



Project
MUSE[®]
Scholarly journals online

INTERNATIONAL LINKAGE AND DEMOCRATIZATION

Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way

Steven Levitsky is assistant professor of government at Harvard University. Lucan Way, assistant professor of political science at Temple University, is a visiting scholar at the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies. They are currently coauthoring a book on post-Cold War competitive authoritarian regimes.

The end of the Cold War posed an unprecedented challenge to authoritarian regimes around the world.¹ The collapse of the Soviet Union and the consequent drying up of aid to Soviet and U.S. client states, the military and economic ascendance of Western democracies, and the virtual disappearance of legitimate regime alternatives created powerful incentives for developing-world elites to adopt formal democratic institutions. As a result, overtly authoritarian regimes disappeared from much of the globe, giving way in most cases to regimes based on multi-party elections. Many of these emerging electoral regimes, however, were not democracies. During the 1990s, in countries as diverse as Belarus, Cambodia, Croatia, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, competitive elections coexisted with substantial abuses of democratic procedure.² We call these *competitive authoritarian* regimes.

These are civilian regimes in which democratic institutions exist and permit meaningful competition for power, but where the political playing field is so heavily tilted in favor of incumbents that the regime cannot be labeled democratic.³ Many of these regimes were initially viewed as “in transition” to democracy; this, it has become clear, was not the case. Although some competitive authoritarian regimes democratized during the post-Cold War period (Croatia, Mexico, Peru, Slovakia, Taiwan), others remained stable and authoritarian (Cambodia, Cameroon, Malaysia, Russia, Zimbabwe). Other cases managed to oust autocratic governments but nevertheless failed to democratize (Belarus, Malawi, Ukraine in 1994, Zambia in 1991).

The divergent paths of these regimes were heavily influenced by countries' relationships to the West. The post-Cold War international environment did not affect all countries evenly. External democratizing pressures, in the form of diffusion, diplomatic or military pressure, multilateral political conditionality, democracy assistance programs, and the activities of transnational human rights and democracy networks, were more intense and sustained in some regions (Central Europe, the Americas) than in others (sub-Saharan Africa, the former Soviet Union). To capture this variation, we divide the post-Cold War international environment into two dimensions: Western *leverage* (governments' vulnerability to external pressure) and *linkage* to the West (the density of a country's ties to the United States, the European Union, and Western-led multilateral institutions).

Both leverage and linkage raised the cost of authoritarianism during the post-Cold War period. But mechanisms of leverage such as diplomatic pressure, political conditionality, and military intervention were by themselves rarely sufficient to democratize post-Cold War autocracies. Rather, the more subtle and diffuse effects of linkage contributed more consistently to democratization.

Levels of Leverage

Western leverage may be defined as authoritarian governments' vulnerability to external democratizing pressure. International actors may exert leverage in a variety of ways, including political conditionality and punitive sanctions, diplomatic pressure, and military intervention. The impact of such measures (or even the threat of them) on authoritarian governments is greatest in regimes over which Western leverage is high. The level of Western leverage is determined by at least three factors. The first and most important is states' raw size and military and economic strength. Weak states with small, underdeveloped economies—including much of sub-Saharan Africa—are far more vulnerable to external pressure than those with substantial military or economic power. In larger, more powerful countries—like China, India, and Russia—sanctions, threats, military force, or other instruments of external pressure are less likely to be employed, and when they are employed, they are less likely to be effective.

The second factor is the existence of competing issues on Western foreign policy agendas. Leverage may be limited, and regimes less vulnerable to external democratizing pressure, in countries where Western governments have important economic or security interests at stake, as in much of the Middle East and East Asia. In these regions, Western powers are less likely to maintain a consensus behind demands for political reform, thereby limiting the effectiveness of those demands. Finally, Western leverage is reduced in cases where governments have access to

political, economic, or military support from an alternative regional power. Russia, for example, has provided critical support to autocrats in Armenia and Belarus, and South African assistance to Zimbabwe enabled the government of President Robert Mugabe to weather intense international democratizing pressure between 2000 and 2005. In Central Europe and the Americas, by contrast, no alternative regional power exists, leaving the EU and the United States as “the only game in town.”

