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Democracy, threats and political repression in developing countries: are democracies internally less violent?

PATRICK M REGAN & ERROL A HENDERSON

ABSTRACT *Although previous research on the correlates of political repression has found a negative linear relationship between democracy and repression, we maintain that the relationship is more complex. We focus instead on the role of threats as a key precipitant to political repression and contend that scholars should attend to both non-linearities in analyses of political repression as well as Fein's (1995) argument that states with intermediate levels of democracy (ie semi-democracies) are more likely to be repressive. Such an orientation leads us to hypothesise that there is an inverted U relationship between regime type and political repression. In this article we examine this relationship for 91 less developed countries over the period 1979–92. The findings support the thesis and indicate that: (1) the level of threat is positively and significantly associated with political repression;(2) the level of threat has a greater impact than regime type on the likelihood of political repression; and (3) controlling for the level of threat, less developed states with intermediate levels of democracies—semi-democracies—have the highest levels of political repression.*

Efforts to reduce the levels of political repression in less developed countries (LDCs) have taken on increased visibility since the end of the cold War with, among other things, the promulgation of democratic enlargement as a grand strategy of the USA and the West (Clinton, 1996). The evidence not only suggests that democracies do not fight each other but that democracy reduces the likelihood of political repression. These developments have led researchers and policy makers to focus with increasing interest on the role of democratic governance as the most effective guarantor of human rights. This view is consistent with a number of studies on the relationship between the level of democracy and the extent of political repression in states (eg Davenport, 1995; 1999; Poe & Tate, 1994). however, there is a competing view in the academic literature that suggests a more complex relationship between democracy and political repression. This thesis maintains that the extent of political repression depends on

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the level of threat faced by a government (Gartner & Regan, 1996). In particular it focuses on the perception by leaders of the credibility and magnitude of the threat facing their regime. For reasons discussed more fully below, this view implies that both democracies and autocracies are just as likely to repress their citizens and that the common view that democracies repress less is largely a function of the different type of threats they face in comparison with autocracies. This perspective dovetails with Fein's (1995) thesis that the most repressive regimes are those that exhibit intermediate levels of democracy (ie semi-democracies). To modify her phrase, there is 'more "repression" in the middle' of the spectrum of political regimes. Her thesis suggests that there is an inverted U relationship between regime type and repression. Moreover, it clearly implicates semi-democracies—not full-fledged autocracies—as the most repressive states. Fein does not systematically examine her proposition and although Gartner and Regan's (1996) thesis has received a modicum of support in analyses of Latin America, it has not been systematically evaluated across a wide range of diverse countries in large N, longitudinal, cross-sectional analysis.

In this article we examine the inverted U thesis for 91 LDCs over the period 1979–92. First, we discuss the prevalent view that there is a negative linear relationship between democracy and political repression. Second, we review the inverted U thesis, which focuses on the role of threats as a key precipitant to political repression and builds on both Gartner and Regan's (1996) contention that scholars should attend to non-linearities in analyses of political repression as well as Fein's (1995) argument that states with intermediate levels of democracy (ie semi-democracies) are more likely to be repressive. Third, we derive several hypotheses from the inverted U thesis and test them on data from 91 LDCs over the period 1979–92. Fourth, we present our findings, which provide strong support for the inverted U thesis. Fifth, and finally, we discuss the policy implications of our findings and provide suggestions for further research.

On democracy and political repression

In one of the first pooled, cross-sectional, time series analyses of the factors associated with political repression, Poe and Tate (1994) found, *inter alia*, that regardless of whether repression is coded using Amnesty International or US State Department criteria, increased levels of democracy are associated with decreased levels of repression. In fact, Poe and Tate's (1994) findings corroborated an enduring finding in the comparative politics literature on the negative impact of democracy on political repression (eg Hibbs, 1973; McKinlay & Cohen, 1975; Ziegenhagen, 1986; Mitchell & McCormick, 1988; Henderson, 1991). Political repression, in the broadest sense, refers to the systematic violation of the civil liberties and human rights of groups and/or individuals. While civil liberties generally refer to particular types of expression, human rights refers to respect for people's personal integrity. It is these 'personal integrity rights' that are usually the focus of studies of political repression.

The theoretical argument as to why democracies are less repressive emphasises the greater availability of official legitimate channels for espousing and organising dissent in democracies. It is thought that the availability of such

channels acts as a brake on larger scale—especially violent—opposition and reduces the incentive for democratic leaders to pursue repression in order to stifle dissent. In addition, it is commonly assumed that the greater degree of accountability of democratically elected leaders effectively limits their ability to use repression domestically, since citizens could turn out of office those heavy-handed leaders that they oppose. Moreover, the system of checks and balances in democratic states—as well as the prevalence of democratic and non-violent norms within the institutions of the government—also make it difficult to organise institutions of the state for repression. The corollary to the viewpoint that democracies are less repressive is that autocracies are more repressive because they lack the repression-mitigating factors found in democracies. It is reasonable to assume that autocratic leaders are more likely to pursue repression since they are unfettered by countervailing institutions. The empirical evidence seems to bear this out. Combined, these two arguments (ie the decreased level of repression in democracies and the increased levels of repression in autocracies) provide the theoretical underpinnings of the empirical findings of a negative linear relationship between regime type and repression.

