Diffusion and the international context of democratization†

Draft version, comments welcome

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Abstract: We argue that international factors and processes between states influence the prospects for democracy and the likelihood of transitions. We first consider some possible explanations for why democratization processes should be influenced by a country's regional context and events in other states. We then show empirically that the distribution of democracy and democratization cluster spatially. Our analysis demonstrates that the spatial clustering in democracy and transitions cannot be accounted for by differences in domestic social requisites. This suggests that the regional context and diffusion processes play an important part in transitions to democratization. This relationship between the regional context and transitions to democracy undermines Przeworski and Limongi (1997)'s claim that transitions to democracy are random.

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Democracy and democratization in time and space

The background for the emergence of democratic and autocratic political institutions around the globe remains among the most central questions in political science. The best-known theory to explain the origins of democracy is probably Lipset’s (1960) “social requisites” hypothesis, which holds a society’s level of development to be the critical requisite for democracy. Other perspectives hold that certain cultural aspects, norms, or values favor the development and durability of democratic rule (e.g., Almond and Verba 1963, Muller and Selligson 1994, Putnam 1993). Still others emphasize distributional aspects such as material inequality or the relative strength of groups or classes (e.g., Muller 1988, 1995, Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens 1992, Vanhanen 1990). Finally, another class of theories of transitions often stresses factors such as the timing of national development, negotiated pacts between elites, and “critical junctures” or forms of path dependence in political development (e.g., Bollen 1979, Casper and Taylor 1996, Moore 1973, O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead 1986, Przeworski 1991, Rueschemeyer et al. 1992).

These explanations differ considerably from each other, and they may entail quite different predictions about variation in political institutions (see, e.g., Vanhanen 1990 for a comprehensive review). However, these explanations are in another sense all “similar” in so far as they relate a country’s prospects for democratization or sustaining democracy to various domestic factors. By focusing exclusively on processes within states, these theories effectively assume that political institutions of a given countries and transitions are not affected by what takes place in other countries as.

In this paper, we argue that international factors and processes between states influence the prospects for democracy and the likelihood of transitions. We first consider some possible explanations for why democratization processes should be influenced by a country’s regional context and events in other states. We then show empirically that the distribution of democracy and democratization cluster spatially. Our analysis shows that the spatial clustering in democracy and transitions cannot be accounted for by differences in domestic social requisites. This suggests that the regional context and diffusion processes play an important part in transitions to democratization. This relationship between the regional context and transitions to democracy undermines Przeworski and Limongi (1997)’s claim that transitions to democracy are random.

1 Some would argue that studies of how position in the so-called “World-System” influences prospects for democracy provide a possible exception (e.g., Bollen 1983, Wallerstein 1979). Leaving other doubts about the usefulness of these theories aside (see e.g., Weede 1996), these arguments usually hold that external dependence influences national economies rather than political structures. External factors influence prospects for democracy only through their impact on the domestic conditions seen as relevant. Somewhat ironically, the domestic processes held to hinder or help democratization are usually similar to those highlighted by the social requisites school.
International contexts of democratization

Figure 1 below shows the changes in the proportion of countries that are considered democratic by common criteria in the well-known Polity data. Whereas the share of democratic states in the world was about 5% of the states in the world, the wake of the so-called “third wave” of democracy has yielded an unprecedented situation where countries with democratic institutions outnumber states with autocratic institutions. Since the domestic and economic conditions typically are assigned importance in theories of democratization tend to change slowly over time, it is difficult to see how stable relationships between social requisites and democracy alone could produce such seeming waves in the share of countries with democratic institutions.

The ideas of waves of democracy and autocracy (e.g., Huntington 1991) have altered researchers to trends in democratization may reflect international influences. For example, many researchers point to that the second and third wave of democratization coincided with two major watersheds in world history, namely the end of World War II and the end of the Cold War. Similarly, the first wave of authoritarianism

Figure 1: The global distribution of democracy, 1800-1996

The institutionalized democracy scale in the Polity data ranges from a low of –10 to a high of 10 in degree of institutionalized democracy (Gleditsch and Ward 1997, Gurr, Jaggers and Moore 1989). The threshold for “democracy” is here set to a score of six or above.
followed in the wake of the interwar period, and a second wave of autocracy followed in the aftermath of decolonialization (see O’Loughlin et al. 1998)

Merely attributing democratization or autocratization to some “international context,” however, explains little without clarifying the relevant international context and how this influences prospects for democracy. It is difficult to see any clear relationship between trends in democratization and the global trends that researchers allude to. Greater participation in war, as indicated by the dashed line in Figure 1, seems to have preceded both democratization and autocratization, and there is no obvious relationship between share of states at war and the share of democracies. Attributing variation in the global distribution of democracy to the relative status of political ideologies (e.g., Fukuyama 1992) or to hegemony and the position of the United States on democracy (e.g., Robinson 1996), begs the question of why the balance of ideologies or hegemony change in ways that sometimes favor democracy and sometimes favor autocracy.

