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The Strategic Origins of Electoral Authoritarianism

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Why do autocrats hold multiparty elections? This article argues that transitions to electoral authoritarianism (EA) follow a strategic calculus in which autocrats balance international incentives to adopt elections against the costs and risks of controlling them. It tests this hypothesis with a multinomial logit model that simultaneously predicts transitions to EA and democracy, using a sample of non-electoral autocracies from 1946–2010. It finds that pro-democratic international leverage – captured by dependence on democracies through trade ties, military alliances, international governmental organizations and aid – predicts EA adoption. Socio-economic factors that make voters easier to control, such as low average income and high inequality, also predict EA transition. In contrast, since democratization entails a loss of power for autocrats, it is mainly predicted by regime weakness rather than international engagement or socio-economic factors. The results demonstrate that different forms of liberalization follow distinct logics, providing insight into autocratic regime dynamics and democracy promotion's unintended effects.

Keywords: electoral authoritarianism; democratization; autocracy; diffusion

Why do autocracies choose to hold multiparty elections? Why would dictators legalize their challengers and risk electoral loss? *Electoral authoritarian* (EA) regimes – defined as autocracies with legal multiparty competition for the legislature – make up two-thirds of post-Cold War autocracies, including Russia, Venezuela, Jordan and Malaysia. Yet despite outpacing the spread of democracy over the last three decades, we know little about what predicts transitions to EA. Scholars have proposed various ways that elections bolster autocratic survival, but have not translated these theories into testable predictions for EA transition.[1] This is a surprising oversight, given the extensive literature on democratization and the recognition that many EA regimes are highly durable and politically significant.[2]

This article sources transitions to EA to a combination of international pressure, socio-economic structure and elite choice. I argue that autocratic leaders adopt multiparty politics *strategically*, in two respects. First, autocrats recognize that a range of international benefits (including increased aid, trade and military alliances) that are nominally targeted at 'democracy' promotion can be secured with merely contested elections. As a result, they strategically adopt flawed elections and reap the rewards. Secondly, since even heavily manipulated elections present a genuine threat, autocrats are more likely to adopt contested elections if they anticipate that they can reliably win them. In particular, winning under EA is less risky when there is a large mass of poor voters who can be co-opted through clientelism and state assistance.

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[1] Blaydes 2011; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Magaloni 2006.

[2] Carothers 2002; Miller 2015b; Schedler 2006; Schedler 2013.

Thus autocratic elites hold elections to gain international benefits, but only if socio-economic conditions favor their ability to dominate the elections.

I use multinomial logit to simultaneously predict transitions to EA and democracy from a sample of closed (non-electoral) autocracies from 1946–2010. Whereas scholars have shown that democratic transition and survival have distinct predictors,[3] this study instead contrasts different types of liberalization. A natural expectation is that these transitions will be predicted by similar factors, given that they involve the adoption of the same formal institutions. However, I find virtually no overlap in what predicts EA and democratic transition. This can be explained by a simple contrast: *Democratization entails a loss of power for autocratic leaders, while transition to EA does not*. Since EA allows autocrats to cling to power *provided* they can control the electoral arena, it is adopted based on a cost–benefit calculation that weighs the incentives to hold elections against their costs and risks. In contrast, autocrats democratize when unable to maintain power within their dictatorship.

In predicting EA transition, I find a major role for pro-democratic international leverage. The more that closed autocracies are dependent on external democracies – through trade ties, military alliances, international governmental organizations (IGOs) and aid – the more likely they are to transition to EA, but not democracy. I also find a parallel regional contagion effect whereby democratic neighbors predict democratization and EA neighbors predict EA transition. To my knowledge, these are the first empirical findings that international variables influence institutional choice within autocracies. Contrary to an extensive literature, socio-economic factors are generally unrelated to democratization, but strongly predict EA transition. However, the effects are in the opposite direction to what one would expect from the democracy literature: autocracies are more likely to adopt multiparty elections at *low* economic development and *high* inequality. The strongest predictor of democratization is regime weakness, as proxied by the recent occurrence of a coup.

This article presents instructive contrasts with democratization theory. Whereas theories on democratization have long been divided between structural and actor-based accounts, this article focuses on their interaction to explain EA transitions. Several democratization theories revolve around a similar strategic logic, in which autocrats accept or resist democracy based on their expectations about redistribution,[4] the supply of public goods[5] or general policy radicalism.[6] This article differs by focusing on expectations about *power* rather than policy, and by applying this anticipatory logic to transitions within autocracy.

The findings on EA transition are significant for several reasons. First, EA regimes are distinctive and worth understanding.[7] There is growing evidence that autocratic elections matter for policy, democratic development and conflict behavior.[8] Even absent leadership change, the adoption of multiparty politics can fundamentally transform a country's politics and long-term development.[9] Further, EA regimes can be highly durable and represent an increasing fraction of the world's regime types. Secondly, most major political transitions are from one autocratic regime to another, yet we know little about what underlies these changes. Thirdly, the results shed light on how international dynamics unintentionally promote liberalized autocracy, which has implications for democracy promotion and foreign policy.[10]

[3] Miller 2012; Przeworski et al. 2000.
[4] Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Boix 2003.
[5] Lizzeri and Persico 2004.
[6] McKoy and Miller 2012; Przeworski 1991.
[7] Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Hermet 1978; Levitsky and Way 2010; Schedler 2006; Schedler 2013.
[8] Donno 2013; Kinne and Marinov 2013; Lindberg 2009; Magaloni 2006; Miller 2015a; Miller 2015b.
[9] Lindberg 2009; Miller 2015a; Schedler 2013.
[10] Carothers 1999; Goldsmith 2008.

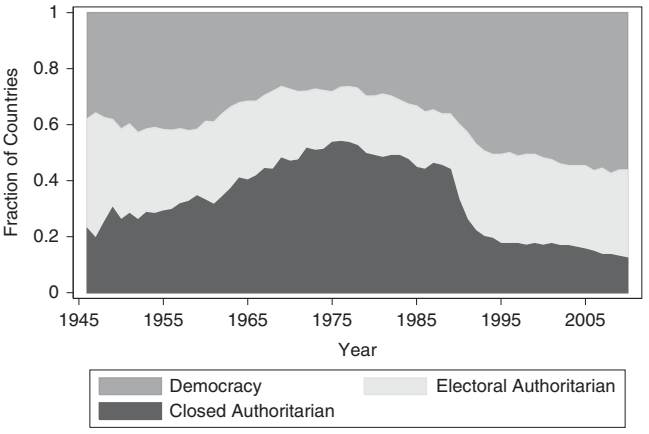

Fig. 1. Regime types over time
Note: the figure shows the distribution of three regime types by year from 1946–2010. Electoral authoritarian (EA) regimes allow legal multiparty competition for the legislature (from Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland 2010). Democracy is measured from Boix, Miller, and Rosato (2013). Note the large fraction of EA regimes as far back as 1946 and the sharp rise in EA around the end of the Cold War.

Lastly, the results present a methodological challenge to numerous studies that aim to investigate democratic change, but fail to distinguish democratization and shifts within autocracy. This problem is particularly acute for studies using shifts in Polity democracy scores.[11] A positive Polity shift from closed autocracy is nearly three times as likely to end up at EA than democracy, yet these transition types are predicted by entirely different factors. Thus studies of Polity shifts may get null results when conflicting effects wash out, or even worse, may mistake predictors of EA transition as predictors of democratization. This article demonstrates the need to clearly distinguish the types of transitions being tested.

BACKGROUND ON ELECTORAL AUTHORITARIANISM

While not entirely new to history, electoral authoritarianism has become the dominant form of dictatorship: 113 countries have held a multiparty election under autocracy since 1946.[12] Figure 1 shows the global prevalence of closed autocracy, EA and democracy from 1946–2010.[13] Again, EA regimes are defined as autocracies with legal multiparty competition for the legislature (for example, Russia, Cameroon and Singapore). What distinguishes them from democracies is that this electoral competition is rendered unfair or insufficiently free due to regime control and manipulation.[14] Closed autocracies either lack electoral institutions (Saudi Arabia, Eritrea) or hold single- or no-party elections (Laos, Swaziland), which are generally ceremonial in nature. This diffusion of autocratic elections, parties and legislatures has stimulated a burgeoning literature on the functions of autocratic institutions.[15]

[11] Marshall and Jaggers 2010.
[12] Miller 2015a; Schedler 2006.
[13] As discussed above, I use Boix, Miller, and Rosato (2013) to define democracy and Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland (2010) to code for EA. These two datasets limit the sample to 1946–2010.
[14] Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Levitsky and Way 2010; Schedler 2006; Schedler 2013.
[15] Geddes 1999; Levitsky and Way 2010; Schedler 2006; Schedler 2013; Svolik 2012.