With so much empirical and theoretical support for the democracy–repression thesis, it was not surprising when Davenport (1995) found that democracy was associated with reduced levels of repression and autocracy was associated with increased levels of repression. However, what was interesting about this study was its focus on the role of threats—and the state's response to threats—as a mitigating factor in the relationship between democracy and repression. Specifically, Davenport argued that states with different regime types respond differently to the threats they face. For him, democracies were less repressive not only because they experienced less anti-government activity but also because they were less likely to view the dissent as threatening to the sitting regime. In a later study (1999), Davenport extended his analysis of the role of threats in the democracy–repression relationship by moving beyond a simple unidimensional characterisation of threats and instead focusing on the multidimensional aspects of threats (he actually utilised four distinct measures of threat). The results of his analysis using an events-based data set of dissident activity and government response produced a strong negative linear relationship between democracy and political repression.

Although Davenport's research advanced the theoretical and empirical analysis of the democracy–repression relationship towards a greater consideration of the role of threats, he did not appear to question (or test for) the presumed linearity of the relationship. Gartner and Regan (1996) argued that, without explicitly modelling a curvilinear specification, scholars risk drawing spurious inferences that democracies repress less than other types of states and, therefore, foreclose the opportunity to examine non-linearities in the relationship between regime type and repression. Drawing on a decision-theoretic framework, they demonstrated that, among other factors, the nature of the opposition's demands shapes the political elite's calculus of its optimal response—regardless of regime type (see also Moor, 1995; 1998). In their view, it is not regime type of a state *per se* that makes more or less repressive, but the nature of the demands that it faces. Therefore, democratic and autocratic states may be similarly repressive depend-

ing on the demands they face from political opponents. If Gartner and Regan are correct, then the level of democracy has little independent effect on increased repression; rather, the level of threat largely determines the level of repression. In fact their argument implies that there is a nonlinear relationship between regime type and threat, where states experiencing higher levels of threat are more likely to repress. Wedding Gartner and Regan's (1996) nonlinearity assumption to Fein's proposition that semi-democracies are the most repressive states, one may conjecture that semi-democracies are more prone to repress their citizens because they face more serious threats. A corollary is that both democracies and autocracies are less likely to repress their citizens because they face lower levels of threat. In the next section, we explore more fully the arguments linking regime characteristics, threats and repression.

The nonlinear relationship between democracy and repression

Gartner and Regan's (1996) implied linkage between regime type and repression relies less on the ostensibly constrained nature of a democratic government's response to political dissent than on the demands that leaders face. Threats to the regime can take the form of large-scale domestic instability, such as civil war, as Poe and Tate (1994) suggest, but they may also take the form of strikes, guerilla warfare, riots and protest demonstrations, as pointed out by Davenport (1999: 102). Elite perceptions of the threat faced from a dissident challenge are—in large part—a function of the fragility of the ruling government (Davenport, 1995). Where the threat is viewed as destabilising, repression is more likely. Where the threat is not viewed in this way, repression is unlikely. We conceptualise threat in terms of the demands on a regime by opposition groups. In general the more severe the demands the less willing the state is to accommodate them. The greater the disparity between the opposition's demands and the status quo position of the ruling party, the more difficult it is to bridge the policy distance between the two groups. When the demands are sufficiently strong and the ruling party refuses to accede them, there is an increased likelihood of violent political instability and its counterpart: political repression.

Hypothesis 1: Increased levels of threat are associated with increased levels of repression.

In our view, leaders in democracies are less likely to be threatened by demands from opposition groups for several reasons. First, the availability of effective channels of dissent reduces the number of credible threats that are not funnelled into—and largely dampened by—the formal institutions of government. These institutions channel all but the most extreme forms of opposition into the formal political institutions of society, where they are then considered in the 'official' debate. Assuming that the median voter determines the make-up of the ruling coalition, any serious threat to a democratic regime would have to come from those whose interests are represented in the far tails of the distribution of citizens' preferences. In most democratic societies the size of any population occupying these extreme political positions is very small. Therefore, in a democratic system, all but the most extreme opposition will be channelled into the

system. The result is that even intensely held opposition demands will not generate sufficient support (or legitimacy) to be considered threatening by the ruling coalition in a democracy. It follows that regime stability in a democracy would generally militate against a severe response to dissent, in part because the elite will not perceive the challenge as posing a credible threat to warrant repression. To be sure, although we suggest that democracies are not likely to face threats sufficient to warrant violent repression of the opposition, it is clear that, while rare, even fully fledged democracies in the advanced industrialised countries have repressed dissidents. For example, in Northern Ireland democratic Britain has been accused of carrying out extrajudicial repression of IRA members, and democratic Spain has, likewise, been accused of repressing Basque separatists. Therefore, it is clear that democracies are not immune to either serious challenges or state repression, they are simply less likely—in the main—to experience high levels of either.

