdot \gamma_l \frac{p(d_k)}{p(d_l)}\right]. \tag{12}$$

While the first term in square brackets represents domestically induced conflict, the second term captures conflict spillovers from the neighboring country. Consequently, the relative political participation possibilities of the two countries enter (12) twice. Differentiating with respect to d_k and d_l, respectively, yields

$$\frac{\partial CI_k^*}{\partial d_k} = \frac{1}{1-\varphi^2}\left[-\gamma_k \frac{p(d_l)}{p(d_k)^2} + \varphi \cdot \gamma_l \frac{1}{p(d_l)}\right] p'(d_k), \tag{13}$$

$$\frac{\partial CI_k^*}{\partial d_l} = \frac{1}{1-\varphi^2}\left[\gamma_k \frac{1}{p(d_k)} - \varphi \cdot \gamma_l \frac{p(d_k)}{p(d_l)^2}\right] p'(d_l). \tag{14}$$

As is obvious from (13) and (14), both increases in the domestic and the foreign democracy level have opposing effects on conflict intensity. On the one hand, higher levels of domestic democracy d_k have a pacifying effect due to increased political participation

possibilities. On the other hand, these improvements lead to a higher level of dissatisfaction in the neighboring country since citizens form their attitudes towards the government based on relative utility. This results in conflict spillovers, which counteract the direct negative effect of domestic democracy. In a similar manner, a higher foreign democracy level d_l spurs domestic dissatisfaction but reduces conflict spillovers by decreasing the intensity of conflict in the neighboring country. Hence, the net effect of domestic and foreign democracy on low-level conflict is ambiguous. These results may provide an explanation for the inconclusive empirical evidence on the impact of democracy on domestic conflict in previous studies.

Although there is no clear sign of (13) and (14), the model reveals an interaction between domestic and foreign democracy levels:

$$\frac{\partial^2 CI_k}{\partial d_l \partial d_k} = \frac{\partial^2 CI_k}{\partial d_k \partial d_l} = \frac{1}{1-\varphi^2}\left[-\gamma_k \frac{1}{p(d_k)^2} - \varphi \cdot \gamma_l \frac{1}{p(d_l)^2}\right] p'(d_k) \cdot p'(d_l) < 0. \tag{15}$$

The interpretation of (15) is twofold. First, the increase in conflict intensity induced by an increase in the foreign democracy level is higher in more autocratic countries [$\partial^2 CI_k/(\partial d_l \partial d_k) < 0$]. Intuitively, higher participation possibilities abroad increase the lack of participation possibilities perceived by citizens under autocracy while they constitute a "catch-up" process from the perspective of citizens under democracy. As an increasing "democratic deficit" affects dissatisfaction stronger than a decreasing "democratic advantage", the marginal effect of foreign democracy decreases in the domestic democracy level. Second, the pacifying effect of democracy is larger in democratic environments [$\partial^2 CI_k/(\partial d_k \partial d_l) < 0$]. Thus, steps towards democracy are predicted to be particularly effective in reducing conflict intensity if the population's reference countries are democratic. This reflects that the effect of democracy is stronger the more a country "lags behind" with respect to political rights. Based on these results, we formulate the following empirically testable hypotheses:

H_1: Domestic democracy is relatively more likely to reduce low-level conflict and state repression in democratic environments, and relatively more likely to increase conflict in autocratic environments.

H_2: Neighboring democracy is relatively more likely to reduce low-level conflict and state repression in democratic countries, and relatively more likely to increase conflict in autocratic countries.

3 Case Studies

The theoretical model developed in the previous section postulates general mechanisms through which political regimes may interaction transnationally. The following subsections illustrate how such interactions may appear in reality. We therefore consider the revolutions of 1848 and the Arab Spring in the framework of brief case studies.

3.1 The revolutions of 1848

The revolutions of 1848 were an important milestone in the progress of democratization across the European continent. After decades of political upheaval, political conflict in Europe escalated in 1848. The revolutions were incited by the overthrow of the French King Louis Philippe in February 1848, which led to the creation of the Second Republic in France. Inspired by the quick removal of the French King, revolutionary movements spread to current-day Germany, Austria, Hungary, Italy, Denmark, Poland, and several other European states. Common to these organizationally separate movements was the demand for more democracy, although the aims of protesters across countries varied widely. Both the onset and the spread of the 1848 movement can been analyzed through the lens of our theoretical framework.

3.1.1 Onset: Democratic inspiration induces conflict

It is generally established that the fundamental conditions for the onset of the 1848 protests were created by the successful advancement of democracy in Europe and its neighborhoods in the preceding decades. For example, Weyland (2009, 393) notes that "the examples of liberal if not democratic England, Belgium, Switzerland, and the United States led to a gradual spread of reformist ideas and values and a questioning of the absolutist monarchies". The months leading to the protests were already accompanied by democratic progress across Europe: a civil war in Switzerland in 1847 led to the establishment of a federalist state in Switzerland; and a wave of revolutions swept across southern Italy in January 1848, forcing out King Ferdinand II. Finally, the easy removal of the French King in February served as the spark that ignited the protests around Europe. However, the demands of the revolutionaries, particularly in Eastern Europe, were more closely aligned with the reforms enacted in England and Belgium than the republican revolution in France (Weyland 2009, 2010). Hence, the existence of young, but relatively advanced democracies in Europe increased the potential for conflict in their neighboring autocra-

cies, led to the ideological foundations of the protests, and inspired the demands of the revolutionaries.

3.1.2 Contagion: The exceptions of Britain and Belgium

The 1848 protests spread from France to other European monarchies within days (Weyland 2010). Remarkably, revolutionary demands were much smaller in countries where liberal reforms had already been enacted in prior years.