Why do autocrats allow contested elections? Although numerous theories have been presented, most fall into two categories.[16] First, elections may be motivated by international pressure and domestic legitimacy.[17] In this view, the elections satisfy a normative or prescriptive demand by observers. However, it remains unclear how autocratic elections can serve this function given the near-universal emphasis on *democratic* competition. Further, there has been a lack of empirical work showing that international pressure explains EA adoption.

Secondly, elections may promote regime survival through domestic political advantages, either by co-opting elites into the party hierarchy[18] or extending control over citizens.[19] Elections can communicate regime dominance through overwhelming victories, cultivating a 'public image of invincibility […] [to] discourage potential divisions within the ruling party'.[20] Autocratic elections can also reveal information and help monitor local leaders.[21] Thus autocratic elections can be seen as a technique for bolstering power.

Despite the abundance of theories on autocratic motivations for elections, there have been few attempts to translate them into clear predictions of when elections will be adopted. In part, this is because many of the claimed benefits of elections apply generally across autocracies. Thus they have limited value in predicting *which* autocracies adopt elections. Further, there is a recognized need to avoid functionalism. As Gandhi and Lust-Okar put it, 'It may be tempting to "read backward" from the roles that elections seem to play to understand the reasons for their existence, but to do so would be a mistake'.[22] Therefore a theory on election *adoption* with regime-specific variation is needed.

In turn, a satisfactory theory on the adoption of elections must take into account their costs to autocrats in addition to their potential advantages. Contested elections can invigorate the opposition and threaten survival if regimes fail to adequately control the electoral sphere.[23] About one in five national elections under EA have led to the incumbent executive leaving office.[24] Many ruling parties eventually lose to rivals and accede to democratization, as in Malawi in 1994 and Mexico in 2000.[25] An implication of this threat is that the *net* advantage of elections for autocrats is contingent on their likelihood of maintaining electoral control.

Perhaps because of these theoretical challenges, to my knowledge no prior quantitative work has specifically predicted transition to EA. A few studies predict shifts to multipartyism, but in limited samples and without distinguishing between EA and democracy.[26] For instance, Marinov and Goemans find that competitive elections follow coups more often after the Cold War and in more aid-dependent countries, but these elections fall under both EA and democracy.[27] This research design is problematic, since autocrats typically make a deliberate choice to adopt controlled, non-democratic elections. As a result, I show that EA and democratic transitions have highly distinct predictors. The same concern applies to studies

[16] Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Hermet 1978.
[17] Carothers 1999; Carothers 2002; Hermet 1978; Schedler 2006.
[18] Blaydes 2011; Geddes 1999; Magaloni 2006; Svolik 2012.
[19] Lust-Okar 2006; Magaloni 2006.
[20] Magaloni 2006, 9.
[21] Blaydes 2011; Magaloni 2006; Zaslavsky and Brym 1978.
[22] Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009, 407.
[23] Magaloni 2006; Miller 2015b.
[24] Using Hyde and Marinov 2012.
[25] Suggested predictors of democratization from EA include international pressure (Donno 2013; Levitsky and Way 2010), reduced resource revenues (Greene 2007) and opposition coalitions (Donno 2013; Howard and Roessler 2006).
[26] Dietrich and Wright 2015; Hannan and Carroll 1981; Marinov and Goemans 2014.
[27] Marinov and Goemans 2014.

predicting movements on Polity, which conflate shifts to democracy with shifts between autocratic regime types.[28]

A final focus of the literature concerns how EA regimes maintain control of elections despite giving citizens freedom to vote and the opposition room to organize. The legitimacy fiction that EA regimes struggle to maintain requires shifting from coercion to more subtle techniques of dominance. Although not all succeed, autocrats have developed a wide array of tricks to manipulate the electoral process, including gerrymandering, control of the media and campaign funding, the harassment or arrest of opposition members, and sometimes outright fraud.[29]

In particular, nearly all EA systems rely on a 'punishment regime', in which opposition is allowed, but comes at a cost to dissenting voters, businesses and politicians. An infamous example is the Venezuelan Government's publication of the *Maisanta*, a list of more than twelve million petition signers. Voters who favored Hugo Chavez's recall faced an average 5 per cent drop in income, with many state workers and doctors dismissed.[30] Voters favoring the recall of opposition figures were more than twice as likely to enter into a government cash transfer program as Chavez opponents.[31] Similarly, across EA regimes, local areas that vote for the ruling party are rewarded with spending, whereas opposition strongholds are starved of government funds.[32] Many authors see this clientelism as the central dynamic underlying autocratic elections.[33] As I argue below, however, this strategy's effectiveness depends on the country's socio-economic structure.

PREDICTORS OF ELECTORAL AUTHORITARIANISM AND DEMOCRACY

This article examines transitions from closed autocracy to EA and democracy. Table 1 displays the number of transitions between the three regime types. As seen, transitions from closed to electoral autocracy are the most common, with 139 cases (or 5.2 per cent of country-years under closed autocracy).[34] Transitions directly to democracy are one-third as common. What are the domestic and international factors that predict these transitions?

General Theory

Although EA and democracy include a similar set of formal institutions, we should expect very different predictors for each regime type. The key distinction is that autocrats typically retain power when they adopt EA, but lose power after democratization. For all forty-five democratic transitions in this article's sample, the final autocratic executive lost power within five years

[28] Other studies on autocratic institutions have clear distinctions with this article. Epstein et al. (2006) distinguish between democracies, 'partial democracies' and autocracies, but do not model transitions from autocracy to partial democracy. Further, partial democracies are defined by mid-range Polity scores, which produces a heterogeneous mix of regime types. Only 36 per cent of partial democracies are EA; conversely, only 23 per cent of EA regimes are partial democracies. Gandhi (2008) argues that autocratic legislatures are adopted to enable concessions to elites. However, she does not model transitions, and only 54 per cent of autocracies with legislatures are EA.

[29] Levitsky and Way 2010; Schedler 2006; Schedler 2013.

[30] Dobson 2012, 99–100.

[31] Stokes et al. 2013, 44–50.

[32] Blaydes 2011; Hicken 2011; Magaloni 2006.

[33] Blaydes 2011; Lust-Okar 2006.

[34] Sixty-seven EA transitions have occurred since the Cold War, including twenty-one in the 2000s. Five years after transition to EA, 66 per cent remain EA, 11 per cent are democracies and the remainder transition back to closed autocracy.

TABLE 1 *Transitions between Three Regime Types*

	Current year		
Previous year	Closed autocracy	Electoral autocracy	Democracy
Closed autocracy	2,514	139	45
Electoral autocracy	115	2,015	57
Democracy	46	20	3,226

Note: the table shows all transitions between the three regime types from 1946–2010. Note that shifts from closed to electoral autocracy are the most common type of transition.

(and all but three instantaneously).[35] In contrast, the majority of executives and more than three in four ruling parties remained in power five years after an EA transition.[36] Further, in an average five-year period, 75 per cent of democratic executives lose power, compared to 37 per cent of EA leaders and 40 per cent of closed authoritarian rulers.[37] Whereas democratization is a virtual guarantee to lose power, EA transition may improve security *if* elections can be controlled. As a result, EA transitions follow from a strategic calculation that balances the benefits of adopting contested elections against the costs and risks.

What are these benefits and costs? On the positive side for EA, regime leaders receive international benefits for allowing contested elections, such as increased foreign aid, reduced trade and military sanctions, and closer engagement with democratic powers.[38] Thus the anticipated size of international rewards and the leverage held by external democratic actors should encourage EA transition.[39]

On the negative side, contested elections present real risks, as autocrats frequently lose power in even heavily manipulated elections. According to Hyde and Marinov, EA ruling parties have lost fifty-one elections since 1946, often resulting in democratization.[40] Further, even entrenched parties can face electoral surprises that induce political flux and invigorate the opposition, as occurred in Mexico in 1988, Morocco in 2007, Russia in 2011 and Malaysia in 2013. Simply stealing the election is no panacea, as this can quickly lead to mass protests and elite defections, as in the Philippines in 1986 and Georgia in 2003.

Given these risks, EA adoption should be more likely when autocrats anticipate that they can control the electoral arena. Yet this can be very difficult to predict in the low-information environment of closed autocracy. In some cases, autocrats have rethought legalizing the opposition when initial electoral results were unfavorable.[41] Absent such signals, regimes must

[35] There are cases in which autocratic ruling parties remain electorally competitive post-democratization (Wright and Escribà-Folch 2012). However, these are almost exclusively transitions that occur from EA, not closed autocracy.

[36] Controlling for average income, year, region and past turnovers, an executive is not significantly more likely to lose power after shifting to EA compared to retaining closed autocracy.

[37] Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2016.

[38] Goldsmith 2008; Levitsky and Way 2010.

[39] Although there are also domestic benefits for regime power, tracking variation in the size and need for these benefits is difficult.