Leverage raises the cost of repression, electoral fraud, and other government abuses. Where Western powers exert substantial leverage, as in much of sub-Saharan Africa, Central Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean, international pressure has played an important role in deterring or ending full-scale authoritarian rule. During the 1990s, for example, Western intervention helped thwart or roll back military coups in Ecuador, Haiti, Guatemala, and Paraguay, and external pressure was critical in forcing autocrats to cede power or hold multiparty elections in such countries as Benin, Georgia, Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia.

Nevertheless, Western leverage over electoral authoritarian regimes is rarely sufficient to convince them to democratize. Even during its heyday during the 1990s, Western pressure for democratization was inconsistent and often ineffective.⁴ With the exception of the EU enlargement process, the instrument of political conditionality generally proved too blunt to achieve complete democratization. International actors focused mainly on elections, often neglecting such essential components of democracy as civil liberties and a level political playing field. Countries often slipped out of the Western spotlight once elections had been held, even when elections failed to bring democracy (as in Zambia, Kenya, and Peru during the 1990s). As a consequence, although blatantly authoritarian acts such as military coups or the cancellation of elections often triggered strong international reactions during the post-Cold War period, Western pressure routinely failed to deter more subtle abuses of power, including government control and manipulation of the media, harassment of the opposition, and significant levels of electoral fraud.

Degrees of Linkage

Leverage is most effective when combined with extensive linkage to the West. The extent of a regime’s linkage to the West is defined by the density of its ties to the United States, the EU, and Western-dominated multilateral institutions. There are at least five dimensions of such ties: 1) *economic* linkage, which includes credit, investment, and assistance, 2) *geopolitical* linkage, which includes ties to Western governments and Western-led alliances and organizations; 3) *social* linkage, which includes tourism, migration, diaspora communities, and elite education in the West; 4) *communication* linkage, which includes cross-border telecommunications, Internet connections, and Western-media penetra-

tion; and 5) *transnational civil society* linkage, which includes ties to international NGOs, churches, party organizations, and other networks.

Although linkage is rooted in a variety of factors, including colonial history, military occupation, geostrategic alliances, and economic development and openness, its primary source is geography.⁵ Countries located near the United States or the EU are generally characterized by greater economic interaction, a larger number of intergovernmental and interorganizational connections, and higher cross-border flows of people and information than are more geographically distant ones. Thus, with a few notable exceptions (such as Israel and Taiwan), Central Europe and the Americas are characterized by greater linkage to the West than are Africa, the Middle East, and most of East Asia and the former Soviet Union.

Linkage raises the cost of authoritarianism by 1) heightening the salience in the West of authoritarian government abuse; 2) increasing the probability of an international response; 3) creating domestic constituencies with a stake in adhering to democratic norms; and 4) strengthening democratic forces in relation to autocrats.

International salience of government abuse. In countries with extensive penetration by Western media and NGOs, dense communication flows, and widespread elite contact, it is more likely that government abuses will reverberate in Western capitals. Lobbying by transnational human rights networks, exile and refugee groups, and international party organizations amplifies even relatively minor violations of democratic procedure such as harassment of the opposition and the media. For example, when the Peruvian government stripped Baruch Ivcher of his television station in 1997, Ivcher used his ties in Washington to mount an effective lobbying campaign that resulted in public denunciations by U.S. secretary of state Madeline Albright, the U.S. House and Senate, and the *Washington Post*. Similarly, due in part to the Slovak opposition's close ties to Western politicians and party networks, the government of Vladimír Mečiar was once cited by the EU for violating *informal* parliamentary norms of committee assignment. By contrast, the international attention given to lower-linkage countries such as Belarus, Cambodia, Georgia, Kenya, and Zimbabwe was sporadic and focused only on the most extreme abuses of power.