While the logic regarding expected levels of repression in democracies is intuitive, it is somewhat counter-intuitive with respect to what we expect to find in autocracies; but actually it is much more straightforward than if first appears. It is important to remember that our focus is on violent forms of political repression and not simply the suppression of individual and group rights. With this in mind, it is easier to comprehend our contention that autocracies will be less likely to employ such violent forms of political repression.[1] Specifically, we maintain that autocratic regimes will be highly suspicious of attempts to subvert their rule, but the absence of legitimate channels for dissent in an autocratic state will ensure that the regime does not have to negotiate with dissenters—at least with respect to allowing dissenters to frame the 'official' debate. In fact, in the face of an overarching state police machinery, the public is cowed and quiescent and made more accepting of domination, such that violent repression by the autocratic state is less likely. In such an environment, potential dissidents are aware than any serious threat will be dealt with disproportionately; therefore, threats to the regime will be minimised. Opposition demands are often met with paroxysms of state violence, which—through a demonstration effect—serve to deter future dissident behaviour. With the opposition muted, the regime will not be inclined to engage in overt and violent forms of political repression, which is the focus of this study.

If both democracies and autocracies are less likely to experience repression, which states are more likely to repress? To answer this question, one needs to focus on the constraining aspects of regime characteristics as they influence both demands and the ability and willingness of the state to respond to those demands. Gartner and Regan (1996) portray this as a nonlinear function of threats and economic constraints imposed by economic forces. Moore (1998) views this dissident-response nexus as the sequential unfolding of each side's behaviour in response to the threat they face. And Fein (1995) envisions the degree of state repression to be largely a function of state-level constraints. Semi-democracies hold a unique position in each of these conceptual models.

Semi-democracies, for instance, face competing pressures that increase the extent and credibility of the threats they faced. In response to this higher level of threats semi-democracies employ higher levels of repression. However, it is not

only the higher level of threats in semi-democracies that makes such states more prone to repression; the manner by which threats are magnified in semi-democracies also accounts for the greater degree of political repression in these states. That is, for reasons rooted in the tenuous structure of their political system, leaders of semi-democratic states perceive opposition threats as much more dangerous compared with what we find among leaders of democracies and autocracies. For example, in semi-democracies the institutional infrastructure is usually not sufficiently developed to efficiently channel the demands of the opposition into the political arena. This means that, when opposition groups challenge a semidemocratic state, the choice of response by leaders is limited by the scarcity of legitimate institutions to channel dissident demands. In addition, citizens in semi-democracies have opportunity to express dissent publicly (compared with citizens in autocracies) and, given the greater probability of dissatisfaction, they are likely to make an increasing number of demands on the state. However, since political leaders in semi-democracies are likely to perceive demands as a challenge to their fragile legitimacy, they are more likely to repress dissidents rather than to address their demands non-violently. The relative fragility of the institutions of government and the limited range of options available to semi-democratic leaders encourage them to respond harshly to opposition threats out of fear of political usurpation. In sum, because leaders of semi-democracies view their regimes as more vulnerable to threats, they respond more harshly to threats. It is this interaction among the prevalence of threats, the paucity of political institutionalisation and the perception of political vulnerability on the part of elites that make semi-democratic states more likely to repress their dissidents.

All told, our theoretical argument suggests that threat more than regime type is the key precipitant of repression. Further, we maintain that there is an inverted U relationship between regime type and threat, and since it is threat more than regime type that determines the likelihood of political repression, it follows that there is an inverted U relationship between regime type repression, with both democracies and autocracies less repressive and states 'in the middle' of the political spectrum (ie semi-democracies) more repressive. Therefore, we also examine the following:

Hypothesis 2: There is an inverted U relationship between regime type and threat, with semi-democracies facing greater threats than autocracies or democracies.

Hypothesis 3: There is an inverted U relationship between regime type and repression with semi-democracies being more repressive than autocracies or democracies.

Research design

Outcome variable

Our analysis is conducted on the LDCs of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. The outcome variable is the level of political repression, observed

annually for 91 countries for the years 1979–92. In this study we use the term 'political repression' to refer to the violation of personal integrity rights, as defined by the US Department of State and outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which list specific provisions that should be accorded to individuals and groups without bias. These rights include freedom from torture, arbitrary detention, imprisonment for political views, and political killings. Repression is measured using a 15-point ordinal scale based on five categories of violations of personal integrity rights: the level and extent of torture, political prisoners, arbitrary arrests, disappearances and extra-judicial killings (see Regan, 1995; Gartner & Regan, 1996). Each of these five categories of repression is recorded on a scale of 0–3 and then summed to form the political repression scale. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the repression data.