Britain Britain had been a constitutional monarchy since the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and reforms to the constitution in 1832 extended the franchise to parts of the middle class. Although 1848 Britain was not a democracy by today's standards, and despite large discontent with the adverse effects of the Industrial revolution, the demands of European revolutionaries did not gain traction in Britain. Mitchell (2002) goes so far to state that "(...) the English were already in possession of what foreigners were demanding, (...) parliamentarianism, if not outright democracy, had been firmly established." While small protests were held in March and April 1848, these were not nearly as impactful as in continental Europe. To the opposite, a large Chartist (regime-opposing) demonstration on April 10, 1848 was met with the peaceful resistance of middle-class groups defending the current order, leading to a rapid loss of support in the society (Mitchell 2002; Smith 1977). The firm belief in the British constitution and the established democratic reforms made the British middle class much less responsive to the revolutionary demands, and contributed to a relatively peaceful 1848 in Britain.

Belgium Belgium had adopted a liberal Constitution in 1830. Belgian foreign policy quickly recognized the new French republic in 1848 and developed good relations with the new regime. To counteract protests in 1848, the Belgian government conceded to some left-wing demands by extending suffrage and spending on public works (Huygebaert 2015). Historians largely agree that the strength of the constitution and the convincing reforms of 1848 prevented the revolutionary wave of 1848 to gain a foothold in Belgium (Huygebaert 2015; Dumont 2002).

Britain and Belgium are not the only major countries that were largely unaffected by the 1848 revolutions. While the protests spread as far as to Latin America, the United States remained calm. Following the American Revolution and subsequent reforms, most of the States in the US had already established exceptionally widespread voting

rights. Therefore, most Americans did not believe their own country needed revolutionary changes akin to Europe, and felt detached from the demands of the European revolutionaries (Roberts and Howe 2002).

As laid out, the events in 1848 are consistent with our theoretical model: The citizens of the central European countries at the epicenter of the protests compared their political system to the reforms in Switzerland and Italy and the successful democracies in Britain and the United States. The establishment of a republic in France incited large-scale protests across Europe, consistent with the hypothesis that democracy increases conflict in neighboring autocracies. Moreover, the revolutionary wave barely affected conflict in more democratic neighboring countries, such as Britain and the United States.

3.2 Arab Spring

The second case we consider to explain the mechanisms of our model is the Arab Spring. Starting in Tunisia and accelerated by the successful ousting of president Ben Ali in January 2011, violent and nonviolent conflicts broke out across the majority of countries in the Middle East and North Africa region. In many ways, the Arab Spring resembles the 1848 events, which led many to draw parallels between the two (Springborg 2011; Weyland 2012). Unlike the 1848 wave, which largely circumvented the most democratic countries at the time, the Arab Spring inspired protests all around the world, also in democracies (Solingen 2012; Gerbaudo 2013). The contagion of the Arab Spring movement is therefore not only related to the goal of more democracy, but also to voice opposition to the political and economic order in democratic countries, as exemplified by the *Occupy* and *Indignant* movements.

Onset: Demand for participation in a democratic world

Unlike in 1848's Europe, there was no democratic poster child in the region that could have served as inspiration for the MENA countries. Nevertheless, several democratic factors in the neighborhood contributed to the growing discontent of the population with their political system. Among these is Turkey, which democratized in 1983, saw further democratic reforms in the 1990s, and supported democratic change in the region (Öniş 2014). Beyond this, the democratic transitions in the former Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990s, and the Color Revolutions at the beginning of the 2000s had made democracy more common than autocratic or hybrid regimes, and led to the diffusion of

democratic hopes across the Middle East, as for example signified by the pro-democratic Green Revolution in 2009. Against this backdrop of democratic change around the world and in neighboring regions, most MENA countries had been under stable autocratic rule for decades, with small democratic reforms enacted only in Algeria and Lebanon. The model suggests that it is precisely the global diffusion of democracy that increased dissatisfaction with the political system, and created the ground for the opposition to protest against the governments in place.

Related to this, the ousting of the Tunisian president Ben Ali showed to potential for democratic change across the region, and paved the way to a wave of protests across nearly all countries in the region.

Contagion: Global effects and democratic exceptions

Unlike previous pro-democracy waves, such as the 1989 events, the Arab Spring inspired protests all over the world, and even in established democracies. As we argue above, the availability of social media and global live reporting makes it much easier to compare one's political participation possibilities to others, so that these global impacts are not surprising. As predicted by our model, the intensity of conflict in 2011 varied between democracies and autocratic countries.

A remarkable case in the MENA region was Algeria, which only experienced a minor wave of protests through 2011, letting observers proclaim an "Algerian exception" (Zoubir 2011). In addition, unlike its neighbors, there were no violent crackdowns on the protests, indicating that the government's repression strategy was also limited. While not a perfect democracy, Algeria had seen some democratic reforms after the end of the civil war, and with president Abdelaziz Bouteflika's reelection in 2004. In addition, Algeria had a relatively strong, pro-democratic civil society (Butcher 2013; Northey 2016). Going beyond the anecdotal evidence of the Algerian exception, figure 2 gives a visual account of the evolution of the model's main variables for six MENA countries from 2008 until 2012. As predicted by our model, the move to democracy in Tunisia had a relatively much smaller effect in the more democratic Algeria than in its neighboring autocracies: Starting in 2008, Algeria was – with an XPolity score of 2 – the most democratic, and – with a CIRI score of 5 – the least repressive country in the sample. In 2011, the conflict indicators increased for nearly every country in the region. Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia experienced enormous increases in the number of demonstrations, riots, and general strikes reported.