Probability of international response. Linkage also increases the likelihood that Western governments will take action in response to authoritarian abuses. Greater media coverage and lobbying by NGOs, exile and refugee groups, and their Western allies increase the pressure on Western governments to act.⁶ For example, intense lobbying by Haitian refugee organizations, human rights groups, and the U.S. Congressional Black Caucus played an important role in convincing the administration of U.S. president Bill Clinton to take strong action against

Haiti's military regime in 1994. In Central Europe, extensive Hungarian lobbying forced the EU to pressure the Romanian and Slovak governments to eliminate policies considered harmful to the rights of Hungarian minorities in those countries. By contrast, because U.S. and European constituencies for African human rights and democracy are relatively weak, there has been little domestic pressure on Western governments to take action against human rights abuses in that region. Western governments also tend to perceive that they have concrete interests at stake in high-linkage cases: Political instability in the Caribbean Basin and Central Europe is more likely to have consequences, such as refugee flows, that are directly felt in the United States and Europe.

Creating domestic stakeholders in democracy. Linkage also shapes the preferences of domestic actors. By increasing the number of individuals, firms, and organizations with personal, financial, or professional ties to the West, linkage creates important constituencies for adherence to international norms. Because egregious violations could threaten their country's standing within Western democratic communities, these "intermestic" actors have an incentive to oppose such abuses. Thus, for businesses that depend on transnational economic activity, norm-violating government behavior risks triggering sudden shifts in trade or investment flows, and for Western-educated technocrats who enjoy or desire access to resources and employment opportunities offered by Western universities, NGOs, and international organizations, participation in an authoritarian or rights-violating government may be professionally costly. Ties to the West may thus induce political, economic, or technocratic elites to seek to reform authoritarian parties from within (as in Croatia, Mexico, and Taiwan) or to defect to the opposition (as in Slovakia and, to a lesser extent, in Romania during the mid-1990s).⁷ Linkage may even shape voter preferences: Mexican, Croatian, or Slovak citizens who expect integration with the United States or Europe to bring prosperity are likely to oppose governments which put that integration at risk.

By heightening domestic actors' sensitivity to shifts in a regime's image abroad, linkage thus blurs international and domestic politics, transforming international norms into domestic demands. The reluctance of key political, economic, and technocratic elites to endorse actions that risk international isolation makes it difficult for governments to maintain stable coalitions in support of authoritarian rule. For example, when Alberto Fujimori's 1992 presidential coup threatened Peru's reintegration into the international financial system, technocratic and business elites lobbied him to abandon plans for a Pinochet-style dictatorship and call early elections. And in Serbia, the damaging effects of sanctions and international isolation—amplified by the country's close proximity to the EU—eroded Milošević's sup-

port within the military and security forces, which did little to defend the regime in 2000.

Reshaping the domestic balance of power. Linkage also redistributes domestic power in ways that favor democracy. First, ties to influential foreign actors can help to protect opposition groups from repression by enhancing their international prestige.⁸ In Mexico, for example, international media coverage and pressure by a vast array of transnational human rights and indigenous-rights groups helped protect the Zapatista movement from military repression during the mid-1990s. Second, ties to Western governments, parties, international agencies, and NGOs often provide critical resources to opposition movements, helping to level the playing field against entrenched authoritarian governments. Thus, in Nicaragua, U.S. funding of opposition parties and civic and media organizations sufficiently narrowed the power asymmetries between the governing Sandinistas and the National Opposition Union (UNO) to permit the latter's victory in 1990. In Slovakia, support from the EU and European party networks helped a weak and fragmented opposition defeat incumbent president Vladimír Mečiar in 1998;⁹ and in Serbia, massive U.S. and European assistance to the independent media and civic and opposition groups helped level the playing field vis-à-vis Slobodan Milošević in the 2000 presidential election.¹⁰

Third, ties to the West may enhance domestic support for prodemocratic actors. Powerful Western friends may increase opposition leaders' prestige and public support by linking them with valued Western ideals or, more concretely, by convincing voters and economic elites that they are best able to secure a position for their country within Western democratic "clubs." For example, in Nicaragua, where the Sandinista government suffered a costly U.S.-sponsored war and trade embargo, UNO's credible promise of better relations with the United States was a major source of electoral support. Opposition forces in Croatia and Slovakia benefited in similar ways from close ties to Western Europe. Moreover, autocrats whose pariah status in the West is perceived to threaten their countries' regional or international standing may pay a significant cost in terms of domestic public support.