Predictor variables

We use four variables in the statistical models to predict levels of political repression:*Regime Type, Regime Type*^{2}*, Threat and Development.* Regime scores are from the Polity III data and are measured as the difference between the democracy and autocracy score for each state. This is the most common metric used in the study of democracy in world politics and significantly—for our purposes—it does not incorporate a human rights dimension in its construction; therefore, it is unlikely that we are conflating elements of one of our predictor variables (level of democracy) with those of our outcome variable (level of political repression). In the Polity III data democracy and autocracy scores are based on 11-point scales, ranging from 0–10, with 10 reflecting the highest level

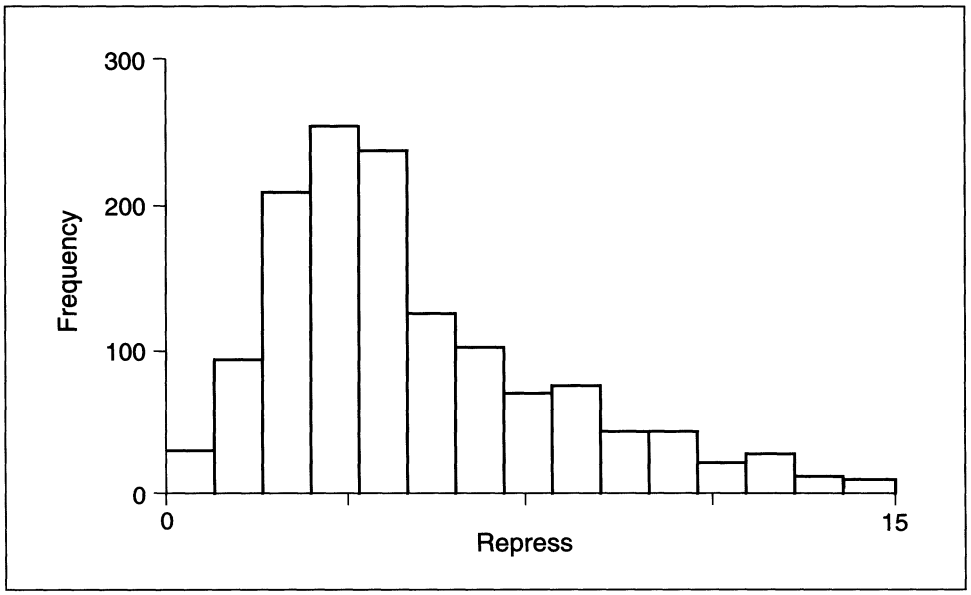

FIGURE 1
Frequency distribution of repression scores.

of democracy or autocracy, respectively. By subtracting a country's autocracy score from its democracy score a 21-point scale is created that ranges from –10 to +10 (see Jaggers & Gurr, 1995; Bennett & Stam, 1996; Hegre *et al*, 1997; Mousseau, 1998; Henderson, 1998). A quadratic specification allows us to capture the hypothesised inverted U relationship between regime type and political repression. This specification requires us to include two 'regime type' variables in our original model (ie *Regime Type* and *Regime Type*^{2}). The first variable, *Regime Type*, is the regime score as discussed above, while the second variable, *Regime Type*^{2}, is the square of *Regime Type*.[2] If the inverted U relationship is bourne out, then the coefficient for *Regime Type* should be positive and that of *Regime Type*^{2} should be negative.

Our interest in threats focuses on the demands placed on the ruling coalition by opposition groups. When the demands are steep we wold expect both sides to prefer some level of violence to either the status quo or government accommodation of the opposition's demands. In countries where there are no demands perceived to be worth fighting over we would expect the political process to accommodate those demands made by the opposition. We measured internal threat using the State Failure Project's data on the average magnitude of rebellion for a given year. The average magnitude of rebellion is the annual average of three indicators: the number of fatalities, the number opposition troops, and the area under control of opposition forces. Each indicator is recorded on a four-point ordinal scale; the index was created by averaging across these indicators on an annual basis (see Gurr, 1999).

In addition, in analysing the relationship between regime type and repression, we control the impact of economic factors, which are also widely assumed to be precipitants of repression (eg Poe & Tate, 1994). This relationship derives, in large part, from the commonly held view the citizens facing economoic penury are likely to hold the sitting political regime responsible for their hardship. The fragility of the economic system in LDCs is often translated into instability for the political system as economically marginalised citizens are more likely to provide fodder insurgency. As Henderson and Singer (2000:281) point out, more highly developed states have resources that can be distributed to disaffected groups to maintain their support of the status quo, but resource-constrained states must often provide resources to the militarised elements in their society that are then used to repress their civilian populations. Gross National Product (GNP) per capita was used as the indicator of economic development. Economic data are from the *World Bank Development Indicators* (1998).

Several multivariate regression models were estimated to test our three hypotheses. We test our first two hypotheses using OLS regression models with robust standard errors.[3] We also conducted Durbin–Watson tests for autocorrelation, which indicated an absence of autocorrelated errors in these models. We test Hypothesis 3 using a simultaneous equation estimation procedure described below.

Results

The initial—and simplest—model (Model 1, Table 1) tests for a negative linear

relationship between regime type and repression, controlling for level of economic development. As can be seen from the results, *Regime Type*—although negatively associated with repression—is not statistically significant. This result is inconsistent with much of the previous research on the relationship between democracy and repression, however, our initial result may be caused by the differences in the spatial domain of this study, given our focused on LDCs. That is, since previous studies have usually included advanced industrialised states, which are both more democratic and less repressive, our exclusion of these cases undoubtedly dampens any robust negative linear relationship between democracy and political repression. In addition, the coefficient for *development* is statistically significant; however, the result is substantively unimpressive. Furthermore, the Adjusted R^2 for Model 1 is less than 0.01, suggesting that the two variables in the equation account for less than 1% of the observed variance in the amount of repression.

