The End of History?
Predicting Future Political Regimes
S&DS 425, Final Project, Executive Summary

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December 20, 2021

1 Abstract

In his 1992 book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Francis Fukuyama famously predicted that with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the world was reaching an equilibrium in which Western liberal democracy would become the dominant—and final—form of government across the world. This raises an interesting question: what historical factors influence the form of political regime that a country takes on, and can those factors be used to predict future trends? My goal was to answer this question on the basis of data collected on countries' political regimes over the past 200 years.

2 Data

For the predictors, data was collected from Gap Minder and Our World in Data. As predictors, I used only internal and objective numeric data from each country; these included: GDP per capita, Gini Coefficient, and poverty rate; infant mortality and average lifespan; population; and average number of years in school. Together, these can be taken to represent the society's economic stability and opportunity, quality of life, and education–all of which are commonly thought to be the backbone of democracy.

The previous decade's worth of these features were used to predict the country's political regime in a given year, as measured by the Polity5 Regime Assessment, which ranks political regimes on an integer scale of -10 (complete autocracy) to 10 (complete democracy). This ranking does not rely on any of the aforementioned predictors, but rather arises from a qualitative evaluation of the regime itself.

3 Results & Takeaways

Using these features, I built a linear model that would predict future regimes. Initial results seemed promising, and the number of predictors was pared down to only several that are intuitively reasonable and encompassing: the change in population over the decade, the average years schooling across the decade, and the GDP, Gini coefficient, infant mortality rate, and average lifespan in the previous year.

However, once the model was evaluated by testing it on regime data from 2017 across 138 countries, results were more ambivalent. On average, for the year of 2017, predictions fall only within 6 points of the actual values. Thus, it appears that these predictors and their trends are not sufficient to get a clear picture of political regime development.