[40] Hyde and Marinov 2012.

[41] The Bolsheviks, for instance, eliminated contested elections after being defeated in the 1917 Russian Constituent Assembly election. Similarly, the Algerian military canceled founding multiparty elections in 1991 when the Islamic Salvation Front won the first round.

calculate whether they can reliably control the population before allowing open contestation. I argue that a chief factor predicting the ease of electoral control is the population's socio-economic status, particularly whether there is a large mass of poor voters that the regime can co-opt through clientelism and targeted public goods.

Democratization works very differently, as closed autocratic leaders rarely retain power under democracy. Assuming power is their primary concern, any rewards stemming from democratization will carry little weight. Not only will the rewards fail to match the sacrifice of power, autocrats will no longer be in a position to gain from benefits accruing to the country. As a result, democratization is driven less by an anticipatory cost–benefit calculation and more by whether the regime has the power to survive as a closed autocracy.[42]

In sum, EA transition should be more likely when the direct benefits of EA are high and the autocrat's risk of turnover within EA is low. The remainder of this section expands on how these benefits and risks vary across regimes, focusing on the leverage of external democracies and socio-economic structure.

International Pressure and Contagion

International pressure for 'democracy'. Over the last two decades, scholars have increasingly turned to the role of international factors in democratization.[43] Numerous political benefits, including foreign aid and trade, are designed to be contingent on democracy.[44] The US Foreign Assistance Act of 1975 and Millennium Challenge Act of 2003 condition aid on democratic and human rights criteria. Diplomatic pressure is also exercised through the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. The EU's European Neighborhood Policy and Cotonou Agreement apply democratic requirements for aid. Democratic conditions are also enshrined in the African Union's charter and Latin America's 2001 Inter-American Democratic Charter. Further, studies show that democracies prefer to trade and ally with similar regimes, presenting an implicit reward for recognition as a democracy.[45]

As many scholars have observed, however, the bulk of rewards cast as encouraging 'democracy' are in practice given for even critically flawed elections.[46] Diamond argues that 'democracy promotion policies have been dominated by a highly minimalist, electoral conception of democracy'.[47] In African countries, 'semi-democracy is probably sufficient to deflect international system pressures for more complete political opening'.[48] As a consequence, the end result of democratic pressure is often transition to EA, since many autocrats will happily adopt partial reforms if they can gain the benefits *without* sacrificing power.[49] Failing to distinguish between different types of liberalization may therefore explain why studies so often conflict as to whether foreign aid and pressure effectively spread democracy.[50]

[42] The democratization literature is increasingly recognizing the critical role of regime strength, as reflected in coercive capabilities, institutional capacity and the cohesion of the ruling coalition. See Albertus and Menaldo 2012; Levitsky and Way 2010; Miller 2012.

[43] Gleditsch and Ward 2006; Torfason and Ingram 2010; Whitehead 1996. Besides the imposition of democracy after war, as in Germany and Japan, democracy can be encouraged by normative diffusion (Whitehead 1996), regional organizations (Pevehouse 2002) and democracy assistance (Carothers 1999).

[44] Brown 2011; Goldsmith 2008; Hackenesch 2015; Joseph 1999; Young 1999.

[45] Mansfield, Milner, and Rosendorff 2000.

[46] Brown 2011; Diamond 1999; Goldsmith 2008; Joseph 1999; Young 1999.

[47] Diamond 1999, 56.

[48] Young 1999, 35.

[49] Carothers 1999; Carothers 2002; Goldsmith 2008.

[50] Dietrich and Wright 2015; Ethier 2003; Finkel, Pérez-Liñán, and Seligson 2007; Knack 2004.

In a recent example, in 2010, Burma's long-lived military regime began a liberalizing project of expanded civil liberties, political amnesty and multiparty elections. Despite remaining autocratic, Burma's opening has been met with widespread international acclaim, leading to reduced economic sanctions by the United States, Japan and the EU, increased development aid, and the first-ever visit by an American president in November 2012.

Another illustrative example comes from the Africa Growth Opportunity Act, a 2000 US program that gives duty-free access to 6,400 products from African countries that meet democratic requirements, including 'the rule of law and political pluralism'. Six countries have had their eligibility revoked and later restored.[51] In each case, the punishment stemmed from political violence that suspended electoral politics (mainly coups). Eligibility was restored following the resumption of contested elections, but in each case these elections were deemed 'not free' or 'partly free' by Freedom House.[52]

In general, the rewards given for adopting democratic versus merely contested elections are remarkably similar. Figure 2 shows country averages of US economic and military aid (top) and IGO memberships (bottom),[53] based on proximity to either EA or democratic transition. Transition years for each are normalized to 1 in the figure. In the four years before democratization, the average closed autocracy receives $10.01 per capita in US aid. In the four years following, it receives $15.80. For EA transitions, the shift is from $8.43 to $12.18, an almost identical proportional increase. For IGO memberships, the corresponding increase for democratic transitions is from 44.7 to 51.2; for EA transitions it is from 42.4 to 46.0. Thus EA transition and democratization result in nearly identical benefits.

In addition to encouraging EA, international actors' approval of flawed elections has often worked (sometimes intentionally) to prevent a full democratic opening. In Kenya in 1991, the threatened suspension of aid led Daniel arap Moi to concede to multiparty elections. However, fears of instability led the United States and United Kingdom to endorse highly flawed elections in 1992 and 1997, even restricting fraud reports by their own observation teams.[54] As Brown writes, 'This electoral legitimation allowed Moi to […] indefinitely postpone reforms that would have allowed a full transition to democracy'.[55] Similarly, US pressure has been central to the adoption and maintenance of EA in Egypt, Kuwait, Jordan, Indonesia, Togo and Pakistan.

Why do international actors reward EA adoption under the guise of democracy promotion? In some cases, observers may be genuinely unable to distinguish EA from democracy, or at least unwilling to apply subjective evaluations of the competitiveness and fairness of electoral politics. In contrast, the presence of multiparty elections is concrete and easily observable. But there are deeper reasons for these lax standards: international actors often exaggerate political progress to make democracy promotion look successful, to maintain access, or to reward regimes for economic reforms and partial liberalization.[56]

Regardless of the cause, many autocrats find that they can profit by adopting the formal institutions of democracy without the substance. Since EA does not require sacrificing power, these international incentives provide a strong stimulus to embrace autocratic elections. As Joseph explains, autocrats 'learned that they did not have to democratize in order to retain

[51] Mauritania, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Niger, Mali and Madagascar.
[52] Freedom House 2013.
[53] Respectively, from Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2007; Pevehouse, Nordstrom, and Warnke 2004.
[54] Geisler 1993.
[55] Brown 2001, 735.
[56] Brown 2011; Bush 2015; Carothers 1999; Goldsmith 2008.

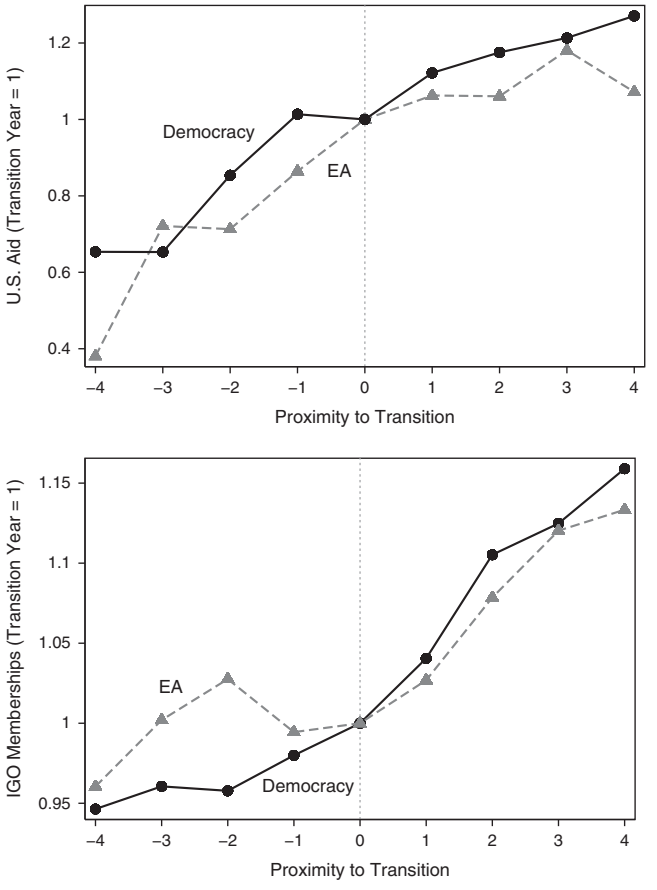

Fig. 2. US economic and military aid and IGO memberships
Note: the figures show the average provision of US aid and average memberships in IGOs by proximity to two types of political transitions (democratization and EA transition). A proximity of 0 indicates the year of transition, with the averages normalized so that transition years equal 1. Negative proximity values are closed autocracies in years prior to transitions, and positive values are democracies or EA regimes in years following transitions. The figures show that US aid and international engagement follow very similar patterns after each transition type.