Unlike leverage, linkage is primarily a source of soft power.¹¹ Its effects are diffuse, indirect, and often difficult to detect. Yet where linkage is extensive, it creates multiple pressure points—from investors to technocrats to voters—that few autocrats can afford to ignore. As a result, the democratizing pressure generated by linkage is often more pervasive, and more persistent, than that generated via leverage alone.

The Fate of Competitive Authoritarianism

Variation in leverage and linkage is critical to explaining the diverging fates of post-Cold War competitive authoritarian regimes. The

coexistence of autocratic governments and formal democratic institutions in these regimes is an obvious potential source of instability. The existence of formally empowered legislatures and courts, independent media outlets, and meaningful (if flawed) elections allows opposition

An opposition challenge can present incumbents with a tough dilemma: Let the challenge go forward at the cost of possible defeat, or violate democratic rules at the cost of potential international isolation.

forces periodically to pose serious challenges to authoritarian governments. These challenges present incumbents with a difficult dilemma: On the one hand, overt repression—canceling elections, jailing opponents, ignoring supreme court rulings, or closing the legislature—is damaging to the regime’s reputation, because the challenges are formally legal and internationally legitimate; on the other hand, if opposition challenges are allowed to run their course, incumbents run the risk of losing power. Hence, competitive authoritarian governments must choose between allowing serious opposition challenges to proceed, at the cost of possible defeat, and egregiously violating democratic rules, at

the cost of potential international isolation.

Regime responses to such crises during the post–Cold War period were heavily influenced by countries’ relationships to the West. Where linkage was extensive, the cost of repression, large-scale fraud, and other serious violations of democratic procedure was often so prohibitive that it limited governments’ capacity to sustain or consolidate competitive authoritarian rule. (This was the case even in some low-leverage countries, such as Mexico and Taiwan.) Where linkage and leverage were low, the international environment was generally more permissive. Autocratic governments could crack down on opposition challenges by means of repression or fraud without paying a heavy international cost, which enhanced the prospects for regime survival. Where linkage was low and leverage was high, the cost of authoritarian abuse of power remained significant, but incentives to play by fully democratic rules were weaker—often resulting in unstable competitive authoritarianism.

Competitive authoritarian regimes in countries with *extensive linkage* to the West were exposed to intense international democratizing pressure during the post–Cold War period. Where linkage was combined with substantial Western leverage, close scrutiny from the media, NGOs, and international organizations drew widespread attention to even relatively minor government abuses, which triggered—or threatened to trigger—costly punitive action by Western powers. This international “boomerang effect”¹² was magnified by pressure from do-

mestic actors with an interest in preserving their country's standing in the international community. Although autocrats who enjoyed strong public support or faced weak oppositions could hold on to power temporarily without large-scale abuse (Fujimori in Peru, Mečiar in Slovakia), opposition ties to the West quickly narrowed those power imbalances, and the cost of cracking down on serious opposition challenges eventually induced these governments to cede power. Because opposition forces almost always maintained close ties to the West, successor governments consistently adhered to democratic norms.

High levels of both linkage and leverage are found in much of Central Europe and the Americas. Countries in both regions confront significant military and economic power asymmetries in relation to the EU and the United States. Leverage in these regions is enhanced by the absence of an alternative regional power and of competing Western foreign-policy issues that trump democracy promotion. At the same time, both Central Europe and the Americas are closely linked to the West via economic integration; extensive cross-border communication; large-scale flows of tourists, students, and immigrants; and substantial Western media and NGO penetration.

The post-Cold War period in Central Europe has been marked by the distinctive role of the EU. The EU enlargement process enhanced both linkage and leverage in the aspiring candidate countries, as membership entails a high level of integration and policy coordination, with regulations encompassing virtually every aspect of domestic governance. EU political conditionality differs from that of other multilateral organizations in several ways. First, it is not limited to elections, but includes respect for human rights, free expression, and the rule of law. Second, European demands are reinforced by extensive monitoring, as the EU and related organizations rigorously observe electoral processes, scrutinize constitutions, and meet regularly with party leaders, parliamentarians, and bureaucrats. Simultaneously, the "big prize" of EU membership creates a strong incentive to democratize and pursue reform. Indeed, governments or parties that are viewed as an obstacle to integration often suffer political isolation and an erosion of public support.