Similarly, looking at transitions to democracy and autocracy at the global level indicates little evidence of any clustering or dependence between transitions. Table 1 displays the number of observed transitions to democracy and autocracy for each year from 1876 to 1998. One way to examine whether the number of transitions cluster in particular years is to compare the observed transitions frequencies with the expected frequencies based on a Poisson model of a random process with the probability of the event given by the observed numbers of years with transitions. These values are given in the column labeled expected in Table 1. As can be seen from Table 1, the observed annual frequencies for any type of transitions are very close to the frequencies expected from a random Poisson processes. Hence, we have no evidence that transitions cluster in time or occur more frequently in some years than would be expected by chance.

Table 1: Transitions to democracy and autocracy by year, 1876-1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To democracy</th>
<th>To autocracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>Expected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>73.3174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25.6313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.4803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.5221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.0456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.0002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The cells with expected frequencies indicate the number of years with given number of transitions based on a Poisson model with $\lambda$ given by the share of years with transitions to number of years ($T=123$). The increase in the number of democracies over time implies that the share of years with transitions to democracy (0.39) is larger than the share of years with transitions to autocracy (0.35)
In our view, international processes that influence democratization are not particularly likely to be found at a global level. Looking for a *Zeitgeist* or universal global influences that influence all countries alike is probably as grossly inaccurate as assuming identical and independent processes within each country. However, looking at regions might give us more insight into local transnational processes that influence democratization. We have shown elsewhere that geography and distance induce dependence and affectedness among states, and shape behavior among neighboring countries. Diffusion and dependence at the local level can yield dramatically different outcomes in different regions of a global system, depending upon the specific composition of neighboring states or their regional context. Statistical models that incorporate the influences from neighboring states have proved helpful for addressing the implications of interdependence for international conflict and cooperation (see, for example, Gleditsch 1999, Gleditsch and Ward 2000, Shin and Ward 1999).

Merely a cursory glance at the geographical distribution of democracy suggests that there are clear regional patterns and geographical clustering for recent years. Map 1 displays the distribution of political institutions by the tri-partite typology suggested by Gurr et al. (1990). As can be seen, in 1996 democracies were widespread in Europe and the Western Hemisphere, but relatively rare elsewhere in the developing world, and nearly non-existent in the Middle East and Central Asia. Similar patterns appear in earlier time-periods as well. If we pick a country at random, the probability that it will be a democracy is about 0.75 if the majority of its neighbors are democracies, but only 0.14 if the majority of its neighbors are non-democracies. Map 2 displays the changes of countries on the 21 point. This maps shows that over the decade 1986-1996 there were a clustering of transitions to democracy in Eastern Europe, as well as changes toward less autocratic forms of governance, if not necessarily full-fledged democracy, in many African countries.

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3 Countries with values of 6 or above on the institutionalized democracy scale in Polity are classified as democracies. Countries with a score of -6 or below are considered autocracies. Countries in the intermediate category of anocracies have scores between -5 and 5.
Moreover, it is possible to show that the observed rates of transitions to democracy seem to differ sharply depending on the makeup of other states in a country’s regional context. Figure 2 shows the estimated
probabilities of transitions from autocracy to democracy and autocracy to democracy given the proportion of neighboring states that are democracies within a 500 km radius by a local regression smoother. As can be seen, the probability of a transition to democracy in an autocratic state displays conditional on the proportion of neighboring states that are democracy displays a near perfect S-shape. Although the unconditional likelihood of a transition in any one given year is small, the conditional likelihood of transitions for a country in a relatively democratic region exceeds 0.1.

![Figure 2: Transition probabilities by proportion of neighbors that are democratic](image)

**Political institutions and theories of diffusion**

The observed geographical patterns in democracy suggest that the likelihood of a transition in one country appears to depend on the regional context and events in other states. What factors may underlie such local diffusion in political institutions and transitions?