[inflows of aid and loans]. What they had to accept, however, was the […] adoption of varying degrees of political liberalization, however effectively constrained in practice'.[57]

Testing international pressure. It follows that the magnitude of international pressure favoring liberalization should predict EA adoption. Testing this presents two primary difficulties. First, we must identify measurable variation in the leverage of external democracies. Secondly, we need to guard against mistaking foreign aid (and other rewards) delivered prior to liberalization as a causal factor when it was given for promises of reform. I therefore show that the results are robust to lagging the international variables by up to five years.

To capture international leverage, I focus on four sources of external dependence on democracies: *trade ties*, *military alliances*, *IGO co-memberships* and *foreign aid*. When an

[57] Joseph 1999, 61–2.

autocracy is more economically and politically dependent on democracies, economic sanctions and political marginalization become much more costly.[58] Democracies thereby have greater leverage to incentivize political reforms, either for normative reasons or to improve the legitimacy of the alliance. However, to the extent that piecemeal reforms satisfy these democratic observers, the likely end result is autocratic liberalization rather than democracy. For instance, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's unexpected decision to allow multiparty elections in 1976 coincided with a turn from Soviet to US alliance. Egypt scholars generally agree that Sadat was guided by a desire for foreign investment and military co-operation with the West.[59]

Previous work has demonstrated the significance of trade partners' political characteristics. Hadenius shows that US trade promotes democracy, and Cao et al. find that trade with rights-respecting countries promotes human rights diffusion.[60] Conversely, other studies show that greater trade with China influences foreign policy and autocratic survival.[61] Trade dependence on democracies can vary enormously, with major political consequences. In the 1980s, 95 per cent of South Africa's bilateral trade was with democracies, compared to 60 per cent of Burma's trade (which subsequently fell as low as 25 per cent). In turn, South Africa liberalized in the early 1990s under intense and costly international pressure from democracies, whereas Burma violently retreated from electoral politics following an unfavorable election in 1991.[62]

Related work examines the influence of democratic military alliances,[63] co-members of IGOs[64] and other network interactions.[65] However, this work either ignores within-autocracy changes[66] or, by using Polity, implicitly assumes that autocratic liberalization and genuine democratization follow the same logic.[67] In line with qualitative scholars, I argue that this overlooks the strategic incentives generated by external dependence on democracies, which should more strongly influence institutional adaptation *within* autocracy.

I compute the fraction of each autocracies' trade, military alliances, IGO co-memberships and aid represented by democracies, and then show that each predicts transition to EA, but not democracy. I also compare the effects of political, social and economic globalization, none of which predicts democratization. Predictions can be summed up in the following hypotheses:

HYPOTHESIS 1A: Transition to EA is more likely when states are more dependent on external democracies through trade ties, military alliances, IGOs or foreign aid.

HYPOTHESIS 1B: Transition to democracy is unrelated to dependence on external democracies through trade ties, military alliances, IGOs or foreign aid.

[58] Goodliffe and Hawkins 2017.

[59] Blaydes 2011, 33–8; Waterbury 1983.

[60] Cao, Greenhill, and Prakash 2013; Hadenius 1992, 96. See also Tansey, Koehler, and Schmotz Forthcoming.

[61] Respectively, Bader 2015; Flores-Macías and Kreps 2013.

[62] Activists are aware of the liberalizing potential of trade ties with democracies. A pro-democratic leader in Swaziland argued that the king will keep the political space closed if external democracies 'continue to treat him with white gloves, continue to trade with Swaziland without taking a good look at the human rights record of Swaziland' (Clottey 2015).

[63] Goodliffe and Hawkins 2017.

[64] Goodliffe and Hawkins 2017; Pevehouse 2002. As an example of IGO influence, Leopold Senghor's liberalization of Senegal in the late 1970s was partly inspired by his desire for full membership in the Socialist International. More broadly, 'Senghor wanted his country to be a model of liberty and democracy for Africa, and he counted on this prestige to attract Western aid and investors' (Coulon 1988, 157).

[65] Levitsky and Way 2010; Tansey, Koehler, and Schmotz Forthcoming; Torfason and Ingram 2010.

[66] Levitsky and Way 2010; Pevehouse 2002.

[67] Finkel, Pérez-Liñán, and Seligson 2007; Goodliffe and Hawkins 2017; Torfason and Ingram 2010.

Regime contagion. A related international effect is regional contagion. Countries are more likely to democratize and sustain democracy if higher proportions of their regions and neighbors are democratic.[68] I argue that a parallel effect holds for EA regimes. Most centrally, neighboring regime types proxy for region-specific international pressures. As Levitsky and Way argue, regions vary in their levels of Western cultural and economic linkage, with Latin America and Eastern Europe at the high end.[69] In their study, this linkage predicts democratic transitions from EA, but it should also explain EA adoption.

In addition, EA neighbors (and to a lesser extent, democratic neighbors) can directly influence EA adoption for four reasons. First, this follows from a policy diffusion logic in which political choices spread through learning and emulation.[70] If elections and parties function well in nearby countries, autocrats are likely to copy these strategies. Secondly, popular pressure for elections increases when citizens witness them in neighboring countries.[71] This effect was particularly pronounced during the wave of liberalizations in sub-Saharan Africa from 1990–94.[72] Thirdly, autocrats want to avoid looking like illiberal outliers in their region.[73] Fourthly, powerful closed autocracies often provide support for similar neighboring regimes to secure alliances and block future regime diffusion.[74] For instance, China has been a crucial stabilizing force for North Korea and Laos.[75] An absence of these hegemonic 'black knights' should promote regional liberalization.

HYPOTHESIS 2: Transition to EA is more likely with a higher share of regional EA regimes.

Socio-economic Structure

Closed autocracies primarily rule by force and fear. As Francisco Franco memorably put it, 'Our regime is based on bayonets and blood, not on hypocritical elections.' EA regimes, by contrast, require active consent from the masses and the continuous control of a genuine opposition. Leaders will be wary of adopting elections if they believe that controlling them will be too difficult or costly. I focus on how socio-economic characteristics of the population influence the threat of contested elections. Specifically, I argue that wealthier citizens are especially difficult to co-opt and thus discourage EA adoption.

How is EA dominance maintained, and how does this depend on the population? Although electoral manipulation takes many forms, a near-universal characteristic is the use of clientelism to co-opt citizens and elites. This can take the form of individual vote buying, state patronage (where the reward is a state job or service), or targeted local public goods.[76] Conversely, opposition elements are denied public goods and economic opportunities. The punishment of individuals and local districts for electoral opposition has been observed in Mexico, Jordan, Singapore, Taiwan and many other countries.[77] In Egypt under the National Democratic Party, for instance, districts supportive of the opposition Muslim

[68] Brinks and Coppedge 2006; Gleditsch and Ward 2006; Starr 1991.
[69] Levitsky and Way 2010.
[70] Ambrosio 2010; Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2006.
[71] Levitsky and Way 2010; Sadiki 2000.
[72] Bratton and van de Walle 1997. For instance, Tanzania's early-1990s transition to multipartyism stemmed from Julius Nyerere's belief 'that the growing number of democratic transitions elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa would inevitably catalyze pressures for similar changes in Tanzania' (Hoffman and Robinson 2009, 125).
[73] Whitehead 1996.
[74] Ambrosio 2010; Levitsky and Way 2010.
[75] Reilly 2013.
[76] Blaydes 2011; Hicken 2011; Lust-Okar 2006.
[77] Respectively, Magaloni 2006; Lust-Okar 2006; Leong 2000; Wang and Kurzman 2007.

Brotherhood were less likely to subsequently receive connections to public sewer and water lines.[78]

The feasibility of this electoral strategy greatly depends on the country's socio-economic structure. EA regimes typically construct their electoral coalitions around poor voters, who are more cheaply co-opted. Reversing the democratic pattern, the poor are often the most likely to vote in autocratic elections and tend to support the ruling party.[79] As a result, higher incomes reduce the grip and cost effectiveness of clientelism.[80] Survey evidence from Ghana shows that both personal wealth and local development reduce an individual's willingness to sell his or her vote.[81] Stokes finds the same pattern in Argentina, showing that clientelistic machines focus on poor citizens in small villages, where traditional social networks make them easier to monitor and control.[82] Further, higher levels of remittances increase local electoral competitiveness in Mexico by reducing voter dependence on state patronage.[83]

In addition to the reduced ability to buy votes, several other mechanisms make wealthier voters more difficult to control within EA. First, they tend to be more mobile, undermining the traditional party-based networks of monitoring and control.[84] Secondly, wealthier voters are typically better educated, and therefore more discerning and critically evaluative of regime propaganda.[85] Thirdly, they tend to value political rights over material needs, and will thus push for civil liberties and fairer electoral competition.[86] Lastly, wealthier citizens have independent resources that can be used to support opposition movements, engage in collective action, and report regime abuses to domestic and international audiences.