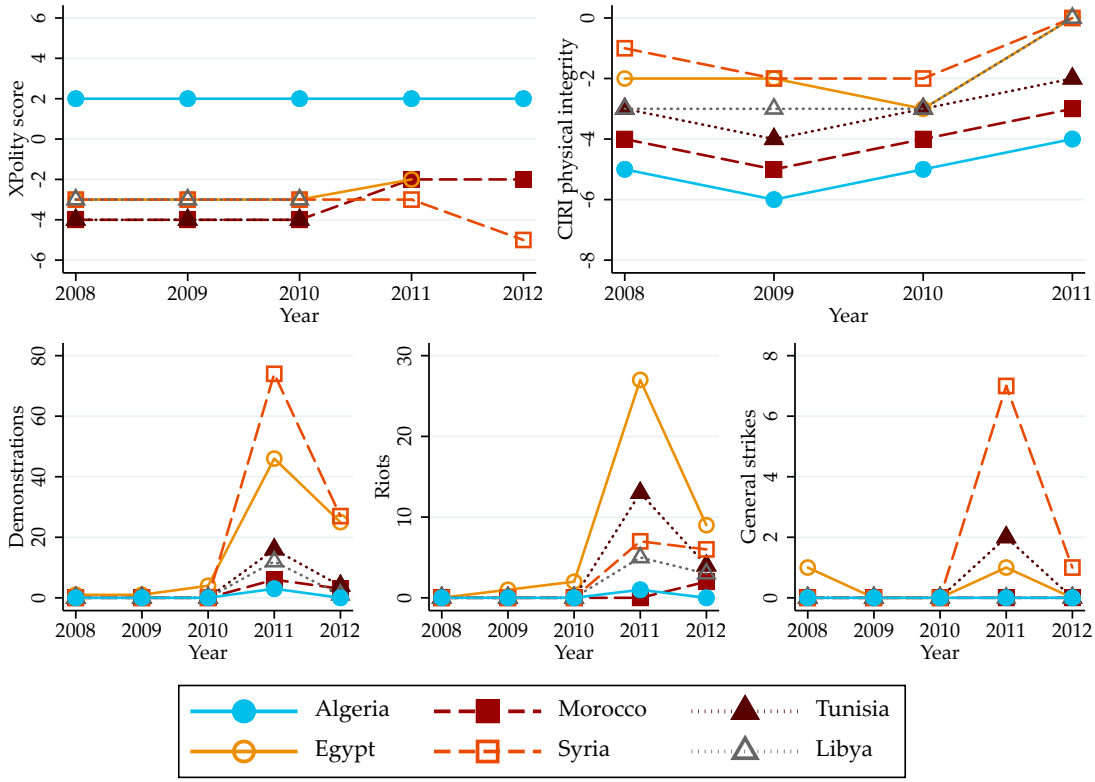


Figure 2: Evolution of main variables during Arab Spring

Note: Evolution of democracy, repression, and low-level conflict around Arab Spring in six major affected MENA countries. Tunisia and Libya do not have XPolity scores in 2011 and 2012, as they were coded as being in regime transition/breakdown during that time. The CIRI repression score series ends in 2011.

At the same time, Syria, Libya and Egypt also saw their repression score increase by at least two points from 2010 to 2011. The figures show that Algeria experienced the lowest increase in low-level conflict among all countries in the sample.[7]

While the situation in Algeria remained relatively calm, autocracies around the world increased repression in order to prevent large-scale protests. In China, small protests in February 2011 were violently dissolved, followed by a crackdown on dissidents. Finally, following the relatively successful democratic transition in Tunisia over the coming years, Algeria and Sudan have recently experienced pro-democratic protests in the wake of a "second Arab Spring" (Turak 2019; Rahal 2019; Georgy and Amara 2019). This development shows parallels with the political landscape across 19th century Europe, where successful democracies have served as inspiration for the insurgents in their neighboring autocracies, while remaining comparatively calm during revolutionary waves that swept across the region.

[7]Similarly, Morocco experienced small changes in the low-level conflict indicators. Interestingly, this went along with political concessions and pro-democratic reforms.

4 Data and empirical methods

4.1 Dependent variables

To systematically test the hypotheses derived from the theoretical model, we utilize multiple measures of low-level conflict and state repression. We follow Danneman and Ritter (2014) and operationalize low-level conflict with three indicators: 1) *Anti-government demonstrations*, i.e. peaceful public gatherings of at least 100 people for the primary purpose of displaying or voicing their opposition to government policies or authority.[8] 2) *General strikes*, i.e. strikes of 1,000 or more industrial or service workers that involve more than one employer and that are aimed at national government policies or authority. 3) *Riots*, defined as violent demonstrations or clashes of more than 100 citizens involving the use of physical force. All data are from Banks and Wilson (2017). We use dichotomous variables indicating whether or not a specific event (demonstration, strike, or riot) occurred in a country-year to measure the presence (or absence) of the respective type of intrastate conflict. As robustness checks, we also estimate statistical models with the number of events as dependent variable and use a latent protest measure derived from an item response theory (IRT) model (Chenoweth, D'Orazio, and Wright 2014).

Data on state repression are provided by the CIRI Human Rights Data Project (Cingranelli, Richards, and Clay 2014). The CIRI *Physical Integrity Rights Index (PIR)*, captures government respect for human rights on a scale ranging from 0 (no government respect for human rights) to 8 (full government respect for human rights). However, as outlined by Vreeland (2008) and Hill (2016), there is a conceptual overlap between democracy and conflict in general and between democracy and state repression in particular. This overlap basically stems from PIR components capturing violence aimed at suppressing opposition groups, which are closely related to components of democracy indicators measuring free political competition. For this reason, these components are removed from the PIR scores (and, as described below, from the democracy index).[9] Furthermore, we reverse the signs of these modified PIR scores to measure repression. In addition, we use the *Amnesty* scores and the *State Department* scores of the Political Terror Scale Project (Gibney et al. 2016). Both indicators measure state repression on a scale ranging from 1 (lowest level of repression) to 5 (highest level of repression) based on the country reports of Amnesty International and the U.S. State Department, respectively. Note, however,

[8] Demonstrations of a distinctly anti-foreign nature are excluded.