Central Europe's competitive authoritarian regimes exhibited a clear democratizing pattern after 1990—despite the region's relative inexperience with democracy. By 2000, such regimes in Croatia, Serbia, Slovakia, and Romania had undergone democratic transitions. In Croatia, public frustration with the country's isolation from Europe contributed to the 2000 victory of the democratic opposition following the death of autocratic president Franjo Tudjman. When Tudjman's party regained power in 2003, its leadership had already been taken over by democratic reformers with an eye on EU accession. In Serbia, massive Western assistance to opposition and media organizations prior to the 2000 election helped democratic forces defeat Slobodan Milošević at the ballot box and then

thwart his efforts to steal the election. In Slovakia, the autocratic behavior of Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar caused the EU to reject the country's application to begin accession negotiations, which hurt his public image and isolated his governing party from potential coalition partners. But-tressed by EU and European party support, opposition forces united to defeat Mečiar and remove him from power in 1998.

Finally, Romania is "perhaps the most spectacular case of the EU's active leverage in helping to create a more competitive . . . political system."¹³ During the early 1990s, intensive EU engagement heavily constrained the less-than-democratic government of President Ion Iliescu, making possible his defeat in the relatively clean 1996 election. A partial exception to the regional democratizing pattern is Albania, which has remained unstably competitive authoritarian. Yet Albania, despite its relative underdevelopment and weak state, which would create problems for democracy in any context, made significant steps toward democracy between 1990 and 2005.

Mechanisms of leverage and linkage in the Americas are far less institutionalized. Multilateral institutions such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and the emerging Free Trade Agreement of the Americas lack the EU's encompassing ties and monitoring and sanctioning capacity. Nevertheless, economic, social, communication, and technocratic linkage to the West is extensive, particularly in Central America and the Caribbean. Both linkage and leverage were enhanced by the 1980s debt crisis and the economic reforms of the 1990s. Throughout Latin America, U.S.-educated technocrats—often with close ties to North American academic and policy circles—hold top government positions, and these technocratic ties are reinforced by a dense web of transnational civil society networks, particularly in the areas of human rights and democracy promotion.

Nearly all the competitive authoritarian regimes in Latin America and the Caribbean democratized during the post-Cold War period. In Guyana and Nicaragua, autocratic governments lost internationally scrutinized elections and peacefully yielded power. In the Dominican Republic, longtime autocrat Joaquín Balaguer attempted to steal heavily monitored elections in 1994, but in the face of intense international criticism and diplomatic threats from the United States, Balaguer agreed to OAS-mediated negotiations that produced his early resignation and democratic elections in 1996. In Peru, Alberto Fujimori's popularity and a weak opposition allowed competitive authoritarianism to endure for nearly a decade, but the country's increasing isolation in the aftermath of Fujimori's flawed 2000 reelection eroded elite support for the regime and helped trigger its collapse later that year. The only competitive authoritarian regime in the region that did not democratize was Haiti, a country that, like Albania, possesses highly unfavorable conditions for democracy. Even there, however, autocrats failed to consolidate power.

Finally, Mexico's democratization merits special attention because it occurred *without* substantial Western leverage. U.S.-Mexican relations are characterized by extensive linkage, which became stronger with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In the case of Mexico, however, U.S. leverage was limited by the existence of numerous competing foreign-policy priorities—including economic relations, drug trafficking, immigration, and national security. Even during NAFTA negotiations, U.S. governments refused to impose political conditionality. Nevertheless, NAFTA exposed the Mexican government to intense international scrutiny and vastly increased the number of domestic actors with a stake in their country's international standing.