It follows that autocratic elections are easier to control with a larger mass of poor voters. Empirical testing confirms that higher average income makes leader turnover more likely in EA regimes, but less likely in closed regimes.[87] Thus EA is less threatening, and therefore more likely to be adopted, when average income is low and inequality is high. Collier points to several extensions of suffrage in nineteenth century Europe based on 'confidence in the operation of clientelism and 'deferential communities'. Similarly, Hugo Banzer allowed 1978 elections in Bolivia because 'he was confident of winning' in the poor environment.[88] Portugal's Republican Party allowed contested elections in 1911 for the same reason: 'The meager resources local bosses traded for votes had value precisely because the population was so poor.'[89]

To illustrate the logic further, consider the divergent paths of four Latin American military governments. After the 1964 military coup, Brazil legalized multiple parties and slowly liberalized, finally democratizing in the 1980s. Inspired by Brazil's concurrent economic

[78] Blaydes 2011.
[79] Blaydes 2011; Magaloni 2006.
[80] Hicken 2011, 299–302; Magaloni 2006, 30; Stokes et al. 2013.
[81] Weghorst and Lindberg 2013.
[82] Stokes 2005.
[83] Pfutze 2014.
[84] Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Stokes 2005.
[85] However, this relationship may not be linear, as better-educated (and therefore literate) citizens are more often exposed to government media (Geddes and Zaller 1989).
[86] Inglehart and Welzel 2005.
[87] This is supported using a probit either without controls or when controlling for growth, regional regime types, resource dependence, leader tenure, regime age and year. A 10th–90th percentile shift on income among autocracies leads to a 11 per cent proportional increase in turnover in EA and a 29 per cent decrease in closed regimes. Turnover is from Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza (2016).
[88] Collier 1999, 76, 144.
[89] Bermeo 2010, 1127.

success, right-wing military governments in 1970s Chile, Argentina and Uruguay imitated a developmental approach that O'Donnell termed 'bureaucratic authoritarianism'.[90] Yet despite copying many aspects of Brazil's politics, all three states banned multiparty competition. Why did Brazil adopt EA when the other three did not? Critically, Brazil was by far the poorest and most unequal of the four countries. At the time of democratic breakdown, Brazil's average income was half the next poorest, with its Gini measure of inequality 43 per cent higher than the others' average. The large mass of poor, rural voters allowed Brazil's military to dominate the electoral arena and engage in controlled liberalization. In contrast, the others' development made elections more difficult to control. Despite widespread repression, military regimes in Uruguay and Chile lost key plebiscites in 1980 and 1988, respectively, due to surprisingly sophisticated opposition campaigns. In Argentina, the 'highly mobilized and organized labor movement' produced by industrialization made EA competition unworkable for the military.[91] The predictions can be summed up as follows:

HYPOTHESIS 3: Transition to EA is more likely when average income is lower.

HYPOTHESIS 4: Transition to EA is more likely when economic inequality is higher.

Note that both predictions are opposite in sign to what is most commonly predicted for democracy.[92] A related factor is the extent of funds available to the regime for electoral control.[93] Greene argues that natural resource revenues are a critical source of capital for clientelism, leading EA ruling parties to democratize when resource revenues decline.[94] By extension, resource dependence could predict EA transition if rulers anticipate having these funds for electoral control. However, resources also help consolidate power in closed autocracy and blunt international pressure for liberalization.[95] Expectations are therefore unclear.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS AND DATA

Empirical Design

I estimate a multinomial logit model that simultaneously predicts transitions to EA and democracy from a sample of closed autocracies, covering 1946–2010. I remove cases of state failure (3.9 per cent of country-years in closed autocracy) since they are generally incapable of adopting electoral politics, although the results are unchanged when including them.[96] The multinomial logit's reference category is remaining a closed autocracy. To account for heteroskedasticity and the panel structure, I use robust standard errors clustered by country.

This empirical set-up allows for a close comparison of the factors that predict each type of transition. Further, it provides a more accurate test of EA transition, as a binary logit would lump together stable closed autocracies and democratizing countries in the reference category.

Multinomial logit relies on an assumption of independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA), which states that excluding specific outcomes does not affect the relative odds of the remaining outcomes. For instance, the relative likelihood of transition to EA versus democracy should not depend on the inclusion of closed autocratic stability as a category. For this article's main

[90] O'Donnell 1973.
[91] Waisman 1989, 88.
[92] Boix 2003; Przeworski et al. 2000.
[93] Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007.
[94] Greene 2007.
[95] Blaydes 2011; Sadiki 2000.
[96] State failure is defined by Marshall and Jaggers (2010).

TABLE 2 *Multinomial Logits Predicting Transitions to EA and Democracy*

	(1)		(2)	
	EA	Democracy	EA	Democracy
Regional EA	2.447***	0.957	3.338***	1.252
	(3.53)	(1.09)	(4.40)	(1.04)
Regional Democracy	1.221	2.444**	–0.760	2.381*
	(1.78)	(3.07)	(–0.89)	(2.28)
GDP/capita (ln)	–0.458***	0.232	–0.688***	0.019
	(–3.48)	(1.26)	(–3.61)	(0.06)
Economic Growth	–0.014	0.005	–0.002	0.011
	(–1.06)	(0.28)	(–0.12)	(0.71)
Recent Coup	0.400	1.186**	0.144	1.106*
	(1.44)	(2.76)	(0.47)	(2.30)
Recent Irregular Turnover from Below	0.262	0.849	0.501	0.541
	(0.69)	(1.63)	(1.11)	(0.93)
Recent Regular Turnover	0.494*	–0.219	0.354	–0.532
	(2.01)	(–0.48)	(1.17)	(–0.94)
Urbanization	0.018*	0.009	0.040**	0.020
	(2.08)	(0.84)	(2.92)	(1.34)
ELF	0.377	0.474	–1.238*	0.314
	(0.81)	(0.59)	(–2.23)	(0.31)
Population (ln)	0.158	0.219	0.315**	0.166
	(1.74)	(1.42)	(2.98)	(0.84)
Prior EA Spells	0.118	–0.049	–0.120	–0.130
	(0.97)	(–0.32)	(–0.78)	(–0.69)
Prior Democratic Spells	–0.294	0.201	–0.378*	–0.025
	(–1.86)	(1.02)	(–2.17)	(–0.12)
Year	0.013	–0.007	0.040*	–0.004
	(1.51)	(–0.52)	(2.36)	(–0.25)
Resource Dependence			–0.021	–0.014
			(–1.63)	(–0.81)
Economic Inequality			0.047*	–0.013
			(2.32)	(–0.47)
Duration Cubic Splines?	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	2,367		1,339	
Countries	106		86	
Pseudo R^2	0.168		0.226	
Hausman IIA (p-value)	0.809	0.211	0.846	0.909

Note: the table displays two multinomial logit models separately predicting transitions to electoral authoritarianism (EA) and democracy from a sample of closed autocracies. Years are 1946–2010. *t* statistics (based on robust standard errors clustered by country) are shown in parentheses. $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$, $***p < 0.01$

models (Table 2), the Hausman χ^2 test fails to reject the IIA assumption for all three regime categories, thus validating the use of multinomial logit.[97]

Establishing Regime Choice

This article's central claim is that autocratic rulers strategically adopt EA. There are two alternative possibilities that require exploration. First, some transitions may be unintended by

[97] In addition, Wald tests confirm that the three outcome categories should not be collapsed.

autocrats. Although the adoption of multiple parties cannot be accidental, it may be that some countries democratize when the ruler intends an EA transition but loses control. To address this possibility, a robustness check recodes the cases of democratization that may have been attempted, but failed, EA transitions. The main results are unchanged.

Secondly, perhaps EA transitions are not strategically chosen by autocrats but forced upon them by domestic actors. For instance, election adoption might occur in the face of overwhelming popular protests. To address this potential explanation, I test several factors related to regime vulnerability and domestic pressure: coercive capacity, state capacity, protests, irregular leader change and civil conflict. None of these variables predicts EA transition.

Measures of Regime Types

Democracy is measured using Boix et al.'s dichotomous coding (updated through 2010), which requires free and fair elections and a minimal level of suffrage.[98] While highly correlated with other democracy measures, this coding is advantageous as it explicitly differentiates democracies from EA regimes based on the freedom and fairness of elections.