[9] Using the unmodified PIR scores does not change the results qualitatively.

that we cannot remove potentially problematic components from the Amnesty and the State Department scores since the Political Terror Scale Project does not provide disaggregated data. To facilitate the interpretation of our regression results, all indicators of state repression are normalized between 0 and 1.[10]

4.2 Measuring democracy

Our main explanatory variables are the domestic democracy level and the democracy level of neighboring countries. As a frequently used indicator of democracy, we employ the Polity scores (Marshall and Gurr 2016), which measure a country's level of democracy in discrete steps between -10 (full autocracy) and 10 (full democracy). However, due to the conceptual overlap between conflict and democracy outlined above, we follow Vreeland (2008) and remove the problematic components from the Polity index. Our modified "xpolity" index thus ranges between -7 and 6. Analogous to the repression indicators, the "xpolity" scores are normalized to ease the interpretation of regression results, but by the 25th and 75th percentile, to use more commonly observed values.[11]

While the operationalization of domestic democracy is relatively straightforward, the construction of a proxy for the democracy level of neighboring countries is more difficult. In particular, when aggregating the democracy scores of neighboring countries, a measure of proximity between the country under consideration and its neighbors has to be determined. This measure should assign greater weights to more proximate countries. In terms of the theoretical model, this corresponds to the operationalization of the transmission parameter φ. In general, the average democracy level of neighboring countries $\bar{d}_{it}$ for country i in year t is defined as

$$\bar{d}_{it} = \frac{\sum_{\substack{j=1 \\ j \neq i}}^{n} w_{ijt} d_{jt}}{\sum_{\substack{j=1 \\ j \neq i}}^{n} w_{ijt}}, \quad i, j = 1, 2, \ldots, n; \tag{16}$$

where d_{jt} denotes the democracy level of country j and w_{ijt} is a measure of proximity between country i and j at time t. One obvious approach to determine the proximity between two countries is geographical distance. However, some authors suggest that there are better measures of proximity in the context of conflict spillovers. Against this

[10] In the online appendix we further provide evidence that our theory is also compatible with the more recently proposed latent Human Rights Protection Scores (Fariss 2014; Fariss, Kenwick, and Reuning 2020).

[11] This implies that the regression coefficient of democracy represents the effect for a country whose change in the democracy level is of such a magnitude that, if located at the 25th percentile of all observed democracy scores, it would find itself at the 75th percentile after the change.

background, we utilize multiple measures of proximity and follow Danneman and Ritter (2014) in taking an "agnostic" stance regarding the arguments beyond the choice of different concepts. However, since Danneman and Ritter find "degraded distance" to yield the best fit in their statistical analyses of state repression and neighboring conflict, we follow this evidence and adopt degraded distance as the central measure of proximity in our study.

Given the minimum geographical distance τ_{ijt} between the countries (in kilometers), degraded distance is defined as

$$w_{ijt}^{\text{degraded}} = \begin{cases} 1 - \left(\frac{\tau_{ijt}}{950}\right)^{\frac{1}{4}} & : \tau_{ijt} < 950 \\ 0 & : \tau_{ijt} \geq 950 \end{cases}. \tag{17}$$

Due to the exponent of $1/4$, the weight assigned to a neighboring country j decreases rapidly with its distance to country i. However, positive weights are assigned to countries with a distance up to 950 km. Degraded distance thus ranges between 0 and 1.

All data on geographical distance used in the following are taken from the CShapes dataset (Weidmann, Kuse, and Gleditsch 2010).

4.3 Control variables

To accurately estimate the effects of domestic and foreign democracy on low-level conflict and repression, we control for several important variables identified in the literature. To capture effects of economic prosperity, we use (the log of) GDP per capita taken from the expanded GDP and population data (version 6.0 beta) (Gleditsch 2002). Since our theoretical model implicitly contains relative productivity θ_{lk} as a parameter influencing dissatisfaction, we also include the (log of) the average per capita income of the neighboring countries and its interaction with (the log of) domestic GDP per capita. The weights used to aggregate GDP per capita of neighboring countries are chosen analogous to those used to calculate the average democracy level (see above). We also control for (the log of) population size which is derived from the same data source as the GDP data. Furthermore, recent studies point to the role of youth bulges for intrastate conflict and repression (see, e.g., Hill and Jones 2014; Nordås and Davenport 2013; Urdal 2006). Hence, we control for the size of youth bulges defined as the number of people aged 15-25 relative to the population aged 15+. The data are from United Nations Population Division (2017). Since the focus of our analysis is on low-level conflict, we also assess the robustness of

our results with regard the inclusion of variables capturing high-intensity conflict. At the domestic level, we include a dummy variable that is coded as 1 if a conflict has resulted in more than 1.000 battle-related death over time and is coded as 0 otherwise. Another equivalently coded dummy assesses the presence of such conflicts in neighboring countries. In addition, the interaction between domestic and foreign high-intensity conflict is included since particularly peaceful countries could be affected by spillovers from neighboring countries (see Danneman and Ritter 2014). Data on high-intensity conflict are from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset version 17.2 (Allansson, Melander, and Themnér 2017; Gleditsch et al. 2002).

4.4 Statistical models

In general, we model the conditional expectation of the dependent variable y_{it} for country i at year t as

$$E[y_{it}|\cdots] = g^{-1}(\beta_1 d_{it} + \beta_2 \bar{d}_{it} + \beta_3 d_{it} \times \bar{d}_{it} + \boldsymbol{x}'_{it}\boldsymbol{\gamma} + \rho y_{i,t-1} + \alpha_i + \delta_t), \tag{18}$$

where $g(\mu)$ is a link function, d_{it} is the domestic democracy level $\bar{d}_{it}$ is the average democracy level of the neighboring countries, $\boldsymbol{x}$ denotes control variables, and $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$, and $\boldsymbol{\gamma}$ are regression coefficients. Several points are to be noted:

Firstly, we follow the standard method in the literature and generally apply fixed effects estimation (α_i). It is likely that unobserved country characteristics, such as history, culture, and geography are correlated with both democracy and low-level conflict. The fixed effects in the model absorb these unobserved time-invariant characteristics and, thus, avoid omitted variable bias. As a consequence, we only use deviations from the country-level mean of democracy in the estimation. Therefore, in this context, the effect of democracy is identified from changes in the democracy level, i.e. democratic or autocratic transitions.