In this context, the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)—led by U.S.-educated technocrats who were highly sensitive to international opinion—undertook a series of electoral reforms and abstained from many of the authoritarian practices upon which its hegemonic rule had been based. Although this self-restraint enhanced the PRI's image internationally, it left the party vulnerable to electoral challenges. In the heavily scrutinized 2000 presidential race, opposition candidate Vicente Fox won, and the PRI ceded power peacefully because it was unwilling to pay the cost of a crackdown. Although Mexico's democratization was largely driven by domestic factors, the incentives and constraints created by extensive linkage, even in the absence of direct external pressure, were critical to keeping PRI elites on the reform path.

Low Linkage and International Permissiveness

Competitive authoritarian regimes in regions with less extensive linkage to the West faced weaker international democratizing pressure during the post-Cold War period. As a result, domestic factors played a more central role in shaping the fate of these regimes. Where low linkage was combined with high Western leverage, international pressure raised the cost of authoritarianism, but in the absence of a strong domestic push for democracy, was insufficient to induce full democratization. Where both linkage and leverage were low, the international environment was far more permissive, which enhanced the prospects for competitive authoritarian stability.

Leverage without linkage: sporadic international influence. Where Western leverage was high but linkage to the West was low, the post-Cold War international environment made full-scale authoritarianism more difficult to sustain than in earlier periods but was less conducive to democratization. In weak, aid-dependent states, governments that failed to meet minimal international standards with respect to elections and human rights often suffered debilitating losses of external assistance. Yet the international community's near-exclusive focus on

elections, as well as its inability to monitor and enforce civil liberties and a level political playing field, permitted many autocrats to remain in power by means of competitive authoritarianism. Even when autocrats fell, turnover frequently did not lead to democracy. Lacking close ties to the West or powerful external incentives to play by fully democratic rules, successor governments often maintained the authoritarian ways of their ousted predecessors.

High leverage is combined with low linkage in much of sub-Saharan Africa, the poorest and most aid-dependent region in the world, where most governments are highly vulnerable to external pressure. Low literacy and the paucity of televisions, telephones, fax machines, and Internet hookups mean that flows of ideas and information from the West reach only a narrow elite. In addition, geographic distance, weak economic integration, low media penetration, and a relative dearth of international NGOs mean that political developments in the region have little salience in Western capitals. U.S. academic and media coverage of sub-Saharan Africa is minimal, and NGOs and other groups devoted to the region are “small and non-influential” and “rarely have the power to significantly alter U.S. Africa policy.”¹⁴

The end of the Cold War brought far-reaching regime transformations in sub-Saharan Africa. After 1989, a steep decline in external support and the unprecedented use of political conditionality triggered the widespread collapse of one-party regimes. Throughout the region, autocrats either consented to multiparty electoral competition or fell from power—or both. Yet this rarely led to full democracy. In the absence of rigorous international monitoring and enforcement, many autocrats learned that they could maintain their international standing by holding multiparty elections without democratizing. Thus, in Mozambique, Tanzania, and Togo, as well as in Kenya from 1991 until 2002, autocratic governments remained in power via competitive authoritarianism. In other countries, including Madagascar, Malawi, and Zambia, autocratic incumbents fell from power but regimes failed to democratize. Zambia’s 1991 election, in which Frederick Chiluba defeated autocrat Kenneth Kaunda, gained widespread international attention and led analysts to describe the country as a “model for democratic change.”¹⁵ Yet Zambia never democratized, because once in power the Chiluba government declared a state of emergency, assaulted the independent media, and banned Kaunda—Chiluba’s leading opponent—from contesting the 1996 election. The international community failed to respond vigorously or consistently to these and subsequent abuses (including a flawed 2002 election), and competitive authoritarianism persisted.

Parts of the former USSR may also be categorized as low-linkage and high-leverage countries—examples include Georgia and Moldova, both of which have been governed by unstable competitive authoritarian regimes since 1990. Both countries are poor and dependent on foreign aid.