EA regimes are defined as autocracies in which multiple political parties exist and legally compete in legislative elections.[99] About 88 per cent of these regimes featured full legislative elections within the previous five years.[100] This definition has two main advantages. First, it is highly concrete, as it is based on a formal legal requirement and not a subjective evaluation of contestation. Secondly, transitions to EA must involve deliberate state action, as legalizing opposition parties is a significant political change.

For twelve countries, Cheibub et al. code the adoption of multiparty politics as occurring one year prior to a democratic transition. Such cases should not be counted as EA transitions, as they simply result from a disagreement between the two sources about the timing of democratization. As such, these cases are recoded as democratizing from closed autocracy in the year assigned by Boix et al.[101]

Independent Variables

I now overview the main independent variables and controls included in each model. All variables predict transitions to both EA and democracy. They are lagged by one year in the main models and by five years in a robustness check to ease endogeneity concerns. Summary statistics are shown in Appendix Table A1. Additional variables, including measures of international leverage, are described in the results section.

Regional EA and *Regional Democracy* are defined as the fraction of EA regimes and democracies in each country's region (excluding the country itself).[102] Similar measures capture the regimes types of trade partners, allies, IGO co-members and donors. Although simple in design, these measures are equivalent to modern spatial dependence models in which the spatial-lag weighting matrix **W** is defined by region, dyadic trade, military alliances, IGO co-memberships and aid.[103]

[98] Boix, Miller, and Rosato 2013.

[99] From Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland 2010. Since this data ends in 2008, I updated it to 2010 using country reports in Freedom House (2013). A robustness check shows that the results hold if also requiring that parties legally exist outside the regime front.

[100] As shown below, the results are robust to recoding the remaining 12 per cent as closed autocracies.

[101] One additional case has a two-year discrepancy, but recoding it does not affect the results.

[102] The eight regions are as defined in Miller (2015b).

[103] See Neumayer and Plümper 2016.

Economic development is proxied by logged *GDP/capita* (in real 2000 dollars).[104] *Economic Inequality* is measured by the Gini index of income.[105] I test five other socio-economic indicators: *Economic Growth* (the percentage change in *GDP/capita*), *Population* (logged),[106] *Urbanization* (the percentage living in cities of 100,000+),[107] *ELF* (ethnolinguistic fractionalization)[108] and *Resource Dependence* (fuel and metal revenues as a percentage of GDP).[109] Due to missing data, I first run a model omitting *Economic Inequality* and *Resource Dependence*.

For three types of executive turnover, I test a dummy variable for whether each has occurred in the past five years.[110] I distinguish regular turnovers (which occur legally), coups and irregular turnovers from below (primarily rebels and protest movements).[111] Turnovers in autocracy have been linked to transitions as they weaken autocratic regimes and force new leaders to seek out sources of legitimacy.[112]

Because global regime types have fluctuated over time, I control for the year as a linear term.[113] To capture regime history, I control for the country's number of prior spells of EA and democracy. Finally, I account for regime longevity using the Polity dataset's *Durable* variable.[114] I add cubic splines of duration with three knots (at the 25th, 50th and 75th percentiles of *Durable*). This represents a highly flexible duration model that allows the transition propensity to vary with regime age.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Table 2 displays the initial multinomial logit results. Due to missing data concerns, I first consider a base model (Model 1) that includes most of the key variables yet retains 92 per cent of all observations. Model 2 adds controls for *Resource Dependence* and *Economic Inequality*. Table 3 summarizes thirteen additional models separated by dashed lines. For each, a set of variables is added to the base model, and the results for these additional variables are shown. I discuss in turn the findings for international factors, socio-economic structure and other predictors.

International Factors

Table 3 displays tests of how international leverage and engagement influence regime change. The first model calculates the effect of trade dependence. The two variables measure the fraction

[104] From Haber and Menaldo 2011; World Bank 2014.

[105] Galbraith and Kum 2003; United Nations University–World Institute for Development Economic Research (UNU-WIDER) 2005; World Bank 2014 (interpolated/averaged).

[106] Heston, Summers, and Aten 2011.

[107] COW Project 2010b.

[108] Roeder 2001.

[109] Haber and Menaldo 2011.

[110] Following Miller 2012.

[111] Using Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2016. About 21 per cent of closed autocracies are within five years of a regular turnover, 21 per cent a coup and 6.4 per cent an irregular turnover from below.

[112] Marinov and Goemans 2014; Miller 2012; Treisman 2015.

[113] Adding a Cold War control does not change the results (see Appendix Table A5). Below, I differentiate effects during and after the Cold War.

[114] Marshall and Jaggers 2010. This is the number of years since the country experienced a three-point Polity change within three years or was categorized as transitional. The results are substantively identical using the Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) regime duration measure.

TABLE 3 *Additional Predictors of Transitions to EA and Democracy*

		EA	Democracy
International Variables	*Democratic Trade Dependence*	4.287***	–0.206
		(3.86)	(–0.13)
	EA Trade Dependence	1.956	2.298
		(1.07)	(1.06)
	Democratic Allies	2.075***	0.591
		(3.74)	(0.49)
	EA Allies	0.754	–0.758
		(1.08)	(–0.51)
	Democratic IGOs	4.280*	3.962
		(2.12)	(0.85)
	EA IGOs	1.997	–11.790
		(0.62)	(–1.53)
	Democratic Foreign Aid	2.512**	1.849
		(2.81)	(0.99)
	IGO Memberships	0.046**	0.030
		(2.91)	(0.89)
	Social Globalization	–0.012	0.032
		(–0.70)	(0.86)
	Trade Dependence	0.005	–0.002
		(1.40)	(–0.24)
	Foreign Aid (% of GDP)	0.029*	0.043
		(2.50)	(1.84)
Socio-economic Variables	*HDI*	–3.907*	6.860
		(–2.19)	(1.76)
	Average Education	–0.101	–0.059
		(–0.95)	(–0.41)
	University	0.014	0.099**
		(0.34)	(2.96)
Political Variables	*Party Founded by Ruler*	1.808***	1.234
		(4.63)	(1.51)
	Party Prior to Ruler	1.403***	1.329
		(4.09)	(1.53)
	Legislature	–0.660*	–0.011
		(–2.25)	(–0.02)
	Military Regime	0.218	1.441**
		(0.72)	(3.13)
	Party-Based Regime	–0.472	–0.159
		(–1.54)	(–0.24)
	Military Spending	–0.173	–0.126
		(–1.61)	(–1.12)
	State Capacity	–0.295	0.306
		(–1.22)	(0.81)
	Political Violence	0.016	–0.031
		(0.28)	(–0.33)
	Protest Activity	–0.019	0.145*
		(–0.24)	(2.24)

Note: the table displays additional predictors of transitions to EA and democracy. Each set of variables between the dashed lines is separately added to Model 1 in Table 2. Thirteen multinomial logit models are shown. *t* statistics (based on robust standard errors clustered by country) are shown in parentheses. $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$, $***p < 0.01$

of dyadic trade represented by democracies and EA regimes,[115] respectively, to test whether economic reliance on these regime types predicts political diffusion. The interesting finding is that economic engagement with democracies strongly encourages transition to EA, but the effect on democratization is slightly negative. In contrast, trade with EA regimes is unrelated to either transition.[116]

The second model in Table 3 tests a different source of international leverage: dependence on military allies. The two variables measure the fraction of each regime type among a country's formal military allies.[117] The third model instead looks at regime types among co-members of IGOs.[118] Lastly, the fourth model tests the fraction of foreign bilateral aid commitments represented by democracies.[119]

In each case, the democratic fraction strongly and significantly influences EA adoption, but not democratization, strongly supporting Hypotheses 1A and 1B. In contrast, the EA fraction has no effect. Autocrats routinely adapt their institutions to mollify the democracies on which they are economically or politically dependent. Thus international leverage by democracies secures the adoption of formal electoral institutions, but not full democratization. These findings are unlikely to stem from democracies engaging with autocracies that promise liberalization, as the results hold after lagging international leverage (see below).

Figure 3 shows the predicted probability of each transition from the first two models, alternatively varying *Democratic Trade Dependence* and *Democratic Allies*. Other variables are held at their means. In both cases, there is a large substantive effect on EA transition. Shifting democratic trade dependence up its full range shifts EA transition's likelihood from roughly 0 per cent to 13 per cent. For democratic military allies, the shift is from 4 per cent to 16 per cent.

The fifth model compares three types of international engagement: political, social and economic. Following Pevehouse and Torfason and Ingram,[120] political engagement is measured by the country's *IGO Memberships*.[121] *Social Globalization* is the KOF index of personal contacts, information flows and cultural diffusion from abroad.[122] Lastly, economic engagement is proxied by *Trade Dependence* (imports and exports as a percentage of GDP).[123] Only *IGO Memberships* predicts EA transition, whereas none of the variables predicts democratization.