Secondly, note that (18) includes an interaction term between the domestic and the foreign democracy level, $d_{it} \times \bar{d}_{it}$, which implicates that the marginal effect of domestic democracy on the dependent variable may be moderated by the neighboring democracy level and vice versa. Based on the hypotheses derived from the theoretical model, we expect the marginal effect of domestic (neighboring) democracy to decrease in the level of neighboring (domestic) democracy. The inclusion of the interaction term allows for these effect moderations across all models nested in (18).

Furthermore, all regressions include a lag of the dependent variable, $y_{i,t-1}$, with coefficient ρ to capture persistence of conflict. δ_t represents unobserved time-fixed effects and allows us to identify the relation of interest net of global dynamics in democracy and conflict.[12]

The statistical models are further specified as follows. For the dichotomous variables *Demonstrations*, *Strikes* and *Riots*, we use the logistic link function, i.e. $g(\mu) = \log(\mu/(1-\mu))$, yielding the fixed effects logistic regression model. For modeling the *Number of Demonstrations*, *Strikes* and *Riots*, we use fixed effects negative binomial regression with link function $g(\mu) = \log(\mu)$. In contrast to Poisson regression, negative binomial regression does not assume equidispersion, i.e. equality of mean and variance, but explicitly models overdispersion. Since the assumption of equidispersion is unlikely to hold in empirical applications (e.g. due to omitted explanatory variables), accounting for overdispersion is essential for obtaining valid standard error estimates. Finally, we follow Danneman and Ritter (2014) in choosing a linear link function, $g(\mu) = \mu$, for our indicators of state repression, namely the (modified) *PIR*, the *Amnesty*, and the *State Department* scores.[13] Accordingly, linear fixed effects regression is applied in these cases. The standard error estimators are clustered by country to account for heteroskedasticity and serial correlation.

5 Results

Table 1 shows the regression results for the dichotomous low-level conflict variables using degraded distance as proximity measure. In a first fixed effects logistic regression (Regression No. 1), we estimate the effects of domestic and neighboring democracy on the probability of anti-government demonstrations without the multiplicative interaction term between these democracy variables. This model specification does not provide evidence for significant effects of domestic or foreign democracy on internal conflict. While the same is true for domestic per capita income, the coefficient of neighboring GDP per capita is negative and significant at the 10% level, indicating that a higher per capita income in neighboring countries decreases the risk of domestic conflict. The estimated effects of population size and youth bulges are in line with the literature as higher values of

[12] The online appendix additionally reports tables for models without lags of the dependent variables.

[13] Although all state repression indicators are ordinal in nature, they are commonly modeled with linear link functions. In addition to better interpretability, a main advantage of this approach is that fixed effects estimation is straightforward, whereas this is not the case for nonlinear models with ordinal dependent variables.

both variables are found to be associated with a higher probability of conflict occurrence. Regression No. 2 accounts for interactions between domestic and neighboring democracy and domestic and neighboring per capita income. The interaction term between domestic democracy and neighboring democracy is negative and statistically significant. This indicates that the marginal effects of domestic and foreign democracy may be moderated according to the hypotheses derived from the theoretical model. Similar evidence is obtained regarding GDP per capita. As demonstrated in Regression No. 3, these findings remain stable when controlling for domestic and neighboring high-intensity conflict and a quadratic term of domestic democracy. The latter is included to capture that anocracies, i.e. hybrid political regimes, may be more prone to domestic conflict than autocracies and democracies. Interestingly, there is no evidence for impacts of high-intensity conflict on anti-government demonstrations. The quadratic term of the domestic democracy indicator is statistically insignificant.

Table 1: Regressions for dichotomous indicators of low-level conflict. Proximity measure: Degraded distance