In Model 2, we add a measure of threat to the predictor variables in Model 1. Here we find that the coefficient associated with *Regime Type* is statistically significant and comports with previous research, which suggests a negative linear relationship between democracy and political repression. Interestingly, in Model 2, *Development* is no longer significant. Model 2 also supports previous research findings that threat is a strong substantive and statistical predictor of repression

TABLE 1
Models of political repression. Outcome variable = repression (0–15)

	Model 1	*Model 2*	*Model 3*
Regime Type	*–0.0006*	*–0.02**	*0.16***
	(0.013)	(0.01)	(0.06)
Regime Type²			*–0.009***
			(0.003)
Development			
	–0.00005*	–0.0000	–0.0000
	(0.00002)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Threat		1.43**	1.39**
		(0.088)	(0.089)
Constant	4.8**	3.9**	5.3**
	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.47)
N	1134	1134	1134
F Statistic	2.17	88.65	70.51
Prob > F	0.11	0.000	0.000
R-squared	0.003	0.23	0.24
Durbin–Watson	2.00	1.99	1.98

Notes
* Author — please explain asterisks.
** Author — please explain asterisks.

(eg Davenport, 1995, 1999; Gartner & Regan, 1996). The inclusion of the threat variable in Model 2 provides an impressive improvement on the explanatory power of Model 1, since Model 2 accounts for 23% of the variance in observed repression.

In Model 3 we introduce the non-liner specification of the relationship between regime type and political repression, controlling for the level of threat. As noted above, if the inverted U relationship obtains, then we would expect to observe a positive coefficient associated with *Regime Type* and a negative coefficient associated with *Regime Type*^{2}. The results of Model 3 demonstrate this pattern quite clearly. Specifically, the findings indicate that both democracies and autocracies experience lower levels of repression while semidemocracies experience higher levels of repression.[4]

The results with respect to our regime type variables support the inverted U thesis and Fein's (1995) proposition regarding 'more "repression" in the middle' of the political spectrum, and dovetails with recent work on the relationship between semi-democracy and internal conflict (Auvinen, 1997; Boswell & Dixon, 1990; Henderson & Singer, 2000; Hegre *et al*, 1997). Moreover, the results not only corroborate findings on the importance of threats in political repression but, given that the level of threat has a greater impact on political repression than any of the other variables in the models, the findings clearly support Gartner and Regan's (1996) contention that threat more than regime type is the key determinant of political repression. For example, in terms of the amount of variation in political repression accounted for by the statistical models, the variable recording the amount of civil violence increases the adjusted R^2 by 20 percentage points over the model that does not include this variable. When controlling for *Regime Type, Regime Type*^{2} and *Development*, a one-unit increase in the average magnitude of *Threat* results in a 1.4 unit increase in *Repression*. A change in the level of threat in an LDC from zero to the maximum value on the State Failure Project's conflict scale would result in a more than five-point increase on the political repression scale. For example, a 5 point increase on the political repression scale would represent either a one category increase on each of the repression indicators, or a multi-unit increase on any number of the individual categories. In the first instance we might expect a country to move from no repression to at least some persecution of the opposition in terms of arbitrary arrests, political detention, kidnappings, extrajudicial killings and torture. Alternatively, to reach a five point increase in the aggregate, a state might move from conditions of no torture, and possibly no political prisoners to hundreds of them. Either way, a movement of five points along this scale represents a considerable—and noticeable—increase in the amount of political repression. By comparison, a change on the regime scale from zero to 10 would result in a 1.51 point change on the level of repression variable. Bearing in mind that such a change on the Polity III scale extends across the full range of the separate democratic (and autocratic) portion(s) of the regime scale, the substantive impact of regime type—and regime change—appears to be rather small. Figure 2 depicts graphically the relationship between regime type and political repression.[5] Interestingly, the overall slope of the line is quite low, suggesting that the effect of regime characteristics on levels of repression is quite small. We see

from this curve that the maximum level of repression occurs at just about the middle range on the regime scale, with the slope of the curve on the left of the inflection point (ie the autocratic side of the scale) slightly greater than that to the right of the inflection point (ie the democratic side of the scale). This substantiates the theoretical assumption that both democracies and autocracies are less repressive than semi-democracies. On the whole, these results provide support for our main hypotheses (H1 and H2) and indicate that there is an inverted U relationship between regime type and political repression and that the level of threat rather than regime type is the key predictor of political repression. On the latter point, our claim is not that regime type is unimportant is analysing repression but only that threat is an even more important factor in explicating political repression in LDCs.

Although our results lend support to the inverted U thesis on the relationship between democracy and repression, they only indirectly support the argument that different regimes experience different levels of threats. A more direct test would examine the impact of regime type on threats, explicitly. That is, both democracies and autocracies should experience lower levels of threat, while semi-democracies should experience the highest level of threats. Therefore there should be an inverted U relationship between regime type and the level of threat. We test this, initially, by regressing threat on regime type, and subsequently specifying a system of equations to account for levels of repression while controlling for the endogeneity among threats, repression and regime-type (see Appendix I for a discussion of the simultaneous equation model).