At the same time, they are weakly integrated into the global economy and have only limited ties to the United States and the EU. In each case, autocratic governments fell twice after 1990, but neither country democratized. In Georgia, international pressure helped force Eduard Shevardnadze to step down in 2003, but electoral manipulation and harassment of journalists under his successor triggered little international response.¹⁶

Low linkage and leverage: weak international pressure and the predominance of domestic factors. In cases of low linkage and low leverage, autocratic governments were exposed to relatively little external pressure to democratize. In the absence of extensive linkage, even serious abuses of power rarely reverberated in the West, and in the absence of leverage, these abuses often failed to produce punitive responses from Western governments. Even when international sanctions *were* imposed, governments were less vulnerable to them. Moreover, because major political, economic, and technocratic actors held a weaker stake in maintaining ties to the West, they had less to lose from association with autocratic governments. In this more permissive international environment, autocrats enjoyed greater freedom to crack down on opposition challenges. Competitive authoritarian governments could manipulate electoral results, arrest major opposition leaders, and virtually eliminate the independent media without serious damage to their international reputation. Without a powerful domestic push for democracy, then, democratization was unlikely.

Cases of low leverage and low linkage are found in much of the Middle East and parts of the former Soviet Union and East Asia. Where domestic pressure for democratization is weak, countries in these regions have been most likely to remain stable nondemocracies. Competitive authoritarian regimes that existed in low-leverage and low-linkage countries during the early 1990s include Belarus, Malaysia, Russia, and—albeit with somewhat higher levels of Western leverage—Armenia and Cambodia. None of these regimes had democratized at the time of this writing in May 2005. In 1998, Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohammad was able to imprison his leading challenger, Anwar Ibrahim, and to crack down on the subsequent protest movement without incurring large-scale external costs. Notwithstanding strong Western support for Anwar and the *Reformasi* movement, the international community never seriously threatened Mahathir's grip on power.

Russia's size, geostrategic importance, and large oil and gas reserves, as well as its limited economic integration and elite exposure to the West, left presidents Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin largely unfettered as they cracked down on opposition challenges. Serious abuses of power, including the bombing of the legislature in 1993, the flawed 1996 presidential election, massive human rights violations in Chechnya, and more recently, Putin's systematic destruction of independent broad-

cast media and virtual elimination of viable opposition forces, elicited few serious responses from the West. Finally, although Belarus lacks Russia's military and economic strength, its close ties to Russia helped insulate the autocratic government of Alyaksandr Lukashenka from Western democratizing pressure. Russia provided key political backing to Lukashenka when he shut down parliament in 1996, and although the regime's increasingly closed nature resulted in its mounting estrangement from the Western democratic community, Russian energy subsidies and other assistance—valued at about 20 percent of Belarus's GDP¹⁷—cushioned the impact of this isolation.

Comparing Regions

A comparison of post-Cold War competitive authoritarian regime trajectories thus provides some initial evidence of the democratizing effects of linkage. We found 37 regimes that were competitive authoritarian at some point between 1990 and 1995: 12 in the high-linkage regions of Central Europe (Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia) and the Americas (Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru) and 25 in the low-linkage regions of East Asia (Cambodia, Malaysia, Taiwan), the former Soviet Union (Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine), and sub-Saharan Africa (Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Senegal, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia, Zimbabwe).

In Central Europe and the Americas, where linkage is extensive, democratization was widespread: By early 2005, nine of the twelve post-Cold War competitive authoritarian regimes had democratized, and two others—Albania and Macedonia—were nearly democratic. In these regions, the only country that has suffered a complete lack of democratization is Haiti, which lacked even minimal conditions favorable to democracy. Equally impressive is the failure of authoritarianism in the two regions: Not a single competitive authoritarian government or its chosen successor survived through 2004.

In the regions characterized by medium or low levels of linkage, the pattern is strikingly different. Of the 25 competitive authoritarian regimes that existed in East Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the former Soviet Union between 1990 and 1995, only five (Benin, Ghana, Mali, Senegal, and Taiwan)¹⁸ democratized, and one of them, Taiwan, is a case of exceptionally high linkage to the United States. In these regions, not only were the prospects for democratization weaker, but the prospects for competitive authoritarian stability were greater. Whereas no competitive authoritarian government survived through 2004 in Central Europe and the Americas, 10 of 25 survived in East Asia, Africa, and the former Soviet Union.