Dependent variable	Anti-government Demonstrations				Strikes				Riots			
Model	FE Logit	FE Logit	FE Logit	Logit	FE Logit	FE Logit	FE Logit	Logit	FE Logit	FE Logit	FE Logit	Logit
Regression No.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Dom. Democracy	0.11	0.45**	0.62*	0.90**	0.90***	1.29***	1.16**	1.62***	0.20	0.63***	1.10***	1.16***
	(0.16)	(0.18)	(0.37)	(0.41)	(0.23)	(0.27)	(0.57)	(0.58)	(0.16)	(0.18)	(0.38)	(0.39)
Neigh. Democracy	0.03	0.68***	0.64**	1.06***	-0.10	0.67*	0.76*	1.42***	-0.15	0.70***	0.68**	0.77***
	(0.19)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.24)	(0.27)	(0.38)	(0.40)	(0.38)	(0.20)	(0.26)	(0.27)	(0.25)
Dom. Democracy ×		-1.07***	-0.98***	-1.40***		-1.18***	-1.26***	-1.39***		-1.46***	-1.30***	-1.42***
Neigh. Democracy		(0.27)	(0.30)	(0.32)		(0.41)	(0.47)	(0.49)		(0.28)	(0.31)	(0.37)
(Dom. Democracy)^2			-0.26	-0.04			0.23	-0.41			-0.65	-0.30
			(0.46)	(0.47)			(0.69)	(0.67)			(0.47)	(0.49)
Dom. GDP/capita, log.	-0.08	1.70***	1.70***	1.28***	-0.27	0.13	-0.10	1.73**	-0.15	0.69	0.62	0.87*
	(0.12)	(0.58)	(0.59)	(0.42)	(0.20)	(1.00)	(1.01)	(0.71)	(0.12)	(0.58)	(0.59)	(0.47)
Neigh. GDP/capita, log.	-0.25*	1.41**	1.41**	1.23***	0.39	0.74	0.49	1.84***	-0.11	0.71	0.60	0.88**
	(0.15)	(0.55)	(0.56)	(0.38)	(0.26)	(0.92)	(0.93)	(0.67)	(0.15)	(0.55)	(0.56)	(0.45)
Dom. GDP/capita, log. ×		-0.21***	-0.21***	-0.13***		-0.04	-0.02	-0.21**		-0.10	-0.09	-0.10*
Neigh. GDP/capita, log.		(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.05)		(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.08)		(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.06)
Population, log.	0.68***	0.21	0.21	0.40***	0.69*	0.50	0.54	0.29***	0.58**	0.29	0.30	0.39***
	(0.23)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.04)	(0.39)	(0.46)	(0.46)	(0.06)	(0.25)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.04)
Youth bulges	0.04**	0.03	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.00	-0.00	-0.01	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.03**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Dom. high-int. conflict			-0.04	0.13			-0.22	-0.22			0.09	0.21
			(0.27)	(0.26)			(0.39)	(0.29)			(0.27)	(0.36)
Neigh. high-int. conflict			0.03	-0.09			-0.23	-0.18			-0.20*	-0.16
			(0.11)	(0.12)			(0.17)	(0.18)			(0.12)	(0.12)
Dom. high-int. conflict ×			0.15	-0.01			0.50	0.28			-0.21	-0.29
Neigh. high-int. conflict			(0.28)	(0.32)			(0.42)	(0.33)			(0.29)	(0.35)
Lagged dependent Variable	0.77***	0.74***	0.74***	1.26***	0.71***	0.69***	0.69***	1.84***	0.89***	0.85***	0.84***	1.34***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.15)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
Observations	7,061	7,061	7,061	7,396	5,189	5,189	5,189	7,396	6,763	6,763	6,763	7,396
Countries	148	148	148	160	98	98	98	160	141	141	141	160
Start year	1950	1950	1950	1950	1950	1950	1950	1950	1950	1950	1950	1950
End year	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011

Standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels: * 10%, ** 5%, *** 1%. Abbreviations: FE = Fixed effects, Dom. = Domestic; Neigh. = Neighboring, GDP = Gross Domestic Product, log. = logarithmic, high-int = high-intensity.

Although the negative sign of the interaction term between domestic and neighboring democracy is in line with theory, it has to be interpreted with caution. As shown by Ai and Norton (2003), the magnitude of the interaction effect is not equal to the coefficient of the interaction term in nonlinear models. The interaction effect may even be of opposite direction. In addition, the significance test for the coefficient of the interaction term may be misleading. To account for these issues, we calculate the average marginal effects of domestic and foreign democracy. However, this is not possible for fixed effects logit models.[14] For that reason, Regression No. 4 shows the results of fitting a "standard" logit model with time dummies and clustered standard errors to the data. The results are similar to those obtained by the use of fixed effects logistic regression. The marginal effects plots based on regression No. 4 are shown in figure 3a. As the democracy variables are normalized, the depicted marginal effects between 0 and 1 approximate the effect of a transition from the 25th percentile to the 75th percentile in the empirical distribution of the democracy scores observed in the data on the probability of anti-government demonstrations.[15] The plots strongly support the moderation effects deduced from the theoretical model. While domestic democracy is found to increase the probability of anti-government demonstrations in strongly autocratic environments by about 20%, it has a negative impact of roughly the same size in fully democratic environments. The effect of democracy at the 25th percentile (0 in the figure) and the 75th percentile (1 in the figure) of the observed democratic neighborhoods is roughly half this size. Nevertheless, domestic democracy in autocratic environments increases the probability of anti-government demonstrations, while it lowers it in more democratic environments. Furthermore, democratic transitions of neighboring countries by such a magnitude that the neighborhood climbs from the 25th to the 75th percentile of the distribution of observed neighborhoods[16] is estimated to increase the probability of anti-government demonstrations in fully autocratic countries by approximately 20% whereas we do not find significant effects for democracies.[17]

The same statistical models specified for anti-government demonstrations were fitted with strikes and riots as dependent variables. The results are shown by Regression

[14]Technically, calculation of marginal effects is infeasible after fixed effects / conditional logit estimation because this would require values for the fixed effects, which are not estimated but eliminated from the likelihood function.

[15]This is a change from -3 to 7.

[16]This is roughly a change from -1.7 to 4.3.

[17]Note that the upper bound of the domestic democracy level is 1 because the 75th percentile is of the same value as the maximum value of observed domestic democracy levels.