Model 4 in Table 2 displays the results of the regression of threat on regime types and economic growth.[6] The coefficients are statistically significant and they

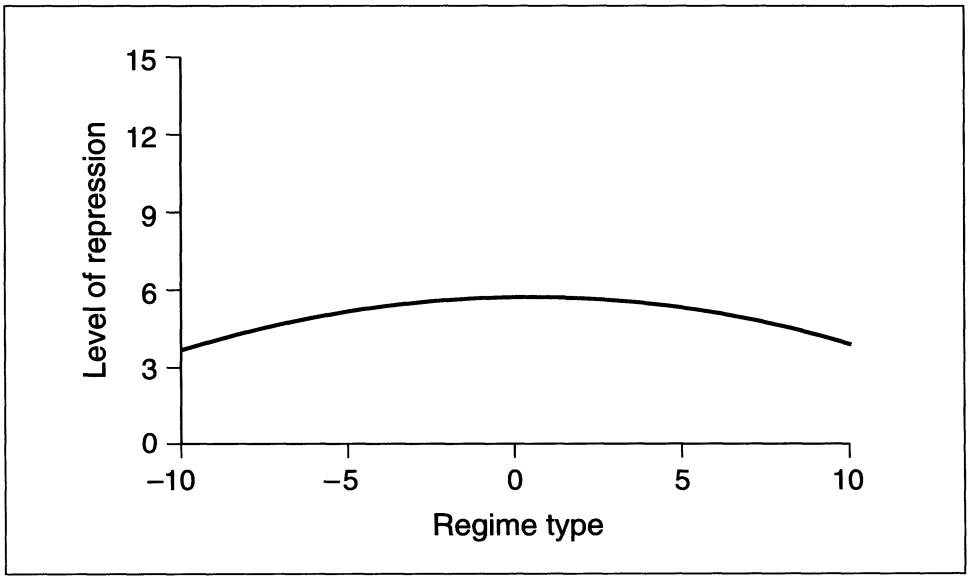

FIGURE 2
Predicted values of repression by regime type.

TABLE 2
Model 4: regression of threat on indicators of regime and economic performance. Outcome = average magnitude of conflict

	Model 4
Regime Type	0.13**
	(0.018)
Regime Type²	–0.006**
	(0.0008)
Growth	–0.009*
	(0.004)
Constant	1.5**
	(0.14)
N	1300
F statistic	18.38
Prob > F	0.000
R-squared	0.03
Durbin–Watson	1.95

Notes
Robust Standard Errors in parentheses.
* p<0.05
** p<0.01

indicate that economic growth reduces the amount of threat, which is expected. More importantly, the findings indicate that there is an inverted U relationship between democracy and threat. The latter finding clearly confirms Gartner and Regan's (1996) assumption that different regime types are associated with different levels of threat and supports our contention that threats provide the fulcrum upon which the nonlinear relationship between regime type and repression rests. In one way, the findings are also consistent with Davenport's (1995) view that states with different regime types respond differently to the threats they face. However they indicate that, where Davenport (and others) assumed that this relationship was linear, it is clear that it is nonlinear. In addition, these findings provide empirical support for the theoretical argument that ties semi-democracies to higher levels of threat and, subsequently, to higher levels of repression.

Discussion

In this analysis we empirically examined the inverted U thesis on the relationship democracy and political repression. The results lend strong support to the view that in developing countries (1) the relationship between democracy and repression is nonlinear, with semi-democracies being more repressive than democracies or autocracies; and (2) threat, more than regime type, is the most powerful predictor of the level of repression. Interestingly, although the results

lend empirical support to an emerging theses in comparative politics (ie Fein, 1995; Gartner & Regan, 1996), they are also evocative of a more enduring thesis in the literature, namely, Huntington's (1968) view that institutional underdevelopment breeds political decay, instability and repression. Huntington posited that political decay results from the failure of the state to adequately respond to the demands placed on it by its citizens. In the face of political decay political elites are more likely to pursue repression in order to provide stability for their regime. To wed our threat-based argument with Huntington's perspective, one would simply have to demonstrate that institutional underdevelopment is more prevalent in semi-democracies. Therefore, the greater levels of repression in semi-democracies, compared with other more heavily institutionalised states (either democracies or autocracies), would result from the decreased levels of institutionalisation in semi-democratic regimes. Whether the institutionalisation argument is borne out or not must await future analyses; nevertheless, it is clear that our empirical findings are consistent with both current as well as better travelled theses on the subject.

The policy implications of our findings are important given the current emphasis on the promotion of democracy and human rights. The first implication is that political elites, citizens and interested third parties need to address the level of threat facing a state, and should not necessarily try simply to create new democracies when attempting to reduce the level of repression in LDCs. If the goal is to reduce the degree to which personal integrity rights are violated, transition from autocracy to semi-democracy to democracy—though morally defensible—might actually have short-term deleterious consequences for the citizenry of LDCs in terms of the heightened likelihood of political repression. To be sure, addressing the root causes of threats to regime stability is critical to the prevention of political repression. The transition through a stage of semi-democracy should be managed with care, focusing more on the institutional frameworks and attention to opposition demands than simply on voting behaviour.