Since the end of the Cold War, Western powers have played a dis-

tinctly positive role in promoting democracy throughout much of the world. Nevertheless, the precise mechanisms of Western influence remain poorly understood. Although analysts and policy makers tend to focus on mechanisms of leverage such as political conditionality and diplomatic pressure, we argue that leverage has rarely been sufficient to induce democratic change. Instead, the democratization of post-Cold War competitive authoritarian regimes has been most frequent in countries with extensive ties to the West. While the effects of linkage often go unnoticed by international observers, they can be crucial to democratization. Where extensive, linkage raises the cost of autocratic behavior by heightening the salience of government abuses, increasing the odds of an international response, and creating influential constituencies for political change. By blurring the distinction between the international and the domestic, and by converting international norms into domestic demands, linkage generates democratizing pressure that is more systematic, and often more effective, than the punitive measures taken by Western powers.

Linkage is critical to understanding cross-national variation in the intensity and effectiveness of international democratizing pressure. This suggests that debates over the relative importance of domestic versus international variables in explaining regime change have been somewhat miscast. The weight of the international environment varies considerably across cases and regions. Where linkage is extensive, international influences may be decisive, contributing to democratization even in countries with highly unfavorable domestic conditions (Albania, Nicaragua, Romania). Where linkage is lower, international influences are weaker, and regime outcomes are more likely to be a product of domestic factors.

Finally, some policy implications are worth noting: First, although the exertion of leverage may be effective in deterring the worst authoritarian abuses, it is far more likely to produce sustainable democratic outcomes in high-linkage cases (Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Panama) than in low-linkage cases (Cambodia, Georgia, Zambia). Second, linkage is primarily a structural variable. Mostly a product of geography, of such historical factors as colonialism and geostrategic alliances, and of long-term processes of social and economic integration, it is less malleable—and hence less amenable to short-term foreign policy manipulation—than are individual leaders or constitutional frameworks. Yet as the experience of EU enlargement (and to a lesser extent, of NAFTA) demonstrates, sustained policies of integration can broaden and deepen linkage over time, with impressive results in terms of democratization. This suggests that over the medium-to-long run, Western policies of broad-based engagement are more likely to have a democratizing impact than are policies of isolation and sanctions.

NOTES

1. On international influences on post–Cold War democratization, see Laurence Whitehead, ed., *The International Dimensions of Democratization: Europe and the Americas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

2. See the cluster of articles on “Elections without Democracy” in the April 2002 issue of the *Journal of Democracy*.

3. Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002): 51–65.

4. Gordon Crawford, *Foreign Aid and Political Reform: A Comparative Analysis of Democracy Assistance and Political Conditionality* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

5. Jeffrey S. Kopstein and David A. Reilly, “Geographic Diffusion and the Transformation of the Postcommunist World,” *World Politics* 53 (October 2000): 1–37.

6. Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

7. Milada Vachudova, *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage and Integration After Communism* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), 162–72.

8. Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*, 92–116.

9. Geoffrey Pridham, “Complying with the European Union’s Democratic Conditionality: Transnational Party Linkages and Regime Change in Slovakia, 1993–1998,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 51 (November 1999): 1229–30.

10. Thomas Carothers, “Ousting Foreign Strongmen: Lessons from Serbia,” *Carnegie Endowment Policy Brief* 1 (May 2001).

11. Joseph S. Nye Jr., “The Changing Nature of World Power,” *Political Science Quarterly* 105 (Summer 1990): 177–192.

12. Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*, 12–13.

13. Milada Vachudova, *Europe Undivided*, 165.

14. Peter J. Schraeder, *United States Foreign Policy Toward Africa: Incrementalism, Crisis and Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 4–5, 44–45.

15. Richard Joseph, “Zambia: A Model for Democratic Change,” *Current History* 91 (May 1992).

16. Zaal Anjaparidze, “Georgian Media Shackled After Rose Revolution,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 29 July 2004.

17. Anders Aslund, “Is the Belarusian Economic Model Viable?” in A. Lewis, ed., *The EU and Belarus: Between Moscow and Brussels* (London: Federal Trust, 2002), 182.

18. The 2004–2005 Ukrainian transition is too recent to score definitively.