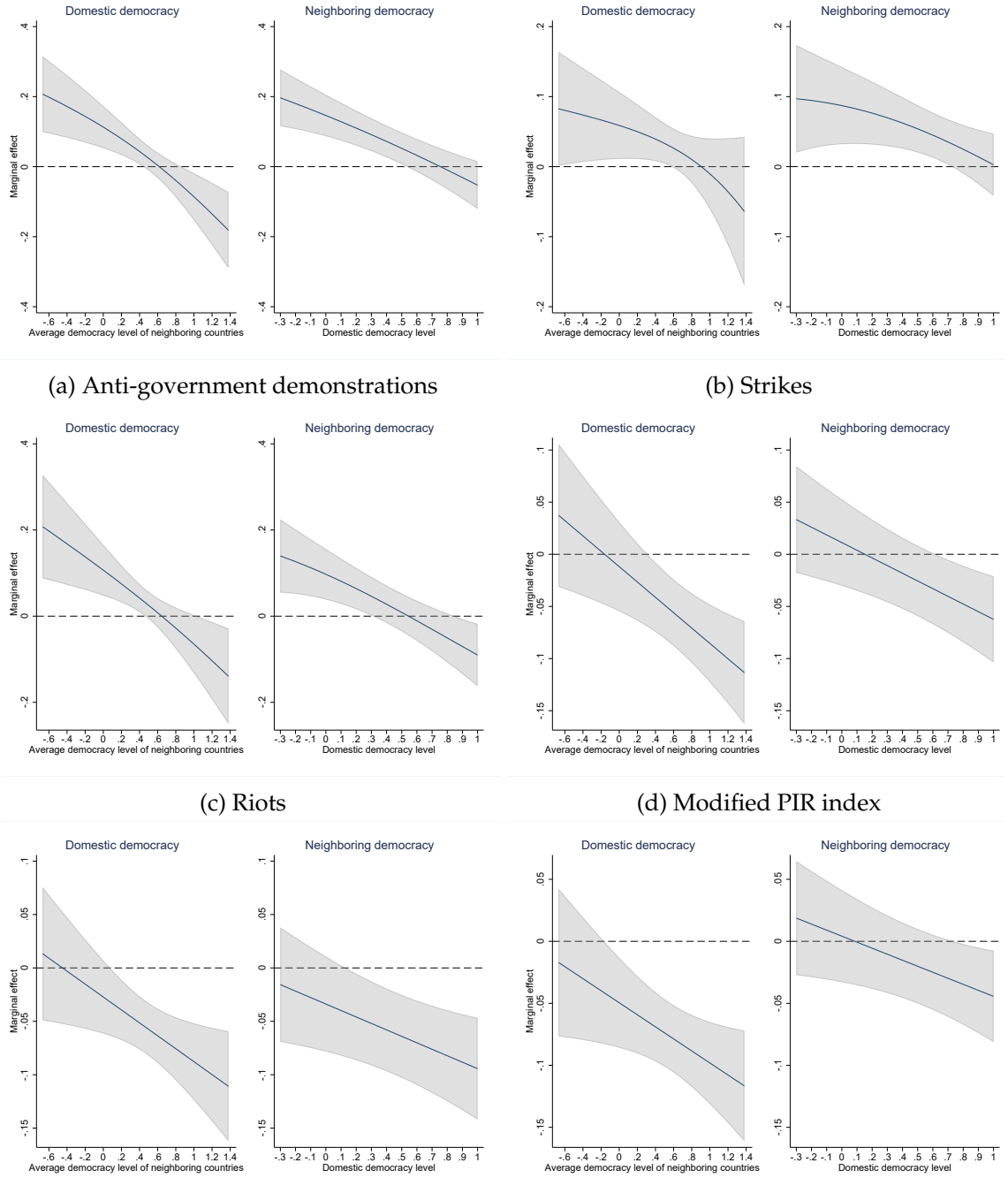
No. 5-12 of table 1. The evidence obtained regarding both strikes and riots is also in line with theory. Across all models capturing moderation effects, the coefficients of domestic democracy, neighboring democracy, and the interaction term are similar to those obtained with anti-government demonstrations as dependent variable. This similarity is also reflected in the marginal effect plots. According to figure 3b, the probability of general strikes increases with higher levels of domestic democracy in autocratic environments whereas it is not systematically affected when a democratic transition takes place in a relatively democratic environment. Moreover, the probability of strikes in autocratic countries increases in the average democracy level of the neighboring countries whereas there is no statistically significant marginal effect for democracies. Regarding riots, figure 3c also indicates adverse effects of domestic democracy on internal conflict if the neighboring countries are autocratic. On the contrary, we find negative and significant marginal effects of domestic democracy in democratic environments. The probability of riots is positively associated with the democracy levels of neighboring countries for strongly autocratic countries whereas the effect turns negative for commonly observed full democracies.

The results for the indicators of state repression using degraded distance as proximity measure are shown in table 2. According to Regression No. 13, there is evidence that domestic and neighboring democracy are associated with lower levels of repression as measured by the reversed PIR scores. Including an interaction between the democracy variables in Regression No. 14 reveals the expected negative moderation effect. As shown by Regression No. 15, this finding is robust against controlling for high-intensity conflict at home and abroad. Figure 3d shows that the marginal effect of domestic democracy on state repression is insignificant when the neighboring countries are relatively autocratic. Similarly, an increase in the democracy scores of neighboring countries is not found to affect state repression significantly in autocratic countries. However, domestic democracy is negatively associated with the PIR measure of repression in more democratic environments. Additionally, increases in neighboring democracy are negatively associated with the PIR measure of repression in more democratic countries. The results obtained with the Amnesty scores (Regressions No. 16-18) and the State Department scores (Regression No. 19-21) yield similar evidence. Graphically, this is illustrated by the marginal effect plots for the Amnesty scores (figure 3e) and the State Department scores (figure 3f), respectively. Across the final regressions shown in table 2, there is no evidence for direct

or interaction effects of domestic and neighboring per capita income on government respect for human rights. While domestic high-intensity conflict is consistently found to be associated with higher levels of state repression, the results do not support an interaction with high-intensity conflict in neighboring countries.

In the online appendix, we report results obtained by the use of alternative proximity measures, including direct contiguity, migrant stocks, ethnic proximity, and degraded ethnic proximity. While the main results remain qualitatively stable, we find geographical distance to be more relevant for the mechanism highlighted by the theoretical model than other measures of proximity. To test the robustness of our findings, we also modelled the number of anti-government demonstration, strikes, and riots using negative binomial models and the latent protest scores provided by Chenoweth, D'Orazio, and Wright (2014) using linear models. As an alternative to the discrete repression scores, we present robustness checks using the Human Rights Protection Scores from Fariss, Kenwick, and Reuning (2020). Finally, we also present results excluding the lagged dependent variable from the set of regressors.

The results from all these robustness checks are in line with those presented in the paper.



(a) Anti-government demonstrations

(b) Strikes

(c) Riots

(d) Modified PIR index

(e) Amnesty scores

(f) State Department scores

Figure 3: Marginal effect estimates of domestic and neighboring democracy on conflict and repression indicators with 90% confidence intervals

Note: Figures 3a - 3c are based on the logit models shown in table 1 and depict estimated marginal effects on the probability of observing a conflict event. Figures 3d - 3f are based on linear fixed effects regressions shown in table 2 and depict estimated marginal effects on the repression indicators.