**The diffusion of democracy**

One way to think about diffusion in the context of democratization is to look at how dependence between countries and transborder flows and processes may fit in with existing theories of democracy. Much of the recent literature on democratization argues that democracy emerges as an outcome of social conflict when
no single actor possesses sufficient resources to impose itself upon others (e.g., Olson 1993, Przeworski 1988, Vanhanen 1990). Institutionalizing methods for sharing power and establishing political and civil rights become rational options when actors are unable to fully dominate or control political power. There is no inherent reason why such struggles over influence and the resources used to wage them should “stop at water’s edge,” or stay within the boundaries of individual states.

Groups can mobilize resources not only at the domestic scene, but may also seek assistance from outside actors. Many non-governmental social and political networks are clearly transnational in nature and operate across national borders. Ethnic movements such as the Irish Republican Army and the Kurdish Labor Party (PKK) have drawn heavily upon resources mobilized in diasporas. Examples of transnational actors trying to change events in other countries span peace activists to commercial interests, armed insurgencies, and revolutionary varieties of Islam (Deutsch 1954, Keck and Sikkink 1999, Randle 1991, Smith, Pagnucco and Lopez 1998). States or coalitions in power will often take an active interest in events occurring in neighboring countries and try to influence outcomes according to their preferences. Finally, demands from transnational actors often shape foreign policies and relations with other states (e.g., Davis and Moore 1997).

The balance between groups can be shaped by both domestic and external events. External support may have a particularly dramatic impact on struggles for political power when there are shifts in the coalitions that hold power in neighboring entities. Schelling’s (1971) “tipping model” suggest that merely small changes in external context may suffice to yield cascades that generate a critical mass in political contestation (e.g., Kuran 1989, 1991, Lohmann 1994). Such processes are often held to have played out in the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe, where the initial political changes in Poland and Hungary spurred subsequent changes in Czechoslovakia and East Germany. Recent regime changes and insurgencies in Central Africa display similar diffusion processes toward autocracy. Many regard the Ugandan support as critical for the 1994 RPF takeover in Rwanda. The RPF then again boosted Laurent Kabila’s armed uprising against Mobutu in neighboring Zaire.

If such diffusion processes operate between states, we should expect to see that democracy and the likelihood of transitions to by regional context and transitions in neighboring countries. We analyze these propositions empirically in the subsequent section.

**The diffusion of conflict and peace**

The literature on the democratic peace has sometimes suggested that domestic institutions may be in part endogenous to conflict and cooperation between states. Proponents of the democratic peace often suggest feedback mechanisms, where democracy first makes peace more likely and the improved prospects for peace subsequently enhances the prospects for sustaining democracy (see, e.g., Russett 1998).

Others hold that the diffusion of regional conflict and insecurity may severely constrain prospects for democratic rule. Some have surmised that the absence of war between democracies could stem from that democratic rule often breaks down under the threat of conflict (e.g., Gates, Knutsen and Moses 1996,
Layne 1994). Thompson (1996) argues rulers’ need to obtain resources and mobilize for military efforts shaped the development of political institutions. Sustained rivalry and threats to security tend to foster authoritarianism as power becomes more centralized. By contrast, a situation of relative regional peace facilitated political pluralism, as internal political processes could unfold with more insulation from external threats. Barzel and Kiser (1997) argue that the stability of a ruler was as essential for contracting between rulers and the ruled. Insecure rulers were not in a position to make credible commitments, and external threats hence tended to hinder the development of voting institutions. Mansfield and Snyder (1998) hold that leaders in transitional regimes with fragile institutions are likely to rely on nationalism and external conflict to hold on to power. This influences both the risk of conflict as well as the risk for democratic reversals.

The relative geographical isolation and protection from external threat may in part explain why early steps toward democracy were more durable in England than in France. Similarly, it can be argued that “zones of peace” first emerged when powerful states were forced to abandon ambitions of regional hegemony and domination (Thompson 1996). In Norway, for example, the initial efforts to push for full independence from Sweden were temporarily suspended in the late 19th century over concerns over increased Russification in Finland. It is not incidental that the 1905 date of independence coincides with the defeat of the perceived threat in the Russo-Japanese war.

Finally, many civil wars revolve around control over the government. Civil wars should thus be expected to undermine existing regimes. The implications of civil war for democracy are ambiguous, however, since civil wars can both topple autocracies, undermine, democracies, and lead to the emergence of new autocratic regimes.