The sixth model tests total *Foreign Aid* (official development assistance as a percentage of gross national income).[124] Previous research disagrees as to whether foreign aid (and democracy assistance) encourages moves towards democracy.[125] The results here are similarly mixed: *Foreign Aid* significantly predicts EA transition, but is insignificantly positive for democratization. This adds nuance to studies connecting foreign aid to multiparty adoption without distinguishing between EA and democracy.[126] The fifth and sixth models further

[115] Trade data from Barbieri and Keshk (2012).
[116] The findings hold if tested as the *fraction of GDP* made up by trade with each regime type.
[117] Alliance data from COW Project (2013).
[118] IGO member data from COW Project (2010a).
[119] Aid data from AidData (2012). Insufficient aid comes from EA regimes to test the EA fraction. IGO aid dominated by democracies (e.g., World Bank, OSCE) is counted as democratic.
[120] Pevehouse 2002; Torfason and Ingram 2010.
[121] From COW Project 2010a.
[122] Dreher, Gaston, and Martens 2008.
[123] Heston, Summers, and Aten 2011.
[124] World Bank 2014.
[125] Dietrich and Wright 2015; Finkel, Pérez-Liñán, and Seligson 2007; Knack 2004; Marinov and Goemans 2014. Unfortunately, data on democracy assistance are too sparse for multinomial logit.
[126] Dietrich and Wright 2015; Marinov and Goemans 2014.

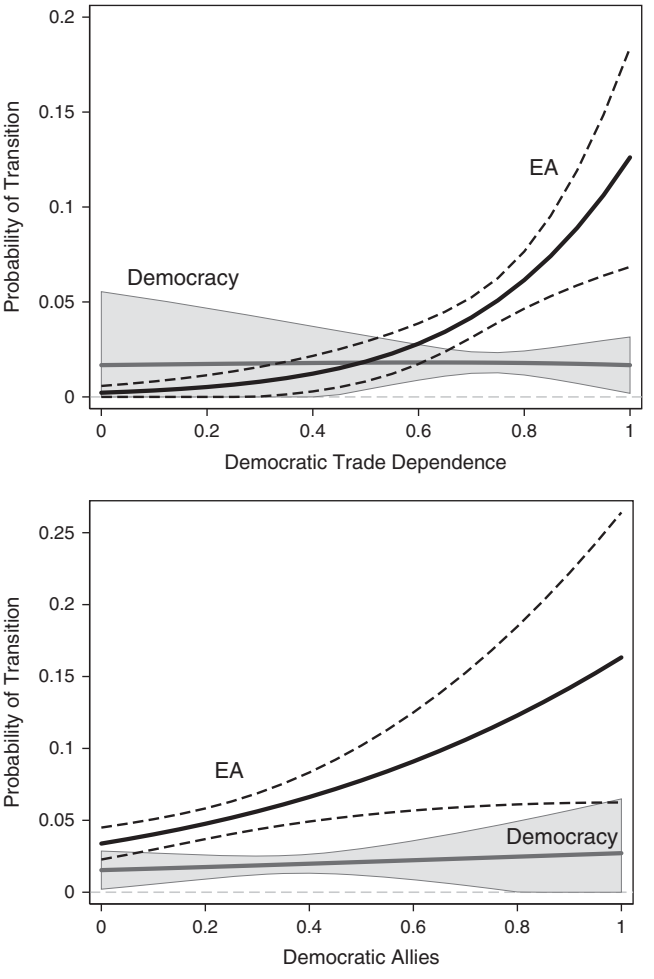

Fig. 3. Transitions by democratic trade dependence and democratic allies
Note: the figure shows estimated probabilities (with 95 per cent confidence intervals) of transition to EA and democracy, based on the first two models in Table 3. The top panel varies *Democratic Trade Dependence* along the horizontal axis. The bottom panel varies *Democratic Allies*. Other variables are held at their means. As clearly seen, external leverage by democracies predicts EA transition, but not democratization.

support the idea that international leverage encourages piecemeal political reforms, but the results are generally stronger if this leverage is held by democracies.

Finally, the two models in Table 2 display clear evidence of regional diffusion: being surrounded by EA regimes predicts transition to EA, whereas being surrounded by democracies predicts democratization. This extends previous findings on regional democratic contagion to a parallel effect for EA, confirming Hypothesis 2. *Regional Democracy* is also positive for EA transition in Model 1, but narrowly misses significance.[127] Figure 4 shows the predicted probabilities of transition to EA and democracy from Model 1. In the top panel, *Regional EA* is varied along the horizontal axis, holding other variables at their means. The estimated likelihood

[127] Using neighboring regime types instead of regional averages returns broadly similar results, except that EA and democratic neighbors tend to predict *both* types of transitions.

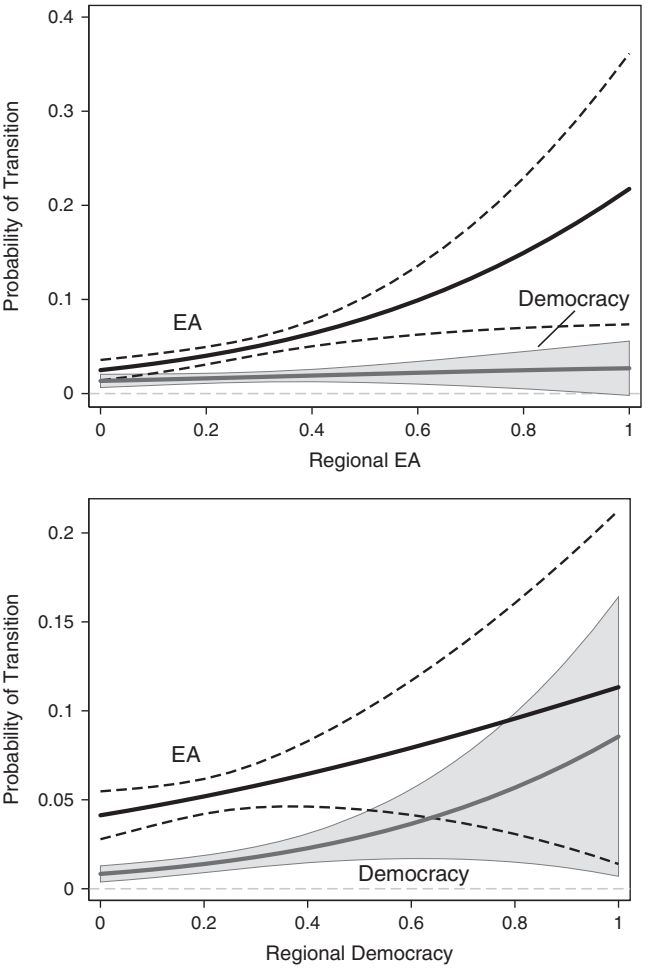

Fig. 4. Transitions by regional EA and regional democracy
Note: the figures show estimated probabilities (with 95 per cent confidence intervals) of transition to EA and democracy, based on Model 1 in Table 2. The top panel varies *Regional EA* along the horizontal axis. The bottom panel varies *Regional Democracy*. Other variables are held at their means. The results show a corresponding contagion effect of regional EA regimes on EA adoption and regional democracy on democratization.

of EA transition ranges from about 2 per cent to nearly 20 per cent each year. The bottom panel instead varies *Regional Democracy*, showing a similarly strong effect on both transitions. In total, EA transition is more sensitive to regime contagion than democratization.

Socio-economic Structure

I now turn to socio-economic factors. Both models in Table 2 support Hypothesis 3: *GDP per capita* is significantly *negative* for EA transition. Using Model 1 and holding other variables at their means, shifting average income from the 10th to the 90th percentile of closed autocracies decreases the annual likelihood of EA transition from 8.5 per cent to 2.3 per cent.[128]

[128] This is about the difference in income between modern Somalia and Oman.

This reflects the difficulty of controlling autocratic elections in wealthier countries, encouraging regimes to retain closed autocracy. In comparison, the likelihood of democratizing increases from 1.2 per cent to 2.6 per cent, although the effect is not significant.

Similarly, in Model 2, *Economic Inequality* is positive for EA transition and non-predictive of democratization, supporting Hypothesis 4. A 10th to 90th percentile shift on inequality raises the chances of EA transition from 4.0 per cent to 9.0 per cent.[129] Further, infant mortality and under-five mortality,[130] common measures of a population's material deprivation and inequality, both significantly predict EA transition when tested in place of *GDP per capita*. Unequal countries have more poor citizens who can be cheaply co-opted by state assistance, which makes electoral control easier. These socio-economic effects are counterintuitive, but help to explain the concentration of EA in the most poverty-ridden parts of Africa and Southeast Asia.