Table 2: Regressions for indicators of state repression. Proximity measure: Degraded distance

Dependent variable	Reversed PIR scores			Amnesty scores			State Department scores		
Model	Linear FE	Linear FE	Linear FE	Linear FE	Linear FE	Linear FE	Linear FE	Linear FE	Linear FE
Regression No.	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)
Dom. Democracy	-0.05***	-0.02	-0.04	-0.05***	-0.02	0.01	-0.07***	-0.05**	-0.05
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Neigh. Democracy	-0.03*	0.01	0.01	-0.06***	-0.02	-0.03	-0.02	0.01	0.00
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Dom. Democracy ×		-0.08***	-0.07**		-0.08***	-0.06**		-0.06**	-0.05*
Neigh. Democracy		(0.03)	(0.03)		(0.03)	(0.03)		(0.03)	(0.03)
(Dom. Democracy)^2			0.02			-0.04			-0.00
			(0.05)			(0.05)			(0.04)
Dom. GDP/capita, log.	-0.01	0.03	0.05	-0.02	0.03	0.02	-0.02**	0.05	0.05
	(0.01)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.01)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.01)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Neigh. GDP/capita, log.	-0.01	0.02	0.05	-0.04**	0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.05	0.06
	(0.02)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.02)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.02)	(0.06)	(0.05)
Dom. GDP/capita, log. ×		-0.00	-0.01		-0.01	-0.01		-0.01	-0.01
Neigh. GDP/capita, log.		(0.01)	(0.01)		(0.01)	(0.01)		(0.01)	(0.01)
Population, log.	-0.01	-0.04	-0.01	-0.04	-0.07**	-0.06**	-0.01	-0.04	-0.02
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Youth bulges	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00**	0.00*	0.00*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Dom. high-int. conflict			0.10***			0.12***			0.12***
			(0.03)			(0.03)			(0.03)
Neigh. high-int. conflict			-0.00			0.00			-0.00
			(0.01)			(0.01)			(0.01)
Dom. high-int. conflict ×			0.04			-0.02			-0.00
Neigh. high-int. conflict			(0.03)			(0.03)			(0.03)
Lagged dependent Variable	0.48***	0.48***	0.43***	0.51***	0.50***	0.46***	0.55***	0.54***	0.51***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Observations	4,158	4,158	4,158	3,939	3,939	3,939	4,712	4,712	4,712
Countries	160	160	160	160	160	160	159	159	159
R^2 (within)	0.31	0.31	0.34	0.32	0.32	0.34	0.41	0.42	0.44
Start year	1982	1982	1982	1977	1977	1977	1977	1977	1977
End year	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011

Standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels: * 10%, ** 5%, *** 1%. Abbreviations: FE = Fixed effects, Dom. = Domestic; Neigh. = Neighboring, GDP = Gross Domestic Product, log. = logarithmic, high-int = high-intensity.

Summing up, the regressions using degraded distance as proximity measure provide strong evidence for the hypotheses derived from the theoretical model. Domestic democracy is found to be associated with higher levels of low-level conflict in autocratic environments. At the same time, domestic democracy is found to be associated with lower levels of low-level conflict in democratic environments. Regarding state repression, a negative impact of domestic democracy is revealed only in sufficiently democratic environments. Increases in neighboring countries' democracy levels are associated a with higher level of protest and uprising in autocracies whereas there is no evidence for impacts on democratic countries. Neighboring democracy is found to reduce state repression particularly in democracies whereas the results to not indicate systematic effects on autocratic countries.

6 Conclusion

It is a core finding in empirical conflict research that intrastate conflicts tend to be contagious. While this has particularly been documented for high-intensity conflicts like civil war, spillovers of low-level conflict have been examined less often. By drawing on a simple theoretical model, this paper offered a stylized analysis of spillovers of low-level conflict between countries. Particular emphasis was placed on the role of political regimes. The model highlighted two opposing effects of democracy on the intensity of low-level conflict and state repression: on the one hand, inclusive political institutions have a pacifying effect as they increase the scope for political participation and, thus, reduce dissatisfaction of the population. On the other hand, we argued that people assess domestic political participation possibilities relative to those offered by the political systems of proximate countries. Increased domestic political participation possibilities therefore may result in increased dissatisfaction abroad, particularly in more autocratic countries. This may fuel intrastate conflict in neighboring countries which, in turn, may result in conflict spillovers. Hence, the net effect of domestic democracy on conflict intensity is ambiguous. Similar implications have been derived for the impact of neighboring democracy. Moreover, the model revealed an interaction effect, stating that domestic democracy is more likely to decrease conflict intensity in democratic environments. At the same time, the domestic democracy is more likely to increase conflict intensity in autocratic environments. Likewise, neighboring democracy is more likely to decrease conflict intensity in democratic countries. On the other hand, neighboring democracy is also

more likely to increase conflict intensity in autocratic countries. We provided empirical evidence for these hypotheses by utilizing data on low-level conflict and state repression in a panel of 160 countries in the period from 1950 to 2011.

Our results underline the importance of transnational effects when analyzing intrastate conflict. They also shed light on more complex interactions between political institutions of neighboring countries in relation to low-level conflict. Although higher levels of domestic democracy may reduce domestic dissatisfaction and, thus, conflict potential, they may also spur dissatisfaction in neighboring countries. According to our results, democracy is most likely to reduce internal conflict in democratic neighborhoods. In autocratic environments, conflict intensity may even increase. Moreover, our results show that a democratic neighborhood is not unambiguously beneficial but increases conflict intensity in autocracies. Future research examining the links between political regimes, low-level conflict, and state repression should take these complex relationships into account.

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