Based on the above discussion we hypothesize that democracies are more likely to thrive in regions with stable peace and that civil wars will tend to promote transitions and undermine the stability of regimes. We will examine these propositions in the following section.

**Regional diffusion and transitions**

In this paper, we reexamine international and regional influences on democracy. Our analysis addresses a number of shortcomings in existing studies.

First, we have argued regional diffusion processes imply that we should observe geographical clustering in political institutions as well as transitions, but the converse does not necessarily hold. Many studies, by ourselves and others, have shown that countries that surrounded by other democracies are more likely to be democracies (e.g., O'Loughlin et al. 1998, Starr 1991). This is often seen as evidence for diffusion of democracy. However, most existing studies largely disregard the potential impact of domestic attributes and processes. An aggregate relationship between a country’s institutions and the countries in its regional context does not provide convincing evidence of diffusion processes. It is easy to show that
the principal social and economic conditions hypothesized to influence democracy such as differences in GDP per capita also cluster geographically. As such, what these studies attribute to diffusion may simply stem from geographical clustering in omitted domestic attributes that influence prospects for democracy. To say something about the relative effects of regional context and diffusion, we must also consider some the plausible confounding domestic factors. In this analysis, we will consider the primary “social requisites,” namely GPD per capita as a measure of a country’s level of social and economic development (e.g., Lipset 1960, 1994).

Second, existing empirical studies of linkages from conflict and security to democracy suffer from many problems. Some studies have examined whether wars exert some effect on the prospects for democracy (e.g., McLaughlin 1996, Mousseau and Shi 1999). These studies tend to find that conflict involvement does not seem to decrease democracy. Looking for a general relationship between war involvement and democracy, however, may fail to capture the linkages discussed above. Conflict participation clearly cannot be strictly necessary for democracy, since many democracies participate in wars and yet remain democracies. However, not all incidents of “war participation” and “peace” are qualitatively equivalent. The relevant factor that may impede democratization is the extent of threats to security in a country’s regional context rather than conflict participation. Rather than conflict participation, we need to consider the locus of conflict involvement and to what extent conflicts pose threats to a state’s vital security. For example, there is no reason to expect that participation in UN peacekeeping forces or colonial wars far removed from a state’s core territory should lead to a breakdown of democracy. Moreover, it is insecurity rather than participation that may influence the prospects for democracy. This means that we should not look at individual outbreaks of conflict, but rather the conflict history reflecting enduring forms of threats that do not necessarily break into open war at any given time. We use a simple count of the number of years that a country has remained at peace as a proxy for the stability of peace.

Finally, many existing studies have looked only at how democracy covaries in a static sense, or is associated at any given point of time, with different factors. This does not necessarily translate into how factors associated with democracy influence the likelihood of transitions to democracy among autocracies. Przeworski and Limongi (1997) argue that although democracies tend to be wealthier than non-democracies, the likelihood of transitions to democracy does not increase as autocracies become wealthier. Rather, the patterns stems from the effects of wealth on the ability of democracies to survive. Democracy almost never breaks down in wealthy countries, but transitions to democracy, in their view, are entirely random. In this paper we estimate a two-way transition model which allows us to address the different effects of right hand side variable on the stability of political institutions and the likelihood of change. This also allows us to distinguish between whether attributes of other states in a region or actual transitions in neighboring states alter the likelihood of transitions.
A two-way transition model of democracy and autocracy

Gleditsch and Ward (1997) suggested that changes in authority structures could be analyzed as a Markov chain process of transition between different states over time. For simplicity, we here limit ourselves to two possible states, democracy and autocracy, defined by whether an observation has a value of six or above on the institutionalized democracy scale. In a transition model, the probability distribution of a variable \( y_{it} \) for observation \( i \) at time \( t \) is modeled as a function of \( i \)'s prior history or state at previous time periods \( t-1, t-2, \ldots, t-T \). If the observations are conditional only on the previous observations, we have a first order Markov chain (see, e.g., Harary, Norman and Cartright 1965:371-7). The transition matrix for a first order Markov chain with a binary outcome can be written as

\[
\begin{pmatrix}
P_{00} & P_{01} \\
P_{10} & P_{11}
\end{pmatrix}
\]

where \( P_{01} \) indicates the probability of change from 0 to 1 (i.e., \( y_{it}=1, y_{it-1}=0 \)), and \( P_{11} \) indicates the probability of remaining at 1 from \( t-1 \) to \( t \) (i.e., \( y_{it}=1, y_{it-1}=1 \)).