Urbanization is significantly positive for EA transition, which may reflect the greater ease of building patron–client networks in urban environments.[131] *Economic Growth*, *ELF* and *Resource Dependence* are insignificant for both transitions. Surprisingly, *Resource Dependence* is slightly negative for EA transition, suggesting that it helps to strengthen closed autocracy.[132]

The seventh model in Table 3 tests the Human Development Index (HDI), an aggregate index of income, education and health,[133] which should match the logic for average income. Indeed, even controlling for *GDP per capita*, *HDI* is significantly negative for EA transition. The next model tests two measures of education: *Average Education* (schooling years among adults)[134] and *University* (percentage enrolled at university).[135] The unexpected finding is that overall education does not predict either transition, but *University* strongly predicts democratization. Besides the critical role often played by current university students, this may indicate the democratizing influence of norms spread through advanced education and exposure to modern ideas.[136]

Other Predictors

Models 1 and 2 in Table 2 compare three types of leader turnover, using dummy variables for an occurrence within the previous five years. Recent coups strongly predict democratization, as they indicate key periods of instability and regime weakness.[137] Using Model 1, a closed autocracy has a 1.1 per cent annual chance of democratizing without a recent coup, compared to a 2.9 per cent chance with one. Other irregular turnovers are insignificant for both transition types. Regular turnovers are predictive of EA transition, but only in Model 1.

Table 3 covers five further models. First, I control for the presence of a regime party founded by the current ruler, a party existing prior to the ruler, and a legislature.[138] Wright and Escribà-Folch argue that parties should be positive for democratization and legislatures negative because parties help regimes retain power post-democratization, whereas legislatures merely bolster

[129] This is about the difference in inequality between modern Laos (low) and Swaziland (high).
[130] World Bank 2014.
[131] *GDP per capita* remains significant if omitting *Urbanization*.
[132] This remains true if *Resource Dependence* is replaced by resource income per capita or oil income specifically (from Haber and Menaldo 2011).
[133] Calculated using UNDP's formula and World Bank 2014 data.
[134] Barro and Lee 2001.
[135] Banks 1976; Norris 2008.
[136] Sanborn and Thyne 2014.
[137] Marinov and Goemans 2014; Miller 2012.
[138] Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland 2010; Svolik 2012.

regime control.[139] In fact, that pattern fits the results for EA transitions. Parties are positive for democratization, but not significantly so.

A second institutional model controls for whether the autocracy is a military or party-based regime.[140] As Geddes observes, military regimes are highly prone to democratization.[141] However, this effect does not extend to EA transitions. Surprisingly, party-based regimes are slightly *less* likely to transition from closed autocracy.[142]

The next two models test whether coercive capacity and state strength predict transition. *Military Spending* (as a percentage of GDP)[143] is insignificantly negative for each transition. *State Capacity* (a combination of 24 variables capturing administrative and coercive capacity)[144] is also unpredictive. In the final model, I test the effects of *Political Violence* (a ten-point rating of domestic civil and ethnic violence),[145] which may encourage transition by destabilizing the country's politics, and peaceful *Protest Activity* (the number of protests and strikes).[146] The latter is significantly positive for democratization, but neither predicts EA transition.[147]

These final three models dispute the alternative theory that closed regimes adopt EA out of weakness, either due to low coercive capacity or strong opposition. In fact, except for the existence of a party, domestic political variables are surprisingly weak predictors of EA transition. Rather, international leverage and favorable socio-economic conditions are the pivotal factors, supporting this article's theory on strategic EA adoption.

Robustness Checks

Appendix Table A2 displays four robustness checks based on recoding EA transitions. All controls in Model 1 of Table 2 are included. The same checks for the models in Table 3 are summarized in Table A3. Model 1 recodes as EA transitions eight cases of democratization that may have been failed attempts to establish EA.[148] Model 2 recodes EA to additionally require a national legislative election within the past five years.[149] Model 3 only counts transitions that retain the new regime type for five years.[150] Finally, Model 4 requires opposition parties outside the regime party front to qualify as EA, raising the bar for multiparty competition.[151]

[139] Wright and Escribà-Folch 2012.

[140] Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014. Personalist dictatorships are the reference category.

[141] Geddes 1999.

[142] This does not contradict the findings on regimes with political parties, which include many military and personalist regimes. Party-based regimes are distinguished by having the strongest and most empowered ruling parties.

[143] COW Project 2010b.

[144] Hanson and Sigman 2013.

[145] Marshall 2010.

[146] Banks 1976; Norris 2008.

[147] The results are insignificant for both variables using two- or five-year averages instead.

[148] In five cases, the ruling party lost founding multiparty elections and accepted defeat. In three cases, the ruling party won, but the election was deemed democratic. This could have been an intended EA transition since the party may have violated democratic norms if threatened with losing.

[149] Hyde and Marinov 2012. This eliminates cases in which multiple parties can technically compete, but there is a long delay in holding elections (e.g., Angola 1993–2008). Further, it shifts the date of transition from the legalization of parties to the first multiparty election. About 10.7 per cent of EA country-years are recoded to closed autocracy.

[150] This eliminates cases of ephemeral regime change for which this article's strategic logic may not apply. Although this removes fifty-nine EA transitions and thirteen democratic transitions, the results are remarkably robust.

[151] Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland 2010. Regimes in fourteen countries are recoded (15.9 per cent of EA country-years).

Two further robustness checks are shown in Table A4. The first includes cases of state failure in the sample.[152] The second successively lags each variable of interest by five years to minimize endogeneity and reverse causation.

The main results for EA transition are highly robust across these checks. For the 24 total coefficients on democratic leverage (four variables, with six checks each), 22 remain significant.[153] *Foreign Aid (% of GDP)* is less stable, but remains consistently signed and significant at the 0.1 level in four of six checks. Regional contagion holds in all but the lagged model. *GDP per capita* remains significant at the 0.05 level in all models and at the 0.001 level in four of six models. Despite data limitations, *Economic Inequality* is fairly robust, remaining significant at the 0.1 level across all checks. *Urbanization* significantly predicts EA transition in all but the state failure model.

Table A5 displays how the main variables' effects differ during and after the Cold War (1946–89). Many authors claim that geopolitical changes following the Cold War shifted regime change dynamics, particularly as Western democracies became more willing to push for liberalization.[154] The results show interesting variation between periods. Although there is no significant difference across periods for democratic leverage from trade dependence or foreign aid, the effects of democratic allies and IGOs are stronger during the Cold War. The positive effect of *Foreign Aid* and the negative effect of *GDP per capita* are both stronger post-Cold War.[155]

Lastly, Figure A1 presents a cross-validation analysis, showing the out-of-sample predictive power of several variables. Multinomial logits are run on randomly chosen sub-samples of the data, and predictions from this model are then compared to transitions in the remaining data. This is repeated 2,000 times. The results show that the main variables add considerable predictive power for EA transition, with the strongest contribution from trade and IGO dependence. The added predictive power for democratization is relatively modest.

CONCLUSION

This article presents a *strategic* theory of autocratic regime change. Autocratic leaders hold contested elections to gain international benefits, but only if socio-economic conditions favor their ability to dominate the elections. Thus EA transitions are predicted by external dependence on democracies (through trade, military alliances, IGOs and aid) and by low average income and high inequality. I also find evidence of regional contagion of both EA and democracy. Despite few predictors of democratization, this study sheds light on modern pathways to democracy since 90 per cent of recent democratic transitions occur from EA.

The results empirically support claims that international pressure and aid aimed at 'democracy' promotion in fact encourage liberalized autocracy.[156] Compared to sustaining closed autocracy, this encouragement of EA is not necessarily a bad thing, as there is evidence that EA promotes human development and later democratic survival.[157] However, the effect of

[152] Marshall and Jaggers 2010.

[153] The two exceptions are both for *Democratic IGOs*, but the coefficients remain large.

[154] Goldsmith 2008; Levitsky and Way 2010; Marinov and Goemans 2014.

[155] Table A6 instead stratifies the sample based on whether the regime is younger or older than ten years, using Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014). Although regime diffusion is much stronger for younger regimes, the democratic dependence variables have virtually identical effects.

[156] Brown 2011; Carothers 1999; Diamond 2002; Goldsmith 2008.

[157] Miller 2015a; Miller 2015b.

democratic leverage should be acknowledged, as it can help spur adaptation that leads to genuinely pro-democratic effects.

Future work should analyze specific cases of EA adoption to further support this article's causal logic and develop new theory. These transitions are politically significant, but have not attracted a fraction of the attention directed at democratic transitions. Once regarded as inherently transitional and unstable, electoral autocracies are now widely recognized as distinct and durable regime types.[158] Future research should avoid lumping them in with democracies or assuming that all forms of liberalization follow the same logic. A better understanding of the origins of electoral autocracies can provide insight into how these regimes function and how international actors can promote democracy, in both form *and* substance.

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[158] Carothers 2002; Miller 2015b; Schedler 2006; Schedler 2013.

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