If the difficulty with semi-democracies is that they do not have sufficient institutional development to cater to the demands of the public, the development of legitimate institutions of government is clearly one of the key directions for the efforts of political elites, citizens and interested third parties. Since public institutions derive their legitimacy from the degree to which they are accountable and responsive to the legitimate interests of the citizens of the state, foreign aid may assist in the development of these institutions. For example, outside parties may influence the human rights practices in aid recipient countries by targeting assistance specifically to institution-building initiatives. Devising and implementing workable proposals requires further study, but some indication of what might work can be gleaned from our empirical analysis.[7]

Since the decision to repress dissent is just one of a number policy choices between the poles of complete accommodation and civil war (Gartner & Regan, 1996), the government needs responsive and legitimate institutions to co-ordinate citizen demands. Considering that our indicator of regime type gauges the extent of institutional constraints on a country's leadership, our findings suggest that the kind of institutional development that needs to be facilitated is that which is

geared to the political process. In order to accommodate rather than violently repress opposition demands, the government must have the capability (and the inclination) to allow those demands to be heard, debated and channelled. Institutionally this might require the development of parties with clearly articulated policy platforms, mechanisms and procedures for transferring power among winners and losers, and at the same time institutions that can cater to the socio-economic needs of the citizenry.

A key problem with such policies is that there is a disincentive for many leaders of semi-democracies to provide institutional and infrastructural development for fear that political development might lead to the political mobilisation of disparate groups and the construction of rival power centres that might threaten their incumbency (Job, 192). As Henderson and Singer (2000:279) point out, 'many of these elites, unable or unwilling (or both), to garner legitimacy from a disaffected, generally poor, usually heterogeneous, and often disgruntled citizenry, turn to government sponsored repression in order to insure the security of their individual regime while devoting resources to the military to stave off insurgency'. Strategies aimed at reducing repression may also require a parallel strategy of demilitarisation in LDCs. It is therefore the institutions of civil society that probably hold sway among the infrastructural developments most consistent with reductions in human rights abuses.

Programmes aimed at developing judicial procedures, civic advocacy or watchdog groups, and bureaucratic infrastructure may also serve important functions in decreasing the likelihood of repression (especially with regard to *coups d'ètat* in recently democratising societies). Alternatively, programmes aimed at the establishment of institutions that increase elite security while simultaneously providing more palatable options for non-violently repressing them) should also be promoted. For example, a comprehensive survey of contentious issues within specific LDCs could serve as a guidepost for targeted assistance programmes. For instance, if a particular country experiences unrest as a result of demands for land reform, job security or price subsidies, assistance that focuses on these demands could open up alternatives for political elites and diminish the inclination to repress political opponents. A reduction in levels of repression may consequently increase the level of acceptance and perceived legitimacy of the government and subsequently reduce levels of violent dissent.

To be sure, the targeting of foreign aid is inherently a political decision and the political relationship between states is often complex and multidimensional and rarely guided by the altruistic pursuit of human rights concerns. Even in the post-cold war era, security and trade concerns seem to dominate the political agendas of both advanced industrialised countries and as LDCs. Initiatives tied to decreasing political repression should be linked to the security and trade concerns of state leaders as well.

Moreover, indigenous initiatives should be encouraged. For example, one propitious path to increasing legitimacy, promoting infrastructural development and reducing political repression may be found in the promotion of indigenous forms of democracy that, while inconsistent with the Westminster model, may be quite egalitarian and respectful of human rights. Congolese rebel and educator Ernest Wamba Dia Wamba (1995), for example, in his effort to replace the

despotism of Mobutuism (and the autocracy of rebel leader Laurent Kabila), has championed the institutionalisation of *palaver*, which is a relatively open form of governance that relies on the equivalent of 'town hall' meetings. Other indigenous institutions have become revitalised during the present wave of democratisation and these should be promoted where they are practicable because they often possess a degree of legitimacy from within the indigenous community, as opposed to foreign structures which have to vie for legitimacy when they are imposed upon a populace.

Conclusion

In this article, we have reviewed the relationship between regime type and political repression in LDCs. Building on Davenport (1995), we argued that the level of threats faced by a government mitigates the impact of regime characteristics on political repression. In addition, our theoretical argument draws on both Gartner and Regan's (1996) contention that scholars should attend to nonlinearities in analyses of political repression as well as Fein's (1995) argument that states with intermediate levels of democracy (ie semi-democracies) are more likely to repress. A synthesis of these viewpoints led us to conclude that there is an inverted U relationship between regime type and political repression. The logic informing the nonlinear specification suggests that threats are the key factors in political repression. Specifically, it suggests that threats increase when the ruling coalition is unable to cater to the demands of its citizens. Demands in a highly autocratic society will in effect be muted by fear of retribution, while demands in a highly democratic society will be channelled politically. In the middle (ie in semidemocracies), where demands are high yet mechanisms for addressing these demands inadequate, repression will be greater. Applying regression models to data for 91 LDCs over 14 years, we found support for the inverted U thesis and also found that threats to a regime—more than regime type—accounts for the the lion's share of the observed variation in political repression.