Two-way transitions for repeatable events or spells of binary outcomes can be modeled by limited dependent variable models (see Beck et al. 2001, Yamaguchi, 1991 #1783: Chapter 3). A matrix of conditional transition probabilities given some set of covariates of interest \( X_{it} \) can be derived by

\[
Pr\left(y_{it} = 1|y_{it-1}ight) = F\left[X_{it}\beta + y_{it-1}X_{it}\alpha\right]
\]

where \( F \) is either a logit or a probit link. In this model, the vector \( \beta \) indicates the effect of the covariates \( X_{it} \) on probability of a 1 at time \( t \) given a 0 at time \( t-1 \) \( Pr\left(y_{it} = 1|y_{it-1} = 0\right) \). The probability of a 1 at time \( t \) given a 1 at time \( t-1 \) \( Pr\left(y_{it} = 1|y_{it-1} = 1\right) \) is given by the vector of parameters \( \gamma = \alpha + \beta \). Such a model has been applied to democracy by Przeworski and Limongi (1997) and by Gleditsch (2002), and to transitions between conflict and peace by Beck et al. (2001).

To facilitate comparison with Przeworski and Limongi we let \( y_{it}=1 \) if a state \( i \) is an autocracy at time \( t \) and \( y_{it}=0 \) if it is a democracy. For the covariates, we include the natural log of the lagged level of real GDP per capita, taken from the expanded trade and GDP data (Gleditsch 1996); the proportion of neighboring states within a 500 km radius that are democracies, based on the minimum distance data (Gleditsch and Ward 2001); whether the state was involved in a civil war, based on the Correlates of War data updated with the Uppsala data (Gleditsch 2001), and the number of years that a country has remained at peace from international war. The final covariate is the presence of a democratic transition in a neighboring state within a 500 km radius. We assume that democratic transitions in other states do not influence the likelihood that democratic states will become autocracies, but may influence the likelihood that autocracies become democracies. In light of this, we constrain the \( \beta \) parameter for this variable to be 0 and let \( \gamma = \alpha \) only.
The results of our model are shown in Table 2 with standard errors in parentheses. We report \( \hat{\alpha}, \hat{\beta}, \) and the implied \( \hat{\gamma} = \hat{\alpha} + \hat{\beta} \) coefficients. The variance for \( \hat{\gamma} \) is given by \( \text{Var}(\hat{\gamma}) = \text{Var}(\hat{\alpha}) + \text{Var}(\hat{\beta}) + 2 \text{Cov}(\hat{\alpha}, \hat{\beta}) \). As can be seen, the test of the null hypothesis of equal slopes across previous regime states (i.e., that \( \beta = \gamma \) or that the parameters \( \hat{\alpha} \) are jointly insignificant) is clearly rejected. Most of our hypotheses are strongly supported by the results in Table 2. A higher proportion of democratic neighbors significantly decrease the likelihood that autocracies will endure as well as the likelihood that democracies will break down. Moreover, a transition in a neighboring country significantly decreases the likelihood that an autocracy will endure. Civil wars significantly increase the likelihood that democracies will break down in a one tailed test, but have no statistically significant effect on the likelihood that autocracies will endure. A more peaceful regional environment decreases the likelihood that an autocracy will endure, but does not have a statistically significant impact on the likelihood that democracies will break down.

Table 2: Probit estimates of transition model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>( \hat{\beta} )</th>
<th>( \hat{\alpha} )</th>
<th>( \hat{\gamma} )</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1.998</td>
<td>0.684</td>
<td>2.682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.631)</td>
<td>(0.800)</td>
<td>(0.496)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDPpc, natural log</td>
<td>-0.492</td>
<td>0.451</td>
<td>-0.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.083)</td>
<td>(0.104)</td>
<td>(0.063)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion democratic neighbors</td>
<td>-0.575</td>
<td>-0.346</td>
<td>-0.921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.246)</td>
<td>(0.319)</td>
<td>(0.205)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil war</td>
<td>0.401</td>
<td>-0.424</td>
<td>-0.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.222)</td>
<td>(0.271)</td>
<td>(0.156)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of no international war</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbor transition to democracy</td>
<td>-0.189</td>
<td>-0.189</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.065)</td>
<td>(0.065)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( N = 6158 \)
\( \text{Model LR } \chi^2 (\text{df}=11)= 6890.95 \)
\( \text{Test of } H_0: \text{Constant slopes } \chi^2 (\text{df}=5)= 4412.87 \)

The likelihood that an autocracy at time \( t-1 \) will become a democracy at time \( t \) is given by \( 1 - p_{oo} \) or 1 minus the probability an autocracy will endure. As can be seen from Table 2, Przeworski and Limongi (1997) are correct that a higher GDP per capita does not significantly affect the likelihood that an autocracy will survive. However, their conclusion that transitions emerge exogenously as a “deus ex machina” out of the whims of history does not follow. The results in Table 1 show that autocracies are significantly less likely to endure in a region with more democratic states and significantly less likely to endure when a neighboring state experiences a transition to democracy. Moreover, states in relatively peaceful international environments are less likely to remain democracies.
Figure 3 displays the predicted marginal effects over differences in the proportion of neighboring democracies on the likelihood of transitions to democracy and autocracy and the likelihood that democracies and autocracies will endure, keeping other variables at their medians. Substantively, this translates to a case where GDP per capita is about $3300, the country does not experience a civil war, and 33 years without prior conflict involvement. The solid lines indicate cases where there is no transition in a neighboring country. The dashed lines indicate a case with a transition to democracy in a neighboring country. Recall that transitions to democracy in a neighboring country in the model is constrained to only influence the survival probabilities of autocracies.

Figure 3 indicates that autocracies located in more democratic regions are significantly less likely to endure. Furthermore, the likelihood of a transition to democracy is high in more democratic regions and even higher when other countries in the region experience transitions to democracy. Although the likelihood that democracies will endure highly autocratic region is smaller, the likelihood of democracies failing is much lower overall than the likelihood that autocracies will fail and see transitions to democracy. Recall also that these predicted probabilities refer to the likelihood of transitions in a given year, and that the likelihood of a transition over a longer time period will be higher. For an autocracy that has a high
predicted likelihood of a transition to democracy given its domestic and regional attributes (say 0.1), the likelihood that it will remain an autocracy for five years is \((1 - 0.1)^5\) which is less than 0.6.

As can be seen in Table 3, the overall predictions of the model are generally good. The model classifies 98.2% of the observations correctly. About 96.5 of all the democracies in the sample are correctly classified.

Table 3: Model predictions by observed outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OBSERVED REGIME STATUS</th>
<th>PREDICTED REGIME STATUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Autocracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autocracy</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, these results provide strong support for the claim that the regional context of authority structures exerts strong effects on regime changes. Knowing a country’s location and the characteristics of surrounding entities does yield some predictive power, and there is a marked tendency for cases to change in ways similar to their regional context over time. Given such evidence of dependence and diffusion between countries, the claim that regime change is entirely random and exogenous seems incorrect or at least overly strong. Like Monet’s water lilies that look like random dots up close and only acquire shape with a change of perspective, the randomness of democratization may lie in the eye of the beholder.

**Conclusion**

Our results show that the prospects for democracy are not exclusively related to domestic attributes, but also appear to be affected by external conditions and events. Likewise, democratization cannot be seen as exclusively as a result of functionally similar processes unfolding independently within each country. Our results indicate that diffusion processes among states at the regional level seem to influence the distribution of democracy in the international system. There is a strong association between a country’s authority structures and the extent of democracy in the surrounding regional context. Not only do regimes tend to be similar within regions, but there is also a strong tendency for transitions to regimes more similar to the regional context. A history of prior regional conflict decreases the likelihood that a country will be democratic.

Since the regional context is more permeable to changes in the short term than socio-economic factors, international influences on democracy appear to be as important as the domestic “social requisites.” Although it may be difficult to fully specify the micro-level processes of democratization and show
how international factors influence these, it seems theoretically inappropriate to treat the domestic arena as independent of the regional context. Nor does it make sense to exclude the regional context and assume that transitions to democracy are random when this component explains the greatest share of the variance.

Many transitions involve some element of surprise and their timing may not be fully predictable. Our ability to predict conflict and peace is also limited at best, and it may be difficult to tell ahead of times how regions are likely to evolve over the near futures. Nonetheless, it seems clear that considering the interaction between domestic processes and regional context allows a better delineation of plausible trajectories of future regime changes.
References