Finally, we discussed several policy implications of this research. Most significantly, since the OECD countries spend considerable amounts of resources to promote economic development around the globe, with the expressed objective for much of this effort being the promotion of democracy and human rights, our findings suggest that these efforts should be co-ordinated through targeted programmes that meet the specific institutional deficiencies in the recipient countries. The effective targeting of such programmes is doubly required since development, in and of itself, seems to have little independent impact on levels of repression once one controls for the level of threat. Additional analyses are required to determine the institutional stresses that are most critical in LDCs. If the objective is to reduce violations of personal integrity rights, then threats to the ruling coalition must be reduced; however, ethical and empirical considerations point us away from policies that would blindly support autocratic regimes and point us towards the promotion of greater openness in these societies—in concert with a threat reduction strategy—so as not to stifle legitimate dissent in autocratic and semi-democratic regimes in the name of the providing order.

Notes

[1] Our point here is that to some degree the reduced likelihood of repression in autocracies is a function of a selection process and the nature of our standards-based measure of political repression. A state where dissidents are not likely to express their dissent because they dare not speak out at all would not necessarily be coded as highly repressive using standards-based measures. Therefore, some draconian states may evince lower levels of repression because the nature of the constraints that they employ on dissidents will not be captured by standards-based measures, which are rooted in an 'integrity-of-person' indicator and not on restrictions on civil rights issues such as freedom of speech or assembly. Nevertheless, these are among the most common measures of political repression in the literature . As a check on the sensitivity of our results to our indicator of political repression, we replicated our analysis using data from Poe & Tate (1994). After creating a sample from their data that reflected a similar case selection as our study, we found that the results of the analysis are strongly convergent with those presented here. In fact, the substantive and statistical strength of the models reported below is enhanced using their data.

[2] In computing the quadratic variable (ie *Regime Type*^{2}), we normalised the regime scores to zero by adding 10 to the scores in order to eliminate the negative values before squaring them.

[3] We used the Huber–White estimation of variance, which produces consistent standard errors even if the residuals are not identically distributed.

[4] We also tested the sensitivity of our results to our operationalisation of threats by using a dichotomous indicator of the existence of a civil conflict. These data were taken from Regan's (2000) civil conflict data set. The direction and significance of the results are consistent, even though the value of the indicator changes the magnitude of the coefficients.

[5] The line is created by regressing only the regime type variables on the level of repression variable.

[6] Growth is more relevant than development in this analysis since the outcome variable that we are concerned with in Model 4 is the level of threat rather than the level of political repression. To be sure, increasing national wealth—especially in LDCs—both allows the public to see progress and the government to cater to public demands. A declining economy, conversely, puts a strain on both the public and the government, leading to an increase in demands at a time when the government has declining resources to meet them. It is the dynamic changes in economic opportunity—instead of the less volatile levels of development—that should determine the citizens willingness to engage in dissent and shape the government's perception of the extent and credibility of the citizens demands. Growth is measured as the annual percentage change in GNP per capita.

[7] In addition, there has ben a considerable amount of scholarly attention devoted to the link between human rights practices and the distribution of US foreign aid. Implicit in much of this work is the idea that contributing to the welfare of the people in the recipient countries will decrease the likelihood of organised violent opposition. Generally this body of research has not been able conclusively to demonstrate a relationship between aid and repression (see Cingranelli & Pasquello, 1985; Poe & Tate, 1994; Poe, 1992; Regan, 1995; McCormick & Mitchell, 1988).

Appendix I

The endogeneity among threats, repression and regime type may result in biased and inefficient estimates if the model is not explicitly specified with this problem in mind (Kelejian & Oates, 1989). In effect there is an non-zero disturbance term between the errors and at least one of the independent variables in the model. That is, if regime type affects both threat and repression the 'true' relationship among these variables may be marked by the lack of independence in the error term. To control for this we specify and two-staged least-squares model, regressing levels of repression on regime type and its square, using the model (Model 4) that accounts for levels of threat as the instrument that purges the covariation in the error term. The results, as displayed in Table 3 (Model 5), buttress our contention that threats account for much of the observed variation in levels of repression, and that regime characteristics are related non-linearly to levels of repression, at least in a sample of 91 LCDs. That is, both regime characteristics—specified to pick up the non-linearity—and threats are statistically

TABLE 3

Model 5: two-stage least-squares regression of repression on indicators of regime and economic performance. Outcome = repression (instrumental variables: threat, regime-type, regime-type^2, development, growth, lagged repression)

	Model 5
Threat	1.39***
	(0.09)
Regime Type	0.11*
	(0.06)
Regime Type^2	–0.006**
	(0.003)
Development	$-22^{x}10^{-5}$
	(0.0003)
Constant	4.97**
	(0.48)
N	1000
F statistic	63.63
Prob > F	0.000
R-squared	0.25

Notes
Robust Standard Errors in parentheses.
* p<0.01
** p<0.05
*** p<0.01

and substantively significant, and in fact the substantive effects change only marginally from the single-staged